

CHAPTER ONE

My name is Dominic Jones and my story begins a few weeks after my twenty-first birthday. Looking back, I think I first realised I was gay when I was thirteen years old but I don't think I fully understood what that meant until I was about sixteen. During the last five years or so, I've done a lot of soul searching but have yet to accept being gay and I still haven't told anybody about it. I haven't even met another gay man that I am aware of. I have decided to write about my life in the hope of juggling all my thoughts in a more logical way. Maybe this way, I will finally be able to pluck up the courage to be who I really am in the world.

Late April in Newcastle, in the North-East of England, usually means one thing for me. It's coming to the end of the football season and my team are fitting tooth and nail for those final precious points to end the season on a high. I'm a Newcastle United fan; always have been, always will be.

My dad started taking me to the United games when I was four or five years old. This family tradition carried on, more or less, for every home game for around a decade and a half up until the end of last season. I say family tradition, but really it was just me and my dad from my immediate family plus a couple of male cousins and uncles.

My mum have never joined us for the football matches, either in person or on the television. She was only nineteen when I was born and my dad is a four years older than her. They both left school with no qualifications but have worked very hard to provide our family with solid security and as many treats as they can afford for me, my brother and my sister.

Max, my brother, is four years younger than me and never caught the football bug. He's more a fan of hard rock and metal music, or I often say to him crap music. It's all screaming in my opinion and a mile away from the music I like. I've got plenty of camp stuff hidden away under my bed.

My sister, Abbie, is fourteen. We don't have much in common but we're still very close. She's the little princess of the family; a real daddy's-little-girl and the apple-of-my-

mum's-eye. She's very much into Disney and chatting to her school mates online; a sheer contrast to the football, football, football culture that I lived in at her age.

Me and dad don't go to the football games together any more. It does bother me that the family tradition seems to be over. There's endless football on the television to get my fix, but the true reason I don't go any more is because me and my dad have drifted apart. We never really spoke about it; we just stopped going to the games and neither party protested. We were never close outside of the football world anyway.

In fact, I've pulled away a lot from all my family recently. I moved into my own flat a few months back about a thirty minute walk from where I grew up and the rest of my family still live. It's a decent bed-sit; nothing to shout about but it does the job.

“Why are you moving out?” my mum said to me when I first told her.

“Well, I'm earning decent money now, mum, so I thought it was about time I got my own place. I am almost twenty-one and I can't live here forever.”

“Good for you. But I do think it's about time you got a girlfriend, Dominic. You'll get lonely on your own. I was nineteen when you were born and had been going out with your dad for a few years by then. You're older than that and there's not a girl in sight.”

“My love life is none of your business!” I replied aggressively.

That was very common of me. To abruptly end awkward conversations by saying something defensive or nasty to the person annoying me. I'm constantly full of worry and confusion and use this as a defence mechanism to try and stop the truth coming out.

Even after several years, gay still sounds a bit weird for me to say or write. It's like a whole new identity that I discovered in myself one day that I have absolutely no control over. I went from not being attracted to anybody, to wondering why I wasn't attracted to one of the many girls surrounding me every day at school to, oh my god, I'm gay.

To be honest, I wasn't happy with the discovery at all. Actually, devastated is a more appropriate phrase; utterly devastated. I didn't want to be gay; I still don't. But I've done my research and, I guess, I don't have no choice. I've heard of some weird therapy that can apparently fix guys to becoming straight but it sounds too good to be true, or bollocks is probably a better way of summarising it.

I am still a virgin and have never even been kissed. I've been attracted to a few guys. The attraction does feel normal. I think I fully understand what a good-looking guy looks like. The only pleasure I get though is on my own. I look at gay photos and videos online practically every day; making sure I delete the history afterwards. I used to delete them

because my brother and sister often borrowed my computer as they didn't have ones of their own. Surprisingly, I still delete the history even though I'm now living on my own. I suppose I don't want to take the risk in case someone comes round and needs to use my computer; not that I get many visitors.

My self-confidence has been shot by being gay. I feel ugly inside and out. I don't know how to portray myself in public any more so certainly have no idea how to go about meeting guys. I've no-one to talk to for advice. None of my family know the truth, or any of my friends. I feel alone and confused. Whenever my mum asks me if I've got a girlfriend yet, or any one else does for that matter, I make some lame excuse. I feel like I'm climbing more and more into the closet.

I've been brought up not to lie but I certainly don't want to be caught in a trap by saying I have a girlfriend and then messing up. I'm building up to telling people; I just don't know how to. I've been online for coming-out advice and there is plenty out there. There's a lot more gay people out there than I expected; apparently around one in ten blokes. That makes me feel less of a freak.

I was in a large social group of sporty lads back in school. About thirty of us and we played football more or less every lunch time and sometimes after school or at the weekend. Surely, at least someone else from that group is gay now; I often wonder who. There was a lot of fit guys in our group but I wouldn't care which of them was gay; they were all decent lads. But I haven't kept in touch with any of them. My wallowing in self-pity has ruled out staying in touch with them.

I just wish I had another gay person to talk to. I'm almost certain I have unconditional love from my mum, brother and sister and even from my dad too, in his old-fashioned kind of way. I can't recall him ever saying he loved me but I'm sure he does deep down.

But I'm not so sure I would still have that unconditional love if I told them I was queer. I think my brother and sister maybe slightly too young to understand it. I don't think my mum or dad know any gay people either. Maybe they do but they have never mentioned any to me. I really don't know how they will all react if I pluck up the courage to tell them.

I've had my suspicions about one of uncles for a few years. He's a good few years older than me and I've never heard about any girlfriend of his. He's sensitive, defensive and can be aggressive; very like me. Maybe he is in the closet too. If he is gay and came out that would really help me to assess everybody's reactions.

Last Christmas, I nearly confessed all to my mum. Like every year, we had a big

family gathering on Christmas evening with my dad's side of the family; some the guys who I used to go the football with plus a few of my aunts and other cousins. We were all sat around chatting and exchanging presents when my mum turned the channel on the TV over.

“We're not watching this shit! Turn that puff off!” my dad demanded. “He isn't funny, he's just a camp ponce! There'll be something better on any other channel!”

“He is funny,” my mum answered. Then she directed a question to the rest of the room. “Is it just me or does anybody else think so?”

I was hoping someone, anyone, would agree with my mum.

“No he isn't!” one of uncles agreed.

“Right then, if nothing is on we all want to watch, why don't we play that quiz we bought Max?” my mum suggested. “The pub quiz one?”

I charged out of the room and up to my bedroom. I felt like it was obvious why but nobody seemed to understand. Only one person came up to see me.

It was my mum.

“What's up with you?” she said.

“I don't feel well. I've got stomach ache,” I responded.

“Really, how come?”

“How am I supposed to know?” I shouted back at her.

She looked annoyed at me for snapping.⁷

“Maybe the turkey wasn't cooked properly. Or that takeaway last night was dodgy,” I suggested.

I was lying. My stomach felt fine. I was furious but not ill. I covered up because I was scared my mum would piece the puzzle together.

“No-one else is ill. Stop being a drama queen!” my mum demanded.

“I'm not being a drama queen. I feel like shit!”

“Oi, we don't swear in this house!” my mum insisted.

She always said that when anyone swore.

“Sorry, mum. Please leave me alone, I'll be down later.”

“Well don't spend all night feeling sorry for yourself. Your family's here and we only see them a few times a year. It's Christmas Day you can't spend it on your own. I would have thought you would have wanted to be around all your cousins.”

“I'll be down later, mum.”

My mum gave a loud sigh and left the room.

I could hear her footsteps going downstairs towards all the merriment. There was lots of noise, mainly laughing, coming from the living room I had recently left.

That conversation feels like yesterday. I had been unhappy well before, but I don't recall hearing any homophobic abuse from any of my family before that day. I had gone from a happy-go-lucky normal lad who loved everything about Christmas to a deeply unhappy, angry, self-conscious loner within a few years and my dad had made things much worse for me with his mindless opinion.

What bothered me the most was that not one person in that room said anything to suggest that what my dad had said was wrong. Everybody must have heard him say 'puff' and 'ponce' and I didn't hear a single 'you're out of order' from anyone. Yes, I wasn't out to any of them but, by not saying anything, they were all condoning my dad's behaviour; well that's I believed any way. I knew he was old-fashioned and narrow-minded; more from being uneducated about different types of people than being a nasty person. But I expected my mum to tell him off or at least one of my younger relatives who may have gay friends or, at least, thought it was offensive.

Yes, my mum said the gay bloke on the telly was funny but that was hardly a glowing endorsement that she would be happy to give up some grand kids in the future for a potentially funny gay son. Any little confidence that had been building up inside me was immediately destroyed.

That was the catalyst for me moving out, which I did soon after. Things have been a bit easier since. Living alone gives me a lot more time to think away from my family. I don't know what's more annoying; my mum and dad treating me like a kid or being around my brother and sister all jolly without a care in the world. They both seem much happier than I feel. I am glad they're happy; I certainly wouldn't want them going through what I am.

I work at a high street fashion store in the city centre. As far as I know, I'm the only gay guy there which is another kick in the stomach. However, there's this rumour going round that one of the other blokes is gay but I'm not sure. It would make my life easier having someone there to study how they relate to the world; I've forgot how to do it. I feel like everything I do screams gay and unhappy. I have no idea why gay used to be a word meaning happy.

The rumour concerns a guy called Freddie. We're good mates and I've spent some

time hanging out with him in work and out. I am attracted to him but I don't want to get my hopes up that he might be secretly gay. He's also close to this guy called Malcolm. They're always talking about girls, whereas Freddie never talks about girls when it's just me and him. Sadly it hardly is, as Malcolm always seems to be around. I'm convinced Malcolm doesn't like me; I'm not sure exactly why but let's just say he doesn't hide it very well. I can recall a recent conversation between the three of us:

“Do you fancy anyone at work, Freddie?” Malcolm asked him.

“Diane's OK but I would have to say Sarah is by far the best looking,” Freddie replied.

I tried my best to hide my sadness at another conversation about women. I think I managed it without being noticed.

“Yeah, I agree,” Malcolm responded.

He then looked over to me expecting my input.

I said nothing, still thinking about the girls Freddie had said.

“What about you, Dominic?” he asked me. Who've you got your eyes on?”

I was stumped. “I don't really know, mate. I've not really thought about it.”

There was an awkward pause before I continued. “So you like Jenny, eh?”

I tried, and failed, to move the focus back on to him.

“What do you mean you haven't thought about it?” he said angrily. “It's all us lads think about isn't it? You're not gay are you?”

“Don't be silly!” I stupidly replied.

I should have just admitted it there and then.

But I chose to go further into my closet. “Yeah, I guess Sarah is the better looking for me too. But I get on with Diane better.”

I just wanted to agree with Freddie so he thought we had even more in common. My feelings for Freddie were growing by the second, especially when he was around.

Freddie is a very handsome guy. He's two years older than me and quite experienced with sex from what he says. He's only admitted to being with women though, so I'm not sure the rumour has any substance. He seems to have gone a bit cold on me recently as well. Maybe he is straight, the rumour is bollocks and he's noticed me checking him out; let's just say I do it often. I try to be discrete about but maybe I'm not. He's so damn funny. He's always the life and soul; cracking jokes and making everyone laugh. He doesn't seem to have

a care in the world; I like that.

My last shift at work was two days ago and I casually looked at the rota to see when we were next working together. It's tomorrow and I can't wait! And as a bonus, Malcolm won't be there getting in the way. Maybe I should take Freddie aside and tell him I like him. What's the worst that could happen?

CHAPTER TWO

I woke up the next day with renewed vigour; time to sort out of my life. I carefully picked a good outfit for work. One of the perks of the job is that you can wear what you want, within reason. No baseball caps, vests, shorts, big logos, but a discrete t-shirt, jeans and trainers is fine. That's my standard casual outfit so it's always nice to go to work like this rather than wearing a boring shirt, trousers and shoes combo like the mind-numbingly dull office job I had a few years ago.

Noticing the time, I rushed to brush my teeth, put some product in my hair and headed quickly out the door towards the nearest bus stop on my route. I have to wait up to twenty minutes for a bus into work. Twenty minutes of worrying about what to say to him.

"Just be yourself," I said to myself very softly, making sure the old woman near me didn't hear and think I was a weirdo. "Think positive and believe the rumour!"

The rumour came from one of the managers at work, Diane. She's not my line manager so gossiping with her is fine, I think. She came to me with the news at lunch time in work a few weeks ago.

"You'll never guess what, Dom?" she said.

I didn't have a chance to say anything.

"Do you remember that staff night out a few Fridays ago?"

"Yeah, of course," I replied, slightly bored.

She continued. "Well, I didn't tell you at the time because he was there."

"Who was there?"

"Freddie" she told me.

"Yeah, I know Freddie was there, because I was there.

She was stating the obvious and I was unsure where this was going.

"Stop talking and listen to me, will you?" she insisted. "So, I bumped into my mate, Stuart, at the bar when you lot were probably dancing to something cheesy. I know this Stuart from my last job. I'd not seen him in a while and I was very surprised to bump into

him. Anyway, he only recognised Freddie!”

“Small world,” I replied. “I was expecting something juicier than that though.”

“Well, you'll never guess what?”

“What?” I demanded.

This was going on too long and I knew she liked to drag out a story for maximum effect. This certainly wasn't the first time.

“Well Freddie apparently got absolutely wasted one night and tried to kiss the face off my mate Stuart.”

“What?”

“I know!”

“That's bollocks,” I insisted.

Secretly, I was excited at the thought of it being true. I wanted to do a big camp dance and struggled to restrain myself.

“It's true, Dom. Stuart wouldn't lie about that,” Diane insisted. “I've known him years. It's too random to make up! He said Freddie had been chatting to him and then lunged at him and he had to push him away. And that's the last he saw of him before we were all out the other week.”

I could feel my smile getting wider and it was hard to contain. How weird would it look to Diane if she noticed I was smiling at a guy trying to kiss another guy.

Diane continued. “The dirty dog! He's going round telling everyone he's straight and then he gets pissed and tries to kiss my mate. He's lied to us all this time!”

“Maybe it's not true. We don't know for certain,” I argued, conscious of the fact that I had also lied to Diane and everyone else at work by saying I was straight when I first joined the company several months ago.

“What should we do about it?” asked Diane.

I sensed she wanted to confront him.

“I don't know,” I responded. “I've not worked with him for that long, we've only seen each other out of work a few times and I wouldn't know how to approach the subject. I can't just go up to him and say somebody told me you're gay. Is it true?”

“Yes fair point,” Dianne said laughing. “I think you should fish for the facts though. You're a lot closer to him than I am.”

What she said did make sense. We were much closer.

At that moment, I switched into fantasy mode and imagined me and Freddie curled

up on a sofa, kissing whilst watching a soppy film.

Diane quickly stopped me. "So you find out all the dirty details and don't forget to tell me!" she demanded.

I sensed she might be suspicious about me too.

This was quite a girly conversation and I didn't know if I was being paranoid, but I got the impression she might be testing me. Was she observing my speech and reactions? Was the rumour a ploy to try and 'out' me?

"But don't get too close to him," Diane suggested. "He might try and kiss you too. He's got a reputation now and you don't want to be his next victim, do you Dominic?"

She laughed to herself as he left.

Maybe she didn't suspect I was gay after all.

Once she was out of reach, I thought to myself I fucking hope I'm his next victim. It could happen anywhere as far as I was concerned in that moment; the fitting room, the canteen or on top of the till point with customers all around; Me and Freddie making sweet love. My thoughts were very deep and slushy and I couldn't help but wonder whether one kiss with him would take all the years of pain away and we could become boyfriend and boyfriend.

The bus finally arrived and I showed the driver my weekly pass. He feigned a smile and signalled for me to sit down. My stomach was churning now. I had been thinking about Freddie a lot for a while now. Going through the rumour in my head again made me want to blurt something out as soon as I saw him. Something corny and cringey like 'you're gay and I'm gay, so let's be gay together' would suit me down to the ground. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed someone familiar walking towards me.

"Alright, Dominic. How's it going? I've not seen you for years."

It was my mate, Cole, from school and I hadn't seen him since I left.

He looked good in his sporty t-shirt, track suit bottoms and white trainers. He certainly look fitter than I remember him with nice stubble and toned arms.

"Alright, Cole. It's been awhile. What have you been up to?"

"Oh nothing much, mate. I'm working at B&Q down the road still. And I'm still with Melanie. We live together now in a house about ten minutes away. I don't drive, that's why I've had to get the bus into town. I need to pick up some stuff for my little girl."

“Oh, that's excellent news. How old is she? And how long have you and Melanie been together now?”

“It's six years now. We hooked up soon after we all left school. And my girl, Elizabeth, is two now. So where are you working now, Dom?”

“A place in town that sells men's, women's and kids clothes.”

“Cool, mate. Have you got a girlfriend, Dom?”

“No, mate!” I snapped at him.

Thankfully, he didn't seem to notice.

I am sick to the back teeth of people asking me this question. It always annoys me; reminding me that I don't have one or, more to the point, that I don't have a boyfriend.

“Nothing serious,” I said. “I have a few girls on the go but I don't want to settle down into an old married couple like you and Melanie, do I?”

If I'm going to lie, I might as well jazz it up I thought.

Cole gave me a nod before realising he needed to get off at the next stop.

“I'll catch you again some time mate,” he muttered as he left.

I secretly hoped I would never see him again. He was pleasant, just like in the past, but I despised the questions about girls. The quick chat did help take my mind off Freddie for a moment though. But now it was all flooding back as I gazed out of the window.

We soon passed my old college and I wondered what my best mate Tom was up to. We first met at that college four years ago but have lost touch a bit since then. He's got a girlfriend and a baby on the way so they're bound to come first.

I missed Tom though. We used to spend practically every day together when we were at college. We were in many of the same classes and sat next to each other all the time plus we always spent lunch together when we both were in and plenty of our free time as well. We also had the same part-time job. We were like two peas in a pod for a good few years. I really missed that come to think of it.

I soon noticed a familiar row of shops out the window indicating it was almost time to get off the bus. I glanced at my watch and worked out I was due to start work in precisely eighteen minutes. I knew that by the time I got off the bus and walked to work, I would have just enough time to put my things away in my locker then head to the shop floor ready to begin another eight-hour shift. There wouldn't be enough time to talk to Freddie before work

began. I would have to catch him for a chat during work.

I was confused about what to say as I began my shift. I was already annoyed when I realised Freddie was working on the other floor to me. I wasn't going to see him unless we happened to be on the same lunch. I tried to rectify the problem by talking to my line manager within the first hour.

“Hi, any chance I can work on Menswear today?” I asked my line manager casually when she came by the till.

That would mean a full day of being near Freddie.

“No can do, Dominic,” she told me matter-of-factly. I know you blokes don't like working on Women's but we're short staffed so you're going to have to stay here I'm afraid.”

She mustn't have understood that something more important than women's clothes and the customers were on my mind today. I would have to think of an excuse to go up to Menswear.

I spotted an opportunity shortly after.

“Alice, can you cover me on the till for a few minutes please, ” I asked her. “I need to sort something out. I'll be as quick as I can. Thank you.”

Before she could answer, I was already walking away.

She had no choice but to put the clothes in her hands down and take my place on the till point.

I noted I was rushing a bit on the escalator. I felt a bit of sweat on my forehead and tried to hide it using the my left forearm. I was as nervous as hell and my heart was racing quicker and quicker.

I saw Freddie in the distance as I reached the top of the escalator. He was helping a man with what appeared to be shirt sizes. He looked so damn handsome; even more so than I could remember in my mind. He looked trim and healthy in his red t-shirt, blue jeans and red trainers. I liked that he dressed similar to me and was not too dissimilar to me in height and weight; maybe we could share clothes in the future I couldn't help but think.

He seemed to be enjoying chatting with the man.

As the customer grabbed a plain blue shirt from the rack, Freddie caught my eye and I gave him a wild, goofy smile.

But he didn't seem to react; like he hadn't even seen me.

I headed towards him and hovered around some men's jeans whilst he finished helping the customer. It seemed like forever for the customer to go away but it mustn't have

been more than a minute. The sweating had gotten worse and it must have been noticeable.

“Do you want to go for a drink after work, mate?” I hurriedly asked Freddie.

It was all I could get out of my body.

But then I rambled on incoherently. “It doesn't matter if you can't. I mean I was just wondering if you were free and wanted to go for a drink. I mean I'm not up to much later, that's all. I thought we could go for a beer.”

“I can't tonight,” Freddie responded after a long awkward pause.

“OK. How come you can't?” I asked.

He looked annoyed at me for asking for an explanation.

“Because Me, Malcolm and a couple of the girls are off to the cinema.”

I felt a sudden pain in my stomach. I didn't know what else to say.

“Oh, right. Have fun then.”

I stood like an idiot waiting for an invite that never came.

After what seemed like an eternity, but no more than a few seconds, he just turned away from me and busied himself with work.

I was visibly upset as I sulked off, slowly heading back down from the escalator with absolutely no enthusiasm in my bones.

All that kept going through my mind the next few hours was 'why was Freddie off with me'. He had made other plans without including me. Even when I knew about the plans, he didn't invite me. He didn't even seem pleased to see me. Rage was burning me inside. I just wanted to get out of this hell hole and hide away from the world.

CHAPTER THREE

It was the best part of a week before me and Freddie and were back at work on the same shift. He had really upset me and I had worried no-stop about the possible reasons for his behaviour on my days off. I decided before the shift that I would leave him alone and he could come and speak to me if he wanted to. He hadn't even bothered to say hello by lunchtime despite us working right next to each other on the tills. Him and Malcolm were even talking really loudly about how great their night out had been right in front of me.

At lunchtime, I sat with Diane in the canteen eating and chatting away. I was having a boring ham and cheese sandwich with crisps and a coke, whereas she was having a nice, healthy-looking home made pasta with fresh salad and a bottle of water. I wasn't sat with Freddie; He was on another table with Malcolm and few others, including Hannah who had taken a severe dislike to me from the start and has held a grudge ever since. I assumed she just didn't like me because I can't recall doing anything to her either.

As we were sat in silence whilst eating, Sarah sat down to join us. She's a very sociable person but has developed a bit of reputation for being 'easy' with the lads. She has shared a lot of stories about her conquests and doesn't seem to mind who knows her business. I always felt a bit nervous around her because she's obviously sexually experienced and I half expected an interrogation about sex at any moment.

“Did you hear about Freddie?” Diane whispered to Sarah as she flicked through the company magazine that was always kept on each table.

“No, what? And why are you whispering?”

“Diane, he's right over there. That's why” I jumped in to keep Freddie from noticing we were talking about him.

“I know he is, Dom. But he can't hear us all the way over there. So chill out!” Diane replied.

“Yeah, chill your boots,” Sarah agreed. “I want to know what Freddie has done now. This has been the worst shift of all time. I need something to perk me up.”

“So,” Diane carried on. “He only tried to kiss one of my mates.”

“Oh, really?” asked Sarah, only slightly surprised. “Have I met her?”

“Oh no!” I said.

I knew where this was heading.

“No, you don't get it, Sarah,” answered Dianne, full of glee. “He came on to a bloke! My mate is a bloke!”

“What?” came Sarah's sudden reply. “No way, I don't believe it!”

“It's true, isn't it Dom?” Diane asked me.

“I think so,” I responded. “I mean we don't know for definite but, like you said Diane, your mate has no reason to make it up.”

“I'm so shocked” responded Sarah.

Sarah had a look on her face suggesting he had something on her mind.

Diane had noticed. “Are you OK, Sarah? You look a bit startled.”

“Well, I didn't tell you lot this but awhile ago, like maybe a month ago, me and -”

Sarah paused in thought.

Me and Diane both gave Sarah a 'go ahead, we're listening' look.

Sarah continued. “Well I was hammered -”

“You always are!” I fired back, trying to bring some humour to the proceedings.

“Funny, Dom,” Sarah said sarcastically. “Hold on a minute!”

Sarah crept over to a drawer near where Freddie was sitting and picked out a spoon. She didn't need one as she was eating a tuna and sweetcorn sandwich. She obviously just went over to make sure Freddie hadn't heard anything.

I looked over and he didn't even notice she was behind him as he let out one of his big, adorable, belly laughs. He was obviously having fun and completely unaware that the rumour was back in full swing.

“Right, I'm back,” Sarah said.

“Can he hear us?” asked Diane.

“No, I don't think so. Anyway, I was hammered and me and Freddie were dancing very, how do I say it, intimately.”

“Fuck, no!” I accidentally let out.

I just knew what she was going to say.

Sarah confirmed my fears. “Well the next minute, Freddie pounced on me and started kissing me.”

I scowled, but discretely enough for no-one to say anything.

Diane laughed. "You kissed a gay man?" she fired at Sarah.

"Oh my god, did I?" Sarah asked. "I don't even fancy him. It just kind of happened. Blame the alcohol!"

She wasn't finished yet. "Oh my god, he slept with me that night. Are you sure he's gay? I'm not so sure. He seemed to know what he was doing in the bedroom!"

I winced.

Diane smirked. "Was he good in bed?" she asked.

"A lady never tells," came Sarah's response.

"But you're not a lady," Diane responded teasingly.

"OK, I'm not a lady," Sarah said in agreement. "He was totally forgettable to be honest. It won't be happening again that's for sure."

The conversation tailed off as the clock was about to strike one o'clock. We were due back on the shop floor.

Doing fitting room duty later on, my mind was fully occupied. Sarah had pissed me off for sleeping with Freddie; she didn't even fancy him. I was annoyed with Freddie as well. I was torn between fancying him and annoyed with him for ignoring me. It's like I didn't exist any more and I was totally unwelcome around him, Malcolm and Hannah. I got the impression that the three of them must be talking negatively about me behind my back because they were all pretending that I didn't exist.

I did feel bad for gossiping about Freddie. But I desperately wanted the rumour to be true and reasoned that by talking to people about it I could assess the possibility of him being gay and also gauge other people's opinions about gays. Neither Sarah or Diane had said anything homophobic which was a start.

My concentration was soon interrupted.

It was Malcolm.

"I'm on here now," he told me, referring to the fitting room duty.

He wasn't friendly at all. What was his problem?

"So you can go," he continued.

"OK, cheers mate," I replied trying to be friendly.

I needed to find out what his problem was.

"What's up, mate?" I asked him. "You seem different. Have I done something to piss

you off? And Freddie as well? He seems to be avoiding me.”

“Nothing is wrong with me!” he responded.

I got the impression he was lying.

He soon changed tact though. “To be honest, Dominic, yes there is a problem between us.

“What are you on about?” I asked cautiously. “We've had some good laughs in here and some nights out together. What have I done to offend you?”

He didn't even justify his actions. He just busied himself with tidying up the fitting room and just blanked me like I wasn't there.

Just like Freddie had.

I shouldn't have said anything else but it just slipped out. “Fuck you Malcolm. I haven't got a clue what I've done to you and Freddie. And there's nothing I can do to make amends if you won't tell me. But I bet you don't know Freddie is gay and has been lying to you the whole time, do you? Ask Diane if you don't believe me. He tried to kiss one of her male friends!”

I regretted that straight away.

A while later, on my afternoon break, my fears came true. I was sat with Diane. Freddie must have still been on the shop floor.

Diane looked flustered as we both sat down with cups of tea.

“What's up with you?” I asked worriedly.

“I think Freddie is going to find out about the kiss. Did you say something to Malcolm earlier?”

“Yeah he cornered me and it just slipped out.”

“Yeah he said you told him Freddie was gay and had kissed my mate, right?”

“Sorry he annoyed me and couldn't help it.”

She tried to comfort me. “Anyway, I told Malcolm it probably isn't true. I said Stuart is known for making stuff up for attention. And I asked him not to say anything more about it to Freddie.”

“I thought you told me Stuart has been a mate for years and he wouldn't lie?”

“That's true. But I thought if I dismissed the rumour then Malcolm would forget about it and we don't need to worry.”

I am a natural worrier and so used to fearing the worst in everything.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

