Further on Up the Road

by opalmatrix

Summary

Doone and Charles have both been looking forward to seeing each other again after a separation of two years.

Notes

Beta by whynzycal, who told me where to end it: thanks again!

See the end of the work for more notes

Doone didn't like bars. Sometimes other junior members of the company invited him out with them, and he went, because he liked the people. But he never knew what to do with himself once he was there. He liked to listen to his friends talk, but bars were so noisy that it was hard to hear them. And then there was the whole business about the drinks. Beer was disgusting. And mixed drinks made his head feel wrong. He didn't like to have to worry about where his feet were going, instead of just letting them do what they wanted to do. So he would usually have a ginger beer, or maybe a half pint of cider. And everyone seemed to think that was wrong—at least a little bit wrong.

But bars were where grown-up people met each other. And so he was here to meet Charles, for the first time in two years.

He had been afraid that he wouldn't recognize Charles, despite the photos from his deployments.
But suddenly he saw a face he knew even though it had been stretched and changed a bit. Charles was wearing a tweed jacket over a shirt and tie, with whipcord trousers, and he had on a hat that covered most of his red hair. The only hat Doone owned was a knitted wooly one for cold weather. He looks like a grown up, thought Doone, and his stomach felt peculiar.

Their eyes met. Charles grinned, and Doone forgot about his stomach. "Doone," Charles shouted, over the noise that everyone else was making. No one noticed. Things like this happened in bars. Doone smiled and waved.

Charles sat down on the other stool at Doone's little table. A waitress hurried over, and Charles ordered a beer. Then he reached right over the table and squeezed Doone's shoulder. His hand was big, and Doone felt its warmth and strength through his good black jersey. "It's so good to see you, I can't even tell you," said Charles.

Doone hadn't changed, and yet he had, thought Charles. His queer little face had lengthened and developed cheekbones that must have been hidden by bits of puppy fat before, but his eyes were the same, greenish and framed with thick, dark lashes. His hair was in a fairly fashionable cut, too long on top from Charles' viewpoint—but then, Doone was an artist and wasn't likely to conform to the military model. And it suited him, as did the black jersey he was wearing: he was very slim, almost willowy, but his shoulders were widening. Charles could feel muscle under his fingers when he clasped Doone's shoulder.

"So you're part of the company now!" said Charles. "No surprise there, of course. How are they treating you?"

Doone's lips parted, and his eyes shifted to the side and then back again. Charles waited. He knew how words failed Doone so easily, tripping him up in a way that his body never did. "They're very kind to me," said Doone, at last. "I'm learning a lot."

"And…?"

"They don't quite know what to do with me just now," said Doone, his head drooping. He looked into his half-empty mug. Cider, thought Charles; the color was too bright for beer.

"How do you mean?" said Charles, taking his own pint mug from the waitress.

"Well, I'm in the corps de ballet. And we have to do everything the same. So if I jump as far as I can, or…you know. I can't stick out."

"Oh, hard luck," murmured Charles. He could see the issue, quite easily. Doone's athleticism and superior technique would have to be suppressed if he were to do his current job in the company. And there weren't many roles for a dancer who was clearly no longer a boy but not yet a full-grown man. "Let's talk about something else, then. How's your family? And Ruth?"

Doone smiled. "Crystal's had a few solos already. Mum and Dad are fine. Will and Kate have a baby…"

"Oh ho, you're an uncle!"

"Yes. It's funny, isn't it?" Doone was beguiling when he really smiled. "Ruth is doing well. She's helping choreograph a ballet for the company. They expect it to be done in the spring."

"She must be getting very beautiful," said Charles.

Doone looked surprised. "I don't know. She's still just Ruth."
"I think she's always liked you, Doone."

"She's my friend," said Doone, artless. Charles sat back, his beer half gone.

"No girlfriend?" he asked.

"No," said Doone.

"That's all right," said Charles, easily. Doone was looking worried. He always seemed to miss that sort of thing. "Whatever happened to that cute little one—Amanda, was it?"

"She's gone to the English National Ballet."

"She was absolutely adorable," said Charles, watching Doone's face.

"Yes," said Doone, after a pause. "Charles, I'm sorry. I'm no good at this."

"You're fine!" said Charles, firmly. There was no point in pretending he didn't know what Doone meant.

"It's so noisy in bars," said Doone. "So many people moving about. It's hard to think."

Charles took a deep breath. "I have a good-sized hotel room. It has a little sofa and a comfy chair. Have you had supper? We could order room service. Or we could go to your place."

"I don't really have a place to sit," said Doone. "It's a just a room. There's a parlor, but it's not private."

"My place, then," said Charles. He had no real plans. He hardly dared think about what he was feeling at the moment. It was all right for that MP to announce that he was gay, but Charles was still just a junior officer, not long out of Sandhurst. The military was a long way from the London arts scene, too.

He just knew that right now, he wanted some time alone with Doone, even if Doone had no real idea what his friend wanted from him.

End Notes

I'm so pleased to meet another fan of this book! I realize that in point of fact, Doone might be asexual, or just a late bloomer in the matter of love and sexual attraction. But this story carries out a thought that occurred to me when reading about Doone's reactions to his female classmates.

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