

## A Moderation of Honour – a novel (unfinished)

### A Moderation of Honour extract – from Chapter 2

Waking up the next morning was something of a surprise to Andrew. He wasn't the least bit surprised to wake up for that was something he'd managed most mornings since he could remember. However, he was a little perplexed to find himself fully clothed and soaking wet, lying in an empty bath, clutching a fire extinguisher. Though the sun was streaming in through the window he was shivering with cold. It made sense to run the bath, dressed as he was, simply to warm up and to rinse out his suit at the same time. His head was aching but he had the sense to drink from the cold tap to relieve the effects of dehydration. The stiffness he felt in every limb was gradually eased by the warmth of the water and he lay back to try and piece together the events of the previous night.

He couldn't remember eating anything, which might explain why he felt so ravenous. He vaguely recalled singing outside the Dean's door. And even more vaguely he pictured himself being supported back to his room by two helpful souls who had then started giggling inanely outside his room, set off the fire extinguisher in the corridor and disappeared into the night. He was able to picture himself staggering from his bed to the corridor, picking up the extinguisher and taking it into the communal bathroom to ensure the contents went down the plug-hole rather than over the recently laid floor tiles. Quite why he'd then climbed into the bath and spent the rest of the night there snuggling up to the bright red metal canister would need to remain a mystery.

There came a knock at the door. "Josephs? Is that you in there?" Andrew recognised the stentorian tones of the Dean.

"Em, yes," he ventured to reply.

"You will report to my rooms in precisely half an hour. Is that clear?"

"It is, er, sir," said Andrew, in no doubt that he was now in hot water both literally **and** metaphorically.

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Precisely half an hour later Andrew entered the very room outside which the previous evening he had evidently delivered a rousing version of some indelicate song or other. Andrew was not blessed with the sweetest of voices, but what he lacked in mellifluousness he made up for with volume and gusto. The only songs he could sing off by heart were hymns, a few Beatles numbers and the ones he learnt from playing in the rugby team. The latter were only sung under the influence of alcohol as a deliberate affront to all right-thinking people employing, as they did, a vocabulary Andrew would never dream of utilising in any other context. They also encouraged team spirit, he had heard it argued, though Andrew would have to acknowledge his had, on this occasion, been a solo performance. He seriously doubted, however, that he had been summoned purely because of a morally misjudged musical rendition.

"Josephs," began the Dean. "This is not the first time I have had to request your presence before me."

"No, sir," Andrew conceded.

"Was it not the case that on your very first day in college you mistook Doctor Barlow's bedroom for your own and disposed of the entire contents of his wardrobe before you could be prevented?"

Andrew had to admit he'd behaved rather hot-headedly over this matter. Frustrated at discovering his own room was not ready and that he would have to take up temporary lodgings in the meantime, he had chosen the wrong door of two at the top of the staircase following the directions he had been given in the porter's lodge. Andrew had judged and assumed the clothes he had discovered in the wardrobe were of such poor taste and antiquity that they had been abandoned by a previous student. Having unpacked his suitcase, he filled it up with the frayed and thinning trousers, jackets and suits that he felt should long since have been disposed of by their former owner and dragged them off to the Oxfam shop in the Cornmarket. The ladies in the shop had not seemed particularly grateful when they examined the contents of the case and only rather grudgingly agreed to dispose of them. Nevertheless, every item had been sold by the time Andrew later tried to undo the damage he had done.

Doctor Barlow, discovering Andrew asleep that afternoon on his bed, had ejected him from the room in speechless fury, barely allowing him the time to bundle up his own clothes from the wardrobe. He had left it to the Dean to deal with Andrew once the appalling discovery was made that, but for shirts, jumpers socks, pants and ties, every item of clothing he had ever owned had been distributed throughout Oxford at bargain prices. Doctor Barlow was subsequently provided with funds from the college to re-stock his wardrobe with an admirable collection from Marks and Spencer's and was instantly transformed into one of the more eligible dons. It could not have been a mere co-incidence that within months he had become engaged to be married and before the year was out had moved his bride into the very rooms where Andrew had wrought such havoc. Andrew escaped without further punishment than being pointed out by every passing member of the Senior Common Room for weeks after.

"Then, there was the unfortunate matter of..."

"The magazines, yes," said Andrew, anxious that the Dean should get to the point.

"December's Playmate of the Month must have been particularly distracting for you," said the Dean, "when you were revising for college collections."

"I'm afraid I don't recall," Andrew replied, wondering who else amongst the senior fraternity had benefited from the seizure of his pornographic pile.

"And no doubt you are unable to recall some of the events of last night," sneered the Dean, "events that led to foaming water seeping through the ceiling of the Principal's bedroom from the corridor adjacent to your room. Water that gathered into a ballooning mass above the Principal's bed before cascading as a torrent upon his and his dear lady wife's heads. Their investigations this morning made it clear that the culprit had wielded a fire extinguisher the contents of which have not only caused considerable damage to the Principal's bedroom ceiling but have also unglued and warped the tiles laid so very recently as an improving facet to your corridor."

Andrew had seen the latter consequences for himself when he'd left the bathroom. He couldn't guess how much it would cost to replace the tiles but he knew the moment he saw them that the expense would be all his.

"I don't suppose you'd like to hear an explanation," Andrew hopelessly inquired.

"Correct in every particular. The bill will be forwarded to your home address. Your return to college will be dependent upon your having achieved an Upper Second in Honour Moderations. Anything less, and you can consider yourself no longer a member of this college."

"But, sir."

"No buts, Josephs. I was not, you may be surprised to hear, particularly entertained by your sweet serenadings last night. Especially as I was not alone at the time. So, how does it feel now, my dear Josephs, for you to be the one facing the music?"