

Excerpt

A THREE DOG PROBLEM - S.J.BENNETT

Sir Simon Holcroft was not a swimmer. As a trainee pilot in the Royal Navy, about a thousand years ago, the Queen's Private Secretary had endured being dunked in the water on various training exercises. He could, if necessary, escape from a sinking helicopter in the Atlantic Ocean, but ploughing up and down an indoor pool held no allure for him. However, as he approached the grand old age of fifty-four, his trouser waistline was two inches larger than it should be and the palace GP was making noises about cholesterol levels. Something needed to give, and it wasn't just the button above his flies.

Sir Simon felt tired. He felt flabby. On yesterday's long, uncomfortable car journey back from Scotland he had come to the conclusion that here was a man who had eaten too much Dundee cake and not offered to accompany the Queen on enough cross-country walks. His first thought on arriving back at his cottage in Kensington Palace was that he needed to jolt himself out of this slump.

Those last few weeks in Balmoral had been bloody. It was as if the midges had been staging a Highland Games of their own. He had been busy most mornings with Prince Philip, discussing the details of the impending Reservicing Programme, and then up most nights on the phone, conferring with fellow courtiers about the Duke's latest suggestions and questions, as well as adding several of his own. If they hadn't done all their homework by the time they presented it to Parliament, the proverbial ordure would hit the fan like a fi reworks display.

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