Another Thing To Fall
by Suzan Lovett

Summary

"You know, James, anyone who references Forrest Gump and Vergil practically in the same breath --" oh, that sentence should never have been started, it didn't have a single good place to go.

"Has a crack in his soul?" Hathaway suggested.

Notes

1 - Canon-compliant until the end of the fifth season; free-roaming afterwards.
2 - a) The old man who walks backwards can be seen in the Morse episode "The Settling of the Sun."
   b) The old case Lewis recounts to Hathaway is in the Morse episode "Dead on Time."
   c) The grave-digging at Wytham woods is in the Morse episode "The Way Through the Woods."

More thanks than I can express to moonlightmead, elizabethoshay and tiranog for invaluable beta. They all went above and beyond to set me right, particularly in the areas of their own expertise. Where the canon plays fast-and-loose with facts, I opted for the canon. I also sacrificed some of their admirably conscientious input on the altar of dramatic licence -- mea culpa.

Update: We've fixed the bad html code throughout the story that caused some annoying missing spaces between the words. We probably missed a few, but hopefully caught the majority of them.
Chapter 1
It's one thing to be tempted, Escalus,

Another thing to fall.

Shakespeare, Measure for Measure

The conventional sound of the old telephone through the presbytery made Father Cleaves jump. Partly, it was the half-forgotten, strident tone. Primarily, it was the person he knew was at the other end. Nobody else remembered the old number any more, and with all the mobiles, social networks and email, hardly anyone had reason left to use it. He kept the old landline in his residence for one purpose only, for the sporadic use of one man who didn't care to acknowledge innovations younger than himself. Or, more preferably, no later than 1516, when Martin Luther had written The Ninety-Five Theses and sparked the Reformation.

"Your Excellency," Father Cleaves said into the bulky receiver, his heart pounding, short of breath, even though he'd taken only a few steps to get to the phone.

"Edmund, my dear boy."

He was thirty-five. He was starting to find occasional grey hairs at his temples. Still, the gravelly, rumbling voice made him feel like the boy he'd been when he'd thought that voice must rival God's. "Good evening, my Lord Bishop."

"Unless you have company, no need to be so formal, Edmund."

He happily substituted, "Mathias. It's so good to hear your voice. How are you?"

"I will be much better with your presence. I'm in need of a secretary. Any chance you would apply?"

"Your diocesan secretary is leaving?"

"A personal secretary, I should've said."

Edmund's heart jumped. "And you thought of me?"

"You're an historian and an admirable coordinator, exactly what I need," Mathias Osborn said, more matter-of-factly than Father Cleaves would have wished. "I've found the production company and the financial backing for the documentary to present my collection. Blessed be."

"Blessed be His Holy Name," Cleaves added wholeheartedly. There were only two surviving heirs to the bishop's vast family fortune. The distant cousin who'd inherited it all, severely handicapped from birth and in a care facility for over forty years, was not expected to live out the year. Osborn had control of the inheritance by proxy, and while he'd never skimped on his cousin's care, otherwise he'd been using it to amass a collection of holy relics and artefacts steadily, at heart-stopping cost. If he was ready to showcase the collection publicly, he must be planning to turn it over to the Church when his cousin died and he could no longer disclaim ownership. Right and proper -- finally. "Oh, Mathias, that is great news. I'm so happy for you."

"For us, Edmund. For us. I need the one man I can trust implicitly to deal with all the
practicalities, as my representative, my right hand. And where I go from there, you will go with me, so what say you?"

_Tu Rex gloriae, Christe._ "My Lord Bishop," he pointed out, "you have no need to ask it of me, you can simply order me."

"When have I ever done that, my dearest boy? I've always chosen to let you come to me of your own free will."

_Let?_ Strictly speaking, it was true. But Edmund Cleaves doubted he'd ever had free will when it came to Mathias Osborn or ever would. "Directly on the morrow," he lapsed into the antiquated speech pattern that had always surprised and delighted Mathias to hear, especially from a young acolyte all those years ago, "I shall, as is your wish, take it upon myself to apply for the position," Cleaves had learned early how to cast his lures as well. Mathias laughed his booming laugh, and as ever, it felt like a blessing. "Surely you never doubted it."

"Certainty generally is illusion, and repose is not the destiny of man' -- even at my age. I have such plans for us. With your young mind and limbs by my side, we'll accomplish great things, Edmund, great things."

One thing Cleaves had accomplished was to exchange his certain place in line to become the vice-chancellor of his diocese for being a glorified go-between. But what did that matter? He was being called back to his rightful place after more than a decade's exile, and his mind was already busy, planning his move to Oxford.

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"Ellie, Ellie!" Bradley Powell's voice could be heard down the corridor, on his way to her office. If he had to yell like a fishwife instead of waiting to see if she was in yet, Eleanor McKenna saw no reason to waste her breath to answer him and kept looking out of the window. She could see the skyline cluttered by the curve of the London Eye and the up-thrust of the Gherkin, which, along with all modern structures, she considered blots on the city's venerable vista.

"Ah, there you are." Powell waddled in and deposited his bottom-heavy body onto the sofa she used when she worked too late to get home.

Well, damn. Now she had to get up from behind her desk and join him if they were to talk like assistant producer to executive producer. And, of course, The Director; he was executive producer so he could always be The Director, uppercase mandatory. "Good morning, Brad," she reminded him of his manners as she picked up the script she'd been marking, and dragged one of the chairs in front of her desk with her so she wouldn't have to sit on the sofa next to him.

"A _great_ morning, Ellie. Talked to His Overblown Reverence half the night. The man's mental, I'm telling you. He's assigning an intermediary --a priest-- to deal with the production, he wants an armoured van to cart his treasures back and forth from wherever he's hiding them, guards to safeguard them on the set. The least whiff of impiety anywhere in the script and he'll pull out. He's a bloody fanatic, but long as he's fanatical over the project -- gift horse, _et cetera_. The upshot is, we're green-lit, the documentary is a go."

As if he gave a toss about the documentary. The Lost Treasures of the Bible, Found. Right. The only treasure he was interested in was the one he had finally finagled from the Catholic Church, BBC funding, and the lucrative concessions he'd get from the host city. He'd promptly raid it to pour the majority of the capital into his precious pilot for a series he hoped to live off for years, and cobble together something half-arsed for the documentary.
"Look, Brad," she said, tossing the pilot script onto the coffee table between them, "I'm willing to work with you on this dross -- "

His cherubic face, at odds with his balding dome and the nasty temper she knew too well, twisted with a sneer. "Dross? Why would you call it dross?"

That's the scum formed when true metal is smelted, you nitwit. "Oh, I don't know, maybe because Oliver Goldsmith wrote the original in the eighteenth century. Wait, it'll come to me -- oh, yes: She Stoops to Conquer."

"He stoops to conquer in our case."

How original. An impoverished scholarly student pretending to be a footballer to secure the affections of an empty-headed heiress. "Let me rephrase, I'm willing to work with you on this innovative script, if you'll give me the documentary. You know I can get exec billing anywhere else, so you can let me have it for one project. You have no interest in it anyway."

Just on the principle of never letting go of power, he hesitated, but she knew she'd picked her time well and he'd opt to concentrate on his pilot. "Well, you see, Ellie, it's such a shoestring budget for the documentary," he immediately started to short-change it as she'd expected. "I'd hate to saddle you with -- "

"I'll make it work, Brad, you know I will. Just say yes."

"Oh, all right, it's all yours," he said as if he'd just made her a Dame of the Realm, then leered at her. "I'll save you a fortune, right? You won't be shuttling back and forth every weekend to see your Oxfordian; you'll be right there."

She forbore telling him the term referred to adherents of a specific theory, not an Oxford resident. "His name is Llewellyn-Pierce, and in fact, I'd like to have him on set as consultant. He's one of the authenticators the Ashmolean uses; he's excellent." Bargaining for an impossible budget was one thing, falling for fakes and forgeries some deluded bishop wanted to unveil, a totally different thing. This was one project with the Powell seal that wasn't going to go as pear-shaped as Bradley was.

"Long as you can get him to do it for your pretty eyes, or whatever portion of your anatomy makes him salivate, fine with me." He scooped up the script with her notes that he was sure to discount and left.

She closed the door after him, picking up her mobile. It was still early; she expected Richard to be home and send her call to his messaging service, but he answered. "Good morning, sweet Eleanor."

What a relief he was, with his cultured voice and his refusal to truncate her name into something more suitable for a cow. "Good morning, Richard. Tell me, how would you like to work closely with me for a few months?"

"You've wrested the documentary." He sounded pleased for her.

"It's mine, all mine. I still have to work with the Satan-spawn on his miserable pilot, we'll be shooting simultaneously, but I'll manage. He agreed to having you on set as consultant. Be warned, though, it'll get you little more than another entry for your CV."

"Bishop Osborn's long-rumoured collection will finally be revealed and I'll be the first expert to lay eyes on it -- oh, His Excellence will be apoplectic. Which, let me admit just for your delectable
ears, is an irresistible incentive."

"It'll take a few months for the prelims, I should be in Oxford in autumn. Along with lorries' worth of film crews, so heaven help your city."

"Heaven should help our dear Bishop if his collection is rubbish. He'll call it an endowment and bribe his way into the Archdiocese, you realise?"

Even though Eleanor said nothing to indicate her rising discontent, Richard seemed to sense it and promptly added, "But for your sake, my sweet, I hope it's the rarest of marvels, and your documentary will be as exceptional as you are."

Good save, my love.

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"Let me see them," Idris Abbas said, fingering through the bowl of nuts on the table, wishing he could pop some of the Jordan almonds into his mouth and crack their hard candy shells. He could handle the peanuts, but some bits were bound to slip under his dentures and give him hell. He pushed the bowl away. "Come on, I need to see them before I make an offer."

"I have thirteen of them, all that were found." The junior archaeologist from the Bethsaida Dig clutched his backpack tighter to his chest. "Shouldn't we go somewhere private?"

Sneaking around would attract more attention in the politically-troubled Al-Shaghour district of Damascus than two tourists chatting in a crowded coffee house. With his dodgy heart, Idris Abbas didn't need any extra excitement in his life. "Just pass me the bag casually. Don't worry, I won't run off with it. I'm a businessman, I don't need a bad reputation." Yours, of course, is worth no more than camel's spit. Sergei, if that was his real name, did as told, his eyes flickering around worriedly. If I'd smuggled a rare find out from under the noses of the Israelis, I'd be worried, too. "Drink your tea and give me a minute."

The bag was as heavy as Abbas had expected for metal items. He opened it just enough to look inside for a quick evaluation and his heart gave a couple of hard thumps that almost worried him. Yes, this find could very well be part of the lost collection of codices mentioned in the Book Of Revelation. The dimensions seemed right, corroded plates the size of paperbacks, held together with bulky rings. Careful of the edges that had flaked and thinned to cutting sharpness, he flipped through a couple. About a dozen plates to each codex, filled with images, symbols, and ancient Aramaic Abbas could recognise on sight but could not read. Some pages were sealed shut, by hand or by time. His Syrian expert had rust-dated the plates to early first century AD, isotope analysis had placed their mining site approximately around the Yarmouk Valley. If the markings were as old as the metal --always the tricky part, but a concern for scholars later, not him-- they might predate the writings of St Paul and would be beyond price.

Idris Abbas didn't give a fig for things beyond price. They were worthless to satisfy him, his wife's desire for a summer villa in the Jordan Valley, his son's university fees at Oxford, his mistress's endless wishes. He intended to be rid of the find while a hefty price could still be set on it. It was advisable to get the things out of the Middle East as soon as possible; Christian relics fared better in Europe, and Israeli agents preferred to keep a low profile in those countries. He should visit his son. While he was in England, he could see a heart specialist, also see about getting better fitting dentures. "All right," he told Sergei, "Let's talk."

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"It's not really a sabbatical, I'll be working very hard through it." Richard was explaining to their dinner guests why he'd opted out of teaching for the Michaelmas term.

*Just shut up about it*, thought his wife. If he didn't elaborate, they'd assume he wanted to concentrate on what he called his definitive book on antiquities, *Facts and Fancies*. But if he mentioned on-set consultancy for a TV special, half their guests would look disdainful, the other half would get stars in their eyes, and some of the sillier wives were bound to start tittering.

"I've been contracted as expert consultant on a Biblical documentary for the Beeb, you see."

Oh, there he went. What they *didn't* see, and neither had Drusilla, was how much he'd be paid on that contract. The university had reduced his wage to the mere pittance they had to pay for the privilege of keeping his professorial name on their rolls, so the film company had better be parting with a substantial amount. Substantial enough to let her keep her show hunters in their stables, which might make her turn a blind eye to his opportunities for shagging his tart more regularly. *One day, Richie, you're going to regret her.*

"Yes, they'll be filming right here," he was answering the curious. "True, mine is just a dusty old documentary," he addressed the youngest wife in the group, little more than a child, "but they'll be shooting the pilot for a series as well, so there'll be occasions for celebrity watching."

"Oh, Dru, you must be so thrilled," the young thing said to her. *Let the tittering commence.*

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"We have a perfectly good props department, Father," McKenna argued, turning the recast of the *La Melik*-handled jar in her hands and comparing it to the photos of the original spread out on her desk. "This is a fine replica." All right, maybe far from fine, but serviceable. A little creative lighting and it'd look like the real thing on film.

"Bishop Osborn does not agree," Father Cleaves told her.

"If he'd allow us to makes casts from his originals -- "

"Out of the question," the priest cut her off with his perfected brand of ecclesiastical severity.

Not that she'd expected any other response. The bishop's collection couldn't be used in any way except to be brought in safely, put on something steady, be filmed and returned. "What would you suggest then? I'm putting together a documentary, not a catalogue. The artefacts or their copies must be used in re-enactments, and as we can't touch the -- "

He cut her off. Again. "Museums display accurate reproductions in order to preserve originals from wear and tear. They also routinely commission inverted replicas to be able to present fuller versions of damaged artefacts."

"Bully for them. They must have the funds for expert artisans."

"A poor world it'd be, if money were the highest recompense."

McKenna kept herself from snorting into his too-handsome face. "Maybe in your circles."

"As you say," he told her smugly. "Which is why I'll be seeing a devout member of our congregation, an assistant manager of collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum. He promised to interest
McKenna got up from her desk after he left, went to look out the window at the lot in front of the warehouse that would be serving as location headquarters for Powell Productions for the next three months or so. Past the busy hive of the lot circled by a security fence, the area was flat, unprepossessing, but behind it the beautiful domes, turrets and spires of the old city rose out of the autumn foliage. Summer had faded spectacularly in Oxford, the riot of reds, golds and oranges a lovely complement to the aged, warm hues of the building stones. Not a bad place to work.

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As he drove up, Lewis saw the fire engines on the end of Longwall Street, where an unconscionably early call had sent him to check out a possible crime scene outside the last building on the corner. The few onlookers were being held at bay by constables while a tent was being erected in front of a deep doorway or maybe an alleyway. The forensics van was already on site, but he couldn't see Hobson. No doubt she'd be disgruntled about the hour. She wasn't likely to be terribly pleased with him this morning either.

Stepping out of the car, he looked for Hathaway, accustomed to his sergeant getting to calls fast enough to meet him with the facts and figures when he arrived. Nowhere could he see a blond head sticking out of the group; it was PC Lockhart who separated from it to meet him, carrying a scene suit package. She was looking green around the gills, quite a feat with her complexion. It must be bad.

"'Morning, sir. Nothing to report yet. We couldn't, well, get close."

She was having a hard time talking and trying to swallow at the same time. "It's all right, we'll wait until we can," he said soothingly. "Anybody think to call Hathaway?"

"He's said not to call him in early for the next few weeks if at all possible. But if you asked for him, we're to ring right away," she handed him the package and grabbed her radio, "so I'll just --"

"No, no, that's fine." Hathaway had said nothing to him, but he must have his reasons. "I'll have a look first." He tore open the package.

"You only need the overshoes," Julie said.

Just as happy to bypass the bunny suit, he fished out the slip-ons. Seeing Laura lean out of the tent to crook her finger at him, he handed the package back to Julie. "Why don't you stay here and guard our perimeter," he told her with a friendly pat on the shoulder; she wasn't the bristly sort of WPC who'd mistake concern for derision.

He made sure he said, "Good morning," to Laura as he paused by the tent to slip on the latex
overshoes. She wasn't in the mood for social graces for a change; she scowled at him. "Bad?"

"See for yourself." She lifted the tent flap for him.

"Cheers -- oh, bugger. Again?" The first immolation he'd seen had been one too many, and he hadn't seen much of that, too busy struggling to hold his drug-dazed sergeant back from the flames. The second time had been only about eight months earlier, with no explosion to bring that one to a quick end. And now a third? Hathaway's biblical hell seemed set on making a point.

At least the flame-repression foam covered the charred body, the smell of burnt flesh and fat inside the tent was somewhat bearable. He knew it had to be his imagination, any airborne particles would've dispersed by now or been subdued by the foam, but he still had to will himself to breathe the air that felt greasy. A large jerry can, also covered with foam but recognisable, sat heat-bonded to a skeletal hand. Petrol must've been the accelerant. "Dental ID is our only option, I take it?"

"Such optimism." Hobson leaned towards the remains slumped into the wall, its fire-ravaged limbs grotesquely contorted, and hooked something...melty...with the end of a long probe. She lifted it close to his face.

Lewis tried not to cringe from identifying it, "Dentures?"

"You got it." She put it back precisely where she'd lifted it from; it squished into place. She had to be keeping the scene intact for fire investigation. "No teeth to identify."

"Any way to tell, at least, if this is -- " he waved at the scene vaguely "--self-administered?"

She pointed at the other fleshless, twisted hand with the probe. "I see the edge of a lighter there, but whether or not that's the lighter that lit the fire -- " she shrugged noncommittally. "Fire chief might be able to tell you more about that. I should let him get on with it, while I work out how to scrape up all the parts of him that have melted into the bricks --yes, him, going by the pelvic bone and the size of the tuberosities I can make out." She looked at Lewis, and what she saw in his face made her relent. "Sorry. I already made you sick once this week, didn't I?"

Who'd come up shorter there was debatable. "Can we just forget that? Please."

She finally smiled at him. "Cheer up, he might have a metal implant. Or maybe an ID insert in his dentures."

That would be nice. Cheering up, on the other hand, was too much to ask. He was more inured to grisly sights than he cared to be, but there was no way he could dismiss them as easily as she could. He pulled out his mobile while he left the tent and impatiently punched in Hathaway's number.

Whatever you're devoting yourself to every morning lately, wrap it up and get here. I'm not doing this alone.

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Hathaway had put his shell into the water with the barest glimpse of light on the horizon. In a few weeks, it would get too cold to brave the predawn on the river, he didn't want to miss a single day of rowing he didn't have to. It was working for him. He had the river to himself at this hour, blissfully relaxing while gliding fast on the water backwards in a coxless shell. He could fix the buds of his iPod in his ears, listen to music, and not worry about warning shouts from the coxswains of other boats. The early-morning tranquility, the stability of his balance that kept the narrow shell steady under him, his breathing in cadence with the smooth slide and reach of his body, the deep, rhythmic pull and push of his legs and arms: hypnotic. An uninterrupted hour or so of rowing
soothed the cares of the previous day, the melancholy or the agitation of the night, left him pleasantly lax and supple in body, calm in mind, and ready to go through another day with the equanimity he needed.

Falling in or out of love couldn't be dictated by will, but behaviour could. Seminary had taught him that much. And now, over a decade later, he was a grown man, more confident of his path, long past youthful proclivity for silly drama. This time, he had no desire to alter his feelings even if he could, or regret them; they were his own, he had a right to them as long as he kept them to himself. It took firm governing -- the heart was a petulant, whiny thing, it wanted, demanded, made him ache, but it could be governed.

Some habits had stayed with him through the last decade. Close enough to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin celebration on the devotional calendar, he was listening to Regina Coeli on a new Catholic Metal release. It started with meditative strings, drums came in to kick it up and quickly led the way into a tremolo fest, a deluge of sound punctuated by slides screaming up and down the neck of the lead guitar. It filled his head with pure sound, pushed thoughts aside, gave him the welcome respite he was after. Into the frantic pace of the music came the softly spoken prayer in centuries-old serenity: Regina coeli, laetare, alleluia.

His first warning was a turbulence in the water he felt shiver up the cleavers into his arms. It made him twist his head to see behind him as he became aware of a drone of voices that penetrated past the ear buds. He was fast skimming towards a jumble of skiffs and -- power boats? There weren't supposed to be power boats where rowers practiced.

A crowd on the shore was waving and yelling. There were floodlights and his first thought was: crime scene. As the reflectors and booms, the cameras on great swinging arms, registered, he was already bearing down on one cleaver and easing off the other to turn his shell. Too late he saw the speedboat heading for him, someone with a loud-hailer on its bow. It also veered to avoid collision, a lot more swiftly than he could manage by muscles alone, and the high wave generated in its wake rolled towards him. There was no time to point either end of his shell into it to ride it out, no way to avoid catching it directly on the side of his light craft. The only thing he had time for was to take a deep breath and hold it.

At least the river held residual warmth from the summer. He could avoid gasping and expel his breath slowly though the sink and rise. As his head broke the water, he felt his mobile vibrate against his side in its watertight pouch.

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"Caught you in the shower, didn't I?" Lewis concluded upon noticing Hathaway's wet hair and apologised, "Sorry about that." In turn, he got a scowl. Did he really deserve the scowls he was getting today? Laura might have some justification, but what had he done, or failed to do, to James? Well, I could've let him be, he thought. "Not much can be done about the case yet, if it is a case." So far, two experts had refused to choose between suicide and homicide. "I probably shouldn't have called you in, but...." He shrugged. Just needed you by my side would sound so feeble.

Hathaway nodded at the tent. "I'll take a look, shall I?"

"Take a deep breath first," Lewis warned, waving him on. He should go back in with him, but by now Hobson had to be scraping and scooping and he didn't have the stomach for it. Bad enough he had the imagination for it. He hoped he wasn't turning as squeamish as Morse in his old age.

Hathaway's face was more severely set than usual when he rejoined Lewis. He stood for a
minute, saying nothing, hands in pockets, watching his shoes.

"All right?" Lewis asked.

"Yeah." He took a long breath, let it out, raised his head to meet Lewis's eyes. "Of course you should have called me in."

"Any ideas?"

"Have we started house-to-house, or should I?"

"Julie's on it. Let's hope somebody saw something or we have nowhere to go." He started walking towards their cars.

"Unless he lived alone, someone would've come out of one of the houses to wonder if he's the suddenly missing husband, father, somebody," Hathaway said, pacing him. "Probably not from hereabouts."

"We'll check with Missing Persons."

"Might be a little too soon. We may have to -- " he stopped suddenly. "Hold up."

Lewis turned to face him. "What?"

"Why here?"

"Why anywhere?"

"No, no. Here. If it is self-immolation, that's usually a statement, a protest. Where matters."

"I know, but what's significant about 21 Longwall Street?" It was just another typical old building in a typical Oxford road. The relevance of the people living or working there was yet to be determined.

"That's the address now," Hathaway turned and started back towards the corner; Lewis hurried to keep up with his long strides, "but this was once the grounds of an estate fronting the adjacent street, and the gallows stood right there at the crossroads, where Longwall Street becomes St Cross Road." He led Lewis past the tent and the people working around it, pointing out, "This was originally part of 100 Holywell Street," he stopped as he rounded the corner, nodded at a plaque placed high on a wall, "and that might be the significance."

Near this spot, the plaque said, listed four names who, were executed for their Catholic Faith, and gave a sixteenth-century date.

"Installed three years ago," Hathaway supplied. "With much fanfare."

"Don't we already have a stonking big Martyrs' Memorial?"

"For Protestant martyrs."

"Right." Six of one, he made sure he didn't say. "More's the pity. No shortage of pedestrians at that busy junction."

"Life is not a box of chocolates, sir."

He knew it was Hathaway's attempt to divert him in his typically awkward but well-meaning
way. He grimaced as he was supposed to. "Whatever you were doing this morning --" he paused in case James might care to fill in the blank, continued when silence stretched,"-- I should've left you to it. All right, you may have a point. Let's check and see if some zealot is missing from his usual haunts. I'd sooner chalk this one up to fanaticism, martyrdom, any affliction, and forget it."

"Except you won't," Hathaway said as they started to walk back to their cars. "*Haeret lateri lethalis arundo.*"

"Meaning?"

"'Once the iron enters our soul.' Vergil."

"You know, James, anyone who references Forrest Gump and Vergil practically in the same breath --" oh, that sentence should never have been started, it didn't have a single good place to go.

"Has a crack in *his* soul?" Hathaway suggested.

"I didn't say that."

"Conflict, then."

"I didn't say that either."

"You were thinking it."

"As a *joke.*"

"Yes, sir." Deadpan.

Clearly, it was fated to be one of those days.

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*In a different century, you'd have been drowned as a witch,* Hathaway was still thinking about Lewis as he walked into the station on his heels. The man could instinctively add up a couple of unrelated comments into an astute observation and not even know he was doing it.

"The lighter's bothering me," Lewis said over his shoulder.

"What about it?"

"It was still in his hand." They moved aside to let pass a gaggle of school kids clearly on a class trip. "You'd think he'd have dropped it sometime during that agony," Lewis said in an undertone out of deference for tender ears.

"Depends on how crazy he was." He didn't remember Zoe burning, thank God, but Ellerby was etched into his brain, still a regular feature of his nightmares. By the time she'd started screaming, she hadn't a mouth to form around it.

Lewis's hand gave his wrist a quick squeeze. "Let it go, James."

*Yep, drowned as a witch.* No doubt. For mercy's sake, Lewis hadn't even been *looking* at Hathaway. His attention was on a young man talking animatedly to the duty sergeant, saying, "...hasn't called my mother *or* my sister."

"I have the Voss inquest this morning," Lewis said, pointing him sketchily towards the desk.
before heading for the staircase. Hooper had seen Lewis do that once and made a his-master's-trained-dog comment, too dull to recognise confidence that could eschew words. Earning that was better than any promotion.

The young man at the desk looked Middle-Eastern, at most twenty, spoke perfect English except for a slight roll of the 'r's. "...missed his meeting with a dealer at Thames Valley Antiques," he was telling the duty sergeant. "I didn't hear from him at all yesterday or the night before, and that's not like him, believe me, it's not. He was supposed to --"

Hathaway stepped in. "I'll take this," he told the duty sergeant, introduced himself and motioned the young man towards a couple of empty seats. "And you are?"

"Rashid Abbas." He added almost challengingly, "I'm Jordanian."

"Sit down, please." Hathaway sat next to him, indicated the Balliol crest embossed on the leather organiser the young man was holding, "Student?"

"Yes." Still ready to bristle.

"I gather you have a missing person to report? I can help."

"My father, Idris Abbas," Rashid said, concern overriding whatever misgivings he'd had. "He's been here nearly two weeks, on business."

"Which is?"

"Import, export. Antiques."

"Right. Go on."

"We had supper the day before yesterday. Around five, too early for us, but he had a meeting later. That's the last I saw him. He was supposed to pick me up this morning, I was going to show him Balliol's new Historic Collections Centre. He wanted to go early so he could keep an appointment with Dr O'Brian before noon, but he never showed up. I've been calling. Nobody's heard from him, his mobile's not answering. For all they say, say to me at any rate, his hotel knows nothing --this is not like him, it's not. He has a heart condition, you see, and I'm really worried."

"In the majority of cases, missing persons turn up with a good explanation. What was the meeting after your supper?"

"He didn't say. He had a heavy package, so I assumed it was some sort of transaction with a client, a showing, a delivery, something."

"Let's go and check his hotel. They'll tell me more than they told you." He started to rise, saw the young man was not following, settled back down. "What is it?"

"You're a terrorism something or other, aren't you?"

So that was his sore spot. "Nope, just a regular copper," He pulled out his warrant card, flipped it open and handed it over. "I only want to help. Nationality has nothing to with it." Except it might mean his deduction of the morning hadn't been worth his breath. "No chance your father is Catholic, is he?"

Rashid gave him a withering look. "He's not into orthodoxy of any kind and he's certainly not Catholic." He was about to return the warrant card when he did a double take at it. "CID? You
investigate deaths, don't you?" He gave it back, unzipped his organiser, pulled out a photo and held it out.

Hathaway looked down at it: Rashid, at some airport, with his father's arm around him, both of them smiling. The man was taller than his son, dark, with an impressive moustache and a mane of grey hair. When he looked back up, Rashid was biting his lip, his eyes pleading. "I've no use for it." He chose his next words carefully, "I have nothing for comparison." Of course, the young man took it to mean we don't have a body, instead of what it was: it hasn't a face. "Let's go and ask some questions, shall we?" He hustled Rashid out to his car. If he established a plausible connection between the missing father and their burnt body, he'd ask for a swab, but it was too soon to upset the young man that much.

According to the chamber maids, Idris Abbas's bed hadn't been disturbed for two nights. According to his son, the only things identifiable as missing from his room were the clothes he'd been wearing on their last meeting. At Thames Valley Antiques, they talked to the person Abbas had been scheduled to meet and learned nothing new, except the names of other business contacts that they either called or visited. By their fourth stop Hathaway had decided he was catching sight of a man on a motorbike—probably a man, difficult to tell under full gear—at the periphery of his vision too often for coincidence. Maybe Rashid had good reason to be wary of the terrorism paranoia. Or maybe it wasn't paranoia. He made a mental note to ask Innocent to inquire through the proper channels.

He was getting a picture of Abbas senior from his contacts and self-immolation seemed out of the question. Unless he was following the wrong lead, they were dealing with murder. Since a package was missing, he asked Rashid if he knew of any courier agencies his father used, got a shrug in return. "I don't know where else to check, I just don't," the young man mumbled, slumped listlessly in the passenger seat.

"All right, let's go back to the station and you can fill out a -- wait, didn't you say he had an appointment with a doctor?"

"Dentist. I keep forgetting you call them Mr here --Ms, in this case. He must've missed that appointment, too."

You idiot, Hathaway berated himself, you may have wasted half the day for want of a single question. "His teeth were giving him problems?" he asked casually.

"He had new dentures made. Ms O'Brian wanted to see him once he'd had a few days to get used to the fit."

There. How likely was it that the day they got a body identifiable only through dentures there'd be a missing person with them? Once they arrived at Beardsley & O'Brian Dental Practice, he judged it best to leave Rashid in the car. When he unceremoniously pulled the dentist away from her patient, it took only minutes to get the barcode of the microchip embedded in Idris Abbas's dentures. He left the office and stopped in the hallway, feeling elated, no longer noticing the major and minor annoyances of the day. He was sliding his hand into his pocket for his phone, eager to give Lewis the news, when it buzzed. He checked the screen and quickly answered it. "I was about to call you," he said, right over Lewis saying, "You can come back." They both paused, and again informed each other simultaneously: "I know who our body is," "Laura identified our body."

He should shut up and let Lewis talk, but he couldn't help thinking, damn it, I identified our body, and rushed to say, "He's Idris Abbas, Jordanian, late fifties. More than likely, it's murder."

"No," Lewis stretched the word, "he's Murdoch Cullen, a vagrant, Catholic, something of a
fanatic. You were right in the first place, and it looks like suicide."

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Hathaway dropped Rashid off where he'd found him, to fill out a missing person form at the front desk. At least he hadn't told the young man anything alarming, the only saving grace of the whole fiasco. He trudged up the steps, the day dragging on him again, all the peripheral irritations setting his teeth on edge. He was getting more and more uncomfortable in his clothes and there was only so much adjusting he could do in public. He hadn't eaten all day, but that was fine; he still wasn't ready for food. However, a cigarette -- having refrained for hours in deference to his passenger, he'd sell his soul for a cigarette, but Lewis was waiting for him, and he was also anxious to know where he'd gone wrong.

Hobson was in their office, one hip canted on the side of Lewis's desk, talking to him. He was standing in front of her, arms crossed, listening. The way he kept shifting his weight from side to side said he'd been doing it for a while. *Sit down properly somewhere so he can, too*, Hathaway thought, annoyed. *Haven't you yet noticed he has manners?*

Then again, he could be out of sorts with Hobson for pipping him at the post. When Lewis said, "Ah, there you are, Laura's been waiting to dazzle you," he managed a politely interested expression.

"It wasn't fun digging the ID insert out of that mess. It's the cheap version, thin foil under cyanoacrylate resin. Try scraping *that* carefully enough to preserve the code," Hobson complained, making Hathaway clench his teeth to keep from reminding her it was no more than her job. "According to the NHS, he's Murdoch Cullen, seventy-eight, once under psychiatric care, where they must've required denture markings. Some institutions do -- a very good thing. No known residence since then, and vagrants are the most difficult to identify when they come a cropper."

*More obvious than dazzling*, Hathaway thought, uncharitably.

She made a dismissive motion in the air at him, "Robbie says you have another identification, but you're wrong. What you have is someone else who wears dentures. Common enough, especially for a Middle Eastern of some age." Hobson wasn't shy; when she had reason to feel superior, she didn't tone it down. Hathaway suspected his polite expression had started to slip when she said, "No need to be miffed. Too bad you wasted your time on a wild goose chase, but -- "

Lewis interrupted, something Hathaway couldn't remember him doing to her before, "He was following the lead I sent him on and doing his usual thorough job." *Get off his back*, came through more clearly than Lewis must've wished. Hathaway thought it was unworthy of him to feel so ardently pleased about it, but he couldn't help it any more than he could help a lot of feelings when it came to Robbie Lewis.

With a shrug, Laura gave both of them her usual *you-boys* look. "Anyway, I couldn't spare time for lunch, I'm going now -- hungry?" she asked Lewis.

"I ate earlier," he responded. "Ta."

She looked at Hathaway. He knew it was mere courtesy and shook his head. "I'm fine, thank you." He waited until she left before asking, "'Earlier' was what, yesterday?"

Lewis grimaced. "Laura doesn't get how much thicker her skin is. " He picked up his jacket from the back of his chair. "Come on."
Hathaway assumed they were going to Innocent's office to report, but Lewis led him down the stairs to the outside, crossed the car park to the perimeter wall and perched on it. "Sit. You're gasping for a smoke."

He lit up, took a long, blessed draw and let it out before he asked, "How did you know?"

"How did you know I hadn't eaten?"

Neither question needed an answer after all. Hathaway put his cigarette back into his mouth. After some more welcome smoke went in and out of his lungs, he asked, "How do we know Cullen's a fanatic?"

"He's been in the nick plenty of times, sobering up, has a long record of public nuisance, praying and raving all over the place, buttonholing people to try and convert them. He lived off Catholic charities, moved from hostel to hostel."

"Before we close the book, would you mind if I checked when he was last seen?"

"Not about to close it before we check. Tell me your version first." Hathaway barely had time to think, Are you humouring me? before Lewis was answering him, "If it was worth your time, I want to hear it."

He knew Lewis had been both surprised and pleased when he'd said: You go, I go. This is one of the many reasons, he thought, you never dismiss my work out of hand. He detailed his morning, was immeasurably pleased when Lewis said, "I'd have concluded the same thing," patted his knee lightly and rose. "Let's check some hostels, see if Cullen has disappeared."

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By late afternoon, the names and locations of the hostels and everybody they had talked to were blurring into a haze for Lewis, but he knew all the information, what little there was of it, was safe in James's BlackBerry. Of course, a big portion of his lethargy was due to his blood sugar crashing. At the Cathedral Church of St Justin, he let Hathaway go on ahead, walked to the corner shop and picked up two chocolate bars. He made himself eat one, carried the other with him into the church. A sister told him his sergeant was in the back office checking their charity rolls, and no, she didn't know a Murdoch Cullen. Then again, vagrants mostly went by their street 'handles,' she believed was the term, not their baptismal names. Bureaucracies might require the poor souls to remember, charities didn’t.

Lewis decided to wait for his sergeant in the vestibule. Somewhere in the body of the church a choir practice --rehearsal, he amended, remembering Laura correcting him-- was going on, the clear voice of a young boy singing about the saving power of waters flowing from a temple. At the end of a day that had started with fire's destruction, the chant was soothing to hear, temple or no temple.

He saw Hathaway come around the back and started towards him. His sergeant was smiling to himself, but Lewis knew the difference between his 'successful' and 'captivated' smiles; this was the latter. He hadn't found anything worth finding; he was touched by the sweet voice raised in song, the purity of its high trill. The look he cast at the ceiling where the sound seemed to emanate from was wistful. Maybe he missed having his days surrounded by these sounds. "Now that," Lewis said quietly as they met in the middle of the vestibule, "almost makes you believe in angels." He held out the candy bar, Hathaway took it absently, most of him still up by the rafters. "Do you miss all this?"

"Not all. Some. Sometimes."
Double doors opening to one side drew their attention, and when they saw old and infirm people, a few in wheelchairs, the only young person a very pregnant woman, being helped into the vestibule, they both stepped over and held the doors. There was a bottleneck, until the sister Lewis had talked to earlier bustled in and took by the arm an old man coming in backwards. "Is this the man?" he said to her, his speech slurring and hard to understand, "By him who died on the cross."

"That's right, Mariner," she said as if it had been said so many times that it no longer meant anything. "Come now, let's get your prayers said so you won't be late for your tea."

"The man had penance done and penance more will do," he whined, but let her lead him. She didn't try to turn him around to face forward, merely steered him as he kept shuffling back blindly.

That was the only reason Lewis recognised him as a feature on the streets who used to cross his path periodically until he had left Oxford on secondment. The man had always been unkempt, skeletal; he was practically collapsed now, especially his face. It looked like one of the shrunken heads at the museum, but he was still grimly going back to something or getting away from something. "Shrieve me, oh shrieve me, holy man!" he cried out, sputtering and dribbling, before the sister led him around the corner.

"The old codger quoting scripture," he told Hathaway as they headed for the front doors, "seen him around since in the days with Morse. He always walks backwards. Must make sense to him somehow." Or it could be the manifestation of a pickled brain; he'd never seen the man sober.

"He wasn't quoting scripture," Hathaway said. "He was quoting bits and pieces of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

"Only in Oxford," Lewis mumbled, shaking his head. Maybe Mariner was one of those 'handles' the nun had mentioned. He indicated the chocolate bar in Hathaway's hand, "Get outside of that, will you. No joy in the records, I take it."

"None." He started to unwrap the bar.

"I think that's it," Lewis concluded, "The few charities who bothered to note his name know nothing about him any more. I wish we could find a next of kin, but it's time to pack it -- James?"
Noticing he was walking alone, he turned around. Hathaway stood frozen at the door to the church, staring at nothing, the half-unwrapped bar forgotten in his hands. Lewis quickly retraced his steps. "James?" Focused on the unresponsive face, only when he put his hand over Hathaway's did he realise it was shaking. "What's the matter? James!"

Hathaway gasped in a breath as if he'd forgotten to take one for a while, blinked, looked at Lewis and gave a start at seeing him so close. "Sir?"

You're asking me? "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he said immediately, still looking like a deer in headlights. "I, erm -- nothing." He pulled away, glanced at the chocolate bar, wrapped it back up absentmindedly and slid it into his pocket.

Not a good idea, it might melt through, but Lewis couldn't concern himself with his suit at the moment. "What's wrong? You're starting to worry me."

"Sir, will you give me a minute? I need to go and see -- just a minute?"

"Yes, of course." Hathaway spun around to go back into the church. "Should I come with you?"
"No. No."

Right, then. Nothing to be done when James Hathaway went into his clamshell mode but stand by. He leaned against the door to wait, registering that the lilting treble of the boy had been replaced by a mature, deep, rich voice. It was the same chant, now being sung in Latin, some of the words recognisable even to Lewis: *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto*. A faceted, resonant voice, in sharp contrast to the thin clarity of the boy’s, a voice with a seductive power. It made him think there was thin line between captivating and ensnaring.

He studied Hathaway’s face as he was coming back. Anything making the man keep that blank an expression had to be a big deal. "All right?"

"Yes."

The sum total of information he was going to get, obviously. "The bloke who was singing," he said when they were outside the church, with little or no idea why he was saying it. Mere instinct, but Hathaway wasn't giving him anything else to go by. "That's an unsettling voice." Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the lad do a double take.

"Is it?" James asked in a tone that was overly casual. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Almost spellbinding. It can lead you anywhere, like the Pied Piper."

Hathaway huffed softly and his lips curled, not a smile, closer to deprecation. Why or towards whom, he kept to himself.

"Been a long day," Lewis changed the subject for him, "I'm done with it. A pint?"

"Oh, yes." Now he looked relieved. When Hathaway went into wilful avoidance, Lewis worried. It never boded well.

He managed to get the lad to dig out and eat the chocolate bar, but once they were at the pub and Lewis waved off food for himself, Hathaway didn't order anything to eat either. Even though it was chilly, they sat outside to nurse their pints to escape the after-work crowd. For the second time that day, Lewis hoped he wasn't turning into Morse, who'd believed beer was a fine replacement for a meal and went down easier. "It won't bother me to watch you eat," he told Hathaway, who was squirming in his seat. He'd been doing that all day, making Lewis wonder. He slouched a lot, bopped to music sometimes, but he wasn't the fidgety sort. If made uncomfortable, his inclination was to pull in and lock down, acid-tipped barbs at the ready. The most fretful thing Lewis had seen him do, rarely at that, was chew his thumbnail. "My problem's not only this morning's sight. Been out of sorts all weekend."

"Didn't you have a date or something this weekend?" James asked indifferently, aimless eyes roaming around.

He knew damn well Lewis had had a date; Lewis had told him. "Therein lies a tale."

Hathaway's head snapped around and his eyes focused so fast that Lewis felt as if searchlights had been turned on him. "No blame to her, but Laura's a little too far on the culinary edge for me."

"What happened?"

"Mussels and scallops in hazelnut cream, topped with something she called green curry froth. Looked grand."

"And tasted?"
He shrugged. "Pretty much all right. Texture, not quite the ticket. Not for me, any road."

"I'm sure you didn't tell her that." But a contrary glint in his eyes seemed eager to hear otherwise. Laura must've really got up his nose at the office.

"Not in so many words. But when it wouldn't stay down...." He shrugged again. "Let's just say her plans for the evening had been a far cry from that."

"Weren't yours?"

Nosy sod. "Probably. Then again -- ah, James, how do I know? Sometimes I think it's little more than the path of least resistance. And really, that's a crummy reason to foist on anyone, let alone a good friend. For all I know, getting sick at just the wrong time may have been best for us both." Laura had been solicitous, but the only way that situation didn't become humiliating was to see the humour in it. As the hostess with the culprit dish, Laura...hadn't.

Hathaway, on the other hand, was clearly having the devil of a time trying not to see the humour in it. "Talking of mishaps," he said, not quite managing to keep a cheeky smile from his lips, "I'll raise you."

Oh? "So what happened to you this weekend?"

"Not this weekend, this morning. I wasn't in the shower when you rang, I was taking a dip in the river."

"In this weather?"

"Believe me, I hadn't planned on it. Did you know there's a film crew in town?"

Lewis stared at him. "Doesn't everyone? Community Liaison's swamped with their permit requests. The nick's been buzzing for weeks, troops climbing over each other for assignments to location detail."

"I don't do detail, I'm yours," Hathaway loftily explained away his disinterest in the bustle and blather of the nick. He sounded so self-satisfied about it that Lewis had to smile, then had to keep his smile from bubbling into laughter as James told him of his abrupt and unfortunate encounter with the film crew on the river, concluding with, "I'm dripping wet, having just dragged myself and my shell out of the water, try that fully-clothed sometime, I'm trying to dig out my phone -- by then I'd missed your call, and nobody's handing me so much as a tea towel so maybe I can keep the phone dry and check my message. Everyone's too busy scolding me, and this waddling little man keeps jabbing at my chest, screeching about losing his light, how his colours are gone, gone, gone."

"And you've no idea what he's talking about," Lewis said, mostly to let out some of the ebullience rising up in his chest, fighting his efforts at staying sympathetic.

"Something of an idea, no inclination to care," Hathaway said gruffly, and continued his tale of misery. "I had my suit with me, to change into at the station. I keep a small towel in the boot in case of splashes, not exactly sufficient for a dunking, but serviceable, so I was able to get dressed in my car."

The thought of the width of his car and the length of him --daddy-longlegs in a pillbox-- almost undid Lewis. He started to take a sip of his beer to distract himself, thought better of it, afraid Hathaway would say something to make him spew it.

Sure enough, Hathaway did. "I hadn't expected to need a change of underpants, though," he
added woefully.

Oh. Oh, dear. "You mean, running around all day long..." he barely managed to hold back flapping about, "...commando?" A snort escaped.

"Not funny, sir," James said, all gloom and squirming again. "Seams chafe."

That was it, he couldn't stop for love nor money, had to laugh. He put his beer down, leaned back and let it come rolling out. It wouldn't be as hilarious if Hathaway weren't so properly buttoned down most of the time, but he was, and it was.

"May I remind you," Hathaway said with disapproving severity, except the corners of his lips wouldn't stay turned down, "you're no longer fifteen years old."

"I so enjoy it when you make me feel like I am," he managed to blurt out between snorts and chortles and outright gales.

Hathaway stopped trying to make his lips behave and broke into a bright grin. "Not much of a challenge, I must say." He looked rather delighted at making Lewis laugh uncontrollably, throwing in a few chortles of his own.

It took Lewis a while to wind down, catch his breath and wipe his tearing eyes. "I'm hungry," he announced, the bout of laughter having made him feel loads better. Still in the same silly mood, he couldn't keep from adding, "Bet you never imagined that bit of you would get me hungry."

Hathaway choked. Literally choked and started coughing. Lewis wondered if it'd help to get up and pound his back a little. "Need a hand?" he asked.

"Oh, God," Hathaway moaned in between hacking, waved off aid -- rather desperately, Lewis thought, and let him be. He finally collected himself, tears in his eyes now, his colour high from coughing, or perhaps a blush. "I must protest the...bit...bit, sir."

"You're right, I know better." Now the lad's mouth dropped open. "Give over, we're both in and out of showers at the gym." Oh, dear. That was a blush. He should stop embarrassing the poor soul. Hathaway was such a modern young man in so many ways that he kept forgetting the prim seminarian still lurking in him. "Let's go and order in while we park ourselves in front of, well, your telly. So you can slip into something more comfortable." Sod it, there he was again. If anybody overheard them, they'd think he was flirting with a lad almost half his age. He'd let hilarity carry him too far. "I'm paying," he said by way of a small penance.

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Drusilla Llewellyn-Pierce had crumpled and straightened the overdraft notice so many times that it was hard to read any more, but she still could make out the words and they still enraged her. Last overdraft the bank was willing to fund. It had made her ring the bank and find out what that bloody production company was actually paying for Richard's services. I can put him out to stud, let him do what he's already doing, she thought, and get the same return. Practically nothing. So that was why he'd taken to advocating the culling of her aging horses, keeping only the show-worthy ones. If I'm to cull anything I've had between my legs, Richie, guess where I'd rather start.

She heard the garage door open and close, and the first thing Richard did when he walked in was to head for the cabinet and pour himself a single malt. He turned while tilting the drink towards her in lieu of asking if she'd like one as well, noticed her attire and asked, "You've been out riding this late?"
Hitting her crop repeatedly against the leather of her riding boots as she'd been pacing for hours had been her only outlet. If he had any sense, he wouldn't remind her there was a better target in the room now. "Ah, you are aware how late it is."

"Filming got delayed. The other set had an interruption early on, our producer had to go and sort out the rest of their day's schedule. We fell behind."

*Which does not explain your recently-showered look.* "Why is it always your set that's delayed?"

The vein in his temple was pulsing; she was annoying him. "They have to work with fleeting light; we shoot indoors."

"And we are not getting paid nearly enough," she snapped at him, balling up the notice and tossing it at his head. "I found out just how little. You have two choices, Richie, give up this nonsense or insist on proper compensation. While you're at it, quit your slag, too, 'cause I've just about had it."

"Whatever you're accusing me of -- " he started, and did the worst thing possible, he came towards her. She lifted the crop and slashed down with it -- across his lying face, she'd intended, but he lifted his hand, splashing his drink, and took the blow on his knuckles. With the severity of the strike he broke the glass in his hold, showering himself with the whisky and glass shards, started bleeding. "Goddammit!" He dropped the remains of the glass and cradled his hand, wisely backing away from her. "Fucking bitch!"

"Honesty. At last."

"Want honesty?" he screamed at her. "You've just about had it? I have had it. I have someone who loves me, wants me -- wants me, not my bank account. She's sexy, she's intelligent, and I'd have to be crazy to play this charade. Guess what, Drusilla, I'm not. We're finished."

You're finished, my dear, she thought, oddly calm now. How did one get blood stains off a valuable Persian carpet?

*****

Lewis said he wanted to go easy on his stomach and opted for soup from the Chinese restaurant. Hathaway knew thin soup wouldn't suffice once some of it went down and reminded Lewis he had a stomach, bypassed his usual highly-spiced choices and settled on an extra large order of plain chicken and veg on noodles. Within minutes of the food arriving, Lewis was eyeing it covetously, and Hathaway could point smugly at the plate and the fork he'd already put on the coffee table for him. When it came to the care and feeding of Robbie Lewis, he was miles ahead of Hobson; he paid attention.

"University Challenge?" he suggested, flipping on the TV.

Lewis looked taken aback. "Terminally pointless, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"Like slugs and black pudding. According to you."

"Oh," Hathaway remembered. "I was talking about pub quizzes."

"And the difference -- ?" he cut off as the box got his attention by announcing the competing
teams: King's College, Cambridge, against Queen's College, Oxford. "I see," he said. "I'm not daft enough to watch that with you, you're bound to get worked up. Top Gear?"

"Oh, please, sir."

"What young bloke isn't interested in cars?"

"Cars are fine. Reckless drivers -- have you seen the one with the turbo-charged caravan? I want to drag the lot to the Magistrate's."

"You really need to loosen up, James."

The issue was decided in favour of a Jeeves and Wooster repeat, Bertie's frantic, witless attempts to keep Sir Watkyn's scandalous memoirs from publication an amusing distraction for both until the food was polished off and the coffee table was cleared. Once Lewis slumped back and started dozing in front of Late Kick Off, however, there was nothing left to distract Hathaway from the thoughts he'd been pushing away all evening.

Back then it had started with a voice raised in chant, too. Fourteen years ago now. He hadn't reached the seminary yet, but he was heading for it determinedly. He'd been at St Laurence's one Sunday for a rare Tridentine Mass, caught up in the reverence of the traditional Latin rite. He could still remember his head had been bowed when the magnificent voice had washed over him, still hear the words that made him think he was listening to the purest form of devotion: Exsultate iusti in Domino. Rectos decet collaudatio. He'd thought that must be the voice Longfellow had called "the organ of the soul," glorious and transcendent.

He hadn't seen Edmund yet, hadn't known the seminarian would look to him as celestial as his voice. By the time Hathaway was in the seminary, the young man was in the novitiate, still living in the dormitory while serving under Father Osborn who'd been a leading light of the Cambridge Oratory at the time. Neither had Hathaway known his association with the ardently spiritual Edmund Cleaves would quickly, pitilessly, make him yearn to reach for grace and fall from it at the same time, find out that there was a vanishing line between agony and ecstasy. But he'd been very young then.

What was his excuse now? He looked at Lewis, sprawled carelessly at the other end of the sofa. Nothing celestial about him, all the more disturbingly real for it. Hathaway wondered why he seemed to want only the impossible, the untouchable. Too fearless or too fearful? Probably the latter, since both times he'd boxed himself in where doing anything but wanting was completely out of the question and, whether it suited him or not, he was forced to stay more or less chaste.

He didn't know if the voice he'd heard earlier belonged to Edmund. He'd realised the rehearsal was taking place on the balcony by the pipe organ, and halfway up the stairs he'd decided not to find out. That period was no more than a bridge to him now, taking him from the fourteen-year-old who had laughed in his best friend's face, because braying like an ass was what boys did when something made them uncomfortable, into making him realise why he'd been so uncomfortable, to now, into more certain, mature feelings he'd rather die than corrupt. "Sir," he said quietly, and when he didn't get a response, touched Lewis's arm lightly. "Sir?"

"Hmm?" Not a single twitch.

"Time for bed, don't you think?"

"Wasn't asleep," Lewis claimed, his mouth the only part of him moving. Barely. "Oh, bugger. At yours, aren't we?"
A fact that would've been abundantly clear if he could be bothered to open his eyes. "On the contrary, you're home, you weren't asleep, and I'm a figment of your imagination."

"Smart arse," Lewis mumbled, pulling himself up to hunch over his knees and rub his face. He looked knackered.

"Why don't you stop the night?" Hathaway offered. "You can go home to change in the morning."

"You won't mind?" And that proved how drained he felt.

"Of course not. I've slept on your sofa often enough. You'll sleep in the bed, though."

Lewis waved off the offer. "No, none o' that."

"On your bike then, sir, 'cause you're sleeping in one bed or the other tonight."

Lewis gave him a sidelong look. "A bit stroppy, aren't we?"

"My best offer."

"Oh, fine, I'll take it and thank you for it. Don't blame me if you muck up your back."

No, I blame me for mucking up your back. He'd been drugged silly at the time, his memories were spotty, but there'd been no shortage of people to confirm who'd run into the burning building to carry him down the stairs and out to the safety of the street. In all likelihood, that feat had set Lewis up for the injury at the squash court later, not that he'd ever said anything about it. If he associated the two incidents in the first place. "Give me a minute in the bathroom, then it's all yours."

He finished quickly, put out clean towels, unearthed the spare toothbrush Fiona had told him a bachelor should always have available, untouched since he'd bought it, placed it on the side of the basin in its package. When he came out, Lewis was sitting at the foot of the bed, shoes and socks off, stripping out of his shirt. "Good night, sir," Hathaway said, carefully watching his own feet as he left the room.

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Hathaway stared at Innocent. "Apologise?"

"Right away. Wholeheartedly, as if you mean it."

He barely kept himself from rolling his eyes at her straight-faced contradiction. "I was the injured party."

"If the film company seeks damages for work interruption as their producer is threatening to do, I might be the injured party. I'm already running this place on a pauper's budget. Go, look contrite, apologise, beg on your knees if you have to, get this monkey off my back." She whirled to head into her office, adding, "And as long as they're shooting on it, stay away from the flipping river."

He almost snapped that he had no idea where to find the miserable film company except on the banks of the flipping river. After he finished fuming and could think past feeling put upon, he went to the Community Liaison Office and perused the copies of the day's permits, chose the address they had supplied for their production offices. "When Lewis comes in, tell him Innocent sent me on an errand," he said to the duty sergeant as he was heading out. "Back soon as I can."
The production company had set up in a repurposed warehouse, the huge lot around it choked with vehicles parked haphazardly, from vans to cars to lorries to golf carts, and some strange contraptions with treads that must require tracks to run on. His warrant card wasn't enough to get past security, calls were made to the station to confirm his identity, only then was he given a visitor's badge and allowed to go through the metal door cut into the corrugated side of the massive building. Utter chaos reigned inside, all manner of equipment piled here, there and everywhere, a great number of people rushing pillar to post, a din of voices over it all.

"May I help you?" issued from somewhere around his breastbone.

He looked down. A ginger pixie with short spiked hair and cut-off denims had sprung into his path. "I need to see the producer." Too pretty for a boy, a young woman, he decided, although woman was stretching it. She was carrying an iPad, had a couple of BlackBerries, a light meter, and spring-type metal clamps attached to a wide belt she wore like a bandolier, a bluetooth over one ear, clunky earphones with a mike wrapped around her neck, its cord dangling free.

"Which one, Powell or McKenna?" she asked.

"Haven't the faintest. Either one in?"

"This way." She preceded Hathaway to a metal staircase leading to high catwalks circling the vast space. Once she was on the higher rungs, he noticed she had smashing legs. She was, however, too young to ogle. "Who shall I say?"

From up high, he could see the equipment on the ground floor was crammed in between various sets, makeshift rooms with partial or missing walls, looking like a demented doll's house. Groups of people doing something or another in them, some in costumes, from footballers, to priests, to -- shepherds? "Sergeant Hathaway," he introduced himself. For heaven's sake, sheep, in an enclosure with sides painted like a hilltop. "Oxfordshire Police."

"Oh, no, it's the trees, isn't it? I told them they had no business stripping leaves off trees that belong to Nature Conservancy." She glanced over her shoulder to check for a reaction. Hathaway kept a blank face; he'd conducted too many interrogations to hold back the rope from people intent on hanging themselves, even if they were cute little ravers. "They didn't know one side of Cowley Road is part of Boundary Brook Reserve. I study at Oriel --this is just the spare-time internship my tutor set up for me; he's a consultant here. So I knew, I told them and they stopped, but a bit late, eh? Who complained?"

You did. "I'll discuss it with your producer."

"Right, you can't tell me. Sorry."

They passed by a glassed-in area where half a dozen people were busy with their laptops, and film clips of stationary objects -- things that seemed to belong in a museum-- were running on a large screen. Metal doors at the far end opened up into a reception, with a door on each side, one open to an empty office. The other door was closed but the transom over it let out the argument going on inside.

"I bend over backwards to make this work for you," a woman was saying. "To make everything work for you. For years! I can't get a single line of interesting narration past the bishop's mouthpiece, nothing's reverential enough if it's not dry as dust, I spent a fortune I don't have to get replicas made of his antiques, Brad's conscripted my best cameraman, he's forever cutting into my budget, my hours, and now you have to pressurise me? You agreed to the work conditions, and suddenly you're holding our relationship to ransom?"
"I don't want to upset you, I love you, I love working with you," a man argued.

Great, a domestic tiff seemed to be going on. The young woman with Hathaway stated fidgeting. "Erm, maybe we should wait outside," she told him.

On the other side of the door, the man's voice rose unpleasantly, "But I'm an expert, not a charity, I deserve more than the pittance you toss my way. If you can't see I'm worth it --"

"I know you're worth it, I simply don't have the funds," the woman interrupted. "And don't yell at me as if I were a shrew, I'm not your wife. Why are we suddenly back to what she needs, what she wants? You said you were finished with her."

Domestic-plus-one, then. Hathaway decided he'd wasted enough of his day, ignored the young thing now tugging urgently on his sleeve and cleared his throat loudly, pointedly. Voices on the other side of the door dropped to furious whispers.

The red-head sighed, looking like a spooked doe. "I'm in so much trouble."

"Blame it on me, you're just being a good citizen," Hathaway told her quietly. "What's your name, by the way?"

"Ginny."

The way she wrinkled her nose at her own name made Hathaway ask, "Virginia?"

"Just as bad. Ginevra -- " she huffed contemptuously " --fair and smooth."

"In English. It's also a Teutonic name," he said, feeling indulgent. "It means woman-of-the-people. Not a bad thing to be." She was young enough to forget her troubles and twinkle up at him coquettishly. *Oh, dear.*

The door finally opened and they could walk in. The woman was a stranger to Hathaway, but he recognised the man from the telly, expounding on one exhibit or the other for the Ashmolean. He had a bandage across his right hand he was trying to keep from slipping off.

"Ms McKenna, Professor, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry," Ginny rushed to say, and promptly passed on the blame, "but Sergeant Hathaway insisted. He's with the police."

As he wasn't the film producer he was looking for Hathaway was going to ignore the man, but the sudden alarm on his face claimed his attention. "Professor... Pierce, isn't it?"

"Llewellyn-Pierce," he corrected, looking relieved that the policeman couldn't readily access his full name. It immediately made Hathaway think: *What have you done to assume I'd come for you?*

"That'll be all, Ginny," the woman took charge, waited until she left, then said, "I'm Eleanor McKenna, how may I help you?"

"I'm looking for the producer of your company."

"I'm one of them, the other's Bradley Powell. He's out on location. Will I do?"

"I don't know. I had a run in with your film crew on the river yesterday. My Chief Super wanted me to come and talk to the producer. She did not specify which."

"So you were the disruption," she concluded, going to sit at her desk and motioning him to a
seat, which he ignored. He wasn't staying that long. "You must've met Brad yesterday. I'm betting he was the one having a screaming fit."

  The droopy-arsed sod with the jabbing finger. "I thought he was the director."

  "One and the same. What did you want to talk to him about?"

  "There seems to be a question of damages resulting from the incident."

  "And you're hoping to do what, talk him out of it? Brad Powell, greed incarnate? Glimmer of a chance and he'd be the mouse that ate Oxford. Mind you, I'd hand him a spoon if I thought my production would see a penny from it." The last was said to Llewellyn-Pierce, meaningfully.

  "My Chief's idea may have been an apology, I have a better one," Hathaway told her. "If he'll forget the damages, I may forget the trees." Not if the Reserve took note and registered a complaint, but it was worth a gamble.

  She made a face. "Ah, you found out about that. He was so hoping that'd be attributed to early frost."

  "It still might -- but tell me," curiosity got the better of him, "why strip trees?"

  "So we can dress them up digitally in green shoots and blossoms for the later scenes. It's not financially feasible to bring the crew back in Spring. But now we'll just film the ending in London and call it Oxford."

  Dear God, he couldn't wait to be rid of this counterfeit playground. "Autumn, Spring, Oxford, London -- by any other name?"

  She laughed at that. "Welcome to my world."

  "No, thank you. But while I'm passing through, may I see your livestock permit?" Her face fell. "Also, I may have noted some safety issues in and around the warehouse. An HSE inspector been in yet?"

  "And I was just beginning to like you," she grumbled. "Very well, Sergeant, I'll impress upon Brad that there's no profit in biting someone who can bite back harder. Anything else?"

  "That'll do." He didn't reach to shake hands. She wouldn't care to, and he didn't care to shake the professor's; that man was culpable of something. "Good day," he said to both for civility's sake and left.

  "You'll be fine," he told Ginny who was loitering outside the door, "they have bigger issues." She started to accompany him. "That's all right, I can find my way," he waved her off, eager to leave the annoying, fake enclave behind and get back to real life.

  He was down the stairs and heading for the exit when he heard, "James? James Hathaway?"

  He turned and immediately wished he'd kept going as he watched his past separate from the bedlam of make-believe and come towards him -- that priest's outfit hadn't been handed out by the costume department. He felt his heart beat in his throat.

  ****

  After going home to change in the morning and before heading for the station Lewis had
stopped by the corner of Longwall Street to take a look at the now-cleared scene. He'd wanted to see what was visible from where, hoping to have a better idea which witness statements waiting in his office were more likely to be accurate. When he got to the station, the duty sergeant handed him the report Hobson had dropped off and told him that Hathaway would be out for a while.

He took a look at the report as he mounted the steps. How had a body burned long enough on a city corner to leave practically no soft tissue and turn the organs into sludge? The gate recess where it had been found was deep, true, and behind it was a cluttered yard, leading to a row of old, unused garages, and there was nothing across from the site except the long, high wall of the street's name, but still.

He ran into Innocent in the corridor. After exchanging greetings, he asked with little hope, "Any chance of a forensic osteologist for my body?"

"I thought you already identified him."

"Circumstantially, aye." James had been so sure of his identification, though. A bone expert would confirm whether or not they had the body expected of an old, worn-down vagrant. Laura was a great pathologist, but she wasn't a bone specialist. "I'd like to make sure."

"Shall I list all the things I'd like but can't afford?"

"Not a chance then?"

"Unless you suspect him of being the police commissioner or the heir to the throne, none."

He noted the order of the priorities, found a smile. He hadn't expected a different outcome. "Cheers all the same."

Once he looked through the reports on his desk, he'd solved the mystery of the time the body was allowed to burn. The first caller had mistakenly attributed the smoke to leaves and debris being burned in the deserted yard and reported it to the council as an environmental issue. Expectedly, the lone overnight clerk hadn't rushed over just to impose a fine. Only later had a bin man on early rounds seen it directly to realise a body was involved. All that was left to do was to wrangle the findings, the witness statements and the forensics into a report for the inquest. He had written enough reports in his time, didn't care to write any more, but his sergeant was still out. Nothing for it but to buckle down.

He didn't get far before Hathaway hurried in, took one look at what he was doing and started pulling together the papers on his desk. "I'm sorry, sir, I'll take over now." He nodded at Lewis's screen. "Just send that to mine."

"Why don't you sit here and finish up? I'll go and get some coffee."

"I can get your coffee."

Hathaway was a studious soul who did more than his share of work, put in unreasonable hours without being asked; even so, this eagerness to get stuck in and fetch was a bit much. Something must be pricking his conscience. "Sit," Lewis said firmly, leaving his seat to him. "So, what were you about?"

"Innocent sent me to the film company, to apologise for ruining their schedule yesterday."

"Apologise?"
"Exactly what I said. Apparently she had word they might seek damages from the department."

"You weren't even on duty at the time." But he knew they'd have reckoned the department would have deeper pockets than a sergeant and tried it on.

"Doesn't matter. I fixed it," Hathaway told the screen as his fingers flew on the keyboard.

He felt offended on James's behalf. "Did you apologise?"

"Nope." A world of satisfaction in one word.

"You fixed it anyway."

"Yep."

That was all right then. "Good man. I'll go and get my coffee. Want a cup?"

"No, thanks, I just had some. I, erm -- " his hands stilled, his eyes stayed on the screen. "I ran into someone. A friend. From a while back. Quite a while. Stopped a bit to have a coffee with him. Catch up."

Lewis marvelled at how clear a _Deep Waters Ahead_ warning it was when Hathaway-the-wordsmith chopped his sentences into fragments, each pause flashing: _Don't ask_. "I'll make up for it, sir, I won't take lunch break," he was reassured conscientiously --as if Lewis gave a toss about that-- and Hathaway went back to entering data.

"A sandwich from the canteen will do me, too," he said. The lad could have his penance if it was going to make him feel better, miss out on the two or three cigarettes he'd have squeezed into his break; he didn't need to fast on top of it. "We can make it up at some place decent after work."

"Erm, I'd like to, but I have rehearsal this evening."

"Ah. Your mates back from hols?"

"Yes, finally."

Lewis shuffled the papers on his desk until he realised that, this time, Hathaway wasn't going to ask if he'd like to come along to hear his group rehearse. He went only sometimes, but he must've become used to being asked. A bit of a sting there. _Act your age_, he told himself and left to get his coffee.

****

The clarinet kept sounding too breathy -- _change the bloody reed more often_, Hathaway thought, irritated with the whole rehearsal, always an uneven thing after a long break. Bill, wielding the group's only wind instrument, was such a quiet, diffident soul that nobody willingly admonished him. Hathaway cringed when the clarinet again sounded an airy off note and seemed to want to take it into a motif, as if they were improvising instead of rehearsing a set piece. He'd been steadily cursing the impulse that had made him invite Edmund when the man had asked, over coffee, what he was doing with his music lately. Cursing the impulse on one hand and regretting Lewis on the other. He truly hadn't realised he'd established a pattern of inviting him until he'd failed to do so and heard an expectant silence follow. He'd almost opened his mouth, but introducing Lewis and Cleaves? Chalk and cheese wasn't in it. More like a lit match and a stick of dynamite.
Anselm, their _pro forma_ leader, tapped his bow on the neck of his cello. "We're all over the place, let's see if a break will help. Take ten."

Hathaway placed his guitar securely on the closed top of the piano, jumped off the stage and went to where Cleaves was sitting. "Mind if we step outside?" he asked, patting his pockets.

Father Cleaves rose. He'd changed from the outfit he'd had on earlier, opted for a casual jacket over a rabat and his roman collar. "You're still smoking," he commented disapprovingly.

"I'm _trying_ to give it up."

"Apparently, it's proving harder than giving up your calling."

_Bugger._ "I have no doubt smoking is bad for me," he said, following Cleaves to the exit out of the auditorium.

"Are you making the argument that doubt is more destructive than certainty, good or bad?"

He reached past Cleaves to push the bar on the door and held it open for him. "For me, yes._ For most people, too_, he thought, but didn't expect Cleaves to understand; he suspected Edmund had never met a doubt in his life.

"Faith paves your way over it."

No, not a single doubt. "That _is_ the crux, isn't it? Unquestioning faith."

"Mysteries are there to marvel at, James, not to reduce to their components and examine."

"Clearly, my inclination is for the latter."

"I'm talking of divine mysteries, not earthly crimes and misdemeanours. You should've come to me back then, I could've helped."

_You're the last person who could've helped then_, he refrained from saying, covered up his silence by lighting a cigarette. Seeing Edmund after so long had shaken him to the core. The immediate reaction hadn't lasted long, he was grateful for that. But he felt as if his restless youth had awakened in him with all the immediacy of his passions and confusions, only to look around and find that his home had since outgrown him. He no longer belonged there, but he kept walking around, kicking the walls, raising a memory here, a reckless thought there, playing havoc with his equilibrium. He inhaled the cigarette deeply and steered the subject to safer waters. "How goes the documentary?"

"Not smoothly. The producer wants a docudrama, my Bishop wants a document. Difficult to balance."

They backed up against the wall to let a crowd of tourists pass by, and not a single female went past without noticing Father Cleaves --until they noted the collar, became abashed, but still kept stealing glances. Edmund's looks had changed from youthful, ethereal purity to a serene maturity. His blue-black hair, almost a shocking contrast to his light hazel eyes under arched brows, no longer fell to his shoulders in lush waves like a young boy's, the dimpling of his cheeks had become creases, his face had lost its soft, smooth look, now pared down to reveal his bone structure, which only made him harder to look away from. Hathaway found it a great relief he could look at him now as appreciatively as he would at any exquisite piece of art, but without coveting. And when he remembered the coveting, he mostly remembered hurting over it. "I'm actually sorry for inviting you," he said after they could peel themselves off the wall. "We're so rusty, your ears must be
bleeding." Lewis would have tolerated it, he was easy-going; Cleaves had the most sensitive hearing, was anything but easy-going.

"It's only a rehearsal. I can't stay any longer, though. I have to attend a bereavement. It came up unexpectedly, the way bereavements do." He held out his hand. "Look me up sometime, I'll be at --"

Hathaway took the offered hand. "St Justin's, I know."

Cleaves frowned. "St Mary's. They're filming the bulk of the documentary in the Old Library. What made you say St Justin's?"

"I was there on an enquiry yesterday, heard you rehearsing." Sod it. What could he say if Edmund asked why he'd left without notice? He kept talking in the hopes of avoiding the question. "I've never attended services at St Justin's, but maybe I should. It seems to have extensive outreach programmes."

"The Sisters of St Mark run a hostel and a clinic in the Auxiliary. As for services, I don't conduct them, my Lord Bishop does only on special days. Our regular priest, well, just between us, he's a bit scattered and he mumbles. You wouldn't like it." Cleaves's hand was tightening around his instead of letting go. "But the enquiry -- what was it?"

"Nothing to do with the church," he assured.

"Even so, I live there, I'd like to know."

"We were trying to identify a vagrant who depended on Catholic charities."

"Did you?"

"Only in the sense of proving a negative." He was getting uncomfortable, standing under the bright lights of the theatre front and, to all intents and purposes, holding hands with a priest.

"What do you mean?"

"I shouldn't delay you," Hathaway said, tugging back on Cleaves's hold. Once upon a time, he'd have bargained away his soul for it. Now it made him uneasy. He was finally released.

"Good night, James," Cleaves said distractedly and turned to cross the street to his car. He still had the easy, graceful lope that used to make Hathaway wonder how another young man had reached the same height while managing such smooth coordination. He had had to learn to hold still not to betray his awkwardness.

Cleaves got into his car and got out of it almost with the same move, his mobile to his ear. He talked into it briefly, put it away, closed the car door he'd been holding open, and crossed the street back to Hathaway. "Don't need to go after all," he said, smiling brightly. "Turns out, the family's more comfortable with their previous parish priest, and he's already there. I'm all yours."

Unsettling choice of words. And Hathaway had been thinking that the rehearsal might end early and he could go by Lewis's flat to see if he'd already eaten. "Are you sure? We're really discordant tonight."

"It's the clarinet."

"I know. Bill's usually good. He's off tonight for some reason."
"He's still good, except he's trying to go contrapuntal and nobody's willing to go along."

He hadn't thought of it that way. "You think so?"

"That's how it sounded to me. Maybe he's been listening to old ragtime-- or reggae? Something older, more raw than the jazz you're borrowing from, at any rate."

All the contradictory notes that had irritated Hathaway suddenly fell into the off-set pattern of early jazz long before it had found manners, when the dominating, instinctual character of African music had first met ragtime, and the unorthodoxy of the West Indies sound had also crept in. Rare to hear that raucous, cheerfully atonal rebellion in it now, except on the street corners of places like -- "New Orleans. That's where he went on holiday, just came back. You should be a detective, Edmund."

"You should be a priest," Cleaves countered.

Best swerve right past that one. "We're not a brass band, we can't duplicate that sound."

"You can duplicate the form -- the spirit, so to speak." It was only a friendly dig. Edmund seemed to have learned to lighten up. "Use the base as the tuba for the rhythm, you and the piano as the trumpet for the melody, and let Bill be the wild counterpoint he wants to be. It'll wreak havoc with the harmony, but it'll add a whole new texture. Your music is more syncopated than homophonic anyway."

Hathaway couldn't wait to try it. He tossed away his cigarette and practically dragged Cleaves back with him into the auditorium. "How about a change of pace?" he asked, waving everybody back onto the stage and Edmund to the fore, "Tell them."

"The last piece," Cleaves chose without preamble, taking charge as easily as breathing. That hadn't changed. "If this suits all of you, you'll switch to a more fitting piece later, but let's start with the familiar." He motioned at Anselm. "Keep the beat. Simply. You," he told Hathaway already sitting hunched over his guitar, "and the piano, cantus firmus."

"Fixed melody," Hathaway translated for their young pianist who wouldn't know Latin if it bit him.

"And you," Cleaves said to Bill, who had caught on by then and looked delighted, "do what you want to do, but drop the dissonance for the resolution and join the harmony. All right," he chopped at the air to indicate the beat, "One and two and...."

On the same wavelength right then, it felt fitting to have Edmund back in his life. As a friend without complications.

*****

"Any reason this can't wait until tomorrow when I'm in my office?" Bishop Osborn asked through the phone, his voice dripping icicles.

So I can do this without the interference of your prissy priest, Llewellyn-Pierce thought -- what a waste, too, that man choosing priesthood when he could've pulled birds by the bushel. "A very good, reason, Your Excellency," as an Oxford professor, he was used to spreading honorifics about, even when he'd rather choke, "which I'm sure you will soon appreciate."

"Convince me."
"I've studied a lot of collections before yours, as you know."

"Yes, yes. Expert. Granted. Your point?"

Fine, then. "I've never seen a collection without at least a couple of questionable items in it, even an outright forgery or two. Or at the very least, items that defy all search for provenance."

A brief silence, then, "I repeat, your point?"

"It leads me to believe that you're not revealing your complete collection, only the items in which you place a high level of confidence. Commendable, of course. A man such as yourself wouldn't care to jeopardize his standing by making rash claims. But if any items are very dear to you," rather, the return you'll get for bestowing them on influential church officials, "I'd be willing to authenticate them for you privately."

"I see."

"And once they're authenticated by an expert...." he let the sentence fade.

"There are other experts."

That could mean Don't bother me again. Or it could stand for Will it be safe? Llewellyn-Pierce chose to take it as the latter. The former wouldn't get him paid. "All the more reason your treasures should be authenticated by one who knows how to anticipate the issues others can raise."

How much clearer can I make this, Your Haughtiness?

"Your time, I take it, is valuable?"

"Without undue modesty, yes." The wealth that had been lavished on the collection Llewellyn-Pierce had only seen a portion of must be great indeed.

"How do you suggest we proceed?"

"First, I must see the items. I can visit your collection in situ -- " he heard a grunt and had the impression of a bristling dragon huddled over his gold "-- or perhaps we should meet somewhere convenient to you, where I can privately conduct a preliminary evaluation." This is all your fault, Dru -- you and your avarice.

*****

The rehearsal had lasted longer than any of them had planned on, toward the end they had all started improvising, each instrument teasing the others to up the stakes.

"You look pleased," Cleaves said as they came out into the street.

"I always enjoy playing, but it's been a while since I got excited about it."

"Looks good on you. Fancy a drink?"

Thank God for the question, for Hathaway didn't know how he could've responded to the comment. "There's a decent wine bar around the corner." Cleaves had never been much for pubs or ales.

Edmund tapped his collar. "Bit of a wet blanket for the punters. Let's spare them and go somewhere peaceful. How about by the river? Remember the outings on the banks of the Cam?"
Under the guise of revision sessions, they would start sober and serious, the affinity of seminary students for spirits would eventually turn them rowdy. If Cleaves happened to be there, he'd round everybody up and point them to their rooms. "I remember you were a right Tartar."

"Kept all of you from getting sent down," Cleaves said lightly. "Come on, let's grab a couple of sandwiches and a bottle of wine -- if you don't mind sharing the bottle."

"Fine with me."

Cleaves patted him on the shoulder. "Lead the way, James."

Hathaway chose a dead-end tributary that veered from the river and formed a tiny cove surrounded by a grassy knoll backed by trees. Having learned from recent experience, he had two large towels in the boot of his car, and a bin liner for storing wet clothes, should the need arise again. The towels were useful to sit on -- in Cleaves's case, to recline on -- and the liner served as picnic cloth. Boat engines could be heard on the river, doing a thriving business with dinner cruises for the tourists, their lights and the occasional lanterns of the punts twinkling in and out of the trees ahead.

"Sort of a cloister, this," Cleaves said softly, eyes on the swathe of moonlight shimmering on the water. "God's own cloister, owing nothing to man."

What would it mean if man didn't look upon it? "And if we weren't sitting here?"

Cleaves laughed softly, folding out a corkscrew from his key case, uncorking the wine and passing the bottle to Hathaway. "I'll say His creation doesn't need our interpretation, you'll ask why the church is laden with interpretations in that case -- we've had these debates before, James, and here we are. Let me cut to the chase: are you happy, content?"

"I don't think I'm made for happiness," he said sincerely, took a long swallow from the bottle and passed it back. "I'm periodically...fulfilled." If God was in everything, then He was in all that was magnificent and benevolent along with all that was horrifying and destructive. Periodic fulfilment seemed the best that could be hoped for. It seemed like God's basic, no-frills plan, in fact.

Edmund handed him a sandwich. "Cheers," Hathaway said, and changed the sticky subject. "You're filming at St Mary's? I thought it was still under renovation."

"It is, they're working around us. I assume they couldn't pass up the money, given the sad state of the economy. You should visit the set sometime. I understand the Old Library was the first university building in Oxford."

"The nascence of all that followed, yes. It's been closed for a good while. If I can find the time, I'll take you up on that. I'd like to see it again."

"Time is an issue for me as well, dealing with the ins and outs of Osborn's documentary -- you do remember him?" As if Cleaves hadn't been the one to drag Hathaway to the man's lectures at the Oratory with all the irresistibility of Attila the Hun. "Of course, you do," Edmund concluded without waiting for an answer, confident as ever of Osborn's ascendancy in the natural order of life. "But I make time for the choir, I need its cleansing." Cleaves offered the bottle again. "Or the celluloid world will drive me to break a commandment."

"That'd be the day. "I don't think they use celluloid any more."

"Osborn's my superior, I use the terminology he prefers. Modernity distresses him."

"Mine lets me use it to poke fun at him. But then, he's down-to-earth. The thought made him
smile, just for himself, not meant to be shared.

"Do you have someone in your life?"

"Yes." He was appalled at the word out there, bald-faced in the open air. What perversity had prompted that question at just the unguarded moment? He hurried to qualify, "Not like that. I mean someone who makes me feel what I'm doing with my life is worthwhile." Makes me feel I'm worthwhile.

He expected a debate, perhaps a barbed question about what had lacked worth in serving God, but Cleaves reached to take the bottle from him, pointing at the guitar he'd insisted Hathaway bring with him. "It's a lovely night, James, play something for me."

If Edmund could refrain from being dogmatic, Hathaway decided it behoved him to be companionable. He pulled his legs into position and the guitar onto his lap, ran lightly through the opening chords of the Magnificat. Edmund gave him a beatific smile, and once the melody was established, started to sing softly: Magnificat anima mea Dominum. Et exsultavit spiritus meus....

*****

Father Cleaves had been driving on this road for months now, if road it could be called. At Mathias's insistence, he even drove an unwieldy armoured van over it regularly, Osborn willing to trust pieces of his collection to the vehicle when they had to be ferried to the set and back, but not to any stranger driving it. And Cleaves still feared getting lost or worse. Once past the village of Burcot and veering toward the left bank of Thames, it shot in and out of mazes of copses, took tight bends, then turned into a winding stretch of furrowed soil and became really difficult. He had to be vigilant to avoid the rusted iron palings and the rotted wood tracks, detritus of habitation and industry from as far back as when the village had been a transshipment point on the Thames before the canals were cut, the river then unnavigable closer to Oxford. The landscape was also dotted with much older Roman ruins, excavation mounds and remains of aqueducts overgrown with vegetation, the only visible evidence of the ancient cisterns underground.

The old estate left to Osborn's cousin through a distant maternal aunt had been palatial once. Now the manor house looked like a huge, decrepit ark. Soon, the whole edifice was going to sink into its rotting foundation. One of the reasons Mathias wanted his collection out of it, into a place that could safeguard it properly.

When Cleaves had seen the house for the first time, about a quarter of a century earlier, he'd been eleven and he'd been thrilled. It had been ancient then, too. Staying in the sprawling manor that dated all the way from the Cromwellian period should have been a trial, but it had delighted Edmund. The long line of descendants of Mathias's conservative, reclusive family --going back to Castilian nobility through an attendant who had arrived in the retinue of a Spanish queen-- had resisted innovations mightily since then. Having never forgotten the hard lessons learned as unswerving Catholics through too many royal vagaries, the family had always preferred to live, in modern parlance, off the grid.

By the time Cleaves was a guest in the manor, electricity was fitfully coming from outdated, deafeningly noisy generators -- to a fanciful boy, siege engines outside the castle walls. Refrigeration had consisted of deep cellars; bottles had been submerged in wells and, when Mathias had allowed him small portions of the wine, the smell of algae remaining from their immersion had imbued the drink with subterranean mysteries for him. Sewers then and now went only as far as septic tanks, not that they were used all that often any more, while water came from the ancient cisterns through pumps into reservoirs, no longer drinkable, barely fit for basic sanitation. The furnishings had been so very old but well-maintained, much like a once gorgeous dowager still holding onto her frayed
fineries with worn pride, her tired beauty still shining through.

The fineries were since gone, riches accumulated through many generations sold piecemeal, even the stained-glass and most of the lead-paned windows exchanged for iron-grated weather boards. The ground floor was a dark, empty cavern, gritty and grimy. A single bulb in a sconce lit the way up the stairs to what had once been a sprawling ballroom, the only part of the house kept immaculate, powered by two huge industrial propane tanks installed at great cost. It had been turned into a gallery, plinths and cabinets and lecterns displaying the vast collection of sacred artefacts that had replaced the family antiques and burdened the family fortune.

"Where have you been?" Osborn asked, looking up from a parchment he was holding, his hands encased in latex gloves. "You were only going to be a couple of hours."

"I'm sorry," Cleaves apologised, taking off his shoes and pushing them to the side where Osborn had left his muddy boots. He must've gone for a long walk. "I invented an excuse to leave early, but something came up and I thought it best to stay." He pulled on a pair of gloves as well; there were strict rules to entering the room. Osborn was in the flannel shirt and corduroys he invariably wore on the estate, and as usual looked like a great bear of a field hand. Age might have lessened him, but not to Cleaves's eyes.

He joined Osborn by the fireplace --never lit, to keep the room free from smoke and soot-- went to his knees and bowed his head, *Bless me, Father*. When the large, heavy hand came to rest on his head, he sighed gratefully. It always felt like coming home. The hand went on to stroke down the side of his face and gave his shoulder a pat before leaving, permission to stay where he was. He turned until he was curled around his knees, only then noticing the items spread out on a pristine cloth on the hearthrug in front of them. Before he could ask why they were out of the vault, Osborn tilted one up for him to see. "Look at this image. That's a cross, the mound behind it looks like a tomb, and those etched squares, that's a wall. Tell me this doesn't depict a crucifixion taking place outside city walls -- the Holy City of Jerusalem?"

"Could be. But that doesn't attribute a date."

"Attributes a period," Osborn was clearly choosing to misread the fact Cleaves had meant the date when the image had been carved, not what period it referred to. "I must get these texts read."

Oh, that wasn't wise at all. "Perhaps not right away," he suggested carefully.

Osborn nodded at the parchment he'd put aside, a thoroughly authenticated item. "Writings from the period talk about these -- think of it, Edmund, we could be looking upon objects held by the first saints of the Church."

Cleaves reached to run his fingers lightly over some of the other items on the cloth, a ritual cup, the carvings on it just different enough from well-known Moabite to be that rarity, evidence of Ammonite text. An ancient crucifix, rubbed by so many devoted hands for so long that the Christ-figure on it looked like a stick insect. The limestone ossuary; the carvings on the box reduced to partial words. "Ya-akov bar-" was James, son of-, but the father's name was gone. In the next line, "hua" could be Yeshua, Jesus, but if connections had been specified, they were no longer visible. Still, it was an extremely rare find in that it held bones, could be dated. The baker's dozen that Osborn was lovingly handling, though -- those could be downright dangerous. "You are not thinking of including them in the documentary, are you?"

"Documentary?" Osborn huffed dismissively. "Once these are authenticated -- "

"If they're authenticated," he had to point out.
Osborn ignored him, "-- they'll be more pivotal than the Dead Sea Scrolls. They're too sacred for the provinces, and really, that's what we are, provincials in our little corner, aren't we?" His hand came back to stroke and play with Cleaves's hair. "Tell me, my dear Edmund, how would you like to go to Rome with me? After all, you brought me this wondrous find."

Once the documentary was released with due fanfare, the collection was supposed to have been presented to the Archdiocese. Now Mathias had the Vatican in his sights for his largesse? "I will go anywhere you bid me go," do anything you bid me do, he thought, his eyes wanting to close at the feel of the fingers carding through his hair, tugging playfully on a strand, "that's never a question. But for now, the old friend I went to meet tonight -- " he felt Osborn's hand leave him as if he'd suddenly realised what it had been doing. He regretted disrupting it."I knew him years ago in Cambridge, James Hathaway, a seminary student. Lost his calling back then." Cleaves had always known he'd played a role in that, hadn't cared, didn't care. "He's a policeman now. I used to bring him to the Oratory with me often. You also lectured for his year, thought highly of his Latin."

"I think I remember him. A pale pole of a thing, wasn't he? Is he Irish?"

"Irish? No. Why?"

"They usually are, the ones who flip from priest to plod. More shame to them, for confusing divine service with public service."

This plod might attend services at our church, look into our charity programmes. "Yes, my Lord, but -- "

"I keep telling you, dear boy, no need for honorifics in private."

"As you wish, Mathias," he amended, although he hadn't meant it ecumenically, but in the way he had loved saying it so very long ago. He'd just started his secondary education at St Bede's; the honorific was only dreamt of then, and they would be in private while he sat at Osborn's feet, just like this, and imagined himself the favoured page of his larger-than-life, powerful knight, devoted to his service, privileged to anticipate his every wish. "But I beg of you, listen to me, I must tell you something."

Osborn was again riveted on the primitive carvings. Despite everything, Cleaves couldn't help but feel a profound satisfaction at having put in his hands something that transported his dear, dear face --deeply lined now, but radiant at the moment-- with joy of past and future glories. For a long minute, he simply watched, then used the one sure way of getting Mathias to listen and pay attention, "Please, Father, will you hear my confession?"

*****

Lewis wasn't sure he cared for the benevolent look Innocent was giving him; there was something calculating in it. "Been to Leeds?" she asked, tapping some papers on her desk meaningfully.

He couldn't tell what they were, except that the top one seemed to be a schedule of some sort. "Aye, once or twice."

"You'll see it again tomorrow," she said smugly, pulled out an ID badge from her drawer and placed it at the end of her desk closest to him. "That's where they're holding this year's National Law Enforcement Conference."

Delegate, it said on the badge. Oh, no. No, no, no. Attendance badge, all right, bearable.
Delegates *participated*. Or, heaven forbid, *gave speeches.*

"You won't be speaking until the last day," she chimed his doom bang on cue, "so you'll have a few days to put your speech together."

"Erm, Ma'am, I'd much rather -- "

She interrupted, "You need to touch strongly on this privatisation lark the Home Office is planning. How would you like a corporate drone for your bagman?"

"I wouldn't." He wouldn't want one of the bright sparks on their own rolls, either. He saw no reason for *any* replacement. "But, Ma'am, I don't see why -- "

"Go and tell them the drawbacks," she interrupted again. "Take a firm stand."

He sighed. "I'm not getting out of this, am I?" This was his penance for having a clear desk for more than twenty-four hours. Where was the latest serial killer when you needed one?

"You're a senior officer, these things come with the job once in a while. Last time you gave a speech, you did us proud."

*Last* thing he wanted to be reminded of. "I didn't write that speech," he protested, "Hathaway did."

"So get him to put something together you can take with you. You'll have time to revise there."

He had a much better idea. "Can I take *him* with me?"

She glared at him. "What are you, joined at the hip? No, you can't take him with you. Before you start, no, not even if you're paying his way. I know you two. You'll tuck yourselves into a corner with a couple of pints and avoid socializing. I want you to circulate, make our views known at the Conference." She held out the stack of papers and rustled them in the air impatiently when he was slow in accepting them. "Besides, I need Hathaway in IT for the next few days."

He grimaced at the conference circulars now in his unwilling hand. "Ma'am, truly, I'm not the best person for this."

"You're the one I'm sending -- go." She tapped at her desk to remind him of the badge he hadn't picked up. Once he reluctantly put it in his pocket, she waved him on his way. "It's only three days, you'll survive."

*I wouldn't count on it.*

"Oh, and, Robbie," she called out after him, and when he turned, "It shouldn't be all work and no play. Don't forget to have a good time," she added with odd, misplaced glee.

*****

Llewellyn-Pierce feared his relationship with Eleanor wasn't going to survive too much togetherness. She had made it clear she had no time for problems immaterial to her work at the moment, what with the odds already stacked against her. She'd meant *his* problems, of course.

Which was why he was following a lackey into Bishop Osborn's office and despairing of the riches lavished on the clergy at this level. The office they entered was sprawling and sumptuous, rare
When Osborn saw him enter, he rose from behind his desk without so much as a greeting or the offer of a seat, waved away the lackey and proceeded to heft a case from the office safe. The man was at least a quarter of a century older than Llewellyn-Pierce, but he didn't look it. More than anything, with his massive build and large head, he looked like a bull preparing to charge. Utter dogma must lend some sort of invigorating power to the bull-headed.

Osborn put down the case next to a sideboard large enough to land a plane on, partly draped with something like an altar cloth. He carefully pulled off the sheet to expose the items already placed on the board, then held out a pair of latex gloves. Llewellyn-Pierce shook his head, rubbing his fingers together. "I need the sensitivity." He ignored Osborn's glower and leaned to inspect the artefacts, a cup, an ossuary and a crucifix.

He picked up the cup, carried it to the window for better light, felt every inch of it minutely, then again. No hint of moulding, it was solid carved stone, chipped and pocked with age, not an aging process. Then he studied the carvings. "Not a ritual cup, a tribute one." Damn it, it felt authentic, and was that...? He pulled out a jeweller's loop and looked closer. Yes, that was a feminine singular 'lyh' in the inscription, a distinct difference from Biblical Hebrew. First or second century BCE, he'd bet, and probably Ammonite, an elusive text which would excite scholars no end. He was holding a fortune in his hands, except it'd do him no good. Any expert could authenticate the authentic.

He put it down and picked up the crucifix. That was better. No identifiers on it, carved from pyramidal, common balsa wood of South America. Clearly, centuries of hope and grief had been foisted on the simple thing by the hands of the gullible. He could invent a provenance for it, possibly tie it to one saint or another. It'd earn him some of his keep.

The ossuary; hardly any had been found still containing bones, or in this case, a bone, broken in two. The letters incised on the limestone surface -- oh now, that was interesting. With the father's name missing from the inscription, not too far a reach to assume son-of-Zebedee, was it? Even follower of Jesus, with that useful "hua" right there? "I'll have to get it under an electron microscope - discreetly, of course-- to make sure no traces are left of the missing letters," he told Osborn, "but this can conceivably belong to James the Greater."

"I should get the bones carbon-dated then?"

Did the man have any functional brain cells? "That'll leave a record, and what if it's not the answer we want? Surely a couple of bone fragments from the first century can be found in a dusty corner of a museum or lab; this is Oxford, after all. I'll see if "

"Stop that barbarity at once!" Osborn thundered, making Llewellyn-Pierce jump. "Do you imagine that I -- I -- will perpetrate a fraud on the Church? How dare you, you offensive cockroach!"

Llewellyn-Pierce suddenly became intensely aware of the man's mass, the size of his gloved hands. "But th-then, wh-what's the p-purpose -- " he stammered "-- of this whole -- ?" Damn the overbearing bastard's pride, had he simply wished to be sure he hadn't been a patsy for sharp practice on some undocumented items? Was that the only reason for a private evaluation? "I thought we had an -- "

"Spare me! Your worthless thoughts must be as unspeakable as you. Perform your function, state your fee and be done. As quickly and in as few words as possible."
"Erm, well...I can certify the cup. I estimate the ossuary between the first and the third century, carbon-dating will narrow it, providing the remains are from the original internment." None of that would get him more than any expert would for any straightforward certification. "Is that all?"

In lieu of an answer, Osborn placed the case on the sideboard, opened it, and Llewellyn-Pierce was fascinated despite himself at seeing the small, ring-bound metal books in neat, padded rows. Could they possibly be -- ? Dear God, if they were a portion of the lost collection of codices that were believed to detail the last year of Christ's life, perhaps even the crucifixion --

Osborn must be hoping for exactly that. His face that had been so cold and disdainful all along was suddenly showing a ferocious avarice, an expression all too familiar to Llewellyn-Pierce. He'd long learned to recognise it, in his career and his marriage. Even found it useful at times.

The corroded edges of the lead sheets had thinned to wicked sharpness. No sense in flirting with lockjaw, he pulled on the gloves Osborn had offered earlier, easing one over the bandage across his right hand. His heart beat fit to burst his chest as he concentrated solely on the images. They looked absolutely authentic and he was a scholar of antiquities, could still be excited by their possibilities, even awed. The story the carvings and the reliefs told wasn't neatly sequential, but then, some plates were stuck shut, and history never came through time accurately anyway, especially history cluttered with so much myth.

Now for the lettering. He turned over some pages randomly, until the inscription on one of them jumped out at him: "ἄλυπε χαϊρε, Ἀβγαρ ὁ καὶ Εἰσίων ἄ" in mirror-writing.

His heart gave another exultant thump, for a whole different reason, then settled down. How trifling a matter, after all. "I'm pretty sure they're authentic," he said, "but I need time to study the text, compare it to other writings from the period."

"There's paper and pencil," Osborn pointed to his desk.

Pencil? Really? Did the man expect him to take rubbings? He pulled out his mobile. "Photos. Which I can sharpen and contrast on an image program so I can see better. Cover up the images if you want, I only need the text." Osborn scowled, but put his hand over the relief under the legend and Llewellyn-Pierce started taking the photos.

When he was done, Osborn returned the books reverentially into the case to carry back to his safe. "I only need to confirm a few points," Llewellyn-Pierce told him, heading for the door. "I'm sure I'll be able to get you the certificates in a day or so. We'll discuss my fee then." And my real fee a little later.

*****

Lewis's collar was undone, his tie loosened and askew, his sleeves rolled up, and he had yanked fistfuls of his hair so often that he was beginning to look like a startled hedgehog. Hathaway thought it was unfair to find the sight charming when the poor man was suffering from anxiety over yet another speech Innocent had foisted on him. "You're making too much of it, sir. Once you start, you'll be fine. Just like last time." He'd even gone off text to crack jokes and the crowd had enjoyed him.

"If only it had stayed the last time," Lewis grumbled. "You know, this could be your fault. If I'd gone with the rubbish I'd written--"

"It wasn't rubbish. It merely needed a little rearranging," he said loyally.
"Being up on a podium rearranges me." He glared at the delegate badge he'd tossed onto his desk. "Last time it was puffery for the press, don't give a toss what those hacks think. It's our lot this time."

"Should make it easier. You'll know some of the attendees."

"On the job for donkey's, bound to be familiar faces. Not friends, though."

"Nobody else going from here?"

"Can you see Innocent springing for overtime and travel for more than one? Reminds me, what'd she fob off on you?"

"The new National Database is going up beginning next week. Our system's not compliant with configuration upgrades yet, she thought I could help with -- "

"Spare me." Lewis held up his hand. "My head hurts already." He grimaced, then asked at Hathaway's look, "What?"

"I was told more than once that you used to be the go-to bloke for technology. Were they having me on?"

"Once upon. For some years there I stopped paying attention." He looked away with a closed expression that always told Hathaway which years he was talking about, then shook himself back to now and continued, "That's a geologic age in technology. Compared to Morse, I was Steve Jobs. Compared to you, I'm, well, Morse." He made a face at the papers spread out in front of him. There was a neat document on his screen, but he was still shuffling the scribbled notes. "Morse loved this stuff. Groused about it, aye, but he groused about everything -- unless he was listening to a lusty opera singer, especially a soprano. He was good at this sort of palaver. I'm going to make a pig's ear of it."

"Sir," Hathaway inclined his head to draw his attention to Innocent heading for their office. Lewis looked up, but failed to straighten his expression or slump, might have even said something vindictive under his breath.

"Just wanted to wish you a good trip before I left," she said brightly once she was at their door. "Don't spend all your time fiddling with the speech, it'll be one among many. Just enjoy yourself." With no more ado, she turned to leave, throwing a conspiratorial look at Hathaway on her way out.

"Ta," Lewis mumbled to her back. He waited until she disappeared, then blew out an exasperated breath. "First she tells me how important the bloody speech is, now she's telling me it's not." He shook his head disconsolately. "Sometimes I just don't understand women."

Hathaway thought that, in all likelihood, he was a lot more handicapped in that area than Lewis had ever been, but he'd been the one stuck with keeping a blank face while listening to Innocent moan about how Lewis and 'our lovely Laura' couldn't seem to get it together. She had tried to recruit him to her way of thinking then, and that look she had just given him -- "I'll print the speech out for you," he used as an excuse to turn to his screen. As the printer was running, he called up the National Conference page and clicked on the functions -- sure enough, The Changing Face of Forensics. He went down the list of attendees. Right there: Dr Laura J Hobson.

Clearly, Innocent was yet again playing matchmaker. Rather astounding after the creepy disaster a previous attempt had turned into. The woman was incorrigible. And Lewis didn't seem to
have the first clue. Come to think of it, Lewis probably owed the speech that was upsetting him so much to Innocent's sneaky tactics. He'd be alone, anxious, off balance...

Should he be told? Was it any of Hathaway's business? Did he have the right to make it his business? In truth, no. It was less his business because he wasn't impartial -- but why should he be impartial? If it were in my power, he thought, you'd go home tonight to find your Val waiting for you, and I'd want no more than seeing your smile tomorrow morning. But Hobson? She was a lovely woman, a good friend, but if she loved Lewis as a lover should, she wouldn't have kept him guessing for so long.

Come to your senses, he told himself, it's not as if he doesn't know that. He's not going to take the relationship further just because she's there -- unless he wants to. And if he does, then it's his decision and you'll live with it. If it came to that, he'd dance at their wedding, wish them happiness and mean it. Because, really, past friendship and loyalty, what did he have to offer in its place?

It took him a while to notice the printer had stopped running. He put the papers together and took the thin stack to Lewis's desk. "Here you go, sir."

"Cheers." Except Lewis looked anything but cheerful.

Hathaway pulled himself together, perched on the corner of the desk and leaned towards him. "Listen to me for a minute. We know the job, we know what it takes. There will be serious pitfalls to privatising portions of the service. We just wrote them out. As with any responsibility you have, you'll get up there and tell them. You'll do it well, that's the only way you know how to do the job. Past that, as long as there's profit potential for the companies backing the politicians, it doesn't matter what you do or say. So just think of the nice pint you'll have once you're done and don't tear yourself up over it. There's no call."

Lewis looked at him for a long minute, then smiled softly. "Right," he said, rising and pulling down his rolled up sleeves. "So come and have a nice pint with me now and convince me. It has to last me for three days."

Hathaway handed him his jacket. "The pint?"

"Oh, I'll have plenty more of that. Your silver tongue and friendly face."

He hoped his grin didn't look as soppy as he feared it did. "Nobody's ever called my face friendly. I'm not sure about the silver tongue, either."

"They're not standing where I am," Lewis told him, shrugging into his jacket. "Tough luck, 'cause I'm not leaving -- well, except for the next few days." He led the way out the door. "So as they say, keep the home fires burning, James."

If you only knew the burning I feel and the burning I risk. But at the moment, he was ridiculously content. "Always, sir."

"Don't forget to feed Monty."

"Never, sir."

*****

Father Cleaves came back from the day's shooting with the revised script Osborn had been waiting for. Everything took frustratingly longer than anticipated or promised in all aspects of filming, the re-writes no exception, and Mathias had been getting testy.
Script in hand, Cleaves went to the bishop's office, but they were yet to settle in to discuss it when word came that a vagrant in the care of the Sisters of St Mark was ailing from starving himself. Sister Agatha was hoping a good word from His Excellency would help. Osborn immediately got up to go and Cleaves followed him to the Auxiliary, to one of the small rooms set aside for the very sick. And the troublesome. The nun was trying to spoon something mashed into the mouth of an old man, patiently entreatng him to eat. To no avail, judging by the man's stubbornly shaking head and the food splatters on the towel spread out over his chest.

Cleaves waited by the door while Osborn tried to be of help, but neither coaxing nor scolding got him anywhere. As weak as the old man looked, he kept spluttering, flecks of saliva flying out alongside his protests against any more gruel, he'd eaten enough slop on the seas, pap was only fit for babes in arms. Suddenly, he started crying, keening about a babe, the sweetest babe he'd once had in his arms but was lost, lost, lost.

Sister Agatha gave a resigned sigh. "All right, all right," she said, putting the bowl and the spoon back on their tray. "Calm down now, calm down. Would you like our good Lord Bishop to pray with you for your babe? You'd like that, wouldn't you?" She got up to help the hiccuping man drink some water, wiped the dribbles and the tears off his face, bundled the stained towel to put on the tray she picked up. "I'll bring you something fit for a man next meal. You must put in your choppers to manage it, though."

"Can't. They be all wrong."

"He's been refusing to wear his dentures," Sister Agatha explained as she passed by on her way out. "Thinks they're not his," she added as she pulled the door closed.

"Ask him," the old man cried out, pointing at Cleaves with a skeletal finger, "He knows. The thief!" Mathias's eyes snapped to Cleaves.

'For there is nothing covered' Cleaves despaired, 'that shalt not be revealed.'

*****

Lewis was actually enjoying the last day of the conference, now that the dreaded speech was behind him. The speech had made him recognisable and, among coppers, popular. Among bean counters, not so much. The Scotland Yard lot, ever in hock to prevailing politics, also gave him a wide berth, with one exception. Fiona McKendrick was in attendance and she'd made a point of exchanging pleasantries with him. She'd introduced a deputy assistant commissioner of the Yard as her fiancé, making him wonder how Hathaway would take it, if he should be told or not.

Once he'd circulated long enough to fulfil Innocent's requirements, he went up to his room to get ready for the evening's wrap-up bash. Left to himself, he'd have given it a miss and started the drive back home, but he didn't want to disappoint Laura yet again. Running into her at the conference had been a surprise, and if she hadn't been just as clearly surprised, he might have felt hoodwinked. He was still wondering about Innocent, who consistently belied her name when it came to meddling in matters none of her bloody business.

The speech had gone well, but it had still made him sweat buckets; he needed a shower before dressing for the shindig. Before then, though, he felt obliged to call James to tell him how well -- oh, sod it, he plain wanted to call him. For three days now, he had turned around to say something to the lad so many times, had even called a waiter 'James' while thanking him for a pint, that he was starting to think, when he finally did retire, he might have to look for the AA equivalent of Hathaway-dependence. He missed having him around. Maybe Morse hadn't been as wilful as he'd always thought, constantly wanting him around.
"Hope I'm not interrupting anything important," he said when Hathaway answered, mindful that it was sundown on Saturday. "Just wanted to tell you your speech went down a treat." He shrugged out of his jacket, switching hands on his phone.

"Your speech," Hathaway corrected. "I know it went well. Fiona sent a glowing message. I understand she's there with her fiancé."

So the lad already knew. "Short, old, running to fat. Not a patch on you," Lewis said, tugging off his tie.

Hathaway's smile came through in his voice, "Thank you, sir, but I don't particularly care. And I don't think he's that old."

"He's about my age, too old for the lass."

"She's about my age, so no, he's not." He sounded huffy about it.

Lewis sat on the bed to take off his shoes. "You need to revise your maths or get out more often."

"My maths is fine and I am out, even as we speak."

He harrumphed. "Probably another rehearsal or something."

"Or something. As out as I get."

"Well, I'm going out." He started unbuttoning his shirt. "I might even dance."

"Don't break any hearts, sir."

"I'm long past the stage I endanger hearts."

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?"

Slightly off, the way the sentence was stressed. He couldn't decide how to take it and left it alone. "I'd better go and get ready."

"Have a good time, sir."

"You, too, James."

It wasn't until dinner gave way to a live band and dancing commenced that he saw Laura, pathologists occupying a table lost to him in the crowd that had doubled with spouses and dates. Bare-shouldered, she was in something long and slinky that couldn't be called too tight, but it clung and shimmered with her movements. She seemed to be in demand as a dance partner, which Lewis thought was probably just as well. The colour of her dress was so close to her skin tones that it would be all too easy to think of her without it. He did dance with some of the women at his table, until he felt hot and sluggish and reckoned he'd put in his time, it wouldn't be impolite to leave. He started across the room, stopping here and there for small talk in preparation to making his escape.

"Oh, no, you don't," he heard -- so near freedom-- and Laura's hand was on his arm, tugging him back. "It's not nice to neglect old friends," she told him with mock severity. "You owe me a dance or three."

"How about a drink instead?" The bar across the lobby was practically empty and looked peaceful.
"Maybe later. First, I'd like a whirl."

"Have a heart, Laura, I'm melting in this suit."

"Take off your jacket." She promptly started to push it off his shoulders.

"All right, all right." He got out of the jacket, folded it over his arm until he could get to his table and drape it over his chair. "One dance."

She beamed at him. "Or three."

All too soon, he knew it had been a big mistake to take off his jacket. In a strapless dress, Laura had obviously opted out of a bra, a fact that was becoming more and more clear as her nipples reacted to her breasts rubbing against his shirt. The absence of the jacket became no aid to cooling off, exactly the opposite. His hand spread on the small of her back clearly transmitted the sway of her hips, the flimsy material of the dress feeling like no more than a slippery film over her skin, her scent an alluring mixture of perfume and her -- by the middle of the second dance, he had no idea how he was going to get off the bloody dance floor without becoming a lurid joke told at the next conference.

"Let's get out of here," Laura said, feeling his discomfort. He hoped that was all she'd felt.

Too much to hope for, since she kept his hand while turning around and towed him carefully close behind her until he could grab his jacket. He appreciated it no end, but as she kept pace with him into the lift with nary a word exchanged, he started wondering what came next. He did the easiest and pushed the button for his floor. She gave him a look he couldn't interpret, pushed the button for hers, two levels below his. She kept glancing at him, making him feel under inspection. When the doors opened on her floor, she gave him another searching look, mumbled, "'Night, Robbie," and stepped out.

"Good night, Laura." The doors started to close, but her hand suddenly shot out to keep them open. She glared at him, stepped back in, let the doors close. As soon as the lift started moving, she slapped at the stop button and brought them to a juddering halt. "Laura, what -- ?"

"You weren't going to follow me to my room, were you?" she asked too evenly, clearly holding her temper in check.

He hadn't heard an invitation, had he? "No."

"You're not going to ask me up to your room, either."

"Erm, no?" He hated it coming out like a question, but she was knocking him for six.

"And no chance whatsoever you'll take any advantage of this private moment?"

He was suddenly angry. "That's your old mate Alec, not me," he snapped.

She looked daggers at him. "Do you know how close I am to slapping you?"

"Damn it, Laura, what do you want? What's this in aid of?"

"Damn it, Robbie," she echoed him precisely, "I was the one dancing with you." She nodded at the jacket he was still holding in front of him. "I know what you're hiding."

"That's not enough reason to fall into bed." After all, his shower flannel often caused pretty
much the same reaction. "I'm not hiding anything, either." He moved the jacket to hang by his side. "Any more."

She actually looked down to check, and something struck her as funny. She laughed, her whole demeanour softening. "We're never going to get it together, are we?"

Might as well find out once and for all. "What is 'it,' Laura? What exactly are you interested in getting together? 'Cause I've been getting mixed messages for years now."

"While I've been getting one message. You'll have all or nothing." A light on the panel next to her had been flashing red, she'd been ignoring it. The receiver on it started buzzing; she ignored that as well. "I like my life, I don't want to change it. I'm not ready to retire and become a gran of sorts."

Ah. That might explain her German doctor soon after Lewis had told her about Lyn's pregnancy, his possible early retirement and move to Manchester. No wonder she'd kept acting as though he'd been at fault.

"But I'm not getting any younger," she continued, "and I get lonely sometimes. Why can't we simply see each other through those times? You must feel the same way, it's been what, eight years, nine? A long time to -- "

"No," he cut her off. "You can't propose casual sex with one breath and bring up Val with the next. You either know what I need or you don't. You can't have it both ways."

"Be honest with me, Robbie. Do you love me enough for...more?"

"Do you?"

She bit her lip and gave no more of an answer than he had. "I suppose I'd better get this thing moving."

"Please. Before we have to explain ourselves to the Rescue Squad."

*****

While the congregation of St Justin's filed out after the Vigil Mass, Hathaway lingered to take a closer look at the panels of the Stations of the Cross on the north aisle, beautiful oil paintings on arched, gilded wood. An earlier call from Edmund, saying he normally didn't conduct Mass but he would that evening and he hoped to see James there, had brought him to attend the service -- not what Lewis would consider being out on a Saturday night. It hadn't been what Hathaway considered attending a service, either. He had been constantly distracted by Cleaves conducting the Mass as if sleep walking through it, by mere rote. What had subdued the ardent youth he remembered?

He was close to the last panel when he realised Edmund, without his vestments, was waiting quietly for him in the chancel, hands folded in front of him. "I was only admiring them," Hathaway said; he hadn't walked the Stations for a very long time.

Cleaves joined him. "I noticed you didn't take communion."

"I haven't been to confession recently." If years could be called recently.

"Confession greatly eases the spirit," Cleaves said with a sudden infusion of the untainted fervour that had once entranced Hathaway. "Don't you miss it, James?"

He had always known that, a lot more than his looks, Edmund's boundless capacity for faith,
the way he'd seemed aglow with it, had attracted him. He now wondered what he had hungered to have for his own back then, when he'd been young enough to be confused, the beautiful man or his absolute certainties. "It's not for me any more, Edmund. At its simplest, how can I reconcile the sanctity of the Sabbath with my job?" And at its more complicated, there are things I will not regret or change. "Some doctrines are contradictory to life outside the Church. I'd rather avoid hypocrisy."

"The Church's or yours?"

"I meant mine." He'd never understood why having doubts about faith seemed to disturb the doubtless more than the doubter. "Anyway, I can't imagine you'd attribute it to the Church even as a point of debate."

"A debate is ephemeral," Cleaves said as if that were the point. "It doesn't have eternal consequences."

"Depends on the people it persuades and their resultant actions, doesn't it? And then, do the consequences apply to the persuaded or the persuader? Where does free will come in?"

"You've become a dan -- difficult man to debate, James."

Hathaway felt sure he'd been about to say dangerous, gave him a sidelong look, but Cleaves had his head turned away, watching the altar boys tidy up. There was something weighing on him this evening. "This is a beautiful church," Hathaway said instead of asking: is there something you need to tell me? He didn't want Edmund to feel like he was being interrogated by a copper.

"I'm usually out or in a back office, but yes, it's one of the finest. Let me show you around." Cleaves threaded an arm through his, surprising him. In the seminary, some students tended to walk arm in arm after the fashion of their monastic brethren, but Edmund had never shown any inclination to do so. He took Hathaway into the Lady Chapel to show him the mosaics depicting Mary's life, each an intricate, delicate piece, then led him outside to the cloister, indicated the residence joined to the church by the ambulatory, housing the secondary bell tower of the structure. "The offices are on the ground floor of the Chancery. My Lord Bishop lives upstairs, I have a room there as well." He waved at the buildings edging the courtyard, "The rest are given to community outreach programmes, and that's the old Memorial Chapel of St Mark."

In manus tuas, Domine, Hathaway could hear coming from the charming, ivy-drenched chapel in mixed voices in response to a low, feminine voice, Sisters of St Mark and their charges starting Compline. "Our elderly still find more comfort in services conducted in Latin," Cleaves said. "Thank the Lord our traditional liturgy has been reinstated. Must everybody comprehend every word in order to believe in The Word?"

It helps. Hathaway decided to take the question as rhetorical and didn't voice the answer. There was a time they'd been so compatible in thought that he'd felt mated to Edmund, in mind, if never in body. It was disconcerting to walk attached to him by the arm while feeling a chasm yawn between them. He let Edmund tow him through the covered arcades to the western side of the cloister, where the two stories of old dormitories and workshops of the lay brothers of the past had been repurposed to serve the needs of the community.

"Mathias was attending one of our residents. Very old, at the end of his time, I'm afraid. While we're here, I should look in," Cleaves explained, leading him into the infirmary. "Individual rooms are set aside for the contagious and the dying," he supplied as they approached a closed door. He let go of Hathaway's arm, tapped lightly on the door and pushed it open, releasing an overwhelming scent of incense, thick and stale and truly unpleasant. A small room, probably an old cell, dimly lit, and a priest leaning close to the old man on the bed, giving the blessing of the Final Anointing,
Clementissime Deus, Pater misericordiárum et Deus totius consolationis, qui némine vis perire in te credéntem atque sperántem.

Hathaway recognised the gruff, rumbling voice of Bishop Mathias Osborn. The greying hair he remembered was now completely silver and the wide shoulders had rounded, resembling a hunch more than broad beams.

"Oh, the poor soul has departed," Cleaves whispered, bent his head to join the prayer. Hathaway kept his head bowed.

"Per istam sanctam unctionem et suam piissimam misericordiam, indulgeat tibi Dominus," Osborn finished, crossed himself, rose to leave the room. He merely nodded at them as he passed by and, as he was carrying the Eucharist, they stood aside and quietly let him pass. Cleaves went into the room right after him, the light from the open door fell on the dead man's face briefly -- very old indeed, must've been blind, too, the slits between the eyelids showing a thick grey film over the eyes. Skin like waxy parchment had sagged to outline the skull, his mouth in a gummy rictus, giving him a look of alarm. Some people who died in their beds met death no more peacefully than the crime victims he'd seen. Cleaves quickly lifted the sheet to cover the face already looking well on its way to desiccation, came out to join Hathaway and closed the door after him. "I should call our doctor for the death certificate. He won't want to make the trip on a Saturday night."

"I'll let you deal with it, I should get on -- "

"Come to think of it," Cleaves interrupted, taking his arm again, "death visits our charges too often, we have the forms. You can confirm the death as a police officer, can't you? The doctor's been expecting it for a good while, I'll have someone drive over the signed certificate, he'll fill out the medical information. I should have the undertaker remove the body right away. Best do it before our old dears are reminded of their own mortality."

Edmund was as much a whirlwind as he'd ever been when something needed to be done. Within ten minutes, he had finished making calls, delegating tasks, and was pulling a bottle of wine and two glasses from a cabinet in the corner of the Chapter House. "We'll have a drink," he said. "Come on. I'll show you the best scenery of the church."

The second bell tower at the back of the church, reached by a spiral staircase, was missing its bells. "Being recast," Edmund explained, as he closed the low door they had both ducked to clear, "but Mathias likes this spot so much, he doesn't really want them back."

It was a likable spot, the parapets at the bases of the open arches comfortably wide to sit on and linger, the tower high enough to see the rooftops peek out of the autumn foliage that resembled humpbacked waves in the dark. The profusion of spires rose into the haze of ambient light capping the city like an ethereal dome. Cleaves sat down and poured two glasses of wine, motioned at Hathaway to sit with him. For a few minutes, they drank quietly, watching the view.

"I was thinking," Edmund spoke up, "would you spare the time now and then to play for my youth choir? Maybe strum along in accompaniment? It'll give us a chance to spend time together. The way we used to." He looked at Hathaway and laughed. "Oh, James, look at your face. Don't worry, I'm not trying to draw you back into the fold. I'm not the firebrand you remember, I have settled into my age."

Hathaway was starting to feel a little pursued, and why else would Edmund pursue him? Then again, Cleaves didn't have roots in Oxford, he was working out of his comfort zone, Osborn had to be around seventy and had never struck Hathaway as the social sort. Maybe he's just lonely and considers running into an old friend God-sent. "My guv and I, we work all hours when there's a
case. I may not show up, or I might get called away, no telling. But when I can make it, sure, I'd like that."

"Bless you. It's so difficult to keep the young interested; they'd be delighted with a guitar joining in. We'll have some informal sessions. It'll be fun."

Might be at that. Edmund raised his glass as if saluting their agreement, Hathaway copied him, they drank in silence for a while.

"I've been hearing Oxford called the City of Atheists," Cleaves was the one to break it. "But look at it, James, each and every spire marks a great institution, places of learning, devotion, enlightenment, bestowed on the people by the Church. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth,' indeed. Enough to pierce your heart. Or do you count yourself among them now?"

"Atheism requires as adamant a certainty as absolute faith." Or sometimes, a devastating heartbreak. "Not my forte."

Silence descended once more until Cleaves spoke again, "Where do you stand on forgiveness lately?" It was an odd question, made Hathaway give him a searching look. Cleaves shrugged in answer to it, looking away. "You were never much given to it, were you? Personal responsibility was always your sticking point."

"Some people forgive to obey God's dictate, mostly because they're helpless to extract the justice they need. They have no choice but to leave the reckoning to God. Some forgive not to lose an advantage, or to gain one, some do it because they love too foolishly. Very few do it unconditionally, from true generosity of spirit. It's frequently rooted in impotence or self-interest."

"Dear me, James, when did you become so relentless?" Cleaves looked almost scared, making Hathaway wonder what he had to be scared of. "Is being judgmental a requirement for working in justice?"

"My boss would say our remit is law, not justice." He hadn't cared for it when Lewis had pointed that out in the Zelinsky case, but he had no good argument against it. "Worldly justice, he's not at all interested in the divine."

"I wonder how you can work with him?"

He tried not to bristle. "Very well, actually," he said shortly. "But I was talking of forgiveness. Mercy is different. You don't have to forgive to be merciful."

Cleaves seemed relieved. "Tell me your views on mercy then."

That went too deep to share. "I hear it's not strained," Hathaway paraphrased irreverently. "'It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,'" Edmund continued the quote more accurately. "So the writer says. His reference was earthly. He rose to cross to the opposite arch to look towards the scattered lights on Headington Hill, reminded of being in Innocent's office two years ago, when the crown prosecutor on the case had announced Monkford would be charged with murder, no mitigating circumstances since he'd caused a death during the active commission of a crime. None of them had expected Lewis to raise an issue, but he had: Where had the spineless, petty con man found the bottle for a real crime? And the 'very nasty men' he'd decamped to Canada to get away from, he wouldn't have referred to coppers that way, especially not to a copper. Something wasn't adding up. Hathaway had reluctantly interviewed Monkford again and found out that, yes, he had driven the getaway car, but for his own getaway, having had second thoughts and abandoned his
accomplices, in the lurch and after his blood. He'd been running away from the crime. Back in Innocent's office, the prosecutor had argued that it made little difference; the man wouldn't have been there if he hadn't consented to the crime in the first place. If one intention matters, so does the next, Lewis had said, and summed it up with a single, clipped word before he'd walked out of the room and the building, holding up a hand to prevent Hathaway from following him: Manslaughter.

What it had taken to see past the destruction of his life and love to behave justly towards a worthless cretin, Hathaway couldn't imagine. But he did know it required more than the 'gentle rain' of a soft heart. It required a principled man who could harden his shattered heart against his own pressing need and do the right thing. God had required his son's life as ransom to grant his mercy.

How could he not love Robert Lewis?

He heard the heavy tread of someone coming up the stairs, then a call, muffled by the closed door, "Edmund? Are you up there, Edmund?" He thought it a good time to take his leave and tossed back the rest of his wine. By the time he turned around, Edmund had opened the door and Bishop Osborn, wearing a huge smile, barrelled through the opening that looked too small to admit him, threw his thick arms around Cleaves and literally lifted him off his feet. "There you are!"

And Edmund laughed like a delighted child, the abrupt, bubbling laugh of a boy taken unawares, his face suddenly radiant. For the second it lasted, Hathaway simply saw its unadulterated charm. It was only when Edmund caught himself in the next second and his whole demeanour stiffened into such an austere propriety that he felt as though he'd just had a glimpse into an inconvenient mirror. Right then, he couldn't quite decide what to think, except for fervently wishing he'd left much, much sooner.

Osborn noticed they had company, didn't look the least bit discomfited. "Ah, your friend's still here," he said, unhurriedly putting Edmund down. "Good. Gives me a chance to greet him. I remember you. Hathaway, isn't it?"

"Detective Sergeant James Hathaway of the Oxfordshire Police," Edmund rushed into the formalities, his voice shaky, "James, His Excellency, My Lord Bishop -- "

"Oh, I'm sure he knows all that," Osborn waved it away good-naturedly, then extended his hand, offering his ring.

Hathaway leaned and briefly touched his lips to it. "Good evening, My Lord Bishop."

"You must overlook an old man's exuberance, as well as forgive the intrusion, but I've had such great news tonight. From the Vatican, no less. I had to share it with my loyal Edmund."

"If you'll both excuse me then -- "

"Sure you won't join us in a celebratory drink?" Osborn interrupted to ask.

"No, thank you, I'm driving. I'll be on my way."

"You won't forget the youth choir rehearsal, James?" Cleaves asked. "After Mass tomorrow?"

"I'll be there," he promised; what else did he have to do with his Sunday? He quickly bid them a good evening and hurried away. The last thing he saw was Osborn unceremoniously chugging wine directly from the bottle.

He'd neglected to pull the door closed after him, and the stairwell carried Osborn's voice down to him. "I just heard," he was saying excitedly, "they're satisfied with the provenances, and
they'll be honoured -- note, Edmund, *honoured* -- to accept my gifts. They're sending a delegation in a few days to deal with the bureaucratic hassles on behalf of His Holiness. Think of it Edmund, *my collection* in the *Vatican*. I'll have returned Christianity's ineffable treasures to Christianity's holiest home, imagine *that*. Are you ready for such exalted circles, my dearest boy? For we'll visit the Vatican soon, God willing, and we won't ever...." The rest got lost with distance as Hathaway took the steps two-three at a time.

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A little late in arriving on Sunday morning to feed Monty, with his second hurrying step, Hathaway tripped on the holdall left just inside the door and went wind-milling into Lewis's flat. Next, Monty was rushing to greet him, promptly choosing the better part of valour with feet flying about, becoming a blur darting in and out of his way. By the time he was able to spare the cat and catch himself, he was halfway through the flat, bent-over, one hand gripping the jut of the wall where it led into the hallway to the bedroom, and the chest of the flat's owner was five inches from meeting his nose.

"You're back!" rolled joyfully out of his mouth, with no filter whatsoever. Flustered, he tried to regroup. "Erm, you're home, sir," he stated the obvious again, straightening. "Only, I wasn't expecting -- " he didn't know what confounded him more, that Lewis was back already, or that he was wearing no more than pyjama bottoms barely held up by his hip bones "-- well, you. Right, who else? Early, that is --I mean, I wasn't expecting you until later, that's what I mean." *Just shut up, blathering idiot!*

"Aye, figured." As if standing there only fuzzily awake, tousled, barefoot and bare-chested, wasn't enough of a provocation, Lewis started knuckling the sleep out of his heavy-lidded eyes, looking like nobody's 'sir,' ever.

*Back away,* Hathaway told himself, grateful that it wasn't *peel yourself off your boss and back away.* A few unguarded words seemed negligible in comparison to what he might have done. "Erm, I'll let you get back to bed. Let me feed Monty, and I'll get out of your -- "

"Pop the kettle on while you're at it," Lewis half-said, half-yawned, patted him vaguely on the arm as he passed by to go to the sofa and stretch out on it, ignoring Hathaway's offer of letting him go back to bed. "Make me an eye-opener, there's a good lad, then I'll make us breakfast. Oh, you might want to close the front door."

Monty was hoovering the food more than eating it and the kettle was bubbling on its base when Hathaway was able to get past other distractions and realise Lewis's early return meant he had not followed going out with spending the night. *No runs, no wicket for Jean Innocent.* Smiling to himself, he reached to pull down two cups and lost the smile and almost the cups when out of nowhere Lewis's palm was on the small of his back.

"Forgot it's Sunday, sorry," Lewis said, as if an addled klutz in his kitchen was nothing to notice. "You were rushing fit to break your neck to get to church, weren't you? Didn't mean to keep you, go on, go."

He took care of the klutz part by putting the crockery safely down. He was still addled, blamed it on the warm, light touch of the hand that seemed in no hurry to leave him. "Don't want to - - I mean, *need* to go -- I mean, *been* already." Lewis glanced at the clock on the cooker, so he added, "I went to Vigil Mass last night."

The pressure of the hand on Hathaway's back increased noticeably and Lewis looked unduly
concerned. "Vigil? Who for?"

"Oh, you thought -- nobody. In anticipation of Sunday is all it means. Regular Saturday evening Mass."

"Ah." The hand patted him for good measure and was removed. "All newly polished and pure this morning, eh?" Lewis grinned up at him, part indulgent, part playful. "And me not havin' touched a razor to me face."

Hathaway had a deranged impulse to grab that face between his hands and show him how far a bit of stubble was from wanton impurity. A felicitous saint must've been watching out for lunatics; Monty, having inhaled his food too fast, made a gagging sound and threw up in between their feet, making them both jump back a pace.

"You don't have shoes on," Hathaway waved Lewis away, "go and lie down. I'll take care of it."

No fool he, Lewis promptly took him up on the offer and headed for the sofa, quipping, "Greater love has no man."

_You don't know the half of it._

By the time the floor was scrupulously clean --Hathaway being severe about cleanliness-- the tea had steeped. Lewis looked asleep, but Hathaway filled two cups anyway and carried them to the coffee table. When he leaned to put the steaming cups down, he saw that Monty had now flattened himself on the floor to reach a paw as far as possible under the sofa, trying to dig something out. He rather suspected what it could be, went to his knees, bent over and slid his hand in, groped blindly.

"What're you doing?" Lewis asked from over his head, reminding him of the utter indignity of his position.

"Just a minute -- ah, got it." He walked the photo back with his fingertips until he could pull it out. Lewis's head was hanging off the sofa, curiously watching Monty's paws argue the toss with Hathaway's hand. "Must've missed one," he explained, handing the photo to Lewis, much to Monty's disgust. He rolled over to sit with his back against the sofa, patting his lap to distract the cat.

Lewis sat up while looking down at the photo. "Missed one?"

"Your floor was covered with photos yesterday, and that," he pointed at the box he had repacked and put out of harm's way on a high shelf, "was turned over in the hallway." From the address on it, he'd assumed Lewis had packed it to post to his daughter, and Monty might have been bored with the tidy flat. After all, he'd been living amid eye-popping clutter previously. "They're not badly damaged," he assured. "Some are a little chewed on the edges, but just the edges." A few were no longer as glossy as they'd been, Monty apparently fond of licking emulsion off photo stock, but maybe that could go without mention.

"Wretched little pest," Lewis grumbled at the cat, then, as was his wont, assumed the fair portion of the blame, "I shouldn't have left it in reach without taping it." Raising two kids must've inured him to diminutive troublemakers. He rose to pull down the box, carried it back to the sofa and opened it to thumb through the photos. "Lyn wants to scan these. Now that she's going to be a mother, all of a sudden she's turned into the family archivist."

Hathaway kept petting Monty who'd settled in his lap. The cat was coming in handy this morning, now giving him a reason to stay where he didn't have to look at Lewis. He hoped the
thought of splatters would make him get more clothes on before he started breakfast. Silly to be so off-balance over it, as if he didn't see the man in all forms of undress at the gym, but that was a public place for public demeanour. There was an artless abandon to the man who'd rolled out of the warmth of his own bed, the pyjamas he'd slept in more naked somehow than nudity.

Pretending preoccupation to avoid saying anything was, of course, as good as shouting in Lewis's ear. "You looked through them?" he asked.

"I just picked them up."

Lewis gave his upper arm a backhanded slap, neatly getting across his views on perjury. Clearly, Hathaway's habit of rifling through anything available for rifling hadn't gone unnoticed. But what could he say, yes, I looked, but I don't know the man in those photos? A very nice looking man with the same sweet smile and bright blue eyes, playing with his kids, embracing his wife, mugging for the camera, part of a family unit. Especially in the holiday photos, his hair a little longer, a little fuller, in the skimpy getups men could once sport on the beach without blushing, he was lovely, lively, yet undimmed: the man Valerie Lewis had loved. The one who grabbed at his heart wouldn't have existed had she lived, the lonely man intimately familiar with pain, etched deeply by time and loss, still holding on to his kind nature.

He groped for something innocuous to say. "You moved a lot then, too, didn't you?"

Lewis chuckled. "Not really. We rented a flat when we moved here until we found our feet, then bought a semi-detached. Once the bairns are school age, it's the same house. Except every couple of years Val would strip it down and dress it up differently."

He put the box aside, picked up his tea and moved the other cup into Hathaway's reach. "She'd be sitting there frowning at an empty spot, and we knew something was bound to fill it soon - empty places need filling, she liked to say. Something would take her fancy, she'd put it in the spot, start frowning at that and we'd start hiding the things we didn't want rid of. Whatever the new thing was, it just hadn't fitted in right, so everything around it had to change. Can't tell you how many hours of overtime I put in just to help the house go topsy-turvy all over again." He didn't sound complaining, only wistful, and a little amused. "She changed so much around us that once I told her I feared she'd exchange me one day for another bloke. She laughed at me, said I was quite filling. Except I wasn't. Working with Morse, I was gone a lot, or I was so knackered I was as good as gone. She didn't complain, well, not often. She probably thought Morse was so empty, he needed filling. Not far wrong there. My lass wasn't into sitting around and moping, worked off and on, took classes, went to lectures. She was curious about a lot, liked learning new things, another year, another language -- come to think on it, she was a bit like you."

Absolutely, positively not going there, Hathaway thought.

"So let's fill you up," Lewis's voice lightened, "Bangers or bacon?"

"Either."

"Both?"

It was Sunday and getting onto noon. "Sure."

"Good man." He went to pick up his holdall. "The hotel served a great tayberry jam from a local farm, talked them out of a jar. You'll like it."

Look how empty you left him, Val. He's happy to make breakfast for his sergeant.
Digging into the holdall for the jam also unearthed laundry to be done, and throwing them into the machine unearthed clothes that must've been left in the washer and the dryer for days, judging by Lewis's repeated, "Oh, bugger," as he set some to wash or dry and piled others into a basket and shoved them aside. He did get around to donning trousers and a polo shirt, started the fry-up, which enticed Monty into the kitchen. Hathaway pulled himself up off the floor and followed.

"What's been happening at the nick?" Lewis asked.

"We're set for the new National Database. Or if we're not, we won't find out until tomorrow morning." Hathaway poured his tepid tea into the sink and got a fresh cup. "There was another break-in on Boar's Hill, complete carnage this time. If you'd been here, we might have caught it. Laxton has it."

"This is what, the fourth break-in?"

"Except this one has a body count." He changed the subject, "We have a couple of new people -- one's not so new, actually. Knox came back." Only days into his suspension, DI Knox had been done for drink driving again and knocked back to sergeant. He'd requested a transfer and Innocent, merciful for once, had put it through.

"There's a surprise. How come?"

"No idea. He made it clear he doesn't care to talk to me."

As usual, Lewis didn't inquire further. He'd never asked about Hathaway's earlier working relationship with Knox, either. He opened the eggbox. "Boiled, scrambled, fried?"

"It's a fry-up."

"Right you are." He set the butter to melt in a pan. "Grab a couple of plates and sit down, I'll be dishing up soon."

Good thing it was the weekend and Hathaway was wearing a t-shirt. Despite letting Monty lighten the load, the amount of food that ended up in his stomach would've have popped the buttons on his tailored shirts on a weekday. Lewis might not be much of a cook otherwise, but his fry-up justified the pleasure he seemed to get out of serving it. Hathaway suspected it had been his speciality when he'd had a family to gather around his table, did his best to be decent company, eat as much as Lewis clearly wanted him to eat. After breakfast, he thought it only fair and started on the washing up while Lewis gave some attention to his laundry. Shortly, he came to the sink and picked up the next soapy plate. "Go on," he prompted Hathaway by bumping him lightly with his shoulder. "Go and have the cigarette you're dying to have, I'll finish up."

It was a brisk, sunny day, the light, as usual for Oxford, buttery, and getting its low autumn angle, throwing longer shadows. Two different residents of the building smiled spontaneously at Hathaway as they passed by him, but only when a little girl running out to meet her friends on the street flashed him a gap-toothed smile, children not being given to pre-emptive civility, did he realise a smile was hanging around on his face. He put a stop to that, then found himself whistling in between drags of smoke -- what was the matter with him? True, he felt content for the moment, but that normally had a calm, contemplative feel. This time it was accompanied by an...effervescence. Maybe there was a bubbly component to -- what? Happiness?

*****

Lewis yawned hugely as he put away the last of the dishes. He'd had too little sleep. At the
late hour he’d arrived home, he’d had to park streets away, haul his holdall and trudge back. He’d opted for another shower even though falling straight into the bed clothes and all had been the most attractive option. Except Laura’s perfume lingering on him had been an inconvenient reminder all through the drive; he hadn’t cared to take it into the bed with him. Maybe he should’ve gone back to sleep as James had suggested, but the lad had been so obviously delighted by his return. He couldn't think of a single person who'd been that glad to see him in...well, felt like forever. He was glad he’d made the effort. With good company and the smells of cooking lingering, his flat felt like a home for a change.

He set up the ironing board and pulled the clothes out of the dryer, piled the shirts on the back of a chair to wait their turn. He was folding the rest on the cleared table when Hathaway came back in, nodded at the shirts and offered, "I'll give you a hand with those, shall I?"

Lewis cast him a glance to make sure he was serious. "It's your Sunday."

Hathaway plugged in the iron, caught Monty in mid-leap as the cat tried to jump onto the board, sternly explained the dangers of a hot iron while carrying him to the bedroom to shut him in. He came back and proceeded to press wrinkles into submission, and the table started looking like the host of a gathering of gentlemen as immaculately crisp shirts draped the shoulders of its chairs. "You're going to make Innocent weep for joy," Lewis had to say. "I won't be able to live up to it unless you start keeping house for me full time. How would I explain that to her?"

"Talking of whom," Hathaway said, a bit too hurriedly, "she'll have a new nestling. The other addition to our ranks will arrive tomorrow. Someone on the accelerated fast-track they're trying out."

"I should get her a cigar." Innocent was something of a mother hen with her fast-tracks. "Lad or lass?"

"Lad. An Etonian. Straight out of training, coming in under the brand new rank of inspector trainee."

The old-timers would have fits. Their noses were out of joint even with the fast-tracks who’d paid their dues in uniform. "Maybe tucking him under her wing will keep her busy -- enough to keep her from meddling in my life, any road." He pushed the folded stacks to one side and upended the basket onto the table, started sorting socks. "Laura was at the Conference. I had no idea, she had no idea, but I suspect Innocent had another one of her dotty ideas to pair me off. Means I got lumbered with that bloody speech for sod all."

Hathaway didn't say anything, didn't so much as look up, bent even further over the board. He may as well have been waving a flag of disavowal. In false colours. Lewis waited for the silence to stretch long enough for his eyes to flicker up, and accused, "You knew."

"I didn't know exactly," he tried to squirm out of it. "Just...sort of...rather... suspected."

"And you didn't tell me why?" That all-purpose reticence, he’d bet, which somehow did not apply when it was Lewis dodging the issue of Laura. Nosing about seemed to be acceptable then. "It's still not any of my business, is it? I didn't want to presume."

Lewis huffed impatiently. "We're pottering 'round my flat of a Sunday, you cleaned cat sick off me floor, you're standing there pressing me shirts -- go ahead, presume a tad."

Lewis had meant it in general, but Hathaway applied the permission on the spot, "In that case, what happened?"
"Not much." He went back to pairing his socks. "Got into a bother last night, she sort of yelled at me, I sort of yelled at her, then we backed off and agreed it's not going to work. At least that's settled."

"Are you disappointed?"

"That it took yelling, aye. Cleared the air, though." Enough sharing. He held up a sock, squinted at it, then dangled it towards Hathaway. "Is this dark blue or black?"

"Blue." Lewis picked a mate for it from the pile on the table, only to have him add, "That one's black."

"Bloody things."

Hathaway stepped around and quickly separated the colours. "I've said this before -- "

"Don't say it again," Lewis cut him off. "I don't need specs."

"Yes, sir."

Sir. So commonplace to hear from Hathaway's mouth, and right then it felt wrong. Lewis almost said Just call me Robbie, before he realised it wasn't the word that was inappropriate, it was everything else. When had he ever sorted Morse's socks? He couldn't imagine Hathaway pressing a single shirt for Knox, either. Just because Lewis felt a little battered from the night before, he had no business taking advantage of the lad to...to fill up the empty places. "It's your day off, James, don't you have something better to do?" came out of his mouth -- sod it. Now he'd said something the poor man couldn't answer either way without denigrating his boss. "Fun. I meant something fun."

"Fun?" Hathaway asked as if the word had changed its definition on him without notice.

"Look, let's leave all this, put on some music. Your choice." And if Hathaway preferred something spiritual, well, it was Sunday. "If you like, there's Handel somewhere on the lower shelf. It's by a children's choir, though."

Hathaway took two steps and stopped abruptly, "Damn it, I forgot."

"What?"

"I, erm, sort of promised -- it's a rehearsal. Not my rehearsal, just a youth choir. I don't have to go."

"If you promised, shouldn't you?"

"Right. I should go, shouldn't I?"

"If you want."

Hathaway seemed to scoff at that, but as he chose Latin to express it, Lewis couldn't be sure. "Volo," he mumbled and gave a disparaging huff. "Differentia est vacuus." He shook his head as if to clear it. "Right, I'm off, sir. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Have fun," Lewis called out after him.

He ironed the one shirt left to be ironed, rolled the socks, put everything away, released Monty, gave the table and the worktops another wipe unnecessarily -- and it was still Sunday. He flipped through the newspaper, then the telly, thought of a nap, couldn't settle for any of them, finally
gave up and dug out his BlackBerry. Latin wasn't a complete stranger to English at the root. He knew *est* was 'is.' *Differencia* had to be something like 'difference,' 'different,' 'distinct' -- yes, 'difference.' *Vacuus?* 'Vacuous?' 'Vacuum?' Ah, 'empty,' an all too familiar state. But what did 'difference is empty' mean?

He searched for the one word he didn't know at all. *Volo:* 'to wish,' 'to want,' 'to will,' 'wishing,' 'wanting' -- suddenly it fell into place. 'If you want,' he'd said. 'Wanting,' Hathaway seemed to have responded, 'is a difference that makes none.'

And meant what by it?

*Don't be a nosy prat,* he told himself, *if you needed to know,* *he'd have said it in plain English,* and picked up the remote again.

*****

Lewis arrived at work early, having had enough of rattling around in his flat. As he was crossing the car park, a well-scrubbed young man came out of his car, nodded at him politely, and proceeded to button his jacket, tug his shirtsleeves to match each other, smooth his already slicked-down hair. Lewis noted the Eton tie, black with baby-blue stripes: Innocent's new fledgling in all his proud plumage. Obviously, police training hadn't quite prepared him for the nitty-gritty. By the time Lewis had exchanged pleasantries with the desk sergeant and walked upstairs, the young man was in the Chief Super's anteroom, looking like a head boy waiting for the head mistress.

Hathaway had come in early, too. He was already in the incident room, looking over the crime scene photos of the home invasion that had been tacked on the whiteboard for a briefing. "Good morning, sir," he said when Lewis approached.

"Morning. Do you happen to have a spare tie in your locker?"

Hathaway cast an appraising eye over Lewis's own tie. "I have a couple, if you want to change yours for something...else."

*Better,* Lewis was sure he'd avoided saying. "*My* tie is fine, thank you." He gave Hathaway a cautionary look should he be foolhardy enough to dispute it. "But if you don't mind loaning one to our new recruit, he's in Innocent's reception. Guess he wanted to show his colours to Oxford, except poking the troops in the eye first thing won't earn him any favours." Clueless young things needed as many favours as they could get. "Go and have a quiet word with him."

"What colour is his suit?"

"Dark grey. Light blue shirt."

"I should have something that'll work."

Lewis ran his eye over the photos on the board after Hathaway left. Three battered and bloody corpses, a man, a woman, both middle-aged, and an old man, husband, wife and the man's father, according to the notations. He read the notes jotted around the photos, the list of suppositions down one side, some sparse facts involving the previous incidents on Boar's Hill, obviously considered linked -- except that felt wrong to him. He stood there mulling it over until he realised people were arriving in a steady stream, and Hathaway was back, looking over his shoulder. "This feels like rage to me," Lewis told him quietly. "Tends to be personal. Nothing personal about the earlier break-ins."

"I think the prevailing assumption is that they made the mistake of entering an occupied
house. The occupants fought back, hard."

"How hard did he fight?" Lewis tapped the photo of the old man collapsed on the floor in front of his wheelchair at the top of a landing. In any case, though, he should leave it alone before Laxton came in and found him sticking his nose into her case. He wouldn't like it, why should she? He headed for their office, Hathaway in tow. "What did you think of the new boy?"

"He rejoices in the name Colin Berkleigh-Collingsworth. Told him to lose Berkleigh if he didn't want to be known as The Berk all his working life. Not that Colin Collingsworth is an improvement. He'll probably become Collie. If not worse canine appellations."

Poor lad. "Other than his unfortunate name?"

"Squeaky young and he knows it."

"Starting a step ahead of you, then."

"I was never that young." Hathaway told him huffily.

Lewis smiled and let it go.

The idiosyncrasies of the new National Database kept Hathaway whinging at his terminal for the next hour as Lewis twiddled his thumbs and agreed, off and on, yes, it could've been programmed better, with only a vague notion of what he was agreeing to. Finally he got bored enough to pull up the CID Internal Audit page and fill in their monthly spreadsheet for expenses, which really bored him. So much so that Innocent leaning into the office and saying, "Robbie, a word?" was welcome, even if he still smarted from what she may have done to his peace of mind lately. Again.

Hathaway started to get up to leave, but Innocent motioned him down. "We have a brand new officer, needs someone to familiarise him with us and the city. Seeing how you don't have anything pressing, I'd like to borrow Hathaway to take him around for a day or two. I hear they've met already."

Lewis couldn't think of a reason to refuse, and why should they both sit in the office and get bored? Before he could agree, Laxton was also at his door, saying to Innocent, "Excuse me, guv." She addressed Lewis once Innocent nodded at her to go on, "I'm long on assignments and short on people, would you mind terribly if I borrowed Hathaway?" making Lewis mightily resist the temptation to ask: Do I hear a bid?

"Case work trumps rank," Innocent decided unilaterally, waving her permission, "he's all yours." She exchanged a done-deal nod with Laxton.

Hathaway looked from one to the other and pointedly swivelled his chair towards Lewis. "Sir?"

Good thing the lad wasn't after quick promotions. Snubbing the highest ranking officer in the room wasn't the way to get them. "Until we have a case, sure, go ahead."

Hathaway followed Laxton out of the office to join her briefing, Innocent followed them to keep an eye on it, and now Lewis's office was as empty as his flat. And just as devoid of anything worth doing. After finishing up the spreadsheet, he played a hand of solitaire, felt guilty about frittering away work time and stopped. He sat back, itching to go and join the only thing he could see happening, the briefing outside.
Bad idea. Laxton had less seniority, he'd snatched a case from her once already, she might feel he was attempting to upstage her. Best stay in his office. Even if seeing Hathaway out there -- you couldn't overlook that height and that blond head for trying -- paying attention to someone else's case felt...wrong. How ironic that what Innocent had inadvertently joined together by getting him a simple ride from the airport was the woman's only success at pairing him off. Should it be enough of a success, though, to remind him of Lyn, eight years old, coming back from school in a lather, wailing about her best friend who'd taken to playing with someone else? A bit embarrassing, that. He shut off the thoughts and tidied his desk drawers instead -- oh, that's where all the paperclips had gone.

Briefing over, Hathaway came back in, gave a put-upon huff and started transferring addresses from the phone directory into his BlackBerry. "I meant this when I said it before, I mean it now," he grumbled. "When you leave this building for the last time, I'd be right behind you."

"Don't cross that bridge in a hurry, your view might be different from a step higher. What's the problem?"

Hathaway cast a glance outside their office. "I asked the question you raised about Standish senior -- that's the old man. The answer was, he must've seen the perpetrators when they tossed the bedrooms for valuables, might've been able to describe them."

"You don't agree."

"Apart from some impressions of bloody shoes, there are no prints, no trace evidence that don't belong to the occupants or the very few people regularly in and out of the house. The intruders broke in, encased in what, rubber suits? But forgot to cover their faces?"

"You think it's an inside job." The severity of the attacks had suggested the same to him.

"I do, but unless the cleaning service they used throws up some possibilities, there are no candidates. It's a small, reclusive family, very tight-fisted according to sources, not given to friends or entertaining. Just two elderly aunts in town, well-off in their own right. And sixteen year old twin sons at St Edward's, living in a boarding house of the school. The other six kids in the house alibi them for the time of the incident."

"There's a mystery right there."

Hathaway frowned. "Where?"

"Tight-fisted. Why pay boarding fees when the family lived in town?"

"I lived in the vicinity and boarded at school year-round."

Why? came to the tip of Lewis's tongue. He bit it back. Maybe one day Hathaway would volunteer the reasons. Right, that would happen. He left it at, "Your nearest didn't end up in our morgue."

"True. In any case, I'll keep it to myself for now." He made a face. "Laxton's team has been on the case for four days, opinions have hardened. I'm just there for drudge work." He raised his BlackBerry. "I'll be out checking pawn shops for the stolen items. Too bad fences don't advertise in the directory."

"I can help with that. Let me make a call." He located Norman Wilkes, the Oxford Mail reporter he'd known for as long as he'd been in the city, took advantage of the man's prodigious memory and his lifetime of poking around the city's underbelly. He jotted down notes, told Norm,
yes, he'd be happy to buy him a drink --or five, knowing Norm-- that evening, put down his phone and handed the notes to Hathaway. "That should keep you hopping."

"So kind of you, sir." His droll delivery made Lewis smile. "Think I'll take Colin with me. Pounding the pavement is a good way to learn a city."

And off he went. Unless a case came up, probably for days. Norm should have enough interesting stories to fill one evening at least.

*****

Ah, yes, there it was. Llewellyn-Pierce stuck a post-it to mark the page that was going to...well, not make him rich, but solve all his problems. He closed and put the book on top of the pile of tomes he'd been double-checking. Ginny was a clever girl, and would make an excellent research assistant next term. She'd tracked down the most important inscription in an easily-missed book from the Halicarnassus Museum in Asia Minor amidst a stack of them she'd collected for him at the library. He once more rifled through the photos he'd printed from the shots he'd taken in Osborn's office, just for the sheer satisfaction, then swept the prints of the codices into a drawer of his desk and locked it.

First, he'd call the damned bishop and set up another meeting, at a more private place this time. Then he'd tell Drusilla that if she held off on spreading her poison for a few more days, he'd be able to set up her and her horses comfortably. Sometime soon he had to pack a bag. He could no longer stand being in the same house with her.

He couldn't wait to get himself to a hotel, invite Eleanor, show her how wrong she'd been for doubting him, and let her work out how best to make it up to him for giving him such a hard time lately.

*****

Hathaway arranged the valuables he'd spent days collecting from various pawnbrokers and fences on the interview room table. He stood a moment, frowning down at the items. Nothing suspicious about them; Boar's Hill was a posh, old-money neighbourhood and an abundance of valuable heirlooms was expected. From all he'd gathered, though, the items had been sold by young men of various descriptions during the two days between the crime and the cleaning service coming in to find the bodies. Nobody had used the word 'teenager' in his hearing, but the shifty eyes and unnecessary avowals said that 'young' stood for very young. None of the descriptions matched the twins, but instead of ridding him of the sickening suspicion that had lodged in him early on, it was reminding him that the alibi for the Standish boys had been furnished by half a dozen teenagers. Except he doubted the fences would be in any hurry to identify underage kids from photos even if he had permission to get photos and disseminate them.

He sent a constable to collect the twins, asked to be notified of their arrival, and headed for his office. Colin saw him crossing the incident room and waved him over enthusiastically to his newly-assigned desk. Lewis seemed to be occupied in their office, talking to the department psychiatrist, probably in preparation for Bethan Vickery's hearing, so Hathaway veered towards Colin.

The young man now waved at his desk as if he wished he could introduce it by name. "Yes, very nice," Hathaway felt obliged to say about the standard-issue desk.

"It's a start," Colin demurred like any good-family progeny warned against showing off. "It'll do for now."
They hadn't supplied the desk with a visitor's chair yet; Hathaway perched on the corner of it. "For now?" Even accelerated fast-track wasn't likely to be as fast as Colin might be hoping for.

"I know I have a lot to learn," Colin said modestly. "That's why I chose Oxford, you see. It's rather old-fashioned, isn't it? I mean, which other force uses the term 'bagman' any more, I ask you? It's positively antediluvian."

Hathaway tried not to glare at him. Was the whelp trying to make him feel hoary? "Your point being?"

"Oh, no, no. That's what I want," Colin hurried to say, letting Hathaway know his attempt not to glare had been a failure. "Precisely why I wanted to be here. With a mentor, that's the way I'd like to learn. I mean, you ought to know. It is the best way to learn the job, isn't it?"

Oh. OK. "In an ideal world. In practice, it depends."

"On?"

Not hoary then. Just an oracle, judging by the way he was being regarded in all earnestness. Hathaway dropped his voice. "Your DI. In the first place, no guarantee of one; there are fewer inspectors than sergeants. Usually, a DI won't put you down or raise you up; you both just get on with the job. For some, a bagman is a bagman." He'd had first-hand experience in being one of the seen and preferably not heard. "Too often, you're the closest target for blame when anything goes wrong. If you're very lucky, you'll get a DI who'll mentor you when you need it but not patronise you, forgive your screw ups, value your contributions, might even come to treat you as a colleague."

And more importantly, he thought, there's his or her heart.

In the course of a single case, he'd realised Lewis didn't stand outside cases looking in, didn't watch the clock, he listened and heard, valued evidence more than his own conclusions even when it went against his grain, was tolerant, protective. But it hadn't been until the very end, as Innocent was arriving on the scene, Hathaway had squeezed in a call to Trudi Griffon at the hospital and found out Lewis had already been there to absolve her son. That was when he'd decided: He's the one, if he'll have me. Most lead investigators would've considered the case closed, the job done, the participants no longer a concern. Lewis's first imperative had been to rush off to give the grieving mother the only consolation he could.

"That's the ideal world," he was concluding when he noticed Colin was no longer looking at him. He followed the young man's gaze to see what had drawn his attention: Lewis, half-rising to hand some papers across his desk. "Forget it, he's mine." Colin's jerk and his widened eyes that snapped back to him made him realise belatedly what he'd said.

"Y-yes, I k-know," Colin stammered. "I just -- he must be one of the best, I was thinking. I mean, for you to stay with him for so long, right?"

"Right." He'd managed to moderate his tone, and it would've been fine if Colin had stopped there.

"But you must be moving up soon. You came in on fast-track, too. Innocent said you can get your promotion just like that," punctuated by a snap of his fingers, "and she thinks it's high time you should."

Bloody Innocent and her meddling! "My track is none of your sodding --" he started before his brain caught up and reminded him he was talking to a clueless young trainee. He'd said something a lot more unforgivable to Lewis when he'd been the junior whit, and to his shame, he
hadn't been clueless, not after seeing the man at his wife's grave. "I'm being an arsehole," he backed off the bewildered young man. "I'm sorry, Colin. Truly."

"Sore spot?" Colin asked.

"You might say. Sorry."

"I'm sorry if I said anything wrong."

"You're fine. Let's just say I'm on the track I want to be and leave it at that."

"Buy me a pint later and we'll leave it at that."

"Spoken like a true copper. You learn fast." He got to his feet. "I should get back to work."

****

Lewis was on the phone with an MI5 busybody who'd rung to berate him for not keeping Judith Suskin's name and whereabouts out of the media during the Voss inquest. In the middle of clenching his teeth and explaining to the man that the Suskin name, business and photos had already been in the media before there was a case, Hathaway came in, shut the door, put a file on his desk and stood over it, tapping it with two fingers.

From his tense, too-tightly controlled movements, Lewis knew James had in fact stormed in, slammed the door, slapped down the file, and was stabbing it repeatedly. No, he told the voice on the phone, he didn't know the cost of relocating the Suskins with new identities and, no, he had no way to judge the danger left over from an old feud in Ireland, or venture an opinion as to the safety of the participants if left in place. But he was sure, he added deliberately, there was a government agency that could. Would it be MI5?

It worked a treat. The man got off the phone. "Pillock," Lewis mumbled, and asked Hathaway, "Problem?"

"The unwritten rules of policing, as usual." He stopped jabbing at the file, but didn't turn around. The tightness of his jaw came through in the way he was biting off his words. "Any Joe Bloggs, kick down his door, drag him out, toss the place, no problem. The rich and the mighty, tug on your forelock and bow away."

Lewis sighed. "You know, James, if someone borrows your belt, they don't expect to find you in the trousers they need held up."

That worked, too. Hathaway faced him, his demeanour slackened into a picture of: *Huh?*

"It's Laxton's case, but all right," obviously, his sergeant wasn't playing well with others, "go on, tell me about it."

"I had the Standish twins brought in to identify the items we recovered. There's something terribly wrong with those boys."

"They're young, they lost their whole family, some weirdness is normal. What did they do?"

"They identified some stuff, didn't recognise others, or so they said. Mostly, they kept finding ways to make Julie lean over the table and leered at her backside."

Teenage hormones shouldn't overcome devastation *that* much. "And you want to do what,
interrogate them, search their rooms?"

"Been done. I want to search the other boys' rooms, interrogate them, the ones who gave the alibis."

*Whoa.* "Bad seed, happens, I get it. Rage exploding in a family, I get that, too. But six other sixteen year olds, not even related? Premeditated conspiracy? I doubt it, James."

"I'm not saying they were in on the killings. After the fact. Even rich families don't give sixteen year olds money to burn. They may not have questioned or wanted to question the windfall at first. Later would've been too late, they'd be implicated already."

Not totally out of the realm of possibility. "I take it you talked to Laxton about it?"

"And Innocent. Been warned off by both. Gut feeling can't get me a warrant, yes, I'm aware, but they're just a bunch of kids, probably scared silly by now. They'll break if someone leans on them. Unless I have evidence to justify it, though, I'm not to go near them. That'll bring in the parents and that might cost Innocent a soiree invitation or two. There's no concrete evidence tying in the twins, let alone the others."

"But you can't let it go."

"Could you?"

"Probably not." *I have no business sticking my nose in,* he thought, but in for a penny. "Morse used to say if you can't go forward, go back to the beginning. Crime scene still intact?"

"Yes. Nobody's living there any more."

"Rawbones was on a sabbatical, Laura was at the Conference. Who processed it?"

Hathaway put the last nail into Lewis's reluctance, "Your favourite locum, Cook."

"Now I know someone has to take another look at it. Grab a kit." Lewis got up and snagged his jacket from the back of his chair. *Start with chucking a mattress into a skip and look where you end up.* "Hobnailed boots."

"Sir?"

He shrugged into his jacket. "What Laxton's going to use to stomp on me."

Hathaway took his coat and Lewis's anorak from the stand. "Talking of leather accessories...."

"Yes?"

"Did you compare me to a belt?" He handed over Lewis's anorak. "Really, sir?"

*****

"Funny, I don't remember saying 'come in,'" Hobson said from the door of her office.

Lewis and Hathaway whirled to face her. "Good evening, Doctor," Hathaway said. "We didn't expect to find you in at this hour."

"'Evening, Laura," Lewis added, "We were just -- "
"I was just leaving you a note," Hathaway overrode him, trying to keep Lewis out of as much trouble as possible.

Laura was regarding them as if she'd caught a couple of miscreants, which wasn't too far off the mark. "Good evening, Sergeant," she said indifferently. "Lewis."

Hathaway didn't care how she chose to address him, but a quick look at Lewis confirmed he did.

"What's so urgent that it couldn't wait until morning?"

_It would have, if you hadn't come in._ "I was hoping you wouldn't mind casting an eye over Dr Cook's conclusions for the Standish case. I looked at the crime scene again, and I think he may have missed a few things. It can wait until tomorrow."

"I'm here now." While Hobson's voice didn't warm up at all, she wasted no time in coming to her desk to locate the file and flip it open, as professional as ever at her job. "What do you think he miss -- oh, wait." She went back and forth through some pages. "Not missed so much as started out with a faulty assumption maybe. In this case, hard to blame him. He says no appreciable trace evidence was recovered from the perpetrators, only the occupants. You're thinking, what if they're one and the same?"

Hathaway could've kissed her. As FME, she was priceless. "Exactly."

"Did you find the shoes that match these sole impressions?"

"I doubt we can. Sir, you're holding some evidence bags for me?" he asked to cover up the fact Lewis was holding them because he'd been the one to notice the uncollected ashes under the grate and sift through them. He pointed at the bags Lewis took out of his pocket and placed on the desk. "Grommets from shoe eyelets, I believe. A couple of metal buttons and rivets, probably from jeans, teeth from zips. All recovered from the fireplace." Clearly, bloody clothes and shoes had been burned.

Lewis put another bag holding a few crimped metal shoelace tips on the desk."And these thingummies."

"Aglets," Hathaway supplied.

"Aigulettes," Hobson corrected.

He knew he should let it go, but out it came anyway, "In English, aglets."

"Originally aigulettes. In French."

"Actually, its origin is Latin, acus."

"Thingummies was working for me," Lewis mumbled.

"Haven't we already established what works for you doesn't necessarily work for me?" Hobson threw over her shoulder pointedly.

Now Hathaway could've slapped her. An awkward silence fell until Lewis broke it, "Right then, I'll let you get on with it." A light touch on the arm told Hathaway: _Not your problem; stay._ "I'm off. Good night, James --" a second's hesitation, then "--Laura."
Hathaway unclenched his jaw long enough to say, "Good night, sir," while Hobson lifted a hand sketchily, her attention on some photos in the file. She was probably unaware of the moment Lewis had almost pushed her to a professional distance but chosen not to.

"That's interesting." Hobson squinted at a photo. "Where did these blood drops in the kitchen come from? They're isolated, no smears or trailing drips connecting them to the bodies. " She motioned at Hathaway and led him into the lab. There, she dug into a cabinet and started pulling out evidence bags from the case. "Stop looming, sit somewhere," she said, "Give me time to check a few things."

He hoisted himself onto a low cabinet while she wrote a note, called in a tech and handed it over. "Do it now," she said to him and sent him on his way. Then she removed some samples from the bags, started working on them. "Oh, stop it," she told Hathaway without looking at him as she set up four small phials.

He wasn't doing anything except waiting quietly. "Stop what?"

"It used to amuse Robbie when I took Morse down a peg." She glared over her shoulder at him. "You, however, bristle."

"From all I heard, Morse deserved to be taken down a peg."

"Robbie doesn't?"

"No," he answered shortly.

"That's your informed opinion, is it?"

Why did she always assume they kept tattling to each other? "You're under a misconception, Doctor. Lewis and I don't share nearly as many confidences as you think we do. I don't know what happened between you. But I do know he doesn't take it lightly, and he was...disappointed."

"He was?"

"That's what he said." He didn't think he was stretching the truth too far.

"He's not the only one." She finished with the tubes, pulled out a blood test card, smeared small amounts of hydrated samples on the fields. "DNA sequencing will be done when it's done. By the quick and dirty way -- just a sec, it's clumping. Ah, Group A."

"Meaning?"

"Both male victims were Group O, the female, AB."

He hopped off the cabinet. "So there's blood from someone else on the scene."

"Not only that, if an offspring of O and AB doesn't inherit either, Group A is a safe bet." She indicated the bags they had delivered to her. "If I carefully burned my bloody clothes, I'd also wash. I sent a tech to process the bathrooms."

"We -- " sod it " -- I thought of that. Reckoned any evidence would've washed away."

"Stains in pipes might still show up under black light. Tissue transferred from the victims could be caught in the traps. If you want to wait and see what comes back, go and have some coffee or something. It's going to take a while."
Upon leaving, Lewis found that the brisk, chilly slap of the night air suited his mood. He was tempted to keep walking, knowing he could easily walk back in the morning; his flat wasn't that far away. But Hathaway would notice the car, wonder, maybe worry, and check on him -- in case he'd been abducted by aliens, he supposed, since there were no other takers around.

By the time he parked his car on his street, he'd had to admit that, yes, there'd been takers, some without ulterior motives, and he couldn't very well blame them if he had chosen not to go along. He may have even used Laura as a comfortable excuse to avoid other possibilities. If he had to make peace with anybody, he should look to himself, shouldn't he?

He could take that walk now and nobody would notice. Or care.

Hathaway loitered in the corridor outside Forensics until he saw the tech come back. He was further reining in his impatience to give Hobson time to study the results when she walked out, buttoning her trench coat. "The boys' bath drain is stained," she informed him. "Better yet, a few strands of hair with bulbs in the trap. Dyed, so probably from the mother. For anything more definite, we all have to wait. I'm going home."

"Thank you, Doctor." Good night, he started to say, but of course, the car park was in the same direction for both of them. He fell in step with her, pulling on his own coat. "I do apologise for -- "

"Once I have the results," she interrupted him, "I'll take them to Laxton directly, tell her I found discrepancies in Cook's report and followed up on them." She looked at him with something like tolerant exasperation. "Going behind a colleague's back isn't the done thing, and dissembling isn't Robbie's style. It's best if proprietary issues don't come up at all, don't you think?"

Once again, he could've kissed her. "I'd appreciate that." He held the door to the outside open for her. "Greatly."

"So I was a bit snappish, but he's still a dear friend, you know. More than that just didn't work out." A gust of wind made her hunch her shoulders and lift her collar. "Predictable, I suppose. We've known each other a long time. Familiarity might be cozy in a settled relationship, but it's dulling at the start. Nothing new to get the blood stirring, as it were. And we're both too mature to be carried away by the prospect of...rumpy-pumpy, as Strange preferred it said. I think the main appeal was the ease."

Ease. Right. So unfair how easily she could've had it and how casually she could dismiss it. "All due respect, Doctor, but that's a bit too much information for me." He was, however, glad to know that the silly epithet for sex had been handed down to Lewis from up high.

"You're too young to act the prude," she chided. "Just toss it into the category of confidences you two don't share."

What a crowded category that was. He saw her to her car and headed for his.

Cold and somewhat footsore as he entered his flat, Lewis expected to be glad of the warmth and the promise of rest. But turning the light on and seeing the place exactly as he'd left it threw him back into the disquiet he'd thought he'd exhausted by a long, determined walk. Unless he changed it,
or Monty was very, very bad, nothing ever changed in his flat. He closed the door in the morning and opened it at night on the same tidy, empty, quiet same. Too late to wish he hadn't yelled at the kids when their toys, books, school bags had cluttered his path, hadn't demanded their noise or loud music to cease, hadn't minded getting tangled in Val's delicates when he'd wanted a late shower, hadn't -- an endless list, really. Of no more.

Monty had given up on him, settled for dry food and burrowed in between the two pillows on the bed too deeply for anything more than an ear twitch. What purpose the second pillow served except help cover the width of the bed -- Lewis tossed his jacket and the tie he yanked off onto the foot of it and left the room.

He wasn't a big enough hypocrite to deny one point Laura had made -- yes, he'd like to have a sex life once more. For the longest time, he hadn't been able to manage a single thought of sex without thinking he'd never love Val again, never hold her, feel her touch, see her beautiful hair fanned out on the pillow, hear her sighs and cries, smell her, taste her. For years that had been the end of any thought of sex and he'd discounted it, but it hadn't stayed discounted. Wanting sex, though, didn't mean wanting only sex. What would that do except make him feel bereft all over again once the heat cooled?

He sat on the sofa, felt too confined, got up to pace. Not that the fifteen or so feet he could cover back and forth were likely to help if walking half the length of the city hadn't. The wind had died down outside, there were only the muted sounds of the occasional traffic on the street, and the regular, too-familiar noises of the flat, the intermittent drip of the tap in need of a new washer, the buzz of the fluorescent light over the worktop, the low hum of the fridge, the click-click of the boiler cycling on and off. Tonight, it all felt sterile to him, as if the flat were a mechanical life-support system, geared to sustain a semblance of life. Much like the set up that had sustained Chloe Brooks, was sustaining Claire Gansa, efficiently and impersonally, in limbo. A loving sister may have made all the difference for Chloe, Alex Gansa might yet make a difference to his wife. Whatever James might claim, or whyever he'd claimed it, most differences made one.

The ringtone of the mobile breaking into the isolation of the flat startled him. Hathaway, the screen said. Oh, thank God. At this hour, it had to be a case. He was awake, mostly dressed, and it'd be such a relief to turn his mind in another direction. "Where?" he asked as soon as he had the phone to his ear.

"Erm...where what?"

Bugger. "Not calling me out to a scene then?"

"No. Just thought you'd like to know the lab results."

Any distraction should've been welcome, but he was disgruntled enough to say, "Now? It's ten to one, James. I could've been asleep."

"Not unless you sleepwalk."

How the -- ? "Where are you?"

"In my car. In front of your flat."

Ah. He went to the front window. The blinds were still up where he'd left them in the morning. He could see the car on the street, and when Hathaway turned on the interior light Lewis could also see him, craning to look at him through the passenger side window. "Go on then, tell me."
"Hobson found blood drops unconnected to the victims. There's some indication they might belong to one of the boys. There may have been an altercation, maybe the father gave one of them, I don't know, a nosebleed? Could've escalated until the boys grabbed the pokers from the fireplace. Or maybe the twins got into it with each other before or after. Any case, there's blood and hair evidence, the latter from the mother, in their bathroom."

Lewis was paying attention, but at the same time he was amused by a surreal sight. His own reflection was on the glass, and Hathaway's head and shoulders lit inside the frame of the passenger window looked like a small telly screen playing on his belly. Belly-telly. He chortled.

"Sir?"

Too, too silly to share with anyone over five. "Should be enough to get you a warrant or two," he said soberly. "By the way, James, if you saw I'm up and around, why didn't you just come in?"

"I thought, at this hour, if you hadn't put yourself to bed yet --" he abruptly cut off.

"Yes?" Silence through the phone. "Spit it out."

"You must have something else to put to bed," came out in a rush. "I didn't want to intrude. But maybe you should know that, erm, Hobson..." he trailed off uncertainly.

*What about her?* "I'm aging as I stand here."

"She said she'll take the findings to Laxton and tell her she found discrepancies while checking over Cook's report."

"She doesn't need to do that. I'm going to talk to Laxton in the morning. I should've done it before we hared off, but...."

"Apologising is easier than asking permission?"

Apologising was harder. Except asking permission may have only stymied Hathaway further. "Something like that," Lewis let pass. "My problem, I'll solve it. You shouldn't have asked Laura --"

"But I didn't," Hathaway interrupted, a bit warmly. "She chose to do it, out of consideration for you. None of my business, sir, but I think you should let her. I suspect she wanted to make up for being...'snappish,' as she put it."

Good to know that years of friendship could survive, with maybe a few bruises, but basically intact. "You may have point. And, James, thanks." He didn't like underhanded dealings, but this way Laxton wouldn't feel her thunder was stolen by another DI. Or worse, a DS.

"Get some rest, sir."

"You, too."

As Hathaway drove away, Lewis realised that he'd like to go to bed now and sleep. Sometimes even an unreasonably late call made a difference.

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Hathaway was in another early briefing, diligently keeping the I-told-you-so expression out of his face. Laxton was handing out assignments indicated by the evidence he pretended to hear for the
first time when Lewis came out of their office, both their coats over his arm. He was already on his
feet as Lewis got Laxton's attention to say, "Hate to interrupt, but I've a call-out. If you don't mind, I
need my sergeant back."

"Yes, of course," she said with a nod to Hathaway. "And Robbie," she called after them,
"thanks for sharing."

Lewis acknowledged it with a quick wave, leading the way out as if he'd just spied water after
a long slog through the Sahara. Sometimes it was nothing short of indecent how their blood
quickened at other people's misfortunes. Lewis took the steps at the pace of a much younger man,
handed Hathaway his coat at the bottom, saying, "Sorry for taking you away. I know you got
invested in her case."

"Frankly, sir, this is one case where I'd sooner not know the circumstances that led to it." The
telly and the newspapers were bound to scream them out for all to hear soon enough. Besides, for the
first time in days, Hathaway wasn't feeling...lopsided. "What do we have?" He kept in quick-step
with Lewis out of the building and across the car park.

"Not sure yet. Uniforms got a vandalism call, took one look, backed out and called us." He
chose his own car. "Get in."

Once they turned from Sandford Link onto a side road and Hathaway saw what loomed
ahead, he had to groan. "Now I wish I were elsewhere."

"What -- why?"

"That warehouse is the centre of operations for the film company. That," he pointed at the
patrol cars and a crowd in a ring around a large cargo container at the far end of the lot, "must be our
destination. Is it too late for me to beg off, sir?"

"Buck up, man," Lewis said as he nosed the car in, parting the crowd with brief honks. "I've
seen you dive into a lake of muck with chomping big blades spinning in it."

"That muck didn't pretend to be anything but muck," he grumbled as he got out of the car,
noting the crime scene tape enclosed a substantial area. What it held, he couldn't see yet through the
rush of anxiously chattering people the constables were trying to persuade to go further back. With
the costumed actors scattered about, the place looked like carnival grounds.

"You again!" a shrill voice piped up from the crowd and a stumpy torpedo shot out of it
towards him. "Bugger off, bugger off my set, you poxy wanker!"

Oh, hell. Hathaway tried to step back, came up against the car, wondering how aggressive he
could get before Innocent got aggressive with him, as Brad Powell shrieked, "Piss off, you sodding
bastard," and jabbed him in the chest, "just piss off, or I'll have you thrown -- ow!"

Lewis had come around the car and grabbed the hand on its way to jabbing into Hathaway
evenly. "Your name, please?"

"Damn it, let go of me! This is my company," the man tried to bluster, but as he was
squirming with the pressure on his hand that Lewis hadn't released, he just looked silly. "I want this
scum off my premises," he snarled.

"Your name, please," Lewis repeated.
"I'm Bradley Powell and this is --"

"Your company, your premises, yes, you've said. I'm Inspector Lewis. This is Sergeant Hathaway, my sergeant. You will not accost him whilst he's on duty. I suggest you don't accost him otherwise either, because, well, look at the size of him." He finally let the man's hand go. "Now, if you'll wait somewhere quietly, I'm sure we'll want to speak to you -- once my colleague and I've decided what we want to speak to you about. Constable," he called out to the closest uniform, indicated Powell, then ignored the man who was turning purple and sputtering about dire consequences. "Come on, James."

"With your permission," Hathaway made a point of saying to Powell too politely and followed Lewis.

They ducked under the tape, took two steps and stopped abruptly before stepping on -- what? Water, certainly, sudsy swirls of it shallowly covering a wide expanse of the concrete, but pinkish, with some red ooze here and there. Buckets and mops and scrubbing brushes were scattered all about, a couple of hoses snaking around them. "Fuck," Hathaway couldn't help swearing as he realised he was looking at an interrupted effort to obliterate whatever the scene had held.

Lewis was shaking his head. "Laura will go spare."

Hathaway pointed towards the back end of the cargo container where he could see Hobson dressing someone down. "She already has."

A WPC trotted up to them. "Sir," she acknowledged Lewis, nodded at Hathaway, "we got a malicious mischief call. That's one of their trailers, for carting sets and props to location. They'd thought someone had broken in at night and thrown red paint all around the inside. By the time we got here, they'd already unshipped the thing and started cleaning up. We could see it was no paint, made them stop and called you." She looked forlornly at the scene. "We didn't go into the trailer, of course, though I doubt there's anything left to disturb."

Lewis thanked her, adding, "Ring the station and get more people, that's a big crowd to handle." As she hurried away, he pointed at two vans driving up with satellite dishes on their tops. "About to get bigger, too."

"Lots of actors around," Hathaway said. "They'll flock to the cameras soon as they appear. We'll have peace for a while yet."

Lewis frowned at the slush at their feet. "We can't screw it up any worse. Let's go and see what's left to look at."

Heading towards the back of the container, they could see Hobson and her techs sorting through piles of dripping...stuff, while she kept berating someone behind her. "How stupid are you that you couldn't tell at the first dash of water? What did you cack-handed morons think, vandals were considerate enough to use water-soluble paint? Of all the witless, bungling, blundering, thick-headed -- "

Once past the side of the container, Hathaway could see the person standing there under Hobson's barrage. Ginny, silently bristling, her iPad clutched to her chest, wearing the fierce it's-not-fair pout perfected by the young. She saw him, couldn't seem to decide between smiling and scowling.

Hathaway went to Hobson who had yet to run out of adjectives. "She's just an intern, Doctor," he said quietly. "Does what she's told, that's all."
"What're you -- ?" With a start, Hobson looked over her shoulder and spun around. "I wasn't talking to her. Where's the other one," she asked Ginny, "McKenna?"

"She stepped away once you turned your back." Ginny informed her, still aggrieved, then gave Hathaway a sudden, beaming smile, spread the fingers of one hand holding her iPad to wriggle them at him. "Hi," she mouthed.

"She did, did she?" Hobson said direly, and called one of her techs to her side. "Fetch back the producer of this sideshow." She waved him away, and explained to Lewis, "I wasn't done by a long shot."

"I think you can go now," Hathaway told Ginny, stepping closer to her. "Stick around, though. We might need to talk to you."

"Oh, I'll be right here when you want me," she said like a bright promise, and damn near skipped away.

"That lass is too chirpy for there to be a body around," Lewis concluded, eyes running over the interior of the mostly empty container. "So what do we have, Laura? This isn't stage blood, I'm assuming."

"It's real all right, human," she said, indicating the portable scene-kit she'd laid out to one side. "With all the chemicals they introduced, that's as specific as I'm likely to get -- unless I find an uncontaminated patch amidst this clutter." She waved at the haphazard piles of furniture, props and costumes that had been carried out of the container.

"That's it, just blood trace?"

"Here, yes. So far. But there's a body somewhere. I can't declare homicide on supposition, mind. For now, my best guess is all you get." She led them to a large, rectangular panel propped upright against one of the piles. "Untreated plywood, absorbed the blood deeply enough that rinsing couldn't obliterate the stains. You can clearly see the initial spray pattern. That's arterial spurt." She pointed at the angled cast-off spatter with jagged, elongated tails, "Slashed with something sharp but not smooth. Death in two minutes." She waved at the wet pavement all around them. "I have no way of measuring the volume of the water they used, but it's a lot and it's still tinged. There is a body. If there were trails on the concrete, they're gone now. Any case, it'd be simple to wrap a body while still inside, in layers of plastic, canvass, tarpaulin -- take your pick. They're all provided," she motioned at the pallets placed around the lot, piled with folded sheets of everything to pack and store or haul away any size item. "Then you can pull a car up close and tip the body into the boot."

"Any chance of a timeline?" Lewis asked, but clearly had no expectations. "Right," he said at Hobson's impatient look, "between whenever someone put the last item in the container and this morning, I got it."

"What's the flaming hold-up here?" they heard Powell demand, turned and saw that the tech had towed in the wrong producer. "Do you have any idea what this delay is costing me?"

Hobson lowered her head and glared at him. "Who the devil are you?"

Powell put his face close to hers and pulled himself to his full height, topping Hobson by maybe two inches. "I, Madam, am Bradley Powell, and this is my -- "

"I've heard this tune, it hasn't improved," Lewis chivvied Hathaway along. "Let's go and do something worth doing."
Hathaway walked away with him, although he would've dearly loved to stay and watch Hobson excoriate the squawking bantam.

"You can just about carry her in your pocket, can't you?" Lewis commented casually.

"Hobson?" he almost squeaked.

Lewis goggled at him. "Give over, nobody's that daft. I meant the bonny lass from earlier, the red-head."

"Oh. Ginny."

"The way she was looking at you, I thought you'd slipped on shiny armour while me head was turned."

"I didn't notice." But of course he had. It had made him uncomfortable. "She might be twenty, but I doubt it."

"So a dozen years is too many, but more than twenty between Fiona and her fiancé is just fine?"

Who cares about Fiona and her fiancé, I was talking about -- what I can't talk about. "Well, yes. Fiona's over thirty, she's a mature woman," he said, doing his best not to sound defensive.

He either failed or Lewis saw something in his face before he collected his wits. "I shouldn't have brought up Fiona," he said. "Not as over her as I thought, are you? Sorry, James."

However utterly wrong that conclusion was, it was a convenient hiding place. "No worries. I don't mind."

They ducked under the tape as Lewis told him, "I'll take the crew, you take the actors."

Hathaway made a face at him. "Your kindness knows no bounds, sir."

Once he was able to round up the actors and distance the reporters, the prevailing opinion seemed to be, people from outside had broken in and done whatever was done. He sent a uniform to walk the perimeter to see if the wire-topped high fence showed signs of breaching, and found out that if anyone from outside had come in, they must've come in through the manned gate. According to the keeper of that gate, only authorised personnel had driven into the lot. Cars leaving the lot weren't noted, he told Hathaway, and no, it wasn't customary to check what anybody carried in or out.

Reinforcements from the station had arrived, the work load of the moment was easing. However, unless a body was found on the grounds, the work load later was going to be monumental. With all the company's hirings and firings, contracted and un-contracted workers, numerous extras picked off the streets -- so many people to track down to find one missing person. Judging by all the self-important tattling poured into Hathaway's ear, it was going to be even harder to whittle down who had it in for whom and for which reason.

At least the warehouse, which would be a nightmare to search, had cameras trained on its entrances. Hathaway was looking around for someone to lumber with watching the surveillance footage when he saw Cleaves, sitting doubled over on a workbox in a corner of the lot, his head sunk into the support of his hands. He looked so despondent that Hathaway hurried to his side, touched his shoulder lightly. "Edmund?"
Cleaves flinched away from the touch before the fear--fear?--in his blood-shot eyes that snapped to Hathaway was replaced by a dull recognition. "Oh, it's you." He dropped his head back into his hands.

Had he been crying? Hathaway squatted in front of him, took his wrists in a light hold and tugged gently to make him surface again. "Edmund, look at me." Christ, the man looked faded. His eyes were like bruises. "Talk to me, what's wrong?" He noticed Cleaves was regarding the hands around his wrists as if they were handcuffs, so he removed them. "It's only me, Edmund."

"Only," Cleaves whispered as though he'd found something ironic in it, and the next instant he’d straightened his shoulders, collected himself, was looking at him steadily. "Nothing's wrong, James, I was half asleep, that's all. I've been up all night, I'm exhausted. We're not allowed to leave or even get in our cars." He indicated their surroundings with a sweeping motion. "While this may be any normal day to you, it's more than a little disturbing to me."

"If it weren't just as disturbing to me, I wouldn't be in this job," Hathaway couldn't stop himself from retorting, "I don't do it because it's thrilling or enriching."

Cleaves looked chastened. "I know that, of course I do. I'm sorry." He carded his fingers wearily through his hair. "I'm just really, really tired."

"Don't worry about it," Hathaway relented. "Let's see if we can send you home. What were you doing through the night, where and with whom?" Not the way the questions should've been phrased for a priest, or a friend, but he could tiptoe around them or get them out of the way. "I have to know before you can leave."

"I understand. The day's shooting at St Mary's wrapped around six, we came back here, I stayed in the car park to meet Mathias. Once a week they put the footage into a roughly edited form for him to see and approve. Waited about an hour for the set-up, viewed it, Mathias didn't much like it, gave me and McKenna a lot of notes. He left, oh, around ten or so, McKenna and I went into the editing room with her team and worked the night through. I don't know what time we were finished. She might."

"Everyone stayed in the room all night?"

"Of course not. Techs were in and out, hunting up more and more footage, we all took breaks, went to get the coffee and the sandwiches catering had left, some went out to smoke. I was out here a couple of times myself," Cleaves freely offered, "to walk off a frustration or two."

"Did you see anything that looked out of the ordinary? Anyone?"

"I was preoccupied, but no, nothing. It was quiet."

"And this morning?"

"Madhouse as usual. Add to that the hue and cry. I just wanted to get in my car and go home, but I was told nobody could leave. Is it OK if I go inside and lie down somewhere?"

"No reason you can't go to your own bed. I know where to find you." He rose and extended a hand. "Come on," Cleaves took his hand, stood, seemed to feel woozy and swayed, making Hathaway put a supporting arm around him. "I'll get someone to drive you."

"No!" Cleaves pulled away from him and repeated more moderately, "No."

"Edmund--"
"I'm fine, James, really. I can drive." He leaned down and picked up a gym bag from behind the workbox.

"Tell me you're not planning a work-out," Hathaway said, also noting that Cleaves was wearing trainers with his priestly garb.

"Certainly not today." He hefted the bag wearily. "Actually, it's mostly books. For research, and for those hurry-up-and-wait times." He started for his car.

Hathaway walked alongside and, when Cleaves raised his eyebrows at him questioningly, he explained, feeling apologetic about it, "I need to take a quick look at your car before you can leave."

"What do you expect to find?" Cleaves guffawed. "A body?"

"I don't expect to find it, but I must look."

"If you must, you must." Cleaves pulled out his keys and aimed the remote at his car to release the locks on the doors and the boot. "What a life you lead, James."

*****

Lewis was wishing he had left the crew to Hathaway and opted for the actors; the breadth of their job: acting. He wouldn't have been trying to keep track of a whole new lexicon for folks who did all manner of baffling things. Gaffer, it turned out, wasn't just an old man, he or she, young or old, did...what exactly, gaffering, gaffing? What did a Grip grip? He was sure Best Boy wasn't what it sounded like, unsure what kind of focus could be pulled by a Focus Puller, and he'd run into a handful of lads going by the title of Cable Puller, literally for pulling cables out of the way -- OK, he got that, safety first, but what in heaven's name was a Food Stylist and why did food need one?

The burly bloke he was talking to was the foreman of something called swing-gang for the Dressing Props Department. At least the man was helpful and to the point. He'd led Lewis to another container to show what an undisturbed one looked like and how it functioned. Unassembled sets at the far end, a couple of bars for hanging costumes in front of them, shelves built in for props on both sides, quite a wide area free in the middle for access, strong interior lighting and a pulley system to get heavy items in and out, which of course could also be used for a body, making it as easy to handle for a woman as for a man. "We only lock 'em up proper on location," the foreman was telling him. "Here, they're just latched for easy access." He pointed at a large, U-shaped bar on one of the doors that would swing down on both sides of the other door and keep them closed.

"So it can be locked from the inside just as easily," Lewis concluded.

"Barred, not locked. The lock's outside."

Lewis gave him an I-wasn't-born-yesterday look and reached to rattle the length of twisted wire hanging off the interior arm of the bar. Fastened onto the handle of the opposite door, for all purposes, it would lock them from the inside.

"Oh, aye...well..." he cast a furtive look over his shoulder.

The McKenna woman was waiting for Lewis's attention a few paces away, no doubt to ask yet again how much longer he'd be tying up her workday. He leaned closer to the foreman who bent his head and pretended to scratch his neck. From behind the cover of his arm, he said, "Useful place, innit? For a dram or two in peace, playin' a few hands with a few mates." His voice dropped to a bare whisper, "For gettin' a leg over."
So anybody could've been in the container, doing anything they didn't want seen. "Any way to know who was in there last?"

"Work-wise, sure. We pack in a specific order, last in, first out, all ready for next day's set-up. Lemme find the inventory." No electronics for him, he took the bulging clipboard he was holding under one arm and started flipping pages.

Lewis looked around while he waited. Order had been established on the lot. Hobson's techs had almost finished packing up their vans with the items collected from the scene. Past a lorry, a van, and a smaller vehicle, Hathaway was checking the boot of a car. When he put the hatch down, Lewis could see the actor he'd been questioning -- some casting choice. Despite his costume, the bloke's striking good looks made him an implausible priest.

"Do you know where I can find the Professor?" he heard someone asking, turned around. The young red-head had come up and was talking to McKenna. "I've been looking for him."

"He's not in today," McKenna answered her shortly, not bothering to look at her.

"He's on the schedule."

"I left him a message earlier not to bother. I was up the whole night and I still have to deal with Brad's contretemps. It's not as though we'll be allowed to do any work, is it?" She was clearly asking it of Lewis, which he conveniently overlooked.

"But he was supposed to bring back -- " At McKenna's sharp look of are-you-still-here? she cut off and started away.

Lewis took the pages the foreman removed from the clipboard and handed him. "Thank you. I'll be keeping these a while. Duty calls," he said to both the foreman and McKenna as he hurried off and started away.

He trotted to catch up with the young lass, who heard him and stopped, flashing him a sweet smile. "Ginny, isn't it?" he said as he came up to her. "I'm Inspector Lewis."

"You work with Sergeant Hathaway." Apparently, a higher credential than mere inspector.

"I do, aye." He spared her the specifics of rank which weren't likely to count much in her priorities. "You were asking after someone who's supposed to be here but isn't?"

"Professor Llewellyn-Pierce, consultant-on-set."

"But not today?"

"Not every day, only as he's needed. But he'd said he'd be here today. See, he was supposed to bring back some books I checked out for him from the Balfour. A lot of books, and they're due back -- " She suddenly looked contrite. "I'm sorry, I know it's insignificant, I mean, considering. But I'm also a student and I can't jeopardise my library privileges. It's all right, though, I'll call him at home, pick them up myself."

"When you find him, tell him to give us ring, would you?"

"Sure."
"If you can't find him, you give us a ring. You know who to ask for." Not a snowball's chance that would be inspector-anybody. But Hathaway was right in his severe way, she was too young for him, poor lass.

Shortly afterwards, Lewis had to inform Bradley Powell, squeezing his words in between the man's objections and dismal cursing, that, yes, Hobson's crew could and would take away the items they'd collected, even tow away the container should they see fit. And no, there was no telling when any of it could be returned. Yes, the premises would certainly be searched, it would expedite matters if Powell gave permission instead of waiting for a warrant, and, regretfully, the fact that two productions were being disrupted could not be Lewis's primary concern. He got through it by imagining Morse in his place, past noon and no pint in sight. When his scenario reached the point of arresting Morse or helping him hide the body, he left Powell to his tantrum and walked off to find his sergeant.

"Tell me something I want to hear," he said when he located Hathaway, who seemed to be free enough to commune with his BlackBerry.

Hathaway didn't disappoint. "We don't have to search the warehouse. The security footage shows nothing body-sized carried in through the night. Hobson's people did a basic walk-through, didn't see anything untoward -- although what their definition of untoward could be in regards to that place is difficult to fathom."

"I've seen all I can, talked to everyone worth talking to." He grimaced, unsure he'd talked to anyone worth talking to. Wasting breath was the price of doing business in most cases, but usually there'd be a hint or two that would draw his attention. Nothing here so far. "I'm finished. How about you? You noted anything untoward, talked to anybody interesting, anyone?"

"N -- no."

The tiny hitch in his answer made Lewis ask, "Nothing I need to know?"

"No, sir."

"You're sure."

"Yes, sir."

"Well then, let's stow all this for an hour and have a bite." The day had warmed up nicely. He might have a pint with his late lunch. He rarely drank in the middle of the day, but he'd justify it as a tribute to Morse and have one today. He hoped a decent meal would energise him, prompt his brain to get to work. He couldn't remember a case where his mind hadn't found a single morsel to at least gnaw at. Surely there was something in this one, too. Somewhere.

*****

Father Cleaves knew the housekeeper would wonder why he'd lit the fire in his room on such a warm day, but being the old-fashioned, motherly sort, she'd call it thin blood and start serving him liver. While waiting for the flames to take firm hold, he splashed his face with cold water to stay awake. He locked his door after himself and, with a lot of trepidation, went to look for Mathias, found him in his suite -- kneeling at his personal prie-dieu, hunched over his elbows with his rosary in hand, praying.

Cleaves backed out quietly, returned to his own room. He waited until he had a roaring fire, pulled on a pair of the disposable gloves he used for handling artefacts, made sure his door was
locked, and opened his gym bag.

Four library books. Shame to burn them, but soaked in blood, they were already destroyed. He fed them to the fire, threw in after them the stained latex gloves he'd used the night before. The metal book wouldn't burn, of course. He took it, and the half bottle of wine on his sideboard, into his small bathroom, washed it, then poured the wine over the sharp edges of the pages. With the pits and the flaking, probably not good enough. Mathias was sure to miss it if he tossed it into the river. He decided to put it in the safe in Osborn's office where only he and Mathias had access, decide on it later. He was bone-weary, thinking on top of doing was getting difficult, and he had more to do, a long drive to take. First, though, there was still the gym bag and his shoes he'd stashed in it. He could wash them, leave them to dry by the fireplace, and put them in one of the collection boxes for donating used items to the poor.

Before he left his room, he changed into casual clothes, minus his collar. A quick check confirmed Mathias was still at his prayers. He longed to go to his knees, clasp his hands and lose himself in prayer as well, but it was going to be hours before he could seek solace.

Leaving the church without his collar, something he hadn't done in a decade, made him feel cold and naked. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.* He ducked his head, hunched his shoulders protectively about his neck and told himself to get on with it.

*****

By sundown, Lewis had read through all the statements and still hadn't found that elusive 'something.' Innocent was in their office, looking askance at the incident board Hathaway had tucked in behind his chair where he could swivel back and forth and fill in the names and the possibilities they teased out of the pile of paperwork.

"That's all very well, but -- " Innocent turned to Lewis with a look of *do I need to say it?* " your prime evidence, the best way to open a murder enquiry and expect me to shell out for it: the body?"

"I wish I had the body, Ma'am; I don't."

"Yet," Hathaway put in, earned a glare from Innocent. Once, that would've stopped him, but no longer. "Doctor Hobson's assessment is all we need, isn't it?"

*Bad idea, lad.* Lewis pretended to study the papers on his desk to avoid meeting Innocent's eyes.

For once, though, their boss didn't question the dodgy statement. "CPs hate to prosecute on mere circumstantial evidence, and I hate *corpus delicti* cases," she said, turning to leave. "Find me the body, Lewis."

Once she was safely away, he raised his eyes to Hathaway, who looked thoroughly unrepentant as he pronounced, "*Corpora delicti.*"

"What?"

"She said 'cases.' Plural. *Corpora delicti.*"

Lewis stared at him. "You want to talk of misspeak? You know bloody well Laura *inferred* there's a body, she didn't declare homicide."

"It's a safe bet, and I didn't specify she did. It's Friday evening, Innocent's had her hair done,
has a shiny new manicure, she's going places. She'll leave it alone until Monday. The body or better
evidence might turn up by then."

If you keep going to the sharp edge with her, you're liable to cut yourself one day. Probably
his fault, though. Hathaway had been a lot more deferential towards their superiors in the early days.
Until Innocent had tried to use him to corral Lewis in the Mallory case and he'd jumped the fence
instead. He seemed to like where he'd landed. "But OK, we'll see what develops." He rose to pick
up his jacket and coat. "Make a list of the people we need to track down, tell the next shift to start on
it. If we don't get called back in the meantime, we'll pick it up Monday."

It was dark by the time Cleaves made it back to St Justin's. Beyond tired, he felt punch-drunk,
taking the steps to the residence with the tread of a man twice his age. All he wanted was to throw
himself onto his bed and close his burning, gritty eyes. He trudged to Osborn's rooms instead, found
them empty. He stood swaying for a long minute, pretty sure where he could find the man, not so
sure he had the wherewithal for the stairs to the top of the bell tower. His yearning for some peace of
mind eventually overcame his need for rest and he dragged himself up into the brisk, open air, found
Osborn sitting on the parapet in the dark with his head down.

"Mathias?" he said softly.

No answer. No acknowledgement at all.

He kneeled, leaned until his forehead rested on Osborn's knee, waited patiently for a long
time. Until finally, finally, one hand covered his head. He sighed gratefully at its welcome weight,
his bones seemed to unlock, his tight throat loosened. "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned."

The weekend started with a lovely, throwback day, seemingly on delayed transmission from
early September. For once, Monty, on the windowsill with his eyes blissfully closed and his fuzzy
belly exposed to the sun, looked uninterested in disrupting the lie-in Lewis intended to have. He
burrowed back into his pillow, rolled this way and that, found that he couldn't settle and within
minutes he was in the shower. He bypassed shaving for the day and got dressed as Monty spared one
eye and one ear to follow him intently and a questioning mrrrrrp? issued every minute or so. Still
reluctant to abandon his place in the sun, he didn't follow Lewis into the kitchen. While calling
himself a proper pushover, Lewis took his food bowl to him so the little hedonist could bask and eat
at the same time.

Deprived of a lie-in, he decided to make himself a nice breakfast, but he made the mistake of
going out to the front steps and picking up his morning paper, and there was the case, headlined:
Unscripted Mystery Interrupts Production. It had more photos than it needed of this and that actor,
and mostly talked of the disruption to filming. He couldn't very well carp about it, he didn't have a
clue, either. His nice breakfast turned into a cup of tea and a bowl of Weetabix. In any case, his
fridge wasn't exactly stocked. As he ate, he duly planned on shopping, running errands, taking a
walk, getting some lunch at a pub, watching a match or two. Once he put on his wind-cheater and
got in his car, though, his next stop was the car park of the station, at about the same time he'd have
been there on any workday.

Here's an idea, he told himself, get a life, you sad bastard. But he'd burned one bridge
already, they didn't exactly crowd his landscape, not much of a chance another would heave into
view today. He might as well get some work done. He got out of the car, locked it, took a moment to
put his head back and breathe in the mild air. *Waste of a bonny day,* he thought ruefully, but doubted he'd have enjoyed it. Having an itch to scratch while engaged with a case was normal to him; he eventually hit the right spot and got relief. Being on a case he couldn't engage in had set up an itch he didn't know how to scratch, let alone where, and it was beginning to drive him batty. He headed in.

He ran into Knox on the staircase. As they were on different shifts, it was his first opportunity to welcome him back, but he kept it brief; having to address Lewis as a superior now must rankle for the bloke. In the office, Lewis found that Hathaway had printed out a neat, prioritised list of persons-of-possible-interest and left it on his desk. Good lad.

Not even five minutes later, the good lad breezed in with his guitar in tow, bringing the outdoors with him, in cargoes and his hoodie, his curlier-than-normal hair and flushed complexion attesting to rigorous exercise on the river. "Is it just me, or did Monday come too early?" Lewis quipped, immoderately pleased to see him, attempting to gloss over it. He dearly appreciated having a sergeant whose work ethic mirrored his own, but that also meant James had no more of a life than he did. He was too young for that.

"Look at it this way, sir, if this one's rubbish, we'll have another crack at it."

"It's a point." Lewis nodded at the guitar Hathaway was carefully stowing out of the way. "Got a rehearsal later?"

"No, audition." The stress on the word coupled to a modest smile told Lewis it was that time of the year again, when Hathaway's group auditioned, unsuccessfully so far, for the Oxford Contemporary Music Council in the hopes of earning a spot in the annual Christmas concert it sponsored at the Sheldonian.

They divided the list between them, started making calls, got frustrated in short order. The film industry didn't acknowledge weekends, either; production crews jumped from set to set; work requirements usually kept mobiles turned off. But at least most calls were returned promptly and the list slowly but steadily got shorter. The fact that actors used stage names while their phones tended to be under their legal names was a problem until Hathaway hit on a bright idea, rang the Casting Office and got the numbers for their agents, who seemed tied to the actors with umbilical cords.

Many cups of coffee later, the list was almost exhausted, and everybody who'd had even the slightest reason to be on the lot of Powell Productions, from caterers to publicists to drop-ins, seemed to be still breathing somewhere. Lewis took a trip to the canteen and came back with a couple of sandwiches, handed one to Hathaway and sank back into his chair, feeling more wiped than sitting on his backside and punching in numbers could justify. "I'm getting too old or too dull for the job," he grumbled. "Both, I'd wager."

Hathaway's head snapped up and he gave Lewis a stern look. "Neither." His next comment was in Latin as he looked back down.

Lewis might not have had a posh education, but his memory was still functional, thank you. "The Vergil bit, iron entering the soul, what you said about the previous case," he addressed the top of Hathaway's head. "And?"

"It hasn't entered yours yet."

"Less cryptically?"

"So far there's nothing about this case to grab you, however hard you've been trying."
"Someone's dead. I should care about that."

"Dead, yes -- in supposition." Hathaway leaned back and looked at him. "A case isn't an abstract puzzle, not to you. The people involved, from the admirable to the despicable -- human nature, that's your acumen. This time we haven't seen the life that was taken, can't personalise him or her with so much as a name, there's not even a crime scene to speak of. You wouldn't ask a master pianist to play Chopsticks, it'd be a waste of your time and his talent. Why would you ask it of yourself?"

Taken aback, Lewis attempted to banter, "Chopsticks is about all I can manage on a piano. Now, on a harmonica -- "

Hathaway was having none of it. "You know what I mean," he interrupted, and concluded in a tone that brooked no argument, "You're not old or dull, merely outside your element for the moment." Looking smug at having demolished the irksome notion, he turned to his screen.

You don't know me, Lewis remembered accusing Hathaway once, some years ago. He wondered if James had shouldered it as an assignment since then. But it wasn't the clear insight so much -- five years, bright lad, of course he knew how Lewis worked, what motivated him. It was caring enough not to let a self-deprecating remark stand even as a passing comment. Any number of people in and out of his life had cared about how he felt towards them. Someone who'd argue against him for him, practically reprimand him, because it mattered how he felt towards himself -- that was rare. In fact, in all his adult years: one. And now, evidently, two.

Immediately, he had the urge to apologise to Val, but he was looking at James at his desk, pale and spare, angular and austere, and it felt as undue as apologising to the warm sun for the cool shade.


He was halfway through his sandwich when Hathaway got a call, picked up the phone, identified himself and asked, "Who? Oh, yes, sorry. No, no, it's fine, I am working. What may I -- ? I see. No, of course you should've. Yes, I'm sure he did. It's very helpful, thank you." He put the phone down and turned towards Lewis, looking a bit accusatory. "Seems you told Ginny to ring me."

"I said us, but I'm just the old duffer who works with you -- don't start, far as the lass cares is all I mean. What'd she have to say?"

"She's been trying to locate Llewellyn-Pierce and can't -- let me check something." He skimmed the gatekeeper's list. "His car came into the lot at quarter to ten the night of the incident, no telling when it left. Of course, they just note the vehicles, not who was in them. Personnel are checked at the entrance to the warehouse." He consulted another list. "He didn't go into the building. According to Ginny, the professor's mobile is off, he hasn't been at the College, and nobody answers at his home. The phone, that is. She didn't feel right about knocking on his door."

"Falls to us then." Having already chucked the remains of his sandwich into the bin, Lewis grabbed his wind-cheater with one hand as he rubbed his chin with the other. "What do you wager these people are on Innocent's social register and I'll be over the coals for looking loutish on an official visit?"

"It is the weekend, sir," Hathaway smiled almost too sweetly at him, "and at most I'd say: rakish."
"I doubt she'd see the difference, not sure I do. Come on. Bring your sandwich. You tuck in, I'll drive."

The front garden of the Victorian house in suburban North Oxford looked a little neglected, but that could be the season. The horse-head knocker on the door, and the discreet bell-pull almost hidden behind the ivy, went unanswerd. Knocking on neighbouring doors got them askance looks and only general information, until they found one house that shared the services of a domestic with the Llewellyn-Pierce household. Had shared, as it turned out.

"They let me go," the woman told them. "Herself said it was only temporary, but as my landlord won't temporarily forego his rent," she shrugged, "I'm pet-sitting the weekends." She recounted escalating strife, mainly over money lately, cold silences between the Llewellyn-Pierces punctuated by sharp arguments, and oh, her word, he also strayed something rotten; shameless doxies, any woman who'd lead a man astray; and the missus now, in all fairness, she was more rightly married to her horses, wasn't she? As to where either was at present, she couldn't venture an opinion.

"Financial woes, infidelity," Lewis concluded as they walked back to the car, finally feeling more in his element, "they can easily go wrong."

"I know one 'shameless doxy,'" Hathaway said. "McKenna." He told Lewis about the confrontation he'd overheard at the production office. "She was on the lot through that night."

"Gird your loins then, that's our next stop." Lewis started the car. "Once more unto the breach -- what?" he asked at Hathaway's sidelong look, feeling a little frivolous, blaming it on the lovely weather. "Don't tell me it's Shakespeare."

"The first one's from the Bible, 'let your loins be girt,' to be precise. The second is Shakespeare. Where did you think it came from?"

"Star Trek."

"No, you didn't."

He kept a straight face. "Yes, I did."

"I don't believe you. You don't even like science fiction."

"Used to be very fond of Dan Dare."

"Who?"

"The world's number one space hero," he quoted, "'the pilot of the future?'" Now they were both giving each other sidelong looks. "Never mind. Before your time."

"I still don't believe you."

Lewis relented. "All right, fine, I knew -- only because Lyn had a book bag with famous quotes on it, mind."

They went through the busy sets on the ground floor of the warehouse and found Eleanor McKenna in a glassed-in sound booth, supervising a voice-over session. Once she accepted she had to talk to them and now, "Take five," she told the techs and the actors. "Five," she stressed to one actor who had pulled out a cigarette and was hurrying out, called out after another one, "Watch your pronunciation. Ge'ez is an old Ethiopic dialect, not something you produce after beans-on-toast."
She closed the glass door of the booth, silencing the din from the outside. "Don't know why I bother, of course," she grumbled as she studied the sound panel and disabled the open mikes. "His Exalted Excellency the Bishop seems to have suddenly decided he needs to," she made air quotes, "'reconsider the suitability of the project.' After we complied with every single one of his whims, complete script control, final say-so on editing, an armoured van to ferry his precious collection from the back of beyond, a fortune on replicas. And I can't even argue my case, because he's," she formed another set of quotes, "'under the weather and can't be disturbed.' If he thinks I'm going to let all my work go to waste --" she huffed impatiently. "I'll redo the script, drop the 'Found' from the title, use only the footage we shot with the replicas and finish the documentary. Brad can deal with the legalities of the contract he signed. Talking of legalities," she faced them, crossing her arms, "yes?"

"We've been unable to locate Professor Llewellyn-Pierce," Lewis said. "Would you happen to know where we can find him?"

"I haven't needed him on the set the last few days, so no."

"You do see him off the set." Hathaway, in his blunt way, didn't bother making it a question. McKenna glared at him, neither confirming nor denying; Hathaway glared right back.

As interesting as it might be to see who'd break first, Lewis didn't care to waste time. "What's your relationship with him?"

"He's the expert consultant for my documentary."

"I meant personal relationship."

"We're friendly."

Oh, for heaven's sake. Like pulling teeth. "How friendly?"

"Inspector Lewis is referring to your affair," Hathaway clarified. "The affair I overheard both of you discussing."

"You must've misunderstood."

"I did not." And there was the glaring match again.

"Ms McKenna," Lewis started, but Hathaway seemed determined to handle the woman himself this time.

"The 'armoured van' you mentioned," he told her, mockingly copying her air quotes, "if you're referring to the vehicle in the bay next to the entrance, it's not, or its weight would've shredded those flimsy tyres long since. That is no more an armoured van than that," he pointed past the glass enclosure at a large model being assembled like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, "is the Colosseum. You dressed up an old vehicle and fooled an old bishop to save money, fine, but for us, you'd best exchange fiction for fact. The truth, please."

Lewis wondered how nonplussed Innocent would be if one day he sent her flowers with a note saying: Thank you, he's priceless.

"You really are the most inconvenient man," McKenna groused at Hathaway, "and I work with Brad-the-Vlad. All right, yes," she told Lewis, "I had an affair with Richard. Had. As of four days ago, it's over. No use asking me where he is now. Ask his wife. If he doesn't show up the next time I need him as consultant, you can ask our solicitor."
"How long an affair?"

"Three years."

Not a casual one then. Had the man eventually decided to keep his marriage intact? And how angry had that made this woman who clearly wasn't the forbearing sort? "Why did it end?"

"Wednesday evening, Richard rings me to announce he's left his wife, he's checked into the Parklands, he's all mine, and I should immediately rush to him. I tell him I'm up to my eyeballs in work, I waited three years, he can wait a day or two. No, he can't, so I drag myself to the hotel after I'm finished here. Right away, he's expecting effusive gratitude in the form of -- fill in the blanks and don't stint. I was dead on my feet, saw no reason to be grateful that he finally got around to doing what he's been promising for years. He said he could've stayed home and not got any sex, it may have been a joke, but it wasn't funny to me. I told him if that was what our relationship added up to, it was over, and I left." She glowered at Hathaway. "Is that sordid enough to fulfil your requirement for truth?"

"I hadn't put any qualifiers on it. Your truth is informed by your own propensities."

Then again, Lewis could sometimes see why most people gave Hathaway a wide berth, why a good-looking bachelor in his prime attracted so little interest. He was an acquired taste and even then you had to be able to tolerate sharp flavours. "How did Richard take it?" he asked McKenna. Maybe the professor had pulled up stakes and gone away in a huff over the break-up, could be drowning his sorrows somewhere.

"I don't know. I didn't look back."

"Did you know he was on the lot Thursday night?"

McKenna shook her head. "I didn't need him on the set. If he'd come to talk me out of my decision, good thing he thought better of it." She shrugged. "He doesn't hold up well on close acquaintance."

Clearly, she wasn't at all associating him with any theoretical crime victim. "Give us a ring if you hear from him. Or of him."

A phone call to the Parklands established Llewellyn-Pierce had checked out after one night's stay. Lewis drove back to the station, told Hathaway it was time to pick up his guitar and pay attention to his audition, almost asked him to drop by afterwards, but the lad should celebrate or mourn with his mates. Who knew, maybe they'd go to a pub, someone would chat him up, turn his night interesting. He gave James a pat on the back, wished him luck, and went to the front desk to issue an APW on both the Llewellyn-Pierce cars. Without any evidence tying the couple to the incident, he couldn't track their bank cards or check their accounts. For all he knew, the husband and wife may have gone somewhere to mend their marriage. Or one may have done away with the other and was on the run. He'd have to wait for more information.

Maybe there was a late match he could watch, or he might turn in early. He picked up fish and chips on the way home. He was sure to get a particularly warm greeting from Monty once the busy little nose caught the aroma. As much 'effusive gratitude' as was likely to come his way.

*****

Hathaway woke up early, felt too good to stay in bed even if a dull headache was reminding him that he'd imbibed rather a lot the previous evening. Well, good wine, good mates, good audition,
and finally, finally, one of the coveted spots in the line-up of the Sheldonian's Christmas Programme. He hadn't felt that uncomplicatedly elated since he'd been awarded the Sporting Blue, the highlight of any Cantabrigian's varsity life. So he'd indulged a bit too much, so what?

Still in high spirits, he bounded out of the bed -- oh. Ouch. Maybe he shouldn't be moving that fast. Adjusting the showerhead to spray softly helped, as would the Paracetamol he took, soon enough. He was rarely this cheery, he wasn't going to let a sore head get in his way. Or the rain, he thought when he lifted the corner of the blind and checked the weather. He went to his wardrobe, pulled out his jeans, thinking he probably wouldn't be able to keep from blurtling out his news as soon as Lewis opened the door. Or maybe he wouldn't have to; Lewis, being Lewis, would take one look, draw the right conclusion and invite him in despite the hour -- he stopped, one leg in and one leg out of the jeans, hopping to catch his balance -- the hour.

It was Sunday, the sun was barely clearing the horizon. How presumptuous to even think of knocking on Lewis's door at such an inappropriate time just because he was eager to share his news, which wasn't even case-related news. And that was the crux, wasn't it? He hadn't been thinking any more than a moth drawn to the flame.

He let the jeans fall to the floor and stepped out of them, reached for a suit instead. Once his mind caught up and arrested his impulses, he was perfectly capable of limiting his behaviour. As to the proverbial --and for him, problematical-- serenity to accept his limits, that took work. For years now, church service only sometimes centred him, but the quiet solemnity, the sheer gravity of an empty church always did and Sunday Mass wouldn't start for a few hours yet.

When he got there, however, the nave of St Justin's wasn't as empty as he preferred or had expected. Up the middle aisle, he saw someone bowed on his knees, and almost backed away, but the person called out, "Help me."

Edmund?

Once he came around the pews, he realised Cleaves was bent over a man on the floor, tugging at him. "Get up," he was saying, "please, Mathias, get up!"

Consideration of the Bishop's age made Hathaway grab his phone to summon aid as he hurried towards them, but Edmund looked over his shoulder, recognised him, and urgently said, "No calls, just help me get him up."

Now that he was closer, Hathaway could see it wasn't a medical issue. Bishop Osborn had prostrated himself towards the altar at the cross of the transept, legs together, arms stretched out in the pose of crucifixion -- for a Roman Catholic, rather odd nowadays. He went to his knees on Osborn's other side, he and Edmund took an arm each, together pulled him up to a slant until they could get their shoulders under them. After that, it was easier to get him to rise to his knees, not that he showed the least inclination to be moved. "I'm sorry, Mathias," Edmund kept apologising, "but the altar boys will be arriving, we must get you up."

They struggled to their feet with Osborn a considerable dead weight between them, his arms still flat out like stiff boards, and sat him on the closest pew. His stubbornly stretched arms made the voluminous, pointed sleeves of the Old English surplice he had on look like the wings of a prehistoric bird. His normally ruddy, fleshy face was pale, sunken, making Hathaway wonder at the change in just a week. As drawn as he was, though, the man’s head was up, his eyes were open and lucid. He simply seemed determined not to alter his stance or speak. Hathaway wondered if he’d taken a vow, and if he had, did they have any business interfering?

Edmund didn’t seem to have any compunctions about it. “You’re so cold,” he despaired,
having tenderly cupped the haggard face between his palms. “Have you been out of bed all night? You’re going to get sick.”

It wasn’t cold in the nave, but the floors were stone, and Osborn didn’t seem to be wearing anything but the surplice. Hathaway took off his coat and draped it over the bishop like a blanket as Edmund went to his knees, sat back and took Osborn’s bare feet onto his lap, trying to rub warmth into them. Feeling like the third wheel, Hathaway distanced himself by taking a seat up the aisle, ready to come back if needed, but far enough to afford them privacy. Except he hadn’t considered the acoustics of the church, and he could hear Edmund entreat Osborn again, “You’ve turned your face from me and I can’t bear it. Please, Mathias, for the love of God, please, I’ll do anything you bid, but if you cut me off –all right, all right, I’ll bear even that if I must, I have before, but look what you’re doing to yourself. Just tell me what’s to be done and I’ll do it, when have I ever not? Mathias, please.”

Eventually, Osborn’s rigid pose slackened, his arms fell to his sides, and Edmund’s voice became a muffled murmur, sounding buried by the folds of the robe. If Osborn said anything it was too low to hear, but in the end he was persuaded to rise. Edmund rose with him, draped the coat over the man’s shoulders and led him away through the choir entrance.

Hathaway thought he should’ve gone to the river for the peace of mind he’d been after. It took mere muscles to navigate those currents. He didn’t care to speculate about the ones inside these sacred walls. Whereas speculation was a process he could cut short, recognition had registered too suddenly to avoid. How ironic that when he had been struggling with his feelings for another young man, he had never stopped to wonder why Edmund, a devoted scholar of theology, unswerving in his faith, had delayed taking his final vows for so long. He’d certainly known from the beginning that his friend revered Osborn, but he hadn’t recognised this --this depth of feeling-- back then. Now, he couldn’t miss it for trying. Still, he had to try. Edmund had come to faith-based St Bede’s at the age of eleven; his attachment to Osborn could simply be filial due to being under his tutelage from an early age.

And if Hathaway tried diligently, he could even believe it. Otherwise, there were only two possibilities, one too close to home, the other...unthinkable.

When Edmund came back, he had Hathaway's coat in one hand, a stole in the other. "Thanks," he said, folding the coat on the back of the bench and sinking heavily into the seat next to him, still distraught.

"How is he?" Hathaway asked quietly.

"I put him to bed, told the housekeeper to take him tea and toast. Whether he'll stay there or eat anything -- " he shrugged listlessly. "He still drinks, but hasn't eaten in days." He sank his face into his hands, the purple stole dangling from them. "I'm losing him, James, and I don't know what to do."

He sounded so tormented that Hathaway wanted to say something to ease him, but consulting a doctor must've certainly occurred to Cleaves and he had no idea what else to suggest or offer. Except maybe sit there quietly and let his friend unburden himself.

"He's cut me off before, soon after you'd left the seminary," Edmund continued, his voice half-smothered by his hands. "He said I'd stayed a novice longer than I should've, I had to look to my own calling. He was right, I couldn't stay under his mentorship forever, but dear God, it tore my heart when he moved away and left me behind."

Christ. Too, too close to home.
Cleaves's hands fell to his lap, his fingers twisting, scrunching the stole. "We stayed in touch off and on; it was *something* at least. Now, he hasn't said a word to me since he last took my confession, didn't even give me an act of contrition. He just...closed off." He gave a start, looked up to meet Hathaway's eyes as if he'd been suddenly alerted to his presence, gave him a lenient smile. "It's all right, James, you don't have to understand."

"But I do," came out of his mouth, at the same time he realised he'd recalled Edmund's attention by laying his palm on the restless hands to still them. Flustered, he seized on the mangled stole as an excuse, rescued it, put it on his own lap to smooth it out.

Cleaves rose, took back the stole, draped it around his neck, and only then broke the awkward silence, "I shouldn't have said that. I *know* you do."

Hathaway tried not to gape at him. How could he possibly -- ?

Edmund scattered his thoughts further by leaning in and kissing him on the temple. "We won't speak of it again, be at peace," he intoned like an absolution as he straightened. "I must go into the confessional, people must be lining up. Thanks for listening, James. It helped." He took a few steps, turned to say, "Stay for the choir practice after the service, please?"

"Erm, sure, yeah, fine," Hathaway said, just mouthing the easiest response.

He sat dumbfounded for a time, before he collected his wits and realised that Edmund couldn't have the first notion of Lewis. He'd been referring to himself. Relieved, he slid lower in the seat, laid his head back. So Edmund had been aware of his feelings back at the seminary without ever letting on, so what? As long as his knowledge steered clear of Hathaway, it no longer mattered to Hathaway. After a few steadying breaths, he got up. He had just enough time to go back home and pick up his guitar. Two of his guitars, he decided. Kids, being kids, wanted to have a go, and since he'd had it stolen and Lewis had managed to get it back for him, he couldn't help being overly protective of his best guitar. Especially now that he'd be using it for the Christmas concert.

Thinking of that reminded him he had reason to be glad today, despite its unsettling start. On the way to his car, he texted Lewis to convey his news without intruding on his day of rest.

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Lewis's phone on the bedside table gave a *ping*. "Someone remembers us," he told Monty stretched out on his chest, using the hand that had been absentely scratching the cat to reach to pick it up. Monty took exception to the change, went up on all fours and arched his back. "Settle down, puss, it's only James -- what the...?" He frowned at the screen. Hathaway avoided text-speak in his messages to Lewis, but this was too formal, surely. It seemed to be cordially inviting him to the University of Oxford, Sheldonian Theatre, on the 22nd of December at 8:00 PM, cocktails in the lobby, for an Evening of Christmas -- *oh.*

He slid Monty down to his lap and sat up, grinning. The lad must be thrilled. He started to text back, but Monty kept butting at the phone with his head. Now that he was partially upright, the little tyrant was determined to have first priority. He managed to punch in I'LL CONSULT MY SCHEDULE in keeping with the spirit of Hathaway's message. "Oh, all right," he told the cat, and swung his legs around. Monty immediately jumped down, prancing in place in his impatience to lead him into the kitchen. "If he can't bother to bring his news, he can wait for his congratulations." It did dawn on him that Hathaway might have considered it too early to barge in, and truth be told, he'd have grumbled at the hour, but just a bit, and only until he'd heard the news. Then he'd have been delighted for the lad and his mates.
He padded after the cat into the kitchen, put food in one bowl, fresh water in the other, plugged in the kettle, opened the fridge. After working through Saturday instead of running his errands, the fridge was still mostly bare. No one's fault but his own. "He could've dropped in and brought breakfast," he groused, "now that would've been a treat, but no -- the silly sod."

Unfair of him to blame his lack of decent food and decent company on the lad. Hathaway had worked through his Saturday, too, and had an audition later; he was probably in church this morning. Lewis settled for a cup of tea and a few digestives, had a lie-in with the newspaper until the pubs opened for lunch.

He chose The Abbot. Practically next door to the station and unable to compete with the prices of the canteen, the pub made up for it by surpassing it in the quality of its basic, unfussy menu. The place was more crowded than Lewis had expected of a Sunday, a large group of officers interrupted their boisterous chatter to acknowledge him. Lewis returned the greetings happily enough but shook his head at the offer of a seat, took himself to a corner table, ordered cottage pie and orange juice.

Halfway through his meal, he started thinking church services would've concluded, he should send a text to congratulate Hathaway properly and see if he'd care to share a couple of pints later to celebrate. He was sliding his phone out when he saw Knox separate from the group of officers leaving the pub, and head towards him. He let the phone drop back into his pocket.

Knox motioned at the seat across from him, a mostly-full glass still in his hand. "Got a moment, guv?"

"Sure," Lewis waved at him to sit down, "and Charles, out here, it's still Robbie."

"Cheers." Knox sat down, put his drink on the table, shoved it to one side with a scowl. "Non-alcoholic," he explained, although Lewis hadn't questioned even by a look, "Cat piss, more like."

If he was looking to be offered anything stronger, he was at the wrong table. "Busy weekend?" Lewis asked instead.

"Laxton's case wrapped up with arrests all over the place. News hounds must be baying at the nick by now -- Shirebrook was so much more peaceful. Hated to leave it."

Lewis had known Knox had transferred to East Anglia, hadn't realised how small a corner he'd been in. But he seemed to have liked it.

"As it turned out, peaceful to me, dull-as-dishwater to Pru," Knox answered another question Lewis hadn't intended to ask. "She couldn't stand it. Tried, though, I'll give her that. On the condition I settle for cat piss, mind. She stuck with it for five years, but once our youngest left home, she up and decided she was moving back. With or without me, her final word on it. Not that ours is much of a match any more, but what's the alternative? Pathetic, that's what. Being alone at our age, or out on the pull, it's too hard, Robbie -- well, you know that only too well. I couldn't face it."

I wasn't given a choice. Maybe a dry Knox was even less tactful than the sodden one, and they'd never been that friendly in the first place. Grousing over a couple of pints about something work-related, aye, anything more personal, hardly ever. The man was now carrying on about how long he might have to put up with his current situation until he got a decent pension out of it, but Lewis couldn't manage to care greatly. He pushed away the remains of his food and interrupted, "Did you have something to ask me? Or tell me?" Judging by the look thrown at him, he may have been more brusque than he'd intended.
"That sergeant of yours -- I'd heard you inherited him. How you've put up with him for so long -- " his hands moved in a baffled spread. "Hard worker, have to give him that, but God Almighty, so bloody-minded, too clever by half, and that sharp tongue of his."

"Haven't noticed," Lewis lied with a straight face.

"No end of theories he's pulled out of his arse and has to waste your time on -- "

"Haven't noticed," Lewis repeated, now in honesty, but more as a warning to Knox that he wasn't talking into a sympathetic ear. At times Hathaway may be all kinds of difficult, but he was his difficult now.

"You haven't changed, Robbie, that's you all over. If you could put up with Morse all those years, what can't you put up with?"

*Right about now, you.*

"Truth be told, I'm more surprised he stuck with you," Knox continued, then seemed to realise how he'd sounded, rushed to add, "No reflection on you, that's not what I meant at all. It was always clear to me, though -- on the fast track, so cocksure and stiff-necked with it, keen to get to places. I was just a wayside station he was chafing to leave behind."

In all fairness, Lewis had noted some of that early on. But a bit of leeway, and as much give as take, seemed to have worked for him. "He was, what, twenty-five when you got him? They grow up, Charles."

"They don't get any less snooty, do they? Look, I don't know what he told you about working with me -- "

"Not a thing." Lewis hadn't asked, either, knowing better after having had Morse ask him. What could any poor sergeant say, except something complimentary, without making his new boss wonder what would be said about him one day? "Backroom tattle isn't his form." *If you'd paid some attention, you might've noticed that.*

"But here's the thing, see? Ever since I've been back he won't stop calling me 'sir.' Tell him to stop it with the sly innuendo, all right? Yes, I know, I was demoted, I'm the one who has to live with it. I don't need the haughty git poking it in my eye."

How could the man have worked with Hathaway for two years and remained so clueless? Lewis had no doubt that if he turned into a dotty old coot drooling into his gruel in the pensioners' home and Hathaway became the High Commissioner of Law Enforcement, James would still call him 'sir' and mean nothing by it but respect. "You're much older, you were his guv, you still have seniority over him," *if not the rank any more, "what'd you expect him to call you? But OK, if it bothers you, I'll ask him to stop." Those who couldn't recognise courtesy when they heard it didn't deserve it.

Knox seemed to be reconsidering. "You don't think he means anything by it? You sure?"

"My word on it. Hathaway wouldn't do that. He was raised polite, that's all."

"Hmm." Knox took an absent-minded sip from his glass and, reminded of its taste, made a face at it, then spared a smile for Lewis. "You're really fond of the smug tosser, aren't you?"

*Oh, for heaven's sake. "We rub along."*
"All right then, you may have the right of it. Forget I said anything, eh?"

Gladly. "Done, and now I should..." Lewis started, intending to leave.

"I was looking over the recent cases, saw Murdoch Cullen mentioned," Knox said. "Your case, right?"

"Couple of weeks back, aye. Did you know him? I'd like to find a next of kin if I can."

"Far as I know, there's none. When I was first in uniform, me and the mates, we used to frequent a pub on the wharf by Tooley's Boatyard. Cheap dive, long closed. He was a fixture there. Put it away by the bucket, but he was an interesting bloke. Did odd jobs, been a sailor previously, had all kinds of stories. Nothing you'd expect from an old salt, though. Devout Catholic, you see. Had a wife, a daughter and a grandbaby. He loved that babe to pieces; his surprise present from the Guy, he used to say. Apparently, his girl went out one Bonfire Night and came back carrying. Devout as he was, he clearly loved his daughter more than doctrine. Anyway, they were all lost in a house fire, oh, near thirty years gone now. Word was, he hadn't paid the gas bill, they were using paraffin lamps -- no wonder it broke him. I ran into him for years, a shambling ghost on the streets."

Well, that more than explained self-immolation. Lewis hoped that the unbearable agony had at least balanced the accounts for the tortured soul.

"You must've seen him, too," Knox continued. "Couldn't miss him, used to walk backwards."

"What?" he asked with a sinking feeling, suddenly realising he'd seen the old man more recently that he should've, had told James about him as they were coming out of...which church?

Knox had no idea he'd just knocked over an ant hill the size of the Cotswolds. "He explained it to me once, while he still made some sense. They'd kept pulling him back to keep him from running into the burning house. He said he was still backing away but couldn't get far enough to stop seeing it."

Lewis's heart and brain flew off in different directions, one twisted with pity while the other clamoured: No, damn it. He couldn't have misidentified a body, not again. "Was he called 'Mariner,' by any chance?" he had to ask.

"From his sailing days, I figure. I first learned his name from the reports of the fire."

Christ! He had. Again. He wouldn't blame Innocent if she wanted his brain in a pickle jar. He rose, barely noticing the chair he almost upset and Knox lunged to catch, dug out his wallet. "I'm sorry, Charles, but I've bollixed a case, must go and sort it out." He threw more than enough to cover his bill onto the table, left Knox looking after him slack-jawed and hurried out.

Which church? They'd been in so many that day. Damn it, which church? He stopped short of his car, unmindful of the rain and the sideways looks from the pedestrians forced to go around him, tried to picture the scene: a group of indigents coming into a vestibule. Right before then, Hathaway, looking up with a smile, entranced by -- yes, the choir rehearsal, the last place they'd checked. The Cathedral Church of St Justin. Where a sister had called Cullen "Mariner," not knowing any better. Neither had he, as the man he'd been looking for had shuffled right past him at arm's length. What a cock up.

On the drive over, he tried to organise the possibilities in his head. Given: a body, burnt, unidentifiable. Except through dentures. Or so they'd thought. If only Innocent had loosened the purse strings for a bone specialist they might have found the discrepancy earlier, but water under, no
sense wasting time on it now. Could Laura have made a mistake? No, the dental ID, by way of NHS records, was solid. As Cullen had been seen alive after the body presumed to be his was already in the morgue, the remains and the dentures belonged to different people. How had that come about?

The type of dental marking recovered from the remains predated ID chips by a large margin; the dentures must've been made at least twenty, more like thirty, years ago. They could've been misplaced, discarded, replaced. Given the living and mental conditions of the homeless, exchanged, sold, taken, or just plain substituted by mistake.

And of course, planted. Which would turn his suicide into homicide. He should've looked closer at the lead Hathaway had developed. He would now, as soon as he located Murdoch Cullen and found out if he was capable of answering a few questions.

At St Justin's, once he described the sister he'd talked to earlier as best he could, a young nun led him through an arched walkway, past a courtyard misty with rain, into a small chapel. "Sister Agatha," she said, indicating a woman doubled over, inspecting the undersides of the benches.

"Chewing gum," Sister Agatha explained when he approached her. "Where there's been bairns, there'll be chewing gum." She squinted up at him. "I know you, don't I?"

He reintroduced himself and asked to see Murdoch Cullen, known to her as Mariner.

"You don't say, one and the same, eh? Live and learn, but I fear he's since left us, Inspector."

Sod it. All that searching for the man, all to do again. "Do you have any idea where I might find him?"

"I do, yes," she gave him a lenient smile, "but I doubt you'd be in any hurry to follow him. He's been called, you see, a week gone now, God rest his weary soul."

"You mean he died?" She nodded solemnly at him. "How? Where?"

"In his bed in our infirmary, and may the Good Lord forgive me for saying it, but not before time. He was just a shade."

"He was sick?"

"Sick, heart-sick, old, frail. He was long done with this world."

That might well be, but right then Lewis was taking no chances. Paupers' funerals were usually a cremation unless the local council believed that cremation would be contrary to the wishes or religion of the deceased, which must apply to a devout Catholic. Knowing from his last visit that they kept records of their charitable works, he asked for the death certificate if they had a copy, the address of the doctor who'd issued it, and the funeral director involved. He hoped it didn't have to go as far as exhumation, but the same person presumed dead a week earlier than he'd actually turned up dead and buried? Conveniently? He was going to peer under every stone even if it meant turning over a communal grave.

"Our Lord Bishop was with him at the end, gave him his last rites," Sister Agatha said reproachfully, as if that should've put all questions to rest, but led him out of the chapel, back past the courtyard and into the vestibule of the church. "Ah, there's Father Cleaves, he'd made the arrangements, he'll know." She motioned at Lewis to wait, hurried after a priest and stopped him at the foot of the steps he'd been about to mount. The man, very tall, leaned towards her as she quietly explained the situation to him.
Another choir rehearsal seemed to be going on, nothing angelic about this one, sounded like pure fun, young voices falling in and out of a song they clearly didn't know well, belting it out enthusiastically nevertheless -- *green bells of Cardiff, silver bells of Wye*-- to the accompaniment of a guitar. When the kids lost their place and trailed off, Lewis could hear the underlying voice keeping the song going for them. Not a strong voice, but light and pleasant, and the precise pronunciation of the lyrics --*oh, what can you give me, say the sad bells of Rhymney*-- tugged at his ear familiarly.

"Yes, of course," the priest answered Sister Agatha in a tone Lewis could hear, focusing his attention on them. "The papers are still on the desk in the Charter House," he turned around and smiled amiably at Lewis, "but we can do better than that for the inspector."

Lewis's first thought was that he must tell his sergeant this priest was a *real* priest, his second was to despair of his wits. Hathaway hadn't only glimpsed the man on the film lot to assume he was an actor purely on his looks, the way Lewis had. He had interviewed the priest, searched his car, would've entered every relevant fact about him into his BlackBerry. Being Hathaway, he probably hadn't even noticed how disturbingly good looking the bloke was.

But that had happened on the scene of a whole different case, hadn't it? Sometimes a *coincidence is just a coincidence*, he told himself, didn't quite believe it.

By then, Sister Agatha had introduced them, said, "I'll get those forms for you," and bustled off.

"You were on the Powell lot," Lewis said to Father Cleaves.

"I thought I'd seen you before. Yes, Friday morning. The company is filming a documentary about Biblical antiquities, partially sponsored by the Catholic Church. I'm the uneasy go-between. Or was. The fate of the venture hangs in the balance at the moment."

"Uneasy?" Lewis chose that word to question, while his mind had snagged on another: antiquities. As in: dealer-of. As in Hathaway's discarded lead. One more hook from one case into the other?

"Between the transcendental and the material, shuttling from the divine to the profane -- yes, Inspector, exceedingly uneasy," Cleaves said with a humble inclination of his head, clasping his hands in front of him. "But that's of no account, let us put *your* mind at ease. First, though, thank you for bringing us the name of one of our flock, may God's mercy rest his soul. Now we can include him properly in our prayers -- not that it matters to Our Father; he knows each and every one of his children."

Uh-huh. One of those, too pious by half. "How astute of him," he said, causing the pillock's handsome head to snap upright. "I doubt the NHS is all-knowing, though. How do you get medical care for the nameless in this flock of yours?"

"Praise be that the more fortunate of our congregation prefer spiritual compensation over government cheques. Some are doctors. *They* oblige us."

Clearly, the battle was joined. "There's the death certificate. Does the County Registrar also oblige you?"

"We submit all the information we possess. How bureaucracies deal with them past that, I have no way of knowing -- ah, there, Sister Agatha has the forms for you."

Lewis took the papers from the nun. On top was a copy of the death certificate issued by the
Registrar, under it, a handbill from Hancock and Son Funeral Service, and under that -- yes, indeed, the copy of the green form required for an internment.

"But as I said, we can do even better," Cleaves was continuing. "One of your colleagues was present on the sad occasion, you can talk to him." He went to the foot of the staircase, raised his head and called out, "James, could you come down for a minute?"

One of the most common names, yet Lewis knew who'd be coming down those stairs before the next second he flipped to the copy of the cause of death form and the signature at the bottom of the page jumped out at him.

Once again, the secretive sod had kept something he shouldn't have from Lewis.

The music hadn't stopped. Father Cleaves took the steps two at a time to the mid-landing and called out louder, "James. I need you down here." The sounds cut off, except for some whinging from the kids, and the priest headed back down -- rather swaggeringly, Lewis thought.

He looked back at the form, inoffensive on its own, properly signed by an officer as on-site witness. Common procedure when a law officer was present at a death and circumstances were clear, except this was his officer and he didn't have complete confidence in the clarity of the circumstances.

The two cases were showing signs of turning into one tangled mess, and now his sergeant was in the middle of it. Worse than that -- he glared at the signature-- his sergeant was evidently in the middle of it. If there was anything untoward going on, and all his instincts were screaming there was, this one piece of paper could land Hathaway in real trouble. Let's not be hasty, he counselled himself. Wouldn't be the first time his instincts were wrong. That was easier to believe than that James, James, would knowingly or foolishly overlook something shady.

If he could just get past: he lied to me. To me. Again.

He could hear Hathaway's voice in the well of the staircase, getting closer while issuing mock-threats against the folly of any boy putting grubby hands on his guitar. He sounded so cheerful, so carefree. Such a rare thing.

Not exactly lies, just his usual bent for avoidance, Lewis tried to make himself accept, couldn't. Not on the job, damn it.

He heard Hathaway say, "If you don't like my music selection, Edmund, you should've -- oh. Sir?"

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As Hathaway hurried to Lewis, who seemed intent on some papers in his hand, his first assumption was that his mobile had malfunctioned and forced his boss to come to fetch him for work. Before he could pull it out and check it, though, he realised that Lewis shouldn't have known where to find him. "Sir?" he repeated, uncomfortably aware that he was standing between two men he'd hoped would never meet, and that Lewis was yet to look at him. "Something wrong?"

Lewis turned a sheet of paper around for him to see. "Care to tell me about this?" He sounded matter-of-fact, but the phrasing, the clamped-down delivery, and the fact he avoided looking at Hathaway blared that he was furious.

He looked down at the paper, wondered why and how Lewis had ended up here with it in his hand, blurted, "It's a cause of death cert --" before he collected his wits. Idiocy wouldn't be tolerated right then. "Last week when I was here for Vigil Mass, which I told you about, I, erm, had occasion
to visit the Infirmary -- " why did that sound so dodgy now when it had been so straightforward then? " -- and I witnessed...exactly what this says I witnessed."

"So you signed it."

"I...shouldn't have?"

"No, fine. Perfectly in order."

Why won't you look at me? "Sir, what's wrong?"

"With the form -- " he lined it up with the other papers, folded them "--probably nothing." He finally looked up as he tucked them into the pocket of his anorak.

Hathaway's heart sank. This wasn't simply anger. "What did I do?" he asked with little breath.

Lewis glanced past him pointedly, making him look around. Young, curious faces were lined up and down the staircase, peering at them from in between the banisters and over the handrail. "Go back to what you were doing," Lewis said, not leniency, an order. "We'll discuss it tomorrow at the office." He raised his voice to say in Cleave's general direction, "I'll have copies of the forms sent for your records." He directed a gentler tone at the nun standing to one side, "Appreciate the help."

He turned and strode out briskly, but Hathaway couldn't fail to notice his shoulders had the pulled-in, rounded set that always made him look guarded, isolated.

"James? What is it?" Cleave touched his arm, making him realise he was still in place, now staring at nothing but the sheeting rain through the front entrance.

"I've disappointed him," he said, mostly to himself.

"I meant, what is it about the form?"

"You tell me," he whirled on Cleave with sudden purpose, "what is it about the form?"

With a start, Cleave backed away a step. "It's just a regular one, we fill out our share."

"Not you, a doctor or a law officer."

"You are one." He turned his head to call out to the boys, "Upstairs, all of you."

"Where we'll be closing the doors and minding our own business," the nun added, following the scarpering boys, clapping her hands as if at a gaggle of geese.

Cleave turned back to Hathaway, "You were there, James. You saw and heard what I saw and heard. What can be wrong with the form?"

"How would it come to my inspector's attention otherwise? There has to be something."

"As in what, carelessness, neglect, wrongdoing? Who are you accusing, the charity of the Church, me, my Lord Bishop, our good Sister Agatha?"

"No," he had to say. "No, of course not."

"Thank you," Cleave intoned huffily, then softened. "I'm sure it was just a routine check."

What did he think Lewis was, a paper-pusher? "He doesn't do routine checks."
"I'm sure he'll tell you at the office. Must say, though, quite contentious, isn't he? Not at all what I thought when I saw him the other day. He looks so mild and...well, bland."

Bland? Lewis? But Edmund had said something more important. "The other day? When?"

"When you had the temerity to search my car so officiously. He was watching us from a few cars away."

How anything that had happened in the last minutes connected to anything else and why, Hathaway still had no idea, but he had a pretty good idea, now, what had set Lewis off. "I have to go," he said, already halfway to the door, patting his pockets for his keys.

"Why? Sounded like you were having fun with -- "

"I have to go."

Cleaves caught him up at the door and grabbed his arm. "James, look at yourself."

His tie and jacket off, collar loose, sleeves rolled up. So? Who cared? "It's fine."

"No, it's not. It's raining out there, it's chilly. Half your clothes are upstairs with your guitars. Come on, James, you're upset, you're not thinking, this isn't like you." He leaned to look at Hathaway's face closely. "You're more than upset, you're practically scared. Just because your boss has a bee in his bonnet? Are you afraid of losing your job?"

He yanked his arm away. "Bugger the job, I'm afraid of losing --"

Providentially, Cleaves snapped, "James! Remember where you are," and prevented him from finishing the reckless sentence.

He clenched his mouth shut. Obviously, the best state for it. He ran upstairs and gathered his things. Under Sister Agatha's strict eye, the boys cast him inquisitive looks but kept their curiosity to themselves. With time to think, it dawned on him that he was going to have to tell Lewis more about Edmund than he'd ever wanted, but there was no wriggle room left. So be it. If he was going to lose Lewis's regard, at least it wouldn't be over a deception. He pulled on his coat, put his guitars in their cases, picked one up by the handle, stuck the other one under the same arm to leave a hand free for his keys.

Cleaves was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs. "James --"

"I can't stay, Edmund." An even bet if he'd be coming back. He only hoped he didn't have come back in an official capacity.

"He's the one, then, is he?"

"One what?" An instant too late, he knew he really, really shouldn't have asked.

"The one who makes it all worthwhile. That was how you put it, wasn't it?"

He'd been right in the first place. His mouth was best kept firmly shut. He hurried out to his car, put the guitars in the boot, got in and drove off.

He didn't have the patience to wait until tomorrow. Anger was one thing. At worst, Lewis would give him a bollocking and let it blow over; he wasn't nearly as clement over disappointments. He'd already forgiven Hathaway for the same offence twice. Twice more than he'd forgiven God.
Hathaway grimly drove and tried not to think of what three strikes might mean.

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The doctor who'd scribbled Cullen's last-known medical condition on the form might prefer spiritual rewards to money, but he wasn't as generous with his time on the Lord's Day. Murdoch Cullen had been death-too-long-delayed in his opinion, no doubt in his mind, what could possibly be questionable about it?

Maybe the man was right. If for nothing but Hathaway's sake, Lewis hoped so, having calmed down a bit. At the time James had signed the form, he hadn't known it might become evidence later --if it did. No reason he should've mentioned it to Lewis. Not informing his boss about his association --close association, obviously-- with a person on a crime scene was, yes, very serious. Especially after experiencing the consequences of lying about personal involvements previously. Twice. But OK, done was done. And in this one case, Lewis's attitude towards religion and the religious may have made him reluctant. It wasn't an excuse, but something to hang at least a small hat on.

Lewis's attempt at good will lasted until he got to Hancock and Son to find out the internment had been nothing of the sort. Cullen's body had been cremated. He stewed over it until he drove home, turned the motor off, finally relieved of the swishing wipers that had been aggravating the headache lodged behind his eyes. He rubbed them for a moment, then pulled out his mobile and rang St Justin's. "I don't mean to offend in any way, but I need some information," he told Sister Agatha when at length she was called to the phone. "I thought the Catholic church prohibits cremation. Am I wrong?"

"Not so much wrong as behind the times," she said. "There are still some stipulations about it, but it's been allowed by the Holy See for a while."

"No longer so strict with the whole sacred-temple thing, then?"

"What modern times we live in, Inspector," Sister Agatha said, a wry smile coming through in her voice.

He asked the important question. "Do you know if Mariner chose to be cremated?"

"He never."

"I understand he lost his family in a fire. Maybe he thought it fitting?"

"Any burning, he'd have left to the next world. He was a true believer."

He thanked her and got off the phone, angry all over again. He had two cases to untangle, maybe three, possibly connected, with little or no evidence, on shaky conjecture, and he had no sounding board. Hathaway had disqualified himself. 'You were wrong and it looks like Hathaway was right' was hardly the way to approach Laura at this juncture. Innocent would raise questions about Hathaway Lewis didn't want raised before he'd had time to decide what to do with Hathaway, what could be done with, for, despite Hathaway.

Bloody hell. Too damned much Hathaway.

He left the car, jogged up the street, rounded the dripping hedges to the walkway to his building, and there, standing at the top of the front steps, half-in and half-out of the overhang in the pouring rain: Hathaway. Hands in coat pockets, shoulders hunched, collar up, chin tucked in, obviously waiting for him. 'Tomorrow at the office' had been unclear how?
"Unless it's a call-out, go away." Lewis realised how sharply he'd spoken when Hathaway flinched. His feet stayed planted, though. "Go home," he softened it a little, leaving the garden gate open behind him as a hint.

Hathaway straightened his shoulders, swept the waterlogged mop of his hair back from his forehead. "I need to talk to you, sir."

"About a case?"

"Not exactly."

"Not now then." He went up the steps straight to the door, riveting his eyes to the keys in his hand. Somewhere, somehow, Hathaway had become someone who could bypass his ire just by looking miserable and his ire didn't care to be bypassed.

"I won't take long."

"You can wait until tomorrow." He put his key in, turned it.

"I can't -- I mean, I don't -- "

"I said tomorrow, Sergeant." He pushed the door open.

"Sir, if you'd just let me have a --"

"No." He needed a drink and a long, quiet time to think, not this...this...this too tall, too long-faced, too secretive, too aggravating --

"Robbie, please?"

About to close the door after himself, Lewis's eyes snapped up to Hathaway.

"I meant sir. I'm sorry, sorry."

-- too wet, too wretched, the sodden strands of the hunk of longer hair sliding down his forehead again. "Oh, for the love of -- get inside."

Hathaway scrambled after him to his door and into his flat. Two steps in, and he seemed to run out of steam, stood there looking wary.

Lewis threw his keys onto their tray. "I'm not bleeding royalty, you can say my name. Caught me by surprise, is all." He waved impatiently at Hathaway to go past him. "Get in."

"I'm all -- " With a look down at himself, Hathaway hurried by and chose the kitchen. As the safest surface to drip on, apparently.

The presence of someone in the kitchen brought Monty running; water drops from the hem of the sodden coat on his upturned face sent him running out again. No welcome for James Hathaway, even from the cat. Lewis sighed, pointed at the tumble dryer. "Put it on air-dry and throw your coat in there for a bit." He took off his anorak before going to the bathroom to get him a towel. And he'd thought Morse had been as high maintenance as they came.

He went back, tossed the towel to Hathaway with a short, "Dry off," plugged in the kettle.

"Sir, if I may --"
"Belt up. I'll be talking first." He pulled down two mugs. "When I'm ready." The tea was steeping in the mugs when next he looked at Hathaway. The daft sod had done no more than wipe his face and, at most, passed the towel over his head, was holding it uselessly in one hand. "Give me that," Lewis said, yanking it away and pulling out one of the stools. "Sit."

A few minutes of brisk—and admittedly, rough—application of the towel got the blond hair, if not dry, no more than damp, and rid Lewis of some aggravation. Hathaway stayed stock-still for it and, when Lewis had finished, his face emerged flushed from under the towel.

Lewis pulled out a bottle of whisky as he tossed the towel onto the worktop, added a splash of liquor to each mug, brought them over along with the milk and sugar, placed the other stool across from Hathaway, sat down. "Drink."

One highlight of having Hathaway at a disadvantage, strict obedience. When the meekness started bothering him and enjoying it felt petty, he knew he'd calmed down enough. He looked up at Hathaway, who seemed to realise time to talk had arrived, pushed away his mug, braided his fingers in front of him and visibly braced himself.

"After all this time, it's ridiculous how little I know about you," Lewis said mildly, raising a hand when Hathaway attempted to open his mouth. "No, fine, there's a lot you'd rather keep to yourself, that's your right. But there are things I must know. When I don't -- " he noted how white Hathaway's knuckles were turning "-- damn it, James, haven't you realised yet that's when we get in trouble, not when you're frank with me. I'm used to having more questions than answers -- on the job, from you. But I won't have it from you on the job. Once and for all, is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"However bad anything is, we'll sort it, I promise. So," he pushed away his mug, too, "I'm not ordering you, but if you're ever going to come clean with me, this is the time. There's no later."

"Right. I...erm..." He hesitated, started again, " Been so long, I --" He cut off again to clear his throat.

"At your own pace," Lewis allowed.

"I've known Edmund --Father Cleaves-- since I was eighteen. We'd lost touch after the seminary. I ran into him again recently."

"Aye, you told me you'd met up with an old friend. We're not finished with that subject, I want to know why you kept it a secret when he turned up on a crime scene. But first, answer me this. The form I showed you earlier. What do you know about the man whose death you signed away?"

"I was only there at the end of the last rites. I attested to what I witnessed. A sister took the form to fill in the information they had about him. She referred to him as Mariner, and I thought he might be the old man we'd seen earlier, quoting from the Ancient Mariner. That's all I know."

"They called him Mariner. Care to know his real name?" Watching Hathaway's expression as he cast about for the possibilities, Lewis saw it hit him.

"Please tell me it's not Murdoch Cullen."

Lewis said nothing, let the implications sink in.

Unlacing his fingers, Hathaway dropped his head into his hands. "Oh, God."
"One more thing. Friday morning, did you search Father Cleaves's bag?"

Hathaway looked up at him, distressed and a little dazed. "Bag?"

"You were checking his car when I saw you two. He had a gym bag in his hand. Did you see what he was carrying out of our crime scene?"

"Edmund said -- " he seemed to realise the absurdity of his answer, amended it to " -- no, I didn't. I'm sorry. I should have."

"You would have. If he weren't your friend and a priest to boot. Conflict of interest rule is there for a good reason. If you had alerted me, you wouldn't have been the one interviewing him. Why does this keep happening, James?"

"Would you have pulled me off the case if I'd said we were in the same residence at the seminary? You didn't take me out of Crevecoeur after you knew I was raised there, did you? Not until Scarlett became the issue."

_That, and your tongue that can flay the skin off a bloke_, Lewis thought.

"You'd have asked what the conflict was," Hathaway continued miserably. "If you hadn't, Innocent would have."

Lewis felt they had at long last arrived at the crux. "What's the conflict you couldn't tell us about?"

"Once...back then...long time ago...I, erm," he looked everywhere but at Lewis, "I loved him."

"Fine. And?"

Hathaway's eyes snapped back to him, more than a little combative. "I was in love with him."

An answer three years in arriving, not that Hathaway's smokescreens around the issue at the time had been all that effective. Lewis hoped the lad had been, at least for a while, happily in love, done everything young people in love do, before he'd seen fit to scour his soul. A dim hope, of course. Hathaway was no hypocrite, he couldn't have ruthlessly thrown strictures at McEwan if he'd given in to the same temptation himself. "All right, maybe you couldn't tell Innocent." Past pulling him off the case, Lewis would bet Innocent's only other reaction would've been to placidly tick one more box in her minority-hire list, but this _was_ Hathaway, reclusive by nature. "You could've told me."

"Telling her would've been easier."

Really? After all the years? And hadn't he expressed --not gently, either-- what he thought of McEwan going to Hathaway with his confused feelings? That big a jump to conclude telling _him_ would be safe? His temper hadn't calmed down after all. "It's the same thing all over again, isn't it? What's your problem, James? How many times -- what's left to -- what more can I --" he suddenly felt bone-weary " -- oh, forget it." He rose and swept the mugs up.

"No," Hathaway scrambled to his feet. "No."

Lewis went to the sink, dropped the mugs into it clattering and splashing.

"No," Hathaway repeated from right behind him. "You can't make me come clean and clam
up yourself. Even a criminal gets to know the judgment against him."

"What're you talking about?" Lewis whirled on him. "What crime, what judgment? How many ways can I prove it to you? I. Don't.Care. If you're gay, that's fine; bi, straight, fine. If you're any or none of those, just don't want to be labelled, that's fine, too. Why should it make any odds to me? You're you, I value you, what're you so bloody scared of?"

"That it will make a difference."

"It won't, it doesn't. What am I doing wrong that you don't know that?"

"It's not what I don't know. It's what you don't know."

"So tell me, what don't I know?" Incapable of not searching when aware of something to find, his mind took off ahead of the answer, prospecting.

No answer was forthcoming anyway. Hathaway bit his lip, shook his head, wouldn't meet his eyes.

"You still don't trust me -- look at me." Exasperated, he bracketed the stubborn head with spread fingers and turned it firmly to face him despite resistance and kept it there.

Hathaway gasped. "Don't."

Christ. He looks so brittle. Lewis had to tell him, just so there'd be no doubt, "Here's my word, James: I won't break you, and if it's at all down to me, I won't let you get broken, I swear." Having established that beyond question --he hoped-- he let go.

James kept looking at him unblinkingly, as though his eyes were trapped open. "You might," he said with hitched breath, "but I don't know how else to get out of this corner. I'll have to take her word."

Lewis saw his hands come up towards his face, suddenly knew it'd take one touch for the tumblers he was just realising were there to start falling. As the hands cupped his face: that touch. When James leaned in and kissed him --no more than a bit too emphatic press of lips against his-- the instant of foresight kept it from being a complete surprise and he carefully didn't react. So this is the wanting you couldn't let make a difference? OK, all right, we'll sort it. That the wanting was aimed at him was staggering, though. How starved are you that the Ploughman's at hand looked like a feast to you? He opened his mouth to say something distracting, something un-hurtful, to ease the awkwardness bound to follow.

Clearly, the wrong time to part his lips. Hathaway made a ragged, needy sound, sealed Lewis's mouth with his and avidly took what he must've thought was on offer. Lewis's stomach flipped. It felt too earnest to be offensive, but it was overwhelming. And when James pushed as if he craved more, binding him back against the worktop, overbearing. Too tall, too strong, too voracious. And weirdly, too scrupulous. He wasn't pressing against Lewis anywhere except his face, which left Lewis arched backwards, sliding on the tiles, grasping the edge of the worktop to stay on his feet, with no hands to push Hathaway off or pull him closer -- wait, what?

"Oh, God," James said half inside and half outside his mouth as he wrenched away abruptly, his hands dropping to Lewis's upper arms to pull him squarely onto his feet. He let go immediately and stepped back, a stricken expression on his face. Only then Lewis realised a forbidding sound had risen up his chest, its vibrations still in his throat. Aimed at James or himself or both, he had no idea. He tried desperately to think of something to say, to make it right. Or at least to keep it from going
horribly wrong.

Hathaway spoke up urgently, "Don't. For God's sake, don't say anything."

No longer off-balance, able to think once more, Lewis found himself marvelling at what a leap of faith a kiss had to be under the circumstances. If it was beyond him to catch and hold up the lad, he could try to let him down gently. Don't allow this, too, to become a failure of faith to him. "James," he started, stopped to clear his throat when he heard how husky he sounded.

"No, please," Hathaway said, "not now, I can't --" his shoulders sagged, and when he continued his voice was strangled. "I won't exacerbate it by apologising. There's no excuse for it, I knew it was wrong, I -- " he grappled briefly for more words, then spun on his heels and headed for the door, his long legs swallowing the distance.

Lewis followed him. "James, wait, we need to talk."

Hathaway stopped at the door, didn't turn around. "I've been trying so hard to behave properly around you, but right now, I can't. You saw I can't. You're the most merciful man I know, so please, let me leave. If you want me to transfer, tell me tomorrow and I will. For now, let me go." He didn't wait any longer, opened the door, stepped through and yanked it shut after him.

Lewis hurried to throw it open again, called out, "I didn't ask you to leave, remember that. I won't tomorrow, either." The outer door had been closing after Hathaway. No telling if he'd heard any of it.

Lewis saw his hand on the door knob was shaking. He didn't know what he felt, but whatever it was, good or bad, right or wrong, it was the most acute feeling he'd had in years, a surprisingly alive feeling. How blunted and blinkered had he been walking through what stood for his life lately that he hadn't noticed the person who spent most of it with him was in a bind? Over him.

He looked down at Monty who'd come to weave around his legs. Reckoning the cat was likely to have as much of an idea as he did, asked him, "What're we going to do with our James, puss?"
Chapter 2

In a fog of its own making, Hathaway's brain finally reminded him where he'd left the coat he'd been desultorily searching for throughout his flat. Once he'd closed his door after himself last night, he'd downed only two glasses of wine, loath to compound his sins with a hangover the next time he had to face Lewis. Past some eye drops so he could tolerate his contacts, there was nothing to be done about the bleary eyes blood-shot from pacing most of the night away.

He'd thought himself lucky, hadn't he, when he'd speculated on Edmund's feelings for his superior? He'd comfortably assumed that, at worst, Lewis might distance himself if he ever found out, but wouldn't revile him.

*He wouldn't have,* Hathaway knew, *if you'd just opened your mouth and told him. But you had to go put your hands on him, your -- Christ, seconds after he trustingly pledges to protect you come what may, you accost him.* He had no idea how he was going to look Lewis in the face again.

Somehow, he had to. Never mind the job, he owed it to the man. He put on his mac as he left, although it wasn't raining any more, just overcast with maybe a sprinkle or two to come.

Lewis's car was already in the car park of the station. Hathaway sat looking at it with dismay. He'd hoped to have time to get into the office and compose himself before Lewis arrived.

Someone tapped on his side window. He jerked, looked around to see Knox leaning over with an actual smile. Surprised, he put the window down.

"Skiving, Hathaway?"

Banter? After two weeks of occasional grunts? "Erm...thinking, sir."

"Blow me down," Knox said good-naturedly, walking away to his car. "Carry on then."

Hathaway craned his neck to stare after him. Baffling.

Inside, the staircase was bustling with officers on their way out, led by DI Grainger. He let them troop by and went up the stairs. Collingsworth was standing at the top, looking forlornly after the departing group.

"A crack den on Speedwell Street with I don't know how many bodies in it," he explained to Hathaway. "Grainger mobilised everyone not bolted down, and here I am, left behind again. When do I get to do something?"

Wrong morning to expect hand-holding from Hathaway. "Early days yet," he said shortly while going past.

"Innocent wants to see you first thing," Colin called out after him.

His heart dropped to his stomach. "Right. Thanks." He hadn't known how he'd face Lewis, and now it looked like he might not have to. He'd been so sure Lewis would've at least talked to him first. Maybe he had nothing to say. Or was too charitable to say the things he had to say.

Innocent's PA wasn't in yet or she was off on an errand, the door to the inner office stood ajar.
He took off his mac, folded it over his arm, knocked on the door.

"Come."

He went in, closing the door after himself. Innocent was standing behind her desk, leafing through a file. "You asked for me, Ma'am?"

She looked up at him, her expression going from neutral to disapproving. "Ah, yes. Sit down." She waved at the visitor's chair, taking her own.

"I'd rather stand."

"All right." She uncapped a pen to sign a couple of papers, closed the file, put it to one side, and looked back up at him. "For future reference, any hard partying you're inclined to do should be kept for Friday or Saturday nights, don't you think?"

_Huh?_ Why would she think he'd _ever_ be inclined to do anything of the sort? "Pardon?"

"You look like hell, Sergeant, but we'll ignore it this once. I don't care to tax you today, considering."

He was getting confused. "I don't understand."

"Don't you watch the news? Laxton's case concluded." She started fiddling with her pen as though the activity required concentration. "Turns out you were right, we should've paid more attention to the boys sooner, all of them. I know I was sharp with you for suggesting it, and I shouldn't have been. Just FYI."

More of an apology than Hathaway would've expected to come his way from Innocent. Astonished, he could only mumble, "Of course. Thank you, Ma'am."

"That's all."

"Thank you," he repeated and left as quickly as he knew Innocent would prefer right then. How could he stay braced for the worst if he kept getting blind-sided by one improbability after another? He hurried to his office, if for nothing but to avoid any more blows to his already shaky equilibrium.

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Leaning back in his chair and watching his hands bend and unbend a paperclip to avoid looking at his own reflection on the blank computer screen, Lewis's saw Hathaway arrive out of the corner of his eye. The clip broke at the same time his sergeant sputtered to a stop, neither in nor out of their office. "Door's got enough posts, get in and close it," Lewis said, chucking the metal pieces into the bin. Now that he was looking up, he could tell the lad must've spent a bad night. His own hadn't been exactly relaxing, either. He'd tossed and turned so often that, disgusted, Monty had left him for calmer climes. "Bring your chair round by me. We need to talk."

Hathaway put away his mac, right over the coat Lewis had brought back for him without seeming to notice it, then rolled his chair, placing it as far away as he could in the small space, sat down.

Lewis swung his seat sideways. "We have a problem, James."
"Let me solve it, sir," Hathaway said quietly, hunched over his elbows on his knees, eyes down, his fingers locked together. "I'll ask for a transfer or resign. Either way, I'll be gone in no time."

_Daft lad._ "I like you where you are -- except now," he indicated the distance between them when Hathaway's eyes snapped up to regard him doubtfully. "Pull up, man. You'll get tongues wagging by acting dodgy." Hathaway finally occupied the spot where he'd normally have placed himself on any other day. "Better. Now, this isn't the place to go into that problem," he used the word deliberately lest Hathaway put the wrong connotation on his next words. "Come to mine after work. All that needs saying for now, it's nothing to do with the job, doesn't change a thing. At least for me. How about you?"

Hathaway looked flustered, but said, "It hasn't for years."

_Years?_ Not now, though. "Our first problem is the Cullen case. You know I can't keep you on it. A shame, that, as I'll be following the lead you developed. So I'm turning over the Powell-lot case to you while I reopen the Cullen enquiry."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"But you think the two cases are connected. Because Edmund shows up in both of them, and you know my...you know."

"I do." Innocent didn't, though, which suited Lewis until he could work out exactly what had happened and how to keep Hathaway out of it -- _if_ there was something to keep him out of. Of course, there might come a time for papers in the back of both their trousers, but Lewis preferred that to the alternative.

"Instead of suspending me, you're going to let me lead a case?"

"Aye."

"You can't. It'll come back on you."

"How about you stop deciding what I can or can't handle -- you know, for a change?"

Hathaway got the point and blushed, but couldn't seem to let it go, "So is this a -- a what? Are you testing me?"

"Do I have to?"

"No, sir. Never again."

"There you are then." Hathaway still didn't look convinced, so Lewis continued, "Look, if I suspend you, from _two_ cases, I have to explain why to Innocent. I'm not doing that unless I have to. But I can tell her that after five years you're entitled to a bit more. We have two enquiries, we're sharing it between us, only makes sense. You haven't signed anything on the Powell lot case, so that's the one you take -- _don't_ look at me as if I were the second coming, James. I made you a promise last night. What'd you think, I forgot? Didn't mean it in the first place? You should know me better by now."

"It isn't you -- "
"Yeah, yeah, I worked that out, actually. It's that you don't really know where you stand with me -- when you bloody well should. You're frighteningly smart and dead confident usually, but once in a while you're just daft. In plain English, you're mine until the moment you want out." Judging by Hathaway's tremulous expression, a break was in order. The lad hated to lose his composure at any time, let alone at the station. "Go and get us some coffee, no rush, then we'll concentrate on the job, all right?"

Hathaway threw him a thankful look, was up and out of the office. Lewis watched him go. He doesn't even realise how unfair this is to him.

Five years ago Lewis had come back to Oxford --truth be told, once he'd put down the bottle and thrown himself into the job, his colleagues on the laid-back island had found his pace and persistence annoying-- to no more Val at home, no more Morse at work, Innocent eager to see the back of him, his son long gone to the other side of the world, and even Lyn hadn't managed to be there to greet him after the two-year absence. He'd taken on the acid-tongued God-botherer, yes, because he was so bloody smart and conscientious, but at the heart, because he'd seemed to be the only soul in sight who'd decided he wanted Robbie Lewis. He'd never expected the wanting to go this far, but now that it had, it made him sad that all he could do was make the lad merely grateful instead of happy.

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Hathaway knew Lewis had said 'no rush' to let him know he could take the time he needed to pull himself together. As he hurried through the incident room, heading outside for a much-needed cigarette and more-needed privacy, he ran into Collingsworth, loitering again. The young man looked up at him and asked promptly, "Allergies?"

Instantly angry at him for daring to notice he was blinking to clear his eyes, Hathaway pushed past, snapping pointedly, "Irritants." Two more steps and he stopped. Just because he felt shaky was no reason to snap at Colin for an innocent question. Take a lesson from Lewis, he thought, turned, pointed at his eyes to give his remark a plausible attribution, "Contacts." About to turn back around and leave, he was struck by how aimless Colin looked, left behind in the practically empty incident room. "Come with me."

He led the young man towards Innocent's office. "You said the call-out was for multiples in a crack house?"

"Right."

"It'll draw the media. Innocent will give the troops some time to secure the scene, then she'll want to be on site." He indicated a half-way spot between Innocent's office and the stairs. "If you wait here, you can offer to drive her before she grabs a uniform downstairs. It'll get you to the scene, and she'll know you're being left at a loose end without your having to complain about it." Having a trainee inspector eager to volunteer for an inferior task would prompt some sharp words into a few ears from Innocent and would get the lad out of the gate.

As he left a happier Colin behind, Hathaway was reminded of another lowly driving assignment, unappreciated at the time, and what it had got him. Deciding he didn't need a cigarette after all, he poured two cups of coffee and carried them back to their office. Their office. Still.

Lewis had put Hathaway's chair back in its place, was standing between the two desks with his jacket off, rolling up his sleeves. Daytime temperatures must've dropped to where the heat had
cycled on; their cubicle was pleasantly warm -- stifling to Lewis, apparently. Northerner at the core, he had a lower tolerance for heat than his sergeant. Still his sergeant. Remarkable.

"Ta," Lewis said, accepting the cup of coffee. "If you filed a report on that antiques dealer, I couldn't find it. What's his name?"

"Idris Abbas. I thought it wouldn't concern us and filed it with Missing Persons. I'll pull up my copy."

Instead of going to sit at his desk for Hathaway to send it to his screen, Lewis came around and leaned in to read it over his shoulder. "Jot down those names and addresses for me, would you?" He reached past Hathaway to point at some entries, nothing reserved or evasive about any of his behaviour. Doesn't change a thing, he'd said. Clearly, he'd meant it.

"I'll send the contacts page to your BlackBerry," Hathaway opted, suiting action to words.

"Or that," Lewis accepted placidly. Technical shortcut he'd overlooked, fine. Heart sick sergeant to overlook, fine. Hathaway knew he should be glad. He was glad. Hell, he was ecstatic. Wasn't he?

Lewis perched on the side of the desk, one leg crooked on it to be able to face Hathaway, folding his hands around his coffee cup, his back a barrier to anybody coming into the room. Obviously, uncomfortable questions were about to be asked. "I know you'd rather close the subject, but I need to -- "

Hathaway didn't let him finish. "It's fine." He'd pushed Lewis to interrogate Hobson about her past when she'd found herself in the middle of one of their cases; he could hardly demur when tables turned. Besides, he now had the assurance he could tell Lewis anything and it wouldn't make a difference. That was good. Wasn't it? "Go ahead."

"We can't be sure the burnt body belonged to Abbas. Safe bet by now, though. The deliberate attempt to hide his identity says murder. Cullen may have died naturally or not, no way left to tell. Your friend may have nothing to do with any of it, but he's connected to both incidents and there's his involvement with antiquities."

"Not his. Bishop Osborn's. Edmund lives with him and works for him. He has extensive knowledge of relics, but no real interest in them. He's simply Osborn's representative." That wasn't exactly true and he was done with obscuring the truth for Lewis. "Except there's no 'simply' when it comes to Edmund's attachment to him. Never has been, I think."

"Tell me."

Maybe there was an advantage to a cluttered desktop. As his computer served most needs, his pens and clips and pads, all those useful items to keep hands and eyes occupied were in a drawer, presently behind Lewis's legs. Hathaway laced his fingers in his lap and kept his eyes on them. "I was still an undergraduate when I met him. It had taken him a month of Sundays to sit in a row where he could look up and see the choir, loath to assign an earthly form to the enthralling voice. Once he had seen, he couldn't have sat anywhere else. Months had gone by before he could work up the courage to approach the young man and open his mouth. He still remembered the spark of sudden attraction as distant admiration had unexpectedly turned raw and immediate, feeling like an ambush, causing a jolt of something much like terror. "He became, erm, sort of a guide to me." He thought of how that could be interpreted and rushed to clarify, "Into the seminary, I mean."

"Aye, assumed so."
He saw Lewis twist around and back by the movement of his legs, then his coffee he'd forgotten on one end of the desk was being handed to him. His eyes snapped up to Lewis who looked his usual, reassuring self. *Nothing has changed,* he acknowledged again and wondered why the thought seemed to have such a cutting edge. "Edmund was raised by and for the Church. Bishop Osborn -- Father, at the time -- took him on as his protégé from an early age. If he had another parental influence before him, he never talked about it. Edmund has always craved his attention, his approval. I'm sure he became an historian to suit Osborn. He'd do anything for him, his attachment is very real and deep. But then, so is his faith. If his beliefs or his mentor hung in the balance, he might circumvent the law, but he'd never break a commandment, not for any reason. He's not capable of it." Would Lewis consider his assessment unbiased, though? Come to that, could he be totally sure of it himself?

"Right," Lewis said and did not belabour it further. "Now you need to locate Llewellyn-Pierce and his wife."

"I'll find out where she stables her horses."

"Good idea. If she's away by choice, she must've made arrangements for them. I'll be out checking -- " he rose and turned around at the tap-tap on their door "--yes?"

Hathaway also rose to see past him. PC Baynes, looking flustered, was leaning in and saying, "Sorry to interrupt, sir, but regarding that APW, I have here -- "

"Oh, get out of my way," a woman said, jostling Baynes to get past and walk in. "I was pulled over. At the end of a weary trip, I might add. Nothing would do but follow this person immediately," she waved vaguely at Baynes. "I'm Drusilla Llewellyn-Pierce, why exactly are you looking for me?" She stood glowering at them, very tall, very blonde and very beautiful, a far cry from what the wife of a perpetually straying husband should look like.

*So much for assumptions,* Hathaway thought as Lewis thanked her for coming in, performed the introductions, and told Baynes, "Show Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce to Interview One. Less chance of being interrupted," he explained to her, or rather, cut short her objections. "Thank you," he added pre-emptively. Emboldened by Lewis, Baynes hustled her away.

"Beginner's luck, I'd say," Lewis commented as he went to pull out his BlackBerry from the inside pocket of his jacket hanging off his chair.

"Sir?"

"*My* persons of interest never show up at a mention. Go on, I doubt she'd get sweeter for waiting."

"Aren't you coming?"

"She's your case. I've said."

So he'd meant that, too. Of course, he had. Robbie Lewis, man of his word through and through.

"Unless you need a chaperone," Lewis added. "You *did* look a bit gobsmacked there."

He was just taking the mickey. Still, Hathaway teetered between getting offended and embarrassed. "She's not what I expected, that's all."

"She's a lot more attractive than McKenna, you mean. Professor Compton's wife was also
younger and prettier than Mrs Temple, remember?" He turned on his BlackBerry and concerned himself with it as he pointed out, "Attraction's a baffling thing. Search me for an accounting."

Hathaway thought it best to get on with his job, now. He took his note pad and left.

Lewis had chosen the interview room on the ground floor that felt the least like an interview room. It was more cozy than the rest, with padded chairs and windows to the outside. Even the obligatory mirror was innocuous. Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce did not look appeased, she had sat down, crossed her shapely legs, was jiggling her raised foot impatiently. "Look," she started as soon as Hathaway walked in, "I was up and down the countryside for days, I've been driving most of the night so I could check on my horses first thing this morning, now I'd like to get home, so what's this about?"

"I apologise for the inconvenience."

"Too late. Get on with it."

"Fine." Hathaway sat across from her. "Where exactly up and down the countryside have you been for days, and do you know where your husband is?"

"I should've known this would be one of his shenanigans. What did he do?"

"As far as we know, nothing." Although he did remember meeting the man and immediately thinking him culpable of something. "We're investigating an incident at his work place."

"Work place? That's almost funny. I assume you mean Powell Productions?"

"Yes."

"Check with his bit on the side there."

"You're aware of his affair."

"Richie's a terrible liar," she said with a dismissive shrug. "I've known for years."

"His mistress claims he'd left you."

"He did inform me of an intention of the sort once or twice."

"You didn't mind?"

"Don't be silly, of course I minded. I made him understand why that was a very bad idea, for him, and he agreed. I've been away since mid-week. If he found the gumption to run off in the meantime," she shrugged again, "he'll be back if I want him back."

"You don't know his present whereabouts?"

"Unless he's at home or at that joke of a job, no."

"You're not concerned?"

Her attention seemed to sharpen. "Should I be?"

Instead of answering, Hathaway asked, "Don't you stay in contact at all?"

"With what? He let the bills languish and our service has been turned off, which I didn't find
out until I was halfway to Scotland and tried to use my mobile. Told you, joke of a job." She waved it away and repeated, "Should I be?"

Hathaway ignored it again. "What did your trip involve, where were you Thursday night from -- " he glanced down at his notes for the time Llewellyn-Pierce's car had driven into the lot " -- quarter to ten onwards?"

She frowned at him. "That's rather specific, Sergeant."

"If you'd be as specific, please?"

"I was in Hereford Wednesday and Thursday, at Ash Valley Farm, to visit a filly sired by one of my horses. I'd hoped to buy her. As it turns out, I can't, but I still wanted to spend a little time with her before she's sold elsewhere. Stayed at a bed and breakfast, Chester Cottage. The rest of the time, I was in Scotland, at various equestrian farms. If you must know, angling for a job -- teaching, training-- where I can also stable my own horses." She glared at him and added, "Richie has been such a disappointment."

Hereford was an easy drive to Oxford. "Did you spend Thursday night in your room?"

"Actually, I spent most of it away from my room." She gave him a meaningful look. "With a friend."

"His name and address?"

"Her name."

OK. "Her name and address."

"Marigold. Ash Valley Farm, main barn, third stall on the left." She flashed a mocking smile. Really, she was seriously beautiful and seriously annoying. "My filly's dam, I'd noticed she was doing a bit of flank-watching. Can be an early symptom of colic, so I kept an eye on her. She'll be no more forthcoming with answers than you are, though. What'd Richie do? You wouldn't be interested in fornication, so what? Lie, cheat, steal, kill, get killed?"

"You don't sound like you'd be surprised by any of them." Or dismayed.

She snorted in an unladylike manner. "Lie, cheat, second nature to him. Steal? Smash and grab, of course not. Fiddling accounts and the like, in a heartbeat if he thought he'd get away with it. Kill, not unless it's an accident, he hasn't the nerve. Get killed? I suppose it might surprise me that someone bothered-- if I hadn't killed him, that is."

"Did you?"

"Not yet. Is he dead?"

"You won't believe me, but in fact I have no way of knowing."

"This is pointless." She started to rise. "If you don't mind -- "

"Not yet, if you don't mind. Tell me about the last time you saw and talked to your husband, and how his hand was injured. Then I'd like to follow you home for a look-through. If you require a warrant, I'll send for it." With little or no evidence, he couldn't talk his way into a warrant, but he might be able to talk her out of one. "I'll keep you company while we wait, shouldn't be more than a few hours."
Innocent had to be busy, out supervising a breaking case that was bound to get the media and the higher-ups involved. Lewis sent her a short message to inform her he was reopening the Cullen case due to misidentification and assigning Hathaway to take charge of the more recent one. With any luck, it'd fly under her radar for a while.

Missing Persons hadn't advanced one hairsbreadth on Abbas. They quickly chucked the case at Lewis, happy to see its heels. Lewis's call to the man's son was answered so breathlessly that it was obvious the young man was hoping for news from them, had none of his own. He couldn't meet Lewis right away as he was on his way to Heathrow. His mother and sister, at a loss for what else to do, were flying in from Jordan. He'd planned to stay overnight in an airport hotel to let the women rest from their flight, but they'd drive back immediately if Lewis saw the need. Having only the old ground to cover, Lewis assured him the next day would do. By the time he cut the connection, a response from Innocent was waiting for him. Obviously, her radar was as alert as ever, but she'd kept it short: If you must. Very glad to hear.

Briefly, it puzzled him, Innocent receiving a reopened case gladly? Then he realised the grudging bit covered that, the next was her reaction to Hathaway taking charge of an enquiry. Lewis knew her attachment to their clearance rate was the only reason she'd been turning a blind eye to one of her fast-tracks stalling in place for years. Maybe she'd begun to think enough was enough. Maybe she had a point. He was holding the lad back professionally. As it had turned out, he might also be holding him back from finding someone who could answer all his needs. There was something called duty of care, after all.

But right then, old or not, the Idris Abbas ground had to be covered again. He headed down the stairs, his BlackBerry still in his hand, putting Abbas's known contacts into some order to avoid crisscrossing the city where possible. When next he looked up, he realised his feet had gone their wayward way and he was in the observation cubicle of Interview One. On the other side of the one-way glass, Hathaway was still occupied with Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce. If body language was any indication, he wasn't likely to be invited to the lady's next do, but despite her icy demeanour she was talking at length. Disinclined to check on Hathaway's progress, Lewis did not turn on the speakers in the cubicle; he wouldn't express confidence just to turn around and give lie to it.

Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce made a slashing motion in the air, prompting a question from Hathaway. She looked put-upon, probably finding the query intrusive or redundant, but answered.

He'll rival Morse one day, Lewis thought, not for the first time. With his disciplined work ethic, surpass him, too. If disappointments don't make him as self-involved and petulant.

In response to another question, Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce held out her hand, fingers loosely curled, then tightened them as if in a spasm. Hathaway nodded, in his usual interview mode, somehow looking both focused and aloof.

I can't let him go, Lewis decided, despite Innocent's cut-the-cord hint. Once he's no longer at odds with himself, all right, yes, but until then --sorry, guv, I have to see him right first. How he was supposed to achieve that, he had no idea.

You did raise bit of a turmoil in these staid bones, m'lad. Buggered if I know what to do with it just yet.

Better get on with the job. That, he knew what to do with.
The Llewellyn-Pierce residence was handsomely furnished and mostly tidy. The lady of the house wrinkled her nose at its state anyway and, after a quick check of the bedroom where the wardrobe and a few drawers yawned open, some shirts and ties lay tossed on the bed, announced that it looked as if her husband had indeed packed and left. "I have a gelding like that," she said airily. "Always sneaking away just to trot back when I whistle."

Hathaway was led to the study, found it in cluttered opposition to the rest of the house. Professor Llewellyn-Pierce seemed to be still attached to paper. Except for a laptop-sized empty spot on his desk, the surfaces of his office were covered with note papers and large, colourful photos of artefacts shot from varying angles to catch every detail. Well-lit, well-focused photos obviously taken by a professional photographer or a cameraman. He wondered why a few of them looked familiar until he remembered the film segment running in a screening room the first time he'd been in Powell's warehouse. Once he had his bearings, he could see an immaculate archivist's hand in the clutter. Exhaustive notes on every artefact, and print-outs of emails relevant to each, accompanied the photos. Going through the emails between the professor and McKenna about the items the man had studied, Hathaway detected a rising frustration that no fault could be found in the collection, and a lot of ire directed at the owner of it.

"What does your husband have against Bishop Osborn?" he asked Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce who was slouched in the doorway, glaring at him.

"They fell out at a debate years ago, went at each other in print for a while. Richie argued all historical remains belong in public museums -- not that he doesn't happily take commissions to arrange private sales. Osborn's convinced sacred historical remains belong to the faithful, must stay in the hands of the church, museums should stick to kings and queens and wars. All along they had acquisition battles Richie kept losing. Besides, he can't stand the holy lot in the first place."

So why exactly had the man authenticated some items for Osborn, Hathaway wondered when he went through the wastepaper bin overflowing for lack of the housekeeper and found crumpled copies of signed, seal-embossed certificates. The cover letters he dug out addressed themselves to the bishop personally. To earn a living, perhaps. But if he'd issued the authenticity certificates, why had he binned his copies like so much trash? He held them up. "I'd like to keep these." He got a shrug in place of an answer, tucked them into a pocket.

The desk had one locked drawer. The professor, he was told, always carried his keys and laptop with him. With no direct evidence of misadventure, Hathaway had to leave the lock alone. Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce straightened as soon as he stopped poking around, asked impatiently, "Anything else?"

"Yet you're so sure you can summon him back at will. How? Matrimonial bliss?"

"Spare me your condescension!" she snapped at him. He kept looking at her equably until she
sighed. "Oh, all right, if something's happened to him, there's no point, is there?" She went to the chair and sank into it. "Some of the Ashmolean's celebrated, fearfully expensive acquisitions are forgeries. Richie took hefty bribes from the sellers to authenticate them -- to use the word unduly. Finished with me? Finished professionally, anytime I feel like opening my mouth. I reminded him of that when he said something stupid about walking out. The university would obliterate his name from its rolls. His magnum opus, as he calls it, the book on antiquities he's hoping to publish, wouldn't be worth the pulp of a single tree branch." She looked at him as if he were at fault. "If he's dead, there's his insurance at least. Which leaves me a suspect in your eyes, I know. So go and sniff around my alibi, or whatever it is you do, just go away."

Hathaway didn't make her ask twice. He'd never understand how people who must have had at least some emotional investment in joining their lives could let their marriage turn into trench warfare and their homes into enemy camps. This was one issue Lewis would also be at a loss to explain, thank God.

He'd toss the decision of what to do about the Ashmolean debacle into Innocent's lap; it was above his pay grade. He got into his car and headed out of town towards Hereford. He should be back by the time Lewis would be expecting him, not that he was looking forward to it.

But what could Lewis say to him, you shouldn't feel your feelings, stop feeling them? He'd only say, don't ever bring them to my attention again. Which was what Hathaway had been doing all along. He wished Lewis would take it as a given and not see the need to discuss it, but if he wanted to talk, they'd talk.

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From Idris Abbas's various contacts, Lewis learned nothing specific, but gathered that the man had been looking to be put in touch with private collectors to market something prohibitively expensive. At least for the antique shops of Oxford which mostly depended on the tourist trade. "Not Christie's now, are we?" Lewis heard more than once. Abbas had been cagey; no one knew what the item was --"Must be dodgy in way of provenance," was one dealer's winking assessment-- but they all seemed to be under the impression the item -- items?-- was museum quality. Very well then, on the chance that Abbas had tried to interest them in his wares, he'd check with museum curators --tomorrow.

St Aldates was ringing six o'clock. So was every other bell tower, but Great Tom easily out-sounded them. The days were shortening, it'd be dark soon. Two doors down from his last stop was a restaurant he'd never tried even though he'd been seeing its odd name for over a year, Açı̇k Kapı, neither i dotted, the c sporting a comma. Once, Val would've towed him into it eagerly within days of its opening. All right, lass, I'll try it, just for you. Give us a smile.

It was more a pub --or, judging by the decor, whatever Middle Eastern pubs were called--than a restaurant, reasonably priced, and the take-away menu consisted of two tin-foil trays of assorted appetizers, listed as meze, one hot, one cold. Most of the contents a mystery to him, he got one of each tray and ended up with enough food for five people. A helpful waitress, who also told him the name of the place meant Open Door, tried to familiarise him with the heaped items, but Lewis gave up in short order and asked her to just point out the ones likely to bite back. There were a lot of those, so he could count on James to eat a fair portion of it.

At home, he fed Monty, stashed one appetizer tray in the fridge, the other in the oven on low, to wait until whenever Hathaway decided to show up. Lewis hadn't missed the quickly suppressed look of alarm that had followed his invitation. Summons, to be fair. Neither of them were chatty
blokes in the first place, and this subject -- Lewis understood the reluctance. Heartily shared it, too.

What needed to be said anyway? All he wanted was to get their balance back, make sure they were no less comfortable with each other than they'd been before, at work and outside it. *So relax, lad, won't make you wade in deep, just a meal, a few beers, and we'll let it be. Should suit both of us.*

He changed into casual clothes, was washing his face when the doorbell rang. He grabbed a towel, went to the door, opened it and almost collided with Hathaway who was at the door to his flat. A neighbour going in or out must've let him in, used to his frequent presence in the building. One tenant in particular, a very old military retiree and clearly inattentive to genetics, had the impression James was Lewis's son. As the man was stone deaf, he couldn't be dissuaded from heaping praise on such a devoted son, so unlike his own. Useless to correct: *Unlike mine, too.*

"Sorry," Hathaway said as if he were at fault, taking a quick step back.

"What for? Come in."

Hathaway followed him in, through his detour to the bathroom to put the towel back in its place, having started detailing his enquiries as abruptly as a preset recorder. Lewis had said there'd be no test, but he seemed to want to show he'd crammed for it anyway. Or he was trying to avoid other subjects. Probably both.

The inclination to follow Lewis around came to an abrupt halt at the entry point to the kitchen, making him think, *my kitchen's a crime scene now?* To nip the nonsense in the bud, he took two plates down and held them out at a distance of only a couple of inches, leaving Hathaway no option but to come and pick them up. By the time the plates were on the table, Lewis was holding out forks and spoons. Then serviettes. Then the salt cellar. After a few trips back and forth, the kitchen seemed to lose whatever prohibition the silly lad had put on it, and he was freely grabbing beer out of the fridge, his nose twitching in the direction of the oven. "What is that?" he asked, interrupting his needlessly detailed report. "Smells great." He'd relaxed enough for a scapegrace smile. "I forgot lunch."

Considering where the day had started, he was likely to have forgotten breakfast, too. Probably even supper the night before. At least the kind that didn't slosh. "Search me, but there's a shedload of it." He donned the oven gloves and pulled out the tray. "There's also a cold version. Get it out of the fridge and let's eat."

"Rather adventurous of you," Hathaway said once the covers were removed, but he wasted no time popping morsels into his mouth directly from the tray. One meatball-looking thing made him declare, "Too adventurous."

"Even for your taste?"

"Just cautioning you." As the remaining meatballs were quickly following their mate into his mouth, needless cautioning. They must be as hot as their red hue indicated, judging by the amount of beer that chased them down and the beads of perspiration dotting his face. Still, Hathaway looked well pleased as he sat and continued recounting his day, which had included scouring newspaper archives for a long-standing feud between the professor and Bishop Osborn. Might be a connection there, or James could be as susceptible to his emotions as any human being, hoping to find a connection other than Father Cleaves. Lewis didn't care to question his motivations right then, but it was something to keep in mind.

When he sat down, Hathaway promptly appointed himself culinary guide, taking quick tastes of whatever Lewis eyed speculatively and interspersing his recital with, "I think you'll like this. Not
that. This, maybe. Try just a bit. You'll definitely like this. Hmm, I don't know. Best leave that alone -- " and one time, at Lewis's expression " --what?"

"Nothing. Go on," Lewis said, unwilling to tell Hathaway he was reminding him of the way Val used to turn all maternal once she'd cajoled him into unfamiliar territory; the best part of allowing himself to be cajoled. He spread some pinkish paste onto a square of flatbread and tasted it. It had tiny red beads in it that burst open with briny flavour. "If you know what's in this," he started, and of course the know-it-all looked ready to jump in with the answer, "don't tell me. I'm enjoying it."

"Ah. My lips are sealed."

Hardly. He must've been really hungry, his hands were busily ferrying food, mouth doing double duty. "If our missing body belongs to the professor, his wife's alibi checks out," he said, interspersed with chewing and swallowing. "Well, mostly. The stable hands did sleep off and on. She resents her husband so much, I suppose I should look for an accomplice. Except she's financially strapped and I can't imagine her condescending to beguile someone into crime. Her default mode seems to be scornful acrimony. Beats me why those two ever married."

"He, maybe because she's the perfect arm ornament. She? Odds are, she loved him beyond reason," Lewis said, making Hathaway stop with his fork halfway to his mouth to goggle at him. "A heart broken too badly to heal tends to fester."

Hathaway took the food off the fork, chewed while he considered, swallowed. "Not much about human nature surprises you, does it --" and all too abruptly "-- did mine?"

He must've been going batty dreading an interrogation, Lewis realised, until he couldn't stand it any more. "That I figured in it, yes," he replied, carefully matter-of-fact. "The rest, I pretty much knew." You can let it go now, lad.

"And I thought I was being so clever with the Yorkie bar and the girlie mag," Hathaway stayed on subject. Maybe the habit of the confessional still lingered with him. "Only time I ever bought anything of the sort, mind, of any sort," he hurried to impart.

You want it off your chest, fine. "When just the day before you'd told me it wasn't as simple as Loaded and Yorkie bars." He poked at a grey-green puree that had been pronounced excellent, still sceptical about it, but once he tried a little of it he had to agree. "I spend half my life listening to people whistling past the truth; I pay attention. So do you. I'd said I wasn't stupid enough to judge by such trappings, so unless you were calling me stupid to me face...." he left it hanging and picked up a crisp pastry roll that had passed Hathaway's muster.

"Evidently, I'm quite capable of fooling myself. I went through adolescence attributing my disinterest in dating to my resolve to stay celibate for the priesthood. Until reality caught me up. In one of the most unacceptable ways for the choice I'd made."

Lewis paused in surprise, both at 'adolescence' and the roll he'd expected to be sweet but found savoury. "Celibacy's not required ahead of the vows, is it?"

"Thought I'd be less likely to miss what I'd never had."

And of course, if purity was called for, he had to be pure beyond human proportions. How early did you become such a harsh taskmaster to yourself -- and why? He tossed the roll --although it was good-- onto the plate, took advantage of his empty beer bottle to leave the table to get another one. He closed the fridge harder than he'd intended, uncapped the bottle -- none too gently, he realised, when the cap flew off and clattered somewhere.
Hathaway had stilled immediately. "You're angry," he concluded quietly, looking at a spot halfway between them.

Lewis took a long pull from the bottle to settle himself down. "Last thing I want is to offend you, James, but I just -- I don't get it. Why would a," he barely kept 'supposed' from escaping, "life-giver forbid the one thing that brings it about? To his most faithful, too."

"No possibility of that the way I wanted to go about it, was there?"

*I don't give a toss. What kind of father expects the lively sap of youth to dry up in his service?* "Is that why -- ? I know you don't go looking for it, but Scarlett, Fiona -- " he came back to the table and sat down "-- are you trying to...erm...?"

"Go about it the right way?" Hathaway suggested, sounding harshly amused. "No. I don't instigate it with women -- never did with men either, and past Will, which doesn't count, neither have they. But once in the moment, it's nice, I enjoy it. I like women, some women -- well, a few women. Then again, I'm attracted to very few men as well. But I've never been in love with a woman."

"You had a long-term relationship with Fiona."

"More or less, off and on. After a while, very much less and mostly off."

"You minded her leaving."

"Getting left behind is never pleasant, even if it is by choice."

"You didn't love her?"

"I could have -- I think. If you hadn't come along."

Too much strain on credulity. Lewis was perfectly aware he wasn't the sort people took one look at and lost all sense of proportion. "Oh, give over," he started to object.

"Not in *that* way. Started with the job." He huffed softly. "I didn't see it the way I do now, the way she still sees it, the way you'd never see it. As the means to an end, each case just a milestone to get ahead. It was the same in the seminary. Alike, of one mind, one purpose, validating each other, connecting and liking it, liking her because of it, feeling I finally fit in. Then I saw how you work, done and dusted never matters, done right does. You believe caring is vital to the quality of justice, you accept the cost and get on with it, it's about the job, not about you -- it was...humbling." He pushed his beer round and round on the table. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you see -- leave personal faith to one side -- this," he let go of the bottle to move his hand back and forth between them, "*this* is what I was looking for in the seminary. A purpose larger than me to believe in, to learn to be useful, balance wrongs, and someone to guide me, show me the right way to do it." He gave a smile like a sudden cloud-break, "And there you were, sir, in your amazing Technicolor Dream...shirt."

Was he ever going to live that shirt down? He clung to that thought because everything else he'd heard was threatening to close up his throat. "Don't break into a song now," he managed to grumble.

Hathaway wouldn't back off. "Last night, there's no excuse for it, and I'll never again, not *ever* -- but I think you already know that -- "

Of course he knew that. So unfair, though, one futile appeal after years of denial. *I'm sorry, James.*
"-- or you wouldn't be sitting here with me. Do you have any idea how thankful I am that you are? I promise you, I have no agenda, I expect nothing, never will, I only want to say -- "

*Please stop, lad. My heart's old and tired and broken already.*

"-- I've never said this before, so just once -- " his mobile rang, made them both jump.

For an instant, Hathaway's face twisted in chagrin, next instant, in anger. By the third, he had it shuttered. "Many a slip twixt," he said hoarsely, a sketchy sarcasm. He reached for the buzzing phone, fumbling with it as he got it out of his pocket and to his ear. By then, his voice was only a little rough. "Hathaway."

Lewis looked down at his hands on the table, pulled them to his lap. They weren't as steady as he would have liked.

"That's right, yes," Hathaway said into the phone, straightening, now completely focused. "Tell them I'll be there soon as I can, not to touch it until I get there." He rang off, dropped the phone back into his pocket as he got up, pulling out his keys, all business. "Llewellyn-Pierce's car is at Gloucester Station, far as they can see, empty. On a side street unfortunately, not the car park, so who knows how long it's been there." He cast about. "Where did I leave my coat?" Absurdly, he was also patting his pockets as if he could've rolled it up and tucked it in one. He wasn't nearly as steady as he looked, either.

"In your car? You didn't have it on when you came in."

"Ah. Right." He seemed to hesitate, "Sir?"

"Go on, go."

"I'll keep you informed."

"You don't have to keep doing that, you know. It's your case." He met Hathaway's eyes squarely. "I trust you."

A small smile, more in his eyes than on his lips. "Thank you." He turned to leave.

*That's the end of it, Lewis knew. Once he leaves, we'll never talk about it again.* He had caught up to Hathaway before he knew he'd moved, so unthinkingly that he had no idea what to say when he'd stopped him short of the door.

"Sir?" Quietly, as if afraid of spooking him.

*We're a pair. We depend on each other more than anyone else. Except, apparently, with words. Say it already.* "I'm sorry, James. Last night -- nobody does that expecting only rejection. There had to be at least a small hope for a better response than you got from me. I'm truly sorry. I wish I -- I mean, nothing I can do about it, and I do question your eyesight, but I wish -- "

"You don't need to," Hathaway said softly, lifting two fingers as if to hush Lewis. "You don't need to eat strange foods, either. I got it, you're fine with things outside your comfort zone and I'm included. I know that now." He smiled an open, tender smile that Lewis hadn't known his austere face could wear. "I won't forget it," he concluded like a promise.

*Too fiddly a motivation for me, lad.* Lewis leaned into the wall as the door closed between them. *If I had one, it was to share something new again with someone I...hold rather dear.*
All that time of denying he'd had any sort of hope, Hathaway thought on the way to his car. But Lewis was right; somewhere in him there must've been a tinge of it despite knowing better, or Lewis's every act of forbearance through the day wouldn't have left a bitter aftertaste. Now, though, it seemed to be gone. He stopped by his car, put his head back to take a deep breath of the cool air and it didn't seem to snag on anything jagged inside, flowed in and out of him freely, easily, felt good.

The kindest words he'd ever heard: 'I wish.'

He got in the car. This time of the evening the drive to Gloucester shouldn't take longer than an hour. Because it was evening, the proceedings once he was there were likely to take longer than Hathaway cared for. He pulled out his phone and rang Hobson. "Sorry to disturb you after hours," he said when she answered.

"Still at work, likely to be here rest of the night," she grumbled, reminding him of Grainger's body count. "What can I do for you?"

He gave her a quick rundown. "I'd like to inspect the car in place, but until it's processed, I can only get it towed. I was hoping you knew someone in their forensics unit to meet me on site, do the initial processing as a favour."

"I don't, not personally. Try Rawleigh, his son's a field analyst there."

"I don't know him."

Hobson snorted. "Of course you do. Angus. You jesters call him Rawbone."

"I thought that was his name."

"You thought parents with the surname Rawbone named their son Angus?" She chuckled. "Really?"

He decided he'd given her enough amusement for one evening. "I'll ring him. Thank you, Doctor."

Rawbone --habits died hard-- was his usual cheerfully accommodating self, and when Hathaway located the car a young man was there with a scene kit and a photographer, setting up lights. Nobody was likely to call him Rawbone, he was thin and delicate, with owlish specs and fly-away curls, refuting his father in every way except cheerfulness. "Fergus," he introduced himself, waved away the apologies for the late hour and got to work energetically. While the two constables who'd found the car stayed around to keep the curious at bay, Hathaway walked the street looking for CCTVs. Some businesses had cameras mounted on their entrances, but those were likely to be close-focused and used more as deterrent than for record-keeping.

He stood at the end of the street and looked in the direction of the railway station, an easy jog away. If Llewellyn-Pierce had wanted to hop a train, Oxford was a better hub. In all likelihood, someone had wanted a lift back to Oxford.

The boot of the car, once the hatch was dusted and opened, was empty --no body, no suitcase, no laptop-- and non-reactive to black light. "Something here, though," Fergus pointed at the back bumper. "Something with blood on it brushed up against it. Leaned into it, more like. But it rained
recently, so the traces are faint. May not yield much.” He covered the area with plastic and taped it off anyway, adding. "The car's been here a while. If it was driven in the rain, water splashing up would've washed away the soil on the undercarriage. There're also clogs of soil in the tyre treads where the metal hangs over. It's been out in the countryside."

Despite itching to get into the car, and to the books he could see lying scattered on the back seat, Hathaway stood aside and let Fergus get on with collecting samples, vacuuming the boot, dusting the door handles, directing the photographer for shots he deemed useful.

The interior of the car on the driver's side excited Fergus when he got to it. "Motherlode," he announced. "Bloody clothes sat on this seat." That there must've been someone inside the clothes seemed to be irrelevant. Hathaway decided he rather liked his breezy single-mindedness. Waiting for him to finish, he pulled his phone out and arranged to have the car towed to Oxford.

"Oh, but this is no good," Fergus was saying when Hathaway put the phone away, busy dusting the controls. "Gloves," he concluded with a grimace. "Smeared the older prints, too. Pity, I tell you. Ah, but there're bloody shoe prints with some clear impressions where the blood had dried solid, there you are, lose some, win some." He directed more photos, covered the driver's area securely for analysis later, fiddled all around the interior, and finally declared himself satisfied.

Hathaway was pulling on latex gloves when Fergus pointed at them and added, "Gloves like those, I meant. Regular ones would've left harder edges on the smears."

As impatient as he'd been to get into it, the car didn't give Hathaway anything except confirmation of its owner. The books in it belonged to the Balfour, must be the ones that had sent Ginny searching for her tutor. He noted down their titles. He couldn't return them, at least not for a while, but he could give her an official receipt and get her out of trouble with the library.

The tow truck was driving up already. Still, it was going to be way past midnight before he had a glimpse of his bed.

*****

Lewis rose early, tossed back a quick cup of tea to clear away the morning fog while dressing. He wanted to get to the hotel Abbas had stayed in before the night shift went off duty since Hathaway had only talked to the day staff. He wasn't expecting much. Attention had been drawn to Abbas after the fact, it had been a while by now with lots of people in and out of the place, and at the end of a long shift nobody was going answer him gladly. They'd be a lot less glad if he knocked on their doors later in the day and interrupted their sleep, though.

He slogged through it for no joy except to learn that Abbas had used the hotel safe to store a package, until a woman at the reception desk, old enough to know better, practically cooed at him about remembering "that priest" in the man's company a couple of times, how could she forget it?

With a sinking feeling, Lewis asked to use their internet connection, found St Justin's site and located a photo of Father Cleaves under Parish Directory.

Yes, that was the one all right, and the receptionist would attend church more regularly if priests of her experience looked more like that. She beamed at Lewis as if expecting him to agree, while all he could think was: *If this keeps pointing in the direction I fear, it's going to break the lad's heart.*

He headed for the station to print out Father Cleaves's photo and take it around with him. He hoped Gloucester had kept Hathaway until all hours and he'd be late getting in. Lewis didn't want to
tell him anything until and unless it was unavoidable. He was so preoccupied when he got out of his car that he didn't realise Innocent was right behind him until he heard her say admonishingly, "Good morning, Lewis."

He stopped short. "Sorry, ma'am. Good morning."

Collingsworth was with her, looked to be carrying some files for her from her car; he piped in with his greetings and fell in behind them respectfully. "I don't know if you know this," Innocent said as they started walking, "but PC Lockhart had a, erm, personal problem with a DI before she transferred here. Turned her shy of being assigned to one specifically. She's up for promotion -- such a bright young woman, loads of potential. Shame to use her as a tech most of the time. You'd be just the ticket, I'm thinking. She'd never have cause to worry."

Lewis was looking around for Hathaway's car and listening with half an ear. No car yet. Good. Wait. What was Innocent saying?

"There's Knox as well," she continued. "I know, bound to be uncomfortable after going through the ranks together. But he might prefer to take orders from one immediate boss rather than a squad of them, don't you think?"

Don't I think what about...what?

"Oh, blast it," she said under her breath as the station doors opened to let out a group of reporters who made a beeline for them purposefully. Despite her words, Innocent immediately put on her perfected smile and dismissed Lewis with a quick, "We'll discuss it later."

He gave the reporters a wide berth and escaped, hoping the next time they discussed 'it', she'd be clearer, 'cause what he'd read into it so far was likely to result in a stand-off neither would like. He had to stay firm on it, or James might harbour a suspicion Lewis had reassured him only to go behind his back.

In his office, he turned on his computer and found that Hathaway had sent him a late-night report of the preliminary findings on the car. Obviously, never again did he intend to be found guilty of imparting insufficient information. While he was still alone, Lewis enlarged and printed out Cleaves's photo, tucked it into his pocket, then paid attention to the report. Safe to assume by now their missing body and missing professor were one and the same, and someone had been trying to scatter the evidence.

His phone rang. It was Rashid Abbas, saying he'd be back in Oxford shortly, he was checking his mother and sister into the Eastgate, they'd be ready to meet Lewis there in an hour, did that suit? He told the young man he'd be there, got off the phone.

Museum curators were next on his agenda, but they were a posh lot, not likely to be in early, very likely to make him wait before sparing him time, no sense trying squeeze any in before his meeting. Might as well grab some breakfast.

Only a handful of people were in the canteen, mostly civilian support staff. Grainger's case must be taking a lot of manpower. He had finished eating when he saw Hathaway come in and head straight for coffee as if he intended to run the machine down and wrestle it to the ground. He filled one of the largest containers and gulped some down before he topped it and added his stingy bit of sugar. Collingsworth was already there getting himself a drink. They started talking quietly, and something that was said made Hathaway exclaim, "What the hell for?" loud enough for Lewis to hear. The young man touched him on the arm, trying discreetly to point out Lewis's presence with tilts of his head and failing miserably. Hathaway's head swivelled towards Lewis, face looking like a
storm about to break, then he leaned close to Collingsworth for a few more rapid exchanges, left him standing there and came over. By then he'd pushed down whatever had set him off, was wearing his impassive face.

"You must've been up half the night, you could've come in later," Lewis told him.

"It wasn't that late. I'm fine."

"Sit down. Want something to eat?"

"I'm fine," he stressed, but sat down.

Lewis noticed Collingsworth throwing them guilty glances as he sidled out of the cafeteria.

"What did the lad do?"

"Do? Nothing." The impassive face, as usual, went with mulishness.

"All right, what did he say?"

"He said you and Innocent were discussing my replacement."

Damn and blast. "I wasn't discussing a thing, don't think I said a word past 'good morning.' She said quite a few and there was a hint of it in the muddle, aye." He pushed his plate to one side and leaned towards Hathaway, "What of it? She's reading too much into my handing you a case. Her problem. If it becomes ours, I'll set her right, OK?"

Hathaway nodded, but looked no happier.

"What?"

"It's all my fault, isn't it? If I hadn't kept secrets from you, none of this would've happened."

"Under the bridge. Forget it."

"I'm sorry."

"Come on, James, things happen. You think you're the only copper to play loose with the truth?"

"In this company, yes."

"You think so?" Lewis looked around and found they were private enough. "Let me tell you something. Back when I was with Morse, we caught this case. Turned out in the end, husband and wife in a murder-suicide pact. The wife was Morse’s fiancée long ago, fell for another bloke, called off the engagement and married him instead. With her husband dead, Morse was sure he had her back. Poor deluded sod, all hope and no sense, couldn't see she was just stringing him along. She'd killed her husband and framed her son-in-law for it. She ended up doin' away with herself. And there I was, holding this tape from her answer phone, every bit of her guilt right on it."

"What did you do?"

"Kept it in my pocket until the son-in-law's alibi held up, then tossed the bloody thing into the river."

"No."
"Yes."

"You -- why?"

"Morse had lost her for the second time, he was bleeding inside. I couldn't bear to twist the knife." He shrugged. "I loved the miserable bloke. Except one of the things I did was to yell at him - not for the first, but as it turned out, the last time-- for standing in my way. Never got a chance to take it back.

Hathaway's face was anything but impassive now; fearing he'd say something daft like 'he was lucky to have you,' Lewis quickly checked his watch and rose. "I'm off, I have an appointment." He patted Hathaway's shoulder as he passed by. We all make mistakes we regret, lad. "Coffee's not breakfast. Eat something."

*****

A receptionist at the Eastgate pointed Lewis at a young man and two women occupying lounge chairs of screaming magenta between the lobby and the bar. Rashid Abbas saw him heading towards them, jumped up to greet him, performed the introductions. The older woman was wearing a modest dress, the younger one was in a well-tailored suit that did its best to downplay her pregnancy. Both wore scarves that looked to be passing nods to convention. The young woman's, especially, was air-thin, in a long, loose drape, doing nothing to hide her lush dark hair. Still, having been through the mandatory diversity seminars, Lewis kept his hand to himself until the women held out theirs.

The mother didn't speak English, simply sat there, fingers worrying an embroidered handkerchief on her lap, looking at him expectantly as if he'd be conjuring her husband out of the air any minute. The sister had a decent grasp of English and, more straightforwardly than he'd expected, wanted to know if holding out even a small hope could still be justified. He had to tell her that missing person cases rarely led to a good resolution after the first forty-eight hours. She bit her lip, sat back, her hand making soothing motions on her belly as though the baby she was carrying was the one in need of consoling.

"So you are now looking for his...body?" Rashid asked quietly.

A good bet that we already have it, he didn't say. "We know nothing definite yet. I realise you went through it before, but tell me again all you know of his movements. Contacts, plans, everything you can think of."

He listened closely to the young man, thanked him sincerely even though he gained no new insight from the recounting. He was about to excuse himself when Rashid spoke up again. "Something Sergeant Hathaway said, I thought it odd then, but -- " he trailed off uncertainly.

Lewis settled back down and paid attention. "Aye?"

"He asked if my father is Catholic. He's not, of course, and at the time I was too upset to wonder why the question came up. But it stuck in my head, reminded me -- " he trailed off again, then dismissively said, "I'm sure it's nothing."

"Tell us anyway."

"A few days before he went missing he had an appointment at the Pitt Rivers. I met him in front of the museum. He came out talking to a priest, waved me away to wait until he was done. I
don't know what they were talking about. The man was wearing a clerical collar, but that doesn't necessarily mean he's Catholic, does it?"

*No, but I'd wager he is,* Lewis thought reluctantly, pulled out Cleaves's photo. "That's the bloke?"

"I wasn't paying close attention. Looks like him. If he's very tall."

*Sod it.* He put the photo away.

"He has something to do with my father's disappearance?" the young man asked, of course.

"Not that I know of." *Yet.*

"You're carrying his photo," Rashid pointed out accusingly. And, Lewis had to admit, reasonably.

"We speculate a lot. Most turn out baseless. It does nobody a favour to air speculations before --"

"*La havle ve la kuvvete!*" Rashid suddenly burst out, half-rising from his seat.

For a second, Lewis thought the young man had lost all patience with him, then realised he was looking out the plate glass at something on the street. "What?"

"*Illah billahil Rabbi-al 'azeem,*" still aimed at whatever he was fixed on outside the hotel.

Looking along his line of sight failed to enlighten Lewis; there were lots of people and vehicles out there. "In English, please," he said mildly.

"That -- that man," Rashid spat out, then noticed that the women were craning worriedly to see what had upset him and became reluctant to go on.

"I have to leave," Lewis said into the awkward silence. "If you don't mind seeing me out?" Once they'd distanced themselves, he asked, "What is it? Which man?"

"The one in leather gear, by the newsagent's. That's his motorbike there. I know all Middle Easterners are terrorism suspects to you, but do I have to live with him popping up everywhere until I -- do what? Graduate? I confess, that's my nefarious plan."

"How long has this been going on?" Hathaway had mentioned noticing someone on a motorbike, possibly on surveillance, during the morning he'd spent with Rashid.

"I don't know, two weeks -- closer to three? Since I've noticed, that is." His face twisted bitterly. "You probably know more about it than I do."

Three weeks would make it around the time Idris Abbas had disappeared. "In fact, I don't. But I'm going to find out." *Should've found out when James first brought it up.* "Give me a minute to cross the street, then come out and go towards your car, let me see how he reacts. You can go back to your family once I get his attention. Sometime today, come in to the station and give a swab -- " still short of certainties, he opted to maintain some ambiguity "-- in case we need it."

He left the hotel, put his hands in his pockets and casually crossed the street at an angle. He knew Rashid had followed his instructions when the man quickly put the magazine he was holding back on the rack, turned while sliding his helmet on and went for his bike. By then Lewis had
blocked the way, his warrant card flipped open. "DI Lewis, Oxfordshire Police. Got a few questions for you."

The man paused uncertainly, threw a quick look in Rashid's direction.

"He's just a student hosting his mother and sister," Lewis told him. "Take my word, they're not planning to blow up anything."

Then the man did something Lewis had seen in American films, put his left hand up, palm out, and slowly, cautiously, his other hand went to the inside pocket of his leather jacket. As if he assumed a police officer might be...what was the word, packing? No doubt Hathaway would've had a pithy remark if he'd been there to see it. The bloke's an operative, but he's no Brit, Lewis concluded.

The badge that came out proved him right. It had the Star of David inside a laurel crown."Now I have more questions. If you'd remove your helmet, please," he checked the name, "Mr Yoelsen." The name was entered in two alphabets, but not the preceding מזכיר. If it was a rank, he couldn't read it, and the man did not offer it.

The helmet came off as Yoelsen said, "Not here, Inspector. Official assignment."

Lewis waved him to his car. If he insisted on 'official,' he ought to meet Innocent. "At the station, then. I'll have someone bring you back to your bike."

Innocent was busy, but she came out to her anteroom to see them. Lewis quickly explained the situation, and she held out her hand for Yoelsen's badge. She accepted it politely, looked at it and snapped it closed impatiently. "Mishteret Yisrael is a civilian police force. You're either pretending to be a tourist while working out of jurisdiction or you don't care to flash your real badge. Which is it, 'sub-inspector'?"

"You can read Hebrew," was the grudging comment.

"Mother's milk, you might say, despite three generations of marriage into the C of E. You didn't answer me."

"I do not carry my badge with me."

"Mossad agents usually don't. You're here tasked by?"

"Antiquities Authority of Israel."

"How timely. You're interested in antiquities nowadays, Lewis, aren't you?"

"Very much so, ma'am," he played along.

"Why don't you two go and have a nice chat then," she suggested sweetly, and indicated the badge she was still holding, "while I have a chat with the Embassy."

Lewis took Yoelsen to his office, left any lingering issues over his credentials to Innocent, a lot more interested in hearing him account for his purpose in Oxford. "Now, sir -- " he started, but the man held up his hand, placed his helmet on a chair, unzipped his jacket and pulled out a thick envelope.

He approached Lewis's desk and proceeded to lay on it, one by one, 5x7 photos until the desk top was almost covered. "Items in photos are property of Israeli government. Excavated at Bethsaida,
stolen and smuggled across border to Syria. Smuggler was caught. He had sold them on black market to Jordanian dealer, Idris Abbas. When items are found, they will be repatriated to Israel immediately. United Kingdom is signatory to International Protection of Cultural Heritage Act.

"I'm sure we are." The man's lack of conversation and his clipped sentences the few times he'd opened his mouth earlier had made Lewis assume he had little English. But despite the missing articles and a flat accent, he was fluent. "And I'm sure the items will be returned, if they're found. If they're also evidence in a crime, not so immediately."

"I will take it up with proper authorities."

"By all means." He waved the man to the chair. "For now, I need to know a bit more."

Yoelsen chose to keep standing. "There is no more. Syria is in turmoil, investigation took time. We tracked Idris Abbas to Oxford, by then he was missing. Or it is ruse, and he is hiding."

"So you decided keeping an eye on his son might lead you to him."

"Correct. Can you lead me to him?"

Lewis shook his head. "Not in any useful way."

"You are deliberately evasive."

"You're not exactly cleared yet, sir. My Chief Superintendent will decide what's appropriate to share between our agencies. Once we establish your agency."

"I will talk to her again. Now."

"Certainly." He called the desk and got a PC to escort the man to Innocent's office and give him a lift later. Yoelsen didn't pick up the photos lying on the desk, gave him a brusque nod and left. Probably so Lewis could entertain no doubts as to what belonged to the man's government.

Well, at least Rashid had pointed him at a specific museum and Yoelsen had narrowed down what he should be asking about. In the absence of Hathaway to take care of the details for him, he took shots of the photos with his phone camera. He stacked and left them on his desk in case Yoelsen gave Innocent a reason to come looking for them. Hathaway was still off somewhere when he left. On his way out, he was amused to see that Innocent was making Yoelsen cool his heels in her anteroom. Never a good idea, trying to put one over on the guv.

*****

With zero inclination to go anywhere near the film company if he could avoid it, Hathaway had rung Oriel and learned that Ginny had a room in the college's newest residence hall. The porter pointed him to the right door which had a pretty little wicker basket hanging on it, containing a note pad and a pen. He folded the receipt with the list of books and put it in the basket.

He had started writing her a note when the door was yanked open and a harried-looking Ginny was yelling at him, "One more bloody note, you bloody idiot, I'll roll it up and shove -- " she cut off abruptly and just as abruptly blushed " -- oh, it's you." Flustered, she looked down to check herself as though her appearance had slipped her mind. She had on a too-large sweatshirt which came to mid-thigh and that seemed to be it. Not dressed for company, but more appealing than he should note. "I'm sorry, I, erm, I wasn't expecting -- I thought you were -- "
"Bloody idiot?" He meant it as a joke, but evidently there was no limit to how deeply red-heads could continue blushing.

"Not you. See, there's this -- he keeps leaving me -- I keep telling him -- "

"I don't really need to know, do I?" he said to put her at ease, but she seemed to take it as admonishment, looked crestfallen. "Let's start again. Hi, Ginny."

"Hi, Sergeant Hathaway." Still uncertain.

"James." Ah, that worked and got him a pretty smile. "I thought you'd be at the film lot or I'd have knocked," he lied. He'd hoped to leave the list and be gone.

"The documentary is at a standstill. I'm running and fetching for Mr Powell now." She shuddered dramatically. "I was just getting ready to go."

"I won't keep you." He pulled the receipt from the basket and handed it to her. "I wanted to give you this, so you can stop worrying."

Once she realised what it was, her eyes lit up. Fearing she was about to throw herself around his neck, or more likely his waist, he backed away fast. "I should get going."

"Thank you, oh, thank you," she burbled effusively, then frowned. "My tutor gave them to you? Why would he do that? He's all right, isn't he?"

"They became part of our enquiries," he explained without explaining.

She wasn't gullible, though. "I keep asking you things you can't answer, don't I?"

"I don't mind." He nodded at the receipt, "Hope that solves one of your problems." Working at Powell's whim, she must have loads of them. "I need to get going, Ginny." He started down the corridor.

"He must've kept some of them," he heard her say, "you know that, right?"

He turned around. "There are titles missing?" If there'd been library books in the professor's study, he'd have noticed.

"Just a few, and that's OK, I'm not complaining. Only makes sense, they're the ones he was really interested in. But if they're part of your enquiry, I thought maybe you should know."

"Absolutely I should." He went back to her. "I'll try not to make you late for work, may I come in?"

"Yes, yes, of course." She pulled the door wider even though she looked like she had a sudden case of stage fright.

Hathaway walked in and saw that the stage was frightful indeed. It didn't feel or smell the least bit dirty, but God, it was staggeringly untidy. He squeezed past the coats and jackets, hats and scarves, on or tumbled off hooks, along the narrow entry, below them, bulging bin liners teetering on top of a pile of shoes and boots. Passing a tiny bathroom, he had to step over a laundry bag, to which Ginny gave a kick and moved out of the way by maybe three inches. As he was picking his way through the clutter into the small room, she let out a despairing squeak and rushed ahead of him, dived into the jumble on the bed to hurriedly pluck out -- girlie things, he assumed. Huddled over her armful, she ducked into the bathroom and shouldered the door closed. "It's such a mess, I'm sorry--"
her muffled voice came through " -- there's just no place to put anything. I'll be right out. There's an armchair, really, there is, just shove the mags off, I'll only be a minute."

Feeling way over-sized for her chaotic little sanctum, he sat down after stacking the magazines neatly instead of shoving them. She came out within the promised minute, having put on a pair of jeans and, for some reason, lipstick, cleared away a corner of her rumpled bed and hopped onto it. "I'm sorry," she repeated, indicating the room.

"It's fine," he lied again, "I've seen worse." At crime scenes, he kept to himself. "Tell me about the books. Why did Llewellyn-Pierce need them, do you know?"

"He was looking for some carvings of old text. He was sure he'd seen one of the phrases before on an ancient headstone, in the book of collections of a museum in an Arab country. But he was wrong, it's on a commemorative stele in the Halicarnassus Museum in Turkey. That's not --"

"An Arab country, I know. Why did he need the information?"

"No idea. Except for his museum job, of course. He authenticates artefacts."

And sometimes throws the results of his work into the waste bin.

"He just gave me a list of inscriptions to track down," Ginny was saying. "That's all I know."

"Do you still have the list?"

"Sure, erm -- " she looked around hopelessly "-- give me a minute," and went on an expedition. It took longer than a minute, but she finally came up with some crumpled papers, stapled together. "There you are," she said brightly and handed them to him.

He thumbed through the hand-drawn pages. "You can read these?"

She gave an apologetic shrug. "Only as an alphabet, but I've seen enough Aramaic text to recognise some clusters --like YhI0 there, earlier version of Yahweh. Also, that bit," she tapped at a line, "I can tell those letters are backwards, and the thing is, that's the inscription on that stele. The photo of it I found in the book -- someone made a mistake, you see, and flipped it. It's printed the wrong way."

From which a late-day forger must've copied the ancient text by sight, only knowing it dated from a time that suited his purpose. Clearly, Llewellyn-Pierce had binned his certificates for a good reason. But if he'd already suspected forgery, why had he issued them in the first place?

"So the Professor wasn't authenticating an artefact," Ginny was concluding on her own. "I mean, he couldn't have been, right? The original's been sitting in a museum for ages and he knew it. The other missing books, they all had bits and pieces of some of the text from his list, on items in documented collections. He must be working to expose forgeries. " She took his silence as disagreement, and added, "I'm just speculating. I can find you someone who reads Aramaic."

"I have a feeling what these say aren't as important as what they say it on." He rose. "Thanks for your help, Ginny. I'll let you get ready for work."

*****

A clerk at the Curatorial Office of the Pitt Rivers heard Lewis out, checked an appointment
book, which was, as befitted a museum, still an actual book. She found the entries for Abbas's appointments and led him into the office of the Assistant Manager, Collections and Procurement, according to the plaque on his door, TSG Armitage by the name plate on his desk. Armitage remembered the foreign gentleman, oh, most certainly, and "bless me," the set of items he'd offered could've been the jewel in the crown of the museum's religious collection -- too sparse a collection, admittedly. But alas, the gentleman had wanted to conclude the sale quickly.

"An unassailable provenance, or time for a thorough assessment by experts," he pointed out on two fingers, "preferably both, or how could a reputable institution like ours enter into negotiations? Simply not possible, I'm afraid."

Lewis showed Armitage the photos on his phone. The man looked at them long and longingly, bloody near stroked them, and confirmed that they were the items Abbas had offered. "One can't take the chance, of course," he added regretfully, "not in one's official capacity. But I don't mind telling you, breaks my heart to think the artefacts may be genuine -- divine relics sanctified by the holiest of hands -- and I had a couple of them in my hands, in my actual hands," he held them up palms open, and Lewis noted the crucifix charm on his watchband, "but failed to give them succour, may the Lord forgive me. After two millennia, they'd found their way to me, me, and I couldn't rescue them from the wilderness, safeguard them."

Having cast a quick look about and found no less than four framed photos of the Pope adorning the room, one of Mother Teresa as well, Lewis took over-the-top drivel as the price of doing business with the bloke. At least it was rescue 'from the wilderness,' not 'from desecration in the hands of an infidel.' "Would you happen to know where Abbas intended to take them next?"

"Can't say that I do. Couldn't be my concern any more, could it?"

The choice of words made Lewis quote back at him, "'Not in one's official capacity.'"

"Ah, yes, true, but...well..."

"I'm not on the museum's ethics board, Mr Armitage, I'm a police officer. I hear a lot more than I repeat, and I realise sometimes job ethics and spiritual ethics might conflict."

"It was imprudent of me, I know," Armitage said in the mournful tones of a confession, "but it felt...well, ordained is probably too daring a word, but not totally amiss. I had a visitor in my office when I was told Mr Abbas had arrived early for his appointment. I don't mind saying, I was distraught at having to tell him we'd considered his offer, had to decline, and I -- well, if one can't unburden himself to a priest, right? Especially to one so knowledgeable."

Not even a small surprise to Lewis by then, more like inevitability. He didn't bother to ask for the name, simply waited for it to arrive. "He was interested, I take it?"

"Concerned," Armitage corrected with all the sincerity of the deluded. "He was good enough to stay, ease my discomfort and Mr Abbas's disappointment. Such a saintly soul, Father Cleaves."

And there was the essential connection. "Thank you for your time. Mr Armitage, I won't take up any more of it."

Lewis left the museum, got into his car. Not much of a mystery after all, someone coveting something badly enough to kill to own it: simple. Happened too often. The difficulty was in getting past Hathaway's faith in Cleaves and his faith. James couldn't have been that wrong, could he?

Perhaps he was too right. How would the passive, hand-wringing fanaticism of Armitage
manifest itself in a much more arrogant, peremptory personality? There's nothing more dangerous than a righteous believer who imagines he's on a divine mission.

As much as he wished to spare James, it seemed impossible. However Llewellyn-Pierce came into it, it wasn't hard to imagine how a dogmatic man and a mercenary one would clash if they'd been snarling over the same bone. Hathaway was sharp, persistent, he'd dig out the connection from his end soon enough. Perhaps it was just as well Lewis could act first and at least keep James from having to disillusion himself.

He should get a search warrant for St Justin's and see if he could locate the damned artefacts. Of course, as soon as he asked for that warrant, Innocent was going to get awfully cranky, anticipating the Catholic hierarchy from Oxford to Westminster going ballistic. And once the media got a whiff of it, they'd be off to the races. Maybe he could proceed more cautiously, appeal to Cleaves's superior and get permission for a discreet search from him. Bishop Osborn must prefer to avoid the media frenzy. So would the Israeli government. Because of the involvement of a foreign ally, someone might even slap a D-Notice on the whole thing and it could be wrapped up quietly. Considering what Hathaway had said about the relationship between them, the bishop should be a big help in getting his priest to cooperate.

At the Chancery of St Justin's, a hive of activity, he was told Bishop Osborn had left the premises early, hadn't notified the office of his destination -- over which the diocesan secretary seemed rather put out. He suggested tartly that the bishop's personal secretary might be more informed. However, Father Cleaves was also out, at the Randolph to greet a delegation arriving from the Vatican. Surely Lewis could appreciate how busy everyone was at the moment -- such an honour, the next day's holy visit -- but if he was still set on finding out His Excellency's whereabouts, he could check with the bishop's driver at the Chapter House.

"Drove him to Burcot, didn't I? He's got a place there," the uniformed man said once Lewis located him in the vestibule instead of the Chapter House, holding the ladder for a young nun who was giving the statue of some saint a good scrub. Every nook and cranny of the church seemed to be getting a thorough cleaning, an old priest sending boys hither and yon, Sister Agatha supervising an army of nuns applying wet and dry mops with vigour. If Very Important Guests were due to arrive, Osborn should be doubly eager to avoid embarrassment.

"Where in Burcot?" Lewis was familiar with the village, having diverted there often on the way back from visiting Val's relatives in Redding because the kids had never seemed able to wait the last fifteen minutes to get to the loo at home. It was a charming little spot by the Thames, but if anything was there other than a some cottages and a pub, he'd never seen it.

The driver's answer got lost as someone started running a noisy vac, making the man repeat himself loudly, "His garage."

"The address?" Lewis specified as loudly.

"No call for an address, a rental. There be four in a row on the Green."

If Osborn was renting a lock-up in the village, he must have property in the area, far enough to need his own vehicle to get around. Probably the place McKenna meant when she'd complained about carting the man's collection to and from the 'back of beyond.' "I meant his address."

"Not a baldy, sorry. I just take him to his garage. He wants drivin' back, he rings from the pub. Father Cleaves drives him regular though, don't he? He'd know."

Lewis didn't care to tangle with Cleaves just yet, neither did he bother asking anyone else at
the church. If Osborn was keeping a valuable collection in a private home, his best security would be secrecy. If Cleaves had the freedom of such a place, the stolen artefacts might very well be stashed there. He got into his car, took out his phone. Secrecy was well and good, but no property stayed secret to utility bills and official records. He almost rang Hathaway out of habit, caught himself, rang Julie instead, asked her to find the bishop's country residence and ring him back with the address, then headed for Burcot.

"Good God, you again." Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce glared sourly at Hathaway upon opening the door. "What's left to rifle through, our knickers?"

"Probably," he told her bluntly, "unless you can give me a toothbrush or a hairbrush you husband uses regularly."

"Don't be absurd. Do you think he packed to leave and didn't take -- " her brain seemed to catch up to her mouth and colour drained out of her face. "Oh, my God." She bit her lip, spun on her heels and walked away stiffly, leaving the door open.

Hathaway followed her inside as she went the length of the house in a straight line until she came up against the fireplace in the room at the far end, slammed her hands against it as if she wanted it to open up and let her keep walking. She had been so cold and calculating previously at the idea of losing her husband that he had not given enough credence to Lewis's assessment of her feelings. He should've considered the big difference between a possibility and a certainty. The fact that she'd been rubbing him the wrong way all along was no excuse, he could've been a lot more tactful. "I do apolo --" he started.

"Don't bother," she snapped, with her back to him, leaning rigid-armed into her hands on the mantelpiece, still pushing against the unyielding stone. "If you're going to be as mealy-mouthed as yesterday, don't bother at all. If you have something definite to say, I'll hear it."

"We found your husband's car, empty, blood stains on the driver's seat. We need a match before we can proceed."

"He's presumed dead?"

"Yes."

She pulled up straight, took one hand off the mantel, used the toe of her shoe to rummage through the kindling and the crumpled papers in the grate. "There," she said when she'd uncovered a wad of dark-stained paper napkins. "He used them when his hand bled. Haven't lit the fire since. There were stains on the rug, too, but I've scrubbed them."

He put on gloves and placed the lot in an evidence bag as she stood watching him. "I'm sorry," he said, sealing the bag, "but I must break the lock on his desk drawer."

"Toolbox is in the garage, break away," she said with a wave, then continued the motion to grab one of the small porcelain horses on the mantel, hurled it to shatter against the wall behind him. "Thought I'd make a start," she explained matter-of-factly, picking up another one of the delicate figurines, using it to indicate the rest crowding the mantelpiece. "Aren't they just darling?"

That was the word for them all right. *Too cute for me*, he didn't want to say. He remembered Scarlett had owned similar pieces when she was a little girl. "They look like original Beswicks."
"Good eye. So tell me, if you know someone likes those," she nodded at two equine statuettes flanking the fireplace, abstract pieces that were little more than armatures, one resembling a rough pencil sketch translated into strips of welded steel, the other a horse-shaped exoskeleton made of loosely twisted wire, "how much attention are you not paying if you keep buying her these?" She sent the figurine flying and nodded approvingly as it broke.

Hathaway looked from the stylised expression of raw grace and power of the statuettes to the cloying figurines prancing across the width of the chimney-front, saw her point and left her to it. Obviously, railing against her husband's disinterest was more important to her right then than the money she could make off the dainty things.

He found the tools, chose a screwdriver and a hammer, went into the study, set up his own racket. The desk was typical IKEA; he didn't worry overly much about damaging it as he forced the drawer open. Spread out over the odds and ends in it were photographs printed on plain paper. Unlike the other photos of artefacts cluttering the room, these looked to be shot on something indifferent like a phone camera, by an equally indifferent eye. A finger or two of a hand obscured parts of the images, leaving text visible, roughly carved on some sort of peeling, rusty metal. He pulled out the papers Ginny had given him. He matched the mirror inscription almost immediately, was finding others when he came across a shot that had pulled back and caught more of the hand. It had a heavy ring on it, diocesan seal engraved on oval-shaped amethyst --

"You might want to know he expected a large sum of money shortly," Mrs Llewellyn-Pierce said from the door, making him look up. "For what and from whom, I have no idea." She started to turn away, paused to add before she walked off, "Not for anything legitimate, I'd bet."

-- he looked back down; the trefoil top of a cross was distinguishable on one side of the setting for the gem. He'd recently kissed that ring.

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Lewis was almost at Burcot when Julie rang to say the utility companies had no record of supplying anything to a residence listed under Osborn's name. She was checking the Land Registry, would ring back as soon as she could. It was past noon, village pubs tended to be founts of local information, so Lewis pulled up in front of The Chequers. The timber-frame building with its deeply sloping thatched roof was as charming as he remembered, but once he went inside, he saw it had been modernized mercilessly. The menu with its roulades and rilettes, tuilles and mousselins threatened to give him a headache until he saw they still had fish-and-chips, now claiming world-wide fame. When it arrived, he had to admit the claim might be deserved, but doubted the world was widely aware of it. There were no old-timers propping up the bar, only tourists, and getting any useful information from the blithe, too-young staff was a lost cause.

By the time he finished eating, he still hadn't heard from Julie. "I'm sorry, sir," she said when he rang, sounding frustrated, " Bishop Osborn has no property recorded in the Land Registry, which may not be saying much as one-fifth of all land is still unregistered. I checked the Electoral Registry, but that only includes his residence at the church. There's no land tax paid under his name, nothing insured. I'm still looking."

"That's all right, I didn't expect it to be easy. Even his official driver at his church had no idea," he told her as he left the pub and headed for his car. "It gave me time for a decent lunch."

"I can go on the Historical Electoral Registry and track down his family holdings, in case he's using a relative's estate. If he comes from a long-line, the Heritage Preservation Society might have
inheritance information as well. If the estate is held through the maternal line, it'll take time to untangle the surnames, but I'll get there in the end."

She sounded so much like Hathaway when he had the bit between his teeth that he chuckled. "No grounds for a siege, Osborn's not a suspect. I'm just hoping he'd do us a favour, that's all. Can't trespass on the bloke's whole family and ask his help. I'll find him sooner or later."

He stood by his car after he rang off, telling himself to take the useless jaunt as a nice, unexpected outing on a weekday and start back. Except he was feeling as restless as he always did towards the tail end of an investigation, itching to get on with it. *It's not as if we're in feudal England, he thought, old or not, an estate needs at least a few amenities. The odd manor might still get its water from wells, Osborn might use his as no more than a warehouse, may have chosen secrecy over insurance, but no serious collector would leave his collection to the vagaries of weather and humidity. On or off the utility grid, there had to be a dependable energy source. He pulled his BlackBerry back out, did a quick search before he drove off to find some likely places to flash his warrant card and expect answers.*

His second stop, Thames Boiler and Propane Services, a short distance away towards Abingdon, turned out to be the right place. The company did indeed regularly service two industrial propane tanks installed at a very remote, very old estate, called Harrowford Hall, in the area the inspector mentioned. Sure, they had an address, but it was the devil to find and if Lewis didn't care to get lost, he'd best wait to get directions from a driver familiar with the route. One of them would be in shortly.

It wasn't all that shortly, but once he got in the driver was very detailed, even did a rough drawing for Lewis. "One landmark's much like the other there, mate, an awful lot o' trees, undergrowth, and ruins. Only fit for badgers, the last bit o' the road -- track, more like. You'll need this."

Lewis took the sheet of paper, thanked him, but wasn't concerned. His car should handle a road that served a lorry. He topped off his petrol tank to be on the safe side, checked his watch and considered that Osborn might or might not still be at the place, but after so much trouble to locate it, he wanted to be certain of the way in case he had to send in a team to conduct a search.

The first half of the drive was fine, too twisty around copses where he scared a few rabbits and a roe deer, but rather lovely. At length, potholes showed up and put an end to the enjoyment. Past an old ruin overgrown with vegetation, he turned onto a rough gravel road, the stones thrown up by the tyres setting up a steady racket and probably wreaking havoc with his undercarriage. Rusty palings and remains of old tracks told him the makeshift road had been laid over a defunct railway, probably resulting from the Beeching cuts of the Sixties, uprooted rails long-discarded by the wayside. He tried to keep an eye out for the dirt track but could only hope he chose correctly: one stretch of beech trees looked just like the next to him.

The track was more or less level if not the least bit straight, its surface corrugated like a washboard, turning suspension into a joke. It was strewn with rocks here and there, making Lewis realise where a lorry had the advantage: the clearance of its underside. Osborn must own a four-wheel drive.

He knew he was going faster than he should on the chancy road, but no way did he want to drive back on it once it got dark -- big mistake: a tight curve banked at too steep an angle, hit a sandy stretch and the tyres lost traction. The car drifted into the less-compacted shoulder before he could regain control, slid off the embankment into a ditch, along with a small avalanche of soil and stones and one loud screech of the passenger side against a boulder, came to a puttering, rocking stop.
Lewis sat back in the seat until the vibrations died down and his muscles could unclench. He loosened his tie, unbuttoned his collar and took a deep breath. All right. That could've been worse. The car might disagree, of course. But once Lewis collected himself and tried the engine, it started up again. The ditch had a gentle enough slope which had deposited him at a decline without tossing him violently; Lewis assumed he could manage to get out of it. But reversing only made the wheels dig deeper into the loose soil and going forward with the nose of the car angled down into a mound of earth was out of the question for anything but a mole. Well, bugger.

Big chunks of the day, not to mention the car, were going to be a loss, no help for it. He'd call for a tow, sort that out, go back to the station and do something useful with whatever was left of his day by then. Getting out of the car that had been shaking him to bits and onto his own feet actually made him feel better -- until he tried his phone and saw it had no bars.

He dropped the useless thing back into his pocket. Right. Onward or back? According to the piece of paper, only a little way left to go, except there might be no one there by now. A lot further to go back, but he only needed to walk until he regained phone service. He could also save time by cutting across country -- no, bad idea. If he got lost and, God forbid, had to be found, he'd never live it down. Hathaway would endlessly take the piss about how he'd so cleverly mislaid himself in the horrible, terrible, no good, very bad wilds of Oxfoxfordshire. Anytime he had to venture outside the city from then on the stroppy git would all too cheerfully offer to be his minder.

He heard rustling from the other side of the track, someone scrambling heavily through the thickets. "Are you all right?" a laboured voice called out. "Are you all right?"

Lewis edged around the car and supported himself on the boot to scramble out of the ditch. "No harm done," he called back to the powerfully-built man who lumbered out of the woods onto the track and to a sudden stop upon seeing him. "Except to my car," Lewis amended, dusting off his hands. "I'm fine."

The bloke kept staring at him. Maybe he'd been expecting someone else, or he simply couldn't talk for breathing like the bellows. He was quite old and more laden than he should be. He was wearing a tweed cap, work gloves, baggy corduroy trousers with heavy boots, and a dusty Barbour. He had a large bundle of branches and twigs under one arm, held together by loops of twine, an axe in the other hand, and he was carrying cords of chopped wood secured in place by webbing on a rucksack frame slung over his shoulders.

"I'm looking for Harrowford Hall," Lewis told him. The eyes that had been studying him intently flickered up past his head and quickly came back to him. Lewis crossed the track and when he turned to look towards where the man had glanced, he saw the crenellated top of a building past the rise of a pitted, rock-strewn hill. "Is that it?"

His answer was a noncommittal grunt. Used to country folk being taciturn with strangers, Lewis didn't take it personally. "I gather you work there?" Nothing else around, and a caretaker hauling firewood to a place managed off the grid made sense, even if he didn't think it right for an old man to be used like a beast of burden. "Can I help you with those?"

Still wheezing, the bloke finally spoke, clearly quoting, "'Come to me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'"

Uh-huh. Of course. What other sort of labourer would a bishop hire? "Right. But as it's just us here -- " he reached for the armful of branches only to have the man twist to keep the bundle away. Hathaway might be enlightened enough to call the attitude rural reticence, Lewis was more inclined to call it bloody mulish. He was tempted to shrug and start walking back, then remembered he was still a stranger to the old man. "I'm Inspector Lewis, Oxfordshire Police. I wanted a word with
Bishop Osborn," he said belatedly, showed his ID. The caretaker squinted at the warrant card for so long that Lewis despaired of his comprehension. "Is he available, do you know?"

No return introduction, only, "We don't get visitors."

*Over that road, no wonder.* "I'm not one exactly. I still need a word and those look heavy, let me help you."

Again, the twisting away, even though Lewis hadn't moved. "Not a good time."

Fast losing patience, he indicated his car. "I'm not having a grand time, either. I'd appreciate some help even if you don't."

The man shook his head as if in refusal, but what he said was, "'Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.'" He handed over the wood bundled under his arm. "Follow me." Gruffly, he added, "Do not interrupt, I must finish my prayers."

They were on their way when it dawned on Lewis that it was likely to be dark by the time he started back. He should've got the torch from his car, but maybe he could borrow one, or he might even get a lift if the bishop was still around. There was no sense in trying to talk to the caretaker; he was intent on keeping an unflagging pace that belied his years and muttering to himself solemnly. And muttering, and muttering. He was either in that much need of divine intercession, or was avoiding conversation. *Next time there's a whiff of churchy-ness to a case, I must do myself a favour and pass,* Lewis was thinking when a change in the wind carried a few words of the old man's prayer to him. *Latin?* In and around Oxford, not exactly unheard of, even for a menial. Still, though....

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As things stood, Hathaway didn't care to run into Edmund just yet, but he had a question to ask at St Justin's. He already knew Osborn's official car had delivered him to the Powell lot early Thursday evening, its entry noted on the gate-log. As they didn't note the departing cars, there was no way to know if it had stayed around to drive him back or left right away. If the latter -- *someone* had driven Llewellyn-Pierce's car out of the place. With the wrapped body inside, he assumed.

St Justin's was in full mobilisation mode for something, but Father Cleaves was nowhere to be seen, much to Hathaway's relief, even though he was uncomfortably aware that he had to talk to the man soon. He no longer had the luxury of disregarding the odd turns their conversations had taken, and the feeling he'd had all along that something serious was bothering Edmund.

In search for Osborn's driver, he was sent outside through the back of the building where, he was told, the man could be found taking a break. There was a gardening shed at the back, and a long enclosure that looked to have been a stable block once, now converted into a multi-stall garage. The driver was leaning against the end of the block, smoking. He straightened and started to put out his cigarette upon seeing someone approach until Hathaway raised his hand and said, "No need. I'll join you." He lit a cigarette, then introduced himself.

The man raised his eyebrows. "Fair mobbed today, we are. What might you be after, guv?"

"A quick word. Last Thursday evening, you drove Bishop Osborn to the film lot. Did you wait and drive him back?"

"Nah, never do. Father Cleaves is there regular, ain't he? Himself prefers comin' back with
Not on that night, he couldn't have. As plenty of people had attested, Edmund hadn't left the lot until the next day. "Cheers," Hathaway said and left the man to enjoy his smoke in peace. Loath to toss his own cigarette away after only a few draws, he chose to walk around the church rather than through it.

He circled the garage to the narrow driveway that serviced it, took a few steps and suddenly realised he could see the tip of the west tower of St Cross directly ahead. He spun around -- a slope past the garage of the church ended in a narrow alley and on the other side of it was another block of garages, abandoned, overgrown, inside a debris-filled yard. Coming in and out the main entrance of St Justin's fronting a whole different street, he'd never noticed that the back of the sprawling complex was only about forty yards from where Idris Abbas's body had been found. Christ.

He went back to his car, got in and dropped his head into the contoured rest. He had yet to own a car where the head rest did anything but push its top uncomfortably against his occipital bone, but a discomfort with a physical cause was welcome at the moment.

According to his wife, Llewellyn-Pierce had been expecting a substantial amount of cash. Blackmail? Considering the discarded certificates the man must've known were bogus but had signed anyway, entrapment followed by blackmail?

The bits and pieces Hathaway had heard while going down the staircase of the tower with the missing bells were falling into place. Had Llewellyn-Pierce gambled that Osborn would be so set on catching Vatican's benevolent attention that he would pay handsomely not to be thwarted? The greedy professor had to have been too impressed by his own clever trap not to realise some people were too dangerous to trifle with.

Hathaway was willing to bet Idris Abbas would have recognised the printouts of the photos now bulging his pocket. He had to share the evidence with Lewis. He would, as soon as he sorted things in his own mind.

For the love of God! A man of faith, a bishop? But then, it wasn't the first time Hathaway had to face conscience and faith didn't necessarily go hand in hand. As bitter a knowledge as it was, he'd learned that there was as much difference between morality and religion as between justice and law. It was the reason he no longer went to confession, crossed himself, or genuflected, hoping that past the trappings there was still an uncluttered, simple path to belief. Just as, even in the most convoluted cases, there was a straightforward line to solution once past the petty posturings, evasions, fears and lies and secrets.

He was starting to see the line connecting the two cases, and he prayed --please, God, please-- that Murdoch Cullen had served only to misdirect identification and gone unmolested from then on to the natural end of his life. He couldn't totally escape the fact that Edmund had discouraged him from attending St Justin's while Cullen had been alive, but neither could he bear to consider the old man may have died shortly afterwards because Hathaway's attention had been drawn to the place. Or the ramifications of his 'witnessing' it.

All too clearly, he wasn't capable of being as objective as he had to be. He sat up and started the car. Having his own case be damned, he needed Lewis.

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Harrowford Hall must've looked over a rambling estate once, derelict farm sheds and collapsed silos dotted the decayed grounds. Unlike most neglected places in the fertile countryside, nature had mostly passed up on reclaiming this one. The manor house stood solitary, an aged stone building, most of its windows boarded up and barred, stacks of wood and a large jerry can on its wide portico. An upper floor had intact windows with blinds, looking oddly well-kept in contrast to the rest of the building. The collection must reside there.

The old man headed for the Land Rover parked in the driveway that must've been magnificent once, fumbling with the hem of his jacket to get to the pocket of his trousers. He couldn't seem to manage it with the heavy work glove, used his teeth to tug it off, tucked it into his pocket and fished out a set of keys. "Here," he held them out to Lewis. "The Land Rover's cleared plenty of trees off the road, it'll pull out your car. The tackle's in the back." He jiggled the keys when Lewis didn't immediately reach for them. "Best hurry, be dark soon."

Lewis let the keys keep dangling from the hand that obviously hadn't seen much menial work in its long life and listened to his intuition, "Kind of you, Bishop Osborn, but I'd sooner have a word."

"Ah." Even when looking directly at Lewis, there was an inwardness to the man's eyes, an unseeing self-absorption. "I've said this isn't a good time, I don't like repeating myself. I suggest you take the keys and go."

"I can do that." He leaned to unload the bundle of wood onto the ground. "But I'll be back with a search warrant for your house and church, and the media's likely to be right behind me. You should spare the time whilst discretion's still possible."

"Are you threatening me?"

Shouldn't the man think to ask what it was about instead of jumping directly into umbrage? Then again, the self-important ones tended to bristle as a knee-jerk reaction. "I'm trying to be helpful. This has to do with one of your priests, Father Cleaves. I'm investigating multiple murders, tied to a set of stolen relics. I have evidence that links him to the crimes."

That brought the codger off his high horse. "Edmund? This is about Edmund?" It seemed to stagger him, he leaned heavily onto the bonnet of the Land Rover. "No, Inspector, you're wrong," he asserted, but in a pleading tone. "You're very wrong."

"Wouldn't be the first time," Lewis said soothingly, out of deference for the man's age and dismay. "You may well be right, but I must follow the evidence where it leads. If you'll use your influence to help me, my enquiries may remain discreet."

Osborn kept shaking his head. "You don't know him. Any sin that's touched him was never his own. He's a lamb, leave him be."

"The best thing he can do is come in and explain his involvement. If he has none that matters in law, I'll gladly leave him be."

"It's up to you?"

"So far. Allow me to search St Justin's and this place, convince Father Cleaves to talk to me openly and it might not go any further."

"Is that's why you came?" He seemed to find it ironic. "To ask me to help you?"

"If your confidence in Father Cleaves is justified, you'll be helping him."
Correct thing to say, apparently; Osborn suddenly turned decisive. "Then I must, mustn't I? He's never been false to me, I owe him." He put his keys back into his pocket, put down the axe, and indicated the load on his back. "Will you help me out of this, Inspector? I'm rather tired." Once it was off his shoulders, he thanked Lewis with a quick "Bless," and picked up the axe again. "If you don't mind carrying the wood to the kitchen for me?"

Lewis held the rucksack frame at his side by its straps with one hand, hoisted the bundle of branches from the ground with the other, followed the bishop towards the back of the building. If Osborn stayed amenable, he might get a lift later and could call for a tow instead of dealing with dragging his car out of the ditch. He wasn't all that young himself, his day felt too long already. He was missing his sturdy bagman for more reasons than one.

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Hathaway stopped by the lab to drop off the evidence bag containing the bloody napkins before he headed for his office, passing by people on their way out of the station for the day and the evening shift trickling in. He glanced at his watch, wondering if Lewis was still around. Some of Grainger's lot remained at work in the incident room, but their office was empty. He went in and immediately noticed a stack of photos on Lewis's desk that hadn't been there before. He tossed his coat over the back of his chair and picked them up. As soon as he started flipping through them he recognised the artefacts, obviously photographed during the course of an excavation, the menorah on the official stamps at the back of the photos connecting them to the Middle East. He huffed to himself, part miffed, part impressed. Trust Lewis to have tracked the things down on his own already, all the way back to the original site of the find.

He quickly updated the case files, pulled out his mobile as he headed for the tech office. He could at least confirm the link between the artefacts and Llewellyn-Pierce, connect a few more dots for Lewis -- whose phone went to voicemail immediately. "If you'd ring me back, sir, I need to fill you in." He frowned at the phone as he cut the connection. Lewis must be still working, probably in the midst of something important he didn't want interrupted. He wouldn't turn off his phone otherwise, especially nowadays when he was eagerly anticipating his grandchild's arrival.

At the IT nook, Gurdip was buttoning his coat to leave, Lockhart was tidying one of the desks. They both paused to look at him. "Not urgent, but soon would be good," he told them. "If you'd request the phone records for Professor Llewellyn-Pierce and see if there are any calls to or from St Justin's or Bishop Osborn's private line. Just in the last month."

"I'll put in the request now," Gurdip said, going back to his desk, while Julie asked, "I got diverted from tracking down the bishop's address, Sarge, should I get back to it?"

"He lives in the residence of St Justin's."

"No, no, the country estate. The one you were looking for earlier."

"What're you talking about?" He knew the man's collection was stored somewhere, but hadn't thought to locate it yet. He didn't think a Catholic bishop should own an estate in the first place, but maybe he belonged to an order that didn't require the vow of poverty, and in any case, where was the sense in expecting a murderer to be principled enough to respect his vows? "I wasn't looking for a country estate for Osborn."

"Oh, sorry. Inspector Lewis was out in Burcot trying to find it. I assumed you were with him."
Trying to find Osborn's country estate? For a search? He wouldn't be in Burcot doing that himself, he'd send in a team.

"Sorry for the confusion," Julie was continuing. "He said it wasn't important, but that was hours ago, he hasn't come back yet and you want the man's calls traced. Thought I'd ask."

An uneasy feeling gripped him. He raised a finger to tell her to hold it a minute and rang the duty sergeant. "Check the roster, would you, anyone out with Lewis?" The uneasiness bordered on dread when the response was negative. "Start from the beginning," he told Julie.

****

Lewis followed Osborn to the back of the house, past two huge propane tanks partly sunk into the earth inside cement cradles, to a squat annexe connected to the main house by a short, enclosed passage. The rear of the three-storey building rose like a grey stone cliff, punctuated by slits of iron-grated openings. It may have looked like a castle once, or been one before the manor had spread out from it, looked more like a prison now. Inside, the annexe was half conservatory, half-scullery, with an old mangle and a huge, discoloured copper tub, leading into a kitchen that predated electricity. It housed the biggest cooker Lewis had ever seen, cheek by jowl with a sooty, mouldy fireplace holding a spit and large, rusty hooks for hanging pots. Strewn over the cracked tiles were discarded containers and barrels, all thick with dust and clearly unused, except the dust on the floor had a clear swathe cutting through it. At some point a more convenient, modern kitchen must've been built inside the main house.

Lewis walked past the bishop to a termite-eaten table, hefted the wood onto it, tried to brush the clumps of soil and wood chips off his anorak, gave it up as a bad job. "If there's somewhere we can sit and talk-- this way?" he asked, indicating the double-hinged door opposite the way they'd come in. There had to be a well-maintained section somewhere for the collection. On the purloined letter theory, he wanted a gander at it.

Osborn had stopped, filling the exit to the outdoors. "Anima quae peccaverit ipsa morietur," he intoned, seemingly at the axe he hefted in both hands. "Filius non portabit iniquitatem patris."

Why did people see fit to mouth Latin at him so often? He was neither a Catholic nor an Oxonian. "Sorry. Didn't bring my interpreter along." I should have, the thought came out of nowhere.

Osborn looked at him with disturbing alertness. "Ezekiel 18:20," he said. "'The soul who sins shall die, but the son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father.'" Eyes bright and feral, he swung the axe high as he lunged.

I made a big mistake. Lewis whirled, slammed through the swinging door. It smashed open, banged against the wall of the passage, ricocheted. He could manage an old man, even a large one, but not past the reach of an axe -- which he heard thunk into the door as it swung back behind him.

Ahead was the entry to the house. Bricked off. An arched opening to one side. He changed direction, skidding a little, hurtled into it, lurched against the wall when it dropped off into uneven stone steps spiralling down, from gloom into pitch black. Felt like madness to chance it, but with madness already on his heels darkness had to do. Splitting his head open on stones or an axe made no odds, and the steps might lead to a cellar with an exit to the outside. He put his hand on the wall
Hathaway had said Cleaves would do anything for Osborn. Lewis had failed to consider what Osborn might do for Cleaves. *What price your 'master pianist' now, James?*

"A favour!" Hathaway burst out, trying Lewis's phone again with little hope. "He wanted to ask Osborn a *favour*?" As someone knowledgeable in relics? No, this was Oxford, he could've found one around any corner. "The man's a killer. What was he thinking?"

"He said Osborn wasn't a suspect, he sounded sure," Julie was trying to be soothing although she had also started to look worried. "Anyway, he didn't have an address, I doubt he could've found it by driving around."

How often did Lewis fail to find what he was looking for? The man could interview a fence post and get results. Out in the country, it may have been as simple as running into an old local walking his dog."Where is he, then?" He realised he was shaking his useless phone in Julie's face like a reproach, made himself stop. "I need to find him, *now.*"

She was already at her keyboard. "I may have a general location. I found a distant family connection to an estate that used to be in the area, called Harrowford Hall, listed as somewhere past Oakthorpe hill and Kestrel Hollow -- a long stretch on the ordnance maps. Thought I'd find a ford over a brook or a tributary named Harrow, but there isn't one."

"Could've been dammed or diverted. Lots of waterways were rerouted during canal work," Gurdip put in, his attention also on his screen.

"I'll get maps that predate the canals -- God, I hope they've been scanned," Julie said fervently. "It'll take so long to get hard copies."

If she could find anybody still in the Bodleian archives around closing hours. Clutching at straws, Hathaway thought to look and see if Lewis had called in for a warrant, but he wouldn't have gone in ahead of a warrant or delivered a warrant alone. Hell, he wouldn't have gone alone -- for a *favour!* if he'd had the slightest suspicion a warrant against Osborn was indicated. *He doesn't know. Would've known if I'd called him soon as I found the evidence. As it is, he doesn't know. Christ!"

"Can't ping his mobile, must be outside the service area," Gurdip said, frowning at his screen. "I'll track his SatNav."

"Don't bother," Hathaway had to tell him. They'd both been routinely issued a set for their cars, in the opinion of both of them, needlessly. While Hathaway had at least installed his, Lewis had taken one look and tossed it into the boot, grumbling that in Oxfordshire he could tell it where to go. "It's still in its package." He lifted his phone again, scrolling through the numbers for St Justin's. "Osborn uses a driver, *he* must --"

"No good, Sarge," Julie interrupted apologetically. "Guv asked him. He'd been to the church already when he told me to search."

One person from St Justin's was sure to know, but if he knew more than he should, he might not be forthcoming. At this juncture, Hathaway preferred to be no further than arm's length when he
asked Edmund anything. Ginny had said the documentary had stalled, so he wouldn't be on set or elsewhere at the film company -- wait. The film company. "I'm an idiot!"

He saw Gurdip and Julie aim questioning looks at him, didn't waste time to explain. "Call me if you find anything, or if Lewis comes back," he threw over his shoulder, running out.

*****

Stale air and the musty smell of mould rose up from the narrow stairwell to wrap around Lewis. A few more steps, and damp mould was under his hand like slimy turf, cushioning the rough stones of the wall he was following. He yanked his hand away, wiped it on his trousers, used his elbow against the wall to guide himself, adding his shoulder when the stairs, already eroded in the middle by generations of use, acquired the same slippery feel.

He noticed the press of darkness turn from black to brown, looked up, saw dull light was starting to spill down the curved walls. He could hear rustle of movement above him, accompanied by the bishop's rumbling voice, weirdly crooning. Osborn had supplied himself with a torch and was following. By the sounds and the creep of the light, unhurriedly. He hoped it was due to the nutter's age and bulk, and not to his certainty that the stairs led to, for all Lewis knew, the family burial chamber.

Lewis outdistanced him so easily that by the time he ran out of stairs and the wall against his shoulder became a corner that veered off sharply, he was in pitch black again. He hesitated, unsure where his next step would land. Then spectral, purplish splotches emerged faintly from the darkness, marking the floor and the walls of the enclosure. Sulphur spores? Reeked enough for it.

No place to go. Or hide, once exposed by the torch. Angry, mostly at his own blunders, moving for no other reason than that he couldn't stay still, he took some paces, the stone floor smoother underfoot than the wall had been, but just as slimy. His next step landed on metal with a clang and made him stop. He dragged his foot back to the edge of it. A curved edge, an inch or so higher than the floor. Lid? Trapdoor?

For coal storage? Which might have a chute to the outside. With his luck, wide enough for a five-year-old, but he was already on his knees, feeling around the lid. He found a hasp with a sliding bar through it that took only a determined tug to come free of its latch with a screech. He could hear Osborn's mumbling again and torchlight was penetrating into the darkness, lifting it a bit more with each ponderous footfall down the stairs. Lewis checked to see if the lid would slide sideways or lift, felt the creaky give of a hinge, heaved it up and shoved it forcefully. It groaned and crashed against the stones on the other side with a resounding clatter.

Intending to feel for stairs in the opening, Lewis found himself falling back instead. He scrambled away, gagging at the stench that rushed up at him. The light getting stronger forced him to clap his hand over his mouth and nose and scramble back despite the putrid stink that made his eyes water and stomach heave.

Not for coal storage after all. From what he could dimly see at a distance lower than a man's height from him, a vast underground cistern. A mound of something floated on the surface, stagnant ripples glistening like oil slick snaked from it. No exit there.

Or anywhere. He rose to his feet, trying to ignore the nauseating smell. No other choice, he had to confront Osborn. It belatedly dawned on him that the bloke was carrying a torch now. He wouldn't be able to effectively swing the heavy axe one-handed. As long as Lewis avoided getting
blinded by the light, he could sidestep it until he regained the stairs ahead of the old man.

*Should've taken the keys to the Land Rover.* He pulled off his anorak to move more freely, considered wrapping it around his arm like a shield, then snorted at himself. Who was he, Spartacus? He tossed it to a far corner to keep from stumbling on it, backed into the wall, feeling ridiculous. Playing silly buggers with a loony. At his age.

****

One handed, the other hand on the steering wheel, Hathaway tried Lewis's number once more, got the voicemail again. "Ring me back right away, please," he said, grimaced at how beseeching he sounded. It could be as simple as lack of coverage or charge, or any number of things, and Lewis would be ringing him any minute to ask what had his knickers in a twist.

Except all the rational reasons Hathaway could come up with didn't help against the knowledge that in this warped case people who went missing stayed missing. No remains yet found to account for one, just a charred skeleton left of the other. And maybe yet another, down to a handful of ashes.

The first red light he came to made him grope under the dashboard and activate the siren he rarely remembered was there. It set his beams flashing and cars started getting out of his way. He had no idea if he had enough justification to use the emergency system and didn't care. He couldn't shake the dread that if he didn't get Robbie within his sight and reach now, he never would. He didn't think he could manage Rashid's resignation or Drusilla's cold anger. *I might lose my mind.*

****

The axe struck the wall behind where Lewis had been an instant earlier, so hard that it raised sparks.

Another mistake. Osborn had on something like a miner's hat, the source of the light, both hands still gripping the axe as he paced Lewis. Despite the powerful swing, he lumbered. If Lewis had ducked under his arms instead of instinctively jumping away he could've restrained the man or been on the way up already.

"Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae," Osborn had started repeating with the strike of the axe, kept shouting it fit to tear his throat. The imminent danger of being maimed or killed wasn't enough, no, Lewis had to have drivel bellowed at him.

Watching Osborn's advance with eyes downcast against the light, he backed up in a semi-circle until the stairwell was free. He was gathering himself for a quick dash when his foot landed on the metal bar he'd left on the floor after pulling it out of its hasp. It slid over the slippery stones, he slid with it, threw his arms out to catch his balance and stumbled back -- into the opening left by the trapdoor.

All he could think was how much he did not want to sink into that noxious slime, squeezed his eyes and mouth shut, and his nostrils as much as possible. He landed on something that felt like blubber rather than water and he sank sluggishly, more a slow dip than a sink. With a heavy, wet slap the water seemed to wrap around his legs, then he was borne higher as the folds -- *folds*? -- slid
off him. *What the -- ?*

But he knew, should've known earlier. Despite all the other fetid smells around, he should've recognised the stench of decomposition at the first stink that had risen out of the reservoir. A bloated corpse was holding him more or less afloat. His first instinct was to flail away from it, but torchlight shone down on him and, bugger the revulsion, no way would he thrash like a hooked fish while that bastard watched.

Just as well, he realised, or he would've become hopelessly tangled in the slimy folds of the tarpaulin he could identify once his eyes were open. Must've been wrapped around the corpse, now spread loose, rippling on the surface. The corpse rolled as he slid off it into the water, the face grotesquely swollen, discoloured, then rolled onto its front again. One hand, skin already sloughing, drifted as though the only thing holding the arm attached to the body was the sleeve.

Lewis paddled away, careful to keep the filthy water below his chin, all the while thinking: *Or what, you'll catch something and die in bed? You should be so lucky.*

Osborn seemed to be talking to him, no longer shouting, just loud enough to get his attention. He squinted up, "Oh," he clearly heard, and the light moved so it wasn't shining directly into his face, "my apologies."

He'd have dropped his jaw at the absurdity if he could've.

"Are you Catholic, Inspector? May I offer you a last service?" Osborn asked, all benevolence, while towering up there with the axe still in his hand.

*Don't engage the mental,* Lewis told himself, treading water gingerly, *it'll make your head explode.*

"As you wish then," Osborn said mildly, backing away after waiting a polite while. "If you'll have nothing of me...."

The light bobbed and bounced overhead, a grunt, the creak of the hinge, and Lewis saw the trapdoor rise. "Answers," he found himself calling out. Well, he was due *something.*

The metal lid stopped moving, Osborn came back into view. "Yes?"

"Cleaves? He's -- " The stench was making him breathe shallowly, not enough to stay buoyant and talk.

" -- not to be blamed," Osborn finished for him. "He met a dealer, knew I'd be interested, brought him to me. He meant no harm."

*Should've had more faith in James's word.* Lewis indicated the corpse, "Llewellyn-Pierce?"

"Correct."

*The body, Ma'am, as ordered. Looks like you'll be getting two for the price of one, though.*

"How many -- " so hard to talk without swallowing filth, " -- did you kill? Two or three?"

"In all fairness, two were unintentional. The third," he also indicated the body, "he deserved it."

"I don't."
"I know, just doing your job. I am sorry. I did warn you it was a bad time."

Lewis heard a cracked cackle, realised it was coming out of his own mouth.

Osborn made the sign of the cross over him -- with the hand holding the axe, for crying out loud -- concluded with, "I'll be sure to say another act of contrition."

*So that's what he's been babbling all along. James would've known.*

The lid crashed down.

Lewis continued to tread the foul water in the foul dark, though he no longer knew why.

****

The gate of the film lot was already opening in response to the blaring siren and the flashing lights of the approaching car, so Hathaway didn't quite knock it off its post. By the time he pulled up at the warehouse, people were coming out to see what was going on, forming a mob around the entrance. As soon as he got out of the car, Powell was right there, yelling at him to get lost. Not the wisest tack at the moment, but Hathaway didn't care to waste time, scanned the crowd for McKenna and pointed at her.

"You," he said, scattering people out of his way to cut through to her. "I need directions to Bishop Osborn's estate. Quickly." She looked at him blankly. "Where he keeps his collection. The country estate. You've been filming the bloody collection, so come on."

"Yes, yes, I understand -- "stepping back, hands up to push at the air between them to keep him at bay " -- I just don't have the information."

He stabbed his finger past her head at the fake armoured van in its bay. "That thing's been making regular trips to it. Driven how, blindfolded? Get me the driver."

"We weren't allowed -- contractually -- to use our drivers. Father Cleaves drove the van to the estate and back, no one else."

*Damn it!* Obviously, neither Edmund nor Osborn had enough world-sense to know real armoured trucks could only be driven by bonded drivers.

"We just sent along a few people at a time to help carry the items securely," McKenna was saying, "that's all."

"Point them out."

"They wouldn't know," she said, raising her voice to be heard over Powell's, somewhere behind Hathaway and bleating on and on about how the buggering siren had ruined, fucking ruined, his set, he'd fucking well get compensated this time, it was his right by bleeding law, as any buggering idiot knew. "Brad, please," McKenna told him, which did nothing to stem the flow of vitriol. "Our crew had to sit in the back the whole way," she explained to Hathaway. "You can see it has no windows. They've been there, but they can't give you directions."

"Are you telling me nobody here has the first bloody idea?" Hathaway burst out with all the frustration of hitting another wall.
"Erm...I do," a hesitant voice piped up from behind him. He spun around, saw that Ginny, partially blocked by Powell, was regarding him as if he might explode. She lifted her iPad like a shield. "Well, this does." Then she explained in a rush, "They were just so haughty, being all secretive, treating us like idiots, so one time I was in the van I used a position-tracking app to track myself through GPS and saved a map of the route. Just because."

"You did what? Powell screamed at her. "We signed a contract, they'll sue us!"

"Shut it!" Hathaway yelled, shoving the man staggering out of his way. "Not you," he told Ginny who'd taken a step back at his approach, "you're brilliant. Mind if I have this?" he asked after the fact, having already yanked away her iPad. "Password -- come on, you can change it later, I have no interest in anything else in it."

"Erm, bowtiesarecool." She blushed deeply -- why, he didn't know or care. "One word. Os are zeros, capital R for 'are', k for c. My Tracks icon, fourth row. It's the only map in there."

"I'll return it soon as I can."

"That's all right, I can manage without it for a while."

"Thank you," he said as wholeheartedly as he meant it. He held up a finger in Powell's face as he was passing by, "She gets any grief over this, you'll be sorry." He hurried to his car, adding over his shoulder, "I do know the laws against battery, I just wouldn't give a toss."

In the car, he pulled up the map. It consisted of squiggly lines on a blank field. Once he chose the Satellite Mode option, the lines laid themselves neatly over landscape and the app started functioning like any navigation system. He wedged the iPad between the dashboard and the angle of the windscreen, drove off, the siren blaring at everyone to get the hell out of his way.

*****

After doing a circuit of the enclosing walls of the cistern, feeling as high as he could reach, Lewis decided that the cellar was a burial chamber of sorts after all. He'd have preferred one not so deep in its stinking bowels, though.

The water felt miserably, numbingly cold, but it had to average out around seven or eight degrees above freezing. At lower temperatures, a corpse would take longer than five days to bob to the surface. Still, it was cold enough to kill him, it'd just take its time going about it. An hour, maybe a little longer -- if the gasses in the air didn't make him lose consciousness first. So really, what was the point?

If he'd known the result would be the same, he wouldn't have tried so hard to avoid the axe. It would've left bone-deep evidence even if everything else dissolved by the time they pulled him out of this cesspool. Not that it would take that long. Hathaway may not start wondering until Lewis didn't show up at work in the morning, but after that he wouldn't stop until he retraced Lewis's actions and put it all together. Nobody was going to be fooled into thinking Llewellyn-Pierce had ended up a corpse in His Excellency's cistern by accident.

Under the circumstances, good enough. If not good, fair enough. He could choose to pass up on his next breath as soon as he felt like it. No air worth breathing anyway. Oh, he'd probably flail a bit, or a lot, but it wouldn't be for very long.

Cold must be making him apathetic. He couldn't seem to work up the outrage normal for his
situation. Or fear. Or panic. He did feel aggrieved, but if it weren't for his disgust at the filth and the stench, he suspected he wouldn't be able to sustain that, even.

He wished he could've held his grandchild. Wished he could've seen his boy at least one last time, been able to say goodbye to his -- oh, God. Lyn. To his son, it'd be news he'd known he'd get one day, arriving sooner than expected. He'd care. Not cripplingly. But Lyn -- no getting around it, Lyn would be devastated. Oh, pet, I'm so sorry.

What could he do, though? What matter if he died now, by at least a smidgen of choice, or an hour later, freezing, exhausted, disoriented, with no choice?

Don't prolong it. Just let go.
Chapter 3

Hathaway had cut off the siren once he'd turned onto the A415; there was practically no traffic on it. He laid his phone on the passenger seat to keep an eye on the bars so he'd know if and when it lost coverage.

Dense woods pressed in on both sides, and by the time he was on an uneven gravel road the trees were black smudges against the grey of the last light fading behind them. With no other cars around, he flicked his headlights to full beam and left them on.

The next turn was onto a teeth-rattling dirt track, but at least the moon, just off full, let him discern the surrounding landscape. As Julie hadn't yet called, she must still be stuck in. He rang her, keeping the phone in his hand on the steering wheel that had become a shuddering, bucking thing. "Stop searching," he called out into it over the clang and clatter of road debris against the car. "I have what I need." He could hear her saying something. "What?"

She raised her voice until he could hear, "What's the address?"

"No address, directions." He didn't care to pull up long enough to transmit the map from the iPad. "Track my SatNav, where I stop will be it."

He'd called barely in time. The phone was still in his hand when he saw the bars disappear. Not that many places left without mobile coverage any more, Lewis had to be somewhere beyond this point. Or his phone was.

Loath to slow down enough to suit the road conditions, he hunched over the wheel and concentrated on getting there, unable to shut off the accusing voice battering at him: If you hadn't been so bloody self-protective, so bloody needlessly, he wouldn't have been working alone. You feared losing his regard? Imagine losing him.

*****

One drawback of being a non-believer, no cheap comfort of telling yourself pretty lies at the end. Even though he'd been talking to Val in absence for years, Lewis knew she wasn't waiting for him with open arms on the other side. There'd be no meeting Morse again, as a friend finally, an equal. As much as he might wish it, he wasn't going to be guiding or guarding his children from beyond.

*Or James.*

Well, lies had never been his thing in the first place.

He hated to think of Lyn in mourning just as she was getting ready to give birth, but she'd soon have the comfort of her own bairn in her arms, and James wouldn't allow any official calls to her. He'd drive up, break it to her gently, might even hold her if she fell apart. *He held Laura when she needed it, he'll hold my lass.*

Who'd hold him?

Who'd even imagine James Hathaway might need holding? Or would allow it?
Please, lad, let someone in. And not just Monty.

The moggie would be fine, James would see to that. He'd see to Bishop Osborn, too, in a whole different way. Once he knew where to put the blame, Hathaway would spare no pity.

And if he blamed -- ? No, he wouldn't, why should he?

Yes, he would. He would blame himself. For not being there. For everything that had led to his not being there. The most unforgivable failing to James: his own.

The lime plaster lining of the reservoir had cracked and crumbled in places, providing hand-holds. Well, finger-holds, once Lewis shook off his jacket to improve his reach, felt about in the dark, found one and anchored himself.

What purpose would that serve except delay the end? He knew how long it had taken him to find the estate, knew holding on for as long as possible was futile. Except, suddenly, he couldn't not.

*****

The bend of the track was so tight that, without its lights cutting into the night to announce its presence, Hathaway wouldn't have known another vehicle was around the curve. He hit the brake, aware that those were the headlights of an oncoming car and he wasn't going to be able to slow down in time. He only hoped the track allowed enough clearance for two cars to squeeze by. The instant he cleared the bend he saw that the other car was on the wrong side, his side. As the antilock brakes shuddered beneath his feet to lock and release the wheels in rapid cycles, he managed to swerve his car out and back in with inches to spare. Pebbles clattering as they spun from the tyres sliding sideways on loose surface, he came to a jolting stop skewed across the track, unable to believe he'd avoided the crash. Then he saw that the other car, a Land Rover, hadn't been bearing down on him; it was stationary despite the churning of its wheels, held back by another vehicle it was working to pull out of a roadside ditch.

Angled crosswise on the road, his beams fell on part of the number plate and enough of the car for him to recognise it immediately. He grabbed the torch from the glove box, jumped out, bounded down into the drop and shone the light into the driver's seat: empty. Passenger seat, the rear: empty. Hathaway reached for the door handle, yanked his hand back and used the hem of his jacket to try it: locked.

For a second he imagined Lewis at a garage, having a cuppa while waiting for his car to be towed. Except no garage that had access to the driver and the keys would've sent someone to tow a car backwards out of a ditch without a way to unlock the brakes and put it in reverse.

In the meantime, the engine of the Land Rover had gone quiet. Who was in that vehicle? He heard its door open and by the time he'd clambered onto the track, Edmund was standing before him, a puffa jacket over his cassock, the tails of the open jacket flapping in a sudden gust of wind. He was shielding his eyes from the torch beam and trying to see past it.

"Where is he?" Hathaway demanded, trying to keep from grabbing him. "Is he hurt?"

"J--James?" Cleaves kept blinking and moving his hand in front of his face as if he could shoo the light away. "Wh -- what're you doing here?"

"Never mind that. Where's he?"
"What're you -- who?"

"Lewis."

"Lew -- your boss? How would I -- oh. Is...is that his car?"

Damned if he didn't sound genuine. Hathaway aimed the light more to one side. "That's his car, it didn't fall out of the sky, so where. Is. He?"

"I don't know. I didn't know it was his car. Archaeology buffs looking for the Roman ruins often take the wrong turn, I thought it belonged to one of them."

"And decided to move it on a whim?"

"I was told -- " he cut off abruptly.

"Osborn told you to move it and you didn't even ask why," Hathaway concluded. "Where were you supposed to move it to?"

"Just to the main road."

"What, not to Gloucester Station this time?" His own words felt like the chill of a scalpel down his spine. Please God, no.

"I don't know what you're on about." Even though the light was no longer in his eyes, Edmund's hand was making the same warding-off motions in front of his face. "I only came to see if Mathias was ready to return. Vatican delegates are in town, he must greet them. He heard my car, came out, gave me his keys and told me there must've been an accident and I should -- "

"Spare me!" Hathaway snapped, trying to control the pounding anger in his head."Get in my car."

"W...why?"

"Because it's over, Edmund," he pushed through clenched teeth. "You're through enabling him. Get. In. The car." He motioned with the torch. Wary, side-stepping, Cleaves started to follow the arc described by the light. As he passed by, Hathaway found himself grabbing the front of his cassock in his fist. "What else did you do for him? Did you kill for him?"

Cleaves tugged against his hold. "For the love of God, James, how can you think that of me?"

"I heard you say you'd do anything he asks. It's a short jump from compliance to complicity, so answer me!"

"No, no, of course not. I can't believe you'd ask me something like that. How long have we known each other? We've been mates for -- "

Hathaway realised he'd spun Edmund around, walked him back and slammed him against his car only as he was saying directly into his slack-jawed face, "Don't try it, mate! You may have known me once -- hell, you may have known me this morning, but you don't have the first notion right now, so don't you fucking try it!" He let go and yanked open the passenger door. "Get. In."

Cleaves obeyed. Hathaway rounded the car and got in himself, clicked off the torch, tossed it onto the back seat with one hand, pulling out the evidence bag holding the folded prints from his pocket with the other. He slapped them down onto Cleaves's lap. "This is the rubbish he coveted,
right?" He started the car. "Llewellyn-Pierce knew it was rubbish but he authenticated the lot anyway," just long enough for Osborn to become dazzled by the prospects of Vatican's gratitude, "then tried to blackmail him, didn't he?"

His wheels skidding on the crumbly surface earlier had changed the gradient, backing up to straighten put the boot of the car into a downward slope. He barely arrested the slide as the front tyres threatened to lift up off the track, pulled forward, until he lost traction again where Lewis's car had loosened the other side. He had to leash his impatience and go back and forth in increments where his tyres kept their grip. Cleaves tucked the prints into the door pocket without looking at them, stayed silent through the manoeuvres, his face set stubbornly. " Didn't he?"

"Mathias and I are each other's confessors. You know I won't break the sanctity of confession."

How cosy."Criminal conspirators don't get to claim sanctity." Finally able to aim his car in the right direction, he accelerated as much as possible. "You don't break God's laws then hide behind them."

"I'll bow to God's judgement when the time comes."

"Believe me, you'll bow to men's first."

"But yours before all."

"You've gone far beyond mine, Edmund."

"I didn't ask for the high pedestal you put me on from day one. I was no different from you, I was young and in love, just like you. Except all you dared was to get terrified of being found out and run away. From all I saw and heard, you haven't changed. 'Join new vows to old perjuries,' that's all you're capable of.'"

Hathaway's inconvenient brain spared the time to serve up the rest of the quotation: ' but dare not call it loving.' Cleaves was luckier than he knew that he had to keep his grip on the wheel. "I wouldn't mention perjury if I were you."

"Unlike you, I never perjured myself over my feelings, never hid them from Mathias," Cleaves countered, sounding combative. "We were lovers for a dozen years."

Hathaway was hardly the repository for that confession, so what was that supposed to be, a twisted form of one-upmanship? If Cleaves thought it bore comparison, he was dead wrong. Best ignore it. Behind the hill he was circling, he could see chimney smoke rising against the dark sky. Almost there.

"He broke his vows for me," Cleaves added as if it were a boast, "but never asked me to break mine once I took them."

Counting back from -- Jesus! "You were, what," he asked, unable to ignore it that far, "eleven, twelve?"

"What does it matter?"

"What does it matter? Wake up, Edmund! A man doesn't mistake a child for a lover. It's called paedophilia." He remembered how surprised he'd been when he'd first found out that Cleaves was three years older than him. "You kept your adolescent looks into your twenties, must've kept his interest long enough to fool yourself, that's all. I bet his interest was steadily flagging."
"He was getting older!" Cleaves protested.

"You were getting older."

"You don't understand."

"No, I don't. Seen it before, and I still don't. Never will."

The hulking manor was finally revealed. Apart from lights behind the blinds of a row of windows on an upper storey, it was shuttered, standing dark and solitary past a weaving driveway. Flowerbeds may have lined its serpentine curves once, they were now rolls of dirt beds. Hathaway drove in a straight line, the car rocking and rattling over tamped earth and cracked pavement, until he pulled up by Cleaves's car parked in front of the wide sweep of the colonnaded portico.

"That's odd." Cleaves was hunched to look towards the top of the building where smoke rose from behind crenellations outlined like gapped teeth. "He lit the fireplace. He never does that."

Who cared about Osborn's habits? Hathaway jumped out of the car, but by the time he was on the portico, Cleaves had caught up and was trying to block him, asking him to, "Wait, wait."

"Get out of my way."

Cleaves waved at the massive, iron-grated doors. "What're you going to do, huff and puff and blow them down? I'll let you in, but let me talk to you for a minute." He reached a hand, more as if to soothe than to restrain.

Hathaway sidestepped it, fearing the slightest pressure would snap the self control he was barely managing. "Talk." He warned, "Talk. Not bargain."

Cleaves clamped his already opening mouth shut, bit his lip, regrouped. "All right, all right -- let me go in ahead, let me talk to him. Come on, James, you know he'll answer me sooner."

Valid enough point. "Fine. Open it."

A carved family crest overlapped the doors, ironically displaying the motto, *Libera nos a malo:* Deliver us from evil. Hathaway let Cleaves unlock and push them open onto a dilapidated, high-raftered hall, stayed on his heels onto the broad stairs, saying quietly at his questioning look, "I'll stay back." If Edmund thought he'd be allowed to talk to Osborn privately, he needed to check his wits.

"He's an old man, James," Cleaves whispered pleadingly. "Leave him out of it, put it all on me. Please? I'll be anything you -- "

"Don't finish that sentence!" He had no idea if the offer was of a criminal or personal nature, didn't care to hear it either way. He was more concerned about the acrid tang in the air that smelled like petrol, mixed with something else he couldn't identify. "Move."

A flickering sconce lit the way up the staircase, more light spilled from two wide doors open past the landing at the top of the stairs. The rest of the house was cloaked in dark shadows that looked as impenetrable as a solid barrier. How many rooms did it have, how long would it take to search it?

A few steps higher than him, Cleaves cried out, "Oh, Merciful God, what has he done?" and he was hurtling the rest of the way into the room, calling out, "Mathias, Mathias!"
From the higher steps Hathaway could also see into the vast cavern of the room, and it took him until he stopped on the landing to decipher what he was looking at. A grand salon earlier in its history, the room was decked like a museum with niches, plinths, cabinets, padded lecterns moulded to cradle delicate artefacts, now all empty, gaping open or tipped over, everything they had held shattered, torn, crushed, scattered across the floor like a landfill. He gaped at the utter destruction.

He could hear Edmund brokenly questioning Osborn, and the old man crooning, "It's fine, my boy, don't take on so, had to be done. Now, now, don't fret, there was no pleasure left in them any more, had to be done, had to be done."

*If thine eye offend thee?* Christ! The extent of loss impossible to tell by the wreckage --shards of icons still in jewel tones, tatters of ancient tapestry, what must've once been a sizable archive's worth of faded parchments in scraps everywhere, unstrung beads, fragmented carvings, splintered wood, crumpled metal, chips and blocks of stone, unidentifiable -- so much history in ruin. He heard Edmund sobbing, felt on the verge of joining him except his next thought had already slammed hard: *What else did he destroy?*

He moved to see more into the room, towards the fireplace. Lambent firelight wavered over a sofa on one side of the grate, its silk faded and frayed, facing an oaken pew, the wood grey with age. In shirtsleeves, Osborn was sitting straight-backed in the pew. "Look on the bright side," he was saying inanely to Cleaves on his knees in front of him. "The thirteenth codex is gone. I couldn't credit it, I looked everywhere, but it's gone as if it never was."

"Gone?" Cleaves choked out. "No, Mathias, it's not gone, it's -- "

Osborn didn't seem to be listening. "I knew His hand had turned against me and I accepted His judgement." His voice rose to booming as he quoted, "'All the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, sayeth the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.'" He continued in a lower voice but no less vehemently, "In His service I've left no branch, and behold, I've sacrificed the roots."

"It's a miracle," Osborn announced. "He's still merciful to His servant, He took away that foul instrument of wickedness, cleansed me of the blood it spilt. The codex was Satan's trap; I was shown it was written backwards, you see. We're warned when the devil makes a deal for a soul, the pact is drawn up in mirror-writing."

"For the love of God, Mathias," Cleaves pleaded tearfully, "what're you talking about?"

*Enough.* Hathaway strode into what looked like the mouth of hell with the flames blazing in the massive, open grate, the fire so fierce that it was defeating the chimney, smoke curling out to rise to the vaulted ceiling. Sooner or later a spark was bound to reach the rips and shreds of aged-paper that covered the room, rustling like dry leaves underfoot. "He's confusing *Dr Faustus* with the testament," he answered Cleaves, then spelled it out plainly, "He's unhinged, Edmund."

Unperturbed, Osborn spared him a benign look, turned back to Cleaves. "You brought your friend with you. You shouldn't have done that, my dear," he chided mildly.

"He brought me. He's a police officer, I told you that. He's looking for his inspector. Was he here?"

Now that he was closer, Hathaway could see that the hearthrug Cleaves was kneeling on looked wet, the smell of petrol sharper in the room. "Edmund, get up," he said urgently, "come away
"Tell me, was another police officer here earlier?" Cleaves was insisting. "An older man, Inspector Lewis, did you see him, talk to him?"

"Oh, that one," Osborn said matter-of-factly. "A decent man, I think, but he had the wrong end of the stick. He was all set to accuse you --"

"You should've let him," Cleaves cried out.

"-- but don't worry, you won't suffer on my account. I took care of it."

"What did you do? Please, Mathias, please tell me you just sent him away."

"That's right, I sent him away."

"Sent him away how?" Hathaway demanded, trampling over the detritus covering the floor to approach the man who looked so damnably serene.

Cleaves jumped up to step protectively between them. "Let me. Please, James. I don't know how much reality he can distinguish."

"How much can you? Look around, this place is going to go up in flames."

Osborn nodded sagely as he intoned, "He shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm."

Hathaway felt like screaming. "Do you hear him? I don't have time for this!"

"I can reach him, I can."

"Hathaway, Hathaway, Hathaway," Cleaves wailed. "You couldn't find the codex because it's not here. I found it where you'd left it in the props trailer, along with some books. I put the codex in your safe back at the church, it's still there. There's no miracle, I'm sorry, but there isn't."

Osborn finally looked like he was paying attention, or at least attempting to. "It's -- not here? It's in --?"

"I've been trying to tell you, but you haven't heard a thing I said since that night."

Osborn rose, unmindful that he'd made Cleaves almost topple and catch himself. "You must bring it back immediately," he pronounced with all the authority of the long-unchallenged. "It has to go into the fire with the others. You must bring it back now."

"I can't," Cleaves moaned, bent over like a penitent at his feet. "James won't let me. I told you, he's a policeman, you must tell him what he --"

"Man is justified by faith," Osborn thundered, "without the deeds of law."

"Law will do me." Hathaway grabbed and hauled the man to him. "That's right, I'm not one of your delusions," he said when Osborn looked shocked at being manhandled. In truth, Hathaway
was a little shocked himself; such a hefty man and he'd moved him like a rag doll. "Where's Inspector Lewis? Is he in this building?" He couldn't think of a single good way Lewis could be there without coming out, calling out, some indication, but it was a big place. "Is he?"

"Days of man are as a shadow that passeth --"

"You want to hide behind scriptures, fine. 'He that perverteth his ways shall be known. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man.'"

He heard Cleaves gasp and scramble up.

"'He that turneth away his ear from the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.'"

"James, don't," Cleaves pleaded, tugging on his arm.

Hathaway shouldered him away and kept going, "'He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.'"

"Stop," Osborn ordered, but shakily.

"I'm just starting. 'He that is perverse in -- '

"All right, all right. If you must find your inspector -- "

"Make no mistake, I will." More in defiance than confidence. He was too scared for confidence.

"So be it. I'll show you the way. Let me get my jacket," he indicated the Barbour folded over the far arm of the pew. "We have to go outside."

Grasping at straws, Hathaway heard 'the way,' as 'the way Lewis took when he left.' Lewis could've left, tried a shortcut or been pointed in the wrong direction, lost his way. He let Osborn loose, saw him reach for his jacket. Anxious to get going, wondering how fast he could flood the surrounding woods with troops, he turned away, noting nothing untoward until Edmund screamed, "No!" and he knew that thin hope had made a lousy interpreter, spun back around.

Cleaves was grappling with Osborn to hold back the poker raised to strike and begging him, "No more, please, no more."

How gullible was he and how had he overlooked the fire irons by the pew? Furious, he stepped up, reached to grab the poker with both hands, twisted it against their tug and shove, snatched it away, clamped down on the urge to lay about him with it and hurled it as far as he could.

Cleaves was already releasing Osborn, who didn't seem to understand the altercation was over and thrust him away forcefully -- "Edmund!" Hathaway shouted as if warning him could stop him from stumbling back -- too, too close to the flames. The tail of the loose cassock caught fire and he didn't so much as notice, but he did notice the horror-struck look on Osborn's face and his urgently pointing hand, swirled to look behind him. His cassock swirled with him, raising bits of paper to flutter about its hem, its petrol-stained front flared up along with the scraps. The fire had jumped the bounds.

By then Hathaway had reached him. "Get out," he shouted at Osborn, hooked his arms under Cleaves's from the back, pulled him off his feet and dragged him twisting and flailing. It was a big room, but with accelerant splashed through it, the tendrils of fire leaping, racing through the flammables on the floor wouldn't take long to reach flashover and turn into an inferno. Petrol vapours
in the air were already igniting here and there like warning flares, burning blue.

"Not him, not him, merciful God, not him!" Osborn was wailing.

"Get out!" Hathaway yelled again, all the time and deed he could spare for him.

Once on the landing, he dropped Cleaves onto the floor, got out of his jacket and put his arms back through it while holding it in front of him, wishing it were heavier, longer, only then noticing he'd forgotten his coat somewhere. Cleaves rocked back and forth on the floor, clawing at his clothes, mewling in pain. Hathaway went to his knees, keeping his hands inside the sleeves, shoved him onto his front to suffocate the flames climbing his torso. Scooting on his knees to keep up, he worked to contain and smother the ones around Cleaves's legs with the jacket. Behind them, the fire became a constant hiss and crackle, the heat rising fast, the air thickening with the smoke billowing out, burning his eyes, his throat, burning up his time.

Making sure he'd extinguished all the flames, he peeled away his tattered jacket. The cassock was just some inches of scorched shreds below the hips, a ragged burn up its front, the puffa jacket shrunken and curled, the trousers full of charred holes, the skin inside them red and blistering already. There was no serious blackening he could see, mostly second-degree, but extensive.

Shaking with reaction, taking shuddering breaths, Edmund started to scrabble at his clothes. Hathaway grabbed him by the wrists to spare the burns on his hands. "Don't. You'll only rip off more skin. Can you walk?" Cleaves moaned, trying to curl into a ball. Hathaway tugged on his wrists to make him sit up. "I must get you outside, Edmund. I can carry you, but it'll hurt worse." The swirling smoke overhead was getting more and more dense, the heat of the fire close to searing on his back, his shirt getting dry enough to crackle as he moved. "Come on."

"Help -- " caught on a painful hiss of indrawn breath, then determinedly "-- help me up."

Hathaway was already hauling him to his feet, all too aware that balls of flame were igniting high up inside the roiling black smoke, the blaze consuming the contents of the room ready to flash over into structural fire. Cleaves grunted in pain, whimpered at each move, but stayed upright as Hathaway half-supported, half-hoisted him down the stairs, intending to take him to the car. Once they staggered outside and took two steps down from the portico, though, Edmund sagged against the balustrade and Hathaway let him slide down it to sit gingerly on the stairs. He'd felt there was something wrong as soon as he'd come out of the building, but it wasn't until breaths of cold, clean air chased away some of the smoke from his lungs and brain that he identified it. Cleaves's car was gone from the driveway. "What the -- ?"

"Oh, thank God, he got out," Cleaves said simultaneously, sudden elation shining through the pain on his ashen face.

Osborn? With that expression, who else? "How?" Edmund must've left his keys in the car, the sound of its engine could've been lost in the noise of the fire, but Hathaway was sure he would've noticed the bishop going past, however preoccupied he'd been.

"Thank God, thank God," Cleaves kept repeating like a mantra, hugging himself. "Thank God, he got out."

Don't you care he didn't wait to see how you fared? Hathaway wanted to shake him until his teeth rattled, but they were rattling already, damaged skin compromising his body's temperature control despite the heat of the fire washing out the front door. "How?"

"Priest holes...throughout."
Naturally, he thought before dismissing the bishop altogether. Too recognisable and too deranged, how far could he run? Although trembling and pallid, Edmund was as safe as he was going to get for the time being, shielded from the fire by the stone frontage of the building and the marble portico. Hathaway had to go back into the house before the fire spread any further.

He ran to his car for the torch, ran back as the windows overhead started cracking and shattering, raining shards onto the portico roof, coughing out tongues of flames. He paused by Cleaves, intending to snatch up the jacket he’d dropped by him and wrap it around his head, when Edmund caught his reaching arm, asking, "Wh--what're you doing?"

"I must search the house."

"You can't," now grasping his arm with both hands despite the sears on them and announcing as if it were news, "it's burning." Hathaway tried to wrench away, ended up dragging Edmund with him, yelping with pain but clinging stubbornly. "You'll go into fire for him?"

*He did it for me.* "Let go!"

"No, wait! He won't be there...not...in there."

That stopped Hathaway. "Do you know where he is?" he asked urgently.

"I hope not, but -- " Cleaves's hands dropped as if made of lead " -- oh, God," he moaned.

"Do you?"

"If he's here...."

"Yes?" He stuck the torch behind his belt, leaned to grip Cleaves by the shoulders to keep him from huddling in on himself. "Tell me."

"Around the back, through the old annexe. Fire won't reach there, but if he's there," eyes cast down, hiding behind his eyelids, "oh, James, don't. Let someone else-- "

"Tell me."

"In the passageway, down the stairs. Look in...there's...in the cellar, there's a water cistern."

There was a discernible lag between the time he saw Edmund's mouth form the words and actually heard them, as though his brain that refused to shut off even when he drowned it in alcohol had tried to go dormant rather than accept the last two. *God, no. Please. Not again.*

*I can't, I don't want to look into another water cistern and this time see --*

How often did wanting matter? What was he going to do, go back and put in a report, dispatch some SOCO tech later to check it out as though Lewis --Robbie-- were one more piece of evidence to dredge up for the case?

*You'll have a lifetime to feel sorry for yourself. Right now, move.* He left Cleaves babbling about they should go, get to the church, could they please go now, and hurried away.

He didn’t need the torch until he rounded the building and its fortress of a back blocked him from the fire. In its illumination, he noted two side-by-side tanks that looked like scaled-down submarines sinking into the earth and finally identified the rotten-egg smell that had puzzled him earlier: propane leak. Osborn must’ve unsecured a connection, or damaged one in the frenzy of
turning his collection into rubble. Great. More fuel to burn. And if sparks were sucked back into the pipes -- don't think, just move.

The sight of the annexe brought a flash of memory -- the same set up behind Crevecouer, used for cookouts a few times a year for the tenants and staff in the back garden. The one he entered was a long-neglected, teetering ruin. Going through it with fear humming in his nerves alongside the adrenaline that kept him moving, his mind stored everything his torch beam passed over, but his main focus was the track visible in the gritty dust covering the floor, looking as though something heavy had been dragged through it. Dear God.

Like an unmistakable this way sign, it led him to the cellar, aware of every twist and turn and step he could've described accurately if called upon, yet with only a hazy recollection of taking them, down and down into the rank depths. He swept the ancient stone walls blooming with purple sulphur with his torch, aimed the light to the ground and there in a corner...what was that?

He picked it up. Lewis's anorak -- an anorak, common enough.

Not with Lewis's keys in its pocket -- some keys, keys could look alike.

If not for the old, scratched key ring with the symbol of a vintage Jag Lewis had never owned, in faithful company to the keys on the more ordinary, utilitarian fob. He was here.

No place left to go from here -- except....

Unable to avoid it any longer, he turned towards the large metal lid in the middle of the cavern, drawn to it and repulsed by it in equal measure, started to let the anorak drop, caught himself, folded it neatly and laid it down. The torch beam found the hasp and the bar securing the lid. He nudged the bar with his foot, felt it move, put more pressure on it, expecting it to stick, but it gave a small screech and slid out. More readily than he'd wished. He put the torch on the floor, leaned, wedged his fingers under the lip of the lid, I can't lift this, I can't, but his arms had already contradicted him, practically tossing it up and over, the jarring crash echoing off the stones, reverberating in his bones. A sickening stench of wet and rot rose from the opening, his stomach heaved, clenched. Impossible to mistake putrefaction. His heart like hard hammer-hits inside his chest, he picked up the torch, "No," he said, as if denial could negate what he'd see, shone the beam down -- on murky water and the body in a dead-man float.

He felt his knees give, instinctively crouched to keep from falling, the torch clanged on stone at the end of his heavy arm. His head, too backbreaking to hold up, fell to his chest. He huddled tighter, dragged his arms in, trying wrap himself around his middle. Nothing that felt that hollow had any right to hurt that much.

Two words out of an old nightmare and you're coming apart. Useless git.

For a deranged instant, he could've sworn the voice had come from outside. But it was all too familiar, some detached, exacting part of him that regularly made him a pariah with others, giving him a mental kick: Stop the histrionics. Think. This short a time, and as cold as the water must be, not even rigor would've set in, certainly not putrefaction. The recently dead would sink, not float. Edmund had clearly had no idea what had happened here today, but he'd pointed out the cistern as Osborn's disposal site. He must've known of or seen an earlier victim in it: the missing body. That's Llewellyn-Pierce, you idiot.

The immediate turmoil receded, leaving him collapsed in on himself, drained, numb, trying to
avoid the next thought: *Recently dead would be in the depths, hidden.* Then he heard, more a wheeze than voice, weak and wobbly, "James....," but he *heard*, "James."

Every sense instantly alert again, he scurried to the very edge of the opening. "Robbie?"

*****

It was all fragments to Lewis. The thunderclap of noise jerking him out of semi-consciousness. Clanging in his teeth, his skull. Sudden, stabbing light. On the after-image inside his eyelids, a cold-blue beam ahead, not touching him. Raising his head and squinting up on a jolt of defiance -- *not as dead as you'd like yet*. All the light up above by then, outlining a huddled form, translucent on creases and crumplades of a white shirt, bright on a bent head, the high sweep of it rising from behind a bowed shoulder like a single wing. A hallucination, surely, but one with a name: *James*.

He must've called out, despite absolute disbelief and past his numb lips, for what had looked like a broken angel moved. The swathe of light was just a torch in one hand coming out from where it had been tucked under the other arm, and Hathaway was leaning in precariously from the edge to ask, "Robbie?" And again, "Robbie?" as if he needed proof.

Dazed, Lewis left it up to his younger eyes. He was old and cold and busy shaking to bits. And, as the light swung on him, blind. Demented, too, he feared. *Broken angel? Lunacy."

"*Robbie!*" Hathaway announced loud enough to set up an echo in the well, making him flinch. "Thank God, you're -- oh, God, you look -- sorry, sorry," and the light became bearable. When Lewis could crack open his eyes again, he saw James had clapped his hand on it, showing red through his fingers, bright needles of it escaping from in between them. "Are you hurt?"

*Just wet* didn't cover it by a long shot and he wasn't up to lengthy explanations. He shook his head.

"How'd you -- how long have you -- how cold -- do you recognise me?"

As though he'd mistake that blond head hanging up there like a lantern. He tried to wake his lethargic wits since Hathaway seemed to be missing a few. "C-called you b-by name."

"So you did. Well done, you," Hathaway said like a proud tutor whose student had aced his A levels. "No confusion yet, that's good -- and you're shivering. That's great, that's brilliant," he enthused, making Lewis wonder if this grisly place made everyone a little loony. "You have to get out of there. It's what, about my height? If I hang down from the edge, that'll add a foot and a half, you can easily grab hold of me."

A *lot* loony. "*Both* our w-weights, b-by your f-fingertips?"

"I don't mean I can pull us up together, but you can climb over me."

Lewis had to yank all of his wits to him fast, for Hathaway was already reaching for the lip of the opening to one side, preparing to swing down. "*Stop!*" he ordered as firmly as he could, cursing the tremors slowing his speech, "I'll d-dislocate...your sh-shoulders," *and drag you in with me*.

"I row regularly, my shoulders will be fine."

"*No!*" Clearly, Hathaway wasn't going to listen to anything that smacked of sparing *him*. "I c-"
can't, I can't." Ah, that made the barmy lad sit back on his heels. "Too sluggish. C-can't feel...m-most of me. I c-can't d-do it." A bit of an exaggeration, but not much. He was still attached to the wall because his arm was numb. Not numb enough to stop jittering, though. "Go and g-get help. I'll be OK."

"I'm going nowhere without you. Don't worry, we'll work it out," James said as though Lewis could be much of a contributor, "and don't stop shivering," he added as if there were a choice. He uncovered the torch beam and swept it over the water. "What's that floating about? That. In ripples."

Light fractured on the wet, slick surface. "T-t-tarpaulin. Wrapped 'round," Llewellyn-Pierce's name was too bloody long, "him, I r-reckon."

"Didn't let blood seep out to stain the boot of his car," Hathaway proved he'd untangled the case from his end, "must be long and sturdy." He scrambled to his feet. "I saw some -- I'll be right back. Have to take the torch, but I won't be long." He turned away, saying, "Just hold on," then he was gone from sight, his voice reaching back to instruct him to, "Keep shivering." A few seconds later, shouted urgently from a distance, "Wait for me, don't go anywhere."

Only for a second Lewis thought it an absurd thing to say to someone who could go nowhere for wishing, then, remembering a harrowing drive to London, he understood. He'd repeated the same thing in his head non-stop between the time he'd received the call informing him his wife was being taken to A&E with severe injuries, until he'd arrived to find out that Val hadn't been able to wait for him, wouldn't have heard him even if he'd been at her side screaming it. The ambulance rush to the hospital had been a last ditch effort while trying to get her heart restarted.

Right, then. Against all odds, Hathaway had got here before he had to stop waiting. Time to stop hanging like a useless boil on the wall and do what he could to regain some control of his body. He was going to need it to climb out of this hell hole.

Making his cramped fingers let go of the crack took determination, then he was more flailing than moving with any purpose, but the threat of sinking into the fetid ooze helped; he felt the pounding heartbeat from a sudden rush of adrenaline and the heavy numbness was replaced by painful tingling as feeling crept back. Along with some spasms, but they didn't flare into crippling cramps. He was able to move with them, through them, the more he moved, the easier to move. By the time the light returned with Hathaway, he was treading water, still freezing cold, aching, sluggish, but he could keep his head up and tread. Hathaway went to his knees, put the torch on the floor and set to doing something hurriedly with his hands. What eventually descended from them was a large, rusty hook, tied to a length of twine, the twine tied to...his tie?

Lewis watched the hook drop to dangle in front of his face. "I'm not a f-f-fish."

Hathaway looked too intent to notice a lame quip. "Find a corner of the tarpaulin and hook it securely," he instructed impatiently, but he was patient through the drawn-out fumbling of Lewis's shaking fingers. He carefully pulled up the dripping mass on the hook until he could grab it, then quickly dragged it all the way out into a sodden pile. "One more minute, that's all. Hold on," he called down, busily gathering it, bunching it, whatever he was doing with it -- which apparently required his belt since he yanked it off and pressed it into service.

"How'd you..." with better blood flow Lewis's curiosity was back, "g-get here...s-so s-soon?"

"Soon? Bloody late," Hathaway growled. Clearly, he had a whole different perspective. Lewis let him be.

Hathaway rose to his feet. One end of the tarpaulin wound around his arm and gripped in his
fist, he tossed the other end down. Wrapped around his belt to prevent slippage, his belt cinched around it higher up and fastened, he'd fashioned a secure loop. "Put your feet into it and hold on, I'll do the rest."

Bracing a foot in the loop and submerging it, Lewis reached up to grasp handfuls of thick folds, had some trouble hanging onto the slick surface with his stiff fingers. Hathaway waited and watched until he indicated he was ready, then pulled steadily, his rower's arms living up to his claim even when the waterlogged weight of man and tarpaulin must've increased substantially past the lift of the water. He paused when Lewis's hands approached the edge, helping him with small pulls to slowly transfer his hold to the support of his forearms on the stones and hang from them, letting the loop go slack. Hathaway immediately dropped to one knee, bent over him to reach down and grip the waistband of his trousers on each side. "Got you. Put your arms around my neck. Come on, Robbie, you can lift them. That's right. Tighter," and he was hoisted up until his knees landed on the edge. Hathaway let go of his waist, wrapped his arms around him, pushed with his braced leg and tumbled back away from the opening, holding him. "Got you," he kept repeating, "got you, got you, got you."

Lewis felt he weighed a ton, he was getting the lad wet, dripping all that filth on him, too. Quivering muscles or not, he should move, push up, or at least roll away. Unlike the water, though, Hathaway was solid, steady, so warm against his bone-deep chill. More than warm, even smelling like fire and smoke, a grand smell to his senses battered by stench. Never mind moving away, he wanted to burrow into the poor lad who didn't seem to care he was hugging what must feel like a man-sized drowned rat and stink worse. "James," he said, "James," to make Hathaway push him off, seeing how he lacked the will himself.

"I'm sorry." Hathaway's hold tightened instead. "Thought I'd lost you. I'm sorry, sorry, sorry." The flexing of his arms with each 'sorry' made Lewis suspect he was apologising for having them around him.

"Best I've f-felt in f-forever, you d-dolt," he stammered into Hathaway's collar. "You're like a f-furnace --" he inhaled deeply "-- s-smell like one, too."

"Oh!" Hathaway yelped and was pushing him away, "Get up. Move, Robbie. You need to get up."
He was suddenly insistent, hustling Lewis to his feet, forcing him to find his land-legs, turning him for the stairs with imploring urgency. Walking felt more like falling and catching himself on one foot or the other.

"Quick as you can," Hathaway insisted, keeping him upright. "God, you're so cold -- wait." He made Lewis lean into the wall, ducked away, was back with the anorak Lewis had forgotten until then, turning it inside out and threading his arms through it one by one. "Let's go."

Staggering up the twisting stairs, still uncoordinated, with Hathaway propelling him and trying to light the way ahead for him, Lewis had to ask, "Where's the f-f-fire?"

"Must be everywhere by now," was the answer, with no trace of levity.

"Wait, th-there is a f-fire?" No wonder James smelt of it.

"Main house. Won't reach us, the annexe is walled off."

"What's th-the hurry th-then?" Lewis asked when they emerged into the passageway and Hathaway tried to prod him into a run his legs didn't yet feel up to.

"I saw propane tanks right outside, they'll explode if hot gasses drift back."
Brain the size of a planet, but no handyman, his dozy lad. "If th-th-that's all, d-don't worry."
Lewis stopped, sagging against the wall to catch his breath, speaking with tight jaw, trying to
suppress his chattering teeth. "T-tanks are f-f-fitted w-w--have safety v-valves. One-way p-
pressure."

"Are you sure?"

Lewis let a nod suffice, annoyed by his teeth biting his words into bits.

"OK," Hathaway accepted, fidgeting as though he wanted to kick-start him anyway. "If we're
blown to smitherestens, I'll take it up with you then. Let's go."

Being blown to smitherestens didn't sound so bad to Lewis right then. It'd be fast, at least. "J-
James?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you," he said, pleased to get that important bit out of his mouth in one piece.

"No worries, just don't ever do it again. Can you move now, please? You're slowing your
circulation. It's not helping."

"Oh. R-right-- God, I hate th-this stutt-ter."

"It's only because you're shivering. Shivering is good until you're dry, generates internal heat,
prevents damage. Long as you're not slurring, you're fine."

In summary: Stop whinging and keep moving.

Outside, the dark shadow of the house was harshly outlined in spurts of red and orange,
flickering embers escaping the updraft and falling around. Hathaway tucked him unceremoniously
into his side, a hand covering his head as if he weren't too wet to get singed. "Oi--" but he could've
been talking to a whirlwind.

In front of the building not even embers broke free from the fire sucking the air greedily, a
noticeable breeze rushing up and away. Hathaway yanked at him to keep him moving as Lewis was
briefly arrested by the flames spiralling from the windows and chimney stacks, scrabbling up stones
to fly into the sooty smoke. "Anyone in th-there?"

"No."

"Wh-what happened?"

"Bloody Osborn was displeased with his bloody collection, set the whole thing on-- hold on,
where's -- ?" He cast about. "Damn him."

"What?"

"Nothing." They stopped by the car. "Not important right now." He tugged off Lewis's
anorak and opened the door for him. "Get in."

"I'm d-dripping with muck."

"I don't care -- no, wait, you'll need a dry seat later, use the back-- no, gets warm faster in the
front, wait, I know." He dived into his boot and came up with a large bin liner, ripped it open, spread
it over the passenger seat. "Get in."
Lewis was bundled in more than climbed in. Hathaway jumped into the driver's seat, started the car and turned up the heater, aimed all the vents towards him as much as possible. It would be a while before the engine warmed enough for the climate control system to allow air through them. Moving had helped Lewis's core temperature, he wasn't shaking as badly, but his extremities were still bitterly cold, his face and hands stung from it, his feet felt encased in ice. Right on cue, Hathaway told him to, "Get out of those wet things."

They were in the middle of nowhere and if there was a stocked wardrobe around it was busy becoming ash. "Erm...and d-do what?"

"Do as I say."

"But, J-James --"

"While your teeth are chattering is no time to argue with me, I know what I'm doing. Strip."

He got out, leaned back in to say, "I mean everything, hypothermia is no joke," closed his door and ran back to the boot he'd left open.

Tiny clicks came from the heater, no more than a promise yet, but still, getting out of the wet clothes might be an improvement. In the filth department, if nothing else. Not as if James was going to drive him around Oxford starkers; he must have a plan.

The contortions required almost defeated Lewis, but he gritted his teeth and managed to peel everything off. As far as getting them into a puddle around his ankles. Buttons had been difficult enough, double-knotted shoelaces were beyond him. The door opened and Hathaway was there, mumbling, "Now I'm glad I fell in the river," while handing him a large towel. "Don't rub, pushes the coldest blood under the skin into the heart too fast. Pat dry." He laid another folded towel on Lewis's lap and crouched. "Let's have your feet."

Yes, nursey, Lewis was tempted to say, resisted it. He cooperated instead, shifting sideways in the seat making it easier to reach his back. He dried himself as his shoes were removed along with the wet clothes and Hathaway snapped open the second towel to dry most of his legs for him.

To finish drying, he had to stand, but before he could move something that felt heavenly was slipped on one foot and then the other. He leaned to see what was so blissfully warm -- Hathaway's wool socks carrying his body heat, the horizontal-striped ones that put Lewis in mind of the Wicked Witch of the West. A jab at Innocent, he'd always suspected, for frowning on more colourful footwear, the lad's one flourish.

Hathaway was sliding on another layer, bunched and bulky, past his feet and over his calves, one of the polythene oversuits from the crime-scene sets he carried for them in his car. Both suits, Lewis realised when they came over his knees, one stuffed as lining inside the other. "I'm going to look like the Michelin man," he fussed, reaching to hold them in place nevertheless.

"You can look like the Yeti for all I care, just get warm." Hathaway hunched back down to add two pairs of latex overshoes to the socks. The thin shirt stretching across his bent shoulders, washed orange by the fire where it wasn't dirt-streaked, caught Lewis's eye, made him suddenly aware of how inadequately dressed he was, in addition to shoes on bare feet now.

"Where's your coat, your jacket?"

"Misled them," Hathaway answered indifferently, glanced up at him, flashed him a smile that was anything but indifferent, "Found you, though."
"Sure did, lad, he couldn't say. He'd finally managed a couple of sentences without stuttering, and now a knot was in his throat at James's expression, suspecting Val would've seen a similar look if he'd walked into the hospital and found her waiting for him, awake and aware.

None so blind? he scolded himself. A young bloke long conflicted about his sexuality finally feeling secure enough with someone to reveal it -- credible, he'd thought, but that wasn't all by a long chalk, was it? This wasn't simply physical -- and that was a distressing thought. Lewis had been trying so hard not to break the lad's spirit, no way did he want to break his heart.

Hathaway put his shoes next to the vent on the side of the transmission casing. "Right," he patted Lewis's ankle before he rose, "you can stand now."

While he dried off the rest of him and pulled up the suits, Hathaway bundled the wet clothes inside the bin liner he pulled off the seat and put them in the boot. Needless, Lewis thought. He never wanted to see them again. But he should probably wait and find out what could be salvaged from the pockets.

He managed to get his arms through and pull the suits over his shoulders. Without the padding of regular clothes, he'd be swimming in them, but so much better than what he had been swimming in. He fumbled with the zips that were never easy, his fingers still too dull to pry out the tabs tucked into the bulky seams at the juncture of the legs.

Hathaway saw him botching it, reached to help, stopped, reached, stopped again, eyes flicking to and away from him. Two days earlier, Lewis was sure, he'd have taken care of it in his brisk, efficient way, without a pause. Now he feared being misconstrued. As if by even the wildest stretch of delusion Lewis could imagine there was anything tempting about him right then. "Butter fingers," he said, lifted his hands and asked for the help, "You mind?"

Hathaway pulled the material away from him before he did up the zips from crotch to neck. Of all the handling tonight, Lewis found he minded that, the scrupulously careful one lest motives should come into question. "Thanks. And, James, the kid gloves? No need."

"Yes, sir," he made a rueful face and ducted his head, sort of an inward flight, "I mean, no, sir."

He was back to being 'sir.' Felt like a demotion. Then again, under urgency, James may not have been consciously aware of calling him by name. Suddenly, Lewis minded that also. There seemed to be a Robbie Lewis that Hathaway diligently kept to himself, wrapped away like something too valuable for carelessness.

His anorak, turned right side out again, was held out for him. "I got you wet, too," Lewis protested. "You wear that."

Hathaway snapped the anorak in the air impatiently, so diffident one second, so bloody domineering the next. "Got my hoodie in the boot."

"Well, put it on, man." By all indications, not until he put on his jacket. Lewis let himself get swaddled in another layer and bundled back into the car.

Hathaway went around, closing the boot in passing, and arrived in the driver's seat minus the hoodie --fictional hoodie, obviously. "I lied," he sheepishly admitted at Lewis's glare. "I'll be fine in here."

The vents were finally hissing and it was noticeably warmer in the car, but still. "Sod it --"
"If you'll hold off the ear-bashing another minute, sir, I have more to confess." He leaned across Lewis to reach into the glove box. "I had both perpetrators in our cases under my nose and I let them get away. I'm sorry."

"Osborn, I worked it out." A pump-bottle of antiseptic hand-sanitizer was deposited on his lap. Lewis was thrilled to see it, vowed never again to use it to scoff at James for being too fastidious for a bloke. "Thought he acted alone."

"Where there's Osborn, there's Edmund," Hathaway spat out disgustedly, shifting in the seat to take a handkerchief from his back pocket and hand it to Lewis.

"He said Cleaves was innocent. I believed him."

"Innocent of outright murder, yes." Hathaway engaged the gears viciously and got the car rolling over uneven ground. "Of conspiracy, cover-up, enabling two murders, no."

"Three," Lewis had to say. "Osborn claimed two were unintentional, but he owned up to three."

"Cullen," Hathaway concluded. "I should've known right away. I noticed the incense was covering something, but attributed it to sick-room smell. I remember thinking the old man must've been blind because his eyes were already filmed over. I should turn in my warrant."

*Can we please stow the blame-taking until I don't feel like a dull lump?* "I'm sorry you're disappointed in your friend, but -- "

"Not an issue," Hathaway snapped, his face in the luminescence of the dashboard indicators drawn, harsh. "Nothing there to be disappointed in, never was, except my idiocy."

"You were little more than a child when -- "

"Not any more," Hathaway refused to be placated, holding himself so stiff his spine could've been fused. "He was bloody sure he could invite me -- literally invite me -- to witness a crime and not know it. Cover up a murder, no problem, I have just the patsy. And I performed right along. What does that say about me?"

An odd feeling washed over Lewis at hearing him so set on condemning himself, a kind of tender terror, making him feel fiercely protective. Everyone got battered by happenstance, but if it turned inward, especially for someone who expected as much of himself as James did, self-blame veered too easily into self-loathing. "It says you're a true friend he didn't deserve." He looked into the rear view mirror to meet Hathaway's eyes, could see only one of them, bloodshot from fire and smoke, fixed ahead on the road. The rest of the mirror was taken up by Harrowford getting distant, framed in a hot glow, becoming a ruin of a stone shell because some people didn't deserve their riches.

*Deserve yours,* tell him. "Care to hear my side? When I came back to Oxford, I had a purpose. To find one, any road." It was why he'd taken advantage of Knox's mistake and Hathaway's subordinate rank to hijack the Griffon case. "But I had no reason, hadn't for years. Just going through the motions. You changed that, James, you've been my lifeline. Tonight, in every way, even before you showed up. Don't tell me you're disappointed in the man I know and love -- " the car swerved, a quickly arrested sideslip, maybe an obstruction on the track, maybe not " -- I won't have it."

He'd set up a dilemma for the lad who seemed caught between having to watch the road and...
wanting to look at him. A few quick tries and he finally had to settle on the road, saying with more breath than voice, "You mean it." Not a question. More like a wonder.

"Not the sort of thing I'd say else."

"Thank you," Hathaway mouthed quietly. "Sir," he added like an assurance that he wouldn't burden it with expectations.

OK, that bothered him, too. Somehow, the inspector mantle had become stifling, but while he was too bedraggled, still in bit of a dumb shock at having a tomorrow again, wasn't the best mindset to -- "Look out!" he called when suddenly the headlights fell on someone ahead, shuffling over the track.

Hathaway had already hit the brakes. "There he is," he spat out, coasting the car closer to the figure stumbling to amble away from the light. "Going straight for the Rover and St Justin's, I bet." He stopped the car, "Just a sec," he said to Lewis, opened his door only far enough to squeeze through and quickly closed it, caught up to the man in a few strides, spun him around.

Father Cleaves, Lewis recognised with some surprise. The priest was no longer his haughty self. He was hunched, shambling, his clothes in tatters, his jacket looking melted to shrink-fit. He yammered and pawed at Hathaway, to push away or hang on, Lewis couldn't tell, but he seemed to be pleading. Showing a distinct lack of sympathy, Hathaway led him and dropped him into the back seat with more haste than should be applied to a flinching man. Lewis craned his neck to look around and in the interior light he could see Cleaves's handsome face was blotchy, a badly inflamed, pustulating streak on one side, his ragged clothes were singed, scorched, he had burns on his hands and legs. He must've been caught in the fire. He didn't look in any shape to be walking about.

Cleaves took one look at him, sent his eyes heavenward and launched into invoking something in Latin. Hathaway got into the driver's seat, "Edmund's giving thanks for your well-being," he explained flatly as he put the car back in gear. "Clearly, his notion of well-being is sketchy."

"Mathias didn't harm him," Cleaves offered as if he were trying to scrape up grace, "he didn't."

He showed plenty willing, swinging that stonking big axe, Lewis kept to himself. No sense in getting James worked up over what had not happened while he was busy dealing with all that had.

"His notion of harm's beyond sketchy," Hathaway grumbled. "I'm sorry, sir, but I'll have to drop him off at the station first."

In the mirror, Lewis was watching Cleaves grimace and bite his lip with every jolt of the car. "Best take him to A&E first."

"No! No, please," Cleaves wailed. "You must take me to the church. James, please, I have to get to -- "

"The only must in my book," Hathaway snapped, "is getting Lewis to a hot shower and a warm bed."

"I'm fine right here," Lewis objected. He was only cold and warming up. OK, wobbly and achy as well, but the bloke must be in real pain. In a pinch, he could borrow a few quid and take a cab home. Of course, finding a cab willing to take him was likely to be problematical. "I can wait."

"If he felt fit enough to leg it, so can he. They'll see to him at the station."
Doesn't pay to topple off your pedestal, does it, lad? Lewis let it be for the moment. By the
time they got into the city, Hathaway might relent, or he could be ordered. "What's so important at
the church?"

"Edmund's sure Osborn is there."

Oh? Now Lewis wanted to go there, too. He'd really, really like to have the homicidal nutter
securely in custody before calling it a day. "James."

"Sir?"

"Been a lousy day -- "

Hathaway met his eyes in the mirror. "I know."

" -- so far."

Blessed lad, he caught on immediately. "Sure you feel up to it?"

Much more than he felt up to sitting back and counting the day's blunders. "I will by then."
He was starting to thaw out, could feel his body as distinguishable parts again rather than one
helplessly quaking mass. He stretched his neck to relieve the knotted tendons of his shoulders,
became aware that past the hill they were circling a brightness was lighting the landscape, noticeably
strobing. "Did you call for backup?"

Also aware of it, Hathaway was slowing down again. "My phone's as dead as yours, no."

They came around and saw that backup had arrived anyway, a patrol car with its top lights
flashing amidst what looked to Lewis to be too many vehicles choking the track, criss-crossing
torches making the scene a confusing jumble. When Hathaway said, "I suppose Julie took it upon
herself," he identified her, coming towards them with her palm out for 'stop.' She lowered her hand
once Hathaway dimmed his headlights and she could see them. She was so specifically looking at
him that Lewis was prompted to wave at her, which made her break into a delighted smile that
seemed out of place aimed at his damp, swaddled self. At least his face was clean. Ish.

Hathaway unlatched his door, held it closed as he said to Lewis, "Stay inside, please. You've
yet to get your colour back." He opened the door, jumped out, quickly closed it.

Lewis recognised Collingsworth's eco-friendly Fiat before he saw the young man trot up to
join Julie, alongside two uniformed constables who must've arrived in the patrol car, all gathering
around Hathaway. The Land Rover Lewis had last seen in front of the manor had ended up here,
seemed to be hooked to his own car still partially in the ditch. Probably why the troops had paused to
investigate.

After a quick exchange, Julie went to get in the passenger seat of the Fiat, Collingsworth
delayed long enough to take off his coat and offer it to Hathaway, who shook his head, indicating the
state of his clothes. The young man made short work of it by tossing the coat to him to catch or let
fall, ran to his car. So far Lewis had been noticing their inspector trainee as little more than a boy
always hanging about with an eager look, like a pup hoping to be taken for a walk. Watching
Hathaway left with little choice but to don the coat --short on him, but no tighter than his own
narrowly-tailored one-- he decided to buy the laddie a pint or two soon and get to know him. Looked
to be a decent sort.

Back-lit by the headlights of Collingsworth's car negotiating a careful turn, Hathaway came
back, followed by the two constables, motioned them to wait and got in the car. "Soon as they have
"coverage," he told Lewis, "they'll send patrols to St Justin's, call in the fire, tell SOCO there's a body to retrieve once the place is secure." He raised his voice, "I can turn you over to these officers, Edmund, they'll take you to A&E, then to the station. Or you'll forget the sanctity-of-confession dodge, start talking, full account, and you can ride along while I drive to the church. If that's OK with you, sir?"

The hospital was close enough to St Justin's if Cleaves exhibited more distress. "Yeah, all right." Lewis was no less driven to bring puzzles to completion than Morse had been, even if he was only roused by the flesh and blood ones, and this one had become personal. For Hathaway, who could barely look at Cleaves, it must be painfully personal. "First, caution him."

Hathaway rattled it off and asked the priest to, "Choose."

"You'll let me see him, talk to him?"

"Within reason."

Cleaves heaved a shuddering sigh that sounded more like a sob. "All right, all right," he said resignedly. "Redde Caesari quae sunt Caesaris."

"Got the gist," Lewis stopped Hathaway who'd taken a breath to translate. "Long as the rest of it is in plain English."

Hathaway waved the constables away and edged around the other vehicles, saying to Cleaves, "If you'd bothered to look at the prints I handed you -- in the door pocket next to you, sir; found them in Llewellyn-Pierce's study," he told Lewis as an aside, " -- you'd have seen we have direct evidence Idris Abbas's codices ended up in Osborn's hands. We're not lacking proof, just the details, so start talking."

Lewis flipped on the map light, fumbled only a little getting into the evidence bag and fingered through the prints. "You came by them through Armitage at the Pitt Rivers, reckoned Osborn would want them, right?" A question was usually a better prompt than a demand.

"I didn't know," Cleaves said. "He never told me, how could I know?"

"Know what?"

"His family fortune was gone. He had nothing left."

"How in all conscience did he have a fortune to throw around in the first place?" Hathaway asked. "Didn't he take a vow of poverty?"

"Everything was meant for the Church all along," Cleaves told him defensively. "He only ever spent it in the service and for the glory of the Church."

"Unlike his vow of chastity," Hathaway grumbled under his breath as Lewis reminded Cleaves, "He had a valuable collection."

"You don't understand. It's his life-blood, his quest -- " he choked " -- was. Bestow it on the church, of course, but he'd never sell a single piece."

"So a man had to die instead?"

"He didn't mean to, I swear upon the holiest, he didn't. He has a temper, that's all. He just...lost control. They'd gone up to the bell tower to talk in private, he merely wanted a little more
time to raise the money. Abbas wouldn't wait, had another buyer lined up in the States, one of those media evangelists -- how could that not enrage Mathias? Said he must've held him by the throat, only to shake him, to keep him there, no more, but he, he -- when I went up to see what was taking so long, Abbas was dead and Mathias was...he was so distraught, took me most of the night to calm him, and the body was still up there. I'd heard fingerprints can be lifted from skin, I had to do something."

Education by telly, probably the reason for the denture caper as well. "Goes to prove," Lewis mumbled upon catching Hathaway's pained look, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Abbas's bad heart could've been what had killed him under duress. If they'd reported it instead of trying to cover it up, considering the amount of support the holy set could throw behind one of its own, a benefactor to boot, it might have come down to manslaughter, or even misadventure since Abbas had been going about a shady business. In any case, two more deaths wouldn't have followed.

"Why a public place?" Hathaway motioned at the thick woods that once more surrounded them, "Why not out here somewhere?"

"Mathias insisted. It made a difference to him, eased his mind a little -- holy ground, sanctified by martyr's blood."

For a Jordanian? The tommorot of dogma or Osborn missing some of his marbles already, Lewis didn't know or care. The dirt track finally behind them, the car felt steadier, making it too tempting to slide down, lean back, close his eyes and just listen. He might drift off, though, and he needed to be alert, especially for the next bit. "Tell us about Murdoch Cullen," he said and noted how Hathaway braced himself.

Through a voice shaky with tears, Cleaves told them, again, how it wasn't Osborn's fault, he hadn't meant the slightest harm. In fact, it was his fault, lots of indigents in the dormitory kept their dentures in glasses at their bedsides overnight, he'd switched the one closest to hand, not knowing whose it was or the harm it might cause, thinking only he had to keep Abbas from being identified.

"You knew Armitage could connect him to you," Lewis concluded, but Cleaves looked at him as if he'd said something nonsensical and continued to tell them that all Osborn had done was to put his hand over Cullen's mouth to keep Sister Agatha, right outside the sick-room, from hearing Cullen accuse Cleaves, but of course the old man was so frail, and once Cleaves had come back from sending the good sister on an errand, he'd found that --

"I can work out the rest," Lewis cut him off. Already sore from it, James didn't need to hear the details of how he'd been used to give plausibility to the cover up. "Get to Llewellyn-Pierce." He saw Hathaway's incredulous look and pre-empted his objection, "Too murky. The CPS won't waste time on it, what's the point?" Without the body, there was no way left to determine how much of a role Osborn's heavy hand had played, especially as there was a doctor on record ready to swear to the imminence of natural death. If that meant Hathaway's part in it could also be laid aside: silver lining. "Best leave it out."

No way, Hathaway's look said. All right, fine, he could fill out a conscientious report, get the gimlet eye from Innocent, they'd take the tongue-lashing for not informing her earlier, the CPS would look at the meagre thing and toss it, then they'd leave it out.

By all indications, Cleaves had as much of an idea about what had transpired inside the props container as they did. He'd only known about the meeting, thinking no more about it until a frantic, mostly incoherent call from Osborn towards the morning, had ducked out to investigate, found the bloody scene and proceeded to hide what he could. He'd come across Llewellyn-Pierce's car in plain sight in front of St Justin's, unlocked, keys inside, had feared to find the corpse in it, but no, only a
suitcase and a laptop in the boot, which he'd weighted down and tossed into the river. Noting the amount of dust on the vehicle and the gravel embedded in the tyres, same as his own car after every trip to Harrowford, he'd driven it away. Later, he'd searched the manor and worked out where the body had gone.

Lewis noted that when he was talking only of his own deeds reluctance and excuses vanished from the recounting, along with all emotion as though he didn't have any to spare for himself. Not the first time he'd seen a personality subordinated to a stronger one, but Cleaves had a robust, overbearing personality of his own, not likely to be subsumed once matured, unless -- the disturbingly flat, indifferent delivery triggered a memory. He asked in a way that wouldn't alert the priest, "Another Paul Hopkiss?"

Hathaway did a double-take. "How'd you -- ?" He cut off to mumble, "You're uncanny."

Could be a mitigating factor. At least in court. Perhaps for James, too, later, at some distance from disillusion.

Hathaway's phone buzzed, telling them they had coverage again. Patrols were at St Justin's, Bishop Osborn was said to be on the premises, and PC Baynes was asking what should be done next. "Unless he tries to leave, nothing. No need to invade the church," Hathaway said into the mobile. "We'll be there soon as we can."

Nothing left to do until then. They were back on the main road, the luminous haze of the city ahead. Cleaves had hunched down and lapsed into what Lewis assumed to be prayers under his breath. Feeling kind of...well, melty, he leaned back and closed his eyes. Just for a bit. Just a bit...no more...a bit....

Next thing he knew, there was a rattling and a hand on his arm, and he woke in front of St Justin's to a night awash with flashing lights. "Stay put," Hathaway was saying to him, "I'll see to it." He removed his hand, the rattling kept going. Lewis realised it was Cleaves fighting his door, thwarted by the child-lock Hathaway must've engaged. "I'll try to wrap it up fast," Hathaway added, released the locks, jumped out of the car and grabbed Cleaves as he practically fell out. A couple of uniforms ran up to flank them and they all hurried away.

The inside of the car now felt like a sauna, the oversuits engineered to let air in but allow nothing out. Feeling hot enough to forget he'd ever been cold, never mind recently, Lewis turned off the engine as he watched Hathaway leave the uniforms outside and enter the church through a side entrance with Cleaves. He checked his shoes, found them drier than they had been, which wasn't saying much. He exchanged the two layers of overshoes with them anyhow, and stepped out of the car. Wind had kicked up and felt wonderful for the moment. Strobes of the rack lights flashed on top of two patrol cars in addition to the one that had kept them company, the little Fiat nestled among them, the officers in alert stances standing around the concrete apron circling the building. People had come out of the church, passers-by had stopped on the pavement, all their gazes on -- the bell tower?

Lewis squinted up. Someone was sitting with stretched legs on the parapet of one of the arched openings, and from the sheer bulk of the dark form -- right, and Lewis was supposed to 'stay put'? Hathaway might as well wave at the pigs flying by if he thought he'd deal with a murderous loony and his accomplice by himself high up in the open air. "With me," Lewis called out to the nearest, burliest constable, who started to bristle, then gave a start of recognition and rushed to obey. At the entry to the tower Lewis waved him ahead, unwilling to trust his own speed up the stairs. "Bring 'em down by the scruff if you have to, just keep my sergeant safe -- and stay safe yourself."

For all he actually cared, the other two could come down by whichever means they preferred.
He kept up much better than he'd expected, stayed on the constable's heels into the belfry where Cleaves was pleading brokenly both with Osborn and Hathaway, who was holding him back while he spared Lewis a quick you-shouldn't-have look. Half-lit and half-shadowed in the light spilling out from the stairway, his large body overflowing the parapet, Osborn seemed to be in a peculiar world inside his head. He was hugging himself while expounding on something about how the 'Mussulmen' had the right of it with their minarets and minbars, messengers of the Almighty should address the faithful from an eyrie so men could keep their eyes on heaven though darkness be over them. "What say you, my dear," he focused abruptly on Cleaves, "wouldn't the Divine Liturgy be more inspiring from up here? Come, come and look. See how it lightens your spirit until you want to take flight."

Cleaves tried to go to him, making Hathaway jerk him back and snap, "Not going to happen."

"But I waited for you," Osborn said as if Cleaves had wilfully refused him. "I couldn't leave before I made sure you were all right."

"Look again, he's not all right." Hathaway passed Cleaves to the constable and faced Osborn squarely. "If you truly care how he is, stop wasting time and let's get him seen to. Come away. Now." Lewis could tell he was trying to sound mild and reasonable, but as usual when he couldn't scare up any sympathy, sounded cold and rigid.

"I never wanted you hurt," Osborn ignored him in any case and kept talking to Cleaves. "Not you. You've always been the best of them."

Hathaway flinched; "Oh, for fuck's sake," hissed past his tightening lips. Cleaves was either beyond parsing or beyond minding, looked transfixed.

"You've ever been precious to me. My loyal Edmund, my beautiful boy -- tell him," he suddenly directed at Lewis, who hadn't thought the bloke could recognise him with the light at his back and kitted as he was. "Let him know how much I did not want him harmed, tell him how I tried to keep him safe," Osborn continued, making Hathaway literally growl.

"He'd rather talk to you, don't you think?" Lewis said conversationally, stepping in front of his sergeant and shouldering him back. Any more and Hathaway was likely to shove the bloke off. "You still can do a lot for him. He's in pain, he needs you. Come with us so we can go down, get him help. After all you tried to do, surely you can do that much for him now."

"You mean well, I realise, but I've already chosen, you see," Osborn told him, "'Rather than these my bones,'" he added oddly, giving Lewis the impression he was quoting. Must've given a worse impression to the theologically-minded; Cleaves let out a tortured moan. "No, no, my dearest, your faith is stronger than that," Osborn soothed tenderly. "Remember, we're promised: 'He keeps all his bones, not one of them are broken.'"

Hathaway spoke up urgently, "You've made promises, too, when you took your vows. 'Know you not, the Spirit dwells in you, you're not your own?' You're not allowed."

To Lewis, so much blather. The upshot was in no doubt, though. He didn't dare move yet for fear of precipitating, but gathered himself. Osborn seemed to notice, "I'm sorry, Inspector," he said politely, " but I've put myself in higher hands -- to let fall or raise," and simply, neatly rolled away as if onto his side, into air suddenly full of cries from many throats.

Lewis had lunged, moving only fractionally before Hathaway's arms were around him like steel bands, holding him back. "Damn it, James!" he snapped, livid. Heat of the moment. The brief instant he could still see the heavy body in the air before it fell out of view made him realise the
parapet would've caught him too short of his waist to keep him from tumbling over with the weight. The thought came and went fast as a sobering slap, overridden by the sickening sound of the impact, dull and sharp at the same time, and inescapably, wet. It cut off the cries into abrupt, shocked silence.

Only the hum of the city in the background, and Cleaves's eerily normal voice, "He left me behind. Again."

Priest or not, must put him under suicide watch, Lewis thought, the job taking over as Hathaway let him go and joined the constable to deal with Cleaves. Free to move, Lewis approached the parapet to look down at the body broken on the concrete. Did you really think blind faith would keep bones whole? All you did was prove your God forsworn. Suddenly dizzy at the sight or the height, he pulled back. It didn't help, he still felt light-headed.

"Let me, Sarge," he heard behind him, turned to see Cleaves being supported like an unstrung puppet, aware enough for a feeble harangue about extreme unction, all three men lodged at the narrow opening of the door. "Back, back a bit and hold him a spell while I nip down here," the constable told Hathaway, his sing-song cadence reminding Lewis of his name: Thomas. With the Welsh lilt, probably his surname. Ducking through the door onto the stairs, Thomas turned to pull Cleaves's arm over his shoulder, the light in the staircase showing him pale and sweaty and young, too young to have to witness a suicide. Steadily, though, he wrapped his arm around Cleaves's waist, lifted him and held him canted on his hip. "There now, now we're tidy. If you'll part your legs a tad, won't pain you as awful," he said gently, turning and tipping into the wall to support their weight, headed down, carrying the priest while quietly assuring him, "'Tis a proper church here, it is, sir, no call to fret. Surely he's gettin' seen to, prayers and all, no doubt."

"Go on ahead," Lewis told Hathaway who'd stood aside to let him go first. "This is part of your case, too." Mostly, it was a dodge to cover up the lethargy swamping him.

Hathaway gave him an anxious glance before he got going and Lewis thought he'd seen through him, then remembered the last clue of his mood he'd given the lad was snarling at him for the great sin of keeping him safe. Right, he'd do something about that, but he had to sit down for a minute. He descended a little way until Hathaway disappeared around the curve, let himself down on a step, feeling shivery again. Not with cold this time, accompanied by a prickly burn in his muscles and stomach like a tinge of acid, a dull throbbing in the back of his head, all the symptoms of adrenaline hangover. After spiking and bottoming out over one thing or another for hours, no wonder.

Lots of voices at the bottom of the staircase. Troops must've rushed in to check on them. He heard Hathaway send PC Baynes to get a patrol car to the rear exit of the Chancery. He told Thomas to head there, asked someone to see Cleaves to A&E, process him into the system once treated and post watch over him. From her, "Aye-aye, Sarge," Julie. Collingsworth spoke up to say the Deputy Fire Chief had been in touch to report the fire was too established to do much, it was going to take time to secure the manor. "Let me have your mobile, I left mine in the car," Lewis heard Hathaway say, listened to one side of his call to the station to send in the coroner's van for Osborn and get more uniforms to St Justin's to keep order when the media inevitably descended. Lewis forced himself to rise and go down, knowing any second now James was going to look around, not find him and come thundering up.

"I can't wait until both scenes are cleared, it'll take most of the night," Hathaway was saying to Colin. "I know your shift's long done, but if you don't mind taking over--"

As eagerly as the laddie jumped on it before the sentence was so much as finished, avowing
his willingness and readiness, Lewis suspected he would've hugged Hathaway if Hathaway were at all the forbearing sort. He got down the stairs, was leaning against the wall as if he’d been waiting patiently all along by the time Hathaway saw him, led Colin out the side entrance. He followed them at his own dragging pace, found a niche outside next to the door and leaned there, uncomfortable with delegating all the work, but too unsteady.

Young Thomas' well-meaning fibs for Cleaves to the contrary, nobody was giving Osborn last rites. The bishop was now his own incident scene, not to be disturbed until processed. People from the church huddled in groups, talking or praying in hushed, tear-choked voices, uniforms in their high-vis jackets stood by in awkward silence, feet shuffling, gazes to the ground. Streamers of crime scene tape fluttered in the wind, setting apart the body and the blood spreading from it, black in the night. The heart must've stopped immediately -- or more likely, burst. Blood oozed because its vessel was broken, not because anything pumped it away.

Thomas came out of the side entrance, hastily pulled out a cigarette, lit it with shaky hands and tried to duck into the niche with it, not realising until then it was occupied. "Oh! Sorry, sir." He stopped short, caught between hiding or tossing his cigarette.

"Don't mind me, go ahead and smoke," Lewis told him. "Bound to smell sweeter than I do."

"Yes, sir --" he said and got himself even more flustered, "I mean, no, sir -- I mean, much obliged, sir."

"My sergeant smokes all the time," Lewis said to put him at ease. He didn't like scaring children. He nodded towards Osborn as Thomas took a deep draw he seemed to need badly, "Your first?"

Thomas shook his head. "I was at the crack house. On Speedwell Street?"

"Heard about it. Sounded grim."

"Right enough, but I'm used to it in a way. My family runs a funeral directors, see? It's just -- truth be told, sir," his voice dropped as if embarrassed, "I've got a thing about heights."

"Ah."

"Sorry."

"For what, getting your job done despite? You did it very well, too. I call that commendable."

The young face lit up. "Kind o' you, sir."

"My old guy, he had the same thing about heights. Great copper anyway."

"Chief Inspector Morse? He's a legend."

"There you are. Something to aim for, Thomas." Much better; youngsters should be beaming happily. He nodded at the cigarette. "Think I can have one?"

"Surely." Thomas quickly pulled out his packet. "Didn't think you smoked, sir, or I'd have offered."

"I don't, so get it going for me, would you?" Looking puzzled, the lad complied and handed it to him. "Cheers. Carry on, Thomas." Lewis levered himself off the wall, walked to where Hathaway was bringing something partly under Osborn's out-flung arm to Colin's attention, offered the
cigarette. "Here, James." Too long and too stressful a time for Hathaway not to have smoked if he hadn't mislaid his cigarettes along with some of his clothes.

"That codex, more than likely it's the murder weapon in the Llewellyn-Pierce case," Hathaway was saying as he absent-mindedly took the lit cigarette, carried it directly to his mouth and sucked in the smoke as if it were life's last breath. "Be sure SOCO makes a note of it," he continued before noticing what he was doing. Perplexed, he frowned at the cigarette, looked at Lewis, added it up.

Beaming happily was too much to expect from Hathaway's expressions, but pleasantly surprised was satisfying enough. "I'll be in the car," Lewis told him.

He turned the key once he got in the car so he could let his window down, adjusted the heater. The oversuits were stubbornly keeping the heat in and making it difficult not to rip the bloody things clear off. He glanced at the dashboard as he unzipped them to mid-chest, gave a start at seeing the time. Middle of the night, he'd have thought. Instead, it was still early in the evening. It had only felt like forever.

Odd thing, time. He'd once dug a grave for two in Wytham Woods, had to have taken him quite a while, but it had felt like only minutes marking the time remaining to him. He still remembered it as frantically brief. He'd had a home to get back to then, his wife and children counting on him to be there for them. Even Morse, who would've spat nails at the notion, but in fact had needed looking after.

Being at the heart of others' worlds, that was the reason to live.

James, while giving last minute instructions to Colin, kept glancing at the car, as if Lewis might disappear unless checked on regularly.

Or one other's world. Surprised at how much he liked the idea, he slid lower in the seat, leaned back and closed his eyes. I must do some serious thinking when I'm not dead knackered.

In a short while, he heard Hathaway get in the car, put it in gear, and say, "My place is closer." Apparently, he was not quite ready to let Lewis out of his sight yet.

Felt more agreeable than, perhaps, it should have. "Lots of soap and water, all I ask," he stuck to practicalities.

Driving out of the church grounds, Hathaway slewed the car and, by the sounds, let a couple of patrol cars whoop past. "Not cross with me, then?"

"No. God, no. It was stupid of me. Couldn't have held him up even if I kept my feet." He thought he should open his eyes instead of talking to the insides of his eyelids, but it was too much effort. "If I hadn't pushed you back, together we might've managed."

"Maybe," Hathaway said dubiously. "I don't know if I'd have tried."

"Yeah," Lewis asserted after mulling it a while, "you would have."

A soft huff was James's only response. Lewis didn't open his eyes until the car came to a stop, then the promise of a shower and clean towels energised him and sent him hurrying into the flat. He dropped his anorak, Hathaway turned on the lights and shrugged out of Colin's coat. Propelled by the same urgency, they both made a beeline for the bathroom and only then came up short, the close quarters not as accommodating to two grown men as the communal showers at the gym.
"Erm, you go first," Hathaway said, a bit discombobulated. "Just let me -- all that smoke -- I'm going to rip my eyes out if I don't get rid of these contacts." He reached past Lewis to turn on the tap inside the bath. "I'll be done by the time the water's hot." His tie lost to being used as a fishing line, he stripped out of his filthy shirt in one move by pulling it over his head, dropped it on the floor, kicked it away, heeled out of his shoes and sent them after it. He bent over the basin, grabbed the soap to first wash his hands and face. "Just one minute and I'll be out of your way."

For the first time that evening Lewis wasn't seeing Hathaway shadowed in darkness or in sporadic, uncertain illumination, but all too clearly under the unsparing light of the bathroom. An assembly of angles, gangly, bony -- nothing new. He'd never looked close enough to notice the whirls of light freckles across his sharp-bladed shoulders, though. A smattering of red pinpoints among them, probably from falling embers. His belt also left behind in that revolting cellar, his stained trousers sat low on his hips, hanging in folds over his bare feet. The sludge Lewis's arms had left on his hair and around his neck had run and dried in streaks.

Watching the fastidious, reserved Hathaway who'd heedlessly scattered and spent himself so he could be here, at a loss with the sudden, half-painful surge in his chest, Lewis was swamped by the urge to hold him. Just...hold him. Close. Just for a bit.

Two days ago, he might have done it, expecting no more from Hathaway than a start as though a strange beast had cantered into his bathroom, an awkward pat or two on his back and the prompt offer of a beer. Now, though, it might be a thoughtless thing to do. Cruel, even.

His contacts put away, Hathaway sighed in relief, sloshed water on his face one more time, turned off the tap and straightened. "My bathrobe's hanging behind the door," he said, combing his hair back with his fingers. "Use it, and anything else you want, go to bed. I'll go and get your clothes in the morning." The water dripping from his face and hair combined with the encrusted grime he'd neglected in his hurry, made messy trails down his pale skin.

Lewis checked the temperature of the water running into the bath and turned the shower on. "Lean in and rinse off that muck at least." James was bound to have cigarettes stashed away and as Lewis was in the flat, he'd try to smoke out of a window. He should be able to put on a stitch or two.

Hathaway bent over, stuck his head under the spray, carding his fingers through the back of his hair, scrubbing at his neck and shoulders. Seeing he couldn't get at some of the drips, Lewis reached and swabbed the muddy rivulets up and over his arched back. After a few swipes, removing dirt was his least concern.

He could just make out the shiny, pale lines faintly marking the skin under the bright light. Narrow ribbons of old scarring angling up the back and curving around the left shoulder as it moved and stretched. Unlike the scar on Hathaway's face, practically unnoticeable. But Lewis had had a childhood friend whose horror of a father had worked at some muck-a-muck's stables, had applied the whips and crops at home as well. His first assignment in Vice as a DC up north had also shown him enough S&M games gone wrong.

He did his best to sound matter-of-fact. "How did you get these scars?" he asked, tracing one with a finger.

Hathaway jerked upright and twisted away so fast that he created a shower of his own outside the bath. "Nothing. That's -- nothing."

"I can recognise whipping scars, James."

Hathaway shook his head as if to deny, but said curtly, "It's called flagellation."
Something to do with religion, then? Another form of torture passing as pious discipline?
"Who did it? Why?" He managed to sound calm, while thinking: *He'd better be hidden six-feet underground.*

"I meant self-flagellation."

*Christ!*

Whatever Hathaway saw on his face, he quickly added, "Don't. Don't blame the church, that's ancient history. My doing, nobody's to blame. It was a long time ago, I was young, it happens. Some do it with a razor, I did it with a whip, that's all. A knout, rather. Only one time."

"Where did you even find a whi--knout?"

"The college's drama club put on a realistic version of Passion of Christ. I was helping out backstage, they had authentic props." He grabbed a towel off the rail. "For what it's worth, I was drunk off my face," he said as he left, closing the door firmly behind him.

After he got in the shower, Lewis stood there with hot water beating down on him, feeling faintly ill. Hathaway's touchy reaction to the cuts on young Briony's arms made a lot more sense now.

He'd known young love, the intoxicating highs, the despairing lows, and the pluck to go for broke at any cost. The one thing he remembered that came close to mortification was shouting, "*I love you,*" at Val from the end of the platform as the train carrying her from Newcastle back to Oxford after the first three, dizzying weeks had pulled out of the station, only to turn around to see a group of school kids, giggling girls and snickering boys, and an elderly couple beaming at him. How could he begin to understand the kind of extremity that had sent a young man tearing into his flesh?

He finally washed his hair until it squeaked under his fingers, reached for the flannel and the soap, proceeded to scrub his skin as sore as his heart felt.

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Hathaway yanked open and slammed closed drawers, found a forgotten ten-packet, three cigarettes remaining. He pulled on his hoodie even though he wasn't close to dry, cracked open a window to lean out of it, lit up, grateful for the smoke scratching down his throat to curl warmly in his lungs.

He hadn't realised the welts still betrayed themselves when his back was arched. He usually had a flannel in between when he had reason to reach his back for any length of time, and nobody, including doctors, had ever given any indication of taking notice, not even Fiona. She'd had her hands on his naked back a number of times, hadn't she noticed or thought to ask? But then, for an investigator, Fiona could be remarkably lacking in curiosity one-on-one. Or maybe just in his case; he had no way of knowing further.

What could he have said to Lewis, *I was blind, then, to my colossal idiocy*? Constantly getting ambushed by the yearnings of the body while earnestly striving for spiritual purity, convinced that his base desires not only contaminated him but also dishonoured Edmund, mortification of the flesh must've made perfect sense to his sloshed brain. Once sober, he'd been more inclined to see it as self-injury to counter deranging confusion and realise he had to gain distance from the main source of his problem. Already on a break at the end of the Lent Term, using the plausible excuse of his aunt's
worsening health and her need for a caretaker, he'd had himself transferred to the Oxford Seminary by the start of the Easter Term. It had solved his problem, or at least had made it manageable. It had also given him the beastly gall to be so disastrously righteous with Will, mouthing strictures that stood for: *I did it, why can't you?*

In all fairness, he did not deserve Lewis's forbearance.

He felt the vibration of his mobile before he heard it ring, startled that he had no memory of slipping it into the pocket of his trousers. He dug it out and looked at the screen -- life just kept getting better, didn't it?

"I can't raise Lewis," Innocent said before he could get a word out. "Is he with you?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Put him on."

"He's in the shower." Judging by the silence which felt abrupt, that didn't add up for her. "He was trapped in a filthy reservoir. He's cleaning up."

"Tell him to be quick about it. I'll see both of you at the station soon as."

"Give me a little time to clean up, I'll be in. The only place he's going is to bed."

Not at all the way to put it; Innocent proceeded to go spare in her precisely-enunciated style. A bishop dead on the grounds of his own cathedral, tapped for three murders, first time she'd heard of the third one, mind, a priest in custody as accessory, an Oxford professor's corpse expected at Forensics, upper echelons of the department and the city council bound to get involved, along with the Catholic hierarchy, perhaps even a delegation from the Vatican from what she'd gathered, not to mention scrutiny from London because of the Israeli interest, media due to lay siege, and she had to hear it all from an inexperienced trainee, couldn't get through to her senior officer in charge? *Not. Acceptable.*

His jaw sore from clenching his teeth, he threw caution to the winds. "It has to be, Ma'am. Investigations are done, particulars up until close-of-day are in files you can access, Colin has the updates. Surely Lewis has earned a night's rest. Dealing with the upper echelons is your job." He braced himself for the scathing riot act, but this time the short silence that followed didn't feel ominous.

"I'm going to assume there's a reason for insolence," Innocent said. "What don't I know?"

He realised he hadn't told Colin what had happened to Lewis, having only partial information himself. Julie would've gathered a little more about it, but she must still be at A&E. "Bishop Osborn also has an attempted murder on his account. If I'd been delayed another ten minutes, it would've been his fourth murder, of your senior officer."

"Is he all right?"

"He will be, given a chance. Right now he's spent."

"I take it he's not injured?"

"No."
"All right. Send me a quick brief and stay with him, take the time he needs."

"Thank you, Ma'am." Rather unsettling that she'd so readily granted Lewis was his first priority, but just then, gift horse.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," she said and cut the connection.

He did as he was told, indulged in another cigarette to settle down, plugged in the kettle. He went into the bedroom, wondered what he should put out, pyjamas, t-shirt, sweatshirt, decided Lewis must know he could help himself to anything he wanted, flipped the duvet over and left. Waiting until the shower went off and the sounds of brushing and gargling ceased, he made tea. Lewis was sitting on the bed loosely draped in the too-long bathrobe, half-heartedly rubbing his hair with a towel when Hathaway walked in and placed the mug on the bedside table. "You'll hate it," he warned. "Get a decent cup later if you want, but drink this first. Hypothermia depletes blood sugar." He headed into the bathroom.

*****

James was framed in the light for a few seconds until he closed the door after himself, leaving behind the image of him still unkempt, rolling his shoulders as if sore, which of course they must be, his wet hair plastered to his skull, his neck looking, as usual, too slender to hold up his head. Lewis reached and turned on the bedside lamp. He was used to the immaculate James Hathaway, his bright hair disciplined against its natural curl, his long, solemn face occasionally livened by his odd sense of humour coming out for a quick romp -- comfortably familiar and, despite being a bit of a puzzle, comfortably defined. Until recently.

He put the towel down and picked up the mug; a more apt description for the tea: treacle, somewhat diluted. He glowered at it but kept drinking it anyway. Since it didn't feel as disagreeable as it should, he must be in need of it.

One thing for sure, he hated to see James hurting. He hadn't been able to stand seeing the lad upset over losing his guitar, even. How was he to stand knowing James suffered from lack of him? But wishing that you could did not suddenly revise over half a century of knowledge settled in every fibre. Pure vanity, probably, that wish. At an age where most illusions were lost, it was flattering to realise a bright young thing still entertained them about you.

Except that should feel good, shouldn't it? Not ache somewhere deeper than muscles and ribs -- and that inane 'broken angel' thought; there was ever only one reason, one excuse, for that kind of nonsense at his age. Unlikely, not his norm, granted, but there, a new growth amidst wreckage, so outside his realm that he hadn't recognised it to sweep it aside and it had quietly sent in a taproot, taken hold, content to wait until seen clearly enough to be defined -- and the only trouble was...what, he's a he?

So there's only one barrier you can't imagine getting past?

Well, yes.

He carried the mug back to his mouth, found it empty. He'd managed to do one thing James wanted at least. He should put the mug down, get in the bed, go to sleep, let the job and the normal run of daily life take over tomorrow.

Sure, that was going to happen. The same thoughts circling round and round in his head and
going nowhere, the sugar making its way into his bloodstream, getting him jittery and more awake with each minute. He was having a chat with Val --I know, bonny lass, caught me unawares, too. You don't mind, do you? Only, you left so many empty spaces, and you never did like those-- when Hathaway came out of the bathroom, drying his hair, a towel wrapped around his waist. He looked taken aback at seeing Lewis still sitting, the empty mug cupped in his hands.

"Oh, you didn't go to bed. You'd rather go home?" He stopped drying his hair and draped the towel in his hand over the doorknob. "No problem," he said without waiting for a response, "I'll throw on some clothes, go and get your things." He crossed to the chest of drawers, leaned to open one, rifling in it with one hand, the other at his waist, clutching the towel to keep it from slipping.

By far the wisest thing to do was to let him get on with it, but Lewis found himself putting the mug down to rise and go to him. James felt him approach and jerked upright, the underpants he'd pulled out of the drawer in one hand, stayed stock still with his back turned.

Taking a step away to stop crowding him, Lewis lightly touched his left shoulder. "Was this because of Cleaves?"

"Mostly because of me. But...yes."

"You hurt that much? Enough to self-harm?"

"Hurt?" Hathaway bumped the drawer closed with his leg and used the space to move another step forward. "Let's name the spade, I lusted that much. Happens at that age." Almost no inflection in his voice while the tension across his shoulders and the muscles bunching down his back fairly shouted: Leave it alone.

Lewis not only couldn't leave it alone, but unable to let it go without some assurance, couldn't keep from making it worse. "And now?" He wouldn't blame Hathaway one bit if he swung around to yell at him, shove him away. If he had no salve to offer, what business had he rubbing in salt?

Instead, the tight muscles relaxed. Hathaway's voice was clear and sure when he spoke, "It's different. It's -- God, so much more. There's no comparison. Senseless to even-- " he cut off to tip his head to the side. "Oh, you meant -- " the angle of his head made Lewis notice the small round mirror on the chest of drawers and meet James's near-sighted eyes that were squinting at him through it " -- am I likely to injure myself over you? Never. Yeah, older and wiser and all that, but the real reason? You. It'll matter to you. Makes no difference if you're there or not, you'll stop me. If you don't know that, you don't know yourself. Or me."

Lewis understood that James meant it in the way he had once, even if he hadn't said it the least bit as fondly; to his best recollection, he'd been angry and cutting. However said, though, it meant the same thing: You guard me just by being, make me better than I am.

He saw James smile at him in the mirror, so affectionately that his heart jumped, buoyant and silly. Grimacing with the surprise of finding his heart still limber enough to gambol like a youngster's, he looked away.

James hastily said, "I don't mean it obliges you in any way, it doesn't," clearly thinking he'd made Lewis uncomfortable. "I'm not a child, I recognise limits. I don't mind them."

No, not a child. But still too young to strangle your desires and think it a virtue. What am I, another blighting church? With the thought came a clarity of purpose, simple and direct. Also, totally improper. But so much water had gone under the dictates of professional distance that the bridge itself must be bobbing in the Channel by now. He was just going to have to accept the consequences.
"You haven't pushed me away, you don't mind the way I feel, that's more than enough," Hathaway was still assuring him as Lewis took the few steps separating them. "The rest doesn't matter, I'm used to dealing with that. Truly, I don't care. It's not a hardship, not at all."

"Two things, James," Lewis told him, turning him around, "you're not that holy," wrapped him in his arms, "and I'm not that sacrosanct." Bit awkward, what with Hathaway doing a jerky pull-push thing, but he managed to contain and hold him, the body in his arms rigid and skittish at the same time. "Shh," he soothed. Too old for him, bound to be incompatible with him -- so what? No two people came ready-to-fit like fretwork hammered to interlock. Let's see how far willingness takes us.

He tuck the blond head into his neck, inhaled the fresh scent of soap and shampoo before it dawned on him to wonder how his head could also rest effortlessly in the crook of the lad's neck; he was used to looking up at him. James was standing oddly bowed, he realised, one hand still gripping the towel, the other one stretched out as if to keep his knickers away, making everything more ungainly than need be. Lewis caught him by the waist and pulled. With a sound between a gulp and a gasp, James pressed against him -- Oh.

Unambiguous and a little unnerving. Mostly because he hadn't really, truly believed he'd be sufficient provocation, whatever James had tried to tell him. Right, then, his pragmatic side came to the fore, consider yourself halfway-there and get on with the rest.

"Doesn't mean anything, it's just circumstantial," Hathaway disavowed promptly, amusing Lewis with his lapse into a procedural term. "It's mostly adrenaline. Been so fraught for hours, hasn't settled yet, that's all," he continued babbling away, but he wasn't pulling away, and the arm not securing the towel had finally come around Lewis. "It's nothing, don't w-w-worry abou-bout..." he sputtered to a stop when Lewis deliberately kissed the bit of him that happened to be against his mouth. Below the ridge of the collarbone. Hmm. Logistics.

"For such a skinny bloke, there's a lot of you." He pulled back just enough to look at Hathaway, who immediately dropped his arm from around him. Lewis smiled reassuringly but it only seemed to worry him further. "This'll work better in bed." God, it'd be good to get his head down, he was still wobbly, but for all the lad seemed to comprehend he could've been speaking Urdu. "James. Bed." A few nudges, and Hathaway complied, as uncoordinated as Lewis had ever seen him sans alcohol, sat on the edge. "Lie down." Anything unfamiliar from here on is just unfamiliar, not wrong, he instructed himself, go with it and don't you dare make him feel bad.

Scooting back obediently while hanging for dear life onto the towel that hadn't the slightest shot at hiding anything, James asked shakily, "Wh--what're we -- ?" he stopped on a sharply drawn breath when Lewis started to untie the bathrobe, realised he'd neglected to belt it in the first place, dropped it to fall where it might. "What're you doing?"

"Everything I can." He climbed onto his knees on the bed and put a stop to the antics with the towel by simply flipping its loose end up, wishing the resultant heart-kick were a rush of desire instead of a flood of tenderness at the way James blushed all over. "You'll just have to forgive me for what I can't."

"Why -- " Hathaway gasped as Lewis, despite intending to lie down next to him, lowered himself on top of him, wanting to feel him as close as he could, hoping it'd spark a need in him as well. "Why would you want to?"

"Because the reasons for not doing it, your reasons, my reasons," or anybody else's who'd
care to make it their bloody business, "don't matter to me nearly as much as you do." Supporting
himself on his elbows, he cupped Hathaway's face in his palms, noticing he hadn't bothered to shave
while scrubbing clean, any more than he had --We're going to mark each other. So much befuddled
affection showed on the normally composed face, though, who cared about the roughness of its
cheeks? "But, James, wanting may not be enough." He searched the eyes he still couldn't tell were
blue, grey or green. "Are you OK with that?"

For a long while, all Hathaway seemed able to do was to keep looking at him wonderingly.  "Much too heavy," he finally said, sounding short of breath.

From the bloke who'd hauled him waterlogged straight out of a hole in the ground? But all
right. Lewis started to push up to move his weight off him.

"Not you." Hathaway's arms banded around him to keep him in place. "That bloody kindness
of yours." He gave an undecided smile, half-abashed, half-bold, "God help me, I'm going to take it."

Lewis let out the breath he didn't know he'd been holding. "No call for divine help, lad, we'll
be fine." Hathaway's hands started moving open-palmed over his back in tentative sweeps, making
him feel his back as if it had long been left undefined. He'd have thought finding himself on such an
unlikely threshold in their fifth year, in his fifty-sixth year, would've flummoxed him longer, been
more staggering. Didn't seem to matter, though, not right then, not like this: face to face, skin to skin,
heat to...well, warmth -- but a good warmth, quietly seeping into the numb, neglected places.
Different needs. All right. Fair enough.

The drying strands of pale hair caught his eye, having always noticed their tendency to curl,
but not frizz. He carded the fingers of one hand through it, realised the frizzed ends were only here
and there; must've been those embers. Hathaway's eyes half closed at the movement of the hand
through his hair, his head leaning into Lewis's fingers straying to the smooth skin beneath his ear,
digging back into the pillow to expose more of his neck when they trailed down, small, passive
motions. Merely reacting. Despite what he'd said, he wasn't going to take until given, even if one
hand had made it to the small of Lewis's back and went lower with each cautious sweep. At such
tiny, halting increments, though, Lewis would be past the sugar high and dead to the world by the
time it got to where it clearly wanted to go.

Get on with it -- no, too demanding. I didn't start this for you to hold back -- right, let's chide
the lad. Maybe he'd lost the voice of loving intimacy for too long. He didn't quite know how to coax
Hathaway who was locked down tight lest he make the wrong move. Slow and easy then, he
decided, hoping he wouldn't fall asleep in the middle of it, leaned in to kiss him on the mouth. It felt
different from the other night, the wide, full lips soft and yielding under his. He ran the tip of his
tongue over them, thinking it probably felt nice because James was holding back. Now that they'd
stepped off the edge, though, if this was going to be more than a bumbling act of mere solicitude, it
had to get more real, more honest. James's timidity, sitting oddly on the strong bones of his face, also
made him impatient: Bugger the slow and easy.

"Let me know if I do anything you don't like," he said, and when James parted his lips to say
something predictably reassuring, dipped his head and kissed him, open and wet and deep, drinking
in the helpless moan that came with it, unprepared for how visceral it'd feel poured into his own
mouth. His heart knocked recklessly in his chest. At a rough estimate, half apprehension, half elation.
A little rattled, he started to pull away, heard the grumble deep in Hathaway's chest take exception to
it, changed his mind, took a quick breath and sealed their mouths again. The large hands dived into
his hair to keep him in place and the wide mouth clung to his as if parched, a low rumbling, rather
like Monty's purr on steroids, vibrated through the kiss.
He'd been scared of this for years, thinking memories would come flooding back, make him try to resurrect --or bury-- his loss in someone else's body. The long, spare body under his defied comparison, though, all sharp ribs, hipbones and knees, bloody near uncomfortable, and for that, comforting. Just James. Purely James.

Lewis held him by the nape and went on kissing him. If not with passion, with feeling, in ways he hadn't felt for so long that it was indistinguishable from passion to him. Until Hathaway coiled one leg around his, pushed up into him, clarifying the difference.

*Stop thinking of yourself and do something for him.* He broke the kiss, earning another wordless dissent, slid lower, nuzzling down to the tender skin of the neck where pulse beat fast against his lips. Slipping both arms behind James's, he hooked his hands over the freckled shoulders, rocked against him, unable to help feeling wicked about blatantly pressing and rubbing at the stiff curve of the erection, aware of the thin trails of slick wetness it left on his belly, and as with most things wicked, a little tantalized.

James moaned, roughly. When Lewis raised his head to look at him, he seemed to be concentrating intensely, eyes screwed shut, biting hard on his lip. *Not enough?* He shifted off, onto his side on the bed, pillowed...well, *laid* his head on James's chest, the rise of flesh no deeper than a section of a thin, firm quilt, but warm and roomy. Plush was too much to expect anywhere on the lad.

He stroked down the body where everything felt elongated, taut, but once past the ribcage, softer and supple, fluttery against his palm the closer he got to the groin, as if timid about being touched. He didn't linger, lest James read it as hesitation and think him unwilling -- especially as he was hesitant. But as he wrapped his fingers around the hard shaft, it felt different, but not strange. The main oddity was not feeling it from the inside, and when James's whimper tugged at his insides, not even that bit odd. The angle was awkward, but he reckoned there'd be little to tell between fumbling and fondling until he hit on a pace James liked.

Judging by the moans and the cooperation of his hips, James liked everything, but just as Lewis felt them in sync, James's hand grabbed his. To guide it, he assumed, but the following, "No...don't...stop," confused him. *Don't or don't stop?*

He leaned up on his elbow to look Hathaway in the face -- flushed, screwed up as if in pain, a face set to endure. "What's wrong?"

"*I can't* -- God, I *still* don't believe you'd --"

It couldn't still be reticence, could it? "Relax, James. I have one of these." He tightened his fingers, making Hathaway whimper again. "It's not complicated."

"*I know,*" he moaned, tugging at Lewis's hand."Any more and all the reciting of Snorri Sturluson isn't going to help."

The tugging was too half-hearted to take seriously. "Who might that be?"

Facts had to be served up under any circumstance, apparently. "Icelandic mythographer. Middle Ages."

"For pity's sake, lad, memorize some cricket scores."

Hathaway's eyes opened to roll heavenward, not with bliss. "I already know Snorri."

"Aptly-named gent, I'm thinking. OK, fine, if you don't want this -- "
"Of course I want it, how can I not? Only -- " he cut off and went back to chewing his lip.

"Is there a better offer on the ceiling?" James's eyes snapped to him. "Now, straight out, tell me what you'd rather."

"If you're sure you want to go on, if you're really, really sure -- "

*Give me strength.* "What does it look like I'm doing, assessing fruit at the greengrocer's?"

Hathaway gawped at him, then snorted and said, "Consumer alert: ripe to bursting."

It startled a laugh out of Lewis. He let James lift away his hand, then used it to gather him into a hug. "Reprobate."

"You started it," Hathaway defended himself.

"Fair cop. Go on then, tell me what you want."

"Can we not rush it, please? Give me a little time? Let me...let me."

"I'm right here." He pulled back and ruffled the damp hair. "You're the one lying there like Shelley's effigy." Just then he looked somewhat like Shelley's effigy, too, more sinewy than sinuous, but rather appealing in abandon. "What're you afraid of?"

"Bollixing it."

"With all the odds against, look where we are, James. How much will I find really objectionable from here on, you reckon?" Any hint of unease from him at anytime and, he had no doubt, Hathaway would back off. "Go on, do what you want," he allowed, rolling onto his back.

*Too* comfortable, reminding him how tired he was, muscles sore, joints stiff, the remnant of the earlier headache lingering. He'd picked one a hell of a time to rush headlong into this, dragging James along. Then again, would either of them have done anything of the sort on an ordinary day? And he *had* dragged the lad along, the least he could do was not fade out just yet.

Propped on an elbow, Hathaway watched him, his eyes going all over him with absorbed attention as if set on missing nothing, seeing, apparently, what only he could see. He didn't at all seem to be saying, as Laura had: You're here, I'm here, let's make do. He looked as though he couldn't believe his luck. No stranger to himself in the mirror, it confounded Lewis, even embarrassed him, but felt better than sense should dictate.

James touched his lips with gentle fingers, traced them, placed a surprisingly chaste kiss on his unshaven cheek, "Stop me if -- " he got out before restraint seemed to fly off somewhere and take chastity with it, threw his arms around him, hugging him fiercely, kissing all over his face and throat like a storm of impulses, moving down to rub his face against Lewis's chest, stubble catching on hair, a deep hum vibrating in his chest like a running commentary, unmistakable sounds of relish he wouldn't be making, Lewis would bet, *except* unwittingly. Used to him either imitating a clam or talking the head off a pin, he found the inarticulate soundtrack amusing. Delightful. *Flattering."

He smoothed his palm over the curve of Hathaway's bowed shoulder, said, "Feels good," and felt his smile against his belly. Maybe it was like Wagner. He'd gritted his teeth and struggled to appreciate the dense music because it had been practically Morse's last wish, until he'd realised working at trying to understand it only got in the way; he simply had to let it soak in, fill him up.

Rather luxurious, to lie back and soak up sensation, except the sensations didn't build up to
arousal, even when James's hands and mouth made their way to his genitals, almost in passing, amiable rather than purposeful. Lewis couldn't tell if he was unsure of himself or didn't want to be pushy, felt bad about it either way; now he seemed to be the one offering no more than 'make do' and James had every right to want to be wanted back.

Hathaway inched his way back up, hugging and nuzzling, breathing him more than breathing, lifted his head to look at him, seemed to read his mood or face, and his absorbed intensity turned into a concerned one. "Don't," he entreated. "Why should I mind your nature any more than you mind mine?"

He was so earnest about it that Lewis pulled him fully on top of him to hug close. "Such unlikely romantics, us," he said in jest, to lighten the mood, but was struck by how true it rang. If either had been interested in a shag, they could've found it elsewhere, in more practical forms. Taking the unlikeliest path, to matter enough so the things that normally mattered didn't -- yep, dozy romantics, both of them.

The fingers on Lewis's shoulders kneaded fretfully, James squirmed to burrow closer, breathing heavily, his hips starting to flex, his body refusing to be ignored any longer. Loath to unwrap his arms from around him and dispel their closeness, Lewis jostled him a bit, nudging his legs into better position, shifting himself until he trapped the full, urgent bulk and heat of him between his thighs, tightened his legs. "Oh," James said as if confronted with something unexpectedly clever --he clearly hadn't had kind lasses indulge him in randy youth-- took his mouth in a deep kiss, and as though the connection between lips and hips was instantaneous, started thrusting.

Strangely enough, it didn't feel oppressive, despite his weight, the sheer size and drive of him, his avid mouth, the clear-cut corrugations of his ribs contracting and expanding with his strong thrusts -- despite all that, he felt fragile to Lewis, more so when he tucked his head into Lewis's neck and made small, broken sounds. "I've got you," he found himself echoing Hathaway from a few hours ago, "I've got you, you're fine," aware of the hitching breath, the quickening movements, "I'm here, we're fine, I've got you."

James's breath caught, his grip tightened, he froze, then started to shudder. Afterwards, he let out a long sigh and went boneless, his head still buried in the crook of Lewis's neck. He seemed to like that spot, seeing how often he chose to nestle there. Skimming the surface of sleep, Lewis ran his fingers through the blond hair, smoothed it down where it was starting to stick out at the crown, changed his mind and fluffed it back into tufts, decided he liked playing with it and did it again, and again.

James started to move off him. Lewis was still unwilling to let go, but he couldn't keep his eyes open and he had little strength left, his arms slid off to his sides. OK, as long as he didn't have to move any more, and it looked like he didn't, at least not on his own. James tugged something out from under him --had to be the towel he'd clung to-- nudged his thighs apart to wipe him down with it. Chez Hathaway, full service.

He felt himself being watched and smiled in lieu of opening his eyes.

"All right?" James asked.

"Better than."

"Truly?"

"Cross me heart."
James's palm came to rest over his heart, but what he said was, "Should I sleep on the sofa?"

When, for the first time in so long, a bed didn't feel like a raft for the lone survivor of a shipwreck? "Why should you?"

"I just thought...."

"You think too much," he mumbled. Too wiped out to explain, he tugged at James's propped arm to persuade him lie down with him already.

"Can I do anything for you?"

Let me sleep.

"Let me do something for you."

"Only if I don't have to stay awake for it," he said. Or thought he said.

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Hathaway rifled through his medicine shelf. After the ordeal Osborn had put him through, Lewis had to be achy. He could use a massage and Hathaway could use making him feel good in some manner. He bypassed the various ointments for muscle relief, unwilling to spread camphor on skin submerged in heaven knew what and, knowing Lewis, scrubbed to stinging, further reddened in places by his own face. He just wanted something soothing that'd help his callused hands glide -- ah, there.

When he came out of the bathroom with the jar in hand, Lewis hadn't moved an inch, was already, deeply, asleep. Still staggered by the thereness of him, Hathaway quietly put the jar on the bedside table, untangled the duvet to cover Lewis, clicked off the lamp. Standing by the bedside with nothing left to do, the improbable day swamped him, making him feel punch-drunk. Harrowing punches, wondrous punches, difficult to distinguish while reeling. Unsteadily, he sank cross-legged to the floor where he'd been standing, feeling for the robe Lewis had let drop and wrapping up in it. In a minute. In a few minutes. Sometime tonight. He doubted if floodlights could awaken Lewis right then and he didn't want to lose him to darkness just yet.

A line from a poem strayed into his mind and for the first time he realised the poet hadn't meant memorised when she'd written: 'Now that I have your face by heart, I look.' If a face could be formed of a man's nature, he was looking at it. As far as he was concerned, any other value was a poor match.

Watching Lewis sleeping, worn out, threw him back years, to the first inkling his feelings for his boss might've crossed the boundaries just a bit. The interminable night in Cooper's basement, the place crammed with files, holding whatever being privy to had made the creep feel less insignificant than he was. Hathaway hadn't a single doubt Cooper had brought up Val only as a wretched attempt to connect more personally with a police officer, but he hadn't had the heart to leave Lewis to labour alone. Hours later, wearied by futility more than the work, he'd simmered to exasperation, his back sore from leaning over, his bum gone past sore into numb from sitting in the middle of the papers spread out on the floor. One last file, he'd decided, and he'd be out of there with or without Lewis.

Just then, Lewis had leaned against his side to look down his shoulder at the file in his hand. Clinging to the tatters of his patience, Hathaway had been telling him there was nothing of interest in
it unless he cared about the peccadilloes of some local toffs when he'd realised Lewis wasn't looking at anything. He'd become tired enough to fall asleep where he sat and he'd slumped into the nearest support.

Hathaway could remember the sudden sluice of tenderness, washing away annoyance, even discomfort. There'd been absolutely nothing sexual about it then --he suspected that would've made him jerk away-- but it must've been at least a little physical, for instead of jostling Lewis awake and telling him it was time to quit, he'd slowly put the file down and slid his arm around him to settle him more securely and held him there, feeling calm, centred, grounded. Useful.

All too soon, of course, he'd realised that the way to be truly useful was to get the man out of his uncomfortable huddle and to his home, and spare him the embarrassment of snuggling with his sergeant. The fact that he'd have gladly stayed as a resting place until the morning had been the first small thing he'd locked away in a private compartment he hadn't at all expected to require so much room in time.

He had no idea what tonight meant -- except more often than not Lewis did try to help him over rough patches. Once he'd left the hospital after Zoe, Lewis had started prodding him into the gym despite having shown no prior interest in working out or playing squash. After the Zelinsky case, when all Hathaway wanted was to crawl away and brood, Lewis had regularly been at his door with take-out. The evening Mrs Temple had tried to blow her head off, with some pub crawl thrown in. The night he'd almost lost another young girl to a watery grave and later said goodbye to Fiona -- the aftermath was hazy, except he remembered Lewis patiently nursing his beer while he drank himself legless, taking him home and pouring him into bed. It must've become complicated by then, because he also remembered wanting to pull him into it with him.

Exactly where they had ended up tonight. A one-time act of compassion --please, God, not obligation-- at the end of a hellacious day? An occasional indulgence --remedy?-- from here on? Even if Lewis were awake, Hathaway doubted he'd know how to ask. Or care to hear the answer. If Lewis was this incapable of buckling when someone needed to lean on him, Hathaway had to be doubly vigilant from now on not to. Just for the rest of the night, though, he'd listen to Horace and stop belabouring tomorrow: quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere.

He rose and dropped the robe. As deeply asleep as Lewis was, once Hathaway started to fit himself next to him he murmured something, gathered him familiarly into his side, pulled one of his arms over his chest and held it there. A grace owed to Val, no doubt. He laid his head on Lewis's shoulder, smiling to himself at learning he snored --a nugget of privileged information-- finding it cosy, soothing, his eyes drifting shut while watching his hand rise and fall on Lewis's chest to the rhythm of his breathing.

He'd neglected to turn out the light. Oh, well....

*****

Lewis was half-awakened by his arm slipping off the bed. He drew it back up, couldn't find a place to put it except across his body, realised groggily that he'd been inching to the edge of the mattress as usual, looking for a cooler spot. Any more, he'd tumble off. He bucked gently against the weight plastered to his other side, "Roll over, pet."

Nodding on and off, it took him a while to notice nothing had happened. He nudged blindly at the shoulder angled into him. "Come on, love -- " early days, he'd taken to getting out of his side
of the bed and getting in the other, but Val had said it disorientated her, she'd rather be told to move "-- roll over."

There. He turned onto his side and settled back against -- threw his arm over --

Oh. Right.

He'd been afraid of this, too, waking up with someone in the bed and Val in his head, feeling as if he was breaking faith with one of them, wondering if he had to push one away to keep the other. Just then, though, they felt inseparable. If he hadn't known how to be loved, he may not have...recog... recognised....

A while later, he surfaced enough to notice he was getting too warm again. Better than growing old and cold, he decided sleepily, pushed the duvet down a bit, draped his arm back over James. This mattress was comfortably firm, too, public school dorms probably didn't accustom one to cushy....

Next time he cracked open his eyes, it was still the wee hours, he didn't have to stir yet, but dawn wasn't too far off. Workday would be looming before he'd care to be upright, but that was why he had a sergeant, to take up the slack when -- oh, wait.

This topsy-turvy was going to take a bit of getting used to, but, he mused placidly, at least he didn't have to relearn the toilet seat procedure. He'd never understood why, if he could put the seat up with no fuss, the next person couldn't put it down without yelling at him.

Smiling at the silly thought, he was about to drift off when he realised the rhythm of James's breathing was different, probably what had drawn him from sleep. With his head snuggled into James's back, Lewis could tell he was breathing in a deliberate cadence, the way one did to control or diffuse something. He ran his hand soothingly over James's chest, trying to wake up his voice to ask what was wrong when he noticed how...alert the nipple under his palm was. Healthy lad, getting on towards morning -- he slid his hand lower-- yep, predictable.

Hathaway mumbled something that sounded like "Shoulda got a bed." Maybe he wasn't quite awake yet and that was just fine. Lewis had always loved the languid not-quite-awake indulgences of not-quite-mornings.

Except there was nothing languid about Hathaway's grip on his wrist, carrying his hand back to place on his hip as if he were returning something borrowed, making Lewis suddenly unravel what he'd heard: Should've got out of bed. He rose on his elbow to be able to look at James who was curling up into himself and disappearing under the duvet. "What is it?"

"I can't. I'm sorry, I can't do this. Thought I could, but I can't."

He hadn't seen that coming. It winded him. He sank back into the pillow, rolled onto his back for some distance. Not seeing things coming was turning into a habit lately. He drew in a long breath, let it out slowly. OK. All right. No sense in blaming the lad. How could he have known what would or wouldn't work for him without ever trying? It had seemed to suit him, but maybe on consideration -- and in all fairness, he should be with someone more compatible. It wasn't James's fault if Lewis had started remembering things he hadn't been able to consider requisite to living for years.

As if he'd heard and was denying it, "It's all my fault," Hathaway said miserably. "I should've kept it to myself, should've never let on, but how could I have imagined you'd ever -- ? I never meant to -- I'm sorry."
"Shh, it's all right." Lewis reached to pat his shoulder, ended up awkwardly patting the duvet. At least his voice was steady, and if it was a little rough, well, he'd been asleep. "Odds were against us in the first place. We try, we fail, how else can we learn?" For heaven's sake, platitudes? You know what he needs to hear. "We're fine, James. Don't worry, no harm done." He should get up, get dressed, go home. But first Hathaway had to go and get him something to be dressed in, and he didn't seem inclined to unfold, let alone get up. "OK, false start, but that's all it is, don't dig yourself back into a hole." He had experience in looking up from the bottom of a pit. His hadn't been self-imposed, but he couldn't deny it had been self-maintained since then. "Don't be afraid to try again with someone better suited," an unexpected wrench in his chest took exception to his own words and he had to push past it, "find out what you truly need. If you decide it isn't for you, or maybe you want kids after all, there are more Fionas out there than Scarletts, you'll find the right -- "

Hathaway seemed to fly out of the duvet, all arms and legs, onto his knees on the bed. "What're you saying? Why would I -- ?" He sat back on his heels, grabbed a corner of the cover and jerked it over his lap although he'd clearly lost interest in the meantime. "I don't care who's out there, all I want is right here."

"So what's the problem? I am here."

"You're here for me."

"Yeah, that's how it usually works. Who're you here for?"

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't. Spell it out for me."

"Do I have to? Last night -- I'd almost lost you, I couldn't help it, but I can't keep holding you hostage to what I want."

"Hostage? Christ, James! However big-hearted --or grateful-- you think I am," he waved his hand between them, "any of this would've been over the limit. Surely you realise I don't just care about you, I care for you."

"I know," Hathaway almost wailed. "I finally got that." He flailed, made a move to reach out, dropped his hands back onto his lap. "But that makes it worse. If I'm selfish enough to keep taking advantage of it, how can I deserve it? Why should I?"

Lewis stared at him. "You've been falling over yourself assuring me lack of sex made no difference to you. Why can't I feel the same?" He wouldn't do Laura the disservice of saying he'd already had the offer in reverse and turned it down; Hathaway would have no trouble making the connection. "You said you didn't mind."

"I don't, on my account. I wasn't the one who got nothing out of it."

Nothing? As though he only had feeling in one bit of his body. "Innocent once told me you think I'm enigmatic. That's nonsense, James. I'm dead simple and the way I see it," he sat up, looked Hathaway square in the face and told him the truth, "I almost chose to give up breathing yesterday. Today, I wouldn't." Cause for the first time in years I don't feel like I'm doing it on an artificial respirator. "Last night may not count as great sex, but in ways that do count, it was making love. I haven't had that in a long time, I've missed it and I liked it."

"You did?" Hathaway asked, doing his best to sound sceptical, but a hopeful edge had crept in. "Really?"
"I was set to like it again," Lewis told him, "but you had to go and agonize over selfishness." By all rights, he should be talking the lad out of it, not into it. But he'd be the one paying the price for his selfishness when it came due, not James.

"Except none of this would've so much as crossed your mind if I -- if I hadn't -- " he trailed off, one hand jerkily indicating both of them.

Lewis plucked it out of the air and kept it, wanting a connection before he conceded the point, "Can't deny that. But that's like asking a blind man if he'd like his cardigan in red. How would he know? Wrap it around him and if it feels nice and warm, what does he care about the colour?"

"That's your argument? For this?"

A damn good argument, he'd thought. In any case, years of interviews had taught Lewis it was rarely the strength of the argument; it was how much the other person wanted to be persuaded. "I'm not a debate society," he countered and tugged.

"God, I hope you're sure," James said fervently and not only let himself get pulled in but wrapped around Lewis, tumbled them both back onto the bed.

*However hard to credit, bloody positive, as it happens.* "We still have a couple of hours before we have to get up -- "

"Innocent said to take as long as you need," Hathaway interrupted while settling them on their sides, tugging a couple of times at the duvet that had bunched between them before giving up on it.

"OK, a few hours yet." Innocent rarely held them to strict hours as long as they didn't watch the clock while in the thick of it and didn't burden her budget by putting in for overtime. But once the reports piled up in front of her today, she was likely to get impatient. "So turn this down a trifle," he lightly tapped James's temple, "and let's just be."

"Be?" Hathaway questioned like an accusation, pulled his head back to glare at him. "Chose to give up breathing?"

*Bugger.* "I was in a dark, dark place," he offered with as much existential profundity as he could manage to fake.

James blinked in surprise and forgot to glare. "Did you just turn that nightmare into a pun?"

"By the way," Lewis said quickly to keep the advantage, bending his thumb at the jar that hadn't been on the bedside table earlier, "is that a hint?"

"No. No, no, no, I just -- last night, after all you went through, you must've been in knots, I thought you could use a massage, that's all. " He reached to pick up the jar and displayed its label like proof of chastity, "See, it says *Strictly Professional.*"

Lewis kept a straight face. "Isn't that what all those massage parlours claim?"

James actually looked hurt. "I swear to you, I never even thought of -- " he cut off to frown at him "--are you having me on?"
"Let's see. How likely is it you'd set up a hand-job and have a crisis of conscience instead? Very least, you wouldn't have left the evidence in plain sight. So yeah, I am rather."

Hathaway couldn't seem to decide between getting amused or annoyed. "Slick," he grumbled.

Lewis cut his eyes to the jar. "Bet it is."

"Oh, that's just -- you may have aspects I'd not suspected."

"Turns out, I have aspects I'd not suspected," he said, then, fearing it might reactivate James's guilt trip, he added quickly, "Was a grand thought, the massage. Wish I could've stayed awake for it." Sleep had further tightened his neck and shoulders uncomfortably.

"You're awake now." James promptly looked pleased and --oh, dear-- ambitious. "Turn over."

Parts of him voted for it enthusiastically, but he found himself saying, "Relax, lad, have a lie-in. I'm snug." For a few more hours yet. This was so new, still so surprising, that he wanted a little more time before he had to open the door to the outside, to life-as-is. Was.

Hathaway tucked his head in between his and the pillow, tightened his arms around him, rolled onto his back, carrying Lewis along to lie angled over him. For a second, it was jarring, being pulled out of a hole in the ground one thing, being manhandled in bed, another. But then, he had a taken a man to bed, and really, it was restful to sprawl without worrying about smothering his partner.

"All right?" James asked.

"Right as." Not exactly cushiony, but plenty accommodating. "Still snug," he assured.

James was fiddling with something across Lewis's back, then he was rubbing his hands together vigorously, making squishy sounds. Apparently, some form of massage within the parameters of snugness was still forthcoming. James Hathaway, nothing if not dogged once he spied a purpose. At work, beyond price. Not necessary here, but surely the lad knew that.

As slippery hands started at his neck and rubbed across his shoulders with light, warming pressure, Lewis wondered if James actually did know that. He may have been brought up to think usefulness equalled worth. Had he ever had occasion to feel secure in an intimate relationship to learn otherwise? It'd be nice to see him as confident of his worth as he was of his abilities.

Patches of warmth bloomed under James's hands moving in circles, up and down and across, over and over, then he gave firmer squeezes to the ropy muscles at the back of Lewis's neck, making him groan.

"All right?" he asked again.

"Grand."

Getting his arms over or under Lewis's to reach more of his back, Hathaway started pushing firmly with the heel of his hand, digging with his fingers into the rigid muscles until they hurt. Lewis hissed in a breath, but James couldn't transfer his weight into his hands while supine, so it was a pleasant sort of hurt. He breathed out in a sigh. The probing into the tightness wiring his shoulder blades made him start groaning again, then, as tension yielded inch by inch, "Aye," he murmured, "that's good." While each muscle loosened and relaxed, he found himself humming appreciatively, moaning here and there into the cusp of James's shoulder.
"Dear God. Do you know how you sound?"

The only thing he could come up with was, "Growly?"

"I wish. Erotic."

Lewis scoffed. "I don't get it. I've seen the beautiful young women -- and the man -- that attract you. This still baffles me."

"Well aware of your inclinations, imagine how baffled I am."

"Oh, well," he mumbled, starting to go boneless with the bunched tendons un-kinking. '"More things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of,' I suppose."

Hathaway literally squawked. "Who are you and what have you done with my guv?"

Lewis grimaced. "Less of the guv, please." A prickly sense of transgression was still lurking in a corner, didn't need light thrown on it. He groped for another subject, "Tell me something, the other night in my kitchen, what'd you mean you'd take her word?"

"Her word?"

"You wouldn't take mine, said you'd take hers instead."

"Oh. Right. Sorry about that."

"No, you're all right. Wondered who and why, is all."

"Innocent. Something she'd said."

Lewis thought the Chief Super's name shouldn't be coming up so often while they were tangled up in bed in the altogether. "Which was?"

"She told me the only way to be sure of any relationship is to test it to destruction."

Blimey! "What brought that about?"

"I'd asked her advice. You know, that time when I...before I told you about Monkford."

"I see." Although he didn't. Hadn't the issue been if Lewis could behave professionally towards Monkford? Why should relationship advice come up in that context? Dealing for so long with loose threads in his cases, he certainly noticed when one needed picking, but he was too pleasantly relaxed to bother.

"What're you thinking?" James asked quietly after a while.

"As your notion of destruction was a kiss, I'm thinking I don't have much to worry about. I feel for Mr Innocent, though, poor bastard."

Hathaway chuckled. "My stomach dropped to my knees when she threatened to send us to couples' counselling. Thank God she was only joking."

Send us to -- ? That thread needed pulling after all. How had 'us' come into it at all? It shouldn't have, unless -- unless Hathaway hadn't been worried about what retribution Lewis might visit on Monkford, but what would be visited on him, merely for being the messenger. No wonder Innocent had been skulking around to pounce on him and ask about the state of their relationship.
before anything else.

How had he overlooked the fact James's instincts and determination had delivered the justice due to Val after even Lewis had given up and scolded the lad instead? Insult to injury, he'd scolded him for the wrong reason. For no reason, in fact. And in the process he'd proved James had had every reason to dread his reaction.

Were you that scared of damaging 'us'? Even back then?

Hathaway had been so easy with him once, freely making cheeky comments, taking the piss over their generation gap, cheerfully feeding him codswallop when he didn't care to answer a question, offering saucy observations over Lewis's budding relationships.

Two far-apart, similar incidents echoed. Rather, did not echo. Barely a day into their association, Hathaway handing him Morse's old case file on Danny Griffon while explaining matter of factly that he'd dug it up because Lewis had expressed an interest. Earlier this year, Hathaway, dishevelled after putting in an all-nighter, ducking away and mumbling, as if embarrassed to tell Lewis to his face that he'd laboured at the monumental task because of him, for him. I get it, lad, the more we fear to lose, the closer we guard.

We've come a long, long way, it seems -- he'd been deeply touched then, nothing compared to what swamped him now -- while I've been wearing blinkers. "And I call myself a detective," he muttered. All of a sudden, James's hands were making him acutely aware of himself instead of lulling him, as though parts of him that had sunk into anonymity were awakening.

Next thing he knew, he'd lifted up, his abruptly shifting weight pushing air out of James in a soft whoosh, and he was kissing James -- making a point of kissing him. Delving deep, straying to the corners of his mouth, his raspy cheeks and chin, his neck where the skin was soft and pulsed underneath, running a hand over his warm, taut flank, making a handle of his hipbone -- until it dawned on him that he wasn't responding to the undertow of James's feelings this time. The sudden urge was all his own, if not sexual, certainly sensual.

He pulled back, expecting to see James look different somehow, but he was still his distinct self, his face holding more character than simple handsome could accommodate, his own odd elegance, lean and wiry, same as always. So was the fondness welling up inside Lewis, but the wonder of it was new, as though he were young and callow again, when love and sex were novel, surprising, full of revelations, and just a bit scary. It was startling to experience it afresh, in ways that still felt like new discovery -- everyone's a sceptic until they have reason to believe.

James seemed perplexed by his abrupt zeal, was regarding at him with a frown, holding his hands like a surgeon's in prep, as if unsure what they should be doing. Lewis moved off him onto his side, sliding his hand under the folds of the duvet to follow the sharp-cut muscle sloping down from James's hipbone. "Change of agenda -- " ah, all his groaning had passed for erotic " -- you mind?"

"Only if you change it back," James said with charming alacrity, yanking the covers free and shoving them out of their way. Once his eyes swept over Lewis, he amended, "I won't mind either way."

Cover of the book, lad, is all. "Not about to change it."

Hathaway turned to lie facing him, scooting closer, his face in shadow now, the light at his back outlining him, turning his tousled hair into a bright halo. It enticed Lewis to bring his hand up to cup his cheek and stroke the long sideburn that practically disappeared in daylight, looking like the
jaw-guard of a shiny helmet right then. He found himself quoting, "The mild eyes and kindly smile of the Knight, the setting sun gleaming through his hair." His cheeks warmed at hearing that come out of his mouth. Had to be Lyn's fault for keeping the illustration of Carroll's long-limbed, gaunt Knight from her childhood book on her wall all the way through her adolescence. "What?" he grumbled when James gave a start. "I read my share of bedtime stories in my day." In his defence, they had tumbled through the looking-glass, hadn't they?

Hathaway's lips quirked as he took Lewis's hand to place a kiss on his palm. "Do you remember his tune, not the made-up song, the actual tune," he asked, bending Lewis's hand back to kiss his wrist next, "the one thing the White Knight did not invent?"

Bugger. He should've known better than to toss a quote at the man who could bury him under libraries of them. He expected silence to goad Hathaway into supplying the answer. Contrary to the norm, it didn't. "You're going to tell me?" All he got was a kiss on the inside of his elbow. "Well?"

"Nuh-uh," issued from James's throat, his lips otherwise occupied, carrying on to Lewis's shoulder, across his collarbone, to his neck, nibbling here and there. He eventually spared his mouth long enough to say, "You'll have to look it up."

Really? Now is a good time to distract me? It'd serve James right if he chose to lie there groping for the name of the bloody tune in old, faded memories. And for a while, as James pressed his forehead to Lewis's temple, lightly bit his earlobe, then seemed to map out his face to leave no spot un kissed, it was all he could do. Shortly, the way hushed words made one focus and strain to hear, James's handling him as though he should be patiently, carefully cultivated became its own frustrating distraction.

I'm not fragile, he was about to object when James bent his head to take his nipple between his teeth with barely felt pressure and flicked it softly with the tip of his tongue, but another old memory nudged him. He'd treated Val like fine china early days, not because she was fragile, skittish, or virginal -- none of those, his self-willed lass-- but because he'd feared he'd do something the least bit wrong and she'd go right off him. Until she'd taken matters in hand and made it clear that neither a gentleman nor a caveman would do, he'd best aim for a happy medium.

Lewis spied the jar of massage cream in between the pillows, picked it up, flipping off its lid, which skittered off the bed. He held the jar where James could see. "Is this safe everywhere?"

James glanced at it and asked, all concerned, "Why, does it sting?"

A mite slow today, are we? "Not that I've noticed. You will, though."

"Oh," the light dawned, "yes, it's safe, but you don't have to -- " By then Lewis had scooped some out with his fingers, smeared it on his palm and had him in hand. James inhaled sharply, his eyes pressed closed and flew open again all too soon. "Don't."

"Let's not start that again."

"No, I meant -- I was too hasty before. For you, I mean. Maybe if I go slow, take enough time...."

Ah, intentionally slow."Your courage is fine, lad, but you're a bit lacking in serenity."

Hathaway gave him an incredulous look. "An overworked cliché from a theologian? Out of your mouth?"

How can I cope with that giant brain if I don't scramble it now and then? "You can always
"close it," he suggested, chuckling when James looked as he did at any flirtation, tardy to process. "Oh, come here," Lewis said, pulling him by the nape and sealing their lips, earning an "Umph," at the suddenness of it. Deep moans followed, long fingers gripping Lewis's hair to press fit to smother them.

Seemed to be a pattern, diffident and self-conscious at the start, until his reserve frayed and tore across the inhibitions of his too-busy mind and turned him feverishly carnal. Resisting sexual awakening so long past puberty while burdening it with the pitiless weight of dogma -- no wonder. Let it go, lad, I've got you.

He groped blindly for the jar he'd dropped -- there. He scooped up some more cream, shaking off the jar, but by then James had thrown a leg over his thigh, firm as a grappling hook, leaving no room for air, let alone a hand. Lewis rubbed his hand down the curve of James's shoulder and wherever he could reach over his smooth chest that became silky under his hand, stopping to rub a nipple with his palm, then pinch it since his fingers were too slippery to hurt, enjoying James whimpering into his mouth. Felt like warm brandy on a cold night, a sweet warmth spreading through his midriff.

Another pinch made James gasp, shift more into him, undulating restlessly, the lubricant turning into damp, sleek heat between them, making it effortless to get caught up in the flow, hold tight and move, with him, against him, just move. Seemed like forever his body had only been something to maintain to stay sane and sanitary. It was intoxicating to find it still pliant, reflexes slipping into the unique balance of intimacy, assertive and yielding at the same time, swapping words from mouth to mouth, indecipherable, but no matter, mere punctuations, bodies articulate enough -- and if Lewis's was still a little deaf, what of it? The inadvertent bumping noses, tangling hands, and colliding knees only added zest, raising a chortle or a snicker, ardour and affection readily commingling without thought, senses on a trip, mind taking a welcome break.

Lolling on the bed, indiscriminate about whatever fell under hands or mouths, lightly biting an earlobe or chin, lapping at a nipple or clavicle, James making a sound of surprise between a huh and a laugh if Lewis arched into a touch he wanted more of, Lewis laughing at himself when once or twice habit expected the familiar here and there only to find a different terrain. "You're beautiful," James said at one point, but since he was looking from so close as to be cross-eyed Lewis didn't give it much credit. Haze of arousal, was all --

-- the lower back muscles under his palm coiled tight enough to quiver, James's breathing ragged and loud, chest heaving rapidly. "Turn around," Lewis told him, thinking that would be the easiest position, and loosened his arms just enough for it, unwilling to draw any further apart. James either didn't understand, or maybe it gave him pause for some reason, so he had to repeat it, "Turn around," before James rolled over onto his front.

Lewis tugged him back to lie on his side, curled into him, wrapping one arm around him and threading the other between the dip of his waist and the bed to gather him close, already familiar with the smooth skin and lean flesh barely blunting the hard bones and wiry muscles, but surprised by the unexpectedly cushiony curves snuggling into his lap. James reached back, fingers digging at his hip, his thigh, and as there was no possibility of pressing any closer -- All right, all right, I'm getting to it.

He had to scoot lower to lean his head in between James's shoulder blades to be able to reach down far enough, but on the plus side, no searching required, pleasure spots readily at hand. He could feel James holding his breath as though Lewis would make him wait -- daft lad. He cupped and kneaded with one hand, stroked evenly with the other, trying not to rush it until James's hips started moving to give him a clue to what he liked, the pace he wanted. Come on, show me what you need.
What Hathaway chose to do was to brace Lewis's forearms with his and grip him by the wrists to keep them together while rolling onto his stomach. Weighed down by both, Lewis's hands could do no more than cradle halfway, not that it seemed to matter to James. He was moving under Lewis as if his sharp bones had turned fluid, rasping out a string of words muffled by the pillow, his back heaving into Lewis's chest and turning slippery with perspiration, his skin salty when Lewis found himself tasting it, his own breath coming out in a heavy rasp as well, as if he'd become porous, absorbing some of James's fever and fret --

-- feeling only the moment and the movement, rising and falling in waves, loath to stop even when James's fingers around his wrists clutched hard again and he locked tight under Lewis on a sharp breath, held it for a count, two, let it out in a catch and a quiver, a catch and a quiver, a shaky sigh at the end.

Not yet, not yet, not yet -- the sudden litany in his head confounded Lewis.

So did James, saying hoarsely to him before so much as catching his breath or letting Lewis catch his, "Anything you want, anything."

Huh?

James was reaching back awkwardly to hand him something. In a fog, he took it automatically, even wondered what use the jar was any longer before it hit him, a visceral charge that made his chest flash hot and his heart race. The sudden realisation he could take the offer -- wanted to -- slapped him sober. He pushed off James to sink onto the bed, unable to tell what shook him more, how he could've been so aroused unawares, or how he could've thought of being so reckless with the lad. He suddenly understood James's conscience crisis earlier -- a wretched thing, answering generosity with a selfish impulse.

The sobriety was all in his head, though; he was already tugging at James, craving the tight heat of him. As he scrambled into his hold, James asked him, damn near pleaded with him to, "Tell me what you want me to do."

"Hold me. Just hold me." Long arms and legs promptly enfolded him, large hands gathered him purposefully, James's size and reach making Lewis feel wholly held, as if all of him was being hugged at once. "Aye, just like that."

James's chest and belly were still sleek, and now tacky here and there, adhering to his skin a tiny bit before letting go, both their breathing ragged, clinging together as if fighting fierce winds, until it felt like his heart couldn't push the pumping blood fast enough to keep him moving. He got caught in the instant of breathless high between never stop and too much before his whole body released its grip, tension pulsing out of him.

James's hold on him kept time with his slowing heartbeat as if synchronised, loosening a little with each breath while Lewis drifted in languor, easy prey to sleep. In a bit, he drowsily registered James's attempt at a sketchy cleaning with just the corner of the sheet, probably feeling unenergetic as well. As far as Lewis was concerned, it could all wait. He'd forgotten how lovely it was, this perfect tiredness pleasantly tugging him under. Into shared sleep. Becalmed, curled up nose to nose, one's breath washing over the other's --

"Are you upset?" James asked and interrupted the sweet lethargy.

Wha--? He forced his eyes open to see the lad looking as if he'd just tumbled out of the dryer, searching Lewis's face too intently. "Upset? Why would I be upset?"
"People are, when something goes against the assumptions they hold about themselves. It's only natural."

_Ah._ "Wrongheaded, more like. Evidence trumps assumptions, every copper knows that."

"Actually," James corrected softly, "only good coppers do."

"Be a shame if I turned out to be a bad one after so long," Lewis told him, unable to keep his eyes open. Then, struck by a thought, he huffed a short laugh. "Bloody Innocent, she managed it anyway, didn't she?"

"Managed what?"

"To pair me off. Shame she can't know. Would've been a treat, seeing her face as she twigged." He couldn't help it, his sentence ended in a yawn.

"Go on, have your kip," James said indulgently, except Lewis could feel him still -- again? already?-- halfway to interested. Ah, youth.

Hathaway gently fended off his hand. "I'm fine. If you pay attention every time, you'll soon be sick of me."

_We may have cleared one hurdle, lad, but years tell._ "If you wait for me every time, you'll soon be frustrated."

"You think I'd care? I'm the one who bargained for no sex of any kind, ever."

"You had a devotion then."

"I've a devotion _now_. This one, I'll never leave."

_At least for the foreseeable_, Lewis thought. Young eyes tended to have short vision. For now, though, it was going to be nice not to wake up alone for a change. He yawned again, heard James chuckle at him as he chose Lewis's chest for a pillow, smiling against it.

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The buzzing of his mobile kept nudging Lewis in his sleep until it dawned on him to answer the pesky thing. His groping fingers found it on the next pillow instead of the bedside table and something crinkled under his hand as he picked it up to carry to his ear. "Llo?" Hearing himself, he tried to do better than a sleepy drawl, "Hello?"

"Good god, you _are_ joined at the hip," he heard Innocent say.

_Huh?_

"Go back to sleep if you need to," she continued without waiting for him to speak, "but tell Hathaway to come in. Father Cleaves refuses talk to anyone else. I need him here." She added a harried, "Hope you're feeling better," and clicked off before Lewis could so much as prise his eyes open, much less make sense of anything.

Some seconds of blinking hazily at his surroundings made him realise he was not in his own bed, and the phone he was still holding couldn't be his, which explained Innocent's comment -- too close for comfort, best not dwell on it. The long-forgotten languid warmth inside and out made him
realise why he’d awakened to sunshine on his bare skin. He hoped James had opened the blinds in the morning instead of neglecting to close them last night. Since he doubted the lad would’ve opened them while Lewis was still asleep, best not dwell on that either. Where was James anyway?

The thing that had crinkled under his hand while picking up the mobile turned out to be a sheet from a note pad, scribbled on it: Back soon. Can be reached on BB.

He must’ve gone off to collect Lewis’s clothes. Thoughtful of him to have left his phone, but of course, his own BlackBerry number was one thing James’s phone did not have in its contacts list-and why would anyone with a dismal social life have such a long contacts list? Lewis tried to remember the number he normally got by selecting the entry on his own phone, was about to let the station patch him through when he heard the front door open. A few seconds later the blond head leaned past the half-open bedroom door to check on him. "Ah, you're up."

"Well, awake. " Lewis sat up and moved the pillow to prop himself against the headboard. A bit ridiculous at his stage of life, how a comfortable presence seemed to have become a necessary one overnight, cut capers in his chest by simply walking into the room.

Hathaway had halfway readied for work, already in the trousers of his brown suit and one of his tailored shirts. Minus a tie for the moment, he was wearing his hoodie under what Lewis always thought of as his country-squire jacket, with the elbow patches. He was loaded down, Lewis’s clothes held up by their hangers in one hand, a large M&S carrier bag hanging off his elbow, a small bag hooked to a finger of the other hand balancing two cups of coffee in a carry-carton. "You've been busy."

"Took your anorak and Colin's coat to the cleaner's, I don't think anything else you had on is salvageable. I emptied your pockets, hope you don't mind. You're missing your phone and warrant card -- called the station, they'll re-issue your card right away. Everything else is drying on the worktop in the kitchen. Packed your BlackBerry in rice, may or may not work. Gurdip might be able to do something with it. Oh, you needn't worry about Monty, I fed him." He draped Lewis's clothes over the valet stand, put the large bag on the bed. "Your stuff's in here. Brought your shaving kit." He came around the bed, placed the carry-carton on the bedside table. "Your cup has the sticker," he pointed out as he dug out a wrapped sandwich and paper serviettes from the small bag and handed them to Lewis. "Got these last, still hot." He took the keys to Lewis's flat out of his pocket and laid them down. "Your car's being towed to Autosmart on Sycamore Road, they have the car keys. They'll call in the estimates later. On my phone, so you hold on to that. You might want to give Lyn my number until you sort one out for yourself. Right, now I'll just --"

"Christ, James, take a breath." Lewis put the sandwich on the bedside table without unwrapping it. "Can't you wait to kick me out?"

"Wha -- ? No. I just -- " he looked closer at Lewis and huffed. "Do you like winding me up?"

"You came in wound up." Lewis patted the side of the bed. "Relax, lad, sit yourself down a sec." He lifted his hand until Hathaway sat by him, then dropped it lightly onto his thigh. "Now, how about a 'good morning'?"

"Is it?" James asked, watching him closely.

Had he been fretting about second thoughts arriving with the light of day? "Might've been a better one if I hadn't woken up alone. I'm sick of it, you realise?" Whatever gadget Hathaway used to beat his hair into submission must have been deemed too noisy while Lewis slept. Left free to fluff into shiny curls, it gave his face a softer look. "But it's a fine morning now."
It got him a smile, a little shy, a lot delighted. Lewis smiled back, the brisk-air flush of James's complexion, the bright sheen of his eyes in the morning light tempting him to take him by the nape, about to pull him in -- but he caught a glimpse of himself in the tall mirror propped on the wall behind James. Rumpled, bleary-eyed, stubbled, while the lad looked newly-minted -- he sighed and let go.

"What?" James asked.

"Nothing. I wanted a kiss, but I should brush my teeth first and shave."

James rolled his eyes in a way that managed to be both exasperated and affectionate, cupped his face, leaned in and kissed him -- bloody near all the way to his tonsils. He finished up with a smug, "Good morning," against Lewis's lips.

_Getting better by the minute_, Lewis thought, too breathless at the moment to say it. Had he really forgotten how complete in itself a kiss could be?

"In case you're in any doubt," James added, "there's nothing, _nothing_, you can do with me I won't like."

He realised the lad was talking practically into his mouth because Lewis had wrapped his arms around his neck, holding him in place. Reluctantly, he let go. Innocent's message was still pending. "You shouldn't give that sort of carte-blanche to anybody."

"I wouldn't give it to _anybody._" Before he pulled away, Hathaway rubbed his smooth cheek against Lewis's rough one, as if for good measure. "Never have."

"No pressure then." Affection smuggled in banter, as usual. "Hate to bring it up, but Innocent rang. She wants you in sharpish."

"I'm nearly ready." Hathaway stood to strip out of his jacket and hoodie, went to the wardrobe to pull out a tie. "You take your time. Call me when you're ready, I'll come and get you."

Spying something colourful in the M&S bag, Lewis pulled it closer. Hathaway had brought his charcoal grey suit and the light grey shirt that hadn't revealed its purplish tone under the artificial lights of the shop and as a result he only wore when he didn't have anything else clean. In the bag, neatly folded on the top -- oh, _that_ tie. Colourful and artsy, it made the shirt seem positively sombre. He dangled it pointedly from two fingers. "Where'd you find this?"

Hathaway glanced over. "In your wardrobe."

"Good God, man, how far did you have to dive?"

"It was in there," James said as if daring him to refute.

"Aye," he had to admit, "by way of Lyn. I saw her pick it up during our holiday, had it pegged for her fella. Except it arrived at my door. Suppose he didn't like it." He'd worn it a couple of times while visiting her. Father's duty.

Done with his own tie, Hathaway pulled his suit jacket out of the wardrobe. "What makes you think it wasn't meant for you from the start?"

"Me? It's too young for me."

"Bollocks. It's Italian silk, it's beautiful, and it's complementary. Wear it."
"Over a purple shirt?"

"That's not purple, just a slight violet, suits your eyes. Stop whinging and put them on."

Part of him wanted to bristle, a larger part rather liked experiencing, again, the small tyrannies of an intimate partner. "Mind if I have a shower first?"

"Eat first. Your breakfast's getting cold." He breezed around the bed, handed Lewis his coffee after removing the tab from its lid, folded the wrapper of the sandwich partway down to secure the bottom half and placed it in his other hand.

Tyranny and cosseting. Felt like home. "Ta." Lewis took a sip, brain receptors sat up and cheered, and he took a gulp, thinking it was going to be difficult when James felt secure enough with himself to leave home. No sense in letting a day in the future start collecting interest in advance, though. It was a good day today.

The sandwich was bacon and egg, minus the cheese or any other additions favoured lately, on a plain roll, the way he liked it. It reminded him consideration should work both ways, and he'd still not given Innocent's complete message. He hated to break the lad's perky, pleasant mood, but letting him go in unprepared would be worse.

"The reason Innocent needs you," he had to say while Hathaway was transferring items from his discarded jacket into his suit pockets and getting ready to leave, "Cleaves refuses to talk to anyone else."

James tensed, his hand carrying his wallet to his pocket wobbled. "Should've seen that coming."

"Why don't you wait until I -- "

"I'll be fine," James interrupted with deliberate clarity, his face set. "Call me when you're ready." He walked out, his coffee forgotten in the carry-carton.

Lewis unloaded his breakfast next to it, pushed away the duvet and got up. As soon as he heard the front door close, he rang the duty sergeant. "Send a patrol car to pick me up in front of Hathaway's flat in twenty minutes." He barely waited for the acknowledgment before tossing the phone onto the bed, grabbed the M&S bag and hurried into the bathroom.

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Hathaway by-passed the car park in front of the station and drove around to the restricted one at the back of the building, hoping to avoid any media circus. When he got out of his car, a flashy red Porsche that looked out of place caught his eye, its wide bonnet stripe declaring itself with ostentatious letters. It wasn't until he was close to the entrance and saw the people arguing off to one side that he added it up. Powell and McKenna, who must've ignored the numerous Authorised Vehicles Only signs and sneaked in. They had managed to corner, of all poor souls, wet-behind-the-ears Colin, and were haranguing him. News of Osborn's demise must've made them envision turning their staid documentary into a torn-from-the-headlines sensation and sent them looking for the inside track. He made a beeline for them. Colin could use rescuing, and frankly, he welcomed the chance to dish it out to the pair; this was his stomping ground.

"What's going on?" he asked Colin, pointedly ignoring the others.
Everybody spoke over each other, Powell was almost polite for once, and as McKenna was her usual brisk self Hathaway assumed the news about Llewellyn-Pierce must be waiting for official identification. He gathered enough from the cacophony to know he'd been right about their motives and interrupted them, "If you think you can badger your way into an investigation ahead of the public, you're living in one of your fantasy worlds. Stop wasting police time and go away before I arrest you." He called out to a couple of constables walking up, "If that Porsche isn't out of here in the next minute, impound it. Come along, Colin."

The young man loped after him, offering a heartfelt, "Thank you."

"No problem," he mumbled, a little annoyed at how bright and bouncy a twenty-three year old could look after what must've been a long, busy night with little sleep.

Inside, as they headed for the back stairs, Hathaway spied Ginny at the other end of the lobby, waiting by the front counter. He owed her...*everything*. He'd like to dine her lavishly, buy her flowers, take her rowing, to a concert, anything her heart desired. But judging by her short, flirty dress, the makeup her fresh face didn't need, and the ridiculously high heels she was teetering on, her heart might desire things he couldn't deliver.

"Blimey, she's a looker, isn't she?" Colin said fervently at his side.

"A lot more than that. I couldn't have found Lewis in time without her." He glanced at Colin and realised the lad looked as if he was drifting away on a vision. "Oh, you're serious."

"Of course I'm serious. *Look* at her."

Ah. "Here," he said with sudden inspiration, handing his car keys to Colin. "Leave them on my desk later. She's Ginny, the iPad in my glove box is hers. Return it to her, apologise for me, tell her she saved a life and I'm beyond grateful." He pulled out his wallet. "If she's amenable, take her out for a drink on me."

Colin pushed at his hand to make him put the wallet back into his pocket. "I'll take her dining and dancing if she's amenable. Think I have a chance?"

"Go and find out. By the way," Colin looked keen as a stray hoping to be adopted, more help might not come amiss, "she likes bow ties."

Doubtful frown. "Really?"

"She thinks bow ties are cool."

"Oh, you mean she likes the Doctor."

"Who?"

"Yeah."

*Wha --? Oh.*

Colin was busily patting his tie, shooting his cuffs. "How do I look?"

"You look fine." Considering Ginny's ginger spikes, he thought Colin's slicked-down hair might need some disarranging, but any hair ruffling was best left up to her, should she be so inclined. "But, Colin -- "
"You'll have my guts for garters if I mess her about, I know," Colin said before he bounded away eagerly.

Innocent waylaid Hathaway at the top of the stairs, first to inquire after Lewis, then to grill him at length on this and that aspect of the cases until a call that couldn't wait summoned her away. "The hospital declared Father Cleaves fit for custody, but he's to go right back if he requests it or exhibits distress," she said as she headed into her office. "Try to get a recorded or signed statement, but no strong-arming. See me when you're done."

Hathaway found out Cleaves was already in the interview room, told himself to get on with it, squared his shoulders and went in. He acknowledged the nod of the constable just inside the door, looked towards Cleaves and immediately wished he'd taken a minute in the observation room to get his bearings. Edmund was wearing a hospital-issue gown and robe. Hathaway could see the dressings through the gauzy cover tucked lightly around his legs. At first he thought Cleaves was praying, then realised he had his hands propped on the table like a supplicant, open-palmed with his fingers loosely curled in, because they were covered with a layer of ointment.

Already finding it hard to look at him, Hathaway came around the table, reached to pull the chair out, saw Cleaves full on and faltered. "Oh, Edmund, your -- " came out of his mouth involuntarily; he clamped it shut before 'beautiful face' escaped. The blood-shot eyes and the puffy, crusted eyelids would heal, but the red, blistering streak of burn from Cleaves's jaw to his temple had been debrided; it was now drained of colour, the raw, waxy flesh puckered. The burnt-off patch of hair on that side would never grow back. He was permanently scarred. As absurdly inappropriate as it was, an old saying about martyrs elbowed its way into Hathaway's head: Cambridge creates them, Oxford burns them.

"What, this?" Cleaves indicated his face with glistening fingers. His lips tilted ironically, emphasizing the pull of the damaged tissue. "Do you imagine I have any reason left to care?"

Hathaway noticed that the constable was watching them curiously, waved him out before he pulled the chair back, sat down, clasped his hands on his lap. Thinking it was best to say as little as possible, he waited for Cleaves to speak. As silence stretched, he was reminded of looking for Edmund each morning across the refectory, drawn to watching him in as mundane an act as spooning in porridge as if that would assuage his hunger, holding his breath if the captivating eyes rove around the room, hoping they'd single him out, linger. All the while feeling that he was violating an untouchable icon. 'I grasped a lovely masked procession/And caught things from a horror show.' Fed up with the silence his mind insisted on filling, he asked, "You wanted to see me?"

"Neither," Cleaves said flatly. "But I must set the record straight -- don't," he snapped when Hathaway reached towards the recorder on the side of the table.

"You said 'record'." But he pulled his hand back.

"Don't worry, I will repeat it for the rest of your --" his mouth twisted unpleasantly and he spat out like a dirty word, " -- brethren."

Hathaway overlooked it. Much worse would come out of his mouth if he'd lost the one he could least bear to lose. But it was unsettling, understanding Edmund's feelings while sickened at the thought of the acts that led to and from them. "What's the point of this, then?"

"Be the judge of it later."

"Mind if I take notes?" He pulled out his pen and notepad ahead of permission, which came
in the form of a shrug. "I'm listening."

Cleaves started with his introduction to Idris Abbas at the Pitt Rivers and their subsequent meetings. Hathaway listened with his eyes on the notepad he held on his lap even though he was only jotting down dates and times to flesh out his report. Anything else Cleaves told him privately would be hearsay, and he was hearing nothing he hadn't already heard or worked out.

Until Cleaves got to the evening of Abbas's last visit to St Justin's and said, "Mathias was beside himself when he came down from the bell tower, said he couldn't look the man in the face any more. He was going to pray and retire for the night, I should see Abbas out, so I went to --"

Taken aback, Hathaway looked up. "That's not what you --"

Cleaves raised his voice and kept on talking. He'd found Abbas repacking the codices, furious over being delayed by false promises that could've cost him his buyer in the States, and how it had all resulted in an argument which had escalated --

Hathaway flipped closed his pad and slapped it down on the table. "Are you about to confess to Abbas's murder?"

"Yes."

"While Osborn stayed pure as the driven, I assume."

"I did confess to him, but he was bound by the seal of the confessional."

"I see. Did you also kill Murdoch Cullen?"

"No. He simply died. Your boss said so, too."

"That's not what he said by a long shot. Tell me, how do you plan on finessing Llewellyn-Pierce?"

"How much finessing will an overburdened court require if I plead guilty?"

Christ! The CPS just might jump on an easy conviction instead of a drawn out, expensive case resting primarily on circumstantial evidence. Two murder convictions at that, instead of measly after-the-fact conspiracy ones.

"One more thing," Cleaves said, clearly aware of having the advantage, "Mathias fell by accident, not intent."

Hathaway could almost understand the abhorrence for suicide. Almost. "Who're you trying to mislead, God?"

"God made His pronouncement on his soul already, His judgement is swift."

"Then what difference can it make?"

"It would make a difference to him. Remember what he said: Thus the Lord has done for me, to take away my reproach among people. 'I had to tell him he was wrong,' and at that, his eyes filled, his voice, so far steady, broke, 'I took away his only comfort, so please, James,' he reached as if to touch Hathaway's hand, stopped short, 'spare me this much mercy, let me take away his reproach among people -- his people.' He started to wipe his eyes, remembered the state of his hands, settled for blinking away the tears. "He was a bishop, a prince of the Church, let him be
buried as such, remembered as such. What can it hurt? What difference does it make to me if
accessory charges carry lighter sentences? Once I'm found guilty of any crime, I'll be laicised. All I'll
have left is a life I must bear until it suits God to relieve me of it, so please, I'm begging you, help
me."

"Even if I -- how can I change what three police officers witnessed?"

"One was just a lackey. He won't contradict his superiors."

*That lackey did his best to ease your pain while he carried you when you couldn't carry
yourself.* The slight thaw that had started inside shivered and froze again. "Even if you imagine you
can get me to lie for you, what makes you think Lewis would?"

"He wouldn't. For me. He'll do it for you. You saved his life yesterday, he owes you."

"He owes me nothing, never will." He put his pen in his pocket, reached for his notepad.
"We're done."

Cleaves slapped his hand on the pad, winced, then set his face grimly. "No, we're not."

"There's no point to this, Edmund." Cleaves kept his hand on the pad as if Hathaway was
somehow chained to it. "There're only a few dates on it. I can remember that much."

"Except you forget how well I know you. You will persuade him."

"I won't begin to try."

"Yes, you will."

"Can't imagine why."

"You're strangely confident --" Cleaves pulled his hand off the notepad and leaned back "--
for a fraud. Do your colleagues know the real reason you ran away from the priesthood? Does your
boss know you fancy him something rotten?"

Instinctively, Hathaway glanced at the observation window. Private interview requests were
usually respected, but not always. Seeing his reflection in the mirror, he hastily averted his eyes and
tried to erase the stricken look off his face.

"And I mean rotten," Cleaves continued, "'cause that's how he'll see it, won't he, working-
class Geordie of his age, your basic hidebound plod? Look at you, his prim and proper sergeant,
always at hand to bend over backwards for him, aren't you? Only now he'll know you'd rather he
bent you over. Better hope nobody ever calls you a wanker and make him wonder what you must be
picturing when you...indulge."

Hathaway realised what kept him sitting there and staring numbly at Edmund was sheer
disbelief at the ugliness of what was coming out of his mouth, how he seemed to relish every
appalling word. *Did Osborn corrupt you or find his match in you?*

"Ironic, isn't it?" Cleaves added with a sneer. "You're so careful with your own disguise, yet
you choose a job that's made for invading lives, laying bare other people's secrets. How much
hypocrisy can you stomach?"

What he couldn't stomach was knowing he'd once seen no further than a pretty face and a
cloak of purity on something malignant, had called it love and desired it, had been brutal to Will
"Running away again?" Cleaves asked mockingly as Hathaway started to get up. "How far do you think -- " The opening door caught him in mid-sentence and Hathaway in mid-move.

Lewis closed the door behind him as questions crashed about in Hathaway's head, how Lewis had got in so soon, if he'd been in the observation room, how much had he seen, heard, if anyone else had been there with him -- but the overwhelming one was: How much ugliness because of me can you stand? It wasn't until Lewis's hand was pushing down on his shoulder that he realised he'd remained halfway to rising. Once he sank back into the chair, Lewis gave his shoulder a pat and left his hand lightly resting there.

"...for a private conversation," Cleaves was saying when Hathaway got around to registering it. "That's my right, isn't it?"

"For your brief, aye. Else, only a courtesy, until the CPS file the charges and you're remanded into custody." The measured way Lewis spoke and the noticeable thickening of his accent said he was clamped down on anger. "Any case, it's a bit late, I was in the car yesterday. You may not be aware, but what's said to two officers is an official statement. That's why you were cautioned before you said anything."

"What I said yesterday wasn't true, I lied."

"You did?" His credulous tone told Hathaway Lewis had been in the observation room and had heard enough. He was only paying the line out before yanking it. "What'd you lie about?"

"I blamed Mathias for the deaths. I accused an innocent man to spare myself."

"Then your conscience overcame you. Right. But you see, we don't have the option to commit perjury and get absolved in the confessional. Your statement is our testimony. You can now change it, but then the court needs to know why there's a contradiction. The answer would be the unholy grip Osborn has on you, how you've been twisted to serve him from childhood -- laid bare, so to speak. Murderer and molester, if that's what you prefer."

"You told him," Cleaves accused Hathaway, making him marvel at the disconnect between hurling abuse at him one minute and expecting fealty from him the next.

"He didn't," Lewis said to Cleaves. "Not a stretch for a plodding Geordie of my age to work out, been there, seen that, nicked them before."

"How much does he know?" Cleaves ignored Lewis and kept talking to Hathaway. "Does he know you're -- "

"He knows a fair bit," Lewis cut him off. "He knows why a child going through a harrowing experience might need to wrap it in a pretty tale, but not why he'd become the sort who'd mistreat the good friend he could've had. He also knows people are frequently unwise where they choose to love..." hearing his voice soften and fall, Hathaway raised his eyes, found Lewis looking directly at him, "...but some manage to do it honourably." Lewis smiled at him with an expression so quiet between two, town-crier loud to other eyes. He lightly touched the backs of his fingers to Hathaway's cheek before pulling his hand away. "You're done here, James. Come on, let's go home."

Stunned, Hathaway couldn't move for a second -- Right here at the station? Then he realised Lewis's back blocked them from the mirror, everything he'd said would've been read as directed at
Cleaves, and people familiar with them would think nothing of 'let's go home.' Edmund couldn't have missed the implications, though. What he thought about it, Hathaway didn't care to see. He scrambled to his feet and followed Lewis.

"You shouldn't have pulled me from the fire, James," Cleaves called out. "Would've been kinder to let me burn."

"Perhaps," he responded without looking back, "but I am a police officer." He closed the door after himself.

"Take him to down to Custody," Lewis told the constable as they passed by him, then paused to add, "Find him something better to put on than that flimsy kit; burn victims get cold. If we don't have anything suitable, ring the residence at St Justin's, get someone to bring him his own clothes, sweatpants, tracksuit, something loose and warm."

Hathaway fell in step with the man who couldn't be mean-spirited even under provocation and thought: 'Unwise'? You're the wisest choice I ever made. "I can't leave," he said when he realised Lewis was leading them to the back stairs. "Innocent's waiting for me."

"Aye, thought so. I just said that for effect." He threw James a rueful look over his shoulder. "Petty, I know, couldn't help it." He started down the stairs. "Come on, we both need to settle down. Herself can wait a little longer."

It had turned into a rare cloudless day, the sky looking scrubbed and burnished, a sharp bite in the air. The restricted car park had become unusually crowded, personal cars of everyone trying to avoid the media gauntlet cheek by jowl with the official vehicles, buzzing with the lunch-time comings and goings of personnel. Lewis looked around, shrugged and chose a spot to one side of the entrance, the spot where Hathaway had confronted the filmmakers earlier. "Go on, light up. Can't be more poisonous than what you inhaled back there." Putting his hands in his pockets and his head back, he closed his eyes. For a long minute, he drew in deep, deliberate breaths and let them out, unaccompanied by smoke in his case, except for the wisps that drifted his way from Hathaway's cigarette.

He blew out one last deep inhalation in a long huff, and his breathing settled. "I was too harsh," he said towards the sky, opened his eyes, contemplated the air. "Not that he didn't deserve it, but he's a victim as well. I just got angry." He met Hathaway's eyes. "I didn't used to get so angry. After I lost Val, though --" he paused, looking inward more than looking away "-- grief crushes you. It's already unbearable, then every time you remember each little last thing you did or said without knowing it was the last time -- gets so heavy, you see, until you feel broken, helpless, the only potent thing left is anger, so you get angry. Just another way to self-medicate when you're through getting pissed to the gills." His eyes turned lucid and direct again. "I know you've been the one catching the sharp end more often than not, I'm sorry for that."

Only then, when Lewis freely, voluntarily shared a portion of his desolation over Val with him that Hathaway believed what every impossible thing that had happened through the night hadn't quite convinced him of: This is real. It suddenly felt like part of the polished sky had sneaked into his chest alongside his breath, broad, bright, and airy. Aware of other people gathering around to also grab a smoke on their break, fearing what might be read on his face if he kept looking at Lewis, he lowered his eyes. "I'm sure I deserved it more often than not, sir," he mumbled and stuck his cigarette back into his mouth.

He heard Lewis huff at him softly. "Finish up while I bring Innocent up to date. Join us when you've rallied past humble." He quietly added as he went by, "Doesn't suit."
Humble wasn't Hathaway's concern. Feeling his emotions soar high was already making him anticipate the fall. Finding what he'd never expected to go past wanting in his clumsy, untried hands -- what if he broke it?

He knew how to be a part of a group, a subordinate or a superior in a chain, but he'd never been half of a whole. He didn't even know how to be a third of a whole, his parents had always been intent on each other. Intent on consuming each other. The only times he'd truly felt a part of his family were during Mass, his parents on either side, each holding one of his hands -- on later consideration, most likely to keep him from misbehaving in the presence of the Mortmaignes. One or the other would be holding the missal so all three of them could see, and nothing would intrude on their quiet unity. His early wish that they could've lived in that little chapel all the time had grown into the hope of a contemplative existence in a peaceful sanctuary, had sent him looking for it in houses of worship. Except the mind did have mountains, 'cliffs of fall, frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed' -- let alone youth-fathomed.

Feeling the heat of his cigarette on his fingers, he put it out, headed in. When he arrived at Innocent's office, her PA threw him a brief, "You're expected," and motioned him to go past.

"...checked out of the Randolph in a hurry this morning," Innocent was saying to Lewis as he walked in. "They must be looking for the first flight back to Rome and ways to disavow our sordid business. Sit," she told Hathaway, then leaned back for a long minute to take in both of them with a slight frown. "I must ask. Happenstance? Providence? Kismet?"

"Ma'am?" they said in unison.

"The first time you decide to divide up your cases to work separately, it all turns into a single case and there you are again, our conjoined twins. One wonders."

"Nothing to wonder," Lewis spoke up. "We frequently go about enquiries separately, saves time. Father Cleaves seemed to have a connection to each case, we suspected they might be tied, didn't yet have enough evidence to call it one case."

"Were you also aware your suspect had a long-term connection to your sergeant?" Posed as a question, a hint of censure nevertheless came through it.

"Of course. James told me," Lewis said as if it were an implicit given and when had no relevance.

"Yet you put him in charge." No question there, just disapproval.

"James is perfectly capable of conducting his own investigation. I have no reason to doubt his competence or integrity, in any circumstance." Prior reasons for it went without a mention.

"Could've become a problem."

"No, Ma'am, it couldn't have. The results in front of you prove it."

Hathaway thought it was a very good thing Lewis didn't go in for crime. He had a talent for selectively rearranging the truth without a single lie to trip over.

"Let's hope the CPS agree. Personal involvements muddle prosecutions," Innocent grumbled a little, but let it go. "Cleaves won't give an interview or talk to a solicitor, not much is going to happen until Abbas's identity is officially established. Autopsy and forensics are still pending on Llewellyn-Pierce as well. You both look like you can use a break. Make sure I can reach you by phone and take the rest of the day off."
"Thank you, Ma'am," they said, again in unison, rising in tandem, a pattern that might be prudent to break.

Innocent waved Hathaway back down, "A word with you."

He sat, thinking if she wanted a word with him she could've had it all along instead of talking about him as if he weren't in the room.

"I'll wait by the car," Lewis said, heading out.

"You'll find the keys on my desk," Hathaway called out after him.

Innocent waited until the door closed. "Now that Lewis has indicated he's fine with taking himself out of the picture," she pulled out a form and placed it on her desk, "it's time we signed you up for supervisory training. I'll assign Collingsworth to him for the time you're gone. Not as a bagman, of course, a trainee. Once you make DI, maybe you'd like to take him over, and Lewis can have his pick of -- "

Hathaway finally got past his consternation -- "Now? Not even twenty-four hours after I almost lost him?--" and interrupted, "I didn't put in for promotion. I don't want or need it."

"Want' is your business, but you do need it. Your superior has just expressed all confidence in you. He gave you your own enquiry, he clearly thinks you have no more to learn from him. You need to start charting your own career path. You've already delayed -- "

"In all honesty, Ma'am, this is pointless," he interrupted again, starting to register her words as little more than meaningless droning. "My superior -- Lewis," he said pointedly, "was nearly taken 'out of the picture' altogether yesterday. I'd have stayed long enough to see the prosecution through, not a minute longer. I don't know what use I'll be to myself without him, but I know I'll be no use to you." He got to his feet. "Please excuse me."

"Sergeant," Innocent snapped, stopping him halfway to the door, but when he turned she tilted her head to study him and seemed to soften. "What're you telling me, James?"

"All I'm going to, Ma'am."

"Lewis shares your sentiments, does he?"

"I can't speak for him."

She gave him a long, calculating look. "I'm beginning to doubt that." She picked up and crumpled the form, be it still blank. "Dismissed, Sergeant."

As he was going down the stairs it dawned on Hathaway that, rather than giving him the non-person treatment earlier, Innocent may have been focused on Lewis to make sure she wouldn't disgruntle her senior officer with the best clearance rate by taking away his sergeant before he was ready to let go. To avoid tarnishing Hathaway, Lewis had given her exactly the impression she'd been looking for.

And what impression did I give her?

He may have said too much. He couldn't afford to forget they worked in a fishbowl of detectives. It'd be too easy to become an embarrassment to Lewis, and as the superior officer, he'd be the one most severely in breach of regulations.
Please don't let me make him regret me, he kept thinking as he headed for his car, worried that he'd been too indiscreet already.

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Lewis immediately noticed that Hathaway was in a state, but the tight set of his lips and the averted eyes said he preferred to keep it to himself and seethe over it. Best not ask until he had time to cool off from whatever it was. "Home, James," he prompted instead, handing him his keys. To keep the phrase from wearing out its welcome, he hadn't used it as often as it occurred to him, but he'd never imagined it'd become so much more than a passing jest.

"Which one?"

"Makes a difference?"

Hathaway finally met his eyes. "It doesn't?"

"Not to me."

That softened Hathaway's look, and perhaps his outlook. He afforded Lewis a quirk of his lips in an almost-smile, turned on the car, put it in reverse, started to accelerate as he glanced into the rear view mirror and abruptly hit the brake. Lewis caught himself, craned his neck to see Laura behind the car, aiming at the passenger side with grim purpose. "Uh-oh, we screwed up somewhere." He rolled down the window as she leaned in.

"Not so fast," she was saying. "Been trying to get hold of you for hours."

"My phone is, well, drowned, you might say."

"Jean said you took a fair stab at it yourself. Tell me you've been to hospital already."

"Hosp -- ? Why?"

"You haven't," she concluded, sounding exasperated. "What is it with you men? Do you have any notion of the rate of bacterial reproduction in stagnant sludge? Contaminated by a putrefying corpse, no less, and the lab has yet to test what other pathogens!" Yet tested or not, she started a list, "E.coli, Staphylococcus, Enterococci, Giardia, Cryptosporidium-- it being autumn, even Leptospira, for crying out loud."

"You realise I don't know what most of those are, right?"

"All sorts of nastiness, that's what: dysentery, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, eye and ear infections, respiratory infections, dermatological disorders -- are you out of your frigging mind? And you," she leaned lower to aim her accusing glare at Hathaway, "where'd you park your much-touted brain?"

Lewis glanced over to see blood had drained out of Hathaway's face. He turned back to Hobson. "I was careful not to swallow the muck, and -- "

"In the first place, you were breathing it, and don't talk to me about 'careful' after you bloody near drowned in it -- speaking of which," she dipped her head again to address Hathaway, "if you had to resuscitate him, this goes for you as well. To A&E, now," she pulled out her mobile, "they'll be waiting for you with big needles. Until the test results are in, broad spectrum antibiotics, anti-inflammatory -- "
Whatever else she had to prescribe, they didn't hear. Hathaway had backed up and was tearing out of the car park with a screech of tyres and a death-grip on the steering wheel. "Steady on," Lewis said, having to brace himself on the dashboard and the gearbox. "She was just trying to scare us."

"She succeeded!"

Clearly, the safest course was to shut up and let him drive.

Laura had set off the alarms, and she must have a lot of pull; jumping the queue had been the only consideration Lewis had known previously, even when he'd come in after head bashings. This time, there was an over-sized porter waiting for them at the entrance to A&E. He opened the car door before Lewis could get to it, hustled him out and, despite his protests, stashed him in a wheelchair for no reason. Hathaway drove off to park as Lewis was rushed to a cubicle in the casualty bay, into the charge of a nurse who handed him a paper gown, told him to strip and left him to do so with the threat of, "I'll be back." Shortly, he heard an argument outside between her and a breathless-sounding Hathaway who, despite his protests, got sent away to wait elsewhere.

She came back in with an HCA who took down his recount of the ordeal while the nurse busied herself with his vitals. Another nurse showed up, carrying a tray with specimen cups, swabs, and more blood collection tubes on it than Lewis cared to count. At least the needles, contrary to Laura's tidings, were no bigger than usual.

The doctor who eventually came in looked familiar to Lewis. From one of his case-related visits to the hospital, he assumed, until the bloke too-pointedly tsk-tsked while looking through the notes and wagged his finger at him. Lewis concluded he was one of Laura's med school friends, someone he must've met at one of her parties he hadn't been able to avoid. Great. A safe bet the boffin had been primed to teach him a lesson by giving him a hard time.

Sure enough, even the scant dignity of the paper gown was traded in for a close examination of his whole body to look for the least cuts or abrasions, rashes or swellings, while the doctor regaled him with a lengthy lecture on infections and parasites. Once he was declared clear of such things -- 'on the surface,' he was reminded--he had to answer too-personal questions about his bodily functions from the time of the incident, including the cringe-inducing one that, yes, he had ejaculated since then, no, no discomfort or burning, and no, not in a way to transmit anything into anyone. At one point, he tried the, "I was careful not to swallow the muck," line he'd used on Laura, again to no avail.

"You must've inhaled aerosol droplets," the doctor told him witheringly, "and surely you know you have more than one orifice." Lewis hoped fervently he only meant nostrils and ear canals, but knew it was too much to hope for. He resigned himself to being poked and prodded mercilessly. When the time came for them, the needles for putting every precautionary medicine known to man into him were as big as Laura had promised. But, he'd wager, not as big as she'd hoped.

Some of the test results had arrived by the time he was allowed to get dressed, and the doctor seemed a lot less severe when he came back with them to tell him that he should be fine on the antibiotics for now, he could leave. If later tests indicated otherwise, he'd be called back in. Then the bloke turned needlessly chummy to say that so far Lewis seemed to be one lucky tosser. Whether he meant it literally or figuratively, Lewis didn't care one way or the other, he promptly headed out.

Straight away, he had to sidestep Hathaway who'd made his way back since being sent off. Judging by his warrant card clutched in one hand, he'd been brazenly giving the unwary the impression he was on official business, and pound to a penny, he'd been eavesdropping. "Your turn," Lewis told him, feeling indecently entitled to the lad's discomfort. Misery did love company.
"Mine? What for?"

"Laura said 'resuscitate.'"

"I didn't. You were breathing fine."

Lewis stared at him, unwilling to say mouth-to-mouth with the doctor right there. "James."

"What? You were."

"James."

Sudden blush. "Oh." Head duck. "Right." If the doctor hadn't caught on after that, he wasn't the brightest bulb in the lot. Oh, well.

Turned out that all they saw fit to do to Hathaway was to draw some blood, get a swab, and he was done in minutes. So unfair. Neither wasted time leaving the hospital, practically running to the car. "I can't believe I saw --smelt!-- all that yesterday," Hathaway despaired while putting on his seatbelt, "and didn't think past getting you warm and somewhere safe. I was so focused on hypothermia --."

"Give it a rest," Lewis cut him off, fastening his own seatbelt. "Any more medical jargon today, one more word on my jeopardy, I'm liable to explode. I'm going to call it Hobson's Revenge and forget it." Deep down, he was pleased that Laura still cared enough to be so concerned, but loath to own up to it right then.

"But if they ring...?" James had been eavesdropping.

"I'll come back. I'm irked, not thick," Lewis assured, motioning at him to get going. "I'm famished," he announced as they left the car park. He'd taken a few quick bites of his breakfast, and so far that was it for the day.

"Where would you like to eat?"

Lewis didn't think long. "I just want to pick up something and go home. The sooner I can stop dealing with anyone today, the better I'll feel."

"Sure, no problem. We'll get what you want and I'll drop you off."

_Oh, for heaven's sake._ "I meant anyone else. You need to start taking some things for granted, James."

"Yes, s-s--Robbie."

All right then. Baby steps.

Lewis didn't want anything fiddly or that required fiddling. He opted for the Pembroke Street entrance of M&S so they could go straight into the food department. He sent Hathaway off for bread, milk and tea, stopped at the hot-meals counter for thick slices of medium rare roast beef, got small tubs of horseradish sauce for James and brown chutney for himself. Tomato and onion tarts someone was putting out from a tray were still emitting fragrant steam; he added a mid-sized one to his order. That should do.

When they parked in front of Lewis's flat and were heading in, Hathaway's feet seemed to be dragging. Thinking he wanted to smoke, Lewis took his carrier bag, told him to take his time, and
went in to find Monty in a flattened sprawl by the door, giving him a droopy-lidded look as if to say: I've been waiting here forever.

"I know, I know, couldn't be helped," Lewis said to him, but by then he'd put down the bags to get out of his jacket and Monty's suddenly-sharpened interest was no longer on him. "Wait your turn, bottomless pit," Lewis groused, picking the bags back up with one hand and pulling off his tie with the other.

Emptying the bag Hathaway had been carrying revealed a couple of extra items, a toothbrush and a package of disposable razors. Lewis put them in the bathroom, pleased that James was starting to take at least a few things for granted. Then he remembered that, in his hurry, he'd left his shaving kit at James's flat. They had to work out better logistics.

By the time the table was set while the food stayed warm in the oven and Monty was given his own food --more accurately, offered, as he obviously preferred to wait for manna from the table-- Hathaway came in. The smell of smoke didn't trail in with him. Why had he been delaying then, to loiter in the blustery air and count the falling leaves? He seemed to rate a greeting from Monty and he crouched to return it with a, "Hello again, handsome." Bottomless pit versus handsome -- Lewis saw the cat's point, left them to commune by the door.

He'd taken the tart and the roast beef out of the oven and put them on the worktop when Hathaway came from behind to put his arms lightly around him, the scent of autumn he'd brought in lingering on him. Felt good, made Lewis rub his head back against his shoulder, but the roast smelled ever so good, and he was really, really hungry. He was about to suggest sitting down and tucking in, but Hathaway spoke first, "I have to tell you something."

Ah. Something had been in the air since they'd left the station, something the lad was reluctant to talk about. Thus his loitering, Lewis reckoned. He started to turn only to have James's arms tighten, didn't know if it was to keep him close or to keep him facing away, stayed put. "Go ahead."

There was a lot of 'She said,' and 'I said' in the recounting, Hathaway clearly set on accurately reporting every word spoken in Innocent's office in context. Lewis didn't see the need. Alert the media: Innocent tries to shove sergeant up the ladder. Beat the drums: Sergeant balks. Until he heard that Hathaway had told her he didn't know what use he'd be without Lewis and couldn't help interrupting, "For heaven's sake, James, why would you say something like that?"

"I shouldn't have, I was upset." His arms dropped away. "I said too much, didn't I? I must have, or she wouldn't have asked for clarification. I'm sorry."

"Huh?" He turned to see James had backed away, his arms wrapped around himself now. With his wide shoulders folded in, he looked cropped. "Sorry for what?"

"She might work it out. At least suspect."

"Suspect what?"

"This." One hand came out of hiding to wave between them, "Us," got tucked back in. "I should've been more careful."

"You can say anything you want to anyone. This," he copied the wave, "isn't a dirty secret. It's as much your business as it's mine. Neither of us is the sort to shout it off the spires, but you can if you choose, I won't mind."

"This morning you told me she shouldn't know."
"She'll have to split us at work if she knows, that's the only reason. I wasn't telling you to lie." Fraternization policy had a sound basis, but as they'd already nicked the lamb, he'd thought, might as well be hanged for a sheep. Not at the cost of deliberate lies and denials as if hiding something tawdry, though. More importantly, not at the cost of James feeling as if he had to hide. "Probably better if she suspects. Sounds like she doesn't want to lose us, and she must know better than to think we're either of us taking advantage of the other. I'd wager she'd choose deniability and avoid finding out."

"Then why did you just object to what I said to her?"

"Not because you said it to her, lad, that you said it at all -- that you think it." Hathaway wasn't looking the least bit relieved, quite the opposite. Lewis tried to explain, "It's not right, or true. Your usefulness -- your worth, has nowt to do with me. Means everything to me, of course it does, but it's all yours."

"I wouldn't know what to do with it without -- "

"Don't say it," Lewis interrupted. "You do, you will, you have to. Your future can't depend on mine. You're still so young and I'm -- " he could see he was only upsetting James worse, didn't have the heart to do more than tie it up briefly "-- not." James bit his lip and gave him a plaintive look that made him seem even younger. Reality, lad. Face it. And he would, one day, when the day came for him to move on.

Monty, bless him, chose that moment to run out of patience and come to plead his case by weaving around their feet and meowing at them piteously. "All right, you little beggar," Lewis said to him, tearing off a decent bite of the roast he thought the cat deserved for the timely interruption. He blew on it until it was cool enough, gave it to him, picked up the rest of the roast and carried it to the table along with the plates. Hathaway carried the tart and the cutlery, Lewis brought over two beers and they both sat down to eat, or in Lewis's case, shovel.

They normally spent so much time sitting, eating, drinking companionably with no urgency to talk that Lewis didn't notice the weight of the silence until he quieted his stomach. Then he realised James was doing little more than pushing his food around on his plate. His beer was gone, though. "Care for another?" he asked.

"Mind if I have some of the Scotch you put in the tea the other day?"

Lewis waved at the cabinet. "Help yourself."

Hathaway poured it out, added one ice cube that would hardly dilute it. Lewis wondered if he wanted to numb down from or work up to something. Waiting for a clue to arrive, he ate a little more, gave Monty a few more bites. When James steadily drank the Scotch down and got another one without putting a single morsel of food into his mouth, Lewis decided the meal was over. He got up to carry his plate and the leftovers into the kitchen, put them away, and seeing that Hathaway didn't bring his plate, went back to get it.

By the table, he hesitated, looking down at the blond head bent over the drink. "You know you don't have to stay. If you prefer to go home -- " That was all he got out before Hathaway shoved away his glass, spun sideways in the chair, yanked him close and wrapped his arms tight around his waist. Any higher and he wouldn't have been able to breathe. "I don't want you to go, lad. I just thought you might -- "

"How'd you carry on?" Hathaway asked, his voice muffled in Lewis's shirt.
"Erm...when?"

"After the accident."

Lewis couldn't quite fathom why the question had come up just then, but its urgency made him answer, "What else could I do? I had two children."

"I won't."

Certainly not by knocking on this door, Lewis almost wise-cracked; his brain caught up in time to arrest his mouth and tell him to stop being the blind idiot he'd been so far. He was the only one with the notion that James would be moving on one day. Chasing after truth for so long, having heard all distortions of it, he couldn't fail to recognise when it rang plain and pure. No airy pillow-talk, this. James wasn't trying to persuade or argue, he was stating a stark fact: I'm here until you leave.

As if the thought had summoned its mate, Lewis’s brain finally dug out and delivered the words to the tune James had wanted him to remember in the haze of early morning: 'I give thee all, I can no more.' Probably a good thing James was holding him up.

"No, no, forget what I said, it's not true, my kids, aye, first and best reason, but I'd have found others, just didn't need to, there are lots of reasons -- " He must've pointed out the age difference at the worst time and touched a nerve still raw from yesterday. Normally, James would've made a deprecating comment and let it slide. Now, though, he seemed to have left his deflective armour at the door alongside his coat and jacket.

"Lots of reasons," he repeated. "Turns out, I'm holding the best one." More like grasping, he noticed, loosened his hold, cupped the blond head with one hand, rubbed the tense shoulders with the other. "I'm glad to be alive, James. Didn't think I'd be, not like this, not again, but I am now." He wished he had better words, skilful, agile, exceptional words, solves-all-problems kind of words. Things that felt simple and clear while silent inside him tended to turn into a thicket out loud; he was no wordsmith. "We've barely started, don't you think we have enough to be going on with for a good while yet?"

Hathaway took a deep breath, let it out, nodded into his chest. The girdling arms took longer to relax, but he eventually let them drop. Just in time, too. Monty was crouched stealthily on the chair Lewis had vacated, about to chance James's still-full plate. Lewis swiped it off the table, making Monty's head pop up to glare at him balefully. Deciding Hathaway didn't need any more alcohol on an empty stomach, he also picked up the glass, went to the kitchen to pour the drink into the sink and stash the plate in the fridge. Deprived of better pickings, Monty ambled by, on his way to his food bowl.

When Lewis returned, James was sitting hunched, elbows on knees. His face pressed into his steepled fingers, he looked disturbingly priest-like -- until he looked up, eyes the colour of rain-clouds, opened his mouth and gave lie to it with a quiet, "Take me to bed?"

Not a bad alternative to a dearth of words. Lewis reached for James's tie hanging loose -- no call to make heavy weather of it, though -- and playfully tugged on it by way of saying: Come on then. He hoped this morning hadn't been a fluke, just a coincidence of his libido surfacing at an opportune time, but really, did it matter? He doubted James hankered for a hot bout of sex right then. Closeness, more like.

Hathaway had jumped up so fast that the tie was still in Lewis's hand. While he had it there, he un-knotted it, let it hang, unbuttoned the stiff collar and spread it. Much better, the long column of
James caught his hand before he pulled it away, held it pressed over one end of the tie. "I thought you were about to pull me with it."

"What, like a leash?" James gave no indication if he'd have liked or disliked that, but for Lewis his slender neck had turned from lovely to damageable in an instant. The job had shown him too many consequences of power games, or he simply wasn't sophisticated enough, to indulge in or be indulgent to them, however mild. "Sorry, wrong punter."

James's face seemed to light from the inside out. "A strong man who prefers to be gentle, the right one. So, bedroom?"

Lewis indicated his hand still in James's hold. "Lead on, Macduff."

"That's a misquote, you know," Hathaway told him --of course-- as they headed down the hall. "Macbeth is inviting an attack in fact. 'Lay on, Macduff,' he says, 'And damn'd be him that first cries --'"

"'Hold, enough!'" Lewis mock-cried.

James turned his head to glare at him. "You knew the quotation all along."

"Imagine that," Lewis said smugly. If one cared to pay enough attention, tricking James Hathaway out of his moods wasn't that difficult.

To avoid territorial disputes with Monty, Lewis closed the door behind them. With the shutters closed, he found the room too dim, pulled away to turn on the bedside lamp; a lot going on with Hathaway still needed to be sight-read.

The first thing that glared under the light, of course, was Val's photo. He turned to see it had caught the lad's eye as well and made him stop between the bed and the door. "Is it going to hinder you?" He didn't mind putting it somewhere else. Val's place in him was safe; past that, she was beyond hurt. James wasn't. "It's OK to say."

"She's part of you, much as any other part. Why would I want less of you?"

_And you go on about my kindness?_ Lewis closed the distance between them and held James firmly by the waist before asking, "You think it'll hinder me?"

"If you couldn't find enough room for me, none of this would've happened in the first place, I know that."

"You should also know it's not a matter of more or less. You don't take anything from her, she doesn't take anything from you." As James's belt was under his hands, he got to unbuckling it, fumbling a little since he didn't care to break eye contact. "I have this one life, she made it worth living then, you make worth it living now." While he was at it, he unsnapped James's waistband to pull his shirt loose. "Different, aye, but same where it counts -- say, air and water, different, except you can't live without either."

An artless, "Wow," came out of Hathaway in a rush of breath. He seemed abashed by it, promptly switched to a more worldly, "Do I detect the soul of a poet in there somewhere?"

"No such thing," Lewis told him with affectionate reproach, working on the buttons of the shirt. "There's this bonny lad, you see -- " he waited until he was done unbuttoning "-- a poetry-
minded sod whom I love. He takes a bit of convincing. "He tapped the bared chest, a little harder than he would've otherwise. "Note I said 'whom.' I don't do that for just anyone, you know."

Before he had a chance to take another breath, Hathaway was wrapped around him like an impossibly big limpet. Probably a good thing Morse couldn't see this outcome of one of his frequent grammar rebukes. "Not going anywhere," Lewis assured, patting his back, wryly acknowledging that the women he'd hugged like this may have been trying to keep from being smothered rather than arching into his manly embrace. Live and learn.

"I'm sorry," James's breath washed into his ear.

"For what?"

"You can't be false or fickle if you tried, I know that. You shouldn't have to convince me."

"It's OK, lad." He patted the wide back more firmly. "I haven't been that easy to convince, either. We're no prodigies at this, neither of us."

Tilting his head to give him a wry look of agreement, James freed Lewis's shirt from the waistband, mostly by yanking since he'd bypassed unfastening anything, slid his hands under it. "Shall I give you a list?"

Lewis pressed back into the hands roving over his back, sizable, warm and noticeably marked by oars and guitar strings, things that gave James pleasure. He decided he liked them calloused. "Of what?"

"Your charms."

_Oh, dear._ Hathaway would either be too skilful at it and mortify Lewis, what with his easy recall of all those long-winded poets waxing poetic, or he'd be so inept as to mortify himself. "Best not."

"Spare your blushes?"

"You're too blond to be talking of other people's blushes."

James brought his hands around to worry Lewis's shirt buttons in the scant space between them. _"You called me 'bonny lad.'"_

"Newcastle born and raised, we do that." Half his words got muffled by his shirt as Hathaway lost patience with the buttons, leaned away to pull it up and off and drop it. Just as impatiently, he unbuckled, unsnapped, unzipped, tried, actually _tried_ to drag everything down and away in a similar move. Having whisked the clothes partway down, he faltered, impeded by Lewis standing firmly rooted in laced shoes.

Tugging the clothes high enough to step back, Lewis sat on the bed and let him get on with it, thinking he was going to miss his artless lad when Hathaway, being Hathaway, became proficient at this, too. Pulling off the clothes and letting them puddle where they might, James sat back on his heels to look him up and down until Lewis felt like squirming. "Aren't we a little past the point of 'look, don't touch'?"

"I'm hoping for more than both." His hands ran over Lewis's calves. "Just thinking of what Thoreau said." Lewis made the mistake of looking at him questioningly, and James promptly informed him, "'The perception of beauty is a moral test.'"
Oh, bother. Perhaps he should've listened to the bloody list and been done with it. "People say the damnedest things."

"I'm not making an observation -- well, not only." He grasped one calf to hook Lewis's leg over his shoulder, making him fall back onto the support of his elbows, went on elaborating. "You see, a tutor at the seminary -- " he took a short break from speaking to trail kisses on the inside of Lewis's thigh " -- he insisted it meant beauty should be perceived within constraints of morality -- " he took a more definitive break to devote to kissing " -- coveting it would be lacking in morals, but in my opinion --" he seemed to lose track of his point again, long enough that Lewis had almost forgotten he was making one when he returned to it " -- he lacked perception, or he was just hoping to keep us chaste, but in any case, he was wrong." He looked up as a lively smile hijacked his face. "I'm sure Thoreau meant not recognising beauty would be immoral. True beauty."

Lewis felt his cheeks warm. "Is this payback for Macbeth, or does your foreplay always come with philosophy?"

"It's not philosophy," James said primly, totally at odds with the way he was arranging Lewis's legs, aligning him for unchaste purposes, "it's an insight relevant to the moment. But I'll stick to sight now, and touch -- and taste," he added, making Lewis's belly clench in anticipation.

For a few seconds it felt so wrong. The blond head he was used to seeing bent over files or evidence shouldn't be...shouldn't be bending to...should not be bending to -- Christ!

Well. OK. All right, then.

Some things didn't leave room for argument. Or breath. Yes, breath would be a fine thing, soon as he could catch one.

Right. OK. Breathing. More like panting, but needs must. Clearly, the morning hadn't been a fluke. Even if, just as clearly, James was a novice at this. Not clumsy, just touchingly awkward.

Then again, some things didn't need much expertise, either. Enthusiasm was enough -- God, more than enough. "Stop," he had to say when he had to dig his nails into his palms, "James, stop, I mean it."

"I was enjoying it," James whinged, but as he had to pull off to speak, it served the purpose.

"So was I -- too fast. And not so much as a snog yet." He placed his feet on the bed to scoot back to a safer distance. "How about you get shed of those clothes for a start?"

"I'm some way past a start," James argued, rising to his feet to start unfastening.

"And some way left to catch up, crack on, m'lad."

James never took his eyes off him while he stripped, unmistakably excited just by looking, whereas watching him was a surge of tender warmth in Lewis's chest, the hot, raw charge of a minute earlier in abeyance, waiting. There was bound to be some disparity, he supposed --

-- too minor a one, he decided as James dropped on top of him unceremoniously, gathered him close to tease, "You called for a snog? How unassuming. A session of snogging, I should think," and locked their lips.

Confidence had joined the party at last. As befitting James, sassy confidence. Lovely.

They kissed a long time, getting breathless and possessive, until kissing was its own delirious
form of sex. So damn good, and again, so damn fast. Lewis caught James's hands to raise their arms out of the way, braiding their legs to flip them over. He leaned up on his elbows, looked down, finding the sight tantalizing when pressed chest to toes. With his rumpled hair, half-mast eyelids, his parted lips wet and reddened, James --of all people, James -- looked sultry, his chest rising and falling with tight, fast breaths, practically begging for more. *I'll give it a go then, shall I?*

He sat up, spread James's legs to either side of him, took him by the waist to pull him up closer -- only to have him say, "Wait, wait," and imitate a contortionist to reach into the clothes piled on the floor without unwinding his legs. Lewis sat back on his heels to let him do whatever he was doing, amused by the contortions, impressed by the flexibility. James gave a grunt of accomplishment and flopped back onto the bed, flushed from the exertion, took Lewis's hand to place a foil packet in his palm. He flushed deeper when Lewis looked at him questioningly, and grumbled, "What? You must've used them before."

*Not since* you've been alive, Lewis desisted saying, age being a touchy issue. "Why?" he asked instead.

"No, I know there are no risk factors. Just...more sanitary for you."

Wrong answer. *Not to mention wrong assumption.* James didn't seem able to bear his silence, was filling it with, "I haven't been carrying it in my pocket, if that's what you're thinking. What would be the point, they'd expire. Got it from a dispenser earlier, at the hospital. I was going to leave it in sight and let you decide, but I didn't want you to misunderstand." He added pointedly, midway between jest and grievance, "*Again.*"

*Sometimes you make it ridiculously easy, lad.* "I can still misunderstand, I can slip it on you."

"No," James looked appalled, "no, no, I wouldn't -- I don't expect -- I'd never expect -- "

"Change your expectations," Lewis told him. Sharing life and bed meant *sharing*; once you invested that much, *trusted* that much, the rest became part and parcel. "If you haven't noticed we've scuppered the old ones, I'll need your warrant back."

"No, Robbie, listen, we're different, we just *are* -- "

"Then one of us is in the wrong place, except I see evidence otherwise."

"If you'll listen to me for a minute -- "

"Just tell me, right out," Lewis interrupted, "is this something you really want, or you think I must, it makes you apprehensive, and you want to get past it?" James's eyes shied away as he bit his lip. Enough of an answer, but Lewis preferred to hear it. "Tell us. Honestly."

James sighed. "Forty/sixty."

"Right." He tossed away the condom to wherever it chose to fall. "Not on. Not yet." *I'll know when.* Not when James could be practical with sanitary issues, but when he writhed and clung and keened, if and when he *needed* it. "You're right, we *are* different. From most couples, that is. We're also learning ourselves -- *re-*learning -- as we're learning each other. So, no rules for or against, for either of us. But I do have one rule." He'd seen too much in *Vice.* Most often from lack of control or sheer ignorance, not even malice. "Within my arms is where you should be safest."

James lifted off the bed into his arms as if proving a point. "*I am,*" he asserted, sounding choked up, "never doubted it, never will."
"Step at a time, eh, easy steps, until I'm as confident?" Once he felt James nod, he eased him back onto the bed. "Now, where was I?" He sat on his heels again, slid his hands under James's buttocks and lifted them onto his lap. Now he could lower or raise his head as he wished, he could lower and raise James if he wanted, and with the lad stretched away at a slant, Lewis could also watch his face with little effort if he wanted to -- and he was stalling. Feeling somewhat daunted was unavoidable, he supposed, and started to lean in.

James stopped him with a hand on his chest, eyes locked with his, "Your turn. Do you really want to, or you think I must?"

"Both, and I've better percentages," Lewis answered with the best part of his heart, "I'm just apprehensive about suck-- blow-- botching it. Bloody hell, why does being rubbish at something refer to this so often?"

"The other way around, I think. The stigma is in the act."

As most pleasures, per your lot, he kept to himself. Instead, he leaned and nuzzled experimentally, making James gasp, "Oh, God."

Aye, that lot. And they've screwed you up long enough. Suddenly impatient, and more than a little defiant, he wrapped his hand around the hard shaft, lifted it and took it in his mouth. Hot, smooth and silky at the crown, with a bit of a yield, like a ripe plum left in the sun. OK, so far so good.

He started to dip lower, heard James make a muffled sound, glanced up from under his lashes to see him watching wide-eyed, his cheeks flamed all the way to his temples, the rest of his face hidden behind his forearm thrown over his mouth like a gag.

Lewis used his spare hand to pull the arm down, and lifted his head long enough to say, "Make all the noise you want, lad, you're home," took him back into his mouth, probably further than he should have, or sooner than he should have --

"So I can bring over my guitar then?"

Cheeky, cunning, and wretchedly timed. So James Hathaway that it tore a laugh out of Lewis, with his mouth over-full, more a wet gurgle than a laugh. "Aye, you can," he burbled, lips stretched too far for speech, before he let go and repeated with what composure he could scrape up, "You can, aye," you cocky prat. Then again, once you'd snorted around and dribbled over a daunting mouthful...well, it wasn't daunting anymore, was it? And the laughter that seemed to bubble up often and easily between them now was proving to be akin to the proverbial spoonful of sugar, it made everything go down easier.

After a few minutes, James did become quite noisy. Indiscriminate, bright sounds that made Lewis happy to hear.

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The room was dark when Lewis next registered it. The duvet he'd last seen sliding to the floor was tucked around him and he was alone in the bed -- again. He'd left James as close to sleep as himself, taking up most of the bed, splayed like a starfish, and grinning as though his brain cells had quit for the night. Where had he bloody gone?

Hoping Innocent hadn't rung, Lewis rolled over to look for his watch on the bedside table. He
found it still on his wrist, its lit face showing short of midnight. The closed door of the bedroom was outlined in dim light. He swung his legs out of the bed, went to open the door, noticing the clothes strewn about earlier were now folded on a chair. The hallway light wasn't on, the illumination was spilling in from the front room, and he could faintly hear James... humming? That was new.

He padded quietly to the end of the hallway, and there was the lad at the table, with Lewis's bathrobe draped over his shoulders, the hair at his crown pointing at something on the ceiling. He was biting into a roast beef sandwich of a size heretofore seen only in cartoon strips. Monty was sitting at attention on the chair across from him, too busy aiming the 'gimme' glare at him to take notice of Lewis. Continuing to hum while he chewed, James reached to offer the cat a respectable chunk that disappeared from the end of his fingers in an instant, with no preamble of dubious sniffs. Obviously, a pattern of delivering acceptable titbits to the greedy maw had already been established.

_What?_ Wrapping his arms around himself, Lewis stopped to listen.

"On two measures, different meter signatures, bloody compound meters. It's not a tune, it's a taunt."

Ah. Something musical, probably something challenging he wanted to attempt for the Christmas concert. In confirmation, Hathaway's left hand started pressing invisible strings in the air as he took another bite of the sandwich held in his right. "Nearly unplayable on a guitar," he grumbled around his full mouth to the cat who was more interested in what went into it than what came out of it, "but I bet I can do it, if I can just shift faster." And that, judging by the wishful tone, would be akin to finding the pot of gold at rainbow's end.

No doubt at all now that a guitar would take up residence and endless tinkling and twanging would commence _-- anon_, as it were. Padding back to bed, Lewis remembered he'd minded noises in his home once, until he'd learned how much louder silence could be. A set of those waxy, pliable earplugs, that was the ticket.

As he was settling back into the bed, he wondered momentarily at how placidly he was taking all these unlikely changes. But it didn't feel as if his life had turned upside down, felt like it was becoming whole again. _Unsought finding_, he thought, snuggling under the duvet. There must be a fancy word for that. James would know.

Halfway back to sleep, he heard James in the bathroom, brushing his teeth. Shortly, the lad was tugging at the duvet so gingerly that Lewis roused himself to reach back and lift it for him, and didn't mind when James promptly plastered his chilled self against his back, tucked his knees into the crook of Lewis's legs. _Guess you miss the oddest things_, he concluded equably, pulling James's arm around him, braiding their fingers, content to be an outsized hot water bottle.

He contemplated that his second pillow still served no purpose, it was apparently as far away as Outer Mongolia for the lad; he seemed to prefer sharing Lewis's pillow, or using _him_ as a pillow. Then he wondered if there was enough shaving cream for two left in the container he hadn't quite emptied before buying the new one, presently residing in James's flat. Which reminded him sooner or later this juggling would have to cease and disclosure couldn't be avoided. It was bound to cause some bother, but apart from the need to steer James through it with as few bruises as possible, he wasn't overly concerned; nobody else's day-to-day well-being depended on him. Then he remembered he had something to ask, craned his head to do so, which James took as an invitation for a kiss, spent a long, leisurely minute going about it. Once released, Lewis spent another minute lying
back against him and grinning about it inanely before he realised he'd be asleep if he delayed asking any longer, "What would you call finding something you weren't looking for?"

"Serendipitous?"

As he'd thought, a mouthful. "That's the one."

"Only -- "

"Only?"

"It indicates gladness at finding it."

"Good. It should. I am."

James laughed softly, a ripple of contentment made into sound. His laugh lingered as a smile sketched against Lewis's neck. He seemed to be doing a lot of that now: James Hathaway of the Perpetual Smile -- who'd have thought?

With the door left open, Monty arrived for his portion of the bed, normally behind Lewis's bent knees, taken up by James's legs right then. Placing his front paws on various parts of Lewis and rising on them to look down and contemplate this new configuration from all angles, he finally decided the slope of the lap would have to do. After taking an inordinate amount of time turning this way and that, he plonked down, took some more time to accept rigorous kneading wasn't going to reshape Lewis's belly, settled down, curled up and started purring, keeping company to James's deepening breath next to Lewis's ear.

Against all odds, he seemed to have a family again.

*That's me, then,* was his last thought of the night, *sorted.*

~ fin ~
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