

Issue Number Two in the BENT COPPERS Series

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...As Two £3 Notes is dedicated with love to LDM, most wonderful husband husband who put up with the madness of two zines in production simultaneously.

-CKC

This is the zine that almost wasn't—at least when it should have been. But since you are reading this, then actually the zine eventually 'was', even though the editor and the Glaswegian should have their heads examined. For your edification we highly recommend not producing two zines simultaneously if you are trying to do the majority of the writing yourselves. Thank God for our outside contributors (Sebastian, Shoshanna, and Thomas) with their absolutely stunning stories. Now as to zine content: it's mixed. If you want lighthearted and humorous, see *Breaking and Entering*; for knockout dark emotion and angst, try *Assault and Battery*; and if you've a mind for sado-masochism in a loving relationship, then the last story in three parts, *Grievous Bodily Harm*, is for you. Enjoy the zine.

-Caroline K. Carbis, Editor

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# ASSAULT AND BATTERY

A section title not to be taken too literally. Yes, these stories offer a harsher perspective on the Bodie/Doyle relationship than some would wish, but two of them end on a hopeful note. Thomas' 'Ambush' (printed here in final form for the first time) and Sebastian's 'November' both refuse to concede that the path to true love is an easy one. Both stories also indulge in certain risky behaviors calculated to raise your temperatures as well as Bodie's and Doyle's. But the first piece is Shoshanna's 'Noli Me Tangere'—a lovely Latin phrase that says it all. There are some things you may want in life, but you can't always have them...

NOLI ME TANGERE

### NOLI ME TANGERE SHOSHANNA

Never touch me. You can look; I like you to look at me. I love you to want me, but never, ever touch me.

Doyle had never said it. He didn't need to.

Bodie followed him up the stairs to Cowley's office, dutifully trailing behind to watch the swaying of Doyle's buttocks, moulded firm and separate and succulent by the grey jeans. His cock stirred restlessly, and he twisted his hips as he moved to try to settle it, angrily looking away. A few steps above him, Doyle ran a hand casually through his hair, pulling his gaze back to tangle with Doyle's fingers in the thick curls. It was uncanny, how Doyle seemed to know when Bodie's attention veered aside, just as he knew how Bodie would move in a shootout. Mentally Bodie writhed, caught in a web of helpless, lusting resentment.

Doyle paused at the top of the stairway, ushering him forward with an ostentatious gesture that meant he figured Cowley's mood for sour and was generously allowing Bodie the chance to go in first and sweeten him up. Bodie thanked him as he deserved—a knowing tilt of the head and narrowed eyes, brushing past him and past Betty's desk into the inner office. Doyle shut the door softly behind them.

Cowley's mood was no sourer than usual, Doyle's intuition having failed him this once, and Bodie listened with half an ear to the details of the stake-out they were assigned to. The rest of his senses, all but his sight and that fraction of his hearing, were focussed on his partner, standing so close beside him. Close enough to feel the heat from his body, to hear him breathing, and to know—yes, as they turned to leave came the gesture Bodie had expected, Doyle's arm slung casually, mate-like, across his shoulders.

I can touch you. I like to touch you. But never. never touch me.

Their hips bumped as they walked, and Jax rolled his eyes when he passed them in the hallway, having to turn sideways in the narrow corridor to get by. Doyle was talking, something about his weekend, his date with Wendy, who had turned out to be every bit as athletic as she looked. "My back is killing me," he proclaimed, wincing with ostentatious pride, and Bodie, watching the tanned shoulders pushing against the dark red of his shirt, hyper-aware of the crumpled cotton where the shirttails were jammed carelessly into the waistband of his jeans, against the swell of his arse and the sweet curve of his back, damned himself for the thousandth time even as he spoke.

"Want a backrub, then?"

And Doyle's head turned, his eyes meeting Bodie's in an openness that was so much a lie, a lie like the open empty rooms at Auschwitz with only the showerheads inside, an openness that gaped like crocodile jaws and smiled like them. Doyle smiled, his lips parting ever so slightly against white, white teeth, and shook his head.

"No, thanks, mate." And Bodie's chest burned and ached with an emptiness that filled his body, until he felt on the verge of bursting.

Three years as partners, before he had finally told Doyle about himself. Told him what so few others knew, save a few men here and there over the years, and his father, if the old man hadn't washed the knowledge from his brain with gin by now, hadn't beached his liver on the bitter salt shore of the alcoholic's implacable doom. And Cowley, of course. And Doyle, the only one he'd ever simply told, rather than admitting it, or wordlessly sounding out a like-minded man, or being caught pants down in the most compromising of positions by his da.

"Something you should know, Doyle. I'm

gay."

And Doyle, head tilted, had motionlessly absorbed the words, expression absolutely unchanged. Saying nothing, beyond a toneless murmur of acknowledgement. He had sat a moment, eyes open and impermeable, while Bodie burned with tension and adrenaline skipped and sizzled in his blood like hot oil on a pan; and then he had leaned forward a little in Bodie's old armchair, gazing through the dimness of Bodie's sitting room, where dusk had fallen before Bodie had found the courage to say what he had said. He had leaned forward and propped his elbow on the chair's padded arm, watching Bodie fidget without moving on the couch, and asked one question.

"Do you want me, Bodie?"

And Bodie, burning with strain that was not quite embarrassment, that was not yet rage and not yet despair but that was definitely, oh, so unquestionably, desire, had numbly nodded, had said the word that bound him to the unholy pact Doyle had sealed them in ever since.

"Yes."

And had watched, not yet comprehending, as Doyle gave a tiny smile and sank back into the chair, his legs just slightly more sprawled than before, his chest so open-and his mouth hard, his lips tight and narrowed even as they curved, ever so slightly.

### Never touch me, Bodie.

They were in the rest room now, with time to grab a cup of coffee and to glance at the papers before taking over surveillance from Mac and Lucas. Bodie poured himself a cup and handed another to Doyle without asking. His fingers tingled where they touched Doyle's hand across the battered china, and he shoved them into his pocket, hating the longing that grew in him every time he looked at Doyle's body, at the sweet strong lines of his back and arms, the full lips and tousled hair and... He clenched his hand into a fist; the movement pulled the cloth of his trousers tight against his crotch, and his cock throbbed.

Surveillance was the worst. Moving, talking to people or trying to track some lout through the seamy docks of London, he could keep his mind on other things. In a shootout he never even remembered Doyle's enticing appeal, his own desperate, hopeless lust; and he had begun to like the fights these past few months, begun to look forward to the whine of bullets and the smell of fear and sweat and blood as a respite from the smell of his own need and the wistful, desolate ache in his balls. His cock. at least. knew that he had to be alive to have even the chance of having sex. Even driving required some of his attention, which was why he had taken to habitual speeding.

But a watching post was sheer torment. A creaky lift sullenly delivered them to the fourth-floor surveillance flat, which offered one chair by the window, next to the camera with telescopic lens fixed to the window frame, and a broken-down couch for the agent off duty. An hour of staring out a window, hearing the little whispering sounds of Doyle moving behind him; and then an hour of nothing to do but watch Doyle, while Doyle watched out the window. Nothing to do but trace the line of Doyle's arm, the jewel-like drops of sweat caught in the crook of his elbow where he had rolled his sleeve up in the sticky August afternoon, and wonder what the glinting beads would taste like on his tongue; nothing to do but talk absently about nothing, nothing that would distract the watcher from his job, or the other watcher from his yearning.

The couch's springs had long since given up all hope of resistance, and Bodie could not sit stiffly upright despite his efforts, but found himself willy-nilly half-sprawled in its passively clinging embrace. His legs had fallen slightly apart, and his cock whimpered and stirred as Doyle shifted in his own seat before the camera, one booted foot propped against the wall, the hard line of thigh muscle shading into hip and buttock clearly visible. Bodie clenched his fist, willing the pulsing away, knowing that somehow Doyle could sense it from across the room, sensed it and was pleased with this further evidence of his desirability, of how much Bodie wanted him.

At first he hadn't understood. At first he had hoped that Doyle's silent reception of his blurted secret, Doyle's tiny smile, meant the acceptance, the receptivity he hadn't dared hope for. He'd learned the truth of that soon

enough. He and Doyle had always touched, casually: a hand on the shoulder, a mock punch to the jaw in retaliation for some particularly ribald joke or boast. But Doyle had moved away from his hand, after that, had shifted out from under the arm across his shoulders, refused the massage that would ease a twisted muscle. And yet, all the while, he had not stopped touching Bodie. If anything, the touches had increased: the hand guiding his, the finger drawn so lightly along the bullet-burned skin of his thigh. Touching lightly, so lightly, until Bodie's cock surged and his hand lifted, seeking, and Doyle, smiling ever so slightly, moved away.

And for another, longer, while, Bodie hadn't understood how Doyle could act so. How could his partner, famous for his guilt-trips and surges of remorse, be behaving so to him, be taunting and teasing him with his body and his movements and always, always that faint twist of his lips, that tiny self-satisfied smile? Even Cowley had been known to say that 4.5 was too hard on himself. and Bodie had had to jolly him out of more than a few bouts of lachrymose self-recrimination, moods where he seemed to take the sins of the world upon his narrow shoulders and suffer for them all. As if he hadn't enough of his own, and as if his own-then, at least-weren't nearly worth the production he made of them.

But even that had come clear to him in time. Doyle fell into black moods of contrition, clammy pits of upwelling guilt, because he felt responsible. After all, one couldn't be guilty of something one wasn't responsible for. And to be responsible meant to have power. Doyle revelled in power in the same way he wallowed in guilt; it was the opposite of the same coin, the dark side of the mirror.

Someday, perhaps, he would come to feel guilty for the way he revelled in his power over Bodie, the way Bodie responded, helplessly, to every flaunting pose. Bodie hoped not. That, he knew, would be more than he could bear. This unspoken, unacknowledged commanding, this lure set for him like a mechanical rabbit before the racing dogs that moved always faster than they could run, he could deal with. He hoped. But if it ever were

spoken of, if the sheet-ice of silence were shattered and Doyle put into words what he said, unspeaking, twenty times a day by the tilt of his head and the flowing line of his hand's turn, Bodie too would shatter. He could deal with this-he hoped-so long as it was all he had to deal with, wishing vainly to club down his surging erection as it tried and tried to span the distance between them. He could fuck a woman or the rare man, he could jerk off at night in the dark and never breathe the name he was calling inside; but if Doyle once laid the weight of his guilt on top of the pain and longing Bodie already carried, if Doyle came to him for absolution as he had for the hostage shot in the fray, for the animals clubbed to make his dinner, it would be unsupportable. The pain of his own balls aching, the wail of his hopeless, helpless longing, those he could deal with. After all, hadn't he, for all this time?

Doyle shifted and stood up from his chair, his hands pressing at the base of his spine as he stretched, arching his back to work the stiffness from his muscles, and Bodie, watching, knew just how those muscles would feel under his hands, under the strong, gripping massage he knew Doyle liked, the kind Bodie had given his partner before this endless game had begun. Doyle stretched and came to stand before Bodie, not quite close enough to be standing between his parted legs, and looked at Bodie looking at him. His eyes moved up the length of Bodie's body, half-reclining in the unsupportive couch, not pausing at the bulge at Bodie's crotch. Bodie kept his hands ostentatiously away from both his partner and himself, one arm along the back of the couch, the other resting beside him. Doyle took a small step, tilting his hips forward ever so slightly, to show how soft and small his own genitals were, how unaffected he was by Bodie's yearning desire. Bodie longed to bury his face there, to smell him and taste him, and roughly he reined his thoughts in, jerked them harshly back to listen to what Doyle was saying.

Which was nothing important, of course. Bodie obediently got up and took his partner's place at the window, listening to Doyle pee in the flat's dingy toilet, trying to keep his eyes fixed on the house across the street and so far below, when most of his mind was wondering which hand Doyle held his cock in, while he urinated. He wrote with his right hand, but he shot with both...and how did he hold it, fingers supporting the gentle curl of pliant flesh, his thumb delicately angling the head as he stood, legs slightly apart, just as he had stood before Bodie only a moment ago?

Bodie's cock was throbbing now, more than half hard and painfully caught under the seam of his trousers. Carefully, longingly he reached down and began to shift it-not to stroke, no, never so close to Doyle, but to ease the pain of flesh twisted and complaining. But as his hand slid across the bulge he heard the gurgling flush and the door opening, and he ripped his hand away from himself with such force that he knew Doyle must have noticed as he came back into the room, still tucking, oh, so casually, his shirt back into his skin-tight jeans. But Doyle only looked at him, as Bodie stared back, feeling naked and vulnerable and all awkward erection and clumsy hands and pleading eyes; and then Bodie pushed himself up and gave Doyle back his position, even though it was his own shift by this time anyway, and bolted for the toilet.

He had meant to jerk off, of course he had, but once there, standing over the gaping porcelain bowl with his keening cock in his hand, harsh light from the bare bulb hammering his eyes, he knew he couldn't. Couldn't, because he knew how thin the door was. knew that Doyle would know what he was doing, in here with the door shut and no sound of pattering urine in the bowl. But the image of Doyle standing where he was standing, only a moment ago, with his cock cradled in his hand as Bodie longed to cradle it, sent stabs of aching arousal through his balls and into the pit of his stomach, rising into his chest and making his lungs burn and his throat thicken. He squeezed his penis hard, until it hurt, and then carefully packed it back into his clothing, settling it as best he could, knowing that he could never hide his desire whether he had an erection or not, and knowing that Doyle liked it that way. He thought for a moment about flushing the

toilet but decided that such uselessly transparent camouflage was worse than nothing, washed his face and hands in the coldest water the tap would yield in the August heat, and, steeling himself, went back into the other room. To watch.

The rest of the afternoon was no more unbearable than any number of others had been before it. His erection diminished eventually, but his longing remained; and whenever he seemed likely to forget, Doyle would be there, stretching his legs or rubbing away the sweat that trickled down his chest, to remind him. Bodie bit the inside of his cheek and kept his hands away from himself, forbade his fingers to curl into fists of helpless fury.

And finally, although the time dragged like molasses, and although in the endless, creeping hours they saw not one movement in the house across the way, finally it was seven o'clock and Jax and Filbert were swinging the door open, calling out incongruously cheery greetings as they prepared to take the evening shift. They were laughing over something, and Filbert was wearing a skirt that showed off the trimness of her waist and the fine, smooth line of her leg; Doyle eyed it and lifted his eyes to Bodie, who lowered his. Doyle said something to her, something gallantly flirtatious with just the right hint of self-satire, and Filbert laughed again and kissed him peremptorily on the mouth before shooing him out. Doyle pursed his lips and glanced again at Bodie, smiling that faint, smug smile.

Bodie had gone ahead—not fleeing, never that, just moving ahead-and held the lift doors open for the other man as he swung himself out of the flat's entrance and sauntered down the hall. He was carrying one hand before him, and as he fell in beside Bodie and the lift doors groaned unwillingly shut, he showed him the small welling of blood, ruby-red, on his fingertip. "Splinter from the door-frame," he informed his partner, and then put the finger, oh, so slowly, into his mouth, and closed his lips around it.

Bodie's knees trembled. He stared, riveted, at the faint hollows in Doyle's cheeks as he sucked, and his cock awoke and surged

demandingly against its cloth confinement. Doyle's finger was wet and shiny against his lips, and Bodie wanted to suck it, and his cock was wailing now, all the desire of the day and the month and the three years pounding in his groin; he fell back against the wall of the lift and leaned there, his head spinning like a weathervane in a gale. "Doyle ... "

And Doyle smiled, ever so slightly, around the hard wet finger in his mouth.

Bodie's left hand slammed against the emergency stop button, and the lift ground to a halt, halfway between floors. Doyle's eyes never left his.

Never touch me. Want me.

Bodie groaned, and his other hand left its white-nailed press against the wall, stooping like a falcon freed from hood and jesses to fasten on the aching bulge of his cock. He caught his breath in surprise as much as pleasure, and in torment more than either. Doyle's eyes widened, but he didn't move.

Bodie was helpless now, one hand rubbing over his fly, shoving and pressing against his hard need, the other flat against the wall, trying to maintain his balance. He felt dizzy; the motionless lift seemed to be plummeting into some undreamed-of depths where anything might happen, anything at all... He realized that his zip was undone, his trousers gaping open and his cock pushing through, searching for his touch, and for Doyle who stood, smiling faintly, watching him. He pushed his pants aside and took the shaft in his hand, palm against bare skin, and stroked himself, moaning.

Doyle took his finger out of his mouth and let his hands fall to his sides. Bodie slid his hand along the taut curve of his need, cupping the head, and stared at Doyle as if his gaze would burn. The green eyes held his a moment longer, and then Doyle looked away, glancing down to watch Bodie's hand working the length of his cock. That freed Bodie's gaze to move down the curve of Doyle's jaw, to slide along the tendons of his neck where Bodie longed to trail his tongue, and to come then to the wrinkled red cotton that rose and fell, evenly, with Doyle's breathing. Hair curled invitingly in the open neck of his shirt, halfhiding under the cloth to brush against it,

whispering of heady, forbidden things.

Bodie dragged in a rasping breath. "Open your shirt."

That seemed to startle Doyle, for a moment. His eyes jerked up to Bodie's face, and his lips tightened briefly. Bodie knew what he was saying, and couldn't bear to have it spoken aloud.

"Please," he said hoarsely, and hated himself for begging. But for Doyle to put anything into words would be worse. "Let me see your nipples."

And as Bodie had known it would, that made it better. Let me look, he had implored.

Look. Don't touch.

Slowly, as the movement of Bodie's hand slowed to match, Doyle's fingers moved to the buttons of his shirt. Slowly he undid them, starting from the top, so that the cotton gaped open and the curly hair spread lush and thick, and Bodie's hand tightened, imagining the curls scratchy against his chest. Or his back. Doyle's hands moved downward, pulling the shirt from his jeans to undo the last two buttons, then freeing the cloth in back as well, so that it hung limp and open, like a veil, trembling with his breathing. Bodie trembled against the wall.

And Doyle, slowly, unspeaking, pulled the cloth aside, half off his shoulders so that his chest was bare and his nipples were revealed, nestled among the curls, pinkish-brown and small, tender and inviting. Bodie licked his lips, watching them, imagining them hard and erect in his mouth, knowing that Doyle knew what he was fantasizing, and his hand moved faster on his cock and his breath caught in his throat. He stared, blocking out everything else except the tantalizing nubs of flesh not a meter from his mouth, as Doyle faced him from the opposite wall of the lift. His cock was arching up, pushing into his hand as he pumped it, oozing precome so that he slicked his palm over his cockhead and gasped with the sharp stab of pleasure, moaning again.

Doyle's hands were hanging by his side again, empty. Bodie knew he was going to come soon, could feel the orgasm roiling in his balls and stretching the skin of his cock like a balloon swelling, ready to burst. But he

didn't want to come, and not only because the pleasure, the desperate yearning pleasure of watching Doyle watch him as he pulled his cock was so achingly wonderful, not only because he could tell this orgasm would shake his teeth in his jaw when it hit. He didn't want to come because he had no idea how he and Doyle could possibly deal with each other after this, after he had finally broken under the unspoken unadmitted flaunting and done this right under Doyle's nose. He didn't want it to end, because the end of this might be the end of everything.

And if it was going to be the end of everything, he would have everything that he could get. Both hands were moving on him now, his left cradling his balls, massaging and rolling them to ease the pressure, feeling them tighten and draw up to the shaft of his cock; he wished he could reach to get a finger or two up his ass, but with his trousers still tangled around his thighs it was impossible. But he wanted more. He licked his lips, wishing for some part, any part, of Doyle in his mouth.

"Undo your trousers."

No hesitation this time, just the slow, considered movement of thin artist's hands to the button of the grey jeans. Bodie squeezed his cockhead convulsively as Doyle slid his zip down and pushed the tight fabric a little off his hips. He hooked his thumbs under the elastic of his pants and slid it down until the profusion of pubic hair could be seen; Bodie

was gasping now, his hand moving in short jerky sweeps, his eyes riveted to the soft swell of cock that was barely revealed above the white briefs. One hand drifted upward and Bodie wrenched his gaze away to follow it; Doyle stroked a finger across his nipple, watching Bodie all the while, and then let his hands fall again. Bodie stared again at Doyle's half-hidden penis, letting it fill his vision, imagining he could smell it, taste it, feel it in his mouth as he longed to do, and knowing that Doyle watched every motion he pumped fiercely on his own arousal, longing to crush himself against the soft inviting musk of Doyle's crotch, crying out now as he gasped, as his hands moved, squeezing his balls and clutching desperately at himself and with a convulsive, choking yell he climaxed, the semen spurting between his fingers and arcing through the air to splatter on the dingy floor. Doyle moved aside, avoiding it.

Panting harshly, Bodie slowed his hands, feeling his flesh go limp and sodden, his fingers sticky. He slumped back against the wall and wiped his hands on his pants. His heart was pounding. He was afraid to look up, so he forced himself to.

Doyle was tucking his shirt back into his trousers, zipping himself neatly away. He met Bodie's eyes calmly, then glanced down at the splash of semen on the floor, and beside it his boots pristine, untouched. He smiled, faintly.

for the Glaswegian and her partner

AMBUSH THOMAS

Doyle WIPED SWEAT from his eyes with a shaky hand, panting with exertion. Ahead came the splatter of explosions, muffled by dirt-caked tunnel walls, though he couldn't tell if the noise was real or an echo. Fear threaded through his veins to his heart and he clenched his fingers tighter around the barrel of his rifle. He liked being afraid: he knew he was alert that way, and still alive.

He crawled forward, dragging himself along, grimly ignoring the dust he sucked in with every breath, his eyes aching to see despite the total blackness around him.

Bloody terrorists, seeding an abandoned mine-shaft with half a dozen bombs. Bloody mining companies, too miserly to gouge shafts wide enough for a man to move comfortably, so long as he could get to the coal-rich walls. Bloody Cowley, sending him through the tunnels just because he was the smallest. Bloody everything.

The plan was simple enough: four CI5 agents to surround and ambush the bastards, Owen covering the southern entrance, Murphy making the climb from the main shaft, and Bodie sneaking overland from the north, while he had got stuck with the western tunnel.

It let out opposite the primary shaft where Murph would be, in theory a good vantage for the two of them to pick off the terrorists one by one, while Owen and Bodie provided diversion.

If his rifle weren't so clogged with dirt it didn't jam. If the diversion were good enough. If. If. If.

And how was he going to be sure if they had even made it? No, no, they were waiting on him. Had to be. He visualised each of them as he knew they would be at this moment, Owen stolid, impassively awaiting the signal, Murphy cool-eyed and tense, Bodie all charged up, impatient to get to it. Probably just about pawing the ground. Loved this sort of thing, Bodie did, Doyle thought in disgust, remembering the glitter of excitement in his partner's eyes as they headed out.

He didn't know why the hell he cared. Especially considering he didn't even like Bodie much any more, not the way he used to. They quarreled continually, even on the job.

His r/t let off a screech of static and went silent. Christ, the others must be in position already.

How much further was it anyway? 100 meters hadn't seemed that far on the map, but he felt like he'd been trapped in the passage forever. He could only hope that Bodie and the others had got through, or he'd be dead as soon as he stuck his head out.

Cooler air whispered across his face. The tunnel widened into a gallery. He wormed his way up to a half-crouch and snaked a cautious foot into nothing.

He managed to hang on to the rifle as he tumbled down, clawing frantically with his other hand as his head smacked something solid. His ears rang with the impact, and he forgot himself and swore, getting a mouthful of dirt for his trouble.

He spat twice, wiped his face, felt his fingers come away sticky. He stared at them, seeing the dark sheen of blood. Must have cut his forehead on something. Light—He'd made it.

The wild thudding of fear assaulted him again as he tugged on one of the old coal bins blocking the opening. Footsteps crunched the ground ahead, and he shoved another bin out of the way and hefted his rifle. One more, then he could squeeze through—

"Ray?" A low hiss. "'S that you?"

Flint-blue eyes gleamed at him as a pale smudged face appeared in the opening. Bodie. Doyle sighed with relief. "No, it's Dr. Livingston.

AMBUSH

### Course it's me. Give us a hand, will you?"

Bodie grunted his assent and the last bin slid past Doyle. He was reaching for Bodie's offered hand when the rifle jerked from his grasp. "Whaaa—"

He barely had time to duck his head before his body followed the rifle into the blare of morning sun. Bodie's arm went around his neck, then cold metal grazed his temple.

"What the hell you playing at, Bodie?" he growled.

"You keep still, sunshine and maybe you'll live to see tomorrow."

Doyle struggled blindly to loosen the chokehold. He sank his teeth into Bodie's forearm, arching to drive a kick into Bodie's kneecap. The rifle butt slammed into his kidneys. He doubled over, retching.

"I did warn you," Bodie hissed. He slung the rifle over his shoulder, straightening Doyle's body, calling out "I've got him," his voice thunder in Doyle's ear.

Doyle looked up to see two assault rifles focused on him like a pair of malevolent eyes. Two white-clad men held the guns steady, while a third man lolled with folded arms off to the side. Doyle recognised his face from the briefing. Anderson, Joseph, age 31, with a reputation for bloodshed unrivaled in all of Western Europe. No particular political beliefs. Any cause would do. He enjoyed mayhem for its own sake.

Doyle's gaze returned to the men in front of him, calculating the chances of distracting them (none by the look of it), while his mind relentlessly ticked off the facts.

Cowley'd got wind of Anderson's return to England and set all of CI5 on his trail with typical missionary zeal. Stalked him and his companions to Wales, cornering them in the 100 year-old mine. But now Anderson was demanding 2 million pounds and a private plane or he'd trigger a ton of explosives.

Anderson nodded to the other two, and the three of them arrayed themselves opposite Bodie and Doyle.

Bodie tossed Doyle's rifle on the ground in front of them. "Told you you could trust me," he said.

"Not so fast, man," Anderson said. "How do we know this isn't another trick?"

"You don't," Bodie said smoothly, "but as I'm the only one can get you past the CI5 cordon, and who knows where they've hidden the cash, you've not a lot of choice really."

"All right," Anderson replied.

"What about him?" said one of the other men, indicating Doyle with a tilt of his head. hate.

"Kill him," Anderson said, turning as if to leave. He stopped, poked his index finger at Bodie. "You do it."

Doyle heard Bodie's gasp at the same time as his own. "Hang about—"

Anderson just laughed.

"You must think I'm a bloody fool, Anderson. He's a hostage, my hostage. And my safe passage once you've flown the coop. No deal."

One of the other men plucked Anderson's sleeve, and they moved out of earshot and bent their heads together.

"What the hell is going on?" Doyle said in an undertone.

"Quiet," Bodie commanded. His grip eased a bit, but Doyle didn't try to escape. Not with the Walther at his temple and a terrorist's AK-47 pointed at his chest.

He shook his head to clear the last of his dizziness. A dark shape at the bottom of the hill attracted his eye. He focused blearily on it, eyes widening with shock as he recognised Owen. Or Owen's body rather. Blood welled from a jagged tear in his skull, spreading around his head like a crown.

He bit down on his lip to keep from gagging as the warm, sickly smell of blood and crushed grass wafted his way. No sign of Murph, either.

Ignoring the pounding fear in his veins, he squinted to ward off the sun, made out a church spire jutting sharply into clear blue sky. On the right he saw the village where the local police were standing ready to move on Cowley's order. No hope of rescue from that quarter.

If it weren't for that bloody village he wouldn't be here. No one cared if the terrorists blew themselves sky-high, and the CI5 men had been privately labeled 'expendable' (of course); but 8000 people lived in that little town. And if Anderson set off his toy, it'd take the village and a few miles of surrounding THOMAS

countryside with them.

That had to be Bodie's motive for this charade. Yet Doyle wasn't as certain of Bodie as he once would have been. Too many close calls lately, not counting this one. And Bodie's persistent silence did nothing to reassure him.

"You gonna tell me what's happening, Bodie, or I am supposed to guess."

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Bodie said, affable and patronising. "I would have thought even you, no correction, especially you, could have worked it out. Told you a long time ago I was in this business for the money."

"I don't believe it."

"You'd better believe it. sunshine."

Doyle's mind swirled incoherently. Sweat dripped down his neck, and the strap of his empty holster chafed on his back, a fierce itching. And bloody hell, he remembered now just why that holster was empty. "Give me your gun," Bodie had said, "Tunnel's so narrow it'll just be a nuisance when you're crawling, believe me, I know. Anyway, you don't need it, do you? Rifle ought to be enough." And Doyle, accepting as always of Bodie's greater combat experience, handed over his sidearm, blindly, stupidly trusting. His heart wrenched painfully. "Anderson another of your old mercenary pals, Bodie?"

"Him-" Bodie reeled off a string of profanities.

"Might as well be," he said. "You're acting just like him."

"You don't seriously believe I'd have anything to do with filth like that?"

Doyle didn't, but Bodie's outraged tone was balm to the gnawing of betrayal. "So what are you gettin' from it, then?"

"Money," Bodie said. "A quarter of a million pounds buys a lot of freedom and a chance to start living for myself. That's why I snapped up the job at CI5. I knew a chance like this would come along sooner or later." He chuckled.

"You're havin' me on, you bastard," Doyle said.

"Took you long enough," Bodie said with a snort.

"It's a hell of a time for sick practical jokes." "Serves you right for not trusting me in the first place."

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Bodie said. "Kind of nice bein' able to shut you up for once."

Doyle was too relieved to pay much attention to the bitterness that lurked beneath the casual tone. "You really had me worried for a second."

"Well keep worryin', cause it's not over yet."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"In case you didn't notice, our mates over there aren't exactly the altruistic type."

Doyle glanced over at the two men still huddled in furious argument. "Are you tryin' to tell me you're going kill me after all?"

"If I have to."

"You son-of-a-bitch—" Doyle barely got the word out, he was shaking so hard. "You kill Owen, too?" he said, injecting it with as much venom as he could manage.

"Naughty Doyle," Bodie said, cuffing him with the pistol. "That was a lousy thing to say, mate."

Although he knew it was no use, Doyle fought him, kicking and biting. In the end Bodie held him more securely than ever. "Temper, temper," he admonished, chuckling again.

Something snapped in Doyle at the sound of that laugh. "Oh, yeah, this is funny, Bodie, really funny. You make me sick." Overwhelmed by impotent rage, he lashed out with the only weapon left to him. "I'll bet you're getting off on the idea."

He felt Bodie stiffen as his words struck home—only for a second—then relax. "You little devil, how did you guess?"

The gun slid down his cheek in an obscene caress. Doyle's heart thumped against his ribs, his temples throbbing so hard he thought he would burst a blood vessel. "Always knew you were crazy," he sneered. "Seems you're perverted as well."

Bodie shifted behind him, his hand sliding across Doyle's chest into his armpit. "Not the only one. You could have knocked me back any time the last few minutes, but you're still standing there." His breath gusted hot on Doyle's face. "Too late now, Doyle."

"I swear, Bodie, you better hope they make you kill me, 'cause if they don't, you'll wish you had. I'm going to take you apart."

"Might be fun," Bodie said, and nuzzled his ear.

To his utter and complete shame, Doyle felt a streak of sexual arousal dart through his body. "m gonna throw up," he mumbled.

Anderson waved them over.

"Move," Bodie said, and pushed him.

Doyle stumbled, began walking, encouraged by the steady nudging of the handgun muzzle on his cheek. He watched in a daze as one foot obediently shambled after the other through the gravel at the tunnel entrance, acutely conscious of constricting denim over his groin. His stomach muscles quivered with the combined assault of anger and lust. Adrenalin, it's only adrenalin, he told himself. Doesn't mean a thing.

They stepped onto grass already trampled with Bodie's footprints.

Bodie halted about 10 feet away from the three men. "Let's go."

"Get rid of him first," Anderson ordered, and picked up the carrying case.

"I told you before. Forget it."

Anderson raised an eyebrow. He knelt and opened the case and extracted the detonator. He fiddled with the switch. "You'd better. Or I'm going to take this whole place apart."

The breeze lifted Doyle's curls off his forehead, stinging on the gash he'd got in the tunnel. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Bodie nod.

Seconds crawled by. The analytical part of his mind ticked away, computing his chances for escape, while the professional in him pointed out that one life was not worth the thousand villagers, even if that life was his. But—7 years together and Bodie acted as if he didn't give a damn. It was too much to bear.

"What are you waiting for, Bodie, my permission?"

Bodie clutched him tighter. "Reckon we got two choices; I kill you, or we all get scattered to the four winds. You're dead either way."

Doyle heard the hammer click back.

"Sorry, Ray—"

"I don't believe this is happening," Doyle said. "Bodie, don't-"

Three shots cracked out, exploding the

chest of the man nearest them. The other two jumped, returning the fire, and Bodie recoiled instinctively.

Seizing his opportunity, Doyle plunged his elbows into Bodie's ribs, threw himself on the ground, snatched the untouched rifle and shot the second man before he could aim. A bullet whistled above his head, then another. the second one slicing Anderson's jaw open, and Doyle glanced over his shoulder, saw Bodie squeeze off two more shots that sent Anderson crashing to the ground.

He laid his burning forehead in the sweetsmelling grass, weak from the aftermath of killing and terror.

Not for long. There was the sound of cars screeching on gravel and voices all around. He rolled over, looked into Bodie's face, starkly white under streaks of dirt, his black hair sweat- slicked and matted.

Doyle ignored the proffered hand and hauled himself to his feet. The whole area was a bustle of men scurrying this way and that, though no one was paying them any attention as yet.

He strolled up to Anderson's crumpled form and kicked it. Sightless eyes reflected sunlight, but he was still breathing. Doyle touched the rifle to his temple and calmly pulled the trigger.

"That was cold, Doyle," Bodie's voice said behind him.

"Listen to him," Doyle said. "You got a lot of nerve talkin' to me about cold, after what you just did."

"That was different."

"Oh, yeah? Me, I don't see a difference, except for it was me you were aimin' at, me, your partner, not some terrorist filth as you so fondly called him."

"Life's tough all around."

"No, wait, there is one other difference. He was nearly dead anyway."

"There's a moral in there somewhere, I'm positive, but I'll be damned if I can find it," Bodie replied.

"You—"

He broke off as a dirt-smeared Murphy came running up. "I got here as fast as I could. **Everything OK?**"

"Yeah, we're alive anyway," Doyle said,

never taking his eyes off Bodie. "Cut it a bit fine, didn't you?"

"Sorry," Murphy said. "Got halfway and realised I couldn't fit through that side. Had to start all over-"he paused. "What happened to you?"

Doyle glanced at him, then followed Murphy's shocked gaze to his blood-spattered jeans. "Was standing a bit close when I shot him," he said, gesturing at Anderson's corpse with the rifle.

Murphy knelt, checking the body. "Cowley's not going like it when he finds out we could have had him alive."

"I don't care what Cowley likes or doesn't like."

Murphy shrugged and stood up.

Bodie was grinning in triumph. "And what happened to Mr. By the Book, eh? Doyle?" His eyes danced with cynical amusement. "Weren't you the one who said every life was valuable?"

Doyle turned on him. "Don't push your luck, Bodie."

"Oh, I forgot," Bodie said. "You would never kill a man in cold blood." He smiled maliciously. "It was an execution, I understand."

"At least I didn't get a kick out of it." Bodie scratched his head in mock-bewilderment. "I don't know about you, Murph," he said, "but it seems to me the guy is just as dead whether you enjoy it or not."

"That's it, Bodie. I'm going to flatten you."

"Be my guest," Bodie said. "If you think you can take me."

Murphy edged away.

Doyle bared his teeth and his fist flashed, catching Bodie squarely in the jaw. Bodie staggered back. He recovered swiftly, though, and grabbed Doyle.

They hit the ground, wrestling for control as so often in practice, now, at least for Doyle, in dead earnest. A selective kick had Bodie contorted with agony, and Doyle straddled him, about to add a few punches when a familiar shout stopped him.

"Doyle! Bodie! What the hell are you two doing?"

Doyle looked up and saw Cowley bearing on them. Reluctantly he released Bodie and got up.

"And what, may I ask, is the meaning of this?" Cowley snapped.

Doyle wiped his mouth and spat, but he was silent under his superior's cool stare. How did you explain that the man you trusted your life to just tried to kill you?

"Nothing, sir," Bodie said after a minute.

"I find two of my agents brawling like sailors and you tell me it's nothing?"

"Just a little disagreement, sir. Doyle here doesn't approve of my handling of the situation."

Doyle would have gone for him again, only Murphy's restraining arms held him back.

"Yeah, if you weren't so fucking callous—

"If you weren't so bloody self-righteous—"

"Enough!" Cowley's bark cut them both off. They glared at each other, two strangers who had once known each better than any-

one else.

Or pretended we did, Doyle thought bitterly.

Bodie stood meekly at attention. Might as well fall to his knees and kiss his arse, said a nasty voice in Doyle's mind. He assumed an insolent slouch.

Cowley paced back and forth like a drillsergeant. "I'll not have it, you hear me. This isn't the first time I've had to speak to you two, but it will be the last. Another scene like this one and you'll be fighting your way through the relief lines. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir," Doyle said as sullenly as he dared.

"Perfectly, sir."

Perfectly, sir, the voice in Doyle's mind mocked.

"Dismissed," Cowley said.

With Cowley's harsh gaze upon him, Doyle had to swallow his anger as best he could, and they left.

Home, he stripped off the sweat-soaked Tshirt and jeans, and dived into the shower, but he couldn't scrub away the outrage and horror that clung to him like dirt.

He snapped up the soap and scoured himself down with enough vigour to turn his skin red. He shouldn't be surprised. What did he expect from the likes of Bodie, anyway? But this was the last straw. He was going to ask for reassignment. He'd had it with years of being patronised and bullied. But first he was going to make Bodie pay, if it was the last thing he did.

Be fair, he reproached himself. You might have done the same, if the positions were reversed. He laid his cheek against the tile and the water cascaded unnoticed over his head.

OK, but why did Bodie have to be so keen?

Once upon a time he'd aspired to Bodie's friendship; till he discovered that behind Bodie's smooth faáade stood another faáade, and behind that, another, granite barriers erected around his heart. If the man had a heart. Be news to Doyle. He'd given up trying to scale those walls long ago, contenting himself with hurling verbal arrows over the top, and the satisfaction he got when the occasional shaft hit home. At those times he was afforded a glimpse of what Bodie kept hidden, a yearning menace that did not belong to civilisation, and he decided it was just as well Bodie had locked it away.

But he thought loyalty counted for something. Obviously he was wrong. Bodie had taken advantage of his powerless position to humiliate him.

The scene replayed itself in his thoughts, making him cringe when the images brought the same dart of helpless excitement he'd felt at the touch of Bodie's gun on his face. He glanced down, found himself semi-erect.

Bodie's laugh echoed in his mind. He slammed his fist into the tiles, barely aware of the tears of rage and frustration burning his eyes. Just once, just once, he'd like to see that insufferable assurance crumble. He'd sell his soul for the chance to reduce Bodie to the trembling bundle of misery and lust he had become already.

He wrenched the shower controls to cold and stood there until he felt a measure of calm returning, then shut the water off and went in search of fresh clothes. But he couldn't stop thinking about it.

Forty-five minutes later when the doorbell went, he had yet to devise a suitable revenge. He sat there, willing Bodie to go away.

Bodie, however, was not taking the hint. Already an irate knocking started in. "Come on, Doyle, I know you're in there. Open up."

Doyle rose and flicked the intercom. "Get lost."

"Come on, let me in, will you?"

The knocking became a relentless pounding. Doyle shut off the intercom and stared at the door release for what seemed an eternity, although it was only a few seconds till he pressed the button. Bodie slid the inner door open and waltzed on in, blithely as you please, as if nothing had changed. "Reckoned you'd be missin' this," he said, and laid Doyle's Walther on the coffee table.

Doyle stared at the weapon.

"Well, aren't you even goin' to thank me for returnin' it?"

"Drop dead, Bodie."

"What's the matter with you for Christ's sake?"

"Oh, listen to him, `what's the matter with you?' What do you think?"

Bodie shrugged.

Doyle's wire-thin control snapped. "You bastard, you were ready to kill me, and you would have, wouldn't you, if it had been expedient. Just a job after all, isn't it?"

"I didn't have any choice. If you weren't so busy sneering at my morals, you might have noticed."

"Oh, great, it's my fault now. I suppose if you had shot me, that would have been my fault, too. Next thing you know, you'll be blamin' me for the invention of gunpowder."

Bodie shifted his weight from one foot to another, looked at the ceiling and then back to Doyle. "OK. I'm sorry. Is that what you want to hear?"

"Like hell you're sorry."

Bodie's gaze faltered, then fell.

Sensing weakness, Doyle homed in. "Your perverted little game, that my fault as well?"

The gates clanged shut again. "Look, I said I was sorry, didn't I? But that's not good enough for you, is it? Got to wring it for everything it's worth, don't you?"

Doyle scowled blackly. "Do yourself a favour and get out of here while you're still in one piece."

"I love it when you get angry," Bodie drawled, unimpressed, "Your face scrunches up and your eyes flash and you look like you're about to spit blood."

Hopeless, it's hopeless, Doyle thought. A wave of weariness washed over him as he stared up at the other man.

Bodie stared back, expressionless, remote as a mountain lake in winter.

"All right, Bodie, you win," Doyle said. "What do you want? You want to forget the whole thing, is that it?"

"Forget what?" Bodie said blandly.

Yeah, that was just the problem, Doyle thought resentfully. Bodie didn't care one way or the other. He was a fool for wanting him to.

He got up and went to the window and stared out bleakly across the rooftops. Preoccupied, he didn't realise Bodie had come up behind him until he felt a hand on his shoulder. "All right. All right. I didn't mean it."

The contrite tone might have fooled a stranger, but it didn't fool Doyle. He dodged under Bodie's arm. "Yeah, right."

"Come on, it was a joke."

"I'm not laughing."

Bodie's lashes lifted, blue eyes sparkling with mischief. "That's the trouble with you, Doyle, no sense of humour."

Doyle grabbed his gun from the table and checked it over. Bodie did whatever he wanted and then tried to pass it off as a joke. Yeah, he'd be laughing out of the other side of his mouth if anyone ever called his bluff...

He heard a loud, exasperated sigh. "What the hell do you want from me anyway?"

Doyle glanced up at him in disgust.

"All right, I didn't mean it," Bodie said.

"Oh, you didn't mean it. That makes it all OK. Or," he mimicked Bodie's bland tones, "`Nothing personal, Doyle, you understand, it's just the way I get my thrills."

Bodie looked at the ground again. "Never said it wasn't personal, did I? You know it's always been you an' me." His lashes lifted, blue eyes sparkling with mischief. "All the way."

Now there was a thought, noted the nasty voice in the back of Doyle's mind. He yanked the ammunition clip free and carefully considered the idea, ignoring the tremors rifling his body.

The more he thought about it, the better he liked it. He couldn't lose. If Bodie refused, he'd be shown up for the coward he was, and if he accepted, then he'd have to admit to a crack in his armour.

Bodie stood with his hands shoved in his pockets, apparently absorbed in studying the wall in front of him, the image of indifference. Doyle's eyes narrowed to predatory slits. He set the gun down. Give Bodie a dose of his own medicine. That'd teach him.

Quickly, before he could lose his nerve, he spoke. "You know what I want to do?" he said, making his voice as sultry as he could manage.

Bodie gave him a peculiar sidelong glance, lashes drooping to veil his eyes, then turned his back. "No, what?" he asked casually.

In what he hoped was a credible imitation of Bodie's own cool recklessness, Doyle sauntered over and ran light fingertips down his spine. "This," he said, and his fingers strayed across Bodie's hips and probed his ribs.

Bodie went rigid. "Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" he said, his voice so low Doyle barely heard.

Doyle leaned around his waist and grinned at him. "Coming on to you, mate, what else? You were the one what said it might be fun."

"Well, you can stop right now."

"Oh, knock it off. Don't play the shrinking violet with me. You know the score."

"The score?" Bodie repeated ominously.

"I've heard all about the games mercenaries play."

"Have you?" Bodie swung around in Doyle's embrace and bent his forehead to Doyle's. "And how, if you don't mind, did you come by this information?" he murmured.

"Not exactly a state secret, is it?"

"I see." His arms tightened around Doyle's waist.

Encouraged, Doyle kissed him. He lapped delicately at the wilful mouth until Bodie responded, mouth opening and taking him in, cold and dark and mysterious. And, gods, he tasted sweeter than any fantasy Doyle could have conjured.

He felt a surge of his former affection, long buried under the avalanche of hostility. And when Bodie kissed him back, hope kindled as well, hope of salvaging something from all this.

AMBUSH

But Bodie broke away. "You got it all wrong, sunshine," he said, his voice caressingly soft, almost a whisper, "I don't play those kinds of games."

"Oh, come on," Doyle said, "they must have tried it on. A beautiful guy like you?"

There was a longish pause, then, "Oh, yeah, someone tried."

"I knew it," Doyle said triumphantly, just before Bodie's fist drove into his belly. He fell and the wall slammed into his head.

Doyle struggled to stop the dizzy swirl of colours and shapes all around him, managed to focus his eyes on the tall figure looming over him.

Bodie bared his teeth. "I blew his brains out."

Doyle's anger, and his even older hurt blossomed into a bright flower of fury. "OK," he said. He rose, moving slowly, and picked up his gun from the table. He rotated it so the butt pointed at Bodie and said, "Here you go."

Bodie gaped at him as if he'd sprouted a second head.

"Come on, take it," Doyle said. "Don't you want to blow my brains out? Or would you rather fuck me? Whichever. I'll make it easy for you."

"Quit playin' around, Doyle," Bodie said, his tone that of a man humouring a dangerous lunatic.

"I'm not playing, Bodie." He flipped the gun over. "Or shall I blow your brains out? I like that idea rather better. I owe you one."

He watched in dull satisfaction as the colour leached from Bodie's face, leaving it bone-white. So that was the only measure of his importance to Bodie: knowing he could hurt him like no one else could. "What's the matter, Bodie? Not scared, are you?"

"Fuck you," Bodie growled, but he never moved.

"S'what I said, isn't it?"

"Have you gone crazy or what?"

"Yeah, what," Doyle said. "It's always the same with you, isn't it? Nothing is ever your fault. You can get your little thrills from tryin' to terrorise me," advancing on him, "and don't give me any crap about it being part of the job, 'cause that's not all it was and you know it. But if I do it, I'm crazy, is that it?" "You think I enjoyed it?"

"On the nose, sunshine."

Bodie flinched as though he'd been struck. And he bowed his head.

Ah, got you now, Doyle thought. He pounced. "I'm right, aren't I?"

Although Bodie's guilty silence was all the answer he needed, Doyle gave in to the terrible urge to get closer, to twist the blade deep into the vulnerable flesh of the heart. "Get off on danger, do you, Bodie? You liked havin' me in your power, didn't you? Make Ray squirm, that's exciting, scare him a bit, great fun. Yeah, I'll bet you've wanted to fuck me for a long time now."

Bodie looked up at that, and inspected him with a chill impertinent stare that raked Doyle from head to toe, and found him wanting.

"Forget it," he said and turned his back.

"That's all right then, I'll just forget it. You tell me how. How can I forget? How can I ever forget that what you did to me with this," he dropped the gun as if it burned his hand, "got me goin'?"

"You're sick."

"That's rich, coming from you."

Bodie wheeled, his eyes a vicious glint in the dim room.

Doyle took a step back.

"Very wise," Bodie remarked.

"Now he's threatening me, is he?"

"You're going to push me too far, Doyle."

"Oh, and then what?"

"I'll hit you."

Doyle laughed. "Go on, then. You've been wantin' to haul off and belt me for years; here's your chance." He thrust his chin forward.

When the blow came, Doyle was ready. He swerved, still laughing. He danced around Bodie, confident that as long as stayed out of reach of those powerful arms, he was safe. He was lighter, faster, and more agile. Bodie could never win.

He landed a few solid punches, easily evading the other man, then snatched his gun from the floor, and got him in a stranglehold. He jabbed the muzzle under Bodie's jaw and flicked off the safety.

"Gun's not loaded," Bodie said.

"You don't know that. You saw me take the clip out, but there's always one bullet left in the chamber." He spoke quietly. "An' I saved it for you."

Bodie was utterly motionless in his arms, but Doyle could feel the arteries pulsing in his neck. "The shoe's on the other foot now, Bodie, and how does it fit?"

"All right," Bodie said. "You've got your pound of flesh. Happy now?"

Doyle laughed again, a short nervous chuckle. Sweat soaked his chest, whether his or Bodie's he couldn't tell, dripped off his forehead onto his cheeks. He spread his legs wider to steady himself, and realised the fire in his body was more than anger. His stomach muscles fluttered with the first shivers of arousal, and he pulled on his trouser legs to loosen them.

The second of inattention was all it took. Bodie threw off his arms and spun, connecting fist to jaw. The gun went flying as Doyle's world exploded into bright specks of light.

Oblivious to injury, he sprang dizzily to his feet, lunging for him, but he'd miscalculated and Bodie grabbed him.

"Is this the kind of game you want?" Bodie shouted. "You like being hurt, is that it?" He shook Doyle so his teeth rattled like the bars of a cage. "This is funny, Doyle, isn't it, a laugh a minute," and he backhanded Doyle across the face with a crack. "Feels good, doesn't it," another slap, "Right?"

Doyle tripped over the edge of the rug and clutched at Bodie's jacket as he fell backwards, taking Bodie along. Bodie landed on top of him with a grunt.

Through a fog of pain, he looked up at Bodie, at the brilliant blue blaze of eyes only partially hidden by soot black lashes, and knew a secret thrill of fear. He felt both excited and scared at the same time because now he was certain. It was going to happen.

He freed his hands from under the trap of Bodie's ribcage and undid the belt and zip of Bodie's trousers. He slipped his fingers under the waistband, waiting.

After a moment, Bodie closed his eyes.

The only sound in the room was their breathing.

Then Bodie lifted his hips slightly, far

enough for Doyle's searching fingers to slide all the way down and enclose the warm, hard core of flesh. His other hand slid open-palmed over Bodie's buttocks. "Yeah, it's sick all right," he murmured, "but you like it, don't you?" He squeezed gently to demonstrate.

Bodie moaned, a soft desolate noise from deep in his belly, and his cock throbbed and twitched in Doyle's hand.

Doyle wriggled closer to him, worked his hand around to get a better grip. Spiraling around the tip, his thumb discovered the moisture there, and he spread it down satin skin, devouring the tormented expression on Bodie's face. "Always wondered what it would take to get through to you," he whispered. "Happen I've found out."

"Don't," Bodie said. "Stop it," but he pressed himself harder against Doyle.

Doyle removed his hand to fumble with his own belt. "I know what you want," he said, "and I'm going to give it to you."

"No!" Bodie jerked away, rolled over and stood, fastening his trousers with a short, frenzied snap. "Damn you, Doyle," he said, voice deep and chilling, lips barely moving as he spoke. "God damn your perverted soul to hell."

Doyle leapt up. "Oh, terrific! And who started all this anyway, Bodie, you did, out there on that field, and don't you forget it, because I'm not going to."

He hunted around for his gun, spotted it quickly and picked it up. He released the safety.

"I'm leaving," Bodie said, and backed away, almost tripping over a footstool in his haste to get to the door.

Doyle vaulted the couch and waylaid him. "No way," he said. He leveled the weapon on Bodie's forehead. "You're not going anywhere."

His breath was coming in great gulps and his whole body trembled as adrenalin spurted into his blood. He grabbed the wrist of his gun hand with his other hand, as much to steady it as to stop himself firing.

He could kill Bodie easily, right now, the lightest touch of his finger and his brains would splatter the carpet.

His hands had gone clammy with perspiration. and fear-what kind of sickness was

it to get a thrill from the prospect of killing a man-He fell to his knees-Oh Jesus, he was going to come right there all over his jeans.

Bodie was on him in a second. He flicked open the snap of Doyle's jeans, yanked on the zip. One touch of cold fingers on hot flesh, no more, and Doyle was coming in a sweet gush of fire, the soft ragged moans of a wounded animal wrung from him by each spurt.

The racking spasms passed, and he came to in a daze. Steel fingers gripped his chin, forcing him to look up.

"So," Bodie murmured, "We're not so very different after all."

Doyle held his gaze rock-steady. "I reckon not," he said after a minute.

"Well," Bodie said, rising smoothly, "Now that's settled—"

"Settled? Not bloody likely," Doyle cut in. He dragged himself to his feet. Bodie wasn't going to get off the hook that easily. "It's your turn."

'What?"

Doyle rolled his eyes. "C'mon, get to it, Bodie, fuck me. 'S what you want, isn't it?" with a pointed glance at the tell- tale swelling in Bodie's crotch.

Bodie's lips twitched into a shadowy smirk and he gave a tiny shake of his head. "No, thanks, mate. Not interested."

"Too bad." Doyle scrabbled around for his gun, but Bodie saw it first and kicked it across the room.

"All right, Doyle, this has gone far enough."

Doyle glared at him in mute hatred. He mustered every drop of venom and flung it at him in one vicious word. "Coward."

Bodie stood transfixed, white-eved, nostrils flared, breath coming in short, shallow pants. "Take that back."

Doyle smiled mirthlessly. "Make me."

Bodie seized his shoulders, pinioning him to the wall. A fleck of saliva appeared at the corner of his mouth to inflame Doyle further. "C'mon Bodie. I haven't got all day. Oh wait, I forgot, you need the gun, right?"

He braced himself for another blow, but it never came. Instead Bodie's eyes widened in a kind of despair and his mouth came down on Doyle's.

Cruel and unloving, it was a mockery of a

kiss, but it ripped pleasure through Doyle nonetheless, like a sniper's bullet furrowing a tree. Beneath anger, he tasted passion, all the crazed, delirious passion of love disowned.

An insolent hand shoved his T-shirt up over his ribs, arrogantly fondling his chest, thumbing his nipples, burned a path to his belly, coming at last to rest on his crotch.

Doyle groaned. Bodie's fingers dug deep into his armpit, and the smell of his own sweat was strong in his nostrils, coupled to a faint odor of Bodie's, lighter, rising like the top-note of some heady, exotic perfume. And with the heavy, powerful body grinding him into the wall as Bodie's other hand massaged the front of his jeans, he was instantly, painfully hard again.

Bodie tore his mouth away, breath hot and sweet on Doyle's cheek. "All right, you crazy bastard, you win. I'll fuck you. I'll fuck your twisted little brains out." His lip curled, exposing one white tooth. "But you won't like it."

And he tightened his grip until Doyle gasped in pain. He stomped on Bodie's foot, and ducked out from under him. "Yeah, maybe not, but you'll like it, won't you, Bodie? Won't you?"

He couldn't strip his clothes off fast enough, gripped by dread lest Bodie should somehow summon the willpower to walk out and rob him of his victory.

Naked, he escaped to the bedroom, hearing Bodie enter behind him. He whirled, tensed as for an attack.

Bodie paused to slip off his trousers, elegant as a knife.

Doyle sucked in his breath. At this angle the swaying cock appeared huge. But the savage gleam in Bodie's eyes told him it was far too late to back out.

He studied the bed, mind racing. He didn't want to get seriously injured, no matter what Bodie thought. Vaguely, he remembered reading somewhere that the safest position would be on his stomach.

He flung himself down, pressed his face into the pillow, shivering uncontrollably. Fear wound its clammy hand around his gut when Bodie touched him, deft, curious fingers spreading his buttocks, transmitting an erotic thrill to every nerve, quickening as he felt THOMAS

something cold and slick nudging inside. He gasped, and smiled a secret smile to himself. Bodie was wrong. He was going to like it.

Doyle turned his head to the side, but he couldn't see much more than the edge of the bed and the wall beyond. "What're you doin' now, Bodie? Stop mucking about."

Bodie's chest settled warm and heavy on his back, his cheek laid smooth and cool on Doyle's face. His whisper was a travesty of tenderness. "You're so tight, sweetheart, I had to wet us down, or I won't be able to get it in."

Doyle's hips were lifted. "Now," Bodie said, and thrust hard.

Doyle bit the pillow. It hurt bad, like hell, worse than being kicked in the balls, like no kind of pain he'd ever felt, but he was past caring whether it hurt or not. His blood sang with triumph that he had brought the walls tumbling down for once and for all.

"What's a matter with you, sunshine," he taunted, "think I'm a woman? Come on, you can do it harder, a big, strong fella like you."

He heard a soft snarl in his ear, "Shut up, you-" and the bed shuddered as Bodie slammed into him.

Tearing a cry from his throat in spite of himself as his guts dissolved in fire.

Christ it hurt.

That thought stood alone in his mind, surrounded by agony. He was almost sorry, but then Bodie leaned close and whispered in his ear. "Had enough, Doyle? I can stop anytime you say the word."

Fighting pain for breath, Doyle shook his head. "No-way-mate," adding, "An' you couldn't stop if you wanted to."

The excruciating motions halted. "Bet?" Bodie said.

"Yeah." Gathering all his pent-up rage into a hard ball of

courage, Doyle thrust upward.

And knew the deepest satisfaction of his entire life when Bodie thrust back with a cry of pure helpless lust.

Pain and pleasure tangled together in the darkness of his heart as the sweet friction of the sheets brought him closer and closer, but he needed more. "Tell me now you don't want it," he said, writhing against the bed, pressing his hips back to meet Bodie's. "Come on, admit it. You love fucking me, don't you? Feels good, better 'n anything you've ever done. Right?"

Bodie made a low anguished noise. "Jesus, Ray, stop it, for godsakes-"

But Doyle wasn't about to let go his hardearned acknowledgment. "Doesn't it, c'mon, tell me..."

"I don't believe this is happening," Bodie whimpered, and Doyle felt him pull back, felt his muscles taut and quivering, poised for the final stroke.

"Tell me, Bodie."

Choking, a muffled sob in his voice, Bodie told him. "I hate you."

He gave a convulsive shudder and was still.

The warmth and wetness washing from Bodie's body into his in quick fitful throbs was such sweet relief that Doyle came, too: fiery streaks of pleasure lifting him up and out of himself, purging him of rage and sorrow and triumph, and finally, of consciousness.

Doyle opened his eyes to dusk. Must have drifted off, he thought lazily, was gettin' on for 7 by the look of it. He rolled over-damn, his head hurt—encountering the solid mass of Bodie, and smiled in gloating reminiscence.

Until horror swept him away like a blast from a winter wind. What had got into him, was he as insane as Bodie? He glanced down his body, surprisingly unbruised except for a small swelling across his diaphragm, twisted to look over his shoulder as best he could, glimpsed livid streaks where Bodie's fingers had gripped him.

His gaze switched to Bodie, sleeping as peacefully as if they had not shredded any hope of sweetness between them. Self-loathing and shame churned in his stomach, but impossibly, desire stirred, too, and he stared bleakly into a future where anger and passion were forever bound.

He traced an idle finger down the gentle curve of cheek, bent to kiss a faint purpling above one eye with lips that did not quite tremble. And the old hurtful longing he'd thought conquered in the afternoon crept up

### to haunt his heart.

Bodie sighed. The black lashes fluttered like moth wings on the pallor of his cheeks, lifted to reveal death-bright eyes. A smile spread drowsily across his face when he saw Doyle watching him. "C'mere," he whispered and drew Doyle's face to his own.

Doyle fought him, vicious and silent, but there was no room to maneuvre, so in the end he was pinned by Bodie's heavier body.

"You're mine," Bodie murmured. "Mine," he repeated, as if it were a magic word, and his teeth nuzzled Doyle's shoulder. "Aren't you?"

For one last sober second, Doyle resisted the glitter of his eyes, then Bodie's mouth crushed into his and he tasted blood on his lip.

Reason fled his mind. He didn't answer Bodie's question. He didn't have to.

"It's your turn," he said through his teeth.

"I'm ready," came Bodie's gibing voice. "Any time you think you can take me."

Doyle relaxed, his fears for the future receding. He and Bodie would handle it. After all, they had each other.

### NOVEMBER SEBASTIAN

THE DAY WAS DREARY, a dark grey lowering, but the room assigned to them in the small hotel was unexpectedly pleasant. Miss Parrish the proprietor opened the door and a flood of rosy light permeated the interior as she switched on a lamp here and there.

"I think you'll be all right here, gentlemen. Breakfast is from eight till ten, or you can leave the card out for our Continental. If there's anything you want in the meantime, just ring down for it to Reception."

Although it was many years since she had left MI-something and she was now a typical old-lady old lady with steel grey hair and a Marks and Sparks twinset, something about the gimlet eyes behind cold thick granny glasses gave Doyle a definite chill. When she had shut the door leaving them alone, Doyle gave a chuckle, throwing one case down onto the floor and setting the larger one down more carefully, continuing the irreverent conversation they had begun with their eyes behind her back:

"Nah, you're wrong, mate. Cowley never 'ad a thing going for *that* one. She makes Annie Whatsername look softer than a marshmallow." Wandering over to the dressing table he yawned widely, running a hand through his hair and peering into the mirror as he did so.

"You reckon? Myself," Bodie said austerely, "I think the reverse. A HevviFraym corset and cast-iron suspenders wouldn't put *Cowley* off."

"Nah, he'd rise excitedly to the challenge," said Doyle, and gave that surprisingly lewd chuckle, rubbing his hands together. Bodie turned the key in the lock and turned to survey the room, eyes swiftly delineating its characteristics: two pink beds, wall-to-wall white carpet, some tasteful mahogany furniture, a bedside light and a tall standard lamp both shaded in deep pink velvet and heavily fringed, casting cosy shadows across the room. Through the wide bay window could be seen the rapidly-fading November dusk. It made Bodie sense fireworks, and Christmas coming, and the thrill of being locked in and safe with siege provisions against the encroaching dark winter. In the bathroom to one side Ray Doyle hummed noisily as he did whatever he was doing in there, accompanied by splashings.

All in all, this suddenly didn't seem such a bad place to be.

However, there was work to be done; Bodie heaved a resolute sigh and got down to it, sleeves rolled up and mouth set in a determined line. It was a matter of minutes before the two men, working quickly and together, had the room set up for a weekend of surveillance over a nearby embassy: a pad for notes and a pair of high res. binoculars on a tripod by the net-curtained window, positioned out of the sightline of anyone passing below.

"Reckon this'll take long?" Bodie asked, and Doyle's hand made a doubtful 'so-so' waggle.

"Depends where he's got to, dunnit?" He leaned nearer Bodie confidingly. "Personally, I reckon the old man's got it wrong this time. Soo's very politically sensitive, very dodgy right now. He's never gonna be stupid enough to come back here, now is he?"

Bodie shrugged, for the very good reason that he didn't really care. Hard to work up much interest and involvement in a routine obs. job like this; however, he knew why they had been given it and was in some sense grateful. He leaned back on one deep rose counterpane and surveyed Doyle idly. His partner was wearing grey slacks and a soft sage v-necked sweater. He was leaning

over affixing the plug of his portable cassette recorder to a socket in the wall and pressing the play button. The strains of Vivaldi's 'Autumn' filtered into the room. Doyle's expression as he turned was one of transfixed bliss.

"You're so sensitive and artistic, Ray," Bodie said in his best thick yob's voice.

Doyle growled and ruffled the cap of dark hair as he passed. "Watch it. And that's my bed you're messing up," he added, opening the wardrobe door.

"Who says?" Bodie squinted over at the other, identical one.

"I do. Can't sleep next to the window," Doyle explained seriously. "Makes me feel insecure."

Bodie snorted. "You, insecure? Come off it." Nevertheless he swung both legs off the bed and got up, glancing out of the window. The door to the Embassy remained shut, the street empty. Not that Amun Soo, who had been spotted at Tel Aviv three hours ago, could even be in the country as yet. Short notice, this. Handy for Cowley, though. He'd probably been sweating on where to place his newly-fit and ultra-sensitive pairing.

Staying there, Bodie reached for his gun and pressed back the barrel, squinting down it. He reached for a cloth from his Gladstone bag, soaked it in gun oil, and absently began to polish the mechanism, looking out all the while without seeing anything. Not hearing Doyle come up, he felt first the light insubstantial caress as two hands from behind briefly covered his eyes and the warm breath of a voice in his ear: "Don't you ever think of anything else?"

"Eh," Bodie said. Doyle, now beside him, grinned at him, cocking an eye out of the window. There, across the street was a girl, a typist perhaps, snatching a minute's break between documents to throw her sandwich crusts to the pigeons; she had long dark hair, a pink blouse, and a narrow waist. They watched her for a moment in silent, shared appreciation. After a while Bodie put the forgotten gun down; his arm slipped around Doyle, his fingers squeezing tight on the narrow shoulder-bone. The moment was quiet; the urge pressed in on him to find something to say.

"You want to go out tonight?" he asked.

Doyle leaned against him easily, one trainer-shod foot turned sideways, his thin brown fingers twining in a knot of curtain rope over and over.

"We'll 'ave to if we wanna eat."

Doyle was thinner than before the shooting, always-narrow hips sharp inside taut skin, but any aura of fragility this might have lent him was, however, quite false: he had trained extensively in the weeks of his recovery, pushing himself to the limit over and over again. How impossible for Bodie, Bodie who had found him lying there with his blood pumping out too fast, his glazed eyes staring fixedly at the carpet, his breathing a laboured struggle to catch, all images stained indelibly and horrifically on Bodie's memory: how impossible, after that, to have him back and not feel fiercely, dangerously protective towards him. Dangerous in many ways, not least that it both enraged Doyle and upturned his fragile new self-respect, regained at cost.

"Unless you *fancy* the Battleaxe Spinster's institution greens?"

Doyle was looking at him, quizzical. Bodie's eyes were shaded by a dark-lashed droop; his mouth set in a little pensive pout which made him look melancholy. Doyle wanted him cheerful: he nudged Bodie's ticklish ribs and repeated his prediction on the menu. He was rewarded by the return of Bodie's attention; the bigger man grinned down at Doyle with a wry, funny quirk of the lips as he patted Doyle's hip and pushed him away.

"We'll do better than that for you, sunshine. Two Big Macs and a large fries more up your street?"

Oh, that smile. Bodie's peculiar gentleness with him frightened Doyle, made him back off just a little bit: the darkest skeleton in his cupboard opened the door and looked out, every time. Nor did it help to know that Bodie tried not to do it. That made the skeleton loom darker, grin wider.

"Oi." Bodie snapped two fingers in front of his eyes. "Where have you gone?"

There was warm, open friendship in Bodie's look: he was perhaps the only person who, knowing him thoroughly, had ever liked Doyle whole-heartedly, really liked him; no rose-coloured glasses could survive five years of often gritty partnership. A partnership that had hung for a while on a thin line between death and life, or indeed anything less than a return to perfect fitness. Doyle had had to do a lot of thinking in the hospital and it had troubled him, to think that if they could no longer work together their friendship might simply fade away in the way of things, a card at Christmas maybe, a drink together once a year. There were so many things; you never gave them a thought from day to day, nor took them but for granted; and then death brushed you close and left you seeing things in a clearer perspective, your eyes sharpened by the foreclosure that everything would come to an end.

Doyle remembered something else, and smiled.

Feeling himself left out of something private, Bodie turned away. "Let's go, shall we? Unless you're planning on changing."

Doyle looked down at himself in surprise. "Don't need to change, do I?"

"Nah," Bodie assured him, softening; "You're perfect as you are." He watched in faint disbelief as Doyle reached into his overnight case and extracted a pair of sunglasses, hooking them unhurriedly over his nose. "Ray. It's November."

"Might snow."

"And it's dark."

Doyle sucked in his cheeks and shook his head with worried wisdom. "Ah, they can be very hazardous, those streetlights."

Bodie gave in. "Well, if you want to look like Medallion Man himself, there's nothing I can do about it." And ducked as a pillow sailed his way.

He followed his partner flying down the stairs, taking them himself at a more sedate pace. Apparently Miss Parrish had taken note of the descent, because she was waiting for them in the hall.

"Going out, I see?"

Doyle favoured her with his nicest charm; he had used it to good effect in the past, his most notable success being Marge Harper. I could do with a bit of it coming my way sometimes, Bodie thought with resignation: then, hard on the heels of that thought came another: at least, whatever I get, good or bad, it's the real thing.

Doyle collected a key to the door—"in case we get held up"—it was locked, Miss Parrish informed them, promptly at ten: and then the two agents set off into the grimy backstreets. Little Asian kids out late played ball in the gutters, the girls in frail pretty dresses trailing in the grime, the boys forcing unpainted swings upwards to dizzying heights over cracked concrete. Tiny grey gardenless houses backed onto the yards of more of the same. They passed several takeaways of the fish-and-chip, Indian or Chinese variety, each emitting a tempting, warm miasma, but kept walking.

Bodie noticed Doyle's breathing, more hurried than his own, and said unthinkingly, "This too far for you?"

Doyle whipped round and glared at him sinking Bodie's heart. "Don't fuss, for chrissake." he snapped. "Just give it a rest, Bodie, will you?"

Stung at the unexpected viciousness, Bodie retorted: "Sometimes you can be a right little nest of poison, can't you? Just a civil question."

Doyle said nothing for a moment. Then: "Sorry."

"All right," Bodie said coolly. But the moment had turned a cold edge to the evening. They kept on walking. Determined not to risk another rebuff, Bodie offered no advice as to direction and it was a relief when they came to a grim-looking pub which promised 'Bar Snacks'.

"Not exactly the Hilton, but it'll do."

"S all right. I'm more at home in a joint where you can spit on the floor." Doyle's rueful grimace made Bodie smile, but distantly: he was still feeling the backlash of Doyle's sudden spite.

Inside they ordered pie and chips and settled to wait with a pint of beer. Round brown tables with cork beer mats and hard wooden benches set the scene; a fruit machine spun and jangled incessantly manned

by a succession of scruffy youths, and two elderly men threw darts at a board defaced with holes. The sweetish malty smell of stale beer permeated, and the air was blue with smoke.

Altogether it was not particularly pleasant.

Doyle was acutely conscious that he did not want to be here: he didn't like the surroundings, he was quite sure he wasn't going to like the food, and most of all he didn't like the distance between Bodie and himself. Lately, he knew, he had been relying more and more on the abstruse comfort of Bodie's company: Bodie understood without any need of words what it was like to die and against all the odds be brought back. It was expected by outsiders that you would seize this extra gift of life gratefully and get on with living it with three times the zest. Somehow it didn't seem to be as easy as that.

The last thing Doyle wanted was to be estranged from Bodie.

He leaned nearer, meaning to try to restore things, but his companion had his mind on something quite different. Catching Doyle's eye, "In with a chance?" he nodded towards two buxom lasses at the bar.

Doyle inwardly winced. Women since Ann had been fleeting, and now he wasn't even sure it was worth the effort. He had put everything into loving Ann and it still hadn't been enough: all that, and it had come nevertheless to cold pale tears in the street you're one thing, Ray, and I'm another—he didn't think he had any more reserves to give.

And even if there was ever to be a longstanding love in his life, he was damn sure he wasn't going to come across her in the Cock and Bull, somewhere in this unsavoury north-west nook of London.

All the same, he mustered a smile when Bodie ushered the two ladies to their table; they were cheerful-looking creatures who would uplift anyone's spirits for a while. Rosa was brunette, with pretty dark eyes; Sal had long red hair which, Siren-like, was attracting the attention of every passing male. Both fell for Doyle instantly as many women did, sensing something fey and complex about him which was probably false, but he generally capitalised on it quite happily, opening wide green eyes and flirting. Nor did they neglect Bodie who was perfect tonight; if he had a darkly brutal air behind the blue-eyed charm they loved it, seeing a sensual strength in the broad shoulders, a spice of danger behind the humour and the promise.

Bodie was in rare sacrificial mood: he was doing his best to make the evening work because he felt a little uncomplicated sex might be just what Doyle needed: had he but known it, Doyle would not have agreed with him, having found that sex was seldom uncomplicated, and an evening's sweaty romp with Rosa and Sal was not what he wanted, on any count at all. But since it seemed to be what *Bodie* wanted, he let himself slide along with it; it was less trouble than to resist and they were nice girls, sweet really.

"Doesn't anyone ever feed you boys?" Sally was asking, watching in fascination Doyle shovel in great and speedy forkfuls of shepherd's pie. Doyle widened his eyes at her, his mouth full, his eyebrows finely arched.

"E needs fattenin' up a bit." Bodie said at once. "Here, sunshine, have some of mine." He tipped Doyle's head back with an easy hand in his curls and popped a chip in his mouth. Doyle swallowed it happily. They were all getting a little drunk. "And no, we're not married, if that's what you're asking."

She flapped a limp wrist at him, deliberately misunderstanding. "Oh, I never thought you were, duckies." This amused both girls, without sending either Bodie or Doyle into raptures. Smiling vaguely down at his plate Bodie thought, *you don't know how right you are,* for being partners in CI5 was very much like a marriage. It wasn't even uncommon to fall a little in love with your partner; most successful pairings were linked by some small passion which sparked in odd manifestations: an overly-biting tongue when the partner was missing, or in danger; a fury vented on them when they

returned safe; all the way to a withdrawn grief should they die.

If they died...

Bodie ached, his guts clenching. The pain of it was actually physical: he gazed at the mop of brown curls with a fierce hunger, every nerve tense with worry and despair.

Doyle, pleasantly drowsy on a pint and three scotches, was leaning first against one soft perfumed curve, then another. He caught Bodie's eye on him, saw the odd expression. He reached out and tapped Bodie's hand. "Hey." And when Bodie's gaze locked with his, hurt and angry and blazing with some fierce and unseen passion, some odd flash of the intuition which made them a good team alerted Doyle to what Bodie was remembering. What he kept remembering. What he could not forget whenever Doyle was at his side—or worse, away from it.

For the first time, Doyle's eyes opened to what Bodie had been through: self-pity and shock had blinded him to all but his own struggle to regain normality. Surprise, then pity overtook him; and a new resolve not to turn Bodie's protective instincts away for reminding him that once he had failed, and so, the talisman of invincibility destroyed, might fail again.

*Why didn't you set the locks.* Why, *Ray?* "It's all right," he said. "We live to fight another day," and the simple words did the trick, the shadow falling away.

"Amen to that. Another drink, ladies?"

Bodie's gallant charm as he leapt to his feet and leaned over them, his eyes that deep nightsea blue, sent shivers down Rosa and Sal's susceptible spines.

"Well, I don't know. Isn't it time we were thinking of moving on somewhere?" Sally said with delicacy.

Bodie met Doyle's eyes, inclined his head slightly. For a moment Doyle did nothing; then he gave a little nod.

Well, that's it then, Bodie thought fatalistically: no getting out of it now.

"You got anywhere in mind?" Doyle was asking, with a little flirtatious toss of the head, lip lifted to show a whitetoothed grin. It was something he did rather well. Bodie had seen it many, many times. He could not repress a smile, watching as Rosa and Sally melted.

"Well, now you come to mention it—"

Bodie offered an arm to each lady and, laughing, they swept along with him, leaving Doyle behind to savour the very last mouthful of whisky. "Are you sure we want the boy with us?" Bodie asked facetiously; with a very telling glance Doyle materialised at his elbow and relieved him of Sally.

That left Bodie with Rosa who was the prettier of the two, velvet eyes and a ripe melony bosom; not that Bodie would have minded, he liked any feminine company if it was warm, friendly and amenable and Rosa certainly fitted the bill. No, it was Doyle who had the taste for cool upper-class bitches, and look where that had got him.

After a chilly but swift walk through dark streets they stopped outside the door of a small terraced house and Sally fumbled for a key. Bodie drew Rosa closer in the circle of his arm.

"Are you sure this is safe, sweetheart?" he murmured into her soft hair. "Me and him, we don't much go for jealous husbands."

Rosa whispered in his ear, "Both divorced."

With his customary speed of attack Bodie it was who reached the bedroom, a frilly ladies' boudoir, first, along with his all-too willing lady; she leaned over him, tickling his face with the tips of her sweet-smelling hair. Time passed pleasantly. As he surfaced from a perfumed kiss a low chuckle from the doorway made Bodie's head turn; Doyle was propped there, arms akimbo, shirt open to the waist, appraising him with a look of slow languor.

"Don't waste much time, do you mate? I could spare you a few chat-up lines if you like."

"Don't seem to need 'em," Bodie shrugged smugly. He turned back to Rosa's plush lips, mumbling against them: "Besides, 'ad me mouth full, didn't I."

"Mind if I join you?"

"Why—am I coming apart?" With amazement, Bodie kept one eye on Doyle, throw-

ing himself down on the bed beside them and making himself comfortable. "Where's Sally?" he asked; his heart was behaving oddly.

"In the bathroom. And if she doesn't get a move on I'll have to start without her." Doyle chuckled evilly, ran a quick, provocative hand down himself, and closed his eyes.

Within a minute Sally was there, dressed in something green and silky which didn't stay on long. Good: he could stop worrying about Doyle now. He would, he really would. Firmly Bodie shut his eyes and threw himself into his lady's embrace with fervour. Go to it, Ray. Enjoy yourself.

Doyle lay there passively while Sal undressed him; he suddenly felt very tired. "What's this?" She noticed his chest.

"Gunshot wound," he answered, and she laughed, clearly disbelieving him. Turning his head to one side as she struggled to draw off his jeans in a most unromantic fashion, he watched Bodie kissing Rosa; both naked already, what a fast worker. Bodie had a good body: strong, muscular, (perfect) skin. He was murmuring something to his girl with an amused twist of his lips; whatever it was it made them both burst out laughing. Sally had arrived at last at his underpants; he was now expected to show some interest in the proceedings.

For a sick second of cold fear Doyle was gripped with uncertainty; but then she touched him and he closed his eyes and it was (thank god) all right after all, his cock awakening to her fondling. He felt more relief than anything: what he would have liked was to get blown, just to lie back and do nothing while the sweet feeling surged, but he supposed it would be selfish to ask, some women didn't fancy it and who could blame them. So to be friendly he stroked her in return, and soon he felt her settle above him; he held her hips and thrust and was inside her, it was as sweet and as simple as that.

Beside him Bodie was moaning, short little exhalations on a rising note. Lost in his own fantasy, Doyle opened his eyes hazily—and was arrested by the sight of him. Christ but Bodie was putting more energy into this than he was, palms pressing into the bed, the long strong muscles of back and thigh moving strongly as he took her, his chest rearing up and his head thrust back. The visual impact of this excited Doyle suddenly, the pleasures of voyeurism not lost on him; Sally moved and moaned and he wanted to push her aside; she was blocking his view. He clasped her to this chest, her head beneath his chin; a move she interpreted as affection and kissed his neck while he studied Bodie's face: dark tendrils of hair curled damply on his brow and as he watched entranced, navy blue eyes opened and linked with his.

At that moment Doyle poured himself upwards in a lightning bolt of glory and it was all over.

After a polite interval, Sally slipped off him and lay beside him. Doyle put an arm around her and held her; she'd probably been disappointed, definitely not one of his better performances. He felt vaguely miserable and ridiculously tired. Sally kissed his shoulder in a comforting kind of way, thereby confirming his impression that he had totally failed to please her.

Bodie was getting his breath back. As Doyle looked over he met Rosa's eye and she smiled at him. She looked pleased, flushed. Well, when they compared notes after this no doubt as to who'd get the better write-up. (Nor who deserved it.) Bodie's arm around her shoulder touched Doyle's: he left it there, a warm and solid comfort.

"Do you want some coffee?"

Bodie started; the whisper had aroused him from the doze he'd slipped into. "Yeah, that would be great."

With a smile and a last kiss she slipped out of the bed and into a robe she took from the back of the door. Bodie looked over at Sally and Doyle, tangled up together, both fast asleep. Pity to wake him, but they'd have to be on their way soon. Bodie's brows narrowed into a frown as he surveyed Doyle; even asleep, little lines of stress showed around his eyes. Silver glints in his hair,

and on his chest the ugly brand of a wound chill. Bodie knew better, this time, than to most mortal.

Doyle was not yet thirty-five years old.

The familiar tight sensation hit Bodie, an expression of fierce brooding twisting his face:

Doyle had nearly *died*.

It couldn't be right. Not that a young man, full of life and vibrance, moods and feeling should be wiped out in a flash, just like that—all he had to offer to the world gone, flung to the winds and lost. For no good reason.

For no good reason.

And if he had died, Bodie asked himself reasonably, eyes dwelling on the smooth honey of his skin, returning as if drawn to that black nightmarish pucker over his heart: if he had died ... What would that have done to you?

He closed his eyes, trying to blot out the rising panic: to quell it, he set about to be practical. To let his mind catalogue the options open to him, to both of them: anything to screen the fearful view of the future which had so nearly become the past. I will do it, he thought, I have to do it; I'll ask him to get out with me, we've done our bit for the nation, Cowley can find some other young hopefuls to do or die.

He touched Doyle's shoulder, found the skin moist, and cool; pulled up the duvet over him. Then, Bodie got up, picked up his clothes from the floor and padded to the bathroom to wash.

Walking home through dark streets, Doyle was quiet. So many moods, Bodie thought: so many areas of light and shade to make up the complexity of one particular man. Doyle could be childish, distant, scrappy; infuriatingly moral or surprisingly cold-blooded: caring and callous depending on the day of the week. Most people were no better, many were worse. Bodie knew plenty with sweeter tempers he loved a good deal less.

Warm puffs of breath smoked the freezing night air a little. Doyle shivered and turned the fur collar of his leather jacket up, a little comfort against the November comment.

"Turn down here, yeh?"

Doyle's only reply was a noncommittal sort of sound. "Nice girls," Bodie offered, not that he felt much about them one way or the other; they turned into a side street.

"Yeah, they were. Too nice for us," Doyle's sour voice floated up from his chest where he had buried his chin.

"Oh, I dunno. They got what they wanted, didn't they?"

"That was what they wanted, was it—a quick poke and a wave?"

Uh-oh. Obviously the blues had set in. Bodie felt defensive, as if Doyle were blaming him for something unknown; he had the feeling of stiffness between them, nothing specific, just that Doyle was very far away from him right now.

"All right, all right," he muttered savagely.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Doyle deliberately, provokingly challenging. Spoiling for a fight.

Bodie clenched his fists, thrust them deep and safe into his jacket pockets. "Thought you'd enjoy it. For chrissake, Ray, you weren't exactly slow on the boil. Didn't have to drag you to the bed kicking and screaming, did she?"

He felt resentful, as people do who bear someone's troubles uncomplainingly for years and never get their sacrifice seen. Doyle was staring at him, with that ominously chilly look.

"I didn't? Hang on mate, you were the flash-eyed Jack. Top marks for effort, sunshine. You really got your rocks off, didn't you? And you're telling me you weren't keen!" He put his hands on his hips and sneered. "I'd love to see it when you're really feelin' in the mood. Must move mountains, does it?"

He said it very nastily. Had a viciousness to him, Doyle did; not often Bodie standing in the way of it. On top of all the emotions raging in him, Bodie was somewhere feeling a vast astonishment: that Doyle could really believe he'd wanted nothing more from the evening than to screw his end away in Rosa.

"Love to see it would you?" he said with a lacing of silky venom and a very pleasant smile. "Yes, I just bet you would."

Doyle stopped dead still, and turned to face him. His eyes glittered in the half-light; any sensible person would step back right now and in a hurry.

"Quite the little voyeur, aren't we Doyle?" Bodie hissed, hot with his own rage now, sick with his own blues. "Turns you on, does it, watching: need it a bit kinky these days, do you? Third-hand thrills, watching another bloke doing his stuff in bed—"

Blind with fury Doyle swung a punch at him with the full force of his body weight behind it; Bodie blocked him, letting the hefty blow flash harmlessly past his ear as he sidestepped and caught Doyle as he cannoned into him, off-balance with impetus.

All textbook stuff. Macklin would be proud of them. What came next was in no book ever written on the martial arts. Bodie took Doyle's arm and pushed him to the rough brick wall behind. "Third-hand thrills? Try the real thing, Doyle," he said and leaned into him, bringing his mouth down onto the pout below and imposing on him the most savage, most brutal kiss he was capable of.

He felt the bitter wind blow against their skin as the kiss went on for uncounted time; Doyle's mouth hard, resisting his, then softening, growing warm, his lips finally parting to Bodie's searching tongue. Tasting salt, Bodie swallowed, and kissed him again with fire but no violence: his body pressed against his partner's, and even through denim he could feel the burning heat of Doyle's body, the driving need of his own.

Finally he drew his mouth away, resting his forehead for one brief moment on Doyle's leatherclad shoulder, Doyle's hurried breath warm against his ear.

Then he pulled himself away and stood there, looking at him, his hands clenching into fists.

"So now we know," said Doyle, his voice odd, husky.

"Oh yeah?" Bodie said bitterly. "You think so?"

"Fancy me, do you?"

Bodie drew in a long ragged breath, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Fancy you?" he repeated derisively. "Oh Christ no, Ray, *it's much worse than that.*"

Without looking at his partner he set off, his steps brisk and purposeful. Doyle came after him, conscious of a deep cold which reached through his icy blood right to the heart of him; in five minutes they were back at their hotel. He followed Bodie up the steps to the ugly stained-glass front door; after all, there really was little else he could do.

Inside he leaned against it for a scant second, starting upright when the bone thin figure of Miss Parrish materialised. He slumped back and let Bodie deal with her, eyes running over the broad back, the powerful lines of Bodie's thighs in closecut cords, tuning into the conversation well after it had begun—

"-rather it didn't happen again-"

and Bodie's coolly polite, unhumble murmur of conciliation—

"—doing our friend the Major a favour is one thing, but having men treating the house like a transport cafe is something else entirely—"

"I'll pass on the message," Bodie promised, with a swift and charming smile: and as she vanished back into her domain through the open door, marked PRIVATE, a television screen flickered—Doyle came to with a blink, realising Bodie's hard, dark gaze was piercing him to the bone as he told him:

"We got company."

Bodie's eyes looked black in the dim light, glittering with the aftermath of the madness which had seized them; Doyle did not know it but he looked as wild, half-fey in the shadows which cast light on his odd cheek, lent a green shine to his eye. They stared at each other for a moment without speaking.

"Come on," Bodie said, and he turned and ran straightbacked up the stairs. Doyle followed, taking them an easy three at a time.

In their room, a haven no longer, lounged two of their fellow agents.

"Well, well, now, if it isn't Butch and Sundance," Flaherty's soft Irish drawl

greeted them as Doyle kicked shut the door. "Dodie and Boyle, Cowley's favourite calflings." An old foe, this: he and Doyle kindled one another like flint against gunmetal, scratching then flaring. Bodie groaned inwardly, watching Doyle's wary, feral stance as Flaherty uncurled his lean six-foot-one frame and circled him slowly.

This is *all* we needed.

"And what have you been up to, Raymond me sweet?" Flaherty's long finger flicked Doyle on the cheek, sharp summersky eyes searching, not missing the bruised, swollen lips. "Looking a little *tired*, if I may say so. Just a touch the worse for wear."

"Shut up, Spud," said Bodie shortly. "I hear you're hot tip number one for the Cow's merit award this month: and a black eye just might ruin your chances." He liked the Irishman, who was a brilliant shot and smart and quick as mercury; also his placid partner Todman, but right now they were nothing to him, they might as well be stones on the beach. "Bit late for a party, innit? Todders needs his beauty sleep like no-one I know."

Burly agent 4.8, he of the crinkly brown hair and the best collection of beer cans ever seen—due, he'd assured Bodie gravely, to a lifetime's quietly joyful experimentation said from the depths of the pink armchair: "George is worried about you two. Hopes you're eating well. He's sent us to share the load, in fact, so you can have regular teabreaks."

Doyle threw himself onto the bed, hands behind his head, dirty-soled boots up on the counterpane. It was in fact Bodie's one, but Bodie decided, looking at the tight set of his partner's mouth, that to remind Doyle of this would not be prudent.

Oh Christ make them go. Or stay.

"We don't need bloody minders," Doyle was snarling at Flaherty, who looked pleased, carefree and winning on points, as he sniffed the air with delicacy. It was faintly rank—possibly boiled carrots? "That your dinner I can smell? Lucky, lucky little laddies."

"We dined ite," Bodie said, "ectually."

The ridiculous remark broke the tension crackling through the room; Bodie, sitting

defensively on the fence, breathed again and they fell to discussing the matters in hand.

"You takin' first watch?" Bodie addressed the other pairing.

"We fully intend to, Bodie me ol' mate," Flaherty responded. "Laid out the sarnies already, for the midnight feast."

"Oh, and just look at the time," Bodie said, pointedly examining his watch and leaping to open the door. "If you don't get going you'll miss the deadline."

On his way out Flaherty couldn't resist one parting shot. "And you look after that little leprechaun of yours, Bodie-boy. He's lookin' peaky, to me."

Doyle sprang up and flew for the door. Bodie slammed it shut on retreating Irish laughter and stood firm.

"Don't, Ray, it's not worth it. *Ray*," fending off Doyle with one hand. "What's the bloody point, he's just a stirrer, that's all."

Doyle turned away from him and thumped both fists hard against the wall in impotent fury, or despair. He stayed leaning there, head between his arms, staring at the floor.

"You can see what they think. What they all think."

"No they don't. Look, Doyle, there's no real harm in Spud: can't you see it's the very *last* thing he'd say if it was true?"

Doyle's head flew up and he glared at Bodie, green fire in his eye. "No, I don't see that. I don't see that at all. Well, I'm damn well going to prove everybody *wrong*, that's all."

Bodie grinned, preferring angry to maudlin any day of the week. "That's my Ray. You do that."

Feeling better, Bodie wandered around having a yawn, drawing the curtains, switching on the rose-pink standard lamp.

"Bodie."

"Yeh?"

"Do you think I'll come back?"

Bodie didn't look at him, banging his pillow into shape. "Yeh, no problem."

"You're just saying that."

Bodie was brutal, swinging round and glaring. "Look, mate, I knew someone in the Mercs had half an arm and a foot bitten off

by a croc. Next I knew he was in charge of a battalion making raids on weapon stores, and if he could come back anyone could so stop feeling so bloody sorry for yourself and get on with the bloody job."

"I don't bloody well feel sorry for myself!" Doyle snapped. "Just as well, since everyone else is more than makin' up for me." He stamped off and slammed the door of the bathroom shut. There was a sound of taps being wrenched around in angry jerks. Water shuddering and hissing into the bath tub. A tank somewhere started to gurgle, noisily refilling from juddery old pipes.

Bodie raised his eyes heavenwards. He marched to the bathroom, opened the door and looked in. Doyle was stripping off; clouds of steam were rising from the genteel pink tub.

"I'm sure Miss P," Bodie said acidly, "and all the other guests will be thoroughly enjoying your midnight ablutions. They'll probably tell us, just how much they enjoyed it, in the morning."

Doyle clearly cared as much about that as he did about the best knitting patterns. The sage sweater came Bodie's way, followed by Doyle's trousers and two flying socks. Bodie fielded them all neatly and tossed them into the bedroom.

Doyle was stepping over the rim of the bath. "Tell her it's on the Cow's statutes we go to bed clean every night."

"It could be, at that," Bodie agreed as Doyle, naked, slid wholly beneath the water, then resurfaced, blurry-eyed and shaking his head of dripping curls. Some brisk interplay with a bar of soap began. Bodie's gaze darkened, drifting like debris on the tide: he said abruptly: "What about resigning?"

Doyle opened wide eyes at him, totally still, the soap forgotten in his hand.

"Not you," Bodie hastened to say. "Both of us."

Doyle's hand wandered to the ugly puckered snarl on his chest. "Because of this?"

Bodie turned restlessly away. "Not just that. There comes a time, that's all...playing cops and robbers all our lives." He stared unseeingly at three ducks in tasteful ceramic winging their way up the wall, thinking it out as he spoke, his voice rising and quickening as his urgency grew, "We've had a good run, we've done it all, every damn thing Cowley's asked us to do for our bloody country save lying down and dying for it: what about getting out before that's top of the list?"

Doyle looked at him; he seemed totally stunned by the turn of the conversation. "And do what?"

Bodie turned back towards him and looked down at him swishing gently, rhythmically in the bath and said: "I dunno. Insurance salesmen. Couriers. Open a shop. Who cares? We'd find something."

Doyle snorted suddenly with laughter and rinsed soap out of his ears. "Shopkeepers!" Bodie's narrow leather holster encircled his broad back; he was balanced on the balls of his feet and frowning into the steamedup mirror; a hard dark fighting man, every inch of him. Despite himself Doyle felt a bleak erotic stab within; all that power, leashed back. Bodie had the kind of dangerous beauty which women found compelling. Women—and some men. Doyle knew only too well how attractive his partner was to gentlemen that way inclined.

"I'm trying, but I just can't see you in a butcher's apron, mate," he said, a delightfully incongruous image springing to his mind, Bodie in a bloodstained apron, bare strong forearms revealed, wielding a mighty chopper.

Bodie was not to be diverted. He returned and sat on the edge of the bath, gazing broodingly down at Doyle, dark gaze raking him from top to toe. Under the scrutiny Doyle winked, and kicked one foot lazily, languishing like a basking seal. The water was clouded with soap; Doyle's body hair lifted and settled, lifted, settled, like seaweed drifting around rocks.

"I'm serious, Ray. Okay, it's been fun, it's been great, we got paid, laid lead into a few blokes the world was better off without. But now—" Bodie's voice sharpened with tension— "you damn well nearly died, Ray. I reckon we can call it a day, no sweat, no guilt. Let some other idiots fall under Cowley's do-or-die spell."

Doyle sat up. One hell of an evening. He swung himself up and over the edge of the bath, pulled a warmed rosepink towel off the rail, rubbed himself vigorously and efficiently. Drops of water flew everywhere. He threw the towel over his head and said from the depths: "Look mate. That's a bit drastic, innit? Okay, it's been a weird night, and we've had some hard times lately. It'll all look different in the morning."

His buttocks were thin, pale and muscular, a darkened cleft between. "You're avoiding the issue, mate." And Doyle whirled to face him, eyes blazing a question, a challenge:

"What *is* the issue, Bodie?" And they were there again, staring into the abyss.

Bodie rubbed his hand over his eyes; he was conscious suddenly of a gritty fatigue.

"You get to bed, Ray." He turned away and began to strip, boneweary. His watch was the last thing to come off—12.30. Christ. For the sake of quiet he used Doyle's water; it was still reasonably hot, if scummy with soap, the odd curl of hair here and there. By the time he got to the soaping stage Doyle was back, pulling a striped silk dressing gown around himself and tying it deftly at the waist. His hair was damp and curling tightly, his eyes heavy with fatigue. He stared at Bodie from the doorway.

"You think I've lost my edge, don't you. Don't fancy trusting me as a partner, is that it?"

"No," Bodie said. "Christ no, Ray, of course not. I'd trust you with my life tomorrow, you know that. I may have to."

"I dunno," Doyle said, "seems everyone's always looking over my shoulder these days. Especially."

Of course it must seem like that to him. Touchy and sensitive as he was: no wonder he took it the wrong way, seeing distrust where there was only—something quite different.

"Look, Ray, if I do that it's only because-"

He stopped abruptly and hauled himself out of the bath, setting off quite a tidal wave in the cool water as he bent over and wrenched out the plug. A dreadful tumult began, loud sucking noises, shuddering pipes and horrible gurglings. Bodie winced. This rate, they'd probably be booted out in the morning by the Iron Lady.

"Because what?" Doyle asked. He hadn't moved, leaning easily on the doorjamb, one slender fingered hand gripping the frame.

Bodie plucked another large towel off the rail, its soft thick pile a noticeable contrast with the dry sandpaper rectangles which emerged from *his* washing machine.

"Give it a rest, Ray." Dry enough, he folded the towel neatly, brushed his teeth at speed and padded still naked to the bedroom, pushing past Doyle.

"Look, if we don't get our heads down soon, we're gonna be in no fit state for 24hour eyeballs tomorrow, so get to bed."

He put his gun within easy reach, switched off the main light and rolled into bed. Too much had happened tonight, his mind whirling with a difficult stir of thoughts; he supposed Doyle must be feeling much the same. *Unfinished*, the tumult lamented, *lost chances, undone.* 

In the sudden dark, memories burned with unwelcome clarity; Doyle turned over, pressed his cheek into his hand, and remembered Bodie's kiss.

If you could call it that.

Assault, more like it.

And yet...

He remembered hard lips bruising fire onto sensitive skin, the lazy kiss of Bodie's tongue with his own; shafts of dark and secret pleasure stabbed him in the guts.

Christ.

More exhausted than he would wish Bodie to know, he fell asleep.

Bodie, not so fortunate, sweated on what to do, what to say, what he wanted—he didn't know—what Doyle wanted—he didn't know that either—and finally he turned his face onto a cool part of the pillow, closed his eyes, and slept.

Doyle jerked, and awoke with a shock to find Bodie looming over him in the darkness. "What is it?" he slurred groggily, reaching out for his gun, for the light, knocking something off the bedside with a clatter. Bodie stopped him, pressing a hand

down on his arm and pushing him back to the bed.

"Okay, mate, it's okay. You were dreaming, that's all. Go back to sleep, it's only five."

Doyle lay back, exhaling like a surfaced whale. "Sorry," he muttered. Almost instantly he was asleep again. Bodie slid back between the sheets gratefully-the air in the room had a chill dawn feel—and wondered what would have happened if he had touched Ray, so warm. If-

Next time he woke it was light. His eyes fell upon Doyle, sitting at the window, back to him, a grey blanket slung round his shoulders as he warmed both hands around a steaming mug and stared out at the horizon.

"Bit keen, aren't we?" Bodie's voice croaked with sleep. He always felt terrible in the morning: and Doyle wasn't usually a ray of sunshine, either.

"Don't want Soo to slip through our fingers. I may be farmed out to babysitting jobs these days but that's all the more reason not to let the baby die on me. 'Ave a coffee."

"Made it for me, have you?" Bodie asked hopefully.

"Kettle's still 'ot," Doyle said without a pause. Bodie grimaced, rolled over and sat up, prising his eyelids apart. Doyle's blue unshaven jaw was tilted in a determined set and his eyes raked the streets mercilessly.

"God," Bodie groaned, "Ray Doyle, supersleuth." He dragged himself out of bed and came to stand behind his partner. "You been reading the Boy's Own again?"

"Nah, just Cowley's motivation pamphlets." Bodie disappeared into the bathroom and reappeared in precisely ten minutes, neat and shining with virtue and efficiency. He narrowed his eyes and peered out at the deserted streets. "I reckon we ought to take a look round the embassy. Just in case."

In answer Doyle tossed him a piece of paper. "Map." Bodie unfolded it and stared at the diagram. "Cowley said not to tread on any toes."

Bodie grinned, stretching and throwing his chest out, hands behind his head. "You and me? Would we? My dancin' days are over, mate."

"'E meant it. Any trouble and we're on our own."

Bodie groaned in earnest, hefting his Magnum from one hand to another. "Not that again."

Embassies were sensitive places: and especially this one, whose occupants were enjoying themselves right now sitting on the fence between Britain, the U.S., and Iran; the apprehension of one of their diplomats suspected of terrorism on the politically neutral ground of an embassy by agents of the host country's government would not weigh too well in Britain's favour.

"That's if one of his own lot don't pick him off anyway," Bodie added gloomily. "They 'ave about fifty branches of the royal family all with a claim to the throne, you know. Die like flies in the swatting season."

Doyle twisted to look at him unblinkingly. "Did your homework, I see."

"Yeah. Riveting stuff." Bodie yawned, feeling a twinge of hunger gripping his belly. "Shall I go down for breakfast first? Or you?" He leaned down over his partner, very close, to catch his reply. Doyle had a large picture of Amun Soo laid on his lap.

Unbearably and inexplicably moved by this, Bodie kissed him on the cheek. Doyle squawked, "Gerroff, Bodie!" and dusted him away.

"Just my natural high spirits," Bodie said, stalking away smugly, "coming out."

Doyle snorted. "Not the only thing comin' out, I reckon."

"Promises, promises," carolled Bodie, batting his eyelids roguishly and heading for the door.

Doyle turned around to stare after him. "Oi. Where d'you think you're going?"

"Breakfast. Don't worry. I'll save some for you."

"If it's black puddin'," Doyle's voice floated glumly through the open door, "don't bother."

Bodie felt good as he went down the stairs, better than for a good while now; Ray seemed to be in a sunnier frame of mind,

not feeling too vengeful. Okay, so nothing was resolved: but things had a way of working themselves out. One way or another. Take each day as it comes...

"Good morning," Miss Parrish's voice transfixed him from behind; her smile this morning looked predatory, like a steel trap for animals. "I'd just like, if you don't mind, to draw your attention to the House Rules, and then if you'd like a table for breakfast—"

The rules began with 'Guests are requested not to smoke in their Rooms', ended with 'Gratuities to the kitchen staff are NOT permitted'; somewhere in the middle was 'Guests are requested not to draw hot water between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.'

Bodie handed them back, smiling with great charm and contriving a puzzled air. All the way to breakfast he could feel her eyes boring grimly into his back.

It was a bright, cheerful room containing several tables, each with a vase of fresh flowers in the centre of a snow-white tablecloth, a stone jar of chunky marmalade and a generous pat of butter in a glass dish—no tiny foil-wrapped portions here, Bodie was glad to note. From somewhere came the heartening smell of frying bacon, and the waitress who approached him had a wide smile and a pleasantly large bottom. What more could be hoped for?

"—with three sausages?" Bodie said winningly as she scribbled down his order. "Need to keep my strength up."

She giggled at him and tossed her long blonde hair as she walked away, and Bodie knew he would get his extra sausage. His lips wrinkled smugly: if you were born beautiful, charming and irresistible, you might just as well exploit it.

His stomach gurgled as he contemplated the three-artery-pileup of cholesterol set before him; looked wonderful. Doyle, now he'd probably munch his way through an identical plateful and then float up to the room claiming he'd had a glass of spring water and a little Austrian muesli. Bodie picked up his fork and dived in.

The door opened and in came a man, bald and wrinkled, who boomed out a cheery excitable greeting as he spotted Bodie, who mumbled a muted response. "Mind if I share? Shame to dirty two tables. Nice girl, that Jane, far enough to do as it is."

"Er—my mate'll be down in a minute," Bodie lied, but undeterred the man sat across from him, beaming as he shook out a snowy napkin and stuffed it inside his collar.

"Name's Fred. You?"

"Bill," Bodie said resignedly, shaking the proffered hand.

"Fred and Bill! Sounds like the Flowerpot Men, dunnit? Best breakfast in all London, this," Fred carried on, "for the price, that is. You on holiday then? Seeing the sights."

"No chance," said Bodie glumly. "Sales have been pretty low lately, my boss wants a 30% rise in definite orders this month." He loaded a fork with sausage, chunk of bacon, piece of fried bread, and dipped the lot in his egg.

"Salesman, are you?" interpreted Fred, a man of lightning uptake.

"'S'right," Bodie agreed through a mouthful.

"Very interesting," Fred said valiantly. "Now what line of business would that be, then?"

Bodie ran through half a dozen alternatives from Bugattis to cosmetics, and said unexcitedly, "Vacuum cleaners."

"You don't say," Fred marvelled. "Now me, I'm retired. Coffee for me, love, and two poached eggs." He winked at the waitress who smiled at him. Then she smiled at Bodie, and whisked off under his admiring gaze.

When he returned it to his breakfast, his companion was peering with him at his plate.

"Like a cooked breakfast, do you?" Fred said gloomily. "Doctor's orders, me—lowfat diet." With a jaundiced eye he watched him use up most of the butter on one half-slice of toast.

I do not want, I just do not want the company of this man at breakfast tomorrow, Bodie thought, the taste of his sausage quite tarnished by dislike; and he opened his mouth and began to tell Fred quite a lot more than anyone would want to know

about the sales, performance, and technology of your average vacuum cleaner.

Twenty minutes later he was closing the door of room 14 behind him. The head of curls silhouetted in front of the window looked decidedly fed-up.

"Your turn," Bodie said, arriving beside him and staring out. "Anything?"

"Nope," came the disgruntled reply. "Street's as bare as the parson's nose."

"Bit early for your average international terrorist, probably." Bodie plucked the binoculars out of Doyle's unresisting hand and displaced him on the stool. "Go and get your juice, old son. You'll like the waitress. Also a charming fellow guest, name of Fred."

"Bodie."

"What?" He didn't turn, being officially on-duty now, but something in Doyle's voice tensed him.

"I *don't* want the waitress. Understand?"

"Okay, fine," Bodie said lightly. "Leave her for me."

Doyle snorted, eyes on the broad back of his partner. For a moment it seemed as if he might say something more, but he turned on his heel and left.

"Don't forget to look out for Fred," Bodie called after him. "Very good conversationalist." "Right."

"Oh, and Doyle—"

"What?" Doyle stuck his head back around the door, irritable.

"You're a salesman."

Doyle breakfasted by himself, noted the charms of the waitress just as Bodie had, then took his third cup of coffee into the bright lounge. As he sank down into a very comfortable armchair, a lean and rangy figure unfolded itself like a creaky spectral vision from a seat with its back to the door.

"Hello there, hello. Fred's the name." The man bounded eagerly over, hand outstretched.

"Ray Doyle," admitted Doyle sourly, having long ago decided that Bodie's Fred was most likely one of Bodie's little fantasies.

"Raid Oil?" echoed Fred doubtfully, but shaking his hand nonetheless. With gloom Doyle saw him take a seat beside him and decided this was going to be a very quick cup of coffee indeed. He reached for it firmly.

"Havin' your coffee in the lounge then," Fred said, nodding approvingly.

"S'right," Doyle agreed, and took a large swallow.

"Then you'll be off on the beat, no doubt." "No doubt at all."

"Business a bit slack, your mate tells me." "Yep."

"Nice chap," Fred said clearly disappointed that Doyle was so different. He chuckled. "I'd buy a Christmas tree in August off that one, all right."

"Me too," Doyle agreed absently. Out of the window he saw a group of businessmen, dark suited, very close to the Embassy doors. Every hair on head prickled with tension: he catalogued the men rapidly. Oriental, yes; suspicious looking—yes; and, ohmigod, one of them was actually reaching inside his doublebreasted suit—

Doyle leapt to his feet, diving inside his jacket for his gun—not there—*damn* and *fuck* it to hell, every sense alert and ready to go, to move, to run: and then the business-man drew out of his pocket a gold lighter which he flicked as he talked rapidly and lit the cigarette of his nearest colleague.

Doyle sank slowly back down onto the chair, puffing out his cheeks with the gustiness of his sigh.

Watching him were two curious eyes.

"Sorry," Doyle said, and he sniffed. "Felt a sneeze coming on."

Anything?" Bodie queried of his R/T, squinting out over the top of it with one blue eye.

"Naught but a word from Cowley," Flaherty's tinny voice reported. "Things are hotting up...so he says."

Bodie groaned. "Well, tell him the only thing hotting up round here is—"

*"—Doyle?"* Flaherty enquired, interested.

"My temper," Bodie told with equanimity. "This is a waste of time, and don't we all know it."

Doyle was on the last two inches of coffee. "I expect it's your mate does the talking," Fred guessed.

"Yeah," Doyle agreed. "Me, I'm just there to discourage—late arrivals of payment." With this, he smiled. Fred flinched.

"Well, it's not everyone gifted with the gab, is it," he comforted. "How many would you say you sell a week, then?"

Doyle set his cup down, suddenly wary. How many *what?*—Wait a minute—

"Well, season's coming up now, of course," he said elusively.

Fred stared at him. He had a peculiarly egg-shaped head, with greasy-looking glasses. "Seasonal sort of trade then, you'd say?"

Doyle stared back. Naturally Christmas trees were seasonal—weren't they?

"Yeah, I'd say so."

"Interesting," mused Fred excitedly. "People do more of it in the winter, do they?"

Something was amiss here.

"Seems so," Doyle said floundering, but hoping for the best. He buried his head in his cup—all gone but the dregs.

"Must be all the pine needles. Never get rid of 'em do you?" jested Fred and Doyle's head snapped up suspiciously. Now they were back to Christmas trees again!

Fed up with this, he decided to lay his cards on the line: placing both hands flat on the table he faced Fred firmly.

"If you're interested, I could do you a nice Norwegian spruce. Special price."

"A what?" Fred looked at him askew. "A what, son?"

Doyle pressed it home, smooth and sure and to the bone. "6-footer, flame-resistant pine-o-tex in natural evergreen with a red leatherette pot. Very," Doyle said, "natty." And he sat back.

"Ah well," Fred said after a pause. "Takes all types, dunnit?"

Bodie was where Doyle had left him, leaning at ease against the wall, the binoculars dangling from one square hand.

"Anything?" Doyle said, shutting the door behind him.

"Not even any street theatre." Bodie turned his way and glowered darkly. "Looks like being a really thrilling day. Pack the dominoes, did you?"

Doyle chuckled as he walked across the room. "Thought you wanted it borin'. Not twelve hours since you were all for us signing on with the Boy Scouts, or somethin"

Bodie turned to look at him, his eyes very blue indeed. Doyle stood stock still; but Bodie said, mildly enough, "Yeah, well that's me, Doyle, always prepared."

Doyle pursed his lips and peered out of the window. Bit of action, that's what Bodie needed. He was too tough, too large a character to be cooped up like this in a soft pink cage.

No action, however, was forthcoming. Only an old man, looking the other way while beside him a mangy dog squatted. Bodie was incensed. He pushed up the sash window and bawled: "Oi! There's a fifty quid fine for that, you know!"

"Poor old geezer," Doyle said as the man jumped a mile and began a haunted visual search for the source of the reprimand. The dog, unconcerned, continued to perform.

"I'm fed up to here with dogshit on my shoes." The R/T bleeped and Bodie angrily snatched it up. "3.7."

*"Just checking up on you,"* Flaherty's mechanised tones filtered from the tiny metal grille. *"We'll leave the baby rockin' in your tree, then, me mate an' I are off to the ball."* 

"What baby," Doyle bemoaned, leaning over Bodie's shoulder.

"You might well ask, me lovey: meself I think the Cow's tossed us an empty bucket."

The connection broken, Doyle was examining the carpet. Bodie glanced at him. "Put some music on, eh? Might liven us up a bit. Even if it's only that Mozart rubbish you were playing last night," he said to be wicked, but Doyle didn't leap in and correct him haughtily, didn't even seem to have heard.

"Do you think Spud and Todders-"

"No, I don't," Bodie said sharply, his spine tensing.

"Why not?"

Bodie grimaced. "Oh, look at Todman. Pipe and slippers chap if ever there was one."

"There was Matheson and King," Doyle said almost defensively.

Bodie shrugged. "Well okay, we all knew about them." He added, half panicking, a jeer: "What's the matter, Doyle? Planning a purge?"

Doyle took no notice of him. "Just wondering, that's all. What any of our chances are—" He stopped, staring out, moody-eyed.

"Of what?" Bodie prompted, his heart pounding, pounding.

"---of living," Doyle said, into the remote distance.

Quietly spoken, terrible in aspect.

After a pause, Bodie said roughly, "You're not the only one has nightmares, you know," and from nowhere the vision came: Doyle below him, the view angled and slanted, his slit chest stretched open by a surgeon's clamps, the bloody arch of his ribs shielding a ravaged heart which trembled and refused to beat: the chink of a bleeding bullet in a dish.

Bodie drummed and tapped his fingers on and on and on. Doyle was silent. "You see?" Bodie said, because he could not bear not to. "You know I'm right. You know it. Let's get out, Doyle, before it's too bloody late."

Doyle shook his head. It was tempting, Bodie thought, to shake a bit more of him, but his anger died away as Doyle said, chin tilted:

"Run away, you mean?" and Bodie understood with his gut diving helplessly that now, more than ever, there was no chance for them.

He turned angrily away. "Make us a cuppa," he said, staring out of the window. "Oh, unless it's against the bloody house rules, of course."

The day passed slowly. People sauntered along the pavement, people went up the Embassy steps. People left the Embassy: but none of them was Amun Soo—unless, as Doyle pointed out, he'd had a foot of shin removed from each leg; Soo was a tall man, and the Embassy visitors seemed one and all to be midgets.

In the late afternoon Doyle snoozed on the bed while Bodie did the watching; he must be feeling more like himself, a week ago he'd have stayed up grim-eyed till midnight rather than give in. Bodie stayed at his post, jettisoning a glance back towards the huddled form on the bed every so often. Ray Doyle! Whether he was blessed or cursed to know him Bodie had no idea.

Doyle twitched, and muttered, and dreamed.

A huge mirrored ballroom dazzled him, so that he could not quite see; he glided about among people whose faces he did not quite know. Confusion and a great weariness troubled him; just to lift one foot and put another down seemed like something tremendous. He was worrying, too; he was late for something important, he had to be somewhere, somewhere else, and how could he get there quickly if he was so weighted down?

He had a partner in his arms, light as down; in the mirrored wall he kept glimpsing the top of her head against his chest. She felt insubstantial, barely real at all and he had no idea who she was.

A tap on his shoulder made him jump. Turning, he saw Bodie there, large and vivid, but it was Bodie with a peculiar look in his eyes which made his heart hammer and his legs turn weak.

"May I have the pleasure?" Bodie asked in his deepest voice, and Doyle let go of his partner, never saw her again. He was enfolded into Bodie's arms and swept off; and he knew with a vast sense of relief that it was all right now: wherever he had to go Bodie would take him. And Bodie whispered into his ear with the subtlest of charm, "Come with me, Ray."

Doyle felt himself tremble, life impossibly sweetened: he felt himself hard and tight against Bodie and he knew he was going to have an orgasm.

"It's all right," Bodie murmured to him, very seriously, "No-one will care ... "

Doyle awoke with a frightening jolt, heart pounding, skin tingling sickly with shock. For a moment he simply stared up at the ceiling, closed his eyes, opened them and stared again, exhaling as he tried to calm his racing pulse. Bodie was by the window,

gazing out; he didn't turn towards the bed. Doyle watched him, saw the broad shoulders in leather, the dark hair curling over his collar, the fine ends of it just beginning to curl. Someone—Bodie of course—had laid a blanket over him while he dozed: with the chills of the newly-awake he was glad of it.

Not yet wanting to face Bodie, he closed his eyes again. His body thrummed with disappointment, threads of sweet delight still hovering, waiting to be gathered. It brought a bitter smile to his lips: he needed *something*, that was for sure.

The smile died, a hazy imperfect memory stealing into his mind; one night, drunk, flicking beercaps at a spot on the wall, much hilarity. They had had many good times like that, himself and Bodie, firing each other on to new highs of energy, of humour, of wildness—excitement—

And this night—

The lights were low, the television flick-ered.

Bodie had suggested something, or he had.

He didn't remember the details; the next morning with a sour belly and an aching head he had dispatched two empty Johnnie Walker bottles down the rubbish chute to shatter at the bottom: old Cowley'd be proud of the singleminded effort he and Bodie were making to boost the Highland economy.

No, the details...

...were unimportant, but he knew beyond doubt or self-delusion that something had happened. Unmistakable, that guilty delight at something secret shared, something intensely thrilling, a little wicked (dirty?) maybe... Bodie had been nice to him for days, a softness in his eye when he looked at him.

In one way he wished he could remember, and yet he didn't need to. Bodie had touched him, and he had wanted Bodie to: they could turn on to one another, it was no use denying it.

*Fancy me?* he had accused Bodie savagely last night; but Bodie had turned the question aside, and answered quite a different one.

Doyle burned, and yet shivered: newly fragile, to invite Bodie's love was surely to kill forever his chance of independence. He could just imagine Bodie, stepping in solicitous, pinning a cloak around his shoulders to protect him from the storm.

With one sudden movement Doyle got up, flinging the blanket aside. Bodie jumped, and turned to look at him.

He was not expecting anything, had no expression prepared: had no idea of the sudden beauty of his eyes, a navy blue gleam under black silken lashes, the handsome, tender line of his jaw. Staring at him, Doyle narrowed his eyes, took a deep breath.

"What's the matter?" Bodie said, and after a moment Doyle came over to him, rested his hand on Bodie's shoulder. What would that commit him to? Nothing. He left it there, squeezing gently. "Seen anything?" He nodded at the window.

"Course not," Bodie said lightly. "Beginning to think you're right, mate, this is an oyster with no pearl."

Doyle leaned against him a little, stayed there. Together they looked out at the grey streets in silence.

The day stretched on: their watch ended at six.

"What shall we do?" Bodie asked idly; he stretched and yawned, all of his joints clicking.

Near enough to notice, Doyle caught the scent of warm sweat; Bodie wore a white shirt, the cuffs of which were rolled up to his elbows, the brown leather of his holster softened and worn in places. The black magnum gleamed, however: Bodie was an army man and you did not take short cuts. "Get an early night, from the sound of you," Doyle growled.

"Need to eat."

"Takeaway?" Doyle suggested, reluctant to go back to the pub. *No more Sals, no more. All that's over.* 

The thought came from nowhere; he felt more relief than anything. And then he knew it meant he was getting older, that soon he would be looking back on his youth. It took him by surprise: a chill ran through him, and then another. £3£3£3

"Getting a cold?" Bodie asked, innocuously enough but it caught Doyle right on the raw. He hunched his shoulders and snarled:

"For chrissake will you stop watching me all the fuckin' time?"

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. Bodie said nothing; after a moment he went into the bathroom.

Doyle took off his gun, viciously. He began to unbutton his shirt. A door slammed behind him and another opened.

"Where you going?" He whirled around to catch Bodie leaving, and Bodie looked back at him, a dark, enigmatic look.

"Thought I'd go out. Since you're in one of your more charming moods."

Doyle crossed the space between them in two bounds. "*Don't.*" He took hold of the lapels of Bodie's jacket in two hands, and Bodie looked down at them expressionless, not caught up with this.

"I know I'm hell to live with," Doyle said. Don't give up on me."

Two beats of silence; then it broke.

A quirk of humour gleamed from Bodie's eye. "All right, Raymondo, you win a second chance." He tapped Doyle's cheek with a firm finger. "But that's your lot."

Making Bodie stay was easy enough. In fact, Doyle had the feeling that making Bodie do anything at all might not be difficult. He found the thought oddly disquieting.

They went down, in the end, to the second sitting of dinner in the hotel; not having prebooked they weren't entirely welcome. But Miss Parrish, obviously remembering some heady, long-ago nights with a dashing young Cowley, bit down on disfavour and produced an unexpectedly good steak-and-kidney pudding. Fred waved from across the room, clearly disappointed to be on his caramel crème when they were only just starting the soup (oxtail).

Back in the room, fed and full, Doyle cast a venomous glance at his R/T. "If Spuddy calls in with more sweet sympathy—"

"I'll take it," Bodie promised in a hurry; he put the television on. There was a match on, Spurs v. Liverpool in a third-round Cup tie, so they settled down to watch. "Can you get a drink in this place?" Doyle muttered, feeling the evening's thirst creep up on him. "Don't you just bet Miss P 'as Saudi sympathies?"

Bodie made a face. "Yeh, bar's as dry as a—virgin's drawers—" He was reaching over to his Gladstone bag, rummaging; came the right way up, with a smug smile. "Fortunately, however—" and he produced a bottle of whisky with a triumphant flourish.

"Good thinkin'," Doyle approved; but the strange mood of the evening was still upon him. The stuff slid on a smooth and fiery track down his throat; he shifted higher up the bed, leaned on the pillows with his glass in hand and watched the football, though he couldn't have told you the score.

The little room was cosy, glowing pinkly again. Rain drummed unceasingly on the windowpanes and pattered on the roof; the cars swished by slickly on the wet roads. It was not a night to be out. Bodie lay on his back, on his comfortable bed with a rosy light beside it, contented enough, doing the *Guardian* crossword. He did quite a lot of it out loud, speculating and frowning and scribbling down anagrams.

"'Pointers to someone'," he read, "'without it'."

"'Aven't got a clue."

"Just gave you one. Too late. Person," Bodie said with satisfaction, and his pen moved quickly and scratchily on the page.

Doyle's eyes flicked from side to side, following the little stick footballers running and running this way and that while the voice of the crowd rose and fell in the background, and the excitable commentator squeaked on and on and on.

Finished, Bodie threw down the paper and the pen and stuffed his hands behind his head, surveying the tensely curved shoulders of his partner, the curls which lay on the collar of his white sweatshirt. Three coloured stripes banded the midriff; as usual Doyle wore brown leather boots tapping restlessly. Bodie considered him, lips pursed in thought.

Doyle was unsettled tonight; anxious, angry vibes filling the room. Bodie took another swallow of his whisky and downed insanity with it.

"Ray."

"What."

"Come here a minute."

Bodie put out a hand. Doyle didn't turn his head, stared straight ahead at the TV screen.

"Ray. Come over here."

Doyle turned, his expression bleak, his eyes a cold and wintry grey. Bodie held his gaze steady, and his outstretched hand. After a moment Doyle tipped back his chin and drank off the beaker of whisky in three or four gulps. Then he set it aside and came over to the bed, perching his hip beside Bodie on the pillow, looking down into Bodie's face, seeing the trouble there, a reflection of his own.

Bodie's frown smoothed out, became instead a smile. His hand slid slowly up Doyle's arm, then curved around the back of his neck. Doyle closed his eyes as he allowed himself to be drawn down. *Maybe this is the answer, after all.* Bodie's mouth was gentle, nuzzling at his then settling, his tongue darting inside Doyle's lips. Little twinges of desire made up his mind for him: he turned within the circle of Bodie's arms, pressing a palm to Bodie's shoulder; and opened his mouth wholly to Bodie's kiss.

The comfort of it vanished as lust ignited in a blaze; Doyle's nerves rang with shock. Disturbed, he opened his eyes to see Bodie's face; unguarded. The vulnerability of it terrified Doyle unaccountably. He thrust himself away from Bodie, breathing hard; stood up and flung himself over to the window. Putting back the curtains he stared out, hard and angry and unseeing, and gave imperfect voice to his thoughts:

"I hate feeling like this," and it hurt him savagely, just as he knew it would have hurt Bodie. Even so, it only took Bodie a moment.

"Don't then, Doyle: simple as that," his voice arrogantly low, mocking, and furious.

"Simple!" Doyle jeered, one foot up on the radiator pipe as he rocked angrily and stared out to the night.

Bodie was angry too, swinging his feet off the bed and getting up in one fluid surge. "Yes it is, bloody simple: don't think I'm goin' to be beggin' to touch you again. You got a vicious streak, Doyle: people like you should carry a health warning."

Doyle winced, believing this only too readily, it being in perfect step with recent events. But he carried on, well-armed; his voice dangerously low, "You've changed your tune. I wasn't that far gone in the hospital, you know: Murph would've laughed himself sick if he'd come in a moment earlier— " Yet it hadn't been funny: Bodie, his eyes furious, desperate, burying his mouth in Doyle's hair— "Not to mention the little débâcle a few weeks before."

Bodie heard him out; he had gone quite white, his eyes blazed fire. "You were more than willing. But don't worry, *mate*." He was by the door, snatching up his leather jacket, dragging it on. "S'funny, innit. There I was, trying to work out a future for both of us. And now I find I'm on my own. Well, believe it or not, that makes it a hell of a lot easier."

"Don't do anything stupid, Bodie," Doyle warned, watching his partner with narrowed eyes.

Bodie was experiencing a curious lightheaded sensation, an overpowering relief: he could go anywhere, do anything, he was answerable to no-one. He no longer had to juggle Ray's sensibilities with his own, struggle with dreams which refused to coincide: this was it. Ray, after due consideration, had scratched it out.

He turned for the door. "That's sweet, coming from you," he said coolly. "Don't give up on you', didn't you say so touchingly? But the trouble is, Ray, you've given up on yourself. And that's too much for anyone to live with."

The door slammed, rocketing a gust of cool air into the room.

Bodie would be back, no doubt; he wasn't one to neglect his duty, not Bodie, and their next shift began at six. Doyle gazed out of the window with eyes that felt stretched open; a light was on in the embassy, just one, high up, and the streetlights cast a haloed orange glow on the wet pavements. Rain drizzled down endlessly onto the shining roads. The whole fabric of the house shook a little, and there was Bodie running crisply down the steps, hands shoved into his pockets, neck hunched against the rain.

No further thought was necessary; Doyle snatched up his jacket and ran, flying down the endless stairwell, grabbing open the front door and slamming it shut; vaulting the rail as his jacket flew out behind him like leather wings, landing on the pavement and setting off at a run.

He could still see Bodie, just turning the corner. Running full pelt Doyle caught him up in no time at all. Bodie had turned once to see who was running; he faced forward again now, walking determinedly, head down against the driving rain.

Doyle grabbed at his arm. "Bodie."

Bodie just looked at him stonily, as if he were a nightmare. Doyle's heart lurched. Bodie was his mate, good for a laugh, a roustabout drinking session; but he had another face, one Doyle had sussed out the moment they met: he was dangerous, aggressive and chancy by nature, out on the edge just the way you had to be to be a leader in their underworld, not a victim. It was that face of Bodie Doyle was looking into now; the knife in his eyes.

After a moment Bodie removed his gaze from Doyle's face and walked off. Doyle followed. "Bodie?"

"Fuck off, Doyle."

He dragged on Bodie's arm again, all his weight behind it, fully prepared to fight if he had to.

"Let me go," Bodie ground out, coming to a halt.

"Can't."

Bodie's eyes, haunted by devils, met his. "*Christ,* Ray," he said violently, "how much more do you expect me to take?"

Doyle didn't answer that. A bunch of teenagers holding beer cans and larking about was approaching. Grabbing a handful of Doyle's jacket Bodie pulled him into a dark alley, a yowling cat fleeing out from behind the dustbins, and manhandled Doyle against the wall, Doyle tense in his hands. But this was better: anything—anger, a fist in his guts—was better than that dreadful, indifferent walk away.

"What am I supposed to do?" Bodie asked with some kind of anguish twisting his face from the inside. "Stand still for all the filth you spit at me and come up all rosy smiles?" He added more quietly, eyes travelling all over Doyle's battered face, "Look, I know you've been through a hard time lately. But whatever I do is wrong."

"I know what I want now," Doyle said, desperately.

Bodie stared back unsmilingly. "Yeah. And then what?"

They had something to lose, that was the trouble: not much, perhaps, a dodgy friendship at times. But no-one saw clearer than Doyle, just how risky this was going to be. Yet still he wanted it.

"It can't be worse than this," he said at last. Neither one thing nor the other...

"What are you trying to do, Doyle?" Bodie wanted to know, a spark of angry venom still there and feeding on itself, "Lead me on again? 'S probably quite funny, is it, from where you're standing?" Doyle made a gesture of exasperation, grimacing down at the ground. "I know, you want me to say, 'Let me toss you off, Ray, you'll feel ever so much better'," Bodie mimicked, flying out high on a line of anger, shocking Doyle and dragging his gaze up to Bodie again. "Poor duped fool, on his knees to you while you grant some obscene favour, and all in the name of therapy? Well, listen to this, mate," and Doyle saw Bodie's Adam's apple move rapidly, heard his voice change, "I cried for you. So help me God, it fucking tore me up when I saw you there, like to die. And you make out it's some sort of game. Well, I'll play, Doyle. We'll go back right now and play: you like it a bit wild, don't you, a bit way out, and yeah, I'll give you that. But don't expect me to walk away laughing when you hit me in the guts afterwards with one of your charming little lines: *I hate feeling like* this, Bodie," and he laughed savagely, a dangerous mockery shining in his eyes. "Plenty more where that came from, I reckon; you seem to have the bottom line in self-pity."

Doyle's head felt heavy with despair; Bodie would never, he knew, come closer to saying the forbidden than that. As for himself he seemed unable to say anything at all. Bodie looked at him intensely, and then looked closer.

"*Oh Christ.*" And Bodie's arms went around him, pulled him close, cradled his head on one broad shoulder and rubbed his hair. "It's all right, Ray. Don't. It's all right."

After a while, Bodie's hands slipped underneath his clothes and touched him, the shock of them cold on his warm skin, but gentle. Shivering, he let himself go with it: it was the only security there was left for him in the world. Bodie's mouth settled against his, Bodie's lips warm, both a comfort to him and a lure: again he felt that incredible, desperate diving inside his guts and wanted only more. He wrapped his arms around Bodie and gave himself up to the kiss, making a wild surrender of it, a challenge.

And when Bodie's ceaseless hands asked a question, Doyle himself unbuckled his jeans, unzipped himself, desperate to be touched, and his eyes fell shut at the pleasure of it. A few moments more and Bodie half-laughed, half-sobbed into his ear, something incoherent; then he dropped to his knees in a stinking alley out beneath the stars and the cold and brought a little pleasure to Doyle, the first he had tasted for so long it seemed like the sweetest of his life.

Afterward Bodie held him roughly in his arms until his breathing slowed and his slumped legs straightened. Bodie's own legs ached and he scanned right and left with his eyes, looking for passersby. Terraced houses slanted unrelentingly to the skyline behind them and in front; here and there a light shone out, but if anyone had seen the two dark figures in the narrow alley, Bodie doubted they'd have seen what they were doing. Or if they had, who cared? Probably not the first time.

Doyle's eyes, open now, were trailing over his face hazily. "Come on," Bodie said, not ungently. "Dunno about you but I'm cold."

They walked quickly; the rain had slowed to a sprinkle and wisps of cloud, silver shining in drifting gauze. Doyle felt dazed and shivery, cold to the marrow. But excitement threaded through his veins fast and quick: he felt as if he was setting out on some tremendous adventure, his bearer at his side: all the dangerous romance he could want, and secret tender nights in the darkened tent to come.

Bodie walked just as he always did, hands in his pockets, brisk and sure, head down against the drizzle; he looked the same, showed no outward signs of what he had done. They passed the same group of drunken teenagers they had seen before: nearing midnight now, a six-pack of beer inside each of them, louchely aggressive and looking for a fight. Doyle watched Bodie handle them, putting down hecklers goodhumouredly, calm with the sheer assurance of being the best man there: which he undoubtedly was, no question of it. The teenagers went on without trouble, and they didn't even need to know, Doyle thought wryly, that beneath the armpit of his partner reposed a high-calibre high velocity weapon; the sight of which would disperse all that group male conceit at a stroke-

"Bodie," he said urgently.

Bodie looked at him in surprise. "You okay?"

"No."

He felt confused, a weird elation, and still that excitement so intense it sickened him: coming sweetly, fiercely in Bodie's mouth had not relaxed him, only fired him further: he felt he would never have enough.

"What is it?" Bodie asked him, closer, concern in his eyes. "Soaked, aren't you."

His curls hung limp and sodden and his face was wet. "Let's get back," he said through chattering teeth.

In the room they put no lights on; a streetlamp already cast a glow. Doyle stood there, provocative, halfway between the bed and the bathroom.

"Shall I bath? Or stay dirty?"

Bodie surveyed him. "Oh, I think you'll do as you are," he said between clenched teeth, and he snatched Doyle, pressing them together hard as his lips slid around to Doyle's ear. "I'm not going to let you sleep tonight: you know that, don't you?"

Doyle was sweating, with a twinge of fear. Bodie seemed like a stranger, eyes and teeth gleaming in the half-light: and yet wasn't that just what he had wanted?

Bodie's breathing was fast as he held him; laying his fingers along Doyle's cheek he turned his mouth up to kiss. His hands slid beneath Doyle's jacket, undid the buttons of his shirt and slipped inside, the cold shock of his hands sending a shiver rippling across Doyle's skin.

"Let's go to bed," Doyle managed.

"No hurry," Bodie said; his hand cupped Doyle's neck, his fingers stroking through a tangle of curls as he drew Doyle towards him again, lapped languidly at his lips, then drove his tongue arrogantly into Doyle's mouth. So unlike a woman, the strength of the arms around him like chains to bind him and keep him: a delicious *tendresse* of fear ran up Doyle's spine again as he tasted the alien tongue, his cock springing to life; he grabbed Bodie hard, kissing him back with urgency, with fire in his heart.

"Hey," Bodie murmured, drawing away, "don't rush," and Doyle, drawing in great gulps of air, understood with a thrill which dizzied him: Bodie wanted to stay in charge, even (perhaps) knew all about the darkness in his soul.

Head bowed, he began to strip off his clothes. "You ever done this before, Bodie?"

"Of course I have," Bodie said, lazily amused, eyes trailing over his body, "and don't try pretending you haven't, corruption's written all over you." His hand traced down Doyle's naked arm from his shoulder, over his narrow strong forearms to the slender hands releasing his cock from his jeans, the touch lingering. Bodie laid his fingers atop Doyle's for a moment, and watched him, and darkly smiled. "But it's a nice thought."

After a while Bodie threw off his last garment and joined Doyle on the bed; his partner lay there face up, eyes closed.

"So, Ray," he murmured in a voice so low and soft it stroked Doyle's nerves, "you want to play the virgin for me, is that right?"

It was so nearly true. Doyle simply said nothing, did not stir, lapped by a desire so strong he felt weak.

"Or is it Sleeping Beauty?" Bodie's voice caressed him quietly, gentle lips grazing the sensitive opening of his mouth as it quivered. "Oh yes, Ray, I think I know what you want, all right." And Bodie's tender mouth, all-knowing hands, absolved him of all blame, all guilt; and, submerged beneath a black sweep of pleasure so intense he could die for it, a spice of sweet tender pain.

When once he opened his eyes it was to see Bodie studying him through eyes that glittered through the blackest of lashes, an unnerving hunger, a curiosity which burned. After a moment Bodie smiled at him. Doyle saw that he was shaking; stabbed by swift tenderness, he raised his hand to touch Bodie's cheek, then his mouth, beautiful still; and held Bodie's look as long as he could, before the terrible pulses of ecstasy racked him, swept his whole body up and involved it so that even his fingertips felt it; and then, when all he wanted to do was sleep, Bodie was quick with him. He stayed with Bodie until he felt the brilliance of Bodie's desire for him explode, and then he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was again to Bodie's eyes caressing him, lingering on his face.

"What time is it," Doyle croaked, limp and dazed with heavy, dreamless sleep.

"S only two. Sssh." Bodie stroked him, up and down, long and luxurious and Doyle relaxed under the touch and the eyes until he no longer felt sleepy at all.

He threw back the covers and leaned up on one elbow to look at Bodie, stealing a swift kiss from his lips.

"My turn now, is it?"

Bodie gave it scant consideration, before lying down, his hands uncurling at his sides. "Yeah, if that's what you want."

Doyle considered it for a while longer, while his hand searched slowly over Bodie's body.

"Come on, Ray," Bodie said. "You can take me all right, you're tougher than you look."

There was admiration in that, and something else.

"Yeah, but it worries you, doesn't it?" Doyle guessed.

Bodie sighed as Doyle's rubbing fingers found a sensitive spot. "What does?"

"Losing control."

"I reckon it worries everyone. Even you. But I—"

Doyle pounced on the pause. "—you what?"

Bodie opened his eyes and smiled, a peculiarly sweet smile. "—I trust you."

That and the smile stopped Doyle's breath, stabbed his heart. He said: "So you do. But, you know, I reckon—it just might not be your thing—" He arched an eyebrow at Bodie, waiting.

Bodie lay there, relaxed, unconcerned. "I'd do it for you."

"Yeah," Doyle said softly, "you would, wouldn't you?" And he moved, into Bodie's arms with a little arrogance, a little possessiveness which made Bodie smile.

"We've got time," Doyle said into his ear when another kiss was over. "No need to rush things. You said so yourself." His hands probed Bodie, pressing on the muscles beneath satin skin, the sharpness of bone; he had forgotten that Time was Bodie's *bête noire*.

"Did I?" Bodie said harshly: "Well, that was rash of me; now I'd say get on with it, Doyle, if I were you." Iron arms and legs locked around Doyle, pulled him downwards; Doyle resisted, fighting free, extricating himself finally and rubbing at his left arm where Bodie's grip had burned him.

"Jesus, Bodie," he spat, glaring. He knelt back on his heels, straddling his partner, breathing hard and ignoring the painful glow of abused skin. Bodie just laughed in his face.

"Hurt you, did I?" and his eyes flashed a mocking glint. "Sorry, mate. Just trying to get you going."

Doyle's stare was icy. "What the hell's got into you? I thought you'd be—"

Suicide. He knew it instantly, would have caught it back but Bodie leapt at it like a trickster snatching bullets out of the air: "Did you, Doyle? Should be happy, should I, now that you've so generously, given me everything? Perhaps I should be on my knees to you kissing your bloody arse in gratitude—?" Then he grinned, a slow delightful smile which didn't touch the burn of his eyes. "I suppose anything's possible."

Doyle sat back, dragging a hand across his lips, a bitter taste in his mouth. "I didn't mean that and you know it." But he lied.

"Oh, don't give me that, Doyle," Bodie drawled, looking up at him with amusement. "Don't tell me you don't think it's everyone's lifetime ambition to come on to you." His hands settled onto Doyle's hips, pinched him lightly.

Trying to work this through, Doyle battled his rising temper, his sense that all this was slipping out of his grasp. He placed a hand flat on Bodie's broad chest. "If you wanna keep it just sex, Bodie... Safer that way. Keep your options open..."

Surprised, Bodie opened his eyes wide; he pursed his lips. Then he sighed, a warm gust Doyle felt like a caress on his naked skin, blowing his fears away.

"Ah, no Ray..." A charming, perverse smile lifted his features into pure, arrogant mischief. "I reckon I could make you happy, all right."

And it was suddenly there again: Doyle breathed hard, and looked down at Bodie, and felt, after all, that they had slipped once more into that curious intimacy so intense there was room for nothing else. They had felt it before, out on the job together. Bodie lifted a hand to trace the curls around his face, taking infinite care, the drift of his fingers exquisite. "But as to time... remember old Marvell, bloody winged chariot and all. Shouldn't hang about too much, old son."

"Gather ye rosebuds?" Doyle asked, amused. Then thinking lewdly about it, "Sounds all right." He ducked his head, kissed Bodie's chest, tasted salt on each nipple. Bodie sighed, and pulled up the bedclothes around them: the bed smelt warm and sultry. A nice place to be on a cold November night. Leaning over Bodie's warm skin, the yielding of his belly, the sweet pressure of his thigh: Doyle basked in it.

"This may be the longest night of our lives," Bodie said into his ear; it jarred Doyle out of his pleasant driftings, and he was tired anyway.

"Certainly feels like it," he snapped. Bodie's silence was a speaking one. "Stop it, Bodie. Just bloody stop it, will you? Don't be so bloody *Camille*. Okay, so you've got a touch of the shadows. Not been too 'appy lately. Me, neither. But it's over now and it's time to start looking past a funeral with full military honours, because I missed my

chance. Geddit?" He paused, looked down deeply into Bodie's eyes, darker than his own and wilder. "Nobody died, Bodie. *Nobody died*."

"Not for want of tryin'," Bodie drawled, with that bright edge of cheery insanity, and looking at the terrible wound on Doyle's chest, tightly stretched and ridging as it healed: he touched it. Doyle let him, closing his eyes. "Don't worry, Doyle; keep at it. You'll make it one day."

A shining rill of anger trickled through Doyle; but it ebbed when he saw Bodie's expression. "Ah, Bodie. What am I gonna do with you, hey?" he murmured, fierce with love and despair.

"Whatever you like," Bodie said, and there was suddenly so much warmth about him, so much attraction, that Doyle gave himself into it wholly and fled the dark with him, at least for a while.

Bodie whistled in the shower; he seemed happy, though reading Bodie was never easy. Some people took Bodie as he appeared to be: a born fighter, somewhat mindless, a gleeful, malicious sense of humour like a boy. Not many saw, or cared to see, the twisted line of character which centred Bodie: it didn't matter, anyway. If there was something not quite safe about Bodie it was to CI5's advantage. Not to mention Bodie's lover. And the strength Doyle had feared, he found he worshipped.

Doyle was only too happy to follow Bodie way out, right out to the limits...

To the end.

He poked his head around the bathroom door to find Bodie shaving. Bodie winked at him and carried on, tracing the shaver around his jawline with concentrated care.

Doyle wandered back and checked with Todman, then with Cowley; the latter, he was told, was out of the office and unable to speak to him. Doyle wrinkled his brow and frowned and looked out of the window. A feeble sun was shining this morning. Bodie came into the room behind him and he didn't turn, only rested his head against the arm Bodie slung around him as he leaned to look out beside Doyle. Bodie smelt freshly of soap and manly scents; Doyle could feel the warmth of him beneath his shirt.

After a while he said, "Can you think of any reason the Cow wouldn't want to talk to us?"

"Yeah," Bodie drawled, and ruffled his hair, but Doyle remained pensive. "Operation bloody Susie," he said, remembering.

Bodie looked suddenly alert: "Do you think—?" Then relaxing, "Nah, Doyle, 's just your guilty conscience."

"I dunno," Doyle muttered.

"Oh all right, all right," Bodie said goodhumouredly. "I've always had me faith in you, ever since you picked that winner at Kempton Park." He knelt down on the floor and pulled out the bag containing their armoury.

Doyle's face twisted with an agonised grimace as the cruel memory surfaced. "I never bet on the bloody thing!"

Bodie's smile was smug as he ranged out their ammunition neatly, sorting it. "Yeah, I did though, didn't I?"

No need to remind him. "What did you do with the money?" Doyle asked sourly. "Fifty to one, wannit?"

"Look, Ray, you can't say I didn't treat you with the proceeds."

"Oh yeah, I remember. Nelly's caf—sausage sandwich—cup of tea and a digestive.

"Should back your own hunches, sunshine. Can't leave everything to me."

Doyle knelt beside him, helped him pack it so it was ready for instant use. His eyes flashed up, met Bodie's levelly. "I'm backin' this one."

"Ah, no need to worry," Bodie said easily. "Could fight off an army with this lot."

"How about Towser and Macklin?" Doyle suggested, and Bodie made a face.

"Now that's optimistic."

The day passed. Nothing.

By the end of their watch the room began to close in on them.

"—and this is the Big Bopper," Bodie droned into the handset, "signin' off for today. After the pips—" Doyle blew the pips through his hand— "the airways are yours, boys." He held out the R/T for Doyle's final, flourishing pip: then thumbed it off.

"That's it for another action-packed day. But cheer up, sweetheart: word is they'll call us off tomorrow night. Before athlete's foot sets in." He rose and stretched, arms behind his head.

"Why does Cowley want Soo anyway?" Doyle idly asked.

Bodie shrugged. "Bit of third degree, no questions asked, I suppose."

"Sprat to catch a mackerel?"

"Yeah, I reckon."

"Been reading up on the political side," Doyle said distantly, "and it looks like Soo's about the worst choice the Council could have made, from our point of view, that is. Very traditionalist. Goes right with the floggings in the street, no truck with these nasty corrupting Western ideas, sort of thing. Bet Cowley's intending a lecture on the virtues of reform."

"Maybe," Bodie shrugged. "But he's not payin' Soo's salary, is he? Only so much you can do to poke about in the way they choose to run their country."

"Does Cowley know that, though?"

"Yeah, I reckon. Ours not to reason why, Doyle."

Hearing the ring of unfinished poetry and waiting for the inevitable, Doyle regarded him grimly. Bodie chuckled despite himself and kissed him lightly, with the kind of presumptuous arrogance Doyle had expected to resent.

Instead he found himself holding onto Bodie and fighting thirstily for more of his kisses; his hands slid around him, under his armpits, and discovered the hard snub weapon, warmed by Bodie's heat. On a whim his fingers rubbed it gently, slid over it and held onto it as he thrust himself, hard, against Bodie's thigh.

When Bodie released him his eyes were bright with with knowing, even with respect. "Randy old toad you are. Pretty, isn't it?"

In answer Doyle slipped the weapon out of its snug leather holster: it came smoothly, just as it should. His hand curled around it with the ease of familiarity-after all, his own was identical-and he cradled it be-

tween them, Bodie's thighs pressing against his own: he felt Bodie's unease, the tensing of his hands behind Doyle's back, but Bodie staved with him. didn't move.

The smooth shining metal was warm to his touch, the black tunnel stared up at them with its one bold eye. Light smacked off it smartly; it glinted its arrogance. The ultimate symbol of power; anyone would bow to the one who held it.

Bodie's breath stirred his hair as lips slid around to his ear. "Safety on, is it?"

Doyle felt for it with his thumb and flicked it off. As he did so he felt his loins flood with obscene pleasure and excitement.

Bodie's eyes were wary now, his grasp on Doyle loose but sure. "Gonna kill us both, is that it?"

"So you keep on sayin'," Doyle replied, the lick of his tongue around his half-smile slow. "Might as well be now as 'ang around waitin' for it."

"Never could stand in a queue, could you, Doyle?" Bodie drawled; he was tensed with alarm, yet he held on. Doyle might be playing, he might be serious: he had the character for it either way. And Bodie did not care to take a chance on it.

"'S true," Doyle said, pressing closer. Bodie could feel how hot he was, his body damp with sweat beneath the thin shirt. "You're so damn sure we're gonna snuff it, Bonnie an' Clyde and all that, why not cheat and go for it before it comes for us? Why not, Bodie, eh?" He jabbed the gun upwards and Bodie recoiled grimly.

"Just bloody watch it, will you, 'cos I'm not sure a hole in the jaw is the best way to go."

"Then what is?" Doyle asked. He pressed the gun to Bodie's belly, soft muscle ridging to hard as the snub barrel probed. "Here?" He trawled it upwards, settled it on a soft spot midway between the breastbone, over the pulsing heart. "Or here? Do the job all right, this range." His eyes were shining: no doubts. No fear.

One second away from death Bodie acted, seized the weapon from Doyle and clicked the safety on as he jerked Doyle's wrist hard, and held him harder, and thrust the gun straight for his genitals, caressing the out£3£3£3

line of his cock with an arrogant sweep of the weapon: "How about here, since this is where all this is comin' from?" Tenderly, lingering, he eyed the pale pinkness of his partner's mouth, a part of Doyle which always featured in the occasional sweaty fantasy he had indulged himself with when longing had seemed a far step from reality: gently, carefully, he traced the Magnum around the sensuous curve of the mouth, then slipped it between lips which parted for it. "There, Ray," he said, voice low, "it's a substitute, innit? You suck on this—" he pressed it in a little deeper— "when what you really want is something else. Something that won't blow away the back of your head when it goes off." He smiled, a curve of arrogance. "Not quite, anyway." And then he snatched the gun away, spun it in his hand.

Doyle tasted metal laced with corbomite and spat, wiping his mouth on his hand, glaring at Bodie. Bodie took him in two hands again, gentle but inexorable, a smooth course set in motion by Doyle's perversity and unstoppable now. Doyle knew what was coming—indeed, he had courted it—and fear laced his high excitement; his heart knocked in his ears and he felt dizzy, his head ringing.

"Tastes nasty, eh?" Bodie whispered to him. "Let's see if we can chase it away. Something sweeter—"

Doyle heard the rasp of a zipper; closed his eyes trembling; heard the dark whisper: "Come on, Ray. Kneel for me." And, blind but sure, he knelt, knowing that Bodie would not disappoint him.

He felt the caress of it over his ear, and the cold kiss of it at his temple.

He said, muffled: "Keep it there."

"Of course," Bodie said above him, and smiled, and shut his eyes.

In the night he woke, and found Bodie propped on one elbow, and watching him again by the moonlight which cast a path through unshaded glass. The room was silvery, Bodie's face pale; he met Doyle's wideopen eyes. Smiled: briefly, then the smile died; he resumed his brooding, selfabsorbed stare at Doyle's body. "A'right?" Doyle asked him, yawning. They were both rather short on sleep, and nights in a single bed were cramped. He lay back on the pillow and examined Bodie's face, stark and perfect in the pale purity of moonshine, his eyes darkened by shadows.

SEBASTIAN

"You're beautiful, Ray, you know that?" Bodie asked, in a strangely detached, almost impersonal way.

Of all things... A gurgle arose in Doyle's throat. "You don't mean that."

But the silence, even the intensity of Bodie's gaze had something disturbing about it: the dark, melancholy sweep of Bodie's fears became monstrous, filled the room from within, beating on the window.

"Don't you want this?" Doyle asked quietly; he slipped his hands into Bodie's armpits for the delights of warmth, and silken hair damp to his touch: "Don't you, Bodie?"

Bodie stared at him, aloof, almost aristocratic, an expression Doyle would have laughed at outright under any other circumstances.

"Don't be bloody stupid."

Because love, when it turned this way, might free you from one kind of misery even as it enslaved you with others; but you could never, having once tasted it, spit it away in the wind.

"Bodie—I need you," Doyle said, panicking suddenly, snatching at time the way Bodie did. And Bodie smiled at him, a little quirk of his cheek as he touched Doyle's hand, lacing their fingers gently. "I know."

The comfort of it was immense; as he settled down to sleep again, near to Bodie, he knew they would be all right.

The were both of them complex, unpredictable, with stardrive needs born of the path they had taken; but together they would be all right.

Wherever he needed to go, Bodie would take him

He fell asleep.

Bodie went down for breakfast, ate enormously, smiled sweetly at the waitress and at Fred, and returned to call Cowley.

The old man was unavailable.

Bodie shook his head. "I dunno, Doyle. 'S odd."

"That's what I've been sayin', innit?" Doyle began with painstaking earnestness, "I'm beginning to wonder-think we should confer with Spud 'n Dud?"

"Nah, they'll just take your head off," Bodie disagreed. "Listen, today's the deadline, right? Nothing happens today, we clear out, leaving, of course, a tip for the maid."

"Payin' our bill?" Doyle wondered.

Bodie gave it his best concentration. "Nah. She can send it on to Cowley."

Doyle was pushing past him as he spoke; Bodie tripped him, catching him and tipping him back in his arms, Doyle instantly arching perilously, tango-style. Bodie began to hum something Spanish. "We gotta stop meeting like this," Doyle breathed, a centimetre away.

"Yeah: this any better?" Bodie agreed, crossing his eyes and leering.

Doyle came up from the impossible position in a fluid move, and he was chuckling. Bodie sank onto the bed and watched him.

Bodie did not yet dare to believe in what had happened to them: it seemed safest not to look it in the eye lest it bang in his face and vanish. He was playing it by ear; Ray was difficult. Not easy to understand, disturbingly sexual: not, most definitely, an easy ride. Keep him guessing, that was the thing; keep him intrigued: look at the way Ray was looking at him now, interest and appreciation livening his eyes. Bodie blew him a kiss, and smiled.

He still had plenty of tricks up his sleeves; oh yes, Ray might surely think he was the last word in brilliant sexual eccentricity, but Bodie knew better, and more, and worse...

Then, when it was all passing, all that sexual rush and fury, perhaps they might find out what they really had going for them.

If they got that far, of course.

He caught Doyle's hand, and pulled him towards him. Noting the darkening shades of mood, Doyle said, "Now what?"

"Do you believe in premonition, Ray?" Bodie asked him, keeping him there with easy strength, holding onto his hand.

Looking straight into his eyes, Doyle said, "Yes, I suppose I do."

Bodie nudged his knee against Doyle's

thigh, a new and precious intimacy. "Then take me seriously."

Doyle was quiet for a moment, staring down. Then he lifted his eyes and said lightly, "I know what's the trouble with you. Don't suppose you were too thrilled about the prospect of a new partner, just when you'd got me trained."

Bodie picked up his cue, "Yeah, took long enough-" but his heart wasn't in it and he continued, his voice dropping, "Listen, Ray—" and he saw the irritation flash into Doyle's eyes, his unwillingness to go over and over it. Bodie just said: "There's a little voice in my head keeps telling me this is borrowed time, Ray. That's all."

Doyle politely retrieved his hand, squatting by the bed. He began to stir around in the ammunition case, sticking clips into his pockets, sliding them into the tight back pocket of his jeans. Bodie squatted too, watching him very carefully, very seriously, eyes on the rounded curve of his partner's cheek. He raised his hand to shape a caress around it, light as a butterfly's wing. He said, consideringly: "I'd really hate, you know, to lose you. So soon."

Perfectly still, Doyle watched him, his eyes a stony grey. Bodie smiled at him, puffed out his cheeks and blew a straggling curl off his forehead, hummed a few bars of 'Waltzing Matilda'; then breaking off, grinning at Doyle's faraway expression. "Ah, don't look like that, Ray. Like your budgie died and you'd just bought a new tin of seed."

"What do you want, Bodie?" Doyle asked with a kind of desperation, brought up at last to stare Bodie's point in the face. "Set ourselves up in a little glass case or something and look out at the world?" Bodie was silent, his eyes dwelling on Doyle's face, eyes, mouth. After a moment Doyle remembered to speak again; he said, more gently, "We couldn't live that way, fella. Get bored in no time, we would."

"Can't do without this, is that it?" Angered now, Bodie reached out and flipped Doyle's gun. "Feel less of a man without it, do you? You could always take up killing birds."

A little stain of colour crept along Doyle's cheekbones: his head lifted and he stared

Bodie in the eye. "Comin' from you, that's sweet. You got a licence in triplicate: didn't want to take any chances on losin' it, didja Bodie?"

But Bodie had already repented. "Ah don't, Ray. Don't let's fight. Okay, if that's what you want. We'll go on till Cowley retires us, gives us our old age pension and the CI5 gold watch for distinguished service in the field."

He winked at Doyle and got up, to ease cramping thighs. Doyle stayed there a moment longer, thinking. "Waltzin' Matilda, Matilda, my darlin'," Bodie sang quietly, looking out of the window.

"That's not the tune," Doyle said absently.

"Nah, it is," Bodie said loftily. "Proper, original tune that is."

Doyle looked up at him, momentarily diverted. "You're up the chute, Bodie. It goes like this." And he la-laed unselfconsciously.

Bodie made a face. "Too bloody Rolf Harris, mate. *This* is the original. As learnt in the Ozzie outback, in person." And he resumed his performance.

Matilda, my darling. A strange sweet sinking filled Doyle's belly, as he got up. He was thinking something quite ridiculous: that to be Bodie's darling, to have the other man lay claim to him with just that endearment, might just be his own personal price. A price above nations, above rubies; above pride itself.

"Bodie." He sprang up and over to where his partner leaned forward, hands on the sill. "Just had a thought."

Bodie mimed shock, arrest, disbelief. "Come here." His hand settled on Doyle's forehead. "Take it easy now Ray, still comin' is it?"

"How about this. Ask the Cow to be taken off Active. Too old, lost our bottle, got religion, whatever. Go into admin.—who knows, you might end up in Cowley's spot, he's gotta die some time, 'asn't he? Or on the trainin' side of things. You know—here's the shooter, make-a-will-and-do-it-quick-sort of thing."

Bodie stared at him, unsure how to take this. "You serious?" Doyle thought about it, lip caught between teeth, then he nodded.

"You'd do that?"

"Yeah, I reckon."

"Right now?" Bodie said.

Doyle shook his head. "Ah, no. See this one out, eh? Safe enough 'ere even for you, innit? Go and practise your knots or somethin'." And Bodie subsided to think it over; their whole lives on the brink of change.

It was perhaps ten minutes later when Doyle, his hands clasped moodily around a mug of coffee, spotted a limousine drawing up outside the embassy.

"Bodie." His hand went out, grabbed his partner's sleeve.

"Wha'?" Bodie applied himself to the binoculars. The door of the car opened and out got a tall man, flanked by two more. "Yeh, that's 'im," Bodie said economically, grabbing the R/T and tossing it to Doyle, who was checking his gun, swift and obsessive, stuffing it inside his jacket: "Better wake up the Spud. This is it mate."

The fire-escape was a rickety iron contraption. They flew down it five steps at a time, Bodie addressing his R/T as he ran: "How long?"

"One minute," the R/T said. "Get to it, laddo, meet you there."

Action. Adrenalin pumped through Doyle's veins, giving him a dizzying rush of fear and excitement; he steadied, as he always did, tasted the extra drive of it, the edge. The very air seemed stronger, keener around him, he felt alive and ready to go. This was more like it. Swiftly and unobtrusively he slipped around the rear of the small white building, gun drawn, dragging on a black hood—absolute anonymity, that was in the ground rules, but he momentarily hated it; and then he forgot it. Bodie, ex-Para, looked at home in his as he scudded around the side of the building at the identical moment to Doyle; he gestured to indicate that Todman and Flaherty were in position at the frontcounting one, two, three-

Doyle and Bodie charged the door, running, flying kick bashing it down. Immediately the piercing whine of an alarm sounded; they ignored it. If this was going to work at all it had to be fast: should be, Christ, they'd planned it often enough, exactly this strikeand-run scenario. They arrived in a pillared hall: empty. Looking up they could see a gal-

leried landing with two, three doors opening onto it, very dangerous, had to watch it all the time. Keeping his eyes stretched wide Bodie motioned Doyle in front of him, up the stairs, covering every angle except the rear which was the job of their colleagues, no chance to check, just trust.

Doyle was right out there in the bloody front line, oh god the thoughtless courage of him. The alarm wailed mournfully. Doyle reached the top of the stairs. And at that moment a man burst out of one of the doors and centred the gun he held on Doyle.

Instantly Bodie killed him, steadying the gun carefully on his other hand: nerves did not affect him at all as he shot, not until he realised, as the man cartwheeled over the banister and thudded to the floor, just how close Doyle had come. His heart thudding and his guts diving Bodie was up the last four stairs in a flash, ejecting spent cartridges and slipping in others. "Cover me," he said tersely. "I'm goin' in."

Doyle spat and wiped his mouth. "The fuck you are." They had never, not since the first days of training, played it that way. Doyle, faster and smaller, had always gone in first, ably and expertly covered by his partner, the better long-range shot.

In that second, looking into Doyle's dead, cold eyes, Bodie knew and understood that there were harder ways of losing Doyle than seeing him fall.

Eyes hard and bleak, he drew up his gun, gestured Doyle on his way.

Soo was there, in the first room, with the two men he had entered the building with. Both had guns drawn, both loosed off shots as Doyle burst in yelling and diving— "Freeze!"

The shots whined past and smacked into the doorjamb, over the head of the man rolling. Then there was Bodie, there behind him, the large Uzi up and ready.

For a moment no-one moved.

A smile crossed Bodie's lips. The worst was over: Doyle was alive, sitting up on the floor. "Come on, drop 'em. You can't argue with this, can you?" And he lifted the black heavy machine-gun, ready, despite the touch of humour to fire; resolute. "Only sensible," Doyle added, catlike and watchful as he crouched on the floor. "He won't hesitate, you know, 'e got out of bed the wrong side."

With a gesture to his companions, Soo raised his hands. With a mutter, they dropped their guns.

Doyle darted in to pick them up. "Now you come nice an' quietly," he said to Soo, "No-one'll get hurt. Someone just wants a little chat with you, thass all."

"Maybe a cup of tea if you're lucky," Bodie chimed in poshly.

Doyle pursed his lips, sucked in his cheeks. "Ooh, that's pushin' it a bit. Thursday, innit?" And they were off, clattering down the stairs, Soo in front of them, cheerful in their satisfaction that the job had gone off well, no bloodshed, Mission (stage one) Accomplished.

No sign of Spud and Dud. Bodie thrust Soo none too gently into the rear of the Capri parked exactly where their fellow agents had promised; the man was wearing a dark overcoat, had a certain nobility to his darkeyed looks. He acquiesced to Bodie's manhandling with a kind of patience; it occurred to Bodie that almost certainly he thought he was being taken to his execution. So he winked at him and gave a grin. "Nothing to worry about. Like 'e said, just a talk."

"I don't spik your language," Amun Soo said coldly.

"This language—? Universal," Doyle told him, looking in the rear mirror, and they were off, gunning away from the kerb with a terrible screech of tyres. Bodie winced delicately. Thank god it wasn't his car!

Ten yards down the road was a blueshirted bobby. Doyle whistled, uncouth as ever. "Close, that."

"Nah, had a story ready," Bodie said unperturbed, as if explaining away the abduction of a diplomat from the sacred ground of an embassy with a submachine gun dangling form your arm was of small matter to a talented liar.

Doyle had the R/T out, driving with one hand on the wheel, using a prearranged code: "Baby's in the cradle. On our way to the nursery. ETA ten minutes."

"Message received and understood, Nighthawk."

Doyle chucked the handset over the back of the seat to Bodie. "Think we'll get our merit awards for this?"

"Nope," Bodie said gloomily, "more likely a fulltime post in this department. Sometimes it doesn't pay to be too good, y'know." As he spoke he spotted a brown van, which he had also spotted in the last street.

Doyle was looking in the rear mirror. "There's still a chance."

"You spotted it," Bodie said in admiration. "They don't call you Nighthawk for nothing. Would you care for a little lie down?" This last politely, to Soo: a flash of blue eyes and he had pressed the man, gently enough, to the seat and covered him with a rug.

"Been with us since we started," Doyle said on a note of surprise; because no-one should have got away from the Embassy in time to follow them, that was what Flaherty and Todman were there for. Speaking of whom— "I suppose it's not our little friends, is it? You know how they love a party."

"They got a Capri, haven't they? Standard issue, innit?"

"Except 6.2. He got the 2CV."

"Yeh, but that's because he told Our Leader he was a cognac man."

Doyle swerved down a side street without signalling then doubled back around the square. When the silver nose of the Capri slipped out onto the road again, they could see the brown rear of the van a hundred yards in front of them.

"That's beautiful, mate," Bodie said, impressed. A dark head could be seen poking out of the van's rear window. "Look—" Bodie pulled Soo's head up for a brief look— "That a friend of yours, sunshine?" He patted the head back down again, onto his lap.

The man looked up at him, cool and impassive. He had a certain aristocracy to his looks; Bodie was fleetingly reminded of Persian nobility, flying carpets and forty thieves. "I have no friends in this country."

"I know the feeling," Bodie said with a grimace. *Poor bugger, doesn't look like a terrorist. Probably got a photo of his kids in his pocket.* "How long, Ray?" Still, an hour with Cowley never killed anyone. Came pretty damn close at times, mind you. But that was only if you worked for him. This fella'd be back home by teatime, with a good story to tell—ABDUCTED by aliens! TAKEN in a strange craft! INTERROGATED by a small green Scot with a limp!—

Doyle's voice cut into his lightening thoughts: "Ten minutes if we're lucky. Fifteen if there's bloody lights on the Finniston Road again."

"Who are you?" Soo asked suddenly; his dark eyes, open and big as pansies, had never left Bodie's face.

Bodie looked down at him, saw the curl of his nostrils, the tint of his skin brushed by a brighter sun than ever shone here.

"Nobody," he echoed softly. "Me and him—nobody at all." And Amun Soo met his eyes for a moment in perfect understanding, for in the context of duty, he too was nobody; a cypher to be moved by his country at will.

Bodie was to remember this afterwards, when it became important to him to believe that the man understood, would not blame Bodie for what happened; but instead what lingered to haunt him was a sense of his own treachery. Quite unjustified. He no more than any of them knew what lay ahead as they travelled along the wide London road, eyes shaded against the dazzle of the low November sun.

The turned off the bypass at last, took narrow streets again. Doyle was giving the insect-dotted windscreen a blast with antifreeze, the wipers swishing this way and that; he was driving fast but not urgently. Postbox, petshop, fish and chippie. Into an industrial backwater, bodyshops littered with rusting tools. And here was the particular graveyard of abandoned vehicles they sought; Doyle turned in. As he did so, Bodie's "Wait a minute!" clashed with his own curse: "Christ, Bodie! That's not—"

Turning in behind them was the little brown van.

"If there's anything you want to tell us," Doyle said.

"-now might be a good time," Bodie added, brighteyed. He was stashing ammo

into a belt, sorting it fast and furious. But Soo looked merely blank.

"*Was* 'e behind?" Doyle said urgently, swinging their car along a covering line of vehicles, bumping up and down on the rough terrain.

"No, no chance," Bodie said calmly. "No way both of us could have missed him."

"Then someone somewhere's a bit leaky." He pulled the car to a scorching halt behind the disused garage offices. "Where the *hell* is the old man?" He pulled out his gun, checked it speedily.

Bodie gave him a slow smile beneath the burn of his eyes. "How does 'not here' sound to you?"

"Very likely," Doyle said grimly, and thumped his hand onto the dashboard: "*Damnit!* You beginning to get the feeling we've been set up?"

"Or strung up." Bodie glanced over at the van, a hundred yards away, from which two, three—too bloody many—brown figures were emerging.

Doyle cast him a swift glance, stuffing his pockets full of bullets, clips, the lot. "I take it all back, 3.7, you're a bloody seer. *You* can pick the Kempton Park runner next time."

"Never works on anything good," Bodie said glumly. Time was running out on them. They dragged Soo out of the car and dashed around the back into the office. They could see, all around them, little brown-overalled men like crabs scuttling for cover, finding vantage points—

"Safe House," Doyle said viciously. He dropped to one knee behind a window, sighted his gun through it, grim and set and in a rage.

"These—are they your friends?" Soo asked, from where he lay on the floor, pushed there by Bodie and snarled at to stay.

"Nope. Are they yours?" Bodie asked grimly, busy.

"No."

"Party's not going to be much fun then, is it?" Bodie said with sweet, black temper, blue eyes gleaming and watchful, very very watchful as they darted all around, front, back, sides, front.

"Where the *hell* is Cowley?" Doyle exploded as they crawled onto the floor and examined the empty room for vantage points. This seemed, at present, just about as dangerous as anything they had ever done. Bodie was deeply troubled, searching his mind for something, anything, which would get them out of here alive; but right now he just had this grim feeling they'd get no takers at all on life insurance. *Pity. Sorry, Auntie Sheila. Never mind. You'll like me African tusk thing.* "Too many bloody windows," he muttered, savagely thrusting the butt of his gun through the glass, recovering it and sighting it in through the hole: little brown spiders, scuttling. "We're going to get surrounded in here, Doyle."

Doyle snorted. "Thanks, Bodie. I hadn't noticed that." He was seething, breathing quite hard: but he forced himself to slow down, calm his nerves, set himself straight. "I don't like this. There's something wrong."

"Maybe we should just make our excuses and leave?"

"So where are Spud an' bloody Dud when we need 'em?"

Bodie didn't answer that. He was remembering Todman, taking up a position at the front of the building. And a whisk of flying blond hair as his partner circled the corner beyond.

And then—nothing.

"Yeah, I think we should be tryin' to make a run for it," Doyle decreed, watching like a hawk for the first move, for any move at all.

"That's brilliant, mate. Trouble is, the Old Man wanted us here—"

"Old Man isn't here himself. And I thought he was the Star Guest."

"—other trouble is, I've got this feelin' that now we're 'ere, they may just fancy a quick game before we leave," Bodie concluded with gritty fatalism.

Actually, something was happening, but not the quick explosive start they were tensed for. A man with a megaphone was approaching the ramshackle building, one arm raised.

"That's brave," Bodie muttered, raising his rifle an inch, "I wouldn't like his job."

"What makes you think we haven't got it?" Doyle growled; his mind was working overtime on things he planned to say to Cowley when they got back.

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*"YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR,"* boomed out the megaphone. *"LEAVE IT AND GO AND THERE'LL BE NO TROUBLE."* 

Bodie looked down at Soo, and back up at Doyle. Soo made no pleas for his life, did not beg them to stay. "He doesn't look like a terrorist, does 'e?" Bodie said softly, to his partner, and Doyle just shook his head, crouching on his haunches, whipcord thighs straining his tight and faded jeans.

"I think we should take it back where we found it."

"Flying carpet?" Bodie suggested sarcastically, because clearly they wouldn't even get as far as the road.

"In the Embassy, I was safe," Soo said. "Many people worked hard to bring me there, where I might be protected. And you have undone all that." He said it with no particular reproach, still calm, merely laying the facts before them.

"Who's after you?" Doyle demanded, hard and direct.

Soo shrugged. "It could be many people...in my position, one has many enemies. Particularly now, when the election is due."

"We've got to get him back there," Doyle said. "It's the only way to get a chance—"

"Oh brilliant, Doyle," Bodie snapped, getting edgy. "I'll just pop out and explain then, shall I?" Doyle was on the R/T now, picking up a crackle of static; he flipped it, banged it. "Still no back-up."

"Trouble," Bodie muttered; all of this had an increasingly nasty look to it, like something recovered from the back of the fridge. The man with the megaphone was retreating, at a run; obviously they had decided enough lip service had been paid to negotiation. "Well, if you're ready, mate, I think they are."

And as the bangs and blasts began, Doyle said to Bodie: "You were right, you know. Let's open a cafe together," but he was never sure if Bodie had heard him, because by then they were in the thick of it.

Soo died very early on, struck quickly and cleanly by a bullet in the head. The two CI5 men lasted quite a long time, scooping and pressing and aiming and firing, firing; the air was blue and the skies seemed to ring with noise. There was so much blood and confusion that Doyle could not decide, crawling hazily about the floor some time later, whether or not Bodie was dead; he was silent, marble-white, and his right hand appeared to be in bloody tatters. It didn't seem to matter a great deal, since Doyle knew it was only a matter of time before they came in here and finished everyone off, himself included; he couldn't shoot any more, too damn tired, something wrong in his chest.

*Too many. Sorry, Bodie.* He laid his head down next to the dark one of his mate. *Gave it our best shot.* 

Only he had the feeling it had all been bloody futile.

They met in the corridor outside Cowley's office. It had been a long time, and each found the changes in the other unsettling, but then there were bound to be changes. Bodie looked fit but for the sling and bandage he wore on his right hand; he was thinner, grimmer. Doyle was quiet: still thin, still greyish. He would pick up, no doubt, in warmer weather.

By now, some three weeks after the trouble, they had each of them pieced it all together; and nothing they had learned predisposed them fondly towards Cowley. And so the interview began.

"You wanted him dead," Doyle accused, eyes hard and stony, "so you set him up. Someone else kills him, and *you* come out of it smelling of roses."

Cowley eyed his surly operative coldly. "The British Government wanted him dead, Doyle, and this way we've avoided any hint of an international incident. You know quite well if you've read the papers that any number of his own countrymen were out for his life before the election takes place. Now the party he represents will be, in all likelihood, overthrown and replaced by one—less *extreme* in its views. I tell you, the world's a safer place today without him in it."

"Who's to judge that?" Doyle said, quiet, but in his eyes were depths of violence.

Cowley said: "I did, Doyle. I judged that."

SEBASTIAN

"Funny that," Bodie said, stirring from where he leaned against the wall. "Then why do I feel as if his death's on my conscience?"

"And mine." Doyle's gaze never left Cowley for an instant.

"Not only that," Bodie said lightly, "but his death came rather expensive, wouldn't you say?" The fingers of his one good hand tapped unceasingly on the wall. "At the price of Todman, for example. And nearly at the price of Doyle and me, as well."

"You've forgotten something, Bodie," Doyle said. "We're expendable. In black and white on our contracts, that is."

Cowley made a noise, an exclamation. He pushed his chair away from the desk and stood up, a small, irascible man who still had the power to chill his operatives with a glance, a word—even these two. He met their eyes unflinchingly, angry in his own right. "Ach, Doyle. You and Bright-Eyes there were meant to dump Soo and run. No-one said you had to hang around doing your Western Heroes act."

"Yeh, but we wouldn't have," Bodie burst out, stung, "if we'd had back-up to cover us out, would we?"

That silenced them all for a moment, for these two, bruised and hurt and altered as they were, had at least come back. Todman hadn't been so lucky. Killed by some bodyguard's bullet before he ever left the Embassy, his term of duty with George Cowley finished before its time.

And theirs?

Cowley did not mention the future. Nor did they.

In the circumstances, an astonishing omission.

Bodie turned right outside the grey anonymous building which housed CI5, head down, trudging along. Doyle kept up with him.

"Where you going?"

"Physio," Bodie said. He did not look at Doyle.

Doyle asked because he had to: "You gonna be able to shoot with that thing?" Bodie's hand was a mess, shattered horrifically in crossfire: ironic. They had delivered Soo to his execution, as per the (hush-hush) behest of Her Majesty's Government who paid their salaries and required of them to ask no questions even in the dirtiest wars: if they had been knocked about a little in the process, so what? They had done their job. Their wages were safe.

Bodie met his eyes then, and a chill swept across Doyle's skin, starting at his cheeks and travelling quickly downwards so that he felt drenched with cold all through. "Who knows?" Bodie shrugged: two words to dismiss his livelihood, his life.

Doyle opened his mouth to speak, but could not. Bodie was turning, about to go on his way; a separate entity now, encased in walls of grey solitude. Doyle could scarcely believe that once they had—

Shared something intolerably precious. Better to drift apart, now, like this, than go the way they had been falling.

Not because what they had was not strong enough.

"Shall I come?" he heard himself ask, a last shot in the dark.

But because it was, as Bodie had seen, too strong by far for either of them to survive the breaking of it.

Bodie was looking at him brusquely, ice in his eyes. "No, don't bother."

Better this way. He had seen Spud: ferociously dryeyed, burning up within. It was not comfortable to be near him.

He watched Bodie go on his way. Something was breaking inside him, but it was all for the best. Darkness was encroaching on the street; it was November, the evenings started early. Soon it would be Christmas, buses packed with shoppers, Santa everywhere you looked. He watched every step of Bodie's, but Bodie did not get very far along the pavement, his pace faltering, then bringing him to a halt.

He turned around, and faced Doyle. "Ray?"

Doyle could not answer, his throat choked.

"Come with me, will you?" Bodie asked, almost diffidently, and Doyle nodded. Wherever they had to go—

They would to together. He began to run.

September 1991

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# BREAKING AND ENTERING

Three pieces of fun and fluff for your consumption. 'A Touch of English' is another addition to our ongoing sports-themed series. 'Flight of Fancy' owes its inspiration to a particular two-year old, a particular recent long flight to Los Angeles, and a very particular sunbeam of a steward. (Bodie would definitely have liked him!) And finally, we present the story affectionately referred to as 'the laundry list'. Challenge the wee Scot to create a tale from that most mundane of objcts and she can't resist putting fingers to keyboard and whacking away.

# A TOUCH OF ENGLISH EMMA SCOT

ONLY DOYLE would come to a stately home in his patched jeans, his scruffy olive green tshirt with the salad cream stain on it and his oldest trainers. In his defence, it would only be fair to add that he had been given the grand total of three minutes and forty-five seconds warning that he was going to be spending the next four days not on leave, as he was supposed to be, but mingling with the guests at one of the nation's finest homes. He'd had a choice: spend his less than four minutes getting changed and leave his home without so much as a toothbrush, or go as he was and actually have time to pack.

Glancing up as his partner walked into the billiards room, Bodie was extremely glad that Ray had decided to pack. Bodie was quite magnificent—and knew it!—in his dinner jacket and fine shirt. But Doyle—Doyle was turning heads, male and female alike, everything about him an intriguing, addictive contrast. Black suit, pristine shirt, black tie. Soft halo of curls, soft curve of mouth—and hard, hard set of the eyes. Hurriedly, Bodie looked away, hoping against hope, not to mention common sense, that his partner hadn't seen him.

"Hello, Bodie," Doyle said, after he had crossed the several yards of Persian carpet and negotiated his way between over-dressed guests and over-blown Tiffany lamps, "fancy meeting you here."

"Listen, Ray," Bodie started, deflecting the sarcasm before it had a chance to entrench itself, "it wasn't my fault. I didn't know Central hadn't rung you—"

"And when did Central last bother to notify both of us separately, eh?"

"Uhmm," Bodie did his Stan Laurel, "two weeks after we were teamed?"

"Just about."

"Well, at least you had a chance to grab some of your things, and you can't forget that I did bring some extra for you. That suit, for starters."

"Yeh, and I'll bet I get the rental bill for it as well."

Bodie wasn't going to tell him all about the rental bill—definitely not the size of said bill until later. Much later. Perhaps when Doyle was asleep, for instance.

"So," Doyle muttered as he sat down beside Bodie on something that was so uncomfortable that it had to be an antique and worth a fortune, otherwise it would have been chucked out years before, "which ones are the druggies then?"

"That's for them to know and us to find out. Anyway, Cowley says he doesn't really expect any action for another thirty-six hours..." He paused, because this was where his partner would expect him to pause, allowing Doyle his customary explosion.

Doyle, however, was unnervingly quiet.

"So, ehm, our George said he wanted us in place in plenty of time so that the natives had a chance to get used to your ugly mug and my perfection..."

Still nothing. Curiouser and curiouser indeed.

"And then we can report to him as soon as we—Ray, are you listening to me?"

Not a mutter was uttered.

"Obviously hanging on to my every word, you are. Yoo-hoo, Raaay!"

"Bodie," Doyle asked him, as if he had not the faintest idea that Bodie had been waving a hand in front of his face, "what the hell are they playing at?"

Bodie looked up, saw two witless wonders having some kind of heated discussion in the corner. "How the hell should I know what they're going on about?"

"You what? No, not them, you stupid git. Them, over there, at the billiards table. What are they playing at?"

"Oh, them," Bodie said knowingly, frowning at the table trying to work out what the hell they actually were playing at. "That?" He took some time to gaze raptly to make it look as if he were engrossed in the game and not just playing for time. "Oh, that's one of the variations of the game. You know. Pool." Then it clicked, and he remembered how he'd spent some of his hours in his various regiments, misspending several weeks with a few friendly American servicemen. "That's nine-ball."

"Nine ball what?"

Bodie shrugged, trying to sort out some of the details that had been hurled at him by teasing mates. "Nine ball pool, or some people call it nine ball billiards. Not that it makes much difference, of course." Not that he was going to admit that it might, because he had no idea whatsoever if it made a difference or not.

"Looks like it'd be great fun."

Bodie looked at Doyle then, wondering if his mate were feeling all right. "You? You think that looks like fun? But I remember-

"That's what I said about Pot Black on the telly. This is different. Don't have all those stupid red balls for starters."

"And how," Bodie whispered into a less than shell-like, "do you know what state their balls are in?"

"Don't you ever give up, Bodie? I've said no and I mean no."

"What you said, my lovely lad, was 'I don't think it's a good idea because we're partners.' No didn't enter into it."

"Didn't it? Well, it's the only thing going to be doing any entering round here, I'll tell you that for nothing, mate."

"Come on, Ray, don't be such a spoil-sport. You want me," he stopped for a second to nod a polite hello to the witless wonders who had finished their argument and were now departing arm in boneless arm, "and I want you. What could be simpler than that?"

"How about not working together? Don't you remember the Cow's last lecture-all four hundred and seventeen times of it?"

Bodie groaned. "No involvement."

"Exactly."

"Only one problem with that excuse, Ray."

"And what would that be, Bodie?"

"You never pay any attention to the old man anyway."

"There's a first time for everything."

"And that's what I'm trying to tell you! You and me, first time—"

"You're about fourteen years too late for that one, Bodie."

Bodie ran his thumb down the satin trim of Doyle's trousers, watching with interest how that made Doyle's eyes narrow and his breath quicken. He was determined that he wasn't going to let this opportunity pass them by: it wasn't exactly every week that he got to spend an entire Bank Holiday weekend with Doyle in such high-class, shared-room luxury. "Started late, did you? I mean, if it's only been fourteen years, and you being so much older than me, too..."

"I'm not telling you, Bodie. Subject closed, taboo and verboten."

"There's no need to be so embarrassed about being so old before you had sex for the first time—

"That was my first time with a fella." He stopped dead, drew Bodie a dirty look and said, "Nice try. But I'm not telling you."

"I'll tell you mine?"

"Now let me see if I remember this right. I can take my pick from your teacher, your next-door neighbour's son, the captain of the merchant ship you ran away on, the bloke who came round to re-do the roof on your dad's house-"

"All right, all right, so I tried to make a couple of stakeouts interesting."

"Interesting? You were trying to make them into grope sessions. Anyway, sitting here listening to you is not getting the job done. I'm going to mingle, see what I can pick up."

"Hope it's the clap," Bodie muttered, under his breath, and smiled sweetly at the bluerinsed old lady who had just taken Doyle's seat at such an inopportune moment. "'Scuse me," he said, sidling off and away after his partner, leaving an old lady to some rather juicy speculations about handsome young men who flirted with each other and then called VD down upon the other for leaving.

Still, he'd best start mingling himself. Not that he was thinking about doing the job-it

was Doyle he wanted to do-but if he did some work now, saw what he could come up with, then he'd have an excuse for retiring early to bed.

A very pleasant prospect, when he stopped to think about, which he did fairly often, being of a very libidinous bent—in more ways than one. The crowd was slowly diminishing, filtering down into the men who liked to play with long hard sticks and smooth round balls and those who liked to watch them do it. Bodie, needless to say, was one of the people who stayed. He listened in to sundry conversations as he wandered round the room, but the only drugs he heard mentioned were ones that apparently worked wonders on dogs with worms. Not quite what Bodie was interested in. He meandered over to the walls with their racks upon racks of cues, tidy rows of chalk lined up on the shelf and someone came up behind him.

"Do you play? Fancy a game?"

Bodie turned round, took one look at the exceedingly pretty boy, stifled a laugh and said, "Only if there's some money at stake to make it interesting."

"Oh, brilliant, absolutely brilliant! I'm Trevor, but everyone calls me Trevvie or Trevhead, something of that nature and how about twenty pounds to start, an extra fiver for every ball pocketed on the break?"

It took half a second, but Bodie sorted the tangled spaghetti of words out and agreed, looking out over Trevor's shoulder to grin at Doyle, sultrily.

Trevor whirled around, saw where Bodie had been looking and was fortunately dim enough to think it was the horsey blonde that had attracted Bodie. "Oh, shouldn't waste my time with her, she's taken. By my elder brother actually, Jeffrey, or Jeffers, but we don't call him that to his face, of course, he'd have a fit if we did, he's always been rather a pretentious shit, actually, so we always call him Marquis—Sadey for short!"

This last speech had carried them across the room and to the billiard table, where the previous had left the table ready for play and Doyle was chatting to a blonde-not the horsey one, but one who would go down a treat at the Miss World competition-which decided Bodie, of course, that he was going to be positively scintillating.

"Toss?"

Thoughts on carnal overdrive, it took Bodie a second to realise that Trevhead wasn't offering him a wank, but a coin to toss for heads or tails. Which thought immediately brought Doyle to mind, head or tail-Bodie wasn't fussy.

"Hello? Anyone in there?" and Trevvie was snorting at his own brilliant humour. Bodie decided that if no-one was smuggling drugs into this set, then he'd start, just to give them an excuse for being such idiots.

"Heads," he said, remembering to be nice. "And tails it is! I get to break," Trevor said. Hopefully your neck, Bodie thought.

Cue poised, face screwed up in concentration, ready to shoot, and then someone poked their head round the door, announced, "Freda!", at which mysterious summons most of the room—and none of them called Freda departed, leaving Bodie, Doyle, Doyle's blonde, her two friends and a matched set of old ladies dozing in the corner.

"Oh, what a shame, Higgins, you shan't go to the ball."

Bodie curtseyed sweetly and then made a very rude gesture indeed with his cue.

"I was looking forward to that," he said, pouting very nicely.

"I suppose you think that's a subtle hint?"

"No, I thought that was a fairly direct question. Oh, go on, Ray, play with me." And there was enough innuendo in that to sink the Bismarck.

Doyle gave him an old-fashioned look, but came over to take Trevor's abandoned cue, whispering as he passed Bodie, "D'you think we should be finding out what this Freda is? Could be the drugs."

"Pull the other one, Doyle, you just don't want me to score one over you."

And there was a smirk to go with that one as well.

Doyle, ever the gentleman—only when it meant he could score points, of courseignored that with a lofty and superior snort. He went back round to his side of the table, flirting outrageously with the blonde, but purely for Bodie's benefit. It was the perverse

streak in him: he enjoyed seeing Bodie crosseved with lust.

"My turn to break the balls?" he queried with an air of tangible innocence.

It wasn't his innocence that Bodie wanted to touch. "You've been doing that for weeks, why stop now?"

"Why indeed?" Doyle grinned at him, street arab in fancy clothes and prick-tease extraordinaire. One swift draw back of his arm, and crack, the balls careened all over the table in a riot of clacking colour. "Bodie, I've just thought of something. Am I supposed to pocket the balls at this stage?"

"Absolutely, Ray," Bodie breathed, fingering his own balls that he wouldn't half mind Doyle pocketing for him: he had a slit cut in the pocket of these trousers precisely for such an activity. Useful, really, if you had a willing friend. He looked, not entirely surprisingly, at Doyle.

"You're supposed to pocket as many of your balls as you can-although most blokes don't get more than two at a time-then you work your stick through them in numerical order, from smallest all the way up to biggest."

"Is that a fact?" Doyle said, again with the wide-eyed innocence that wouldn't have fooled a blind gnat. "And only two at a time? Oh, I am surprised. Okay, so I've pocketed twonumber two, Bodie, so get that look off your face. Right, number three up next. In the bottom pocket, I think."

"Awkward position, that," Bodie murmured. "Might have to screw under it," he added, wickedly, "to get it in the hole.

Doyle ignored him, although he missed the ball by a mile.

"Oh, what a shame, you're off your stroke, Ray. If you want, I could give you some lessons later?"

"And as I've already said," Doyle retorted with all the saccharine he could muster, "the answer is no."

"I shall leave you to struggle to find your stroke yourself then, shall I?"

"You just do that, Bodie," and he stepped aside as Bodie came round to take the shot himself.

"I think I'll pocket your ball—" a pause for a terribly sweet smile, "with a touch of English

bringing the cue ball round to kiss the number three ball and drop it down."

Doyle waited until precisely the right moment. "I'm surprised your balls haven't dropped yet."

That was when Bodie left the first large chalk mark on the green felt.

He turned round, missing Doyle only because that young man did a quick two-step out of the way. Then it was Bodie's turn to wait until precisely the right moment, when Doyle was bent over the table, arse in the air, cue on the table. "At least I've got you perfectly positioned now."

Large chalk mark number two. And by sheer fluke, the number four ball dropped out of sight.

Bodie, for the life of him, couldn't remember what happened when the balls were pocketed out of order. He said, hurriedly to hide his ignorance, "You lose a point for that. And it's my turn now."

Playgirl would have been delighted by the way he managed to turn so simple a manœuver into so ogle-some a spectacle. Doyle was, of course, completely unmoved. Completely, that is, bar a few recalcitrant inches that knew what they wanted even if they were attached to a complete wally.

"Oh, look," Bodie said, pointing at the lie of the table, "the balls are open. I might even be able to run them."

"Which means that I'd get to rack them, doesn't it, Bodie?"

Bodie took the hint, slowly working his way round the table, sinking the number three, the number five and getting a bead on the number six. He kept up a running commentary the entire time. "Learned this game from some Yanks I was barracksed with. One of them claimed his dad was the 1975 winner of the Brunswick championship-the opening year, that was, the nine ball championship." That last one was too good to resist. "I tried to get in, but they wouldn't let me play. I only had two balls."

"You won't have any if you don't shut up, Bodie."

"Then I'd match you, wouldn't I?"

That was large chalk mark number three, as Bodie heard what he'd just said to Doyle.

"I suppose you think that's a witty way of saying I'm too scared to fuck you?"

"Shhh!" But it was too late. The three young women were staring at them with copious amounts of interest. Bodie laughed, weakly and said, "He's just trying to embarrass me."

"Trying to? I just bloody did, or do you always turn beetroot when you play billiards?"

There was nothing Bodie was going to risk saying to that, not when the three elegantly dressed ladies—probably literally, knowing his luck-had surrounded them. "I think it's your ball, Ray," and he retired to the wall. For all of about two milliseconds, when an idea of absolute brilliance crossed his mind.

Doyle was bent over the table, working out the best shot to make.

"Checking the lie of the balls, Ray?" Bodie asked, getting three giggles and one glower.

"I think you'll need a freestroke and come three sides to get under the six ball, Ray."

Doyle refused to even look at him for that, winning the game being the best kind of retaliation when Bodie was in one of these moods.

He had his cue touching his ball, when someone touched his ball. Both of them, balls plural. He grinned, thinking it was one of the sniggering women behind him. He looked up and saw-all three girls. In front of him. On the opposite side of the table. And there was still a hand on his balls. He was, to coin a phrase, caught between a rock and a hard place. If he said anything, it would make sure that the girls would notice, and that didn't bear thinking about. But if he kept his mouth shut, Bodie would keep right on doing what he was doing.

Doyle kept his mouth very firmly shut indeed. And then Bodie squeezed.

Large chalk mark number four. At this rate, they were going to have more white on the table than balls in the pocket.

The door swung open and Bodie's hand swung away back out of sight.

"Ah, there you are, girls," came a voice that ought to belong to a Basil Brush look-alike. "Come along, Freda's waiting. And wake your aunties up, they should be in bed by now." The decorously dressed and couture-coiffed

matron took one look at Bodie and Doyle, sniffed, and turned on her heel, taking three grumbling young ladies with her, and trailing two grumbling old ladies behind them. The door swung shut, and the two men were alone.

Bodie grinned evilly, rubbing his hands in glee and saying in the worst German accent in the world, "Aha! Now ve haff you, Mata Hari, oont ve vill haff our vikkid vay viz you."

Doyle, being a spoil-sport, refused to play that game, going back to the billiards table.

"You know something, Doyle, you're no fun at all."

Doyle stood up, leaning against his cue. "You wanted me to play with you, so I'm playing with you. What more can you ask for, Bodie?"

Bodie shuffled his feet like a schoolboy. Then he fiddled with his cue. Then the chalk.

Doyle went back to the game.

"I'd like you to like me."

Truly enormous chalk mark number five. Doyle looked at him in amazement. "You want me to like you? That's funny, I thought

all you wanted me to do was lisp 'yes!' and spread my legs."

"Well, that too."

"As well as what?"

Bodie shrugged, incredibly inarticulate for a man who could normally quote poetry at the drop of a hat. "As well as...well, liking me."

Doyle sighed heavily. "I already like you, Bodie. Though why I don't know.'

"Not like that. Well, I'm not complaining that you like me like that, but I want you to, you know, really like me."

"But not...like that? Have you ever considered learning English? It'd make life much easier for all concerned. How do you want me to like you, Bodie? The way I like yoghurt? Or the way I like Mozart? My old goldfish? The bloody cat that ate the bloody goldfish? How, Bodie?"

More shuffling: much more of this, and Bodie could have a career on the stage.

"All right, that's it, I admit defeat," Doyle finally said in disgust. "I give up, Bodie. Forget I said anything."

The silence was deafening as only one of Doyle's sulks could possibly be.

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"I want you to like me the way you would...well, the way you would..." Something was whispered at the end, Bodie obviously in a paroxysm of embarrassment.

"What'd you say, Bodie? Didn't hear that last bit." The sad thing was, for once he was telling the truth and not just making Bodie suffer on general principle.

Another inaudible mumble.

"For fuck's sake, Bodie, can't you speak?"

"A girlfriend, a fucking girlfriend! Did you hear that?"

"I should think half the house heard that, Bodie," Doyle said, quite kindly. "So you want me to wine and dine you, spend a lot of money on you, fuck you through the mattress, unless you won't come across-not that there's much chance of you keeping your legs crossed and your bra on, is there?—and dump you when I get bored. That what you want?"

"No. Not like that."

"Okay, so you want me to like you, but not like that and not like that and not like that. We're running out of likes, Bodie."

"You're a right bastard, you know that, don't you, Doyle?"

"Oh, yeh," Doyle replied, looking as pleased as punch with himself. "And I'm going to keep being a right bastard until you spill your guts, Bodie. And there're plenty of balls on the table if you don't have any yourself."

Bodie glared at him, then shrugged, as if he didn't care, as if it wasn't anything important. "I can say it. Just didn't feel like it before. Nothing to do with being scared, or anything." He shrugged again, looking for all the world the way he must have when he was trying to chat up his first girl, or bloke, all big eyes and bravado. "Romantically. I want you to like me romantically. See? Told you I could say it."

"And so you could," Doyle said, turning his back on him, going back to the table. "I've got a ball in hand, so I think I'll go for the six, and I'll put a kiss of English on the number seven, and take eight from behind."

He stopped at that point, looking over his shoulder at Bodie, who was doing a very credible impersonation of a pillar of salt. "What're standing there like that for? Weren't you in the middle of something when that old bat came in?"

Bodie looked at him in dumbfounded amazement, then found his voice again. "You bastard!" he said, affection fighting fury, a wiggle of Doyle's bum winning the entire battle. "You've been playing hard to get."

"Hip, hip, hurrah. Thought you'd never notice. And before you ask, yeh, I just wanted to make sure it'd penetrated your thick skull that I was more than a wham, bam, thank you, sir."

Bodie came up behind Doyle, both hands making suddenly intimate contact-in other words, grabbing cock and balls, denim and all.

Large chalk mark number five.

"Bodie..."

"Can't say no now, Ray."

"Yes I can! Bodie, we're in a public room in someone else's house and the door doesn't even lock."

"Never thought you wouldn't be adventurous when it came to sex."

Doyle didn't actually answer, being too busy groaning because Bodie had his zip down and out of the way, and obviously had no intention of pocketing his balls-palming was more like it. Doyle considered making another protest, but then his jeans were pulled down and Bodie's hands found his arse, and then his cock again.

Doyle stood up, pressing his back to Bodie's front, wriggling around which didn't exactly help in the parting of Bodie's clothes, but certainly added to the general sense of urgency.

Bodie bent him down over the table again, the buttons of Bodie's shirt digging into Doyle's back, but he wasn't paying much attention to that, being far too interested in the way Bodie's trousers and pants were down around Bodie's knees and the interesting bits that were now thus available to Doyle for a bit of a free-hand stroke.

"I'm going to fuck you, Ray," Bodie said, rubbing his cock up and down the cleft of Doyle's bum.

"About bloody time, too," came the immediate answer, Doyle arching back to grab Bodie, doing a bit of rubbing of his own. He lifted his right leg up, so that his knee was on the lip of the table, and then pulled Bodie in EMMA SCOT

close behind him.

It's amazing what can be accomplished with saliva, a bit of precum and loads and loads of lust. Doyle grunted, indelicately, but eloquently, as Bodie pressed into him, stopping Bodie for a second while he adjusted, then thrusting back, impaling himself on Bodie's cock. Bodie's hands were roving over him, palming nipples, stroking cock, and Doyle twisted around so that they could kiss, tongue meeting tongue, sucking and kissing and biting, building up to a crescendo, Doyle's hands scraping the table felt, Bodie's hands clutching Doyle's cock, milking him, until cream spurted from Bodie into Doyle, and from Doyle, onto the table.

Well, it was another big white mark, but it definitely wasn't chalk.

Bent over the table, face next to one of the balls that had started the current run of events that ended up with Doyle's balls in Bodie's hands and Bodie's balls rubbing against Doyle's bottom, Doyle decided that he was a happy man indeed.

"Can see why snooker's such a popular game," Doyle finally managed to find enough breath to speak.

"Wasn't snooker," Bodie panted, still recovering from his exertions. "Was nine ball."

Doyle chuckled, filthily of course. "Wasn't

nine balls. Was only four."

But before Bodie could come up with a suitably obscene retort to that, there was the ominous sound of feet and voices and, presumably, therefore people, coming down the corridor. Having just come all across someone else's baize table, our two heros decided that discretion was the better part of valour and that it was time to beat an exceedingly hasty retreat out of here.

Clothes tidied and fastened in record time, they were walking decorously down the corridor before the first person even came within sight of the billiards room. Which isn't quite what could be said about Bodie and Doyle.

Who, at this point, were climbing the stairs to the room they'd been banished to share together, Doyle's infamous laugh framing Bodie's salacious comments about early to bed and early to rise, and how the early bird catches the worm.

"Yeh," Doyle's voice suddenly came down the staircase loud and clear, to the delight of a little old lady with blue rinsed hair who had been following them since she saw the pretty one arrive in such wonderfully workmanlike clothes, "but judging by what I felt across the billiards table, I'm going to catch something a lot bigger than a worm, right, Bodie?"

And never a truer word was spoken.

GAEL X. ILE 

# FLIGHT OF FANCY GAEL X. ILE

"OI, DOYLE?" Bodie whispered as quietly as was possible, considering that they were in the main body of a plane with hordes of passengers milling around with excess baggage, most of which seemed to be coming from their mouths.

"Doyle!" Bodie said again, loudly this time, his reward a baleful glare from gritty green eyes.

"What is it now, Bodie? Christ, you're not still nervous, are you? How a man who can jump out of a tiny little plane could be this nervous on a fucking jumbo jet before it's even off the ground, I'll never know."

"Language!" Bodie hissed at him, smiling with uncommon sweetness at both the young mother who had paused beside them to stare her disapproval and the snot-faced brat who was gazing at them with something that looked frighteningly close to hero worship. "And I am not nervous. But if I were, and I'm only saying if, mind, then it would make perfect sense. When I went up with any of my old lot, I had a parachute strapped to my back and I was *supposed* to end up back on the ground without the plane. Not to mention the fact that I wasn't depending on some civvy moron to fly us."

"All right, Bodie, I've got the message. You are not, and I repeat, not nervous, you only look that way and can I please have my arm back if you've quite finished squeezing it to death?"

"Oh, sorry, hadn't noticed."

"I had," Doyle muttered, rubbing his arm and wincing. "Christ, look at this lot. The flight from Hell, that's what this is going to be. There must be hundreds of kids on this fucking plane!"

"Nah," Bodie said, wincing in his turn, this time as a result of the infant squirming in the seat directly behind him and shrieking her opinion at the top of her lungs. "Can't be more

than a dozen. Just sounds like hundreds," he said miserably. He got even more miserable when the seats in front of them were claimed by an old couple, she of the hearing aid that didn't quite work, he of the 'I can hear perfectly well' school of deafness. They were shouting at other, guite sweet, really, if you liked to hear about the intimate details of life for the over 70's delivered with more decibels than the jumbo jet itself could generate. Of course, the old dears couldn't manage to get their hand luggage into either the overhead compartment-the rack was too high up-or under the seat in front of them—that being too low. Taking pity, reminding himself dutifully that one day, he'd be like that, Bodie smiled at them and stowed the bags and carrier bags and the odd little box away.

With a sigh of relief and showered with praise for being 'such a nice young man', he sat down beside Doyle, who was wiggling around in his seat like a constipated dervish. "What's the matter with you now?"

"Something—" this muffled as Doyle got himself into a very improbable position in his seat, "is digging in-" another unlikely twist, "to my backside and—" one more odd warping and if anyone had described the position Doyle was in, Bodie would've said it was anatomically impossible, although his bendytoy of a partner seemed to manage quite well, "it's bloody wet. Oh."

Bodie looked at what Doyle was holding in his hand and started to laugh. "Bet that's the first time you've ever sat on a *dummy* tit," he said with great wit, making Doyle glower all the more effectively.

"Excuse me, but I've lost my baby's pacifier. Have you seen it?" The American voice came from behind them, and Doyle stood up, intending to pass it over with a look that could curdle milk. One glance at the rather pretty young woman made him turn the grimace

into a charming smile, and he proffered the dummy tit playfully.

"This what you mean?"

"Yes. I'm real sorry, I guess it kind of went flying in your direction when Megan was having her tantrum. It's the terrible twos," she shrugged apologetically, reaching out for the bit of pink, orthodontically correct plastic.

"You do know what we call this in England, don't you?" he said, positively oozing charm. "We call it a dummy...tit," he went on, with a lascivious stare at the pertinent, and far from false, part of her anatomy.

"She might not know what you call it," came a voice heavy with both Yorkshire and threat, "but I fucking well do."

"Lovely daughter you've got there," Doyle said, handing over the dummy tit as a pacifier and beating a hasty retreat.

"Tut, tut, Raymond old son, chatting up old married women with babies? What is the world coming to?"

"Shut up, Bodie." And with that, he subsided, staring out the window at the black sky and the lights shimmering in the mist.

Bodie shut up, even managing to stay quiet right up until the moment when the seats in front of them. the ones that had been claimed by the old couple with much fuss and botheration, were currently being claimed by another couple, who were young, this time. To make matters even worse, they had yet another baby with them, this one positively puce already. And they hadn't even taken off yet. Bodie, at this point and quite understandably, groaned.

"Oh, god, what else could go wrong?" he asked, regretting it immediately as the Universe and the Captain began listing what was in the process of going wrong, even as he spoke.

"We regret to inform all passengers that there will be a...short delay before we can take off. This is due to a minor technical difficulty with one of our wing lights and as soon as this problem is all cleared up, we'll be on our way.'

There was a communal muttering and groaning, and as if he had heard the rising question, the Captain came back on and

said, "The delay to repair the light should be about forty-five minutes, and we don't foresee too big a problem in getting a flight window at that time."

There was no possible response to that, apart from a full-throated scream of dismay, but that activity seemed to be well taken care of by the ever expanding horde of squalling children crowded all around them.

"Oi, Doyle," Bodie dunted his partner, "you know how they have non-smoking sections? D'you think we could ask for the nonscreaming section?"

Doyle obviously thought that was beneath notice.

But not, however, the on-going battle between the old couple, the young couple and the stewardess—and if one were to judge purely on volume alone, the baby was winning hands down.

A second uniformed type came up, brightscrubbed face, bright eyes, bright smile, so bright in fact, that you wondered why he was on an aeroplane and not working at Disneyland. He was charming and filial to the old couple, charming and friendly with the young couple, and an absolute saint with the infant. None of which was getting anyone very far, considering that the airline had either sold these seats twice or someone had buggered up the booking system. Just to make it a really jolly little group of people, both sets of claimants simply absolutely had to be, couldn't possibly not be, in Los Angeles within the next twelve hours. Which with the way this flight had been delayed already, might be beyond all of their wildest dreams.

Doyle, with his usual eye for a bargain, piped up, waving his CI5 warrant card for good measure. "Listen," he said, only to be drowned out by stereo cries from children fore and aft. "Listen!" he shouted, actually managing to attract the attention of the somewhat tarnished-around-the-edges bright-button of a flight attendant, "I've got an idea."

"You don't know how glad I am to hear that, sir!" the perky young man said, excusing himself from the rabble in order to pay homage to the badge of officialdom, but not without sparing a smile for Bodie and making sure that he was leaning across Bodie to hear Doyle over the caterwauling complaints of scared, wet, hungry and purely sour-faced babies.

"Look," Doyle was saying, "business class and first class are always almost empty on these flights, right?"

A very telling pause, and then the steward said, "Yeesss..."

"So, why don't you bump me and my friend here into business—or first, we're not fussy, we're just trying to be helpful—and give our seats to this lovely couple?"

The flight attendant seemed doubtful, until Bodie smiled at him, reached out and gave his forearm a quick squeeze. "Go on-" he squinted, read the name badge pinned to the red braces, passed it over in favour of the little brass badge with what had to be a nick-name engraved on it, "Skippy. Why don't you see what miracles you could work? I'm sure you're very good with your mouth—coming up with the right words at the right time, I mean."

Skippy blushed and pushed his red-framed glasses-the ones he'd spent a fortune on because they matched his braces and his car-and gave Bodie an exceedingly cheeky grin and said, "Oh, I'm very imaginative at coming up with the right thing at the right time. Hold tight, and I'll go see what I can...come up with this time."

Bodie felt Doyle's eyes on him before Skippy had taken two steps.

"What was that in aid of?" Doyle said, quite reasonably suspicious. After all, it wasn't every day that your straight partner started chatting up the local gay boys.

"Nothing, Doyle, so don't look so worried, petal. I'm not going to throw you over so I can run off with our friend Skippy. It's just what I was saying to you when we got on the plane in the first place."

"Bodie," Doyle told him with infinite patience, which just went to prove how false the reasonable tone was, "you never did get round to telling me whatever it was you were going to tell me when we got on the plane in the first place."

"Didn't I? I was just saying, d'you think that all the blokes who work on planes as

stewards are poofters?"

"Nah," Doyle said, dismissing the issue from his mind, going back to watching the workmen struggle around at the tip of the wing.

Of course, by the time two different stewards had come over to help two different sets of people, he was beginning to wonder if Bodie might be right after all.

"Oi, Doyle, listen. D'you think they have a special interview for these blokes?"

Doyle looked at him warily, thinking about how easy it would be for the air stewards to bump them off this flight completely and how likely a prospect that would be, if Bodie got started on some of his queer jokes.

"Can just imagine it!" Bodie put on his plummy upper crust voice, the one that sounded as if chins and brains had never been invented. "Now, tell me, Roger dear boy, are you a homosexual?" He changed to a high-pitched lisp. "Why, no, sir, not me, sir!" The marbles were back in the mouth. "Hmm, pity about that, we thought you looked quite fetching in the outfit. Oh, well, come back when you've been buggered a few times. We're always looking for men with experience!"

For that little effort, Doyle just gave him the filthiest of looks and then spent the next three minutes trying to disentangle a two-year old fist from his considerably older head.

"Oh, god, I'm real sorry," the mother was saying, and from this angle, when most of what he could see was the nappied bottom of a kicking and screaming toddler, she didn't look half as pretty. "I stood up to let my husband get the diaper bag for me and she grabbed you. She's got a thing for curls, haven't you, Megan?"

"Don't like curls," said blonde cherub announced, trying to eliminate these particular curls from the face of the earth and the top of Doyle's head.

"Now, now, Megan, be nice," the mother was going rather red in the face, trying to unprize her daughter's fingers without also detaching Doyle's scalp from his skull. "Let the nice man go."

"Don't like 'at man."

Bodie, needless to say, had collapsed in a puddle of total hysteria by this point, gasping GAEL X. ILE

and pointing and saying incoherent things that sounded somewhat insulting to Doyle's luck with the ladies these days.

Doyle was too busy stopping his eyes from watering to pay much attention-he'd never live it down if he let a two-year bring tears to his eyes, Bodie would see to *that*.

"Megan!" the father boomed, making his daughter jump, and lifting Doyle up on to his tip-toes. "Let go of that man this instant!"

"Not like 'at Daddy," the grot tot replied, her composure quite recovered and in fact, strengthened by Daddy's disapproval.

"Megan..." the Daddy threatened.

"Not like 'at man, Mummy."

"That man, darling, is your Daddy and of course you love him very much now let-" a heroic tug, enough to make a lesser man weep, but Doyle was stoic through and through with stiff upper lip even if the lower one was trembling somewhat, "-the nice man go!"

A few, forlorn chestnut strands wafted down on the air flow and the sound waves from the screams of the other children, most of whom, no doubt, were just jealous because they didn't have a full-sized living doll of their own.

Doyle was beginning to think rather longingly of the gun he had had to pack. It would have been so nice to have his shoulder holster on and his loaded weapon in there. Just pull it out and blam!, no more torture.

"Ahh," the bright-faced Skippy was back. He took one look at the situation, and smiled at the angelic little girl. "Hey, would you like a pretty doll? Or a stuffed toy? See," and he reached magically into the bag of distraction he brought with him and pulled out a gorgeous fluffy white lamb.

"Not like dolls," the little girl said, entrenching her fingers all the more determinedly. "But I like lambies," she added, and everyone heaved a sigh of relief, a truce obviously in sight. Everyone, that is, save the mother, who had this very pained look on her face-almost as pained as Doyle, actuallythat fraught expression of someone who has a horrible feeling of what is coming next.

"Great!" Skippy said, holding the fluffy lamb out to the little girl.

"Yes, Megan like lambies," she said, with the thoughtfulness of the two year old. "Me eat lambies for 'unch."

There wasn't a lot to be said to that, was there?

Bodie decided that, the worst of his hysterics over, it was time to come to Doyle's rescue. "Did you know," he said to his partner's torturer, "that lions eat lambs?"

"Yes," she said, meaning of course, you've just told me so, so yes, I know that now.

"And lions have biiig teeth and even bigger claws."

"Yes," and she was getting interested.

Bodie leaned forward a bit more, distracting her almost enough while everyone else held their breaths and wondered if he was going to come out with something the infant monster would like but that they could also stomach. "I've seen lions," Bodie whispered confidentially, "eating lambies for 'unch." He nodded, solemnly.

She nodded back, huge blue eyes like saucers. She had obviously finally found a grown-up she could both respect and admire. After all, he had seen lions eat lambies for 'unch.

"Tell you what, if you let my friend go," Bodie went on, "I'll draw you a picture of the lion."

"Eating the lambie?" she asked, not letting go until she was sure this man wasn't going to turn into a peddlar of cuddly toys as soon as he had what he wanted.

"Yes, eating the lambie, if that's what you want."

"Like lions," she said, adding as an afterthought, "eating lambies."

Bodie smiled at her, unfastened her fingers from Doyle's hair, and said to the thoroughly embarrassed mother, "Don't worry about itbut when she's older, a man called George Cowley'll be able to find the perfect job for her!"

"I must remember that trick," Skippy was saying. "Should come in handy on this flight! Uh, sir," this, to Doyle, who was still rubbing his head, and making sure he was well crouched down in his seat where the sweetfaced little monster behind him couldn't reach, while Bodie tore a page out of his notebook

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and did the promised drawing, complete with biiig teeth and claws and lambies for 'unch, "I've checked our manifest and it looks like I can get you two into business class up front. However, you'll have to pay for the upgrade in ticket," he said loudly, leaning forward to whisper to Bodie, "only we won't charge you anything. I have to say you'll pay or we'll have a riot on our hands in here!"

"We'll be happy to pay," Bodie said, hands on his belly like an expansive and expanding business man. "Will Access be all right? Or would you prefer a Barclaycard?"

"Oh, we'll take care of all the paperwork in the forward cabin, sir. If you'll follow me?"

Bodie winked in agreement and slipped the gruesome drawing to tiny hands that treasured it.

Doyle, meanwhile, was muttering under his breath about being careful what you ask for.

"What are you muttering on about?" Bodie demanded as they squeezed and pushed their way through grateful married couple with ungrateful infant, thankful elderly couple with extra luggage, and what seemed to be the entire cast, crew and extras from Ben Hur.

"You and 'Skippy', that's what I'm talking about. You'd best stop flirting with him before he gets the wrong idea about you, mate."

"Oh, stop moaning, Ray," and then he was laughing again. "You're just pissed off because that little girl thought you were her golly!" This statement went down like the proverbial lead balloon, garnering Bodie one of Doyle's best glares and a not so accidental whack on the back with their hand luggage. "And at least me being nice to him got us better seats without costing us a penny and anyway, once he gets us down there, he'll be back in steerage with the plebs and we won't see him the rest of the flight."

On a scale of one to ten for accuracy of prediction, Bodie had just scored a zero. Of course, if he weren't careful, it might be a hell of a lot more than a zero he would be scoring later. Not that Bodie was exactly famous for being careful...

Take-off finally accomplished, a mere three hours after the announcement of the first

forty-five minute delay, cruising altitude finally achieved, dinner trays dispensed, Doyle sitting scowling beside him, Bodie had to laugh when Skippy came up to them, perched himself on the arm of Bodie's leather seat, back against the seat in front and said, "Hi, nice to see you again. A friend of mine— Frank, that's him over there—took my post in the main cabin for me. We...uh, swap things a lot. Everything okay up here?"

"Couldn't be better," Bodie grinned at him, looking nowhere near Skippy's attractive face. Doyle, fortunately, was too busy listing the miseries of being up past his bedtime (although admittedly, he did have cause to complain, this being a full day after the aforementioned bedtime), burst water tanks in the home immediately before he was supposed to be leaving on a very expensive holiday, the uselessness of the parking at Heathrow, the stupidity of partners who tried to save a few quid and end up booking them on a rotten flight instead of travelling one of the marginally more expensive days with all the business travellers instead of armies of package holiday families, the serving of burned-plastic aeroplane food when all a man wanted to do was sleep and-

Skippy smiled at him and said, "Oh, that sounds *terrible*. Would you like a drink, sir?"

Doyle glared at him, pissed off at being cut off mid-complaint.

"It's on the house, sir," Skippy added, still smiling, although that may have had something to do with where Bodie's left knee was in relation to Skippy's left buttock.

"I'll have a gin and tonic," Doyle answered, not quite sure what was going on here, but sure that his partner was up to something. Before he could cast his suspicious glance in that direction, Bodie had moved and Skippy was on his way to get the drinks.

"Two gin and tonics, gentlemen." Doyle was handed his without ceremony, while Bodie's was held on to, Skippy's fingers, just purely accidentally of course, touching Bodie's around the glass. "Care for a lime?"

"No, thanks, this is just the way I like it."

A call interrupted the mutual admiration society and as Skippy retreated, neat bottom filling black trousers perfectly, Doyle snorted,

"Care for a lime? You might not, but he," a nod at the busy Skippy, "obviously wouldn't mind a limey."

"You're imagining things, Doyle," Bodie said dismissively and quite dishonestly.

"Oi, I thought you were the one who said that all the stewards on these things were gay."

"It was only a joke. For Christ sake, why don't you have your drink and go to sleep?"

"Suppose I might as well." A bone creaking stretch, gin and tonic and ice—but no lime, lemon or any other fruit—wavering dangerously close to Bodie. Then a couple of long swallows, the glass dumped in Bodie's waiting hand, and Doyle was wrapped up like a papoose in the grey blanket provided. Also in the grey blanket provided for Bodie and both their pillows. A long-fingered white hand snaked out from the cocoon and stabbed the button unerringly; the overhead reading light went out and Doyle had become a grey lump in the window seat, and now bore a distinct resemblance to a sewing-kit Dalek. Thirtyfive seconds precisely, and the advent of sleep was announced by a tiny snore. That was it: once Doyle was asleep nothing, short of an atomic bomb or a certain Scottish accent, could wake him up.

Bodie, secure in his ignorance, sat back to enjoy the flight.

Skippy had finished clearing up after dinner and settling the other passengers down. With a last inaudible word to Frank in the kitchen area, a thorough check to make sure that he and Bodie were the only non-sleeping occupants of the forward cabin, he came back to perch once more on the arm of Bodie's seat. Bodie decided that it might not be just the flight he enjoyed...

Skippy, he had noticed, was a thoroughly attractive young man. Good-looking, light brown hair, not too short, slightly wavy. Blue eyes, made all the larger by his long-sighted glasses with their thin red frames. Slender body, set off beautifully by the tailored black trousers that suggested all sorts of wonderful curves and bulges, white shirt and red braces. There was another badge between the two name badges and this one read: Ich spreche Deutsch.

Bodie nodded at it and said, winking, "I was always better at French."

"Me too. But to be very frank, Greek is my speciality."

"Very active in it, are you?"

"Oh, depends," he smiled, moving slightly so that he was half-off the arm of the chair and half-on Bodie's lap, his left hand coming down to steady himself and-it's amazing what can happen purely by accident, isn't it?-brushing against Bodie's groin. He must have liked what he found there because he added, "But when it comes to the Greek thing, I can be positively laid back."

"Bend over backwards, do you?" Bodie asked, blue eyes glittering, right hand bringing Skippy's hand back to the site of its 'accident', holding it there while Bodie's enthusiasmnot to mention some other bits-grew apace.

"Oh, sometimes."

"Where'd you get the nick-name from?" Bodie asked for something to say whilst his body indulged in quite a bit of language of its own. "The bush kangaroo?"

"Maybe, but I usually say it's from peanut butter."

Bodie slipped his left hand up over Skippy's leg, encountering the nick-named area. "I can see why," he murmured, one hand between Skippy's legs, the other trusting Skippy to hold on tight between Bodie's own legs, and then roving upwards to the braces. He fingered a nipple through the white shirt, the red braces pressing his hand close-now he knew why Skippy wore the braces, apart from just making him look extra tasty.

"Belong to any clubs?" Skippy asked him.

"A few. But there's one I've always wanted to belong to, but I haven't joined yet."

"Mmmm..." Skippy moaned, but Bodie took it to be a request for information.

"What's it called—the 50,000 foot club?"

"We're only cruising at 35,000—but what's 15,000 feet between friends?"

Doyle chose this moment to snuffle and shift, blankets and pillows pushed and pummelled all over the place, a tousle-haired and sleepy-eyed Doyle appearing, accompanied by bad tempered muttering as he shoved the divider between his seat and Bodie's up out of the way, finally lying down, curled up

on his side, most of him on his own chair, his head and shoulders and tent of a blanket on Bodie's.

With a rueful glance and a shrug, Skippy made to stand up and leave. Bodie's arm shot out and grabbed him, his voice strangled. "Don't—it's okay, you don't have to leave."

The blanket was tossed back and a very tousled but very unsleepy Doyle emerged, announcing, "Yes you do fucking well have to leave, don't you, Flipper, or whatever your name is."

One look at those green eyes and Skippy remembered why jealousy is called the greeneyed monster. The economy cabin full of brats seemed very appealing all of a sudden. With an apologetic look at Bodie, Skippy decided to depart for more fertile pastures, thinking that maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to hook up with Frank again.

"What'd you go and do that for?" Bodie demanded, all aggrieved where he wasn't frustrated, some bits of him managing to be both at once.

"You, mate," Doyle snarled at him, struggling to free himself from a blanket that resembled an octopus in more than just colour, "are lucky I decided to be subtle and didn't rip your balls off and feed them to you."

"Oh," Bodie said, a wealth of nastiness in that one word. "So because you've discovered your partner is AC/DC, you're going to throw the world's biggest fit and flounce off in a huff. Well, I've got news for you—you're on a plane, and there aren't any empty seats."

"I've got news for *you,* Bodie."

"Oh, yeh? And what's that?"

"Yeh. I'm not going to throw a fit because you go both ways. I'm going to throw a fit because you didn't tell me and you were going to let some pretty little thing like that have you instead of coming to me.'

Bodie sat like a fish, staring at him.

"Cat got your tongue?" Doyle said. "Well, I'm having more than your tongue. Get your arse out of that seat. Go on, Bodie, I'm not going to sit here all day. And if you don't move, I'll have you right here."

There was, Bodie thought, looking at the bright glitter of those eyes and thinking about the mile-wide wild streak that was where

Doyle's back-bone should be, a distinct possibility the daft bastard might actually do it. At which point, Bodie got his arse out of his seat and went where Doyle shoved him. Which was, not surprisingly, to the lavatory.

The door snibbed shut behind them, Bodie squirmed round to find Doyle sitting on the closed lid of the toilet, his trousers down to his ankles, his cock up to his navel, and his hands immediately grabbing and undoing Bodie's zip. Before he could even steady himself, Doyle had Bodie's shirt unbuttoned and shoved out of the way, trousers unzipped and shoved out of the way, and Bodie's cock poised at parted lips.

Doyle grinned up at him, teeth gleaming whitely. "You'd better keep your fingers crossed we don't hit any turbulence, hadn't you, Bodie?"

And before Bodie could come up with a response to that, his cock was sucked in to an incredibly gifted mouth. He looked down at the bobbing head and couldn't believe his luck. Not that he was going to complain about this unexpected turn of events: what was that old adage about not looking a gift horse in the mouth?

Bodie braced himself against the walls, thrusting his hips forward, groaning his pleasure as hands started playing with his arse and Doyle kept on sucking him.

Of course, there was another old adage, the one about leading a horse to water and not being able to make him drink. Bodie realised that as he was released and Doyle stretched up, covering his fingers in the hand lotion so thoughtfully provided—although not, presumably, for this particular function. But then again, considering the stewards...

Bodie was turned, and went, more than willing, bracing himself once more, locking his knees and hollowing his back so that Doyle could get his finger into him, sighing happily as the first digit penetrated him. A second finger soon followed the first, and he was wriggling around, trying to get them in deeper.

Then Doyle's hands were on his hips and easing Bodie backwards, and there was the first sweet press of cock against his arsehole. Doyle had obviously slicked himself down GAEL X. ILE

too, for he was sliding in easily and comfortably, sinking into Bodie as Bodie sank down onto him. There were rather conveniently positioned handles on the wall, and Bodie grabbed on to them, holding on tight, giving himself enough leverage that he could move up and down, meeting Doyle as Doyle thrust up into him.

There was a tug at the door, the usual rattle as some nervous passenger struggled to overcome his 'relaxation' drinks and work out why the door wouldn't open.

Buried to the hilt in Bodie's arse, Doyle held completely still, while Bodie tried manfully to both stifle his hysterical giggles and yield not to temptation. The Sisters at his old school would not have been the least bit surprised to find that his resolve lasted all of ten seconds, and then he yielded to temptation the way he usually did and started fucking himself on Doyle's cock.

Coming through loud and clear from the other side of the door, they could hear Skippy speaking very loudly and clearly indeed. "Sir. Sir! This lavatory is out of order, see, I was just putting this notice up. Why don't you come with me..."

And then Doyle was giggling into Bodie's back, but only until Bodie moved in a certain particularly effective way, and then Doyle buried his face in Bodie's back, his cock in Bodie's arse and wrapped his fingers around Bodie's cock. The small washhand basin light illuminated them, and Bodie watched himself in the mirror, as he moved up and down, being fucked. And stared, transfixed and impaled, as orgasm transformed his face and as his cum splashed up onto his chest,

beading palely in the light.

And he watched, as Doyle's hands slid upwards, rubbing the cum into his skin as Doyle shuddered inside Bodie, his cry surely telling half the people on the plane what they were up to.

Doyle slipped, soft, from the depths of Bodie's arse, and Bodie stood up, more than grateful for those handles, considering the shaky state of his knees. The lavatory was tiny, now that they were calm enough to notice it, barely large enough for one person, positively confining for two. They stayed as they were for a moment, one standing, one seated, both staring, as it dawned on each one of them what they had just done, and the possible consequences. And then Bodie grinned, and nodded towards the crowded huddle of bathing facilities.

"At least we're in the right place for cleaning up after."

Doyle leaned forward and licked a droplet of cum from Bodie's belly. "Yeh," he grinned up at Bodie again, an echo of his earlier pose, "suppose we are." He lapped, delicately, at the limp cock, hoping that Bodie was as fit and eager as he was.

Bodie crouched down and stopped, his face a scant inch from Doyle's and said, "How long before we get to Los Angeles, then?"

Doyle looked down at himself, then at Bodie and said, "Altogether? Oh, about sixteen inches."

It was indeed, about sixteen inches, although it took them several more hours and in the end, they never did get to see the inflight movie...

# MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDERETTE CALLY DONIA

Doyle,

Where the fuck did you leave my shirt? Remember it? My good shirt, the lawn one with the ruffles that belongs to the dinner jacket that's also disappeared? The one you borrowed to go out with that bird and promised you'd have dry-cleaned and back in my wardrobe before tonight?

And the milk's gone off-better get the milkman to start delivering. If I depended on you, I'd starve.

Bodie.

Bodie.

You're a kinky one, aren't you? Don't know now if I should've let Cowley coerce persuade me to let you stay here-dry clean my girlfriend and have her back in your wardrobe? Always preferred the bed, myself.

What shirt?

Buy your own fucking milk. Who do you think I am-the Cow?

Doyle.

Dovle.

I can't believe you! No, I can, you little crud. The shirt, Doyle, that I needed to wear last night to that stupid sodding dinner babysitting that stupid sodding Arab and his stupid sodding Ambassador. That shirt, the one I didn't have and had to go out and buy a new one of. And just to say thank you to you for losing it, I've attached a nice little present for you.

Got milk, but you've run out of soap powder, Scrooge.

Bodie

### Bodie,

If you meant that shirt, why didn't you say

so? Thought I gave you that back ages agonot my fault if you're too bloody lazy to have the thing cleaned, is it? Where'd you buy the new one anyway? Could buy a house in Wales for that much money. You ought to try a bit of thrift once in a while, mate. I mean to say, buying a shirt to save on the dry cleaning's a bit rich, isn't it?

You okay after that spat last night with the Ambassador? Jax says it got a bit nasty. What'd you do anyway? Fuck his wife?

Did not run out of soap powder. Never buy the stuff-that's what Morag down the launderette's for, isn't it?

Doyle.

Doyle,

What d'you think I am? Anyway, he didn't bring his wife—any of them!—with him, did he? So I couldn't do anything that stupid. Leave that kind of thing to you. What's this I hear about you and the new recruits down the training range? Sleeping rough, eh? And them so young, naughty Raymondo.

Saw Morag. Isn't she a bit big to fit in the machines? Thought it'd be easier just to use soap powder myself. Is that moustache her own, or is it just a trophy she got from some poor bloke? Oh, yeah, and she says not to put your denims in with your underwear any more, else you'll end up with pretty blue undies, petal.

Bodie.

## Bodie.

What did you say to Morag, you bastard? She was all over me, offered me tea and sympathy, even offered to hold my hand. If you've landed me in it— What do I mean, if? I'll get you for this, Bodie, the minute I find out what you've said, I'll get you for this. And

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while we're on the subject, you can pay next time, you stingy bastard. You getting desperate or something? I never did put my denims in with everything else, which means you've been fiddling with my knickers. Something you want to tell me, butch?

And I still want to know what happened with you and the Ambassador. Cowley nearly bit my head off when I asked him and then went off down the corridor sounding like something out of Macbeth. You know, hubble, bubble, toil and trouble. Cept I think it was your head he was planning on boiling.

Sleeping rough, I can inform you if you care to listen, blockhead, means getting twenty shit-scared, farting, snoring wet-behind-theears little pricks and taking them out to harden them up so they can survive CI fucking 5. So shut up.

> Yours, Naughty Raymondo.

Dear Naughty,

CALLY DONIA

Little pricks wet behind the ears? You shall have to teach them to aim better, petal! Can just picture that, all sitting round while Mr. Doyle pulls out his weapon, shows them how to load it, cock it and shoot! Hardening the little pricks—Freudian slip there, ducky?

Suppose that explains the piles of clothes you leave lying around behind your arse. Can't you at least dump them all into just one pile? Almost did myself a mischief this morning. Got in early (by the way, I expected you to be here at 6.30. Thought the training schedule was easy-peasy? Didn't Cowley say something about 'light duties' until diddums was all better?) and as it was still dark and as I was absolutely knackered after last night, I didn't see your fucking athletic support until I'd caught my foot in it and measured my length. And if you think I'm taking that down to Morag, then you're even stupider than you look, Goldilocks.

Got you some stuff from the dairy on the corner on my way home. Could do with some meat on your bones, going by last time I saw you.

### Bodie.

Dear Bodie,

It's not usually my feet I measure in my jockey strap. But it takes all sorts, doesn't it? Foot fetishists and all, I suppose. Oh, well, I still love you. thousands wouldn't but they didn't before, did they?

Cowley's idea of 'light duties' this time round means 14 hours, half down the training, the other half doing crap in the office. And get your mind out the gutter, you perv! Didn't mean that and you know it. Thanks for the stuff from the dairy, but could you get margarine next time? Don't use butter. And I still want to know what went on between you and the Ambassador. I'm beginning to think you were a very naughty boy, William. Told one of your Arab jokes, did you? Or tell them you're Jewish? C'mon, Bodie, give! I'll try to give you a ring later, if you're still in. Won't phone till after about one, though, give you a chance to sleep.

The little pricks are still stupid enough to get themselves wet behind the ears. Christ help us all. Listen, if Cowley tries to send you out with McNulty, you put your foot down. Grapevine down here has it that he's trigger happy, makes Shotgun Tommy look calm. No point in me getting better if you're going to end up flat on your back, is there?

Where'd you put my green T-shirt? And my old denims, and my white shirt, bath towels, spare sheets and socks? You can't have lost them, so where have you put them to be 'tidy', you mad military bastard?

> Yours. Doyle.

Dear Ray,

See you found the sheets. I'll see if I can find the other stuff for you. Must be in this pigstye somewhere, I suppose. Although how you can ever expect to find stuff, I'll never know. Here, have you been using a new aftershave, or has a strange man been sleeping in our bed?

Look, give it a rest. About the Ambassador, I mean. There was a bit of a misunderstanding, that's all, nothing major, but you know Cowley. The only time he doesn't get his knickers in a twist is when he's in his kilt. Borrowed a pair of your underpants-Christ, but you're a skinny thing. Could hardly get them on.

Thought you were going to ring me today? Woke up specially and then had nothing to do but watch the test card. Won't be in today— Cowley's got me baby-sitting some diplomat in the afternoon and stake-out overnight. By the way, thanks for the lasagne. Was starving when I came in.

#### Bodie.

P.S. It'd take something bigger than your support for me to measure that length in, Ray.

### Dear Bodie,

All right, so I know where one pair of my underpants has gone (never be able to wear them again, not after you've stretched them all out of shape with your fat bum), but where are the rest of them? Had to go to work this morning in all my glory and if that lot start slagging me off, I'll have your guts for garters. And no, I don't wear garters, so don't bother saying it. And what the hell happened to my towels? How the fuck did you manage to get them covered in green streaks? You're costing me a fortune, mate. And don't blame it on Morag-never had any trouble with her before.

Cowley says I'll be off this weekend. Any chance of you having some time free? Could maybe have a drink, actually get to see what the other half of this team looks like?

### Ray.

P.S. It true what the rumours are saying?

### Dear Ray,

Had a whole hour off today (Christ, can't wait until we're back up to full strength. In fact, I'd settle for half-strength.) and spent it running round Marks and Sparks like a chicken with my head cut off. Hope you like your new fucking towels. Cost enough. It was your fault anyway. I mean, who leaves a pair of green knickers in his pocket? And what I want to know is how come I don't have the time for a pee, but you've got time to fuck some bint, eh? Bottle green knickers? What was the rest of the outfit like?

Been quite nice out in the country, baby-

sitting that diplo. Champers and caviar all the way-for the nobs, we plebs have to make do with chip butties and Fresca. And yeah, yeah, I know about the cholesterol, but it's either that or nothing.

Wish you could phone me. Feels like months since I saw your ugly mug. Need to be reminded how incredibly handsome I am and no one does that better than you. Asked Cowleythe old bastard actually had the cheek to grin at me when he told me I was going to be up in Birmingham from Friday to Tuesday. You'll have to have a pint for me.

> Yours. Bodie.

Dear Bodie.

I asked you a question about the rumours about you and the Ambassador. Are they true? Better tell me, mate, before I start jumping to conclusions and find you guilty.

Left you a salad to make up for all those chip butties. Murphy says Birmingham was really nasty and you got knifed. Cowley tells me it's nothing, but I want the truth from you. Are you all right? And don't go all stiff upper lip on me. If you're not all right, I'll get Cowley to put me back on active and if he won't, I'll rip his balls off and feed them to him. What's going on, sunshine? It's not like you to be this careless. Is it all those chip butties slowing you down? Or is something getting at you? Wish I could park you on the settee and not let you out of here until you'd spilled your guts, but all I can do is leave you these poncey notes. But you tell me, Bodie, if there's something the matter. I can always call in sick and wait here to see you, if you want. We're so short handed, Cowley won't even be able to fire me.

Jax says his oppois going to be wrapped up in about a week, so we should get some time off together then. You be careful, you stupid fucking sod, or I swear I'll kill you.

#### Ray.

P.S. The green knickers belong to some O.A.P. who has the misfortune to live down the Estate where one of our bright young lads was supposed to do a house to house and managed to jump a fence right into a £3£3£3

clothesline. Was so busy picking him up, I didn't realise I had a pair of her knickers in my hand until she was coming after us with her carpet beater and curlers. Speaking of knickers, I shall have to wear those if some of mine that haven't stretched don't turn up soon, fat arse.

## Dovle

Ta ever so for the phone call. I feel so much fucking better already. What would I do without friends like you, eh? As I said, I'm being careful and no, there's nothing wrong. I'm just fucking knackered from working all the hours of the day, running my arse off, doing my sodding job. Sorry you were so upset that I couldn't set you straight about those rumours you're so fucking worried about, but that's because I haven't heard any, but that's not too surprising is it, since I don't get to sit on my behind all day, slurping tea and talking about people who're supposed to be my partner behind his fucking back, do I?

Will be in Manchester for four days, so you can have your precious flat all to yourself. Bought you three packets of sodding underwear to shut you up. And if you had half a prick on you, your own would still fit you.

В.

# Bodie.

That does it. I'm taking Thursday morning off, you should be back by then, and we're going to sort this out. What're you getting your knickers in a twist for? Or my knickers, you seem to have lost all yours. All the rumours say is that you made a pass at the Ambassador and the Sheik had a fit and threatened to turn you into a eunuch then and there, and with a blunt knife. You really pick them, don't you? Look, it's no skin off my nose if it's true, but it is important if that's what's making you so bloody stupid on the job. Keep this up, mate, and I'll be spending my first day back on full duty laying wreaths at your bloody funeral. Just tell me, Bodie, that's all. I'm not going to faint, even if it's true.

By the way, I was only joking about the stupid underpants, but thanks anyway. I suppose it's the thought that counts. Although I'm going to leave it to you to take them to the launderette and explain to Morag why I've suddenly started wearing leopard-print pants.

> Yours. Ray.

Dear Ray,

Sorry I flew off the handle before I went up to Manchester. Didn't really mean it.

Thanks for having my washing done, especially since I didn't get in until this afternoon. Was hardly here before I had to go back out again. Really appreciated having some clean clothes for a change. Let me know how much I owe you and I'll leave it for you.

Look, to be honest, I got back to town this morning, I just didn't have the balls to face you. I know you said it was all right, but it's one thing for you to leave me a note that says that. Didn't want to actually see your face when I told you. I didn't make a pass at the Ambassador, I'm not that stupid. But he made a pass at me, and we were on our own in his suite, there wasn't going to be anyone else back for ages. So he started giving me all these outrageous compliments and putting his hand on my knee, the same kind of thing you'd do with a girl. Then he started telling me what he wanted to do to me and what he wanted me to do to him. Ray, I know I should've told you ages ago, but what was I supposed to say? By the way, your partner, the guy that you share a bed with on stakeouts and who gets to see you naked in the showers and works out with you is as queer as the proverbial three pound note? Yeah, I thought it was a fucking stupid idea as well, so I kept my mouth shut. I've been passing for straight all my life. I'm one of those blokes who can do it with women, but I prefer men. I even thought about getting married, when I was in the Paras, you know, to give myself a bit more cover, quiet the rumours down a bit. Never did it, which is probably for the best, I suppose. It's not something I ever chose, the being queer, I mean. I've always been like this, as long as I can remember. I think that's

why I'm so good at keeping my hands to myself where I'm not wanted, so there's really nothing for you to worry about. Honest, Ray, I'm not going to creep up behind you one dark night and have my wicked way with you. You matter to me too much. You're the best friend I've ever had, and you don't know how many times I've wanted to tell you the truth, but I was always too scared it would make you go all uneasy and stiff about me. We're too good a team to let that happen, aren't we, Ray? And I promise you, give you my word, cross my heart, the whole bit, I'll never lay a finger on you. You can trust me, honest, sunshine. I've never touched you yet, have I? And it's not me that's changed, it's just that you know about me now, that's all. Don't let it ruin things between us, please. That's the only reason I lied to you and made you think I was a real ladies' man. Didn't want to ruin things.

Anyway, about the Ambassador. We'd got as far as a bit of serious feeling each other up and he was rabbiting on in his own lingo, don't know what it meant, but I got the general gist. Anyway, we were Sorry, you won't want to hear all the gory details. We hadn't got very far when the door opens and in walks the Sheik. Who threw a fit, because it turns out the Ambassador is his baby brother, one of dear old daddy's by-blows. So he's jabbering on, and the Ambassador is jabbering on, and all the bodyguards are at the door, screaming to know what the fuck was going on, and then Cowley showed up. I had to lie to him, Ray. I had to tell him that the Ambassador had suddenly started feeling me up and that I'd been in the process of turning him down when the Sheik had walked in.

Well, that's the lot. But Ray, you've got to believe me. I won't touch you, would never do that to you. As I said, I've never laid a finger on you before, that won't change just because you know about me now. All right?

#### Bodie.

P.S. Don't know what you did with them, but there weren't any socks in the washing, so I ran some through by hand and hung them in the bathroom. Should be dry for you in the morning.

Dear Bodie,

What do you mean, I can trust you not to lay a finger on me? What were you touching me with all those times when you've felt my bum up, or 'accidentally' brushed against my crotch when you've been doing something else and could pretend that your hand just happened to be there? You've never kept your paws to yourself before, Paddington, so why should I believe you now? You're the one who wants us to keep on exactly the way we were before, so if you stop feeling me up, it'll be you who's going all stiff and funny peculiar on *me*, not the other way round. But if you keep on the way you used to, every time you put your hand on my arse to help me upstairs, then we'll both know that it's because you fancy me something chronic. You do, don't you?

I don't want clean socks, I want you to start telling me the whole truth. Now, Bodie, not next week, not next year. We might be dead before then, and I want the truth. It's obviously easier for you to write me a note than tell me to my face (which just goes to prove that it was your fat arse that stretched my underwear, not your balls), so I won't try to make you tell me in person. But I want the truth, Bodie. All of it.

R.

Dear Ray,

Believe me, mate, you don't want all the truth. D'you really want to hear that I started with boys when I was only ten, before I knew it could spit stuff out as well as get hard? I thought I'd broken it, the first time I actually came, scared the life out of me and Jack McCluskey. First girl when I was almost 19, did that to keep some ugly brutes off my back and stop them from calling me a pansy and setting me up as a public convenience. Had my first real love affair when I was 21, lasted until he got killed. Run over by a bus, which was pretty funny under the circumstances. Not that I did much laughing over it. But since then, there've been blokes, some of them pretty important to me, but I couldn't really risk the involvement, not when I was under constant security checks and all the ones I fancied were the kind my CO was guaranteed

to have a canary over. But you said you wanted the truth, so there it is. And yeah, I've got eyes, so of course I fancied you. Christ, mate, half the straight blokes play tents after you walk past them, so what can you expect from a fucking poof, eh? So don't pretend to be stupid. You know, I know, and let's leave it at that, okay?

Mathieson and King should both be back in a few days, so we should be able to catch our breath soon. Still fancy that drink with me? I promise not to lisp or hit you with my handbag if my fella fancies you more than me. Bodie.

Bodie,

You bastard! I told you I wanted the whole story, and you give me that crap? Come off it, mate, I'm more to you than a tight arse walking away from you and I know it. But I don't know why I'm disappointed that you didn't tell me the truth. Why should you, when you didn't have the balls to tell me you were queer. D'you honestly think I didn't know, you dozy bastard? Christ, but you can be incredibly thick sometimes. How'd you expect me not to guess, when you spent half your life around me hard as a fucking rock? And what about that night we were stuck on night manœuvers with the army and we put our sleeping bags together to keep some heat in? Bodie, how did you think anyone could ever manage to sleep through all that heaving around and huffing and puffing? Don't insult me, *mate*, just tell me the truth for once in your godforsaken life, you fucking coward.

Your so-called partner,

Doyle.

P.S. And stop borrowing my T-shirts. You're ruining them.

Ray,

You knew the whole time and you let me go through all that? Then you have the cheek to call me names. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! Christ, we'd need floodlights to find you on a dark night.

But you want the truth, do you, you little

bastard. All right, I'll tell you the truth. Want to hear it, Ray? Get your jollies from me suffering, do you? Then you're going to love this, prick. While you were sitting there laughing up your sleeve at me, I was so fucking miserable I even considered going back to merc work. I was in love with you, though what I saw in a vicious little sod like you I'll never know. Oh, yeah, that's right, I was in love with you. That night down on the pig farm with the Army? You heard me coming, but did you pay attention to after? Couldn't bear it, so there I was at three o'clock in the morning in February, walking around outside because I was too fucking scared of what I'd do if I stayed in there with you. You see, I knew I could always put the other down to feeling my oats. I could always say I had a wet dream, but there's not much I could say to wangle myself out of it if you woke up to me cuddling you and telling you how much I loved you, is there? So I ran away instead. Always running away to protect you, so that I wouldn't scare you off with who and what I am. Oh, you're broad-minded, I know you are. But you crowned that bloke who tried it on in the pub that night, and look what you did to that fella who grabbed you and kissed you when we went in to nab Vickers from that club. Remember that night? You must've laughed yourself sick when you got home, seeing as how you knew that I was queer and you probably knew that I was in love with you too. And there was me, terrified that someone in there would recognise me and blow my cover and that would be the end of us. Pathetic, isn't it? I stood back and let you beat some poor fairy up because I was scared you'd suspect me if I tried to stop you. So go on, have a good laugh, have a proper giggle at my expense, but I'm warning you, Doyle, you'd better get it out of your system before you see me next. One crack, just one crack, and I'll beat you to a pulp, I swear. It's not even that I can't take it, but I won't, Ray, I won't. You make any digs at my expense, you say one fucking word to Murphy or anyone else, and you won't see me for dust. You got that? Really clear, is it? Just want to make sure. I won't take it, Ray, so don't even make any jokes.

Well, this note's a bit like Pinocchio's nose, isn't it? Grew and grew and grew. Almost forgot to tell you: Cowley said last night that you'll be back on active duty in three days and I'll be off this case in about 60 hours, so we'll be back together as a team. If you still want us to. If you don't. Look, if you don't, then just say so, and I'll talk to Cowley. I'll tell him that I've decided that I work better on my own, that it's nothing you've done, don't worry, I won't land you in it. But make your mind up, will you? Don't chew over this the way you usually do. Worse than a bloody cow, you are. Not much else to say, really. I was so furious with you when I started this, but there doesn't even seem much point in that, does there? So you knew and didn't say anything. It's better, I suppose, than you knowing and going to the Cow. He's got a saying for this—god, the old bugger's got a saying for everything, hasn't he? But he'd probably tell me that half a loaf's better than none. Or be grateful for small mercies. I am, in a way. As I said, I suppose it's better than you finding out and running away from me screaming rape. So there it is, Ray. Your partner took one look at you and fell like the proverbial ton of bricks. I did the one thing I always swore I'd never do, because of you, but that's not your fault.

If you can't face me after this, then at least have the balls to tell me. Leave me a note if you have to, and I'll be out of here before you come back off your shift. But don't think you can play your games with me, Ray, because I won't let you.

Anyway, suppose this has gone on a bit, hasn't it? Nothing else I can say. It's your turn now.

### Bodie.

P.S. Your mum rang, something about it being her birthday and what kind of son forgot a thing like that. I laid it on a bit thick, got you off the hook. Said you'd just finally had time to send a card today, so you'd better get your finger out.

P.P.S. Sorry about your T-shirt. But I'm sure Morag'll be able to get the bolognese sauce out.

Dear Bodie,

Blood out of a stone, that's what it's been. Have you any idea how long I've been trying to push you into this? Years, bloody years. All right, then months. I caught on at the very beginning, you know, all those years as a copper paying off, you could say. Not that it was hard to tip what was going on. You're about as subtle as a bull in a china shop and almost as clumsy. But just because I knew what was going on in your head didn't mean that I knew what was going on in *mine*, did it? Now that you've been honest, I suppose I ought to as well. Well, here goes. I've played around a bit, the way boys do, really. You know, round the back of the bicycle shed, you show me yours and I'll show you mine. Funnily enough, the first time I saw anyone come, his name was Jack as well. He was in the second form and used to show off to us young'uns in the first what he could do with his prick. Made us all as jealous as hell, and I don't mind telling you I was quite the local hero when I started shooting too. But none of it ever went much beyond jacking off, crouched down together, trying not to get our trousers messy. Then there was a bit of playing around when I was on the swimming team, but we never really did much there either. Then there was art school. I did everything when I was in with that crowd: booze, drugs, orgies, you name it, I did it. Including mutual masturbation, fellatio and sodomy. It was at one of those orgies that I kissed my first bloke. But the thing is, Bodie, I never liked it as much with men as I did with girls. There was something about women that could get me going in a second, when it always took actually doing something with a man before I could get hard. So I didn't know what the fuck to do when I realised that not only did you fancy me, but you weren't going to pack it in. And you weren't going to conveniently make my decision for me, either. There was only the once that you stepped out of line, only the once when I could have said that yes, you definitely made a pass at me and that was when that mad bastard Preston was after me. We were going up the gangplank to Browny's boat, and I think you meant to just pinch my bum, the way you usually do. But I slowed

down when you weren't expecting me to, and your hand slipped between my legs and your cock bumped into my arse. Then when I turned to look at you, you just sort of spread your hands and looked so fucking scared and apologetic, I let it pass. Anyway, we were on a job and I was concentrating on not being picked off by some maniac.

I never wanted to play one of my games with you, especially not when I realised that you were in love with me and that that was why you never chanced your arm. I mean, if it had just been lust, you could have picked a night when we were one over the eight and tried it on then, couldn't you? If I'd fainted in horror, you could've put it down to too much booze and that would've been that. But you loved me, it was as plain as the nose on your face, so I had to be sure what I wanted before I said a word to you. I had more or less made up my mind, but this not seeing you is what finally did it. I actually had to do without you, even though we were sharing because of the security cock-up. D'you realise this is the longest we've gone without actually being together since the day Cowley teamed us? And it's half-killed me. Well, I suppose you know all about that too, don't you, pet? So this is it. I'm willing to make a go of it if you are. Not just a fling until I get bored or until a bit of skirt attracts my attention, but a proper relationship. The best I can promise you is that there won't be any men apart from you, and any girls I fuck will be just passing fancies, nothing serious. But I don't know if I can give up women for you, Bodie. I'd have to call myself bisexual, but I'd say I'm about 80-20% towards women versus men. I know it's not exactly red roses, but it's all I can offer without lying to you. But it's all right by me if you want to give me roses! Always remember, pet, that you've got it in writing, which is more than anyone else ever got: I love you. More important than that, you're the one person I trust and the only one I don't resent if I need to lean on them. Won't be plain sailing, but you knew that because you know me. I'll try, Bodie, I'll honestly try. And when I see you, I'll explain to you about that bloke in the pubbut it wasn't because he grabbed my balls. I knew him from my days on the drug squad

(wake up, Bodie!), and, well, I'll tell you about it later. I know I'm supposed to be the brains of this partnership, but it honestly never occurred to me how you'd see me pummelling his brains out. But it had nothing to do with him being queer. I just had a lot to get him back for.

See you on Saturday? We could get this pigsty sorted out before it drives your orderly military soul round the twist, have our Morag take care of the washing, then go down to the Black Swan for lunch, talk about all this, sort a few things out. If you're willing to go for it, given the circumstances. I'll be gone by the time you get home (Cowley thinks that as I'm almost back on active duty, I can stop 'lying around on your spreading backside doing nothing at the tax-payer's expense' and make myself useful, so I'm out setting up security for that conference at 5.30 in the morning.). Sent a card to Mum-thanks, mate. And you owe me a new T-shirt-not even Morag can do away with Luigi's bolognese sauce. Anyway, I won't be here when you get home, so leave me a note, will you?

Ray.

#### Dear Ray,

Sod the fucking launderette. I want you waiting in bed for me. Not much point in doing a washing, is there? We're just going to get the sheets in a mess anyway. I'll see you my Christ, I can hardly believe I'm going to finally see all of you, in bed, for me! But I'll see you on Saturday, Friday if I can get the Cow to set me free early. D'you think I could wangle some compassionate leave? Conjugal visit? Nah, didn't think so either! I can hardly wait, love. Listen, em, a bit of a delicate question here. Obviously, I've been round the merry-go-round a few times, nothing's going to be a bit much for me, so no worries there. The thing is...Look, how long has it been for you? I mean, if I want to fuck, you know, the old sodomy and buggery, the love that dare not speak its name and all that crap, how would you feel about that? We can wait a bit, if you really need to. But I want you, god, Ray, I want you so fucking much all my trousers have gone too tight. You've no idea how many

wet dreams (and not all of them when I was tucked up safely in my own bed. Remind me to tell you about that time in Cowley's office, will you?) I've had about your gorgeous arse, the way the muscles clench and Sorry. Getting a bit carried away with all the excitement. Saturday!

#### Love.

#### Bodie.

P.S. Took you at your word. It's all right if you're not madly in love with me yet, as long as it's all right with you if I go a bit overboard sometimes. Hope you like the roses.

### £3£3£3

Bodie.

If it didn't mean we'd both be out of work, I'd kill the old bastard. I thought we were going to be back at work on the same shift again, not spending another two days cleaning up the Bishop op. Well, at least we had Saturday. Worth waiting for, wasn't it? Listen pet, you really mean it when you say you love me, don't you? Good. That means you can take the sheets down to Morag and explain why they're covered in cum and vaseline, you messy bugger you. You should take a leaf out of my book, mate, and always use the receptacle provided!

> Love, Ray.

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# GRIEVOUS BODILY HARM

This tale is divided into three parts, the first 'In the Beginning', being just that: a romantic start of the relationship. The second progresses until two bent coppers discover they are of precisely the same 'bent'. And with the last piece, 'Blessèd Are the Meek', the relationship moves more deeply into 'kinkier' sex and, more importantly, into complete love and trust. So what, naturally, was the working title for 'GBH'? Why-'the ultimate trust story', of course! So, this is a romantic love story—albeit SM—where the Glaswegian explores how honesty and trust can save a relationship when the conventionality and morality preached from outside would destroy it. If all this doesn't sound like your cup of tea, then don't read part three or even part two: You have been warned.

# PART I: IN THE BEGINNING M. FAE GLASGOW

IT WAS THE TWINKLE in the eyes that did it. Of course, by the time he discovered that there was a foul-tempered, moody, difficult bastard behind the twinkle, it was too late: he was hooked. Completely, totally, absolutely and utterly, caught, gutted and hung out to dry.

At least, that was how Bodie described love-but only in his less-cynical moments. The rest of the time, it was a cross to be borne, but not silently. The loneliness of loving Doyle and not being loved back had to be concealed by joking and messing about, and the desire that would lurch through him had to be camouflaged by pretending it was all just pratting round, the kind of poofter games that only the straightest of the straight would ever dare indulge in. Whatever it was, however he did it, the one constant was that it had to be kept inside, caged up small in a windowless room, lest it peek out and be seen by green eyes that would miss nothing. Bodie had even found that it became easier as time wore on, a routine of almost music-hall proportions subliminating the desire to love and to hold—and to fuck, as he was always quick enough to admit to himself, lying alone in bed, hand fisted around his weeping cock, his eyes threatening weeping misery even while his body snatched relief.

But that was in the solitude brought by night. Fingers tapping a counterpoint rhythm to the song on the radio, he wasn't even thinking about Doyle sitting beside him today in the car: he was congratulating himself that Doyle, poor bastard, had absolutely no idea whatsoever that his ostentatiously straight partner had fallen for him like a ton of bricks.

"What's the matter with you then?"

Startled, Bodie shot a glance at his passenger. "What?" he replied with grace, elegance and an extremity of wit.

"I said," Doyle repeated in that tone of voice that made the rest of the world sound like

morons put on this earth purely to try him, "what's the matter? You look like you can't make up your mind whether you've won the Pools-or forgotten to send your coupon in."

"That, Raymond old son, is because you don't recognise complete sexual repletion when you see it."

Doyle gave him one of his patented looks, to which Bodie smiled broadly, the spitting image of a man who was getting more than his share of earth-shattering sex. "So that's it, then?" Doyle said. "Not to worry, sunshine, the first time hits all of us like that. Bit more experience and you'll be taking it in your stride."

"You're just jealous because the wonderful Wendy walks around with her legs crossed. Frustration's a terrible thing, Doyle, you ought to do something about it. I've been told," he leaned over as they stopped for a red light, "that some blokes actually masturbate. So seeing as how you can shoot with both hands ... " He let it fade off into his most wicked smile, face lit up with glee and the red glow of the traffic light.

Doyle just glowered at him, turning away in disgust—and defeat. It was still half-dark outside and far to early in the morning for him to come up with anything approaching witty repartée. He passed the time, instead, struggling to fall asleep for another five minutes as Bodie drove them past all the hoarded-up shops and sleepy bus drivers. And trying to ignore Bodie's disgustingly cheerful singing along with '247, wonderful Radio One'.

"Will you fucking shut up?"

"Cheerful as ever, Doyle, eh? C'mon, it's almost half past seven, you should be all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed by now. You've had your coffee—"

"No I 'aven't. Run out." "Well, your tea, then."

"No milk, have I? You and your bloody cocoa..."

And if Doyle in this mood were given half the chance, that one small thing would become the symbol for every single thing that was wrong in the world. "Christ, you going to start on about that again? All I did was make a couple of mugs of cocoa-"

"Yeh, then buggered off to meet whichever girl you're working your way through this week, and left me with the mess in the kitchen—"

"And nothing but your imagination." He was pulling into the car park now, Cowley's car visible over there in the far corner, a small clique of agents already clustering like grapes. A glance at the sour-faced expression sitting beside him, and he couldn't resist it, his own face revealing more than it should. "Want me to invite you along the next time? Have a nice little troy, you and me?"

Grinning, he jumped out of the car, approaching Cowley, only the empty space beside him making him turn back in time to see the look on Doyle's face. The speculation he saw there threw him off balance completely, the picture of it reverberating round and around his mind, until he was like a cat chasing its tail. No matter how carefully, nor how often, he ran after it and examined it, he couldn't quite place it. All he could see, when he replayed the memory of that face, was speculation. Thoughtful speculation, coming from Doyle to him.

Needless to say, Bodie was basically useless the rest of the day.

"Christ on a crutch, Bodie!" Doyle was yelling at him before the door was even shut, never mind security locks on. "What was wrong with you today? Apart from the obvious, of course. Shite, forgetting to check that bloke's warrant card—just as bloody well he was a genuine copper. Dozy bastard, you almost landed us right in it. It'll be a fucking miracle if Cowley doesn't have your guts for garters tomorrow."

Being wrong always made Bodie defensive, his face surly as he followed the bellowing Doyle into the living room. "So I had a bit of an off day—"

"Bit of an off day? Christ help us if you ever have a really bad day, then." Jacket dumped, voice diminishing as Doyle disappeared into the kitchen for crockery and cutlery.

"And since when have you been so fucking perfect, tell me that?" Bodie shouted back. Carrier bag on the table, shiny foil trays with their hieroglyphed white lids appearing in aromatic mounds. "I had a bit of an off-day, right, that's it—"

"Yeh, right!"

"—and I'm still better than you are when you're at your best. Not that I've ever seen it to know what it is."

Doyle, back again, not lowering his voice from shouting through from the kitchen. "Don't pull that one with me, Bodie. This is the job we're talking about, not some bird, not some darts game we've got a bet on, the fucking job, Bodie. That was my neck on the chopping block—"

"A routine security oppo? You call that having your neck on the block? There was no harm done, nothing that could've gone wrong—"

"Apart from you."

Bodie looked at him then, really looked at him, recognised concern mixed with the temper in the green eyes.

Then a very different tone of voice, one that made Bodie shiver all the way to his toes. "What's the matter. Bodie?"

"Nothing." Hearing himself, he didn't believe him either.

"Oh, don't be a prat, Bodie. What the fuck's the matter with you? Something's going on inside that thick skull, and it's affecting the job."

"It'll be all right tomorrow."

"You sound hell of a bloody sure about that."

"Course I'm sure. Today was just...a whatd'yamacallit. A momentary aberration." "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," and Bodie grinned, all seraphic sinfulness, implying any number of things, from an excess of sexual indulgence the night before to a lack of sexual athletics which was on the verge of being remedied, anything to distract Doyle.

"And you expect me to believe that."

"Why not?"

"Why not, he says. Why not. I'll tell you why not, you great wally. Because your mind wasn't on the job, that's why not. You weren't paying attention-"

"It was a boring routine job that we could do with our eyes shut, Doyle, so don't say you weren't half-thinking about other things all day as well."

"Yeh, such as what the hell you were playing at, but at least I still managed to do my job, didn't I, Bodie?"

"You saying I didn't?" Attacking now, to cover that he was in full retreat, deflecting Doyle's natural and excessive need to know. "You trying to say I didn't?"

"You saying you did?"

Bodie just looked at him, recognising Doyle at his stroppy and stubborn best, then shrugged, as if by showing that it was unimportant to him, then Doyle would take the hint. Supremely nonchalant, Bodie went back to the Chinese food, piling his plate into an Everest of chow mein and spring rolls.

"Okay, so now we've established that your mind wasn't on your job today."

"You *have* left the Force, you know," Bodie mumbled round a piping hot mouthful of sauce-drenched spring roll. "Handed your uniform in and everything."

Doyle, to Bodie's unease, wasn't about to be distracted. "It'll be quicker in the long run if you just tell me, Bodie. Go on, give! You know I won't give in until I find out what the hell is going on."

Without warning, Bodie threw himself across Doyle's lap, lisping, "Oh, darling, darling, it's you! I simply can't contain my love for you, light of my heart!"

"Shurrup, Bodie, and get up off my lap as well. God, look at the mess you've made. If that sweet and sour stains my carpet, I shall have you pay for its cleaning."

Bodie smiled, well pleased with his ploy, everything once more hidden in plain sight where Doyle would never see it. He considered, for a tantalising second, camping it up a bit more, maybe even copping a feel under guise of pratting about, but he shoved the temptation aside almost primly: wouldn't do to get either too greedy or too sure of himself. Best

to leave as is, with Doyle distracted and off the trail.

He should be so lucky. Bodie groaned, as Doyle proved his tenacity once again. "Right, you admit that you were way off today, but you say you'll be fine tomorrow, and I'm supposed to believe you. I'm supposed—just want to get this straight, Bodie-to trust you with my back, after today's complete ballsup, with nothing more reassuring than you saying it'll be all right?"

"Don't you think you're over-reacting, Doyle? Look, so I was a bit slow off the mark today, but so've you been. It was only a routine—"

"Boring job, I know. But how'd you know it was going to stay that way?"

"Didn't, did I? But you know how it is, Doyle. Bit of danger, the adrenalin starts flowing, and you're off and running."

Doyle sat beside him, very quiet, very thoughtful, spearing Bodie with the occasional sharp glance. Bodie, used by now to covering up, ignored it all blithely, carrying on eating, downing his lager, watching the telly. Everything as usual, nothing whatsoever out of the ordinary, or so it seemed, were the observer to miss the tension underlying the banality. But the unease was down deep, and the banality on the surface, and in between lay the middle ground, the area that held their friendship, and the area that was now home to a lingering feeling of things not being quite right, of there being something missing, something not quite...enough. Bodie knew that median well, knew it for the thin ice it was, for all that it seemed so warm and cosy and safe. One step on there, into the barely delineated emotional longings, and he would be falling, sinking in over his head before he could catch his breath.

So instead of pulling Doyle in closer, instead of slipping his arm around Doyle's shoulder and drawing the slender strength into the curve of his embrace, he concentrated on his drink instead, moving on to Newcastle Brown Ale when the lager was finished, contemplating whisky when the beer was gone, watching out of the corner of his eye as Doyle set himself to the task of working his way through a hell of a lot of booze. The television set was decidedly

fuzzy round the edges, and Bodie felt himself slipping into the same dangerous state. Time, then, to leave, and to leave behind both Doyle and the temptation to let himself get really drunk, to give him an excuse to himself for letting go and reaching out to touch Doyle. To touch, and to kiss, and to love... He should leave, he knew he should. But he convinced himself that he could resist the lure of boozey amnesty as excuse for sex and that he could manage to keep the whole evening as simply closeness between friends. Doyle need never know the truth...

Night drawing late, Doyle drawing closer, sleepy curls drooping, fierce face softening into the faintest of smiles to curve the full and inviting lips. And Bodie sat very still, staring at him, whole body aching with the desire to do nothing more daring than cuddle Doyle in close to him, to cherish the wiry strength to him, to keep Doyle all for his own.

Not, wisely, a desire he acted upon. Instead, as limpid green eyes blinked at him, as the somnambulant warmth seeped from Doyle into him, Bodie got to his feet, stretching as if it were nothing more than stiffness from being sat there too long, yawning widely although he was far to involved to be tired. Knowing that the truth of it was that temptation was proving too alluring to be resisted for very much longer, and that if he gave in to his own desire, then this adorably rumpled sweetness blinking at him so unaware would turn into a beast that would bite off the hand that tried to feed it love.

"Best be off, then," Bodie said, pottering around, tidying up even though he knew it was stupid to prolong the moment, but he couldn't bear to leave just immediately, not with Doyle half-sprawled the length of the settee, legs akimbo, standard-lamp pooling light and shadow in the rills of Doyle's jeans. But, Bodie admitted wryly to himself, his small smile of self-deprecation fumbling its way through Doyle's unconscious appeal, it just went to prove how far gone he was: it wasn't even the sex that made him want to linger, it was this rare, sweet mood that had swaddled Doyle.

Bodie had dumped the last of the foil containers and the beer cans into the bin.

was gathering up his jacket and keys when Doyle spoke, speech slightly slurred by the lateness of the hour and the consumption of too many cans of lager.

"You ought to kip here tonight, mate."

"Oh yeh?" Bodie said, quite calmly, or so it sounded. "So you can keep me awake with your snoring?"

"So's you can avoid getting more points on your license and Cowley coming after you with a bloody hatchet for driving under the influence again."

Bodie stopped then, hand pausing in the act of clinking car keys into jacket pocket, a legitimate excuse for spending the night the last thing that had been on his mind-the last thing that had been on his sane and sensible mind. "I haven't had that much," he answered, for the sake of his conscience. The second Doyle had opened his mouth, a myriad of possibilities had presented themselves to Bodie, all of them wonderful in the night and probably lethal in the day, when coherent thought and consequences would demand their due. "Anyway, what're the chances of me being stopped, eh?"

"Driving the way you do, at this time of the night." A ponderous stare at his watch and then, added, "This time of the morning. 'S too late—or too early—for you to hit the streets." A chuckle, somewhat damp and bleary-eyed around the edges. "An' the way you drive, hitting the street's what it'd be, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah, but I'm not sleeping on that bloody settee of yours, so that means I'm going home to my own bed." He wanted to hold his breath, to keep himself entirely still, to wait patiently to find out if Doyle was going to make him an offer he couldn't refuse, even though he most certainly should. Instead, he wandered over to stand in front of Doyle, behaving as he always did. "Unless you're willing to sleep on that lump of springs and give me your bed?"

"Fat chance. I'm being nice to you, not bloody stupid. Nah, you can come in beside me. It's a big bed, you know."

Oh, Bodie knew, he knew! He'd lost count of how many times he'd seen that bed and wondered how the hell to persuade Doyle to let him into it. Now here was Doyle, inviting him to 'come in beside' him, as if they were

both just kids who hadn't discovered what their pricks were for yet. Christ, get into bed beside him, Doyle with nothing on but those stretchy pyjama bottoms he wore, and Bodie himself, suddenly, almost blushingly aware, that he had nothing with him he could sleep in. Nothing but his birthday suit and the future of England carried proudly before him. Bloody insane to even consider it, he told himself, stiffening his resolve, turning away so that he wouldn't have to look at Doyle and thus stood at least some chance of resisting temptation.

"You've gone off again, Bodie," Doyle was saying to him, slurring nonexistent esses, eyes owlish from the drink, mouth incredibly, invitingly soft. "Wish you'd tell me what was wrong, you great prat. Could mend it for you then." Doyle slumped back, abruptly boneless, and Bodie wanted desperately to caress the dimpling crease of Doyle's smile. Before he could, Doyle smirked at him with the delight of the drunk and said, sing-song: "I could make it aaaall better!"

With the traditional kiss? Bodie thought to himself, some memory of his mother surfacing unexpectedly, with her perfume of roses and ample bosom, all of it ensconcing and suffocating to a small boy held close to maternal love. "You, my old chum, are absolutely pissed," he said, sounding perfectly sensible when he wanted to scream in frustration. Trust Doyle to pick tonight to camp it up. In fact, if he hadn't known better, he would have said that drunkenness had given way to sodden seduction. But still, Bodie couldn't help but smile in response to Doyle's beaming face.

"Yeh," Doyle finally got round to saying, "I am. Pissed. Pickled as a newt, that's me." Eyes growing wider, "You'll stay, won't you, Bodie? Won't be able to find me way to bed else."

"Oh, come on, you, I'll see you upstairs." So saying, he bent down, looping Doyle's right arm over his own shoulder, hauling his partner to his very unsteady feet. "That's my lad, up the stairs to Bedfordshire with you. Soon have you tucked in and snoring.'

And Bodie didn't actually add out loud: before the drink turns you nasty. Doyle could

be a vicious drunk—Doyle could be vicious sober, for that matter-and Bodie didn't want to be here when that started. He'd had a few too many himself, and he wasn't exactly the village vicar when he got going either. Plus, there was no saying what would happen if he got an attack of the wandering hands and Doyle was sober enough either to remember it in the morning, or notice it in the night.

So he helped Doyle upstairs, his own feet a bit on the unsteady side, but his intentions absolutely rock-solid: Gibraltar had nothing on him. Apart, perhaps, from constancy. At the bedroom door, his intentions were purely virtuous, consisting of getting Doyle safely into bed, all alone, and Bodie himself out of there with his face intact and his balls still attached to his body and not removed by some swift jab of Doyle's vengeful knee. By the time they had got as far as the edge of the bed, all the promises he had made to himself were pretending to be lemmings, leaping off the edge of the bed to plunge, metaphorically speaking, between the sheets.

Doyle, at some stage in the manœuverings between door and bed and Bodie's attempts to stop him, had removed his clothes and was, quite literally, bollocks naked.

And Bodie, poor Bodie was stuck there, his arms full of naked, squirming Doyle—"I can't get my sock off, Bodie, give us a hand"-and his y-fronts were full of squirming cock, his body happily betraying him in favour of the luscious Doyle. The naked, luscious Doyle. The naked. luscious and-

Couldn't be willing, he thought to himself, trying to disentangle himself from a Doyle who seemed for all the world to be undoing Bodie's shirt buttons. "What're you doing?" Bodie demanded, Liverpudlian docks back full force, his accent freed by his shock-and his fear. "Give over, Doyle, pack it in!"

"No, won't. Can't come to bed with your togs on like that. Get me sheets all mucky."

And he was giggling, Bodie noticed, not the usual filthy chuckle, but an infectious giggle, the way Doyle laughed when he was absolutely plastered. Oh, god, he thought, what did I do to deserve this? There he was, in Doyle's bedroom, with a naked Doyle in his arms, and a very enthusiastic Doyle trying to strip him off. The very stuff of dreams, apart from the minor detail that Doyle was drunk and had no idea what he was doing.

But even as his mind was rejecting taking advantage of Doyle's drunkenness, Bodie's body was whole-heartedly embracing it, grabbing at the opportunity, cock twitching as his blood pulsed heavily through him.

"C'mon, Bodie, gerrem off! Go on, show us what you've been keepin' covered. Bet you've got a willie the size of me little finger an' that's why you've been so shy. That it, Bodie? Yeh, bet it is."

Bodie shoved him aside, not gently, the probing fingers leaving his zip alone, Doyle collapsing backwards onto the bed, genitals flopping, gales of laughter filling the room.

"William Bodie," Doyle managed between bouts of hysteria. "Little Willie Bodie! That what they call you, eh?"

But before Bodie could stand on his dignity and then retreat in high dudgeon, leaving them to be friends again another day, Doyle stopped laughing and stared at him, eyelids at half-mast, marginally glazed eyes fighting to focus on him.

"But they're wrong, aren't they, sunshine?" Doyle slurred with ponderous seriousness. "An' even if they were right, the whole fuckin' lot of them," an arm waved, encompassing some vague massing of unknown, uncaring strangers, the world out there against the world they had in here, just the two of them, "I wouldn't care, would I? Best fuckin' partner a man ever had, you know that, don't you?" Doyle was saying, maudlin in drink as he always was, and for Bodie, this part of the evening was well worth the price of the booze for getting Doyle into this state.

Affection was a rare crumb from Doyle's table, and Bodie always snaffled it up as voraciously as a dog, but never, absolutely never, letting Doyle see his hunger. "Yeh," he said, smiling in spite of himself, hand ruffling Doyle's hair, "I know that, glad you finally twigged."

"Twigged about something else, you know," Doyle whispered, all wide eyes and slightly wobbly winking. "Somethin' 'bout you, Bodie."

"You did, did you?" and he betrayed, not by action or expression, a single second of his

unease, as his mind effortlessly replayed the incident that morning.

"Oh, yeh," Doyle carolled in uncomplicated glee, "I know something you don't!"

"Well, if it's about me, then 'course I know about it, don't I?"

"Oh no," curls bobbing, Doyle staring at him with the unblinking concentration of the drunk. "You haven't worked it out yet, don't think. You'd've done something if you had, wouldn't you?"

"Doyle—"

"Don't like it when you call me that. Did you know that? Never liked it, 'less we're on the job. Makes me think of other stuff. School, an' the police an' me dad, all that crap."

Looking at that unmasked face, Bodie knew he was sinking, ineluctably, into the morass of his own feelings. It was high timepast time-that he got out of there, with Doyle's virtue and their partnership still intact. "Want me to call you Raymond, do you, then?" he muttered, disappearing off out of the bedroom for a minute, voice rising with the increase in distance. "Or d'you fancy Raymondo?" He was back, not really looking at Doyle now, careful to concentrate instead on the practicalities of a bucket on the floor, glass of water and towel from the kitchen on the bedside cabinet. "Like that better, do you?"

There was a longish pause, and he assumed drunkenness had slid Doyle off to sleep, but just as he relaxed and went to stand up, Doyle spoke again, a small voice, but clear as a bell.

"Prefer pet. Or sunshine, or mate. Like it when you give me nicknames, you see."

Christ, but he had to get out of here! If Bodie stayed, he'd take Doyle up on more than Doyle was probably offering. That was it, he explained to himself, Doyle always turned maudlin and melancholy when he got drunk, the lonely, self-pitying misery interspersed with giggling bridges that only led to more sadness and more confessions. And Doyle was one for reaching out when he was drunk, all his inhibitions removed. Doyle, reaching out to him for love and affection, all the rules thrown out by the drink... The temptation was too much, and he had to run, bolt, else he'd be in that bed with Doyle, fucking him,

and fucking their partnership up permanently. And he knew, had weighed it all up more times than he cared to remember, that a quick tumble, even if it were to satisfy either Doyle's curiosity or Doyle's drunken thirst for affection, wasn't enough to destroy a friendship. For Doyle, after, there would be embarrassment, and regret, and that gnawing feeling of betrayal every time he looked at his so-called best mate who'd taken terrible advantage of him...

Turning away without looking directly at Doyle, a sudden movement caught Bodie's attention, and he turned. There was Doyle, dressed to the nines in his birthday suit, laughing like a drain.

"Just thought of something," Doyle managed through the giggles. "Remember that song?" He laughed again, and then he started singing, voice belting forth with more enthusiasm than musicality, feet and hands and hips keeping up with some inner beat, "Little Willie, Willie won't, go home, and you can't put Willie down, Willie won't go..." Then the giddiness was gone again, Doyle serious, sombre even, with the spurious and intense sobriety that only drunkenness brings. "That happen to you, Bodie? Up it comes, an' then it won't go down. Doesn't matter what you think about, you can't get it to behave itself, and you have to sit there, with everyone lookin' at you an' sniggerin'. Happens to me, all the time, in fact. Doesn't take much to get me started, does it? Anything, really. Or anyone. Sometimes, all it takes is someone wanting me..."

Bright green eyes gazing at him, Doyle's voice coming between Bodie and the few paltry panicky defences he had left. Bodie swallowed, hard, his eyes never leaving Doyle's, the moment turned upon him, and it was then that Bodie saw how inevitable it had all been, from the very second he had first laid eyes upon Doyle. There was, quite abruptly really, no point in fighting it any more; time, at last, to give in, yield, let temptation and love and lust have their sway. How could Bodie not? For whatever reason, Doyle wanted him, or wanted to try a bit of the queer, or simply couldn't face being alone. For now, for the time being. Tomorrow would be different.

Tomorrow would see the return of the prickles and the hackles, tight expression over tight mouth, Doyle gone all proper on him, maybe not even willing to look at him...

But Doyle was looking at him now. Right now, here, in front of him, naked and beautiful and irresistible. What price Bodie's honour and resolve now? Slowly, Bodie's hand went to his own clothing, beginning to undress himself, to make his body as naked as his eyes, and all the while, Doyle was watching him.

"We're drunk, Bodie, aren't we?"

"Oh, very, very drunk, sunshine," Bodie told him, feeding him lies, cocooning him in deceit, keeping him safe. It would be Bodie to bear the blame tomorrow, when all that was left for Doyle was a hangover and the aftereffects of sex. But Bodie could take it, because he had always known that he liked men. Never had to fight it, always taken for a macho bastard by dint of looks alone. Nothing for anyone else to use as threat to his own sense of masculinity, unlike Doyle with his curls and his artistic bone structure and grace. Oh, yes, Bodie could bear it.

For Doyle, he could bear anything.

"You're stayin' with me, aren't you, Bodie?"

"For as long as you want me to, mate."

"Like it when you call me that," Doyle told him, tongue tip moistening his lips, the pull of that going straight to Bodie's groin.

"Know you do," he whispered, kicking his shoes off, getting rid of socks and trousers and underwear and shirt, all of them shed as if they were his own misgivings and his own fears of what the repercussions would be.

"Goin' to call me nice things all night?"

"Want me to, pet? Want me to whisper sweet nothings to you? Is that it?"

"Want you to make the loneliness go away. Did you know, Bodie," and the voice was suddenly almost chatty, the eyes blinking slowly, "did you know that I'm always lonely? In here—" a thump to his chest, over the sternum where the heart lies, romantically speaking, "right here, that's where it's always empty. No-one ever gets in there, Bodie. Cept you.'

"I won't let you be lonely any more, Ray," he whispered, kneeling on the bed between Doyle's spread legs, a shiver of arousal going through him as he was able to touch Doyle for the first time, here, and here, where the hair on his chest curled beautifully around the pinkness of nipples.

"We're drunk, Bodie," was all Doyle said, and Bodie left it at that, for it was true-for one of them. He wasn't even close to being as drunk as Doyle, but it was enough, Doyle drunk enough that he would be able to face himself in the morning, Bodie 'relaxed' enough that he could excuse himself to his conscience when that under-used faculty started kicking him awake.

"We're as drunk as you need us to be," Bodie said, closing his eyes and leaning down closer, until he could smell the soap that Doyle used, and the deodorant, and under it all, animal keen and sharp, sweat, and musk, and Doyle. He licked, tentatively, not wanting to push too fast or too far and scare Doyle off. His hand lowered, until he felt the plush of crisp body hair, the flattened curls fluffing up with his caressing, and then the incredible sensation of actually having his hand on Doyle's cock. The experience, generically speaking, was hardly new to him, but this time, it fascinated him, this new texture and new map of veins that was uniquely Doyle. He wanted, so consumingly that he could think of nothing else, to taste him, to suck him in deep and feel the surge of cock down his throat. Slowly, hands careful to stroke and knead and pleasure every available inch of Doyle's skin, he swallowed Doyle down, inch by inch, widening his jaw to accommodate the thickening flesh. The hardness excited him, his own cock rising to press against his inner thigh and the edge of the mattress. He pressed down hard, and groaned in pleasure, the sound reverberating through Doyle, the muscles trembling fine and lean under Bodie's hands.

Bodie withdrew, just far enough to cradle the head of Doyle's cock in his mouth, his tongue teasing the flange, paddling under the foreskin, tracing every sensitive nuance, knowing to the finest detail what Doyle was experiencing. He sucked, hard, pulling Doyle back inside him, letting him go, flickering the tip of his tongue against the small slit, then

sucking Doyle back inside. One hand was massaging the sweet curve of buttock, the other dallying with Doyle's balls, rolling them, squeezing them, thumb coming between to separate them, thrillingly, the suggestion of danger itself showing how much trust there was between them. But still, his next move was made cautiously, wary of turning Doyle off or sobering him up with shock. Bodie danced a finger along the raised rimple of flesh that led so unerringly from balls to arse, beckoning his touch, demanding his caress. He fingered the puckered opening, and Doyle's entire body went suddenly still, and Bodie withdrew, quickly, returning his hand to the mind-numbing massage of Doyle's balls, sucking on his cock with renewed enthusiasm.

There were fingers tangling in Bodie's hair, disarraying both the style and his own equilibrium. He couldn't get over the fact that this was Doyle, his Raymond Doyle, clutching at him, thrusting into his mouth. Couldn't get over it and didn't want to get over it. He never wanted to let Ray go, wanted to hold this precious man inside, to worship him with a carnality of passion made taboo by religion. And he was going to snatch every second's enjoyment he could from this night.

It was obvious that Ray was close to coming, so Bodie slowed his caresses down, bringing Ray back from the peak, stringing him out on a resonating thread of pleasure. Hunching over Doyle, Bodie stretched behind himself, fingering himself, consciously relaxing his anal muscles. He used his left hand to stroke Doyle's cock, tantalising Doyle while he spat into his own hand and used that to whet his arse, spitting again, fingers going inside himself, making himself ready, doing all the work so that all Ray would know was the incredible power of sinking into a yielding body.

Bodie wanted none of the details to be left to Ray, for if they were, then Doyle might lose the hurtling urgency of sex, might slow down enough to think, instead of being slowed down just enough to be held close to the edge of orgasm. Perfectly aware of every inch of his body, Bodie pressed outwards with his sphincter, his fingers sucked in as his body contracted again. Oh, yes, his arse was ready,

as ready as he was. He sucked Doyle into his mouth again, and there was a keening cry of pleasure and the liquid suction of Bodie's lips reluctantly freeing the wet cock. Bodie would have preferred something a bit more lasting than saliva, but he'd been fucked often enough that he wasn't too tight any more, not the way he had been at first. He'd learned, oh, how he had learned to take a man inside.

Bodie was on his knees now, Doyle coming round behind him, both of them carried along by the heat of the moment and the waves of need coursing through them. And for Bodie, the insistent croon of love that was inside. This, having Ray wrapped around him, strong arms banding his chest, hair tickling his back, cock thrusting hard and demanding between his thighs, the slick head of Doyle's cock pressing into his balls, this was what he wanted. This feeling of Doyle encircling him, covering him, possessing him. But Bodie was not yet complete, his own aching loneliness a chasm in his body, a hollowness crying out for Doyle.

A fumbling, a stifled groan, and then it happened: the moist head of Doyle's cock pressing at Bodie, his arse opening so readily, so easily, to the demands of the flesh. Saliva commingled with pre-cum, mixed with experience and yielding love, and Bodie was open wide, Doyle pushing into him, the beautiful cock stretching him with delectable care. There was a flash of pain, but Bodie welcomed even that as a signature of his love being inside him, and then the pain was gone, forgotten, subsumed by the exquisite pleasure of cock against his prostate, of cock filling him, of cock marking him as Doyle's. Doyle's breath was against his neck, he could hear the guttural moans and, with shivering happiness tingling his spine, the words of affection, the endearments uttered by a drinkloosened tongue. A tongue that was laving him now, and a mouth that was nibbling on him, while hands caressed his chest, and sharp hip-bones bruised his arse as Doyle fucked him. Harder and harder, with Bodie pushing back to meet every inward thrust, fucking himself on Doyle's cock, wanting to please Ray beyond all else. He arched his back, letting himself give voice to his pleasure,

allowing himself to surrender to the joy of making Ray happy, his own body alive with the feeling of having Ray inside him.

It was incredible, literally, a dream come true, and Bodie lost himself in it. Nothing existed but him and Doyle, together, become one, Doyle in him, Doyle fucking him, Doyle loving him. For he could tell himself that, with Doyle umbrella-ing him, with Doyle saying those shattering words to him. Love. Words of love coming into Bodie from Doyle's mouth, words and words and words, all of it flooding him, and Doyle was in him, fucking him, cock plundering him, heat inside him. It hit Bodie: Doyle had come, inside him, deep, deep inside him, was collapsing heavy on top of him, cock still clutched in the darkness of Bodie's arse. A hand grabbing Bodie, milking him, Doyle still whispering words to him, hand blurring in perfect motion, cock still inside him, still hard, the slickness of cum melting the heart of him.

Bodie was coming, a stream of pleasure erupting from him, captured by Doyle's longfingered hand, rubbed into his belly, the aroma of his own musk filling his nostrils. Slow, slow circling caresses on Bodie's belly, Doyle heavy on his back, and then they had collapsed together on the bed, Bodie flat on his stomach, Doyle sprawled beside him, one hand trapped under Bodie. Awareness creeping in on Bodie, and then Doyle was asleep, a limp weight beside Bodie, and Bodie was in limbo, neither awake nor asleep, wholly absorbed with the memorising of this night's pleasure.

And most of all, with this night's words. As Bodie began to fade into sleep, he shifted Doyle into a more comfortable position, then wrapped himself around his partner, reliving words he never expected to hear again. Until the next time they got drunk. Until the next time Doyle could tell himself that they were both too pickled to know what they were doing.

Unless, of course, when Doyle woke up he remembered everything and blamed Bodie. It would be typical of Doyle, to take his own feelings of guilt out on Bodie, and lay all of it at Bodie's feet. But Bodie knew he could take that, had done so, in the past. Bodie could

take anything, as long as he didn't lose Doyle. He could take anything at all...

With his partner and erstwhile, temporary lover warm against him, Bodie drifted off to reluctant sleep.

Bodie was stiff, and sticky, and it took not one second for him to remember the why's and the wherefore's. But it took him almost two seconds to realise that the presence in bed beside him was awake, and watchful.

"You awake?" Doyle said.

Bodie considered lying, considered pretending that he was still asleep so that he could stay where he was and relish another few minutes of being with Doyle, of being in Doyle's bed, with the evidence of their lovemaking dried upon him. To lie there in the arms of his dream for another little while, until reality and sobriety made themselves felt.

"Bodie, I asked you, are you awake?"

"Yeh," he muttered, hoping that Doyle wouldn't kill him, that Doyle had forgotten everything that had happened the night before and would suffer from a sudden bout of extreme stupidity and thus fail to recognise the signs of sex all over the bed.

"How's your head?"

So, Bodie realised, drunkenness was going to be their excuse. Fair enough: it was the best he'd expected.

"Which one? The one attached to my shoulders with a herd of fairy elephants in it, or the one that's floating above the bed, spinning round and round in circles?" Joining in the show, not letting on at all that he'd been completely aware of what they had done and why.

"Mine's..."

The pause made Bodie wonder: Doyle didn't usually let not knowing what to say keep him quiet. In fact, Doyle was prone to opening his big mouth without thought of consequence when he could least afford to.

"My head's fine," Doyle said finally.

It took a minute or two for it to register with Bodie. Doyle always got the worst hangovers when he'd been really drunk. So if he didn't have one this morning-

"So's mine," but Bodie said it quietly, and

into the pillows.

"I got the impression," Doyle asked him, voice very gentle, "that last night wasn't exactly your first time?"

"For being fucked?"

"Yeh. I was scared I was going to hurt you when you shoved yourself at me like that, but...'

"But you didn't, did you, mate?"

There was a rueful chuckle behind Bodie, affectionate enough to make him turn round and look at Doyle.

"Christ," Doyle shrugged, reacting to the way Bodie had said 'mate'. "I actually told you about that, didn't I?" And incredibly, Doyle was reaching out, fingers tracing the arch of Bodie's eyebrows, the proscenium of his lashes. "Must've been drunker than I thought."

Bodie could see Doyle waiting for something, and when he finally listened to what he'd just heard, he realised precisely what had been inferred. "Drunker than you thought?" Bodie pushed up onto one elbow, blinking rapidly as Doyle turned the bedside light on. "You—you mean to tell me you were sober last night?"

"Sober as a judge."

"Oh, in that case, you were plastered, then."

"No, just tippled enough to give myself a bit of Dutch courage. And," Doyle looked down, away from Bodie, before impaling Bodie with a searching gaze, "to give myself an excuse if you weren't that way inclined."

It was Bodie's turn to caress well-known features, to learn them tactually as well as visually. "Worried, were you?"

"Course I was! Thought you wanted me, but I might've just been seeing what I wanted to see. So ... "

"After what I said yesterday morning, you decided to give it a go, and set yourself up as drunk so that I couldn't object too much."

"Yeh," and the familiar urchin grin was back, Doyle oozing confidence, and a relatively simple delight. "You should appreciate the brilliance of that, my lad, and learn from it."

"Oh, that was incredible-can you do Cowley?"

"Nah—he wears cast-iron knickers." "Has anyone ever told you you've got a dirty

#### PART I: IN THE BEGINNING

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mind?"

"Only after I got to know you and you corrupted poor little innocent me."

"Innocent! You? Christ, Doyle, you probably winked at the mid-wife."

"Don't be disgusting, Bodie." A glint of a smile, then, "Didn't start any of that till I got my hand up Mary Morrison's skirt at Confirmation."

"You randy old toad!"

"Randy young toad back then. And we'll have none of the old comments now, either. I'm only two years older than you."

"Three, if you start counting straight after your birthday."

"No chance. Two full years as the calendar flies."

They both stopped abruptly, swallowed, lay for a moment looking at each other. It was sinking in, under the banter and the lightheartedness of their usual backchat. Sinking in that last night they had fucked. That last night, they had changed all the rules. Bodie was very serious, fidgeting with the edge of the blanket, then visibly gathering his courage and saying, "I don't want last night to be a one off."

"I should bloody well hope not. It's not everyday we get a chance like this, Bodie."

"Yeh," Bodie agreed. Continued, carefully finding out the parameters of their new relationship, "Won't have to explain about the job to you."

"Or buy me flowers if you have to work late and cancel going out at the last minute."

"Won't have to come up with an excuse for leaving early when the phone rings."

"Or needing sex hard and fast after a rotten day."

"No," Bodie agreed, smiling, happiness beginning to overwhelm him. Doyle-his

Ray—hadn't been turned off by last night. No, his Ray wanted more, wanted it to be a proper relationship—"if you have to cancel going out," meant dates, meant being togetherand by the cat-got-the-cream look of him, Ray'd also thoroughly enjoyed the night before. And 'hard and fast', well, Bodie shouldn't be surprised by that, should he? They both knew what the job could be like, what a man could need afterwards. And that feral masculinity of Doyle's was one of the things that had attracted Bodie most, after the wickedly amused eyes. He feasted his eyes on the vision of Ray lying naked in bed with him, small pink nipples peaked in anticipation, full lips parted in invitation. "Can I ask you something?"

Doyle looked at him steadily.

"Can I kiss you, Ray?"

Doyle grinned at him, left arm snaking up to pull Bodie down to him. "Course you can," Doyle purred at him, mouth opening, tongue coming into Bodie, taking possession of Bodie's mouth, stopping his heart with delight.

There was an elation in Bodie then, at this proof that Doyle wasn't some basically straight bloke flirting with a bit of the bent side of sex: blokes like that didn't kiss like this. Most of them. in fact. didn't kiss at all. for that was the last bastion, the one thing that could be refused, for kissing meant queer and kissing meant affection. Or for Bodie, with Doyle in a bed rumpled from their passion, kissing meant love.

Sighing into Doyle's mouth, Bodie lay down and let his lover lie on top of him. His mouth was filled with Ray Doyle, his senses overflowing with him. And Bodie could never have enough of it. Bodie sighed again, opening his mouth and his legs to Ray Doyle and surrendered completely, ecstatically, to love.

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PART II: SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

PART II: SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND M. FAE GLASGOW

IT WAS GOING WRONG, and he knew it. What he didn't know was how to mend it.

"Bodie," Doyle began, getting only an abstracted grunt in reply. "Pay attention, Bodie," he joked, casting a worried glance at his lover whilst continuing to polish the chrome on his bike.

"What?" Bodie said, not looking at him.

It was that kind of thing that was niggling at Doyle. There had been no argument, no falling out, nothing, but now he felt as if it were all slipping away, dissolving in his hands like salt in water. He couldn't get a grip on it, couldn't even see it, but he knew it was there. Felt it, every time Bodie went off into a world of his own, or ogled some bloke-or some bird, or both together—in the street. Or when Bodie would refuse an offer of a night out, disappearing for however long their leave lasted, coming back to him some time later. Sometimes a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks, but the old togetherness was becoming worn and patchy, an uncertain rug under their feet, bare spots to trip the unwary. Well, he was wary now, had to be. Because if he weren't, Doyle had a feeling he was going to loose Bodie.

It bothered Doyle, that Bodie hadn't even noticed the long pause, that Bodie was so badly attuned to him that no comment had been made about his own moodiness and silence. "Look," he finally said, blurting it out, "there's something wrong with you and you'd better tell me what."

Bodie looked at Doyle then, a cold stare, of the sort usually reserved for commanding officers who had boot-licked their way to the top. "Been watching Agony again, have you?" Bodie went back to his newspaper, cutting Doyle out, a page turning, then he rose to his feet. "I'm off," he announced, baldly, not looking to see what effect his words had on his partner. "I'll see you at work on Thursday, all right?"

"What's wrong with seeing me tonight, or tomorrow or Wednesday?"

"We're off-duty. And I don't want to live in your pocket, Doyle." Which was approximately opposite of the truth, but safer by far to say.

Doyle polished a square inch of chrome furiously, frowning all the while, and then saying, actually coming right out and saying it. "You want out, then?"

"Of CI5? Nah. It's not much, but it's the best game in town, you know that."

"It wasn't that I meant, so don't come over all innocent with me, Bodie." Doyle looked him straight in the eye this time, defying him to either lie or say yes. "D'you want out of us?"

That pulled Bodie up short. "Want out? Christ, Ray, don't be so fucking stupid. What would I want out for? Eh? Tell me that?"

"Yeh, but that's the problem, innit? I can't tell you that, but I can see you gettin' itchy feet. You're goin' to walk soon, aren't you, Bodie? You're going to leave me."

And Bodie heard the unspoken: Just like everybody else. He groaned, turned away, stared out of the window for a moment, then turned back to Doyle. "Look, love," he said, knowing Doyle needed the comfort of words that were usually confined to the bedroom, "I don't want out. It's just... All this—" and his encompassing arm took in the flat, the cosy scene of them working on the bike together like an old married couple, the perfectly normal life outside the job, "it's not enough, not for me. And it's not your fault, there's nothing you can do about that," he rushed to reassure, "it's me."

"So I'm not good enough, is that it? You bastard, you've been going on and on about how much you love me, and all the time you want someone better? Tell me, Bodie darling, who am I when you're in bed with me? Eh? Who do you pretend I am?" The pain ripped

through the room, stripping Doyle bare, showing a depth to him that was white from being kept hidden so long and so well.

"It's not that at all, Ray and don't you go twisting what I'm saying. I'm trying to explain-

"Oh yeh? Trying to explain what? Trying to explain that I'm not enough, that I can't give you enough? Then you tell me this, Bodie. I fuck when you want to fuck, I hold you when you want me to hold you, I stick by you when no-one else'll touch you with a barge-pole. I'm the one who listens to you after a job, or when you're hurt. I'm the one you come to if you need anything and I'm the one who gives you every single fucking thing you've ever asked for. And now you're telling me that's not enough? So go on, Prince Charming, you tell me what is enough. You tell me what you need that I'm not giving you."

"You don't want to know, Doyle." Warning, loud and clear as an air raid siren.

Doyle ignored it, ploughing on. "Don't want to know? I just fucking asked you, so how can you say I don't want to know? What you mean, Bodie, is that you don't want to tell me."

"Yeh, that's it. You're right, I don't want to tell you, I don't want you to know. And if you don't like it, then tough titty, Doyle, because that's the way it is." Bodie's voice was growing bitter now, with the disappointment of a relationship that was proving false for him. No matter how much he loved Doyle, what they had simply wasn't enough to fulfil him completely. "You don't own me, mate," he said, tinged with something like sadness, "and don't you forget it."

"Now hang on just a minute, Bodie! You owe me an explanation, mate. You can't just walk out of here-"

"Can't I? You just watch me, Doyle. You just stand there and watch me!"

The door slammed shut, cutting them off, one from the other, only the echoing anger of their words left to keep Doyle company.

Slowly, he sat down, picked up the polish and began to buff a piece that was dull and tarnished, as if by shining that up, he could take the bitter tarnish off his own life.

Bodie's heart was still racing, thundering in his chest, breath fast and shallow. He walked for a long time, needing to get the anger out of the way, needing to let the pain subside. Christ, but he couldn't take much more of this! But he couldn't leave Doyle either. Caught between a rock and a hard place, nowhere to turn, nowhere to go, and all he could see was the slow acid erosion of his relationship with Doyle.

At the door of the Club, Bodie hesitated, thinking about the consequences of going in there, running the same old argument round and round again. It was this secret that had come between them, this secret that was destroying the trust they both needed. But then his mind cleared, and he recognised that it wasn't his secret that was the problem, it was the fact that it had to be kept secret, that it was something he couldn't tell Doyle about. That was where the problem lay, and there was a way out of that. He could tell Ray, lay his cards out flat on the table, and if Ray couldn't handle him having another outlet, one that Bodie knew from life-experience that he couldn't be complete without, then Ray could walk. But the choice would have to be Ray's, because Bodie couldn't make the break. Not for all the tea in China could he even contemplate leaving Ray, the furious arguments and slow dissolution notwithstanding.

It was the same decision Bodie came to every time he stood on this doorstep. Tonight, though, the metallic bite of fear filling his mouth made him wonder if this time, he might actually do it.

The thought terrified him, and so he pushed it aside, opting instead for the thing he had stormed out on Doyle for. Bodie raised his hand, knocked in the accepted code, and was permitted to enter.

It was worse the next day for Doyle, and the next, and by Thursday, his misery had worked itself up into a fine temper.

"Oh, look at what the cat dragged in," was what Doyle said by way of greeting when he bumped into Bodie in the corridor. "Glad to see CI5's finest managed to find his way to work all by himself."

"And good morning to you an' all, mate,"

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Bodie muttered to the retreating back, praying that Cowley had a ton of work for them to do, not relishing the threat of spending the day stuck in a car with Doyle if all they had to do was sit and watch some house. And hoping, frantically hoping, that this was nothing more than another of Doyle's spectacular sulks that would blow over eventually. It was one thing for Bodie to say that he could take anything, it was quite something else to bear the cutting edge of Doyle's anger.

A carbon copy of the day that had started their relationship in the first place, it was a stultifyingly routine job: one that would have been boring, but for the tension that snapped and crackled between them, the simplest exchange turned into vilification and argument. Part of Bodie wanted to argue, to fight back tooth and claw. but he didn't. Couldn't. because it was his fault. It was Bodie who had attacked Doyle's masculinity (in Doyle's eyes, anyway, Bodie knew), it was Bodie who had said that what they had together wasn't enough. And it was because there wasn't enough trust in Bodie for him to tell Doyle why it was all falling apart around them.

Their relationship was winding down, to an ending, or winding up, to a confession, and thence, an ending. Either way, it was over, or would be, soon enough. Bodie could see that quite clearly in the masked pain every time Doyle looked at him, could feel it in his own enervating depression as he contemplated coming out into the open and watching Doyle walk away in disgust. There was always a chance, of course, that Doyle would want the same things he did, or more likely, be willing to turn a blind eye. But how long would that last, with Doyle's possessiveness and jealousies?

Bodie glanced at Doyle, who was standing beside him, the perfect picture of the perfect team, but they both knew differently. The old tacit communication was gone, strangled by a lack of trust and an anger fed by pain. Doyle's face was drawn and pinched, bags under the eyes and lines there that Bodie had never noticed before. The lips were tightcompressed, clenched shut to keep God knew what bloodying comments in, words always one of Doyle's more lethal skills. It was, for

both of them, quite simply unbearable. Bodie didn't want to upset Doyle, didn't want to bring him anything but pleasure and comfort and belonging, but Bodie could see no way of accomplishing that without destroying what little they had left.

"Fancy a drink tonight?" Bodie asked out of the corner of his mouth, not turning full round, not with Cowley's gimlet glare mere vards away.

Doyle felt no such constraints. He turned, abandoning all pretence of scouring blank walls for hidden terrorists and delivered a glower of which even Cowley would have been proud.

Bodie wouldn't budge. "Go on," he whispered, "come and have a drink with me. We could go to that Indian place you like. Or even better, we could go round—

"I don't want a fucking drink with you, Bodie. In fact, I don't even want to see your face or hear you voice, d'you get me?" It was the most Doyle had said to Bodie all day, and it revealed as much agony as it caused. "Fuck off, Bodie, and find yourself some other mug to mess about."

"I'm not messing you about—"

"Well, well, well, it does have a brain after all," Doyle said with all the sarcasm at his command. "Yeh, you're fucking right you're not messing me about. Not any more. As of Monday night, if you want to be precise about it."

A fist of panic hit Bodie in the gut, Doyle's hissed fury more than the usual huff, far more than any mere temper tantrum. "C'mon, Ray," he whispered, the beginnings of desperation churning him up, "don't. It was just a fight, we've had them before-"

"But we won't be having them again."

"All right, so I won't argue with you again, that's fine. But you've got to talk to me—"

"Oh, I'll talk to you, all right. On the job. But if you come near me after work, the only thing I'll say to you is stuff you don't want to hear."

"Ray—"

"I said," and Doyle was dangerously furious now, "fuck off, Bodie."

Bodie subsided, battered by Doyle's unmitigated anger and by Cowley's frowning

stare. Silent as the tomb, Bodie stood beside Doyle, and knew that they'd never been farther apart emotionally than they were right now. Even at the very beginning, when Doyle had been hostile and contemptuous of an ex-merc gun-runner, it had never been like this. Back then, the hatred had been impersonal, simply directed at Bodie for what he had once been. But this-this was personal, intensely so, piercing every chink in Bodie's armour, cutting him to shreds. Cowley, bowing unctuously, was playing civil servant to the hilt, seeing the ubiquitous foreign diplomat out the door, the outside team taking over. Bodie and Doyle were suddenly alone.

"Ray, listen to me. Okay, so you're angry with me—"

"Always this quick, are you?" Again, aciddrenched sarcasm, Doyle giving no quarter.

"But at least let me explain."

"Oh, you want me to come and have a drink with you and waste my evening off to sit and listen to you come up with a pack of lies." Doyle laughed then, very nastily. "Why? So that you can salve my ego and get me back into bed with you? What's the matter, Bodie? Worried that your on-tap source of sex is going to dry up on you?" His gaze raked Bodie from top to bottom, concluding with a contemptuous sneer at Bodie's groin. "Oh, what a shame. My heart fucking bleeds for you."

With that, Doyle was walking, boot-heels clicking on the parquet floor, jacket flapping with the speed of his retreat. Doyle was refusing to take it any more, Bodie lying to him the way he'd seen Bodie lie to a hundred birds. he was damned if he was going to put up with it.

But there was a part of Doyle listening still, hoping that Bodie would come up with an excuse for him to stay, to mend the broken fences before his heart broke.

Bodie said, the one thing that could make Doyle stop, the one thing that Bodie had never said anywhere else before apart from in the bedroom. "I love you, you know that, don't you?"

"Do I?" Doyle said, keeping his back to Bode and his face turned away. Not letting Bodie see, not letting Bodie know how much Doyle needed him. "You've got a fucking peculiar way of showing it."

The voice was right behind Doyle now, breath stirring the lighter curls, tangling in the heavy ringlets at his nape. "Didn't know what else to do. Didn't know how to tell you, did I? I mean, I couldn't just come out and say it, could I?"

"You just did, Bodie. Or was that another bit of strategy?"

"It was desperation, that's what it was. Christ, Doyle, half CI5 is wandering round here, Cowley can hear flies fuck three miles away, and you've got me standing here telling you I love you and complaining that I'm only doing it for show? Come on," he let himself plead, more than willing to beg this man, "come home with me after work. Let me talk to you."

"Got a good excuse all worked out, have you? One of the lines you use on your birds?"

Bodie took a deep breath, exhaled, started the painful process of laying himself out for vivisection by Doyle's less than tender mercies. "No. It'll be the truth, although you won't like it."

"That bad, eh? What is it? A wife and ten kids? A predilection for kiddie-porn?"

"Bad enough."

But Doyle noted that Bodie denied none of it, leaving him to wonder and worry. Doyle was, he considered, an extremely worldly and broad-minded person, but Bodie had not only been round the merry-go-round a few times, the bastard had been on the swings, big dipper and ghost train as well. But if it were really nothing more disgusting than Bodie needing a bit of spice in his life, a variety of men, then he had to decide what he was going to do about it.

Funny, Bodie with women didn't bother him, to the point where that was something that they hadn't even needed to discuss, but the thought of Bodie needing to go to another man emasculated Doyle-and infuriated him. It was all right for some to have these open relationships, but not him, oh, no, not him. Bodie was his, completely or not at all, and Doyle neither could nor would accept half a loaf.

Unless, perhaps, it was half a loaf or none at all. It was that question, that thorn in his

side, that Doyle had to think about. And what his reaction would be if Bodie were willing to stick with him and no-one else, but only if Doyle did the same.

"All right," Doyle finally said, his display of reluctance not entirely for show. "Your house, tonight. We'll be finished here shortly, so I'll come over at seven thirty."

Without giving either Bodie time to argue or himself time to think, Doyle walked away from Bodie and outside, where he wanted to think.

"Come in," Bodie said to him, all darkly handsome in navy blue shirt and trousers, feet still bare, socks in one hand, shoes in the other.

"I'm a bit early," Doyle shrugged, not caring to put Bodie at his ease, still undecided whether or not there was room for anything but hostility in him.

"That's okay," Bodie answered, awkward, uncomfortable because they were talking to each other as if they were near strangers, politeness covering up a profound distance. "You hungry? I've got—"

"Nah, I already had something." Then added, as an afterthought as Doyle often did when he had forgotten his manners in front of strangers or mere colleagues, "Thanks anyway."

Standing marooned in the middle of his living room, Bodie was at a loss. This was, in some ways, worse than outright hostility, because if Doyle were chucking things at him-words or crockery, it made no difference-then at least Doyle was being himself, and feeling something. This indifferent chill was throwing Bodie completely off balance, and he needed something, some prop to get him through this. "A drink then?" he asked, brighter than he should.

Doyle regarded him with all the superciliousness of the mature adult for the gauche and acned teen. "Considering where we end up when we drink, no thanks."

It was like a slap in the face, and Bodie sucked his breath in, whirling round so that Doyle couldn't see his expression—and so that Bodie would resist the temptation to blubber at Doyle's feet. "Well, I'll put the kettle

on then, shall I? Former copper like you wouldn't turn down a cuppa, would you?" And Bodie cringed with embarrassment at himself. He was doing all the worst things, everything he knew he shouldn't and Doyle was going to kill him—

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But Doyle was looking at him with the faintest glimmerings of approbation.

Bodie grinned, delighted, that at least he hadn't made things worse and that he had found something that eased Doyle's rabid displeasure. He bumbled a bit more, making a show of getting tangled with shoes and socks, careful to be utterly charming in his shrugging abandonment of the attempt to finish dressing. "I'm all fingers and thumbs tonight. I think I should give up on these, don't you?"

He waited, not moving until Doyle had given him the smallest of nods, the way he did on the job, when they had to do something Doyle didn't like.

"Right. A cuppa, then?" he asked, still too bright, rubbing his hands like a Vicar at the tea tent.

Doyle said nothing, seating himself on the sofa, wishing that he could simply wave a magic wand and have everything be all right again. But he couldn't. There was nothing for him to do, according to Bodie, and that was something Doyle couldn't forgive the other man for. Doyle was well-acquainted with guilt, knew how to deal with it. And if he had done something wrong, then he could mend that, start doing the right thing instead. But to simply be told that Bodie had been lying to him all this time, and that there was nothing Doyle could do-there was no chance of him simply forgetting that.

The clatter of the cups heralded Bodie's return, and Doyle looked up at him, giving nothing whatever away, letting Bodie know that the onus of proof was upon him, that Bodie was guilty and it was up to him to give Doyle a reason for not passing the harshest of sentences.

The fact that Doyle was searching frantically for loopholes was neither here nor there, and something that Doyle himself was not about to let slip. Bodie had messed him about too much, and Bodie had lied to him, and that

was the one thing he would not forgive. "So you were going to tell me your excuse for all this shite you've been pulling with me."

Bodie didn't answer, postponing the denouement for another few moments, this the hardest thing he'd ever done, SAS, Northern Ireland, Africa all included. "Okay," he said when Doyle stirred, restless, "okay. It's just hard, y'know, to come out and say it. You know, flat out like."

"You managed that today when you wanted to stop me. Or was I right about that as well and it was all just more lies?"

"Nah. I meant what I said today. Never had the balls to say it before, that's all."

There was a long pause, which Bodie filled for himself by busying about with the tea.

"I'm not going to waste my whole evening on this, Bodie," Doyle said, sounding for all the world as if he were bored, whilst his heart trip-hammered away to itself.

Doyle was sitting opposite him on the settee, and Bodie was reminded of the day on Brownie's boat, or any number of times, when Doyle wore sun-glasses and was as frosty and welcoming as ice. Welcoming or not, Bodie knew that Doyle's patience was gone and Bodie had to tell him now.

"Okay," Bodie said again, forgetting all about role playing and machismo, forgetting about pleasing Doyle and thinking about nothing other than having to tell the truth. A lie now might get him out of this particular jam, but Doyle would turn him into mincemeat when he found out. So the truth it had to be, if he had any chance of rekindling the trust between them. "I wasn't buttering you up when I said it wasn't you. You know, me going off like that. It's nothing you're doing, or anything."

Doyle didn't move, barely blinked, completely impassive, focussed intently on analysing every word Bodie said.

"It's more...well, it's something you're not doing. Not that I blame you, or expect you to do it, or anything like that. It's just...there are some things I need and you can't give them me."

"Such as?" The tip of the iceberg indeed, so much hidden under those calm words.

Bodie looked everywhere but at Doyle,

then finally looked Doyle straight in the eye. "Power," he said.

"You what? What the hell are you going on about, Bodie?" But Doyle had an inkling, a small germinating idea, and he wanted to know the rest of it before he permitted himself a reaction. He lashed his temper down tight, and listened.

"Power. And domination. Pain, the kind that's actually pleasure."

"Are you trying to tell me," Doyle said, velvet whisper over steely ire, "that all this crap, all this fuss I've been through is because you're into S&M and were too fucking scared to tell me?"

"Yeh." Not quite defiant, wariness taking the braggadocio out of Bodie's words. "Have been for years."

Almost whispered, a test being given, Doyle asked him: "And if I told you you had to choose either me or it?"

"Then I'd choose you. But I wouldn't be able to keep away from it, and if I did, then I'd go back to being the bloody bamstick I was when I was in Africa. And I won't be like that again, Ray."

"So you're telling me that you'd lie to me? You'd spew your lies about loving me, and then go off somewhere to some big hairy bloke with tattoos and have your arse flogged and your tits clamped?"

"No, because I don't go for big hairy blokes with tattoos," Bodie snapped, regretting his outburst immediately. He didn't want to push his luck: Doyle was actually taking his admission about the S&M quite well, considering the bigotry he usually got from people. "But yeah, to be honest, I'd go back to the Club because I can't give it up any more than you could give up everyday sex."

"The Club? And what the fuck is the club when it's at home?"

Bodie shrugged, feeling like a lamb being led to the slaughter, but having to go all the same, wondering all the while that Doyle hadn't asked the usual questions or raised the usual issues of spurious morality. "It's a private members club, same as all the others, only difference is that in our place, all the members are men and all of us like some pretty specialised stuff."

Doyle leaned back, the pose he adopted during suspect interviews. "What kind of men?"

Another shrug, while his mind raced. Doyle hadn't asked what kind of specialised stuff, but what kind of men. Perhaps Doyle's jealousy was actually going to help here. "Most kinds. A lot of Service blokes, quite a few from the Intelligence Services, doctors, lawyers, Indian Chiefs. All sorts, really."

"And you let anyone who fancies it have a go at you?"

"Not anyone. But sometimes, depending on what I need ... "

A long silence, while Doyle digested this, fingers playing with a loose thread on the inner seam of his jeans. "Why'd you never tell me? Didn't you trust me enough?"

"It wasn't a question of trust!"

"Wasn't it? What else was it then? Something like this and you can't tell me about it? You'd rather fuck the relationship up, bugger the partnership, and all because you didn't trust me enough to stick by you?"

Bodie didn't know how to answer that, so he kept silent.

"What'd you think I was going to, throw up in disgust?" Doyle demanded, temper rising. "Come off it, Bodie, I'm not a shrinking fucking violet."

"Look, Ray, I hinted at it a couple of times, and you weren't interested. And it's not exactly everyone's cup of tea, is it?"

"So you were trying to protect my poor sensibilities. Nice of you," Doyle sneered. "And it must've been some bloody hinting, Bodie, because I never even noticed. What'd you do? Something subtle, like walk out on me and not tell me where you were going?"

Bodie winced, looked down at his shoes.

"I take it, by the way, that that's why you wouldn't come near me for days at a time? Letting the welts heal, were you? Waiting till the bruises had faded so that I wouldn't guess and try to make myself a part of your life there as well?"

"Ray, I've already told you, it had nothing to do with trust." Bodie was shouting, partly because he couldn't bear to hear Ray mock him like that. "Listen, mate, every time I asked you to be a bit harder with me, you'd go

all sweetness and light, and that-well, that told me everything I needed to know."

Doyle glared at him, fiercely, devouring Bodie with his eyes, demanding that all the truth be laid out on the table between them, where he could see it. "Even if you thought I wasn't interested, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you wouldn't understand, that's why! Outsiders never do."

"And what wouldn't I have understood?"

"You want it all, don't you? You want all the gory details. All right, I'll tell you. But don't blame me if you don't like hearing it." He stopped for a breath, composed himself a little against the pain and embarrassment within. "I go both ways, Top and bottom, giver and taker. But a lot of the time that's only because of the way I look. People expect me to be a Top, so I end up doing that a bit more often than I'd like. What I really like is being a bottom, Ray, and don't tell me that it wouldn't have fucked us up royally once you found out that your big tough partner liked to be tied up and made to beg to have his arse thrashed."

"So you decided to wait until things were already up the spout before you trusted me enough to say anything?" Doyle's voice was no longer unadulterated anger. There was something else in there, underneath the fury, mingling with what might have been relief. "You waited until there was nothing left to lose before you'd risk telling me with the truth."

"No. I waited till now because I didn't want to risk you." Bodie rubbed his hand across his face, worn out by emotionalism. "Ray, have you any idea how often I've lost someone because they don't understand about what I need? Because they can't see that what I am in the bedroom or someone's blackroom is only a bit of me, not all of me?"

"Oh, yeah, that's right. Outsiders don't understand." Doyle paused there, waiting until Bodie heard his silence and looked up at him. Then, and only then, he said: "But what about insiders. Bodie?"

And Bodie stared at him, astonished. He'd hoped that at best, maybe Doyle would be willing to give it a try, but he'd been sure that Doyle was the sort who had his fill of aggro

and power-plays in his work, and didn't want to come home to it as well, no matter how much love was part of it. "You?" and he couldn't help sounding utterly incredulous. "You're one of us?"

"Used to be." Doyle looked away, turning inwards, reliving something usually only glimpsed at, something best left fallow.

"Used to be?" Bodie leaned forward, elbows on knees, hands loosely clasped between his thighs. "What made you stop?"

A laugh redolent with bitterness then, and Doyle sprang to his feet, going over to stand at the window, his hand running through his hair. "Quite the night for true confessions, innit?" he said, and his voice was shaken, and there was a tremble deep inside him, as the purulent memories resurfaced, grinning at him like skulls. "Fair's fair, I suppose," he muttered, to his own reflection in the window. He laughed again, briefly, a sound sad enough to draw blood. "Grown-ups playing I'll show you mine if you show me yours, isn't it?"

"You don't have to tell me, Ray," Bodie said, not because it was true, but because he hated seeing Doyle hurting like this.

"Yeh I do, and you know it. You've done your bit, it's up to me now. You were right about the first bit being the hardest." He turned for a second, a flash of genuine amusement in his eyes, "Fancy another cuppa, do you?"

"Yeah, why not?" Bodie said, hefting his own half-full mug. "I'll have a whole fucking pot of tea, if you need a bit of time."

"Nah. Just being a coward. Hate going through this." An enormous sigh, and then Doyle spoke, his voice devoid of self-pity, a sere recitation of facts that revealed more of his turmoil than histrionics ever would. "I had a friend once, someone I've never told you about. I really cared about him. I mean, really cared about him, Bodie. You're the only person I've ever loved more than him."

The casual admission of love shocked Bodie to the soles of his shoes. He'd thought all of that sort of stuff had been pillow-talk, the kind of thing said during sex and rejected the rest of the time as sentimental codswallop. To think that Ray had meant it, all of it, but had felt that there was no place for it in their

relationship appalled Bodie and flailed him with guilt.

"This friend of mine... He was ex-Services as well, same as you. Anyway, he was a really complicated man, I never knew quite where I stood with him. He used to be a Top too, but he'd given it up, before he even met me. And he never would tell me why he'd given it up, just kept on telling me I ought to stop it. But I wouldn't, and although I kept on waiting for it to happen, he never left me."

Bodie was beginning to understand a bit more clearly why Doyle had been so upset by the silences and the secrets.

"He'd turn a blind eye whenever I went out, you know, pretended I wasn't still doing all that." Doyle chuckled, obviously remembering some of the good times he had had in the past. "I used to get into some really heavyduty stuff, serious, you know, not just playing at it-and I was bloody good, as well. Anyway, I was always a Top, never fancied the other." Another stiletto of laughter. "Never trusted anyone enough before him, to be honest. To cut a long story short, we'd been together for quite a while, and he'd stopped saying anything about what I did on the side. He even started taking an interest, you know, saying he was worried about me, saying that he wanted to make sure I was all right, that I wasn't getting in too deep."

Doyle stopped then, and simply stared out of the window, his face a picture of misery. Bodie waited patiently, knowing how hard it had been for him to simply face what he had expected-bigotry and revulsion-and thinking how much harder this must be for Doyle to confess to.

"Then he came to me and said..." Doyle swallowed hard, then went on, "he said that to be a really good Top, you had to be a bottom at least once. Course, I was thrilled-Christ, I was a right fool over him, wasn't I? I couldn't believe my luck that he'd changed his mind, that he actually wanted to get into a scene with me. So I convinced myself that it must've been that he'd got jaded before, but because he loved me so much, he wanted to get back into it. I'd never wanted to be a bottom, Bodie, always hated the idea. But I was in love with him, and he said he was doing it because he loved me. So I let him." The hand run, shaking, through the hair again, skin gone pallid, tiny beads of sweat on upper lip. "It was-Christ, it still makes me shiver if I think about it. He wouldn't stop, you see."

And Bodie felt that, deep inside, knowing the gut-wrenching fear and horror that it must have been.

"He said he wanted me to know what it was really like. Started on about all this shit about how what I'd been doing—what he used to do-was sick and unhealthy. Then he said he wanted to take me to my limits, then past them, show me what it was like, teach me what I was doing to myself and to my 'victims'."

Bodie wanted to go to him, to hold him, but he knew better. He knew Ray had to talk this out and he knew that he himself had to wait until Ray was ready for him.

"Course, I had no idea he was going to do any of that. And on top of everything else, I was always a Top, so you can imagine how scared I was about being a bottom to begin with, giving myself up to someone like that. Completely, no control. You know what it's like.'

Bodie did, of course, but from the other side of the coin, as a man who exulted in being able to take whatever someone else could dish out to him, or ecstatic at being free from having to make even the simplest of decisions. But to be abused like that, by someone Doyle had trusted... He shuddered, and held his tongue, listening to the dry catharsis of Doyle's speech.

"He hurt me, Bodie, and not the good kind of hurt. Fisted me when I wasn't readymade me bleed, ended up at the doctor because of that. But the physical pain was okay, I got over that quick enough. But, Christ, Bodie, I'd trusted him. I'd trusted him with everything, and look what he did. He betrayed me."

"He raped you. That's what he did. You didn't want it like that and he forced you, so it was rape."

Doyle was looking at him, an expression of longing in his eyes, saying something that he still couldn't give voice to, not even this many years after that nightmare.

"Oh, Ray, love, you poor bastard," and

Bodie understood what Ray couldn't tell him he needed. He was on his feet, ensconcing Doyle in his arms, holding on tight, while Doyle poured the rest of the words out.

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"He did what he said he was going to do. Took me right beyond my limits, and it was... I couldn't face it again. Couldn't face him again. And the bastard didn't understand!"

"How could he not understand? He'd raped vou—"

"No he hadn't, not according to him. He didn't see that he'd forced me farther than I could go. He thought he was curing me of something that he thought was sick.'

"No worse zealot than a convert, eh, Ray?" But despite the light tone of his voice, Bodie had a knotting urge in his belly, to kill, to murder, to maim. To destroy the man-and just because Ray hadn't told him didn't mean Bodie wouldn't find out-who had done so much damage to his Ray.

"D'you know, he couldn't see that what he'd done to me was violence, not... I don't even know what to call it any more."

"Something primitive about what we like, isn't there, Ray? It's there inside us, and it's instead of hurting people on the outside, all the people who don't like to be hurt. Nothing wrong with it, Ray."

"Then why didn't you tell me you were into it?"

"Because how many people understand us, eh? But he used to be one of us—and he shouldn't've done that to you. Bastard."

Doyle said nothing for a while, resting against Bodie, relishing a strength that was enough to prop him up for a time. "I thought I'd never mend, Bodie. I mean, I trusted him enough to let him Top me. And then he went and did that to me. And after, I was too scared to go back into again-or maybe too damaged to feel comfortable with myself any more. I'd even told him he'd 'cured' me, that I'd give it up the way he had. Maybe I did give it up for the same reasons as him. But I doubt it. As far as I was concerned, it was because I couldn't trust anyone like that again... Left him right after that, never even saw him again after that night."

"I'm not surprised. But Ray, you can't let him ruin things for you." Bodie was arguing with him now, trying to bring him closer. "It was rape, exactly like rape," he repeated, needing to make Ray understand, desperate to undo the festering damage the un-named bastard had done with his violence disguised 'cure', "because he forced you and hurt you and—"

"Betrayed me, yeh, I know. But..."

"But what?"

"But look at me, Bodie! Just look at me. All around me, everything about me is violent. My temper, my work, even the sports I likeshooting for one. And then he took sex and twisted it all up with violence and deceit and-Christ, Bodie, I was terrified that he'd corrupted me. And what if he has? What if I'm right and him bringing violence into my sex life—what am I saying, sex life? I was in love with him. And he kept on telling me that he was only showing me the truth, he was just showing me what a sick bastard I was. What if he's corrupted me about love too?"

"Ray, love," Bodie whispered, caressing Doyle's cheek, kissing him lightly, "what was I complaining about? I was saying that every time I wanted it rough, you'd go all gentle and lovey-dovey on me. Now, does that sound like a man who's got violence and love mixed up?"

"That's what people say about S&M."

"And we know the truth. And I want you to be my Top."

Even Doyle's breathing stopped, for a moment, and then started again, rough with emotion and unease. "No. I'd hurt you ... "

"I should bloody-well hope so," Bodie answered him, seductively.

"I don't mean like that, you daft git. I mean the way he hurt me. I might, Bodie. He might've screwed me up more than..." Doyle tailed off, contemplating something dreadful.

"Only one way to find out," and Bodie said, and he sounded too cheerful, too hearty, as if none of this were important and recognised it for the mistake it was the second Doyle tensed and pulled free from his arms.

"Don't you ever listen to me, you fucking twat? I can't trust myself, Bodie. And what would I do if I hurt you, eh? What would I do if I betrayed you the way he did it to me? You just tell me that."

"You couldn't, because I like being bottom,

so I wouldn't be forced into something that's not natural for me. And I want you to do those things to me, and I can take a lot, Ray, I can take—and enjoy—everything you can give me. So it wouldn't be the same, even if you did exactly the same physical things to me that he did to you, because I want it."

"Do you? Do you really? Or is just a conditioned response of your body?" Doyle was asking himself, not Bodie, but he still had no answers for himself.

"So you enjoyed some of it at the time, then, did you?" Bodie answered, putting two and two together and responding from a well of supreme calm deep inside him. He understood, perfectly, Doyle's reaction both at the time and later, and now he could see the path out of this, could see a way to keep them together forever. All he had to do was trust Ray implicitly, with everything about himself, and he'd already done the worst of that. He knew Ray wasn't going to go running off in horror or disgust because of what he liked, and fear of that was what had come between them. And the rest of it was easy, for him.

The dread was gone now, and all that was left was the trust, and the love. Bodie smiled, broadly, happiness growing in him as he saw just how rosy the future looked. "Ray, I trust you with my life every day of the week, near enough, barring days off. So it stands to reason, doesn't it? If I can trust you like that, then what's the sex, but the icing on the cake?"

"You still don't get it, do you? What he did to me, Bodie-yeh, you're right, some of it I enjoyed in a twisted kind of way, at the time, but that was only to get me through what he was doing to me. I couldn't believe he was doing that to me-god, what he did was on par with the Spanish Inquisition." One step, that realisation, that splitting what had been done to him in cruel morality from what he did for pleasure and for love, and then he had Bodie in his arms, or he was in Bodie's, the two of them holding on to each other. "It had nothing to do with sex," Doyle said, and meant it, and believed it, his own guilt disappeared and his self-loathing sinking fast. "And as for love and trust—" he whispered, to the man he loved and trusted despite all his

fears, "all he did was destroy them, for him and me. And I know it had nothing to do with what we like, not really, but...now I'm not sure I can do it properly any more."

"What're you so worried about this for?" Bodie said into the froth of hair that veiled Doyle from his sight. "Worst that can happen is you'll fuck a scene up, and god, even someone as perfect as me has been known to do that."

"That's the worst I can do?" Doyle demanded, self-contempt putting up one last fight. "Oh, no, Bodie, the worst I can do—"

"Is what he did to you, and you're not going to do that to me. I've already told you, even if you take me farther than I want to go, I'm prepared for it, so it wouldn't be the same thing. Not in the ways that matter."

Doyle leaned back, looked carefully at Bodie. "You know, going by the way you're trying to persuade me, you must be really desperate to have me do you."

"Dead bloody right I am," Bodie agreed cheerfully. "C'mon, Ray, look at it from my point of view. I've been shitting myself from the day I met you in case you found out what I get up to on the side and started looking at me funny if you did. Then I thought you were coming here tonight for me to confess my all and end up with you up-chucking all over me or reporting me to Cowley as a security risk. And what do I get? It turns out that my walking wet dream isn't disgusted by my kinky little specialities at all. In fact, he's a Top himself. C'mon, Ray, it's all my Christmases and birthdays rolled into one!"

Doyle's face remained sombre as he watched Bodie. "I suppose it is, if you look at it like that."

"How else is there to look at it? Karma," Bodie said, wiggling his eyebrows, happy as a lark and twice as giddy form the sheer relief, "that's what this is. Karma."

"You reckon?" Doyle asked him. "What about Doom? What about this being a nasty kettle of fish? This could backfire on us, Bodie."

It was obvious that it was going to take more than a quick confession from Bodie to get Doyle loose from the damage he still dragged around behind him. That worried

Bodie, because he knew Doyle-let him walk out of that door with their relationship still in two separate pieces, and it would take a miracle to overcome the guilt and the pessimism and get them back together. But there was a way round that, a very simple way, and one that would not only glue them back together, but would establish the bond of trust once and for all.

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And Bodie knew Doyle was ready for it. He was very much at his ease in this: he had never had any problems accepting that he liked to submit to other men. It was just a part of him, as basic as breathing and as necessary to him. But it didn't mean that he was of the slave mentality, not even close. Right now, with Doyle still reeling a bit from facing his own personal nightmare, this was Bodie's time to take command, his time to lead the way. So he stepped back from Doyle and slouched, just a fraction, so that the bootheeled Doyle was taller than him. Bodie lowered his eyes, staring at the floor, face totally blank and said, "That's up to you, sir. Please do whatever you want to me, sir."

Bodie should have felt ridiculous saying it, would have, within the confines of CI5, but this was separate. This had only a glancing influence on their lives outside of these walls, but everything to do with who they were. Bodie stood there, passive, waiting, hearing the sudden intake of breath with something akin to joy.

The moment stretched on and on, and still Doyle stood there, watching Bodie. Bodie, whom he trusted more than he'd ever trusted in his life before-only to discover that the one time Bodie had broken that faith was in a warped attempt at protection. Bodie, whom he loved, enough to let him go if that's what Bodie needed, and enough to own Bodie completely-or to forge a perfectly balanced relationship between them, the S&M filling the spaces they needed it to, more banal pursuits fulfilling their more banal needs. The question was not whether or not Bodie could do it, of course: that answer was patently clear. The question was whether or not Doyle could overcome his own fear and fully experience his own sexuality once more.

There was, he knew, only one way to find

out, and it was the only way left to him that would not either disappoint or betray his lover.

"Take your clothes off," Doyle said, and trusted Bodie enough that Bodie would choose not to hear the tremble in his voice.

"Yes, sir," Bodie answered, doing as he was told, stripping and folding clothes with military precision and a very Bodie-like economy of movement. Perfectly naked, he stood in front of Doyle, head still bowed, waiting for Doyle to take further command, to dole out pleasure and punishment—and was there really a difference? For Bodie, no, there was no difference at all.—as Doyle saw fit.

"Get into the bedroom."

Bodie went, a frisson of delight dancing on his spine as he felt Doyle's gaze linger on his body. There was the question of how far Doyle was willing to go, and he hoped his Top would ask him if he had any tools of the trade here. Not that he would offer the information, of course. Not unless asked.

"Kneel."

Bodie knelt, felt hands in his hair, wondered with a fierce excitement what Doyle was going to do next.

"What're your limits?" Doyle asked, needing to know, the question going far beyond mere token formality.

"No blood, no permanent disfigurement, no scat, sir." His heart was pounding now, his cock rising. He wished he had a ball-stretcher on, but he had a feeling that even without any toys, the simple fact of it being Doyle would turn this into one of the best scenes he had ever had. Love had a way of doing that, unless you were the helpless masochist type, who longed to be a slave. But that wasn't Bodie. He simply needed the release from responsibility, and the punishment for all the things he did and the power he had outside the bedroom. And the pleasure of pain, of course. Always, the pleasure of pain.

Doyle was looking down at his kneeling lover, his own excitement leaping within him, and then the control came damping down, the power coming into him, and he was a Top again, supremely in command of this man, and most importantly, himself. He put both hands in Bodie's hair and pulled, and was

relieved beyond belief that there was nothing more to it than the sweet lure of giving and receiving pleasure.

"Where are your things?" he asked, tugging on the silken hair, fingers darting down to pluck at a nipple.

"In my wardrobe, sir, the one where I keep my old uniforms. I keep it locked, sir. The keys are in a plastic bag inside the talc container. The Imperial Leather, sir."

"Oh, I like your choice of hiding place. Don't move a muscle. I may be kind enough to select a few items for my amusement," Doyle said, sliding back into the role with all the comfort of real need. He left Bodie kneeling there and went to the wardrobe, finding the keys in the ironic hiding place, unlocking the inner drawers, uncovering a treasure trove of toys. There was everything he could wish for in here, of the smaller items, of course. He sifted through the abundance for a few minutes, scenes running through his head, discarded and rejected. It had to be something very special, something appropriate for both of them, something that would fulfil the needs in both of them.

Then he decided what it would be, and smiling, picked up the beautifully crafted crop, recognising it as official issue, and he thought, possibly expensive to obtain. He weighted it in his hands, and found the balance to be perfect, but that was no more than he expected: Bodie had excellent taste, a very discerning eye, and a private source of income with which to indulge himself. Not that one asked Bodie about where the extra money came from, not unless you were Cowley.

"Does Cowley know about your trips to this Club?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he hasn't ordered you to stop?"

"Yes, sir, he has."

"But you continued to go there. Well, now I'm telling you so you won't go back there, ever. Do you hear me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Yes what?"

"Yes, sir!"

"That's better. But you still forgot. And you've been lying to me about this, and

having other men."

"Yes. sir."

"That's going to stop."

"Yes, sir."

"But I'm going to punish you to make sure you remember.'

"Thank you, sir."

Doyle paused for a second, looking at the collection of blindfolds in the drawer, deciding that Bodie was experienced enough to take a lot more than mere blindfolds and a thrashing the first time—certainly judging by the sophistication of some of the equipment in the wardrobe. But he didn't want it to be too involved today, something fairly simple, but the perfect thing to mend the broken trusts between them. He took a mild blindfold from the pile, a simple black leather one with brass eyelets for lacing up the back. He saw Bodie's cock respond enthusiastically to the first touch of the leather, and he fitted the blindfold nice and snug.

Next—"On your feet," and he took out the English cage, fitting the straps round Bodie's cock and balls, making sure the cross-strap separated his balls into two smoothly taut mounds.

Then—"Kneel, over the edge of the bed. Later, if I feel like it, I'll let you take your punishment like a man, but you don't deserve that yet, so you can cower there like a boy."

Bodie, subsumed totally into the event, didn't answer, for he hadn't been given permission to answer. He was wholly happy, for he was doing something that pleased Doyle, and the one man he had always wanted as Master was his. And he knew-knew-that he could take anything Doyle did to him. He felt his manhood swell, and his self-image preened proudly. He was well aware of how gorgeous he must look, bent over like this, the muscles in his back displayed, his skin so white and flawless, his arse raised ready. He held his breath, waiting.

"Hands behind your back," Doyle said, taking the quickly crossed wrists and binding them in a pattern of leather thong that he remembered so well from before. "Arse up higher."

Obedience, of course, instant and total, and they both revelled in it, the bonds of love and trust tighter than any leather fetish could ever be.

Doyle raised his arm, pausing on the upstroke to admire both the beauty of the tool and of the arse it was going to turn red with heat and the scintillation of pain. It whistled its admiration on the way down, then bit into tender, unmarked flesh, leaving Doyle's brand behind. He had quite some skill at this, and his arm and his rhythm never faltered as he administered a pattern of blows, welts rising redly on the whiteness of Bodie's arse. He stopped, stroking his hand across the rippled surface, following the arching lines his crop had made.

"That's better," he murmured, cock hard and needful, caught tight and tense by his jeans. "Now, turn round."

Blind, practice helping him keep his balance despite the deprivation of both his sight and the use of his hands, Bodie turned, his arse glowing with a lovely lingering pain. He waited, silent, in the dark, for his next command.

"Suck me."

A groin was thrust in his face, and he struggled with teeth and lips to lower the zip. He could normally manage this very well, with flair, even, but the jeans were too tight and the cock too swollen to allow him much leeway. He couldn't do it, so he bit instead, doing no damage but incurring both punishment and rescue. He was slapped, hard, head ringing and face stinging, and then the zip scraped open and a hard cock was thrust at him. Eagerly, he swallowed it down, no hesitation, just devouring passion. But it was taken from him before he had a chance to savour it fully, and his Master withdrew from him. In the quiet, he heard the exquisite sound of clothing being removed, and then he was shoved, toppling over onto the floor, landing heavily on his chest, his cock tormented by the coarseness of carpet and the dig of leather into his balls.

Doyle grabbed Bodie by the hair, dragging him up and shoving him towards the bed. "On your back," he snapped, standing aside to watch as Bodie struggled to position himself, arms caught underneath the weight of his body. Doyle began with Bodie's left foot and a long length of buckled leather, attaching Bodie to the legs of the bed, then kneeling beside him, reaching under to loosen the arms. Each wrist was attached by straps that matched the ankle bindings, until Bodie lay spread out across the bed, naked and blindfolded, balls stretched and cock hard. Doyle left him there and went back to the wardrobe, taking his time to make his choice, and gathering up an unopened tub of lubricant to bring with him. He said nothing to Bodie, giving him no warning.

Bodie nearly screamed at the unanticipated pleasure. His nipples were on fire, settling down to embers of heated pleasure as he adjusted to the tit-clamps biting into him. He wanted to moan, to arch and writhe, but he didn't know all the foibles of his Master yet. He held himself as still as he could, his pulse hammering in his cock, the pleasure radiating painfully from his tits. But nothing he couldn't take, not even close.

Still, it was perfect for the first time. He was at Doyle's mercy, bound hand and foot, cock and balls vulnerable, blind and dependant. Trusting, in other words, absolutely trusting. He smiled then, overflowing with love, and then the bed indented on either side of his head, and strong thumbs dug into his jaws and his mouth was opened. Then he was filled, wonderfully, orgasmically filled, the long slide of cock possessing him without pause. He thought he could die from happiness right then and there.

It was Heaven: here he was spreadeagled, tied to the bed, hand and foot and hand and foot. Doyle was astride his face, cock buried deep in his throat, balls spread across his nose, filing him with the redolence of Doyle's body. Doyle's hands, those wonderfully strong, hard hands, were tugging his nipples, pulling them tight and away from his body, brilliant pain coruscating through him. Then Doyle was slapping at his tits, hitting them hard, flicking the tit-clamps with his nails, but hard, so hard, and Bodie knew he could come just from that and the fucking of a cock down his throat. Doyle must have sensed his weakness too, for his Master leaned forward, cock going deep enough to gag even the experienced Bodie, and grabbed Bodie's cock

and balls, twisting them round, the leather biting him until the imperative to come had faded down to screaming pleasure, and he was suffused with a glow of heat to match his arse.

Doyle was well pleased with Bodie's performance. They could work together, he and Bodie, and he thought they had enough flexibility to make it work. At least, he hoped so. Carefully, he brought himself out of Bodie's mouth, getting up off the bed, slathering his cock in viscid lubricant. The crop was slippery in his hand, so he laid it down and wiped himself on Bodie's naked belly, caressing the quivering skin with the crop before lifting it, and hurtling it down to crack against the tight tit-clamps.

Bodie screamed out loud as his nipples exploded, then whimpered as the pleasure of the pain infused him with thudding desire. He wanted to come, he needed desperately to come, but he couldn't. His Master hadn't given him permission yet. So he writhed and mewled and begged, tugging on his bonds, arching his back, the movement setting his tit clamps moving, adding to the corolla of desire.

Doyle had intended to make it last, to fuck Bodie for a while and then withdraw, indulge in a few sophistications upon the oh-sowilling flesh, but with Bodie seducing him with his own lust, he couldn't. He knelt between legs that were already wide-spread for him, Bodie bending his knees like the welltrained bottom he was, but it wasn't quite enough. Doyle undid the ankle restraints and Bodie immediately lifted his legs high, exposing his arse without hesitation. A dip of hand into the tub of lubricant, and then the first finger was taking possession, and then, quickly, a second finger, dilating and spreading and opening. Doyle positioned himself, one hand steadying himself, the other generous enough to stroke Bodie's cock.

And he was taken. His Master plunged into him, slick and hot and hard, filling him up, making him a receptacle for his Master's pleasure, and giving him purest ecstasy in return. He wrapped his legs round his Master's hips, groaning in pleasure as his arse felt the harsh flat of his Master's hand, punishment for changing position without permission, but his Master was kind to him: the cock was not taken from him, it fucked into him, deep and possessive, just like his Master himself.

There was no possibility of Doyle taking this slowly, his balls throbbing with the impending of orgasm. He held on tight to Bodie, thrusting into him, letting go of everything in the world apart from himself, and Bodie. The two of them, Bodie under him tonight, belonging to him, obeying him.

"You can come, Bodie," he said, so pleased with Bodie's performance that he was willing to be bounteous and permit him not only to come, but to hear himself honoured by being called by name. "That's it, make it good, move for me, Bodie. Fuck yourself on me."

Bodie did, striving to push his arse upwards, using the strong muscles of his back and legs to pull his Master in closer and deeper, clutching at him with his arse muscles. His Master was talking to him, using his name, telling him to come, and the sweetness erupted in him and from him, his entire body a pinnacle of pleasure, the straps round his cock and balls making the orgasm last forever.

The spasming of arse round his cock was the last straw: Doyle came, streaming inside the clinging body, heat all around, pleasure drilling through him. He didn't collapse, of course, but rose up on knees that were admittedly shaky, pausing there to wipe the sweat from his face and the cum from his cock. Bodie, he was pleased to note, remained in position, although the long thigh muscles were trembling with the strain. Orgasm receding slowly through his veins, Doyle picked up the ankle restraints, attaching them first to Bodie's ankles and then to the 'D' rings on the wrist bands. Then he picked up the crop, and knelt beside the body awkwardly bent double on the bed.

"You changed positions when I hadn't given you permission to," Doyle said.

"I'm sorry, sir," Bodie answered, suitably penitent of voice, but body trembling with anticipation of the strokes that would surely come.

"I shall have to punish you for that, to make sure you do better next time."

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"Thank you, sir," and he was ecstatic next time! His Master had said next time. It was going to be all right, it really was going to be all right. He almost wept with pain and joy as the crop sliced into him at a perfect fortyfive degree angle to the smouldering welts from before. Ten strokes, ten long, hot strokes, with time enough between for the anticipation to build to fever pitch, only to erupt into flames as the blow struck.

Doyle surveyed the red arse, with the rosette of muscle at its heart, puckered and red and with a thin trail of his semen spilling from it. And he knew then: Bodie was his. His, and his alone, and no-one would ever come between them, not now. Not the vicious, violent ghosts from his own past, and not the tempting sirens of Bodie's present. Wellsatisfied, he undid the restraints, letting the circulation return before he gently undid the tit-clamps, unwilling to make it too heavy a scene this first time and determined to prove to himself that he really could go back to this special pleasure of his without the taint of real violence. He nuzzled, sweetly, at the upthrusting nipples, his saliva cooling the sting of release and then he caressed the leather around Bodie's still turgid cock and swollen balls, smoothing Bodie's own cum in with sweeping swathes of his hand from belly to balls and back again. Finally, he removed the blindfold, fingers playing in soft hair as he unlaced the leather.

Blinking rapidly as his eyes adjusted back to the light from the utter darkness, Bodie stared up and watched, wide-eyed, as his Master, now Ray again, leaned down, Ray's face filling his vision, Ray's tongue filling his mouth. Bodie gave himself over to the love, completely, fully, and for the first time, honestly. There was more trust between them than ever before, and as he kissed Ray, as Ray kissed him and they held each other close, he knew nothing was ever going to split them apart.

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M. FAE GLASGOW 

# PART III: BLESSED ARE THE MEEK M. FAE GLASGOW

HE COULD WAIT. It would come. Now? Soon? Later? He could not know. But it would come. He could wait. He knew he could.

It was the kind of party that only CI5 could get away with: no-one else had enough small print at their disposal to get the police to turn a blind eye to this sort of shenanigan.

Doyle watched it all with jaded eye and vast amusement. There was an enormous amount of alcohol being drunk, some very dubious substances being consumed, and some very uninhibited sexual groping going on. Oh, yes, the party was going well. He was, as usual, propped up against a wall, legs crossed at ankle, hips canted invitingly, and enormous 'Do Not Touch' signs plastered all over him. Again, nothing that everyone didn't expect. They all knew that Doyle was exclusive, in a relationship with Bodie that was common knowledge but only now beginning to come out in the open, thanks at long last to certain remarks made by Her Majesty's Prime Minister.

Everyone knew Doyle was monogamous, everyone saw the 'keep out' signals, but that didn't stop the occasional brave soul from trying.

"Lovely party," Murphy said, leaning an arm against Doyle's wall, his hand close enough that it was caressed by Doyle's hair. Shorter, and greyer with the passage of years, but still as thick, still as curly, although it was somewhat tamed now, until all that remained was a suggestion of the old wildness. But Murphy didn't mind: Murphy knew that every last ounce of the wildness was all still

there, just under the surface.

"Glad you're enjoying yourself." Doyle answered pleasantly enough: he actually sounded as if he meant it, no mean feat considering he hadn't wanted to host this party to begin with and had only agreed after some very heavy-duty blackmail by his former boss and his friends. At least, that's what he had told all of them. The simple truth was that Bodie had asked him to do it.

"Bodie coming later?" Murphy dropped in casually, never averse to chancing his arm with Ray, probably because he knew there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell that Doyle would even consider taking him up on his invitation.

"Bodie, as you know perfectly well, Murphy my old mate, is up in Liverpool and won't be back until the third. And before you ask, no, I'm not lonely and I definitely don't need any company to keep my bed warm. I've got an electric blanket for that. Much less trouble and it uses up a lot less energy."

"Can't blame a bloke for trying. Listen..." he hesitated, then banked on many years of friendship and asked, "is it family Bodie's gone up to see?"

"Why don't you ask him when he comes back?" Doyle asked back, knowing that noone, not even Murphy, would dare to ask Bodie about his family.

But Doyle could ask about the dreaded and dreadful Bodie clan, and did, often enough to really irritate his partner thoroughly.

Doyle was smiling to himself, and the happiness on his face shafted a bolt of jealousy through Murphy, before he controlled himself and made himself happy for Ray, and for Bodie, that they'd managed to find a relationship that worked as well as theirs did.

"It's a pity Bodie had to miss seeing in the New Year with you, though."

Doyle shrugged. "I'll survive. Anyway, we

had Christmas together, and that's the best anyone's done in years."

Only Doyle could say that to Murphy without wincing in self-reproach after. It had been one too many Christmases and birthdays and cancelled holidays that had scuppered Murphy's marriage: and not only the job, but also the fact that Murphy couldn't be faithful no matter how hard he tried.

"Well, I'm glad you enjoyed your Christmas," Murphy said, a bit awkward.

Doyle gave him a steady look. "Meant a lot to Bodie, so thanks for swapping days off with me. It was decent of you."

Murphy immediately felt Doyle's forehead, exclaiming, "He's sick! He must be sick! Raymond Doyle doesn't thank people for their selfless sacrifices. Oh, I get it. Bodie made you promise you'd say thank you to me."

Doyle grinned his irrepressible grin, the one that still let him get away with murder. "Got it in one, Murph. He also made me promise that I would see to it that you had a wonderful night, and keeping that in mind," he took Murphy by the elbow and started steering him through the ravening hordes, "there is a very attractive young man I'd like you to meet. I just took him on to help me in Admin, and he is right up your alley." He looked at Murphy and then added, "I take that back. You will be right up his alley. Just be gentle with him, Murph, I'll need him back by Monday morning, at the latest, otherwise I'll never get the new employment guides done."

"So I have until Monday to do my worst to him? Lead on, MacDuff. Which one is he?"

Doyle took him over to the slender young man making such good friends with the corner, the lamp and the drink in his hand.

"That's him. Steven, and he's sweet and he's shy, and if you treat him badly and cost me the best assistant I've got, then I'll ram your tonsils out your backside for you."

Murphy leaned down and planted a smacking great kiss on Doyle's cheek and sighed, "Oooh, I love it when you're butch."

"Christ, it's obvious you work with Bodie, Murph, he's beginning to rub off on you."

"Chance would be a fine thing. Now, why

don't you bugger off and torment someone else, while I take that young man under my wing. Actually, look at the poor sod. He's terrified, isn't he?"

"And he's gay, and he's not quite come to terms with that yet. I'm serious, Murph, you take it easy with him. All right?"

Murphy didn't hear him, too distracted by staring at Steven Hamilton to pay attention to anyone else.

Doyle wandered off, extremely pleased with himself that he'd finally found someone who could take Murphy's mind off the divorce and onto the future: that had been more than polite interest he'd seen kindled in Murphy's face when he'd looked at Steve. Definitely good possibilities there.

Murphy taken care of, he went to have a laugh with Jim MacPherson who was standing under the truly tawdry 'Welcome 1992' banner over against the far wall. Someone, a very scantily clad someone, bumped against him as she chased her boyfriend across the room, and Doyle grinned: it was definitely a CI5 party.

It was utterly dark, and he was thirsty, but he wasn't cold, winter held at bay by some kind of heating. Warm zephyrs of air caressed his bare skin, intermittently, and he could hear a faint whir, so he knew that there must be a fan on. To keep the air fresh and sweetsmelling? Possibly.

There was a sandalwood joss stick burning, and the smell would come to him more strongly after the warm air had brushed across his skin, therefore he knew that he was positioned between the fan and the incense.

But that was all he knew. Apart from one other thing. He could wait. He knew he could.

"Aren't you going to have any of this spread, Ray?"

"Nah, Duncan." He patted his perfectly flat stomach-a stark contrast to the CI5's accountant's paunch-and intoned, "I am on a strict diet."

"And have been all your life, by the looks of

you. Well, here, have another lager then."

Doyle accepted it with a good grace he could never have managed a few years before. Then, there would have been some sarcastic comment about being offered his own beer in his own house, but now he simply ignored it, tolerating Duncan's little foible. Not that he liked Duncan Smith, but if there was one thing that working with Whitehall had taught him, it was how to put up with people he didn't like. Still, he made his escape quickly, parking himself on his sofa, leaning back and enjoying watching the world go by.

He wondered, alone in the dark, how long it would be before He came back. Not too long now, surely? He needed to use the lavatory, but he couldn't, not until He came back and gave him permission. So he would have to wait. He distracted himself by moving just enough that the chain connecting his titclamps to each other jingled and swayed, the sound music to his ears, the motion music to his body. But he wished He would come back soon, and then, instead, he schooled himself into patience.

He could wait.

He knew he could.

Quietly, without anyone noticing, Doyle slipped into his bedroom-their bedroom, the one he'd shared with Bodie since they'd bought this flat almost six years ago. That still tickled his funny bone: the price of property in London so prohibitive that two men could get away with buying a place together, as long as it had at least two bedrooms and a buy-out clause in the mortgage. This flat had been a find, a real fixer-upper in an area that was only beginning to climb back into gentility. The streets round here were filled with wellmaintained homes now, expensive cars bearing parking permits lined the streets, nannies pushed prams at ten o'clock every morning. Suburbia come to the city, and Doyle loved it. Everything he wanted within easy reach, and the perfect man to share it with.

The one and only time Cowley had come to see it had been before most of the renovations had been done, and it had almost been

beyond them to keep their faces straight when Cowley had come into the main bedroom, opened the door to the huge walk-in storage room and pronounced in complete innocence that they had a 'glory hole'. The poor old sod had had no idea whatsoever what he'd said, but he and Bodie had. They'd christened the room that night, and it had been the Glory Hole ever since.

The bedroom door well and truly shut, Doyle unlocked the door to the Glory Hole, stepping inside and re-locking the door before he switched the light on. It was, of course, painted black, and seemed to absorb both light and sound; the floor, laid with special plastic tiling; the walls, hung with wooden slats and shelves; the equipment, meticulously clean and perfectly displayed; the air, heavy with incense and leather.

And the man, kneeling, head bowed, hands and feet bound.

Doyle's heart leapt within him at the sight, and a surge of love so strong that he almost curtailed the scene to begin immediately with Bodie's favourites. But he controlled himself, and poised, instead, against the wall, just inside his Blackroom, drinking his beer.

Bodie, hearing the sound of his entrance, sensing the light, turned towards him.

"It's a terrific party out there." Doyle kept his voice distant and cool, an edge of disapproval to it. "It's your fault they're all here, and it'll be your own fault if someone gets in here and discovers you. Can you imagine what they would do if one of your staff came in here and found Mr. Bodie kneeling like a slave, with a blindfold on, clamps on his tits and trussed up like a chicken."

He watched as that frissoned through Bodie, the long heavy cock rising as the thrill of discovery seeped in.

"Can you hear the music in here?" "No. sir."

"I shall have to turn it up then, shan't I? No, better than that: you shall have to keep quiet when I thrash you."

"Thank you, sir."

Doyle took another long drink of his beer, his free hand massaging his cock through the thin grey cloth of his trousers.

"Murphy was asking for you, of course.

Told him you were up in Liverpool till the third."

"Thank you, sir. Permission to ask a question, sir?"

"You can ask."

"Will this continue until the third, sir?"

"What did your Christmas card say?"

"Sir, it read that this scene would begin on the last day of the old year and finish on the first day of the new year."

"Which means it can't go on to the third, which means you weren't paying proper attention to me.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Do you need to be punished?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Doyle leaned negligently against the wall, surveying the extreme enthusiasm, and decided to change his planned scene: he had intended to use his best belt on Bodie, then a nice thrashing, but Bodie was too keen, and too cock-sure of what was coming next. Definitely time to add a bit of spice to the scene, to throw Bodie off-balance a bit, because otherwise, they'd end up in a rut, where trust and love would be taken for granted. "In that case," he murmured, turning out the light and unlocking the door, measuring Bodie's reaction to the lack of sensuous pain, "your punishment is going to be the withdrawal of physical chastisement until I decide otherwise."

Bodie groaned in disappointment, even made a move to stand up.

"I won't be provoked. Disobey me now, and I'll untie you and tell Murphy you came home early. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," Bodie murmured, settling back down into the correct position for when his Master was present. "Permission to speak, sir."

He made Bodie wait before he gave his permission this time.

"May I use the lavatory, sir?"

"No," Doyle said, his voice a crack of the lash, and left once more, locking the door behind him.

Alone in the dark, Bodie knelt patiently, his bladder full, his cock aware of the pressure and responding to the gentle discomfort as it built up to pain. His shoulders were

aching from being pulled backwards, his ankles from being held in place by the leather shackles. All of him ached with the longing for his Master to return.

But he could wait. He knew he could.

Murphy saw him coming out of his bedroom and pounced, as playful as a cat with a mouse.

"A-ha! Coming out of the bedroom, and keeping the door locked? You've got someone in there, haven't you, Ray?"

"Oh, yeh, you couldn't be more right," Doyle said conversationally. "I've got Bodie tied up in my dungeon in there."

Murphy, of course, laughed like a drain at the joke. "Okay, okay, I can take a hint. And it is none of my business why you're keeping your bedroom locked, and I'll just take my big nose and my big mouth somewhere else."

Doyle fell into step beside him, nodding towards the almost empty balcony, and neatly sidestepping round a couple who were getting to know each other extremely well indeed.

"God, they get worse every year, don't they?" he muttered, as the cold air sliced into him and the fresh air filled his lungs.

"You mean that pair in the hall? You've got to be kidding, Ray! You must've forgotten that year your Bodie and the lovely Susan performed on my kitchen table!"

Doyle laughed with him over that, remembering not only the performance, but Bodie's mortification when sobriety returned. They'd been able to slag him off for months over that one, especially since Susan hadn't an inhibited bone in her body and joined in making poor Bodie blush. "Yeh, and wasn't that the year McCabe got arrested, and you and me went down the local cop shop waving our ID's all over the place?"

"That's right. You claimed we were investigating a smuggling ring—"

"I thought I said it was terrorism?"

Murphy shrugged. "One or the other, we never much cared back then, did we?"

"No," Doyle said, very quiet, party spirit left behind. "I never really cared much about anything at all."

Murphy hemmed and hawed for a minute, and then decided that Ray was in a rare mood indeed, and well worth the risk. "Bodie's been good for you, hasn't he?"

Doyle shot him a hard look, then softened, smiling. "It's not like you to come right out and say anything about me and Bodie, Murph.<sup>3</sup>

"It's not like you to be this communicative, Raymond."

"Touché. Yeh, you're right, he has been good for me. It's funny, I'd been in love before, even thought I'd fallen for people after I met him, but it's different with him. Goes above and beyond everything else."

"You know how much I envy you two, don't you?"

"Well, who knows, maybe you, and the young Steven?"

"Not like you to come right out and ask. The young Steven, for your information, is a suitably cautious young man."

"In other words, you shoved your great big paw down his front and he told you to sling your hook."

"No, I did not! I just talked to him, and it turns out he likes me enough that—" and that expression was back on Murphy's face, that glow of excitement, "he's coming out to dinner with me tomorrow night. He wants a proper courtship, Ray, and God help me, I can't wait to do the flowers and the walks in the parks, the whole bit."

"Sounds like love at first sight."

"Oh, no, not me. Lust at first sight, maybe, but it takes a long time for it to turn into love."

"Not always, Murph, believe me. Not always."

Even in the tree-shaded light of the streetlamp, the secret joy showed on Doyle's face.

"You look like you know something I don't know, Ray."

He turned, leaned on the balustrade, and grinned, finally secure enough in his relationship with Bodie that he was willing to open up emotionally about it to a very few, very select friends. And there was no-one more select than Murphy. "Bodie fell for me the second he laid eyes on me. And he hasn't stopped loving me since."

I thought it had to be something like that with you two. How...Hell, live dangerously, I'll ask. What about you, eh, Ray?"

"Fancy yourself as James Bond, do you? Actually, I don't mind. It's nice to be able to talk about him, really. Me? I don't know. We'd been together for a while before I admitted to myself that I was in love with him, so Christ knows when it happened."

"Oh!" the new voice managed to blush furiously. "Excuse me, didn't realise you were with someone, Patrick, could only see you, the way the plants were..." Steven Hamilton stammered off into crimson silence, wishing the ground would open up and swallow him when he realised that it wasn't just anyone Patrick was with: it was his boss.

"It's all right," Ray Doyle said, very, very gently, making Murphy look at him in surprise. "I was on my way back in. You go ahead, give Pat his drink."

After Doyle departed, Murphy stood with his arm round his young man and gazed after him in astonishment. "My God!" he finally said, "Ray Doyle is finally getting soft in his old age!"

"Mr. Doyle? He's always like that. Unless someone cocks something up, of course."

"Ray? Our Doyle that we know and love and duck whenever he enters a room? Oh, Stevie my gorgeous young lad," and he kissed him, drawing him in amongst the profusion of plants, "let me tell you all about your Mr. Doyle, as he was when I worked with him..."

When he locked the door shut behind himself this time, he came straight over to Bodie, unhooking the chain from the wall bar, leading his blindfolded man to the toilet area.

"Get on with it," he said, pushing Bodie down, "I've not got all night."

Although he had. He'd promised Bodie 'the best night of your life', and that was exactly what he was going to give them both. He grabbed Bodie again, leading him by the balls back to the wall bar, hooking him up again, taking a few minutes just to play around with the tit-clamps, heightening the anticipation of what was coming later.

"Well, that explains the smug expression!

He turned the key in the lock, and as Bodie

relaxed into the waiting posture, he returned, silent on the special tiles, and kissed Bodie, fiercely, grabbing him by the throat and turning Bodie's head upwards, ravaging Bodie's mouth with his own. Then, silently, leaving Bodie not knowing what was coming next, he left.

After several minutes of listening with his entire body, he was certain that He had left again. That made him want to weep. He needed Master to come back. That kiss! The thought made him tingle, and he ran his tongue round the inside of his mouth, where his Master had been. There would be more of that, later, perhaps. Or not, he didn't know, his Master hadn't told him. Only promised that it would be the best ever.

He shivered, cock growing hard again, and even that was better for him than before. He shifted, felt the pressure against his groin and grinned, imagining what the ring looked like: a custom-made chased silver cockring, with engraving on the inside. 'Follow me and love shall set you free.' And with it had been the card, a typical Christmas snow scene, robin redbreast and all, but the message inside had been in Doyle's best writing, slanting and curling, beautiful to behold but almost illegible. Unless you had as many years' worth of reading it as Bodie had.

But thinking about that only made him miss his Master more. He wished He would come back.

But he could wait. He knew he could.

Doyle could hardly wait. The anticipation was getting to him, and every nerve in his body seemed to think he was a cruel bastard, making them wait like this. He was almost itchy, so tinglingly aware was he. Every time he blinked, he could see Bodie, bound and naked, kneeling waiting for him, completely helpless. Not knowing what was going to be done to him, trusting Ray with everything he was.

Doyle kept eyeing the bedroom door, sorely tempted to simply announce the party was over and toss everyone out. He fingered the keys in his pocket, and thought about Bodie.

He should wait. He really should. But instead, he went back in, taking Bodie completely by surprise.

Fully dressed, he squatted beside his naked Bodie, playing with Bodie's cock and balls as if they belonged to him, which they did, for tonight and any other night he and Bodie played this. Bodie was arching up into him, breathing hard, trying to kiss him.

Not yet. There would be no more kissing quite yet. He left Bodie alone again, but this time only while he filled the clean metal bowl with soapy water from the washhand basin. A clean towel, the cut wash cloth, his own hands scrubbed, and he was ready to begin. The lube was close to hand, of course, and he picked a brand new tube this time. The sealed bag was brought down next, unzipped with a crisp hiss, all this done deliberately, and without speaking. The very uncertainty was making Bodie's cock rise, and that made Doyle smile. What he had in mind would probably shock Bodie into next week, but the degree of trust involved was thrilling.

He undid the ankle shackles and re-cuffed Bodie's hands round in front of him, taking a few moments to indulge them both with a bit of tit-work, Bodie gasping and straining by the time Doyle was ready to go on to the next delightful torment. Doyle placed the cut cloth over Bodie's cock, the hole framing him perfectly, and grinned to himself as Bodie squirmed. Bodie, obviously, thought Doyle was in a really sadistic mood and was going to shave him: something they did only very rarely, and always to Bodie's extreme discomfort until the prickly stage of regrowth was over.

Before Doyle started, he removed the cockring, caressing it over Bodie's face and mouth, his own excitement mounting as Bodie sucked and licked at the silver band he had given him. Then, finally, he suspend it like a weight from the right tit-clamp. Only then did he start washing Bodie, paying careful attention to what he was doing, and thoroughly pleased that Bodie stifled all his protests and submitted, even though Bodie must have been convinced that he was going to be shaved again.

Not this time. This time, he had something

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far more interesting in mind, and something far more challenging for Bodie. Something for Bodie to test himself against, to push his limits and give him the exhilaration of being able to take it all. The bathing was finally done to Doyle's satisfaction, and he emptied the bowl out, bringing it back with him, just in case it was needed. He didn't expect many sordid details, but he hated interrupting a scene to take care of banal details. The towel was laid aside, and then he bent over Bodie, one hand tugging on the clamps, while he kissed Bodie breathless.

"Thank you, sir," Bodie managed when his mouth was his own again.

"Don't mention it." And that wasn't a polite cliché. He kissed Bodie again, thrusting his tongue into Bodie's mouth, and when he was finished, Bodie contented himself with a smile.

"That's better," Doyle said, moving back down Bodie's torso, keeping one hand on him all the time, reinforcing the bond between them. "Are you ready to serve my pleasure?"

"Yes. Master."

"Any pleasure at all?"

"Yes, Master."

"Do you yield to me completely?"

"Yes, Master."

"Then remember that. No matter what I do to you, no matter what happens, remember that you have no control over anything I choose to do to you. You have no choice but to trust me."

He picked up the K-Y and, still being careful to practice the 'clean system', he began to lube up the new toy. He had used its partner on himself a few weeks ago, so he knew precisely what Bodie was going to feel, down to every quiver of pleasure and shiver of fear. Wiping his hands to make sure they weren't likely to slip, he took Bodie's cock in his left hand and picked the Foley up in his right. His hands were shaking with excitement, so he stopped for a minute or two, calming himself with deep breathing. Bodie was swelling in his hand, but that wasn't going to be a problem.

His hands were steady again, although his heart was pounding as fast as Bodie's. Carefully, knowing how frightening it was the first time, he slowly inserted the catheter into

Bodie's cock, taking his time, drawing the sensation out, his own cock getting hard at the sight of the tubing disappearing into Bodie, possessing that ultimate, final bastion of the male.

Bodie screamed.

"Shh," Doyle said, "it's all right. You'll be fine in a minute."

Bodie squirmed, trying to pull away, fighting Doyle, fighting his Master.

Although it was in his rights as Master to punish Bodie very severely indeed, all Doyle said was, "Can't take it, then?"

"I can't—"

"Do you want me to stop? Do you want to admit defeat?"

A long silence, and all the while, Doyle was easing the catheter into Bodie, the tubing disappearing inch by slow inch. And now, Doyle knew, the minor irritation of insertion would be over, and the feeling of fullness would be overwhelming him. He knew how it felt, physically, but could only imagine how it felt, emotionally. It was the most tightly guarded part of a man's body-his arse and mouth were easy to yield in comparison. But to let someone else possess his prick, when he himself was blind and bound, that was quite incredible.

A tiny trickle of liquid into the bowl showed that the Foley was in all the way, and he used the hand-grip to inflate the air bulb that would hold the catheter inside. Bodie groaned, and Doyle stopped, asking, "Everything all right?"

"Oh, yes, Master, yes!"

"What does it feel like?"

"It's as if you're inside me, inside my cock somehow. I feel...I feel as if you're part of me, as a man..."

"I'm going to leave it in, Bodie," and he bent down, sucking at the join of cock and catheter, Bodie arching in exquisite pleasure every time he flicked his tongue over the blend of latex and flesh. "And while you're lying there, I'm going to go and have a few drinks. When I've had enough beer, I'm going to come back to you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

Doyle's footsteps were silent, but the door locking was loud in the silence of his leaving.

Bodie lay on the floor, the tube up his cock, his manhood a toy for his Master's pleasure. In the dark, he smiled. His bound hands found his cock, fingered the tube curiously and with rising excitement. He squirmed, and that set his cockring swaying against his chest, his nipple coruscating in delicious agony. He cupped his cock, cradling it close to his body, the tube trailing along his inner thigh. He was shivering with anticipation, and fear. And gratitude, that he had such a good Master, one who never let him become lazy or complacent. He could take this new delight, he was sure of it. And he hoped it wouldn't be long now before his Master came back to take His pleasure. Impatience gnawed at him.

But he could wait. He knew he could.

Playing the perfect host, Doyle went from room to room, making sure that everyone had a drink and that no-one was in any imminent danger of doing themselves a mischief, unlike the year Davidson had managed to get his foot stuck in the toilet. He nodded a hello at Murphy, unwilling to disturb his old friend when said friend was obviously progressing by leaps and bounds with the beautiful young Steven. Half-an-hour later, the old year was drawing to a very rapid close, and Doyle made a last round, handing out drinks to toast in the new, switching the television on to show some odd Scottish heuching and teuching to see out the old year, and then discreetly dropping a couple of condoms into Murphy's pocket in case he overcame Steven's shyness with sufficient enthusiasm.

Duty done, he returned to his Blackroom.

Bodie was lying on his back, precisely as he had been left, and Doyle felt a jolt of pure love run through him: to see that mind-boggling degree of trust, and all of it for him! Lust joined the love, and he walked over to Bodie, using the toe of his boot to nudge the heavyhanging balls, bending over to jiggle the catheter just enough to produce an incredible sensation of fullness and possession.

"All right down there?"

"Wonderful down here, Master."

He brought his foot down, fairly gently considering Bodie's insolent humour, on the unprotected balls. "The only cheek I'm interested in from you is your arse."

"Sorry."

Doyle raised an eyebrow at that and lowered his foot at the same time. It wasn't often that Bodie was this pushy in a scene, and if it hadn't been for how well he'd accepted the catheter, Doyle would probably have walked out then and there and left Bodie to stew. But he'd promised Bodie the best night of his life, and he knew what Bodie wanted.

"On your knees."

"Thank you, Master."

He used the best belt after all, then the crop, and finally, because Bodie had made such a point of being disobedient, he brought out the braided leather cat-o'-nine-tails. It wasn't often they used it, for it took a while for Bodie's fine skin to lose the last of the tell-tale signs and sores the cat left, but there were precious few Government staff working on Friday, and he and Bodie weren't among them. Oh, the benefits of no longer being on the active roster! He could do as he pleased, without having to consider an inadvertent uncovering of their secret perverse vice by something stupid like a trainee hurting Bodie and forcing him to go to the CI5 doctor. He drew the long thin strands of leather across the palm of his hand, the whisper of the cat exciting him as he gazed at the glorious red welts it had left on Bodie's back.

Then, muffled by the distance, he heard the party crowd starting the count-down, so he gave Bodie one last kiss of the cat and brought Bodie to his feet.

Doyle took a mouthful of drink, and held Bodie's mouth open, pouring the beer from his mouth into Bodie.

"Happy New Year," he said, and kissed him, slow and deep and loving, Bodie's bound hands pressing between them, Bodie rubbing at his Master's cock through the softness of Italian trousers. Suffused with the goodwill of the season, Doyle overlooked the infraction. He stroked Bodie's cock, fingers continuing along the length of the catheter as if it were all Bodie, as if Bodie's cock had grown to heroic

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proportions.

"I've got something special planned for later, if you're good."

"I'll be good, Master, I promise."

Doyle squeezed Bodie's cock, and Bodie twisted and turned, the fullness driving him crazy, making him frantic for more.

"Like that, do you?"

"Oh, yes, Master."

"Well, if you earn it, I'll get a bigger one for you."

"Thank you, Master."

"But we'll have to wait and see." He held Bodie in his arms, running his hands over the pattern of raised welts and heated hollows of Bodie's back, aroused by the marks he had left and by the murmured pleasure of his lover. But despite his own desires and Bodie's needs, he had to leave: had to attend to the party, had to see to it that everyone got home. More importantly, he had to make sure that everyone left-and soon. He tugged on Bodie's clamps, flicking the dangling cockring to make it swing, heavily, the rhythm rippling through Bodie's entire body.

Before he gave in and fell victim to his own desires, Doyle left, quickly, else he would have stayed and the guests be damned. But that wasn't on the cards: it was one thing for Bodie to fantasise about being caught in full scene, but it was Doyle's responsibility to make it seem likely while protecting Bodie completely.

Still, he paused at the door, turning to gaze at Bodie and it was only with an effort of pure will that he was able to leave.

Bodie heard the door close again, and curled up to wait, the tubing reminding him how lucky he was to have a Master who could own him so thoroughly.

Still, it was only with an effort of sheer will that he was able to obey his Master's standing orders and refrain from masturbating. His pleasure was not his own, it belonged to his Master and he was here to please no-one but Him. But he wanted to feel his Master on him once more. He wanted-desperately-to experience whatever new delicate torture his Master had found for him.

But he could wait.

He could wait.

"You in a rush by any chance?" Murphy asked as Doyle escorted one of the women from Tactical through the front door before she had finished saying good night, resulting in a very graphic and absolutely anatomically impossible suggestion-unless you were the legendary Philips from Communications.

"Who, me?" Doyle asked with the kind of innocence that convinced the people who hadn't met him until after his settling down with Bodie had worked its magic. Murphy, of course, having known Doyle from old and well able to remember the stroppy little bastard who must still inhabit the lithe form, wasn't in the slightest bit convinced.

"You're like the cat on a hot tin roof, Ray."

"Pardon me for breathing! And would you care to go home now? Some of us would like to get to bed, you know."

"Oh, am I the last one?" Doyle wasn't the only one who could fake innocence, obviously.

"Are you the last one? Of course you're the last bloody one, you're always the last bloody one. Now why don't you go home and get some beauty sleep-if you want to nail young Hamilton, you'll need it!"

Murphy looked at Doyle in serious suspicion. "You know something?"

"I know a hell of a lot more fucking things than you do. Such as when I've overstayed my welcome somewhere."

Murphy chose to ignore that. "I think you're in a hurry to get rid of me because you've got someone stashed away in your bedroom, and you're scared someone's going to find out and tell Bodie."

For a second, it was a toss-up whether Doyle was going to laugh himself sick or give Murphy his head in his hands to play with and without benefit of anæsthesia. "I should clock you one for that, Murphy, but me mum always said not to clock the afflicted."

"Very droll, Ray, but I know you. You've got someone in there, haven't you? How could you mess about with Bodie, eh? I mean, you've got someone like him and in this day and age, with syphilis and AIDS, you're going to screw around?" Murphy narrowed his eyes, seeing past the fine shirt and tailored

trousers to the street-wise man he had known for years. "No," he said, abruptly convinced of the truth, "you wouldn't do anything that stupid. So what're you up to, Ray?" He laughed, making a joke of a very serious concern. "What's going on-hey, I know! You weren't kidding earlier on, you have got Bodie tied up in there."

"Well," Doyle said, banking on a friendship that had started so long ago they had both been dead keen on flared trousers and white shoes, "you know what they say. Never a truer word was spoken in jest."

Murphy stared at him in profoundest shock and then guffawed, actually leaning on the door jamb to hold himself up. "Oh, you had me for a second there, Ray, you really had me going. But Bodie—Bodie for crying out loud our big Bodie tied up and, and

Doyle was simply staring at him, in an expression instantly recognisable to those who had fought beside him on the streets, before he had moved on to office wars.

"Fucking hell, you're serious!"

"And what if I am?"

"That's sick, Doyle. Saying that about Bodie, that's really sick."

He could argue about it, he could put forward his view, he could quote statistics. He could even point out that he and Murphy had both been born in an era that called homosexuality sick and thought that bisexuality was a symptom of severe mental disturbance.

He could. But he didn't.

As Murphy himself had said earlier, Ray Doyle had matured, grown up into a man who would still fight dirtier than the next person, but now he had the sense to know which battles could be fought and won and which would merely draw blood on both sides. "I wouldn't say that," he finally said. "Bit strong, don't you think? Anyway, if it's got you that bloody nosy, I kept my bedroom locked because I didn't want that lot using my bed to fuck each other silly in and because I didn't want anyone sticking their great big noses into my business and wandering off with private stuff about me and Bodie that would embarrass the face off him."

"Yeh, well, suppose that makes sense." But the suspicion was still there, the feeling

that the truth had been told as a joke and was now being denied in seriousness. The unease was there, the total inability to comprehend something that was so completely alien to Murphy's sexuality. And the beginnings of mistrust were there, born of the insecurity of suddenly finding out someone once well known has turned into a kinky stranger overnight.

"So now your curiosity is happy, will you just bugger off and let me get to bed? Alone, in case you're still wondering."

"All right. Em, well...see you."

"You will—on Thursday. We both have to be at that fiscal allocation meeting with the Minister."

"Oh, yeh, I'd forgotten."

Doyle didn't bother mentioning that they had also mentioned going for a few drinks after. Not much point really, not until Murphy either came to terms with his suspicions or learned to live with his doubts.

"Well. See you on Thursday then."

"Okay." And as Murphy was going down the stairs, he couldn't resist rattling the keys in his pocket and adding, "I'll tell Bodie you were asking for him!"

Then the front door clicked shut with satisfying finality, and all the locks tripping into place were music to his ears.

It was time.

It was finally time.

He started stripping before he'd even turned the hall light out, kicking shoes off as he went, dropping his clothes behind him, careless of everything but where he was going, what he was going to do, but most of all, who he was going to. A smile wreathed his face as his hand turned the key to the Glory Hole, Murphy's disapproval buried with all the other incomprehenders, deliberately entombed far from his thoughts, for all Doyle wanted to think about was the man he loved, who was waiting for him. Waiting, always, for him alone.

He switched the light on, pulled off his last sock and tossed it behind him into the bedroom, then closed the door, enclosing him in this black, fertile womb with Bodie.

Hearing him, Bodie had risen to his knees, head suitably bowed, hands not touching his PART III: BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

cock, the transparent filament impaling him.

Doyle wanted to fuck him, right then and there, but there were other things to do first, other things he had promised Bodie, other things that would fulfil them both.

"All right?" he asked, checking the catheter for any signs of improper fit or insertion.

"Yes. Master."

Doyle vibrated the catheter, making Bodie jump, setting the suspended cockring and light chains tinkling musically. It was the only music he allowed in his Blackroom, everything else an annoying distraction from the source of real pleasure.

"Does that hurt?"

"Not a bit, sir."

"Inside?"

"Nowhere at all, sir."

"No burning, no sharp edges anywhere?" "Only for the first few minutes, when I thought I needed to pee, but it's been...god,

it's been fucking fantastic since then, sir." Doyle grinned, hands smoothing a path up Bodie's torso until his fingers were inside Bodie's mouth. "I promised you tonight was going to be the best, didn't I?"

"Yes, Master," mumbled indistinctly past the fingers fucking his mouth.

"Now," Doyle said, displaying his lack of Bodie's patience, hurrying to get on with the scene, "I've had a lot of beer tonight. Not enough to impair my judgement, of course, I'm too good a Master for that. But enough that I need a good piss. I need a Jimmy Riddle. Do you want to be my Jimmy?"

"Christ, yes, Master!"

"Oh, I like the way you said that. So I tell you what. I shall take your blindfold off and let you watch."

Doyle went through the same washing sequence that he had already done for Bodie, except that he took care of himself standing at the little sink. He turned round and caught the expression of undiluted, screaming desire on Bodie's face. Bodie, it would seem, had clicked as to what was going to happen next. And liked the idea.

Ready, Doyle made Bodie kneel in position, and stood in front of him, groin only inches away from Bodie's hungry mouth. One foot propped up on an impaling stool, he took his

own sweet time to insert a small gauge catheter into himself, the shimmering tube taking a lifetime to be consumed into his prick. There was a tube attached, with a glass spigot towards the middle, the handle at ninety degrees to the tube.

"Do you see what I'm doing?"

"Yes, Master," breath stirring the hair at Doyle's groin and brushing against the back of his fingers as Doyle adjusted his own catheter under Bodie's starving gaze.

"You're empty now, completely empty, not a drop left in you. And I'm going to fill you up again. I'm going to fill you the same way I do when you're lonely. I'm going to fill you up from my own body, and you'll be able to watch it flow into you."

He didn't let Bodie speak, for the expression on Bodie's face said everything that could possibly be said. "I'm going to possess you, Bodie, I'm going to own you more than ever before. I'm going to piss up your virgin cock, and then you won't be a virgin any more, because I'll have that too."

He joined the two tubes, the juncture sealing tight, and then he put his right hand on the spigot, and with his left, he gripped Bodie's chin, holding him steady as Doyle leaned forward to the opening mouth and tasted it with his tongue. Doyle released the spigot and as the first of his piss, hot from the depths of his body, flowed from him and into Bodie, Doyle pressed forward again and whispered-

"I love you, Bodie."

And as the first of the liquid sunshine began filling the emptiness in Bodie, Doyle opened his heart up and kissed Bodie, with all the love in him, the intensity of his emotion passing from his mouth into Bodie, filling him with love as his body filled him with piss.

Bodie was his, utterly and completely, controlled and dominated at mouth and cock, supremely joined to him, mouth to mouth, cock to cock. For as long as his piss flowed, as hot as cum, an orgasm of loving possession, Doyle kissed Bodie. Only after, when the flow was exhausted, did he release Bodie's mouth, taking Bodie in his arms to cherish him.

There was so much more they could do, but he couldn't wait. He tidied himself up and then he emptied Bodie, careful to make sure not to remove the catheter until all risk of irritation was passed. It would be about half an hour before urine or cum could pass the urethra without stinging and burning, and he didn't want Bodie distracted from the unique pleasures of the experience. Not this first time.

"I'm going to fuck you," he murmured into a perfectly-shaped ear, nipping at the lobe. "I'm going to fuck you and then you're going to take my fist inside you. And I'm going to make you come so hard you'll think you're in Heaven. But," he tugged Bodie's hair, tipping his face back so that Bodie's throat was as exposed and vulnerable as the rest of him, "not for at least half an hour. You're going to beg me to let you come, but I won't. You'll be screaming because I'm going to keep you on the edge."

Doyle took the cockring and slipped it on round Bodie's hardening cock and fecund balls, caressing where the burnished silver met flesh. Then began the slow, serious business of turning pleasure into pain and pain into pleasure, giving Bodie the best night he'd had in his life. He was grinning as he said again, "You'll beg me to let you come, Bodie. But I won't. Not until I'm ready to let you."

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AND AS HIS MASTER kissed him again, filling him with love again and again, desire exploded through him. He couldn't get over the stunning experience of having his Master's piss inside him like that, nor of having something shoved up his prick. It had been the most incredibly exciting thing he'd ever known. And he wanted more of it.

Perhaps, if he were lucky, his Master would use him that way again. But then he reminded himself that he was not here for his own pleasure, but for his Master's. And right now, his Master's hands were on him, pinching and kneading and nipping, doing incredible things to his cock and balls. He was being pushed downwards, his favourite belt snapping across the redness of his back, and then his Master's cock was presented for him, and he closed his eyes and opened his mouth, surrendering himself to the ecstasy of pain and the agony of love, orgasm running wild and chained through him, refused permission to bring him sweet release.

But he could wait.

He knew he could.

It would come, for his Master loved him. Soon.

He could wait.

He knew he could.