...AS A £3 NOTE

Issue Number One
in the
BENT COPPERS Series

A slash zine of The Professionals

WARNING: THIS ANTHOLOGY CONTAINS SAME SEX, ADULT ORIENTED MATERIAL. IT WILL NOT BE SOLD TO ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN.

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To Our Readers:

On the Question of the Zine and its Title
Yes, the portion of the saying that comes before the ellipsis periods in ‘...as a £3 note’ is ‘As queer as...’ and that’s precisely what we at Oblique Publications hope will spring to mind when you see it. £3 is our first effort at producing a full length Professionals slash zine (There are a number of the Glaswegian’s Pros stories in our Pean to Priapus series.), and we don’t expect it to be our last. Only two sets of hands have worked on £3: those of the editor—me—and those of one writer, M. Fae Glasgow, a tireless and prolific Scottish nanny. We both hope you won’t be disappointed with the quality of the contents.

On the Question of Queers
In a sense, £3 is not for beginners. I think it can be read and enjoyed by a Pros novice, but it does presume a working knowledge of the Pros universe. If you have read widely among Pros fiction, then most likely you will be familiar with the conventions and themes that appear over and over. First and foremost is an acceptance that Bodie and Doyle are/have been/will become lovers. Call it the basic premise. Then, building on this, a number of classic themes and storylines emerge. Some are obvious and universal, used in other slash fandoms. Others are quirky, odd, and restricted to the Pros universe. £3 touches both categories.

On the Question of Contents
It is my belief that the vast majority of Pros slash stories are romantic pieces. Certainly our heroes have their ups and downs, their collisions and miscues. Still, in the end, boy gets boy and love conquers all. What more could we want? Well, rather a lot if you talk to the Glaswegian...

She insists that one of the most delightful aspects of writing slash—apart from the sex scenes!—is that as fantasy about fictional characters, you can vary the parameters and specifics with each story. (Come to think of it, you can do that with any kind of fiction writing.) There is no need to always render Bodie and Doyle in exactly one fashion. In one piece Bodie is as gay as they come and well-adjusted, indeed, while in the next tale it takes him years to recognize and come to grips with his sexuality.

But to return to storylines. Each tale in £3 makes a comment about a common Pros fiction convention or theme. In some, M. Fae Glasgow adds her own contribution to the existing library of stories; “I Saw Three Ships” is a Christmas story, sweet and touching and romantic, nothing out-of-kilter, while “Silence = Death” is a death scene.

Ah, but that’s just the beginning. The wee Scot has also chosen to write about Murphy, teddy bears, sports, undercover operations, Glasgow, outdoor sex, Cowley, and a rather feminized Doyle. And these tales are not necessarily what you may expect—unless you already understand M Fae’s devious mind. She is psychological in approach and dark in execution. Be prepared for twists and turns, for white when there should be black, and deepest black when there should be color. If a straight road leads from A to B she will find a back alley that takes twice as long to traverse. She is a storyteller with a lot to say!

Her writing is solid and dense, utilizing every last bit of allotted space on the page, any leftover whiteness methodically searched out and filled with more words. You’ll find she writes long narrative passages punctuated by bursts of sharp, spot on dialogue. Well—at times the dialogue isn’t so short, but it always retains a sweet, piercing clarity. And the sex scenes, oh the sex scenes! They are vivid, richly detailed descriptions, hot and arousing and not for you if you prefer to stop at the bedroom door. She says she likes to write these scenes in a ‘oner’: starting at the beginning, fingers flying over the keyboard, hands never pausing or lifting until both partners are sated and basking in the inevitable afterglow.

On the Question of Sources of Inspiration
You probably already know that a vast body of Pros stories have been written over the last dozen or so years. (And if you don’t know, write to me at Oblique Publications. I can send ad-
dresses.) What a resource! The Glaswegian and I cannot begin to list all the wonderful writers we have enjoyed, but if there is one to be singled out as a source of inspiration for tone and theme and content, that person is Sebastian. She, too, has a mind that twists towards a dark perspective on sexuality and the human condition.

On the Question of Words

This is really a comment on wordsmithing: the act of creating new words, inventing new vocabulary. You think that it’s not proper, that it’s somehow illegal? Sorry, but Shakespeare invented thousands of new words and phrases, many of them still in common use today. The Glaswegian is taking a similar approach. If she can’t find a term that says exactly what she wants it to say, or if an existing word doesn’t have quite the right sound or nuance to it, she’ll simply ‘create’ a new term. As her editor I refuse permission for about half of her new darlings. The other half I let her use. For example, ‘reality’ doesn’t appear to have a counterpart ‘surreality’ (or at least not in my particular dictionaries) and ‘surrealism’ doesn’t seem to convey the same idea. So, you’ll find ‘surreality’ in several stories. The same is true for ‘mundanity’; it just ought to be a word.

May you enjoy reading the stories!
Author's note: I just wanted to mention a couple of things. First off, this does have a sequel, already written and in this 'zine, so don’t come to lynch me until you’ve read that bit, too! Secondly, this story is set in the ’70s, so keep in mind that homosexuality was only taken off the criminal statutes in 1967 and in officialdom at any rate, is severely not approved of. The atmosphere for anyone homosexual serving in the Government at the time (and unfortunately, probably still today, thanks to such delights as Sections 25 and 28) was one of fear of being caught and exposed. Even in the ’80’s, the gutter press in Britain was able to have a field day with ‘exposés’ of various pop-stars homosexual relationships, and careers can still be severely damaged by such allegations. Think what it must have been like for men who had grown up when what they wanted was still against the law, albeit a rarely enforced one. Third, and lastly, the terminology. I’ve used ‘queer’ throughout, because at the time, that was the most commonly used term, ‘gay’ not yet quite having reached its current usage.

Boredom had long since set in, curiosity giving way to the enervation of waiting. They simply sat silent now, not even bothering with banter, the heat having dried all the witticisms up. Bodie was half-dozing, Doyle staring out the window, the frame making a picture of the city-scape that flourished outside, blue sky burnishing grey sandstone and glinting off the purple moire of the pigeon preening on the window sill. Eventually, the bird settled down, chest puffing up, coos dying down into quietude. Doyle’s gaze slowly came back into the room, to the plant, to the polished gleam of desk and the matte of manila folder. He’d already read the contents, tossing the interesting bits over to Bodie to scan quickly before the Old Man came in.

But Cowley hadn’t come in, not at nine when the briefing was supposed to start, not at ten when Betty had brought them tea, not even at eleven. Now the street below was filling with the muted roaring murmur of the lunchtime crowd, hundreds of office girls in their translucent summer frocks on their way to spend their luncheon vouchers, hundreds of business men ogling the flash of leg illuminated by the brightness of the sun.
And they were stuck in a stifling office, awaiting his lordship’s pleasure. There wasn’t the usual frustrated anger in them at this being left sitting like schoolboys outside the headmaster’s office: it was too simple a pleasure to be skiving off after the helter-skelter of this month past. Doyle settled his bones a little more deeply into relaxation, allowing himself the luxury of letting life pass by unhurriedly and unchecked.

Listening to the occasional ripple of laughter that rose above the flow of the crowd, Doyle ran the files through his mind again, finding them even more boring this nth time through. Just a list of the many civil servants whom MI6 believed subverted over to the other side, whichever side it was in whichever case. Just a list of names, with photographs to go with some of the names, jobs done, positions held, sundry things in common… And not a single common thread to tie them all together into uniform rope, as far as he could tell, nor any hint either of what kind of investigation was going on into which kind of skulduggery. Which is why they were sitting there waiting for Cowley to come in and tell them what the connection was and where they fitted in.

A truncated snore drew his attention over to his partner, his pupils widening and eyes narrowing as he feasted on the sight of Bodie sprawled half off the chair, bone cords stretched tight, shirt pulling out of the waistband, a fraction of white skin exposed to the pretence of coolness that nakedness offered. Doyle stared at him, following the lines of muscle, the curve of flesh, the beauty of the sleeping face.

He was going to have Bodie, one day.

One day, when things were right between them, when they could fuck without fucking up the relationship. There was a tantalising hint of more than just sex coiling sweetly between them, glittering like agate in the sand when the tide goes out, only to be covered again when the sea washes in again. He couldn’t quite grasp it, not yet, the promise amorphous and intangible, but always, always, almost close enough to touch, but slipping away when he reached for it. Perhaps it was a matter of nothing more than timing, or of trying too hard. It would happen, eventually, when it was ripe and ready and they were able to make it work. But for now, it was enough for them to look, and then go off with their ‘birds’, keeping it light and easy and free, letting the bond beneath the friendship slowly weave itself into reality.

He was enjoying this time between them, this anticipation kindling heat in the deeper caverns of his soul, bringing fire to places in himself that he’d never dared touch before. He was enjoying the flirtations too, savouring the brief touches they allowed themselves: a caress of fingertip down a shivering spine, a brush of hand on a stubbled cheek, the quick press of hip on quickening groin, gone before the arousal could rise too far. Oh, yes, it was a rare thing they were building between them, nurturing this amœba that was slowly evolving and unfurling its offers of a future that would survive. Doyle stretched out a little more himself, unconsciously echoing Bodie’s pose, matching him with what had grown to an almost—so just-on-the-tip-of-the-tongue almost—complete empathy between them. His breathing slowed its cadence, lowering him into demi-dream, where it was all right to fantasize and hope: all right in dream, for he knew that if Bodie were to wake, there would be a moment of lingering tenderness in his eyes that would match the sweetness of Doyle’s own dreaming.

He toyed, for a moment, with the idea of reaching out, spanning the couple of feet that separated them, and joining them at the hand, but the reality of being in Cowley’s office stopped him, his hand falling to hang limply at the side of his chair, fingertips brushing the coarse pile of carpet instead of the plush of skin. Perhaps tonight, if they got off early enough, Bodie would invite himself over to be fed and between them, they could conspire to casually drop in one of their myriad excuses and give him a reason to spend the night. And then, he could reach out, to link his fingers with Bodie, an invitation to stay, to let it begin between them… He smiled at that, the warm sun bringing highlights of copper to his hair and a blush of colour to his cheeks. No, not tonight, Josephine, he thought to himself in Bodie’s dreadful French accent, not tonight. Too soon, far too soon. Needed more time.

Needed, for that matter, to get a grip on himself and stop wallowing in fantasy. If Bodie caught him at this… He straightened in his chair, looking anywhere but at Bodie. It was too
easy to see all of Bodie’s messing about as invitation, when it really could be nothing more than the camping up that graduates of the Services were wont to do. Addicted as he was to adrenalin, the danger itself was tantalising, but it was, he reminded himself, sternly gazing at a cloud as if it harbinger of thunder and not glorious summer, danger pure and simple. If he was wrong, if Bodie were just piss-arsing about and then Doyle himself took him up on an offer that had never been given...he’d be picking his teeth up for a week. Too risky, just yet.

He stretched again and despite his stern warnings to himself, he couldn’t keep up his glower at the clouds, turning his attention back to Bodie. It wasn’t often he got a chance to watch him like this, all supine and supple and bare, if not physically, then emotionally. All the armour was off, here in the safety of their own HQ, Bodie’s face softening to a moue of sleep. Gorgeous, he was absolutely gorgeous, and the heat gathering in Doyle’s groin had less and less to do with the sultriness of summer. He wanted, with a gnawing hunger and a burst of mouth-watering tactility, to taste that exposed banner of skin, where it beckoned, pale and cool and mysterious. To know if Bodie tasted salty, or if the faint hint of musk that surrounded him was on his skin or only in the after-shave he used with religious, martinet efficiency. Of a sudden, he was as tight-coiled as the clouds he’d been watching. Gorgeous, he was absolutely gorgeous, and the heat gathering in Doyle’s groin had less and less to do with the sultriness of summer. He wanted, with a gnawing hunger and a burst of mouth-watering tactility, to taste that exposed banner of skin, where it beckoned, pale and cool and mysterious. To know if Bodie tasted salty, or if the faint hint of musk that surrounded him was on his skin or only in the after-shave he used with religious, martinet efficiency. Of a sudden, he was as tight-coiled as the clouds he’d been watching. Gorgeous, he was absolutely gorgeous, and the heat gathering in Doyle’s groin had less and less to do with the sultriness of summer. He wanted, with a gnawing hunger and a burst of mouth-watering tactility, to taste that exposed banner of skin, where it beckoned, pale and cool and mysterious. To know if Bodie tasted salty, or if the faint hint of musk that surrounded him was on his skin or only in the after-shave he used with religious, martinet efficiency. Of a sudden, he was as tight-coiled as

The process was so depressing, his cock wilted more than the poor pot plant, there being not one thing that could point, irrefutably, at any real desire on Bodie’s part. And yet, the temptation to have Bodie was almost palpable, drawing him closer to the edge of action, a tumultuous rush to the precipice that would change them irrevocably from friends to lovers. Not lovers, Doyle thought, sober yet from his brush with reality. Not yet. It’d just be sex and once we got that out of our systems or got into the habit of it, it’d never get beyond that—always supposing I’m not completely off in reading Bodie. Be nothing more than a bit of shagging and then—pfft! Nothing.

And Doyle was nothing if not greedy, voracious for more than what he’d had before. There’d been his share of and his fill of anonymous encounters in ‘discreet’ clubs; there’d been more than his share of ‘favours’ as a copper, blow jobs and spread bums laid out before him in return for a blind eye being turned. He snorted in laughter, jolting Bodie awake, noticing Bodie’s abruptly questioning stare, not that he was about to illuminate him. No, until he was sure of his reception, Bodie didn’t need to know quite yet that his partner was queer, fond of women but fonder yet of men. Nor did Bodie need to know just how this particular ex-copper had
managed to end up with so many informants owing him so many favours. It wasn’t even that he had been corrupt—not in his own eyes, anyway. He’d never accepted money, nor gifts. Never turned aside when real crime was going on. But if a bloke had a few funny ciggies in his pocket and wanted to keep his record clean by opening his mouth or bum, well, that was different. And it had given him access to some truly useful insider information: he’d caught many a big fish from letting the little fishies go. He heard Bodie move, heard the creak of stiffened bones as Bodie stretched, heard the groan of leather as gun was settled less uncomfortably on heat-prickled body. Yeh, he’d had men, more than Bodie’d had hot dinners.

And that worried Doyle. It was written all over him—or at least it was, to men who liked men—that he was available. And that meant he encountered more than his share of gay or bi men, and that, in its turn, meant that it brought him back round in a full circle: did Bodie fancy him, or was it just his own ‘bent’, so to speak, that was making him parlay innocent camping into an offer he had no intention of refusing? He glanced over again, to see Bodie staring at him with intense, uneasy scrutiny, so he looked away, unwilling to face him. He wasn’t quite ready to answer questions that Bodie wasn’t quite ready to ask. Time enough later, always supposing Bodie shared this attraction...

Giving himself something to do, he picked up a tattered copy of the News of the World, raising his eyebrows that Cowley of all people would have a slag rag like this in his office, but that thought soon went out the window. Another headline in a very long list of headlines, all the news that was fit to print, read all about it and thus make him more skittish than any grown man had the right to be: another civil servant caught in a love-nest with his boyfriend, shocking pictures on p.3. He wasn’t about to look at Bodie, not when he was sure that the guilt was written all over him. The sweat broke out under his skin, where it made his flesh creep with the memory of the old, old fear. He’d come to manhood before ’67, with all the anguish and fear-filled discretion of those days. He read the lurid prose of the so-called newspaper, with its condemnatory and inflammatory choice of words, with its po-faced self-righteousness that allowed itself to use queers the way other idiots used blacks or Jews, and felt his stomach clench with the dismaying knowledge that the Law had changed, but nothing else in this scept’rd isle had. Christ, if Bodie found out about him! He scanned the rest of the story quickly, reading details that perfectly echoed the details he’d been reading for months now, in story after story after story. It could be him, plastered all over the papers, if he weren’t careful. Or more than likely, it’d be him plastered all over the pavement if Cowley caught him breaking his word and fucking around with men. In this day and age, in this climate, he’d be hung by his balls and left out to dry—if he were found out. That was the golden rule, of course. Do whatever the hell you wanted, especially if you wore the right old school tie, but don’t ever, under any circumstances, get caught. For then the very people who most closely shared your...predilections would be the first in line to rip you to shreds, lest the mud slung at you should stick to them.

Looking at the story, something clicked in the back of his mind, and he picked up the folder again, riffling through the pictures and names of all the subverted. And found himself wondering if they were in this file only because they had agreed to sell their souls so that they wouldn’t end up in that newspaper.

The door clicking open sounded a fraction of a second before the faint pllop! of the manila folder dropping into the drawer, and the first of Cowley’s footsteps merged flawlessly with the sigh of fabric as Doyle sprang back into his seat, abruptly nonchalant, an expression of angelic innocence suspiciously covering his face.

“Jeremy Thorpe,” Cowley said, without preambles, setting off a sudden rumble of prescient fear in Doyle’s belly. “Elton John. The Right Honourable Sir Robert Forsyth. Mr. Duncan MacPherson. Sir Geoffrey Percival. Mr. Michael Symington, defence contractor. The Right Reverend Hugh Pym. All men who have been victimised by allegations of homosexuality by those after money or power or secret information.” He sat at his desk, sloughing jacket and loosening tie, slapping a new file on the desk top in front of himself, his voice never once pausing, but becoming sonorous, a minister delivering Sunday sermon, his tone as smooth and
doleful as the funeral bell. Bodie was sitting up now, taking notice, the fragile stillness of the man at bay, one quick glance telling Doyle that whatever the reason, Bodie shared his sense of impending disaster.

The new folder was opened, motes of dust dancing in the sunlight, the two men watching Cowley utterly still. The top sheet of paper was pristine white, save for the two dark black columns marching off down towards the bottom, the blue tip of Cowley’s pen marking off every randomly picked name as he said it with perfect, precise diction, as if it were a poem of sorts. “Peter Beale. Sandy MacIlvain. Dudley Smith. Jim Starkey.” One brief, cutting stare at Bodie, then the pen went smartly back up to the top of the page, to the other column, a bloodied Bodie sagging in its wake. “Jim Archer.”

With the first name, Doyle’s stomach knotted in sickening knowledge. He couldn’t spare a look for Bodie, too concerned with staring in wide-eyed horror at Cowley’s implacable face as each condemning name was enunciated. “Ewan Evans. Derek Jackson. Michael Potter.”

A pause, although neither list was close to being completely disclosed, and by the time Cowley had his glasses off and his eyes, wearily, wiped, the only thing for him to see were two agents facing him, defiance and aggression marking them. “I think that’ll be enough for us to be getting on with for the now, don’t you? The first list, well, you’ll have recognised those from the papers. The second and third...if either of you remember past last week, then you’ll remember those names, won’t you?”

Silence. Profound and defensive silence. Neither one of them willing to speak, neither one willing to be the first to make the exposé real. Doyle crossed his legs, one ankle going over the other knee, a pose aggressive in its masculinity, silently shouting out his refusal to be cowed.

Cowley rose to his feet, hand going to the small picture on the wall. “I knew,” he began, an autumn leaf of a voice, “when I signed you on, and I knew it fine well when I partnered you that something like this would eventually come up. I even half expected,” he gathered up whisky and glasses, coming back to his desk, putting something between himself and them, bomb-shelter from the upcoming storm, “the problem to come from you two. But it hasn’t, and for that I’m grateful. But the fact remains,” he shoved two generous drams over towards them, and they took them, warily, while he went on speaking, “and it can’t be denied. The pair of you,” he hesitated, took a drink, continued, not looking at them, “are queers.”

The room fell frigid. The much-vaunted communication between Bodie and Doyle came crashing down, all lines severed, all the links lying cut and bleeding on the carpet between them. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, or so it is said, and there was an over-abundance of danger in that room, the silence threatening. Threatening what, none of them could say, for time was suspended, breathless, while the world continued its merry way outside, the office girls still laughing, the workmen still whistling their rude appreciation, the pigeons still cooing in broody contentment. But in that office, there was nothing, just waiting. Bodie moved, restless, his mouth tight, his skin whitening. Doyle wanted to look at him, but didn’t dare: he had too many demons riding on his own shoulders to confront any of Bodie’s. And beneath it all, unacknowledged, unheard in the clamour of rising uncertainty, was the stiletto-smooth question slicing into him: and why hadn’t Bodie told him the truth?

Nestled in with the reason why he hadn’t told Bodie his own little truth, that insidious nagging buried itself under the sound of Cowley’s voice. “The Minister,” he was saying, “has laid down his own brand of the law. He wants all security risks removed.”

Fired. He—they—were going to be fired. The anger began, the old St. George against the Dragon, his own crusading zeal instigated not for some abstract nor for some underdog, but for himself. “You can’t fire us! You know as well as I do, we’re less of a security risk than the Minister, with his bit on the side in the City while the little wife keeps the home fires burning. I’ve...
been queer from the start, you know that. And
if you think that just because the Minister knows
that I’m going to turn into some limp-wristed
poof who’ll hand over every secret he can get
his hands on, then you’re a fucking idiot.”

Cowley stared at him, gimlet blue cooling him
down.

“Sir,” he added, belatedly, sparing a glare at
Bodie, cursing him for keeping his mouth shut.
“Cat got your tongue?” he asked, with all the
softness of hacksaw on steel. “Or is it just that
someone stole your fairy dust, tinkerbell?”

He saw Bodie swallow that, throat muscles
contracting, fists clenching, eyes going very, very
hard. “Isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black,
Doyle?” The gaze was very insulting, defensive-
ness turned to hostility, fight, not flight. “And
if anyone round here’s a fairy, wouldn’t that be
you, petal?”

Doyle opened his mouth, but Cowley spoke
first. “Shut up, Doyle. And you, Bodie. Come
on, the pair of you. Here you are, threatened
with losing your careers, of being blacklisted as
undesirables by the security review board, and
all you can do is shoot each other in the back?
I thought I had trained you better.”

They matched each other for ill-grace as they
subsided under Cowley’s command, the habit
not yet broken.

“As I said, before you two went into your com-
edy routine, the Minister wants all security risks
eliminated. So does MI6, but that’s because they
can afford to pay lip-service to the Minister on
this. I don’t have that luxury. We’re still fairly
new, this department of mine, and I don’t have
the manpower to just throw out some of my best
operatives.” He fiddled with his spectacles, ab-
sently, while he looked at the two men sitting
opposite him, the sun sharply bright on the
whisky glasses. “It took some rather…creative
conversation, but I persuaded the Minister to
try something other than wholesale firing. I told
him that getting rid of people now wouldn’t solve
any problems, but just delay them. And that
the only way to actually solve the situation was
to cut the corruption out at the root. Which is
where you two come in.”

The old patterns snapped back into place
from where they had been reeling in shock. A
quick glance of communication, that bespoke
understanding, the recognition of an operation
to be undertaken, a job to be done—themselves
to be let off the hook.

“And where’s that, sir?” Bodie asked for them
both.

Cowley hesitated for a moment, visibly choos-
ing his words. “You two are going to—I believe
the expression is ‘come out’?”

There was no confirmation from either one
of them, just shocked hostility.

“You’ll come out, as a couple, but discreetly,
very slightly, as if you were just getting compla-
cent, careless. That should flush out the ring of
blackmailers. When they approach you, you
come to me, and we go in there and get them.”

“And then we go back to having birds and all
is forgiven?” Suspicious, knowing Cowley and
the mores of Whitehall too well to believe that it
could ever be so simple, Doyle asked more to
have his reservations confirmed than his hopes
satisfied.

“No.” Bald, unadorned, the word lay on the
desk like a gutted fish, until Cowley spoke again.

“Getting this bunch won’t solve the problem any
more than firing all the homosexuals would. No,
we have to go to the root of the whole thing.”

Another pause, another drink, then more words,
these ones delivered only after Cowley had risen
to his feet and turned towards the window and
away from them. “You two will have to stay pub-
lic, and prove that even homosexuals can be
good agents. You’ll have to be above all the usual
criticisms that are levelled at…your sort, of
course, but that’s certainly not a problem for
you. After some time of this, I shall be able to go
to the Minister with proof that it would be un-
wise to weed people out for one flaw in their
character. Which means you two will keep your
jobs instead of being turned out with ‘unstable’
stamped all over you. And I won’t have to watch
a considerable amount of money being thrown
down the drain. Not to mention a considerable
amount of effort on my part.”

“D’you honestly expect us to believe that—
sir?” Bodie’s voice rang with the echoes of the
parade ground, and with that, the chill rain of
Services disapproval of ‘that sort of thing’. “Come
off it. We’re being set up. We get to catch the
blackmailers and as soon as we’ve bagged them,
then we’ll be for the chop, won’t we?”

“I’ve already told you how it will be, so stop
causing difficulties. You two are going to be the
test cases, and if you do the job you've been trained to do, then you'll be able to keep it.”

“Oh, yeh, right,” Bodie sneered, voice and expression ugly, his words careening on before even Doyle could get his tuppenceworth in, catapulting them all forward. “And where have I heard that one before? It might fool Doyle here, but you and me are both old army men, sir, and even if you keep your word to us, the other bastards involved in this won't. We'll get to do their dirty work for them and then we'll be for the chop. Same old story it's always been, innit? It's all right to have queers if there's a war on, but the minute the trouble's past, it's shoot the nancies and if you think—”

“Aye, I do think, and that's the difference between us, Bodie. Now sit down and shut up. Use your head, man. They already know about you now, whether you like it or not—”

“Know what? That I'm queer? Then they're wrong if that's what they think, sir. I'm no fairy.”

“Then what was that list of names all about?” Doyle snapped at him, his body still with tension. “Bridge partners, were they?”

“Look, Doyle, I've buggered a few blokes in my time, but only when there was nothing else available. It's not the same as being a pansy.”

“Not the same? Like the 'virgin' who was only a bit pregnant—it didn't count because she didn't enjoy it? Or doesn't it count if you just shove it up some poor bastard's arse—mean to say, it's not as if you kissed him or any of that queer stuff, is it?”

“That's enough, Doyle. Bodie, I've already told you to sit down once. I'll thank you to remember you've not been fired yet, so on your backside and listen to sense.”

With exceeding ill grace, Bodie buttoned his lip, subsiding enough to obey the letter of Cowley's command, if not the spirit of it. His blue eyes were bitterly cold as he glowered at Doyle, heaping guilt upon his shoulders, for the real culprits were faceless and nameless and far beyond his reach. Far easier then, to blame Doyle for his apparently easy slide into leaving the safety of the closet, than to face up to his own little skeletons.

“Now,” Cowley was saying, watching them both very closely, “I don't want any sudden changes in you. This has to be done slowly and carefully—are you paying attention, Bodie?—for we don't want to scare this bunch off. No real changes at first, apart from cutting down on the number of girls you go out with. Get a little bit careless, you know the kind of thing, the things that get you pair ribbed unmercifully round here. Oh, aye, no need to be so surprised. I know all about the rumours and the joking that goes on about you two.”

“That's part of why we were picked for this, wasn't it?” Doyle, pensive.

“What rumours?” Bodie, barricaded.

“Get off it, Bodie. You can't have missed them, they've been all over the place! Every time we go on holiday together, every time one of us mentions spending the weekend camping together, the stories fly. And you're the worst offender!”

“I've never heard any off-colour comments. Apart from Lucas' bloody stupid jokes.”

“The root of those 'jokes', as you call them, Bodie, have had more than one of your colleagues in here making sure that the pair of you aren't a security risk.”

Bodie whipped round to stare at Cowley, refusing to believe what he had spent so much time and effort refusing to see or hear. “Who? Who the fuck's been coming to you with lies like that? Me and Doyle haven't done a thing, not a single sodding thing and not one of them can say any different. Never laid so much as a finger on him, not for sex, anyway.”

Tacit it may have been, but ‘methinks the lady doth protest too much’ reverberated through the room, silence broken only when Cowley spoke. “Be that as it may,” he said, with unwarranted mildness, “the...involvement you two have is common knowledge—or rather, gossip, I suppose you'd prefer, Bodie. But all it will take is to have you two seen to have access to even higher information than you actually have and at the same time, have you—become careless with your relationship. Let yourselves be seen, be less discreet than you have been up to now.”

“I've already told you, Cowley, I'm not having it off with Doyle!”

“Och, what d'you think I am, Bodie? All the nights when you've slept at Doyle's flat and vice versa, all the times you've gone 'to the country' with one another, when neither one of the pair of you ever showed the blindest bit of interest in the countryside before I paired you off. Aye, I
know what I did, when I put you two together. I said at the time that a good partnership is like a marriage and never a truer word was said. You know fine well I've never cared about what you did, as long as the doors were locked and you didn't take out an advertisement in the Times. Now we're wasting time because of your fit of the vapours, Bodie, and I've got far too much to do to be raking over this time and again. I want the bastards that are going through our security teams like worms through an apple. And you two are the best means at my disposal—and I do mean disposal, Bodie. You'll leave this department when I damn well please, and not a second before, so you can just wipe that look off your face and get on with your job—before you end up so blacklisted that not even the Americans will employ you. Here, take these files and study them, they'll give you all the background you'll need on the pattern of blackmail. And this one, too. While you're convincing everyone that you've gone decidedly lavender, you can be running this arms dealer to ground—I want to discuss a wee matter with him and he's being less than co-operative."

Bodie sat in his seat, a louring Sphinx, while Doyle gathered up the various files. A scant glance in Doyle’s direction, and then Bodie was on his feet, a storm of hermetically sealed anger, the fury wiped from his face and his eyes, bespoken only by his excessive display of control. “Will that be all, sir?” he asked, making Doyle snap round to stare at him, this mild mili-

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Cowley nodded, watching them both like a zoo keeper at the lion’s den. “For the time be-
tary blandness unexpected.

Doyle snap round to stare at him, this mild mili-

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Cowley didn’t acknowledge him, bar a mumbled “What else could it be?”

The younger man departed, Cowley cast from his mind as he went off in search of the far knot-
tier problem of Bodie. The Old Man, left sitting at his desk in the hot glitter of the sun, felt very old indeed, far more aged than his years told him, more aged, even than his bones told him. There was a crinkled and cracked photograph, crisp black and white tinged with the beginnings of sepia, and he took it from his wallet, smooth-
ing at it uselessly. The face looked back up at him, frozen in eternal stillness, a moment that would never pass, kept from the flow of time. It could have been his own face, trapped in a mir-
r, but it wasn’t. It was his hero, the one per-
son he had striven so hard to be like, growing up with a father bedridden from the Great War, his strapping great son the man of the house, youthful zest to paper over the invalid’s wheeze. Years, it had taken Cowley, to accept what the police had told him that morning. Longer years still, to accept the truth that had festered in the battered old leather diary, words scrawled and blotched with the haste of honesty. Aye, he’d tell them all about his fears for this organisation he’d built, and those fears were reason enough. No need for him to tell them about his beloved elder brother and a career, and life, cut short by the blackmailer’s pen. No need to tell them at all…

“Hold your horses!” Doyle yelled over the gun-
ning of the engine, wrenching the door open and hurling himself in over the stench of tyres burn-
ing themselves on concrete. “Christ, like a bat out of hell, you are. Where are we going in such a hurry anyway?”

“I,” the emphasis was vicious, “I am going over to the Swan, where I’m going to chat up a pretty little barmaid who’s had her eyes on me for weeks, and then I’m going to fuck her into next week. You can go wherever you bloody-well want to, as long as you keep your hands off me.”

“Aren’t you going to say it? Oh, I am surprised. It’s not like you to be so tactful and restrained, Bodie. Shall I say it for you? Fairy. Or maybe you’d rather I called myself pansy. Or nancy. Ginger. Queer. One of those do? Or is there another one you prefer? Which one do you call yourself, Bodie? Eh?”

The car swerved, tyres squealing, a vicious snap of Bodie’s wrist turning the radio on full blast, Tony Blackburn simpering away at deafening volume.

Doyle turned the radio back off, his own voice rising to fill the frigid silence. “Yeah, but you don’t call yourself that, do you? You’re a real ladies’ man, that’s you, isn’t it, mate? Lady killer, that what you prefer? Or are you willing to be really brave and call yourself bisexual?”

The car was filled with pop music, so loud it was hard to make out the song among the racket. An articulated lorry went past, kicking up a wind that was hot, even at this speed. Bodie’s face set, white and hard as marble, his foot pressing down harder, the speedometer needle rushing farther round the dial. The sound of the lorry’s hooter, blasting at them, a blare of heat and dirt and diesel, and they were past it.

“King of the road Bodie. That make you feel better, did it? Really proved your masculinity there, convinced me at any rate. What’s next—going to take on the gorillas at the zoo?”

Music still screeching, they fled the motorway, whistling to a stop by the kerb, a forest of banal suburbia closing around them, a dozen net curtains at a dozen windows twitching, the noise and the car fuel for gossip for weeks ahead.

“Get out.”

Doyle stared at the graven profile, at the eyes turned resolutely away from him. “Give me one good reason why I should.”

“I’ll break your neck if you don’t.”

“Threatening Her Majesty’s agent? Tut, tut, Bodie.”


The last time Doyle had seen such friendly warning, he’d had his cheekbone shattered by steel-capped boots. The anger from then rose, suddenly, an eruption from a wound never healed, the unvented fury from his helplessness that night. “Yeah? Well, let me give you a friendly warning right back, Bodie. You see this?” he grabbed Bodie’s hand, forced it to touch the disfigured cheek. “You feel that?” as Bodie grabbed his hand back, stuffing it into his pocket as if to hide the memory of that broken flesh. “You’ve always wondered where I got that, haven’t you? Queerbashers gave that to me one night when I was walking home. And d’you know what I did about it, Bodie? Nothing, absolutely sweet F. A. I let them do me, because I was too fucking scared to stand up for meself and too fucking ashamed as well. Told my dad it was one of the local bully boys that did it, after my money. Shame, Bodie, that’s what that lump on my cheek’s always meant to me. Shame that I never stood up for myself and shame that I was queer. And if we do what you want to do, it’ll be no different from me running home with my tail between my legs the night they did this to me. It’s the same thing all over again, Bodie. Except this time, I’m not running. This time, I’m going to get them back for what they did to me. D’you hear me, Bodie?”

“You go right ahead, Ray. Just go right ahead. Let them label you queer and ruin your chances of staying on. Just go on and let them paint you into a corner and when you’ve finished letting them do that, you can sit back and let them tar and feather you as well. Get them back! A load of rubbish, Ray. The one’s that worked you over are long gone and you’re not a teenager any more. You’re just letting them pull your strings and jumping wherever they tell you to.”

“Maybe. But that’s still better than running away like a coward.” The sudden hand clenching his throat brought tears to his eyes, his lungs struggling for breath.

“Don’t you call me a coward, you bastard. I’m not going in there like a lamb to the slaughter, which makes me clever, not a fucking cow-
ard. Anyway, you’re the one that let them do you over the first time, not me.”

The hand was gone and his own rose in instinctive violence, but he clenched his fingers, trapping the violence before it could overspill. “Bit bitchy tonight, aren’t you?” This time, he caught hold of Bodie before Bodie could touch him. He held on tightly, the fist trapped in his hands shaking with bottled-up fury—and other, darker things that were roiling in Bodie’s eyes. Doyle waited, mouth closed to keep the wound- ing words inside, his breath coming from him in gusts. Slowly, slowly, he calmed and the hand he held stopped its shaking. He saw a spasm of cramp tie a bow in the long muscle of Bodie’s forearm, and he smoothed it out, letting go as he saw the tension that clotted Bodie’s muscles every time he touched him.

“All right,” he said, “all right.” He ran his hands through his hair, then propped his arm in the open window of the sweltering car, his mouth resting on his fist. “We’re going to kill each other at this rate, aren’t we? Which means we’d better get this sorted out—and bloody fast as well.”

“Nothing to sort out,” Bodie muttered, looking straight ahead, his body language denying Doyle’s very existence. “You’re a queer, been one from the start and never told me. Let me mess about with you, thinking you were just a mate and all the time—”

“And all the time,” the fulmination filled the car, Doyle’s voice loud with his anger, “you were fucking around with more blokes than I was! Don’t come the innocent with me, Bodie. I saw that list in Cowley’s office—and there were more names on yours than there were on mine. Suppose that explains why you never told me you were queer. You were too busy fucking anything that would stand still long enough. But that’s not quite right,” he went on, all plans of diplomacy merrily racing to hell on the road paved with his good intentions, “you were too busy fucking anything that would bend over for you. But you’re not queer. Christ, Bodie, if fucking fellas doesn’t make you queer, what does?”

“Look, Doyle, I don’t know what you get up to when you’re with blokes, but for me, it’s purely physical. Sometimes I don’t feel like being all gentle and romantic, sometimes I don’t feel like whispering sweet nothings and spending a for-
Claim it was all one of those hush-hush jobs MI6 is so in love with.”

“Damage’ll be done by then. And I still don’t get why you’re taking this all in your stride, Doyle. Anyone’d think you wanted to do this!”

A guilty start, a manifest interest in the scene outside, then Doyle was back in control, the reins of the game held firmly in hand. “Well, you’ve got to admit, it’s not often you get a chance to bugger on Her Majesty’s Service, is it?”

“Is, if you work at the Palace! Doyle…” a long pause, as languorous as the afternoon, while Bodie watched an ice cream cone drip pinkly down a child’s arm and Doyle watched Bodie’s question being formed with such exquisite care.

“About fucking fellas…”

“What about them?” There was a tingle of excitement in him, the knowledge that it was finally going to begin, now that it was out in the open, now that they were both acknowledged queer—or at least as fuckers of men. He was going to have Bodie, it was inevitable if they were going undercover as a homosexual couple having an active liaison with each other. And now Bodie was beginning the mating dance, setting the measured steps out before them, so much picnic on a red chequered cloth, just waiting to be sampled, morsel by enticing morsel. “Well, Bodie? What about fucking other fellas?”

“Why d’you do it?”

“What’re you asking me that for? You’ve done it enough yourself, you should know that by now!”

“No, not just doing it for jollies. You’ve never once uttered a mutter about people calling you queer. Doesn’t seem to bother you. So…” he followed the flight path of an ebon-winged raven, thinking that Doyle would either work out trajectory, or wax lyrical about the ominous portent of raven taking to wing. It was better, really, to think about such things than to confront Doyle with a question he was almost afraid to have answered.

“So?” Doyle prompted, anxious to have the question asked so that the answer could come out into the open, so that he could get them started, now that he knew for sure that all Bodie’s little flirtations were indeed flirtations and not just kidding.

“So… So why do you sleep with blokes? You didn’t seem to think much of my reason.”

“I’m bisexual, always have been,” Doyle said, twisting in his seat, until he could feel the excess heat from Bodie’s body stretching out to touch him. “I mean, I like girls, too, but given my druthers, I’ve always preferred blokes. Like the way I get on with them, like being mates with the fellas I sleep with, like the way they smell, the way they —” he moved his leg another inch, until his knee pressed into the strong muscle of Bodie’s thigh, “— feel.”

And Bodie jumped a mile, flinching from him, stuttering away from him, twisting the key in the ignition, racing the car away as if he were running himself. “Don’t you fucking start, Ray Doyle!” he shouted, face reddening from a confluence of emotion and heat. “Don’t think you’re going to turn me into one of your pansy ‘friends’!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Stung, Doyle lashed out, biting sarcasm dripping as caustically as the acid disillusionment gnawing his belly raw. “Oh, how could I forget. That’s right. The great butch Bodie’s not a queer. No, not him, he’s no fairy. He just buggers men, that’s all. What’s the matter, Bodie? Have I got hold of the wrong end of the stick, is that it? It’s not that you bend blokes over, it’s that you lift your knees for anyone who’ll ask, isn’t it? And you can’t handle people finding out that great big butch Bodie, the stud of CI5 is just another ginger who claws and miaows and spreads her legs for a fella. What’s your name, sweetheart? Wilhemina? Or Phillipa? Yeh, you look like a Phillipa. Call you Pippa when you were in the Army, did they? Call you—”

The car came to a neck-jarring halt, the old woman crossing the street drawing them a dirty look, wandering off quite happy to have an excuse to bemoan the younger generation to her cribbage party. In the car, there was a cessation of time, as Bodie sat there, stiff and burning cold with fury. “Get out,” he whispered.

Doyle didn’t move.

“Get out.” Barely breathed this time, real danger inherent in every syllable.

Still Doyle didn’t move, although he stoppered his mouth.

“I swear I’ll do you, Ray, if you don’t get out.”

It took them a moment to register the sound, training taking over as Doyle snagged the radio. “4.5”
“17 Wickham Street and on your bikes!
Stewart’s got Fergheal Malloy and O’Riordan and
they’ve got an entire family at gunpoint. Move!”

Sleek as silk, the hostility was buried under a massive slab of professionalism, the personal battles postponed until the public had been won. The car took off smoothly as Doyle responded to Cowley, everything else secondary in the face of emergency.

He wondered if the stains would ever come out of the parquet floor, or if there’d always have to be a rug casually scattered there to cover the splatter of blood. It had been messy, hideously messy, making his bones ache with man’s inhumanity to man. He had wanted to kill that bastard where he’d found him, wanted it so badly he could taste the blood in his mouth and smell death on the vicious little man who had done what he’d done to the young girl. His gun was still dangling from his fingers as he stared out the window, his back to the room now as the others finished the ugly task of mopping up the mess. There was that unmistakable sound, the wet cabbage noise of head hitting canvas stretcher, another dead body on its way to the mortician’s knife.

“Ray?”

“I wanted to kill him, Bodie. I wanted to see my bullet burst him like a tomato.”

Gingerly, Bodie approached him, watching him out the corner of his eye, an experienced horseman with a colt. He’d known it was going to be like this, when he’d got in the house and seen what Ray had been first to find. Ray always was worst when it was that kind of thing done to a child. “But you didn’t. You followed the book, Ray.”

“I was like an animal, no worse than him. I wanted to feel him die.”

“Pack it in, Ray. You’re not the same as him. Look at what he did. Even his own organisation wanted him taken out, he’d got so bad. And you didn’t do anything compared to what he did. Yeah, you wanted to kill him. But you didn’t. You won, Ray.”

“This time.” Doyle wiped the sweat from his forehead, his weary hand leaving a smear of blood to brand him. He stared at his hands, the gun in one, the blood on the other. “Out, out damned spot, Bodie? It’s called winning when you wanted to kill, you just didn’t do it? Not much of a world, is it then?”

Bodie put his hands on Doyle’s shoulders, easing him back until the one needing support had all the force of their partnership to hold him up. They stood there, in the window, watching the dawn rise, the mark of how much time they’d been here, besieging a pair of lunatics gone wild. Doyle leaned against Bodie, not thinking a thing, just feeling, body automatically holstering his gun, mind adrift on tiredness and lack of food. A cup of tea and a soggy sausage sandwich half-eaten before midnight had long since left him, consumed by the adrenalin rush. Relaxing into Bodie, letting the warmth flow through him, he felt the first sweet curls of arousal. He smiled, albeit with an edge of bitterness from the nightmare of this place still echoing in him.

Bodie let him lean on him, doing for Doyle what Doyle had done for him, when he’d needed it after some particularly trying job. It was what mates were for, after all, the partnership that was more important than anything else because it was what kept him alive on the streets. There was something tickling at the hairs on the back of his neck, hackles rising as if there were still some danger... Slowly, knowing he was being absurd here now that CI5 were the only living beings in the place, he turned his head to see what it was that made him feel back in the jungle, being watched by unseen hostile eyes. McCabe. Looking at him, with a most peculiar expression. And all the words of the past day came crowding back in to him, filling him until he thought his head would explode from it. He could remember everything said, every single last thing. And McCabe was looking at him as if he’d never seen the likes of Bodie before. Speculating. As if he were wondering if Bodie really was queer... Bodie let go of McCabe as if he had been burned, spinning on his heel and getting out of there without even noticing Doyle stumble.

Doyle caught the quickest glimpse of what Bodie had seen on McCabe’s face and cursed, not quietly. He went after Bodie, as he had done just the afternoon before, although that felt at least half a lifetime ago. “Bodie!” he bellowed, hoarse from lack of sleep and the length of report he’d had to give Cowley. “Bodie! Slow down, you half-Irish idiot!”
He was, not surprisingly, ignored by Bodie, although all the lingering CI5 people paid him the fullest attention. Like brush fires, flurries of gossip erupted in his wake as he ran down the stairs at full tilt, chasing after and shouting at someone who had seemed even more distraught than he. The rumour mill went into overdrive, small words beginning their slow meander from mouth to ear to mouth, from CI5 rest room, to the pub at lunch time, to the ear of the ‘casual’ listener, to the mouth of the man who was always willing to pay for such intriguing information on government men falling from a state of grace.

But all that was beginning behind Doyle, whereas he was looking forward, determined to catch Bodie up, to pin him against the nearest wall and knock some sense into him.

“You,” he said, when he finally had Bodie pinned, not to the wall, but to the railing that was straining to hear what the hell was going on between them, away from the ears of anyone but Doyle could hear, keeping this information to the mouth of the man who was always willing to pay for such intriguing information on government men falling from a state of grace.

“You,” he said, when he finally had Bodie pinned, not to the wall, but to the railing that had failed so miserably to keep harm out, “are a stupid bastard. You went running off like that because of McCabe, didn’t you? You fucking prat, he was supposed to see us. Any road, we weren’t doing anything we hadn’t done before, so why’d you go tearing off like a scared virgin? You’ll ruin everything if you’re not careful. Slow and easy, the Old Man wanted it. We’re supposed to be on a job, Bodie, not playing at being Sister Immaculate Conception!”

“Get your paws off me, Doyle! Christ, I’ve known octopuses with fewer hands than you.” Doyle backed off; Bodie straightened out the latest crop of wrinkles in a woefully wrinkled shirt. “Now you listen to me,” very quietly, so that no-one but Doyle could hear, keeping this between the two of them, away from the ears that were straining to hear what the hell was going on between them. “I’m tired, I’m hungry, I stink to high heaven and I still haven’t decided if I’m going to take on Cowley’s filthy game.”

“Then you’d better think about it before this afternoon, because he wants to see us at four. I don’t want this assignment any more than you do,” Doyle lied, ruthlessly elbowing seduction scenarios out of his mind, “but I’m not going to let them blacklist me. I’m doing this, Bodie, and I’m not letting you throw my career down the drain, not when there’s a chance I can salvage it. If it’s not with you, then I’ll have Cowley put me on this with someone else.”

“Fine. Whatever you say. Don’t let me or our partnership stand in your way. And don’t let what I want get in your way, will you, mate?”

Several minutes later, Doyle was still standing beside the fence, cataloguing, word by word, what had gone wrong between them.

“I’ll do it.” That was it. The sum total of further discussion on the subject, then Bodie shut his mouth and kept his own counsel, stonewalling every attempt Doyle made to thrash the situation out. Conferences were held, strictly, coldly business, stratagems were refined, specific times and places were set up, until they had a timetable for this ‘coming out’. And the armed neutrality between them was as comfortable as the trenches at the Somme and as murky. All the old easy familiarity was gone, replaced by a calculated control of contact. It was a mirror now, of what had been before. Now, it was Doyle who would touch, repeating what Bodie had done to him. They were seconded to a very hush-hush department, the kind that hadn’t been discovered by the Press and thus had no name yet. They knew they were being watched, playing to their unseen audience, Bodie filling the rôle with panache, but always from a distance, as if his mind had nothing in common with what his body was doing. And always, always, with that moment of tautness, when he would turn, and catch one of his own, one of CI5 staring at him…

Even the Minister watched them, calling them in to his office to look at them, and exchange mocking, laughing glances with his Permanent Secretary. Bodie took it, stoically Spartan, suff ering like a man whilst others questioned his manliness, never saying a word, never falling out of character, always, always, playing his part with surgical precision.

But he made sure Doyle paid for it all afterwards. Every single look, every single word came back to haunt Doyle, for with every undermining of his masculinity came the recrimination of silence that blamed Doyle for all of this. It was, after all, the safest course to take. Truth always held such nasty pitfalls for the unprepared and the unaware.

“Three weeks. Three fucking weeks and not a single nibble.” Doyle threw himself down on a chair, tugging his tie off, shedding his jacket...
and kicking his shoes off with a grace of motion that drew Bodie, until he reminded himself that this was just a job, just a set-up. Just a way of being blackmailed to stop other blackmailing.

“Twenty-four days of that lot,” Doyle’s thumb poked the general direction of CI5 HQ, “snickering like poxy teenagers. And if I hear one more queer joke—”

“You’ll hit them with your handbag.”

“Don’t start, Bodie. Don’t you fucking well start.” The top three buttons of the fancy white shirt were unbuttoned, punctuation for the deliberate invocation of their troubled truce. “I suppose you’ll want supper?”

“Who, me? When we had to take those two long-legged beauties home early because Cowley wants us to start being a bit more blatant? Me want supper to replace my missed dinner? Perish the thought.”

“Then I won’t make you anything, will I? And before you think it, you can forget getting up in the middle of the night for something to eat. It’s bad enough you having to spend the night here without having to listen to you banging and clattering around at all hours.”

Doyle went in to the kitchen, pulling his socks off and tossing them into the corner where the launderette bag lurched against the wall, dropping his belt over the back of the chair, whistling to himself as he washed his hands. He concentrated, fiercely, on the tune, leaving no room in him for the tension. From the living room came faint noises, of Bodie making himself less uncomfortable in a house where he’d always been so much at ease. The tension began creeping into Doyle again as he thought about these past few weeks and how much they were both paying just to keep the Minister off their backs. And to keep himself from running, the way he had the night he’d had his face kicked in. The humiliation could still ambush him, when he least expected it, even in the cheery brightness of his kitchen, the sound of Panorama filtering tinnily from the television in the sitting room, the food hissing and sizzling away in the pan. Funny, in a way, how he couldn’t for the life of him remember the bloke’s face. But he could still remember how he had tasted, shoving into his mouth, while he had knelt there, taking it, hoping to escape a beating, shit-scared and sweating, horribly aware that this bloke was built like a tank and could kill him without getting out of breath. So he had stayed there, knees aching and cold in a puddle, in a doorway that stank of stale urine, sucking someone out of fear, his mouth filled with humiliation, his ears filled with even more, as the other fellow had put him in the gutter. He’d remembered that night, over and over again, more since this operation had started than he had in the years before. He laughed at himself, not gently, mocking his own Sir Galahad notions that had driven him to join the Police when that night on his knees had taught him that being tough was nowhere near enough. He never had caught the bastard who’d done his face in, even after he’d sucked him off, but he’d put away enough bastards in his place.

He heard Bodie sneeze, and realised that the nosy bugger was looking through his books, the undusted shelves triggering the infamous allergies. Remembering some of the books that were there, Doyle refused to blush. All part of the plan, those books were supposed to be. And what did it matter if Doyle had enjoyed reading them? Who knew, maybe if Bodie looked through them it would give him a few ideas. That was why he’d left them there in the first place, if he were to be honest about it. He took his time in the kitchen, giving Bodie time to satisfy his curiosity about the kind of homosexual material Doyle would read—and look at—and giving them both time to fade the fraughtness of playing this game publicly. It was getting easier now, for him at least, to make all the looks and innuendos and raised eyebrows stop bothering him. He could even, more or less, ignore the biting remarks made by two girls dropped off and dumped by two men who made it plain they were more interested in each other than anyone else.

He took an inordinate amount of time over putting a simple supper together, using the ritual of cooking to ease him from the outside world into the security of his own home. If all were to go according to his hopes, Bodie would look through the books, getting more and more turned on by the pictures he saw and the words he read. The harsher memories of this evening would fade under the onslaught of sexuality, then a little careful seduction, the pose in the doorway, the right degree of sexual heat exuding when he sat beside Bodie, and they could
begin. They could touch and kiss, let this grow between them. Use the sex to go back to the beginning, when there had been the tingle of anticipation between them. Before being forced into it had made Bodie run a mile.

Doyle glanced over at Bodie, at the handsome profile, at the hair that was curling, ever so slightly, over the white shirt collar, and his hands began to itch again with the need to touch. There was no doubt now, that Bodie had indeed been flirting with him before all this started, but that uncertainty had been replaced by a new one. The armistice between them was less strained now than when first forged, but there was still the gnawing lie between them, that Bodie wasn't queer or bisexual, but just a man who fucked other men, when there was nothing else available.

Well, there was nothing else available tonight, was there?

Nothing to stop them. Nothing at all, and if they had sex, then Bodie wouldn't be able to keep on lying to himself and to Doyle. There was a flicker of anger in him, as the image of Bodie lying to him regurgitated, but he pushed it aside: he understood the fear of self-confession and of the pointing fingers. He wouldn't give in to his inveigling temper but he would yield to the temptation to make this façade reality. They could, he was positive, regain their old partnership that way, could recapture the friendship that had almost atrophied under the strain of pretending to be lovers when they weren't.

He couldn't keep his eyes off Bodie, intrigued, as always, by the contrasts the man offered. Food was discarded, drink abandoned as he fed himself with the beauty of what he was seeing. Hunger stirred in his belly again, reaching out to stretch all the way to his toes, curling them with the insidious pleasure of watching Bodie. He and Bodie—they could have it all, he knew, could have something truly wonderful. As was his wont, he'd spent hours worrying at this situation, staring at it and staring at it, until he'd been able to sink his teeth into it and see the solution that had been staring back at him the whole time.

Bodie hated to be trapped. Bodie hated to be tied down. Bodie hated to not be in control of his life. Ergo—give that control back. Stamp on his own temper, his own inclination to bend the world to the way he saw it, and give Bodie the lead. Within strict limitations, of course. Bodie swallowed and Doyle watched the ripple of flesh, thinking how it would be to be in Bodie's mouth when he swallowed like that. If he swallowed like that, the voice of caution muttered, reminding Doyle of Bodie's attitude to sex with men. The voice was ignored, completely routed by the sensual delight of watching Bodie and the imaginings of what it could be between them. Oh, yes, that's how he would do it: let Bodie take the lead, prove to him that it could work between them, give this form substance. This coming out hadn't been anywhere near as bad as he'd expected, nothing more really than some nasty comments and vicious jokes. Less, really, than he'd had either as an art student defecting to join the Establishment or as a policeman shopping his fellow officers. And he had his haven where he belonged: with Bodie, with CI5, with Cowley unchanged towards him. There was a part of him, too, that was revelling in the thumbing his nose at everyone, enjoying immensely the ripples of shock that spread in his wake, laughing at those who tried to mock him. He wanted Bodie to have that, wanted him to enjoy the freedoms they were buying, instead of this constant living on tenterhooks. Look at him now, sitting there tense and stiff, uneasy instead of relaxed. Stupid, really, to fight it so, when they could be having so much better a life. He had no idea what the television was burbling, doubted very much if Bodie knew either. The air between them was beginning to thicken with the draw of attraction and Doyle feasted his eyes on Bodie, willing him again to turn, to look, to open up...

And Bodie, feeling the eyes upon him, feeling the desire banking up beside him, spreading tendrils of heat—got to his feet.

"Right, I've been here over an hour, that should do it. You go upstairs, make it look like we're going to bed and I'll put the lights out down here and kip on the couch. Anyone watching'll think we're hard at it—always supposing someone is watching, of course."

Brusquely, he began setting the room up for occupation, but Doyle wasn't about to accept those battle lines. “Got a better idea,” he said, arousal making his voice deeper. “Go upstairs together, leave the curtains open, as if we'd just
forgotten about them, and give anyone watching an eyeful.”

“Don’t be stupid, Doyle. No-one’d believe that two agents would be stupid enough to get that careless.”

“That’s not what Cowley said at the meeting the other day, is it? And you kept mum about it, considering your opinion.”

Bodie was quite resolute in his refusal to look at Doyle, although he was aware of him with every leaping nerve in his body.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, Bodie! Anyone’d think you’d never done it with a bloke. What the hell’s the matter with you?”

A back, silently, eloquently turned towards him.

“Oh, that’s good, that’s really good that is. Just don’t talk about it, don’t look at it and the problem’ll go away. You and MacMillan would have got on like a house on fire, sitting having tea together pretending that nice Mr. Hitler wasn’t going to hurt poor little Poland. Bodie, will you talk to me? Bodie!”

“What d’you want me to say, Ray?” Bodie erupted, pivoting round to face Doyle, going halfway into defensive stance. “What d’you want to hear? That I fancy you? All right, so I fancy you something rotten. So now you’ve heard it. Stick poor Bodie in a situation where he can’t have any sex and he’ll pant after anything under 50 and still breathing.”

“So why not do something about it? You fancy me. I fancy you. The whole world and its granny already thinks we’re having it off. Doesn’t make sense for you to be keeping your distance like this.”

The reminder of the watchers nipped at Bodie, sharp little teeth drawing blood. “Want me, do you?” said insolently, with a glance at the every-tight denim at Doyle’s groin. “Fancy me?” this, as Bodie planted his legs wide apart, hands on hips.

“Christ, yeah,” Doyle breathed, eyes dilating as if drugged, shutting out everything but the sight of Bodie, willing, finally willing and waiting, for him. A few steps and he was there, right there, plastered to Bodie’s front, his prick pressing against Bodie’s, feeling his own erection grow against the heated movement of Bodie’s cock, lengthening, hardening. He ground himself against that, hardness on hardness, hands gripping convulsively at the ripeness of arse, clutching Bodie to him, mouth marking the translucent whiteness of skin. “Want you,” he murmured, and Bodie’s hands came round to hold him. “Want to suck—” he took a tempting ear-lobe into his mouth, delivering on his promise, “—your cock down until you’re screaming to come in me. Want to be under you, on my knees, you fucking me till I can’t stand up. Or on my back, so I can see you when—” he took one of Bodie’s hands, shoved it into the seam in his jeans, at the back, where the fabric pressed onto his hole, making him squirm, making Bodie’s cock leap in helpless lust, “—you shove your prick up me.”

Bodie was undulating against him now, pulling Doyle in close, closer still, tugging at clothes, pricking at nipples, smoothing swatches of lean muscle, his mouth open on Doyle’s neck, his shoulder, anywhere he could taste the clean salt of skin. He cupped his right hand around the hard mound of Doyle’s cock, the heel of his hand pressing against Doyle’s, his fingers reaching below to caress the fecundity of balls and to seek, slowly, with fire, the entrance to Doyle’s body. His other hand came to help, undoing button and zip, spreading fabric as he was soon to spread flesh, hands burrowing in to the spring of hair and the hardness of flesh. And Doyle’s words were all around them, weaving magic, pulling them both in, in, where there was nothing but them and their bodies and the glorious feeling of sex.

“Want you, Bodie. Want to hold you and never let you go.”

And abruptly, suddenly, they were alone, separate, disparate, isolated, even in each other’s company. Doyle heard himself all over again, heard what it was that he had said. The words were a fulcrum, the declaration forcing upon them the moment when he would have to choose to be what Bodie had called all the other men he had had sex with, or the moment he would risk it all and go for broke. He had waited for so long to have Bodie, the ache more than merely physical, although his body was protesting loud and long at its abandonment. From the first, almost, he’d wanted more from Bodie than the anonymous or casual encounters he usually had to settle for. He had always wanted to build on their partnership, not around it. Or
under it, where it would erode the foundations until one day, suddenly, they would turn round and discover they had nothing left.

He had sworn to himself, when this had started, when he’d been forced into a decision about his lifestyle, that he’d never hide again. And that meant emotionally, too. “Scared of that, are you?” he asked, his voice betraying none of his body’s passion and none of his mind’s turmoil. “You’ve never liked it when people get too close. Hail-fellow-well-met, have another drink, tell another joke, that’s you. Never let them get close. Well, you’ve already let me in close, Bodie. I know you, mate, I know you. Better than anyone else ever has at that. You’ve never let anyone see as much of you as you’ve let me see, have you, Bodie? And you’re always giving me another snippet, a bit of something here, an insight there. You want me to be close to you, Bodie. You want me to love you, don’t you?”

He held himself very still as the moment took Bodie, watching him intently. And Bodie, too, was on the sharp tip of the fulcrum, balanced in his own moment, his own make or break. To open, and thus yield, or to slam the doors closed and hug his freedom close in the sweet darkness where no-one could touch the centre of who he was. He stared at Doyle, stared at the fey gorgeousness of him, the animal allure snaring him, dragging him in to the trap he’d never really fought against. For had he fought, he would have run, or cut Doyle off, or even simply maintained proper, polite working distance. But it had never been like that with them, not even in the very beginning, when they fought like cat and dog and mixed like oil and water. He’d always been drawn, Doyle’s hook in him from the first second those green eyes had fastened on him. He could feel Doyle’s will on him again, that unerring pull, the palpable desire reaching out, tugging at him, tingling at his groin. He could have Doyle, if he wanted, right now. Here, in this living room, without bothering with any of the niceties, the way he always did when it was malesex. So what was he complaining about? Why was he tearing off like a scared virgin?

Because hell may have no fury greater than a woman scorned, but he’d take that over a furious Doyle any day of the week. And Doyle had spoken the verboten word. Love. Not in his dictionary, as Bodie was so fond of saying, not in his book at all. To have Doyle, loving him...

Pointing fingers. Knowing stares. Stigma. Shame, following him the world over. Meeting old mates, looking for a job to replace this one when the Minister and/or Cowley went back on what they’d said—all of that, with everyone pointing at him and Doyle, knowing. And wanting their share, of him, or of Doyle. And Doyle, wanting to hold him forever. Owning him, tying him down, making him stay in the one place. Doyle had never been farther than the North of Scotland, and felt no desire to roam, content with the greenness of Britain, with the dichotomies he understood because he was a part of them and they of him. It filled him up, spilling over, the thought of Doyle loving him. But it emptied him, ebbing him away, the thought of Doyle when the disillusionment set in, when the dissatisfaction crowded all the love out. For he was no Doyle, to love and give and surrender his soul. Not him.

And it never even occurred to him to wonder at the way he looked at Doyle, nor the way he risked his life for him, nor the way he already put Doyle first in everything. It never occurred to him at all, for then he would have to question that most intrinsic of things, his own self-identity. Only queers loved other men. Only queers actually set up home with other men. Only queers were sweet and soft and romantic with other men. And he wasn’t a queer. Not a cream puff, not him. Fucking men occasionally didn’t make a man queer, didn’t even make him bisexual like Doyle claimed to be. Just made him a man who couldn’t do without it, even if it meant fucking blokes.

He had taken too long to respond, and Doyle had the bit between his teeth, mouth off and running, words spewing from him. “You’re just scared, that’s all it is. If I was a stranger, you’d have me on the floor by now, wouldn’t you? But it’s too risky for us, isn’t it, Bodie, cos you might actually get really involved. I wouldn’t be satisfied with the way you treat your birds, with your flowers and your chocolates and your sweet nothings. I want something real from you and you can’t handle that. You’re nothing but a coward, Bodie. A pathetic little coward.”

“Coward? Coward am I? I’ll show you—”

Doyle was inundated by him, his weight, the
“If that’s how your idea of a good time, mate, then it’s a wonder you’ve still got a prick to use.” He was rising to his feet, nimbly tidying clothing till there was not the slightest hint of what they had come so close to doing before he had opened his mouth and had Bodie leap in with both feet. “ Doesn’t say much for you, does it? Jumping me like a bull in a brothel. What do you think I am, just another convenient hole for you to fill? Just another arse to be buggered, never mind who’s attached to it? Pathetic, that’s what you are, if all you can do is resort to what amounts to rape. Well, I’ll tell you something, mate. I’ve had it up to here—” he bent down, chopped at Bodie’s throat, “—with you. All that flirting at the beginning, that was never meant to get anywhere, was it? All you wanted was to cop a quick feel or have a good grope. You were never interested in taking it beyond that, were you? Too much of a fucking coward. Well,” he whispered, right into Bodie’s face, giving no sympathy for the sight of pain-sheened skin, ignoring the wheezing belches of Bodie’s breathing, “you might be ashamed of being queer, but I’m not, not any more. You wanted to sleep on the sofa? You go right ahead, mate, don’t let me stop you. Because d’you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to be a good little fairy, Bodie, and I’m going to go out and pick up the first half-way decent bloke I can find. Then I’m going to bring him back here, and I’m going to take him upstairs. He’s going to fuck me, Bodie, while you sit down here, nice and quiet, and listen to us. Sound travels in this place, so you should be able to hear every single noise. And you can sit there and think that it could’ve been you up there with me, if you hadn’t been such a wally. Nobody forces me, Bodie, not even you can get away with that.”

Bodie’s agony had receded to a dull tide of pain ebbing and flowing with his pulse. “Think you’re so fucking clever, don’t you? Can’t do that, you’ll break our cover.”

“Not being queer, you wouldn’t know that queers’ll fuck anyone that’s under 50 and still breathing, even if they’ve got their boyfriend at home. Some queers are really kinky, they like a bit of the old ménage à trois. But of course, not being queer, you wouldn’t have any idea about that. I’ll bet you don’t even know that some queers are so kinky, they like their sex rough.”

Bodie was on his knees by now, breathing close to normal, although that was the only normality left in the room. “Don’t expect me to hang around here while you fuck men, Ray Doyle.”

“Why—make you jealous, would it?”

“Don’t be disgusting.”

And with that last snatch of pride, the writing hand of Fate stroked all the t’s and dotted every single last i.

“Disgusting, is it? It’s only all right if it’s not much better than rape, tough guys just having a bit of a laugh? I’m not the one that’s disgusting around here, Bodie. Not by a long chalk. You walk out of here and you’ll be walking out on this operation. You do that, mate, and I’ll make sure Cowley kicks you so far off the squad, you’ll end up in Siberia washing socks. I’ll see you shortly—when I’ve found a real man who can show you what it’s all about.”

A swirl of air, the chill of a draught, the slam of the door, and Doyle was gone. Truly alone this time, Bodie hunched on the couch, head in hands, not thinking, not doing anything but trying to get a grip on this evening that had kaleidoscoped so far out of his control. The door slammed again, but this time, there wasn’t just the stomp of one pair of feet, but the patter of two people, going past him, towards the stairs.

“Emm, don’t mean to be nosy, but who’s he?”

“Disgusting, is it?” He was rising to his feet, nimbly tidying clothing till there wasn’t just the stomp of one pair of feet, but the patter of two people, going past him, towards the stairs.

“Him? Someone I work with, no-one important. He’s just kipping on my sofa for a couple of nights, that’s all.”

Doyle put the lights out as he went past, switching others on as he progressed upstairs. Anyone outside, watching, would think they had struck a goldmine—not just two queers in the...
department, but ones prone to adventuring, too. And from the noises beginning to filter down from upstairs, Doyle was no cowering mouse in bed. Bodie’s skin crawled when he heard the first shoe hit the floor. His stomach clenched into a knotted, ulcerous fist when he heard the first low moan. And his heart stuttered when he heard Ray laugh—

“Him? You’ve got to be joking! Queers scare the shite out of him. Anyway, I want a man to fuck me—”

—and he was on his feet and out of there, running, racing away from hearing any more, escaping the sounds that were threatening to rip him open and expose him to himself. He was fleeing, as fast as his feet could carry him, from the self-knowledge that threatened to shatter him.

Morning was already well under way, heat and car fumes rising in equal measure with the tempers of those unable to escape the city’s cage before they saw each other again. As if from behind battlements, they stared at each other, Bodie poised on the way out, Doyle standing his ground in front of him. They met each other eye to eye, but there was nothing in the look, only the stonewalling set up for both protection and attack. A long-stretched moment crawled past leadenly, yet neither one spoke, each knowing, in his heart, that the other should speak first, should apologise first. Should first admit the pain...

A tumult of bodies, tumbling through the door in vociferous abandon, bumping into Bodie, shoving him out of the way with good-natured curses, coming to an abrupt stop as they saw who else was there, and as the turgid atmosphere hit them. Not even the prospect of a long, cold pint down the local could re-inflate their spirits, so they were muted, words banal and cold...
“Only after you ponced around in denims like those, complete with strategic holes, of course. Oh, yeh, Mr. Look-but-don’t-touch Raymond Doyle. Prick tease, that’s what you are. You’re lucky I stopped when I did last night and didn’t just give you what you were really after.”

A coiled tornado of temper, Doyle stalked him, coming up to within an inch of him, spitting the words at him, stung by truth. “I’m after something you don’t recognise, even when it jumps up and bites you. Unlike some people I could mention, I’m all grown up, Bodie, and I’ve got past the spotty stage of shagging for the sake of it. I want a bit more in life, Bodie, such as love—”

“Love? You’re a fine one to talk. You never mentioned love, Ray,” Bodie sneered, conveniently forgetting that it had been mentioned. “All you wanted was a good fuck and to own me. Never let me go, you said. If it was love, mate, you’d stop thinking about no-one but yourself for a minute and look at it from my side.”

“That’s easy enough done, isn’t it? All I have to do is disconnect my brain and think with my balls. That’s about as deep as your view of life goes, isn’t it, Bodie? Well, you can keep it, mate. Christ,” he said, horror slowly dawning in the back of his mind telling him what they were doing here, what was happening here, but his mouth streamed on, his anger too hot to let him slow down enough for his brain to catch up to it. He was hurling the words at Bodie, vicious from his pain. “And to think I actually used to believe that the biggest problem was working out whether or not you’d have sex with blokes. The biggest problem, mate, is that you’re a pathetic little poof who’s too scared to even admit that to himself.”

“And the biggest problem with you, Doyle, is that you’re a selfish bastard who refuses to see beyond the end of his own nose. Here,” and now it was Bodie who was hurtling along, shoving ID card and gun and ammo at Doyle, making Doyle’s arms overflow with visible rejection, “seeing as how you want it all your own way, sonny, you can have it. You said you’d see me out of CI5 if I fucked up this ‘chance’ of yours, so I’ll just save you the bother. When he comes in, you can tell Cowley for me that he needn’t bother waiting till all this is over to fire me, because I’m getting out, right now. And I’m getting far enough away that I won’t ever have to look at your ugly mug again.”

An intake of breath, a frantic search for the right words, but Bodie was already leaving without so much as a backward glance.

Doyle felt the regret rise in him like death and squelched it, along with his feelings, making himself hard enough to cope, the way he always had. He’d survived worse than this before: he could survive this. He would survive this. A moment to stare at the confusion of hardware he held, and then he began putting the pain behind him. He absolutely did not, he tattooed on the inside of his skull, where he just had to shut his eyes to see it, had not, loved Bodie. Had been in lust with him, perhaps, but never love. Bodie’d been a good mate, like Sid Parker, although he’d never fancied Sid. That was all it was: a confusion of two emotions, mixing up to pretend to be the possibility of love. Spine stiffening, head held high, control perfectly rigid, he went off to his briefing, rehearsing in his mind what he was going to tell Cowley. He wasn’t going to run away, not the way he had when he was young and scared. Never again, he’d promised, never again. He glanced, once, over his shoulder at Bodie’s retreating form, but this time… This time, he didn’t go after him.

This time, he let Bodie go.
THRUPP’NY BIT

A thrupp’ny bit is a multi-sided brass coin. Similarly, the two stories in this section show us two different sides to the same theme of dominance and submission. The first is a softer piece, an exploration of the breaking of barriers to let complete love and commitment come through. The second story is much harder in tone, delving into the psychology of power, violence, and control. In both pieces, Bodie is the focus.

PANORAMIC VIEW

EDI N. BURGH

“Bodie…”

Having cause to distrust that spectacularly banal tone of voice, the body in the bed beside Doyle stiffened, made wary by cordiality.

“Yeh?” he finally ventured, it becoming obvious that Doyle wanted to be drawn out on whatever it was this time.

“It true what they say about mercs?”

The bombshell dropped, exploding messily between them. The stiffness now was hostility and with it, an old friend, or enemy, depending on whether one were surviving in the jungle or trying to build a home: fear slithered coldly onto the bed and under the covers with them.

“Depends on what they say about mercs, doesn’t it?”

“Not about the collecting ears or any of that stuff.”

“Some did that. And if you have to ask me, then you’d better bugger off now before I smash you one.”

“Know you didn’t, Bodie. And I’m not asking about you, ”the lie laughed loudly, mocking his patent dishonesty, “just about mercs in general.”

Bodie heaved a sigh, the action obviously used as often as the cliché. Like a latecomer schoolboy reciting yet again the Books of the Bible in front of his form, Bodie began intoning the answer to the unasked question. “If you couldn’t get to the cities, you’d find out if the local women were available. An’ if you could get your head separated from your shoulders for looking at them the wrong way or if you’d have to marry them just to fuck them, then you’d either wank or you’d wank with one of the other fellas. Some of them got to the point where wanking wasn’t enough and they went on from there. And yeh, I did fuck a few blokes there and I let a few of them fuck me. Satisfied?”

Doyle leaned back on his pillows, bedside light tangling with chest hair and the moonbright glint of his necklace, as he carefully perused his oh-so-fascinating paperback. Without even needing to look, he knew that this would be a proving ground for them, the moment when Bodie either let him in or shut him out. And if it was the door slamming in his face, then that’d be it. All or nothing, he’d told Bodie that, till he was sick of hearing himself say it. Not that it had made the blindest bit of difference: Bodie just kept on going his own sweet way, doling out the barest modicum of trust to keep Doyle sticking with him. Not for the bedroom, that lay-down-of-life trust that Bodie had tossed to him without so much as a ‘catch!’ when first they started as a team. No, that was only for where it was safe, on the streets where dying was the greatest risk and living something that happened by accident.

He wanted more than that, wanted the treasures that Bodie had cached behind his façade of bonhomie. Wanted to possess and be possessed, wanted an end to this ‘good mates who happen to screw each other’. What they had now could be chalked up to the simple fact that shared danger, shared lives, and shared ungodly work hours could drive men to having a quick wank alongside, until the loneliness of ‘women just don’t understand us, mate’ enriched it to wanking each other, the lovely feel of another
man’s strong, sure fist wrapped around your cock. Then the need to snatch something good out of the cesspit they lived and worked in transmogrified it into having sex with each other. Eventually even, if ignored nurturingly enough, it could bloom into fucking, as it had for them.

Fucking, that was what he had thought would have been the ultimate between them, would have been a serious commitment, would have been enough to cement them together. But all it had done was drive knowledge through his heart like a stake: the more Bodie gave him physically, the more he was able to distance himself from Doyle. Nasty trick that, using intimacy to keep your distance, but one Bodie was obviously a past master at, so good at it in fact, that it had taken Doyle months to realise what the hell was going on.

And it was when he had seen what Bodie was up to that his own sharp brain started worrying at it, chewing on it, going over it again and again, not to be satisfied until he knew. The answer, when it came, was stunning in its simplicity and frightening in its possibilities. Bodie was keeping aspects of himself hidden because they were overflowing with dirty little secrets, the kinds of things a man would hesitate to admit to. And Doyle, when he saw that, sitting over a cuppa in the sitting room, watching Panorama, waiting for Bodie to get home from fetching the curry, had laughed. A programme on the telly, all serious and erudite and boring as hell, the secret to understanding the secret of his Bodie.

Angola. The British mercs captured there. That’s what the report had been on, telling in foul detail what these men had gone through in prison, hinting with acute BBC decorum at the ties they had formed before, during, and after. Bodie hadn’t been in Angola—never mind the smoke-screen of lies he put about—but the principle was the same. And there he was, keeping his nasty little tendencies secret, giving both of them the short end of the stick because he was afraid of losing everything if he let Doyle see what else was still in this particular Pandora’s box.

That was the best part of the joke: if Doyle were right, they were perfect halves of one whole. As obvious though the answer was, the solution was far less simple. It was one thing to be convinced that Bodie really wanted the same kind of fantasy-made-real that Doyle did, another to convince Bodie of the self-same thing. Which is why they were lying here side by side, 36 hours leave stretching languidly before them, with Doyle ostentatiously buried in ‘Dispatches’.

“Good, that obviously answered your question,” Bodie muttered into Doyle’s silence. “I’ll get some kip now, if you don’t mind.” Burrowed into the bed, covers down to his waist in the summer heat, the exposed expanse of back was a tundra of tension knotted muscle. Sleep was all very well to speak of, but that back displayed that the mind was far from rest, was, in fact, hip deep in memories that roused and undermined, all in one fell swoop. There was a stab of sympathy flashing bright through Doyle, so one hand abandoned his book to stroke the shoulder that still carried the mute scar.

“Had a feeling that’s how it was when it came to sex.” The reassurance, verbal and tactile, ebbed some the tension out of the muscles. “But what about the Game?”

The tension tsunamied back in, crashing between them, a barrier of silence.

“C’mon, Bodie, tell us. Did the Game really go on?” Face securely hidden in his pillow, Bodie nodded.

“’D you do it, love?”

No motion, no sound, no speech.

“Get off it, don’t be such a bloody coward, mate. It’s not going to scare me off, is it?” He dropped his book onto the floor, the small thud making Bodie start. Doyle soothed him, running his hands along satin-smooth skin, opening his mouth to lick his way down Bodie’s spine, lapping up the lissome traces of salt sweat that dotted there like rock pools on the shore. “Did you do it, Bodie? Did you play the Game? Fuck people, did you? Wrestle them, fight them, get them down on the ground and then shove it up them, did you?”

No answer, save the convulsive shiver of arousal that rippled the skin under his laving tongue. “You can tell me,” Doyle whispered, bright eyes devouring the signs of sex that were beginning to pulse from Bodie. He pushed the covers out of the way, swooping down to press
his face between Bodie’s cheeks, suddenly, shockingly, sucking on the tiny bud of flesh nestled there. He plunged his tongue inside the dark depths, feeling the ring of muscle contract around him, just as he had hoped it would. Just as he had wanted to feel it do, the desire growing the more Bodie avoided anything like this.

Needing to breathe, he got to his knees, mouth and chin glistening from rimming Bodie. One finger slid in to make Bodie remember where his tongue had been. “It’s not as if I’m your maiden aunt, is it? Go on, Bodie, tell me. Did you like doing it, getting the other guy down on his knees, ripping his trousers off so’s you could shove yourself up him? Like that, did you? Like the way it feels. Better than with me, eh? Is it better, Bodie, when you get to force him? Better when there’s a whole crowd of blokes standing around watching and cheering? Saying things? Did they pull their pricks out when they watched you, eh? Did they?”

An explosion of movement and Doyle was under him, Bodie’s long legs straddling him, cock straight and hard, pointing at him with wonderful threat. “Yeh, they used to stand around and watch and yeh, I used to play the Game. Any chance I got, Ray. Loved it, I did. Liked it better than anything else. Got to where it was all I wanted, couldn’t even look at a woman, ‘specially not after that bastard Krivas was finished with my girl. Couldn’t take what he’d done to her, so I went for men more than I was finished with my girl. Couldn’t take what woman, ‘specially not after that bastard Krivas it was all I wanted, couldn’t even look at a thing fierce and strong and enduring. It would

One of those brief, bright moments where everything ‘clicks’ and all is revealed in stunning simplicity, all the facts sorted and resolved by the nether reaches of the mind. Quite comfortably, illumination settled in his thick skull and he felt the skin on his face move with his smile. Saw Bodie’s anger wander into muddled confusion. Felt his whole being shift, a tectonic plate, leaving one continent behind and coming into its own. The thought went through him, quite distinctly, with none of the usual flurried hysteria of new ideas, the very sedateness of his understanding telling him that this was what he had known, but not told himself, from time immemorial. It wouldn’t be a matter of him going under to Bodie to force the bugger into something fierce and strong and enduring. It would be he letting Bodie do that very thing, he giving Bodie what Bodie was too scared to ask for. What Bodie was too scared to want. What Bodie needed to be ‘forced’ into, giving all the responsibilities for it over to someone else. Vulnerability, not dominance, then, was Bodie’s secret vice, anathema to a Liverpudlian hard man. He stretched a little, Bodie’s buttocks warm and heavy, Bodie’s eyes staring at him, and all the while he could feel all the lifetime’s worth of imbalances and seekings find their spot, turn around and around and pronounce approval of the new order.

It didn’t matter to him that the wordless had elongated to such lengths, for his hands rested quite contentedly on the reins. He let them stroke flatly across the delicate blackness of pubic hair, nails fingerpainting stripes of pleasure along the curve of Bodie’s ribs, red roses blossoming over Bodie’s nipples as fingers tugged at them.

“You want it, then, do you,” Doyle murmured, lazy as summer on the river, not asking a question, simply stating a fact evidenced by the arching of Bodie’s body and the gasp of shocked pleasure coming from him, his own words answering the frightening desire that was erupting in Bodie. “Lucky, that, cos it’s what I want an’ all. Want you, Bodie, want you screaming under me. Want to fuck you, an’ I’m going to.” Fingers closed on nipple, pulling, tenting Bodie’s flesh. “Hard. An’ often, as often as I feel like it. All I have to do is snap my fingers, isn’t it, Bodie? Cos you’ll be getting it exactly how you want it, too.”
The look in Bodie's eyes sent power thrilling through him, awakening all the impulses once wreathed into fantasy, settling the responsibilities evenly upon his shoulders, imagining Bodie belonging to him and liking the picture immensely, a stained-glass window in his soul.

“Yeh,” he said, not needing to whisper, wanting it all out where they could see it, no shame and no reluctance, “that's what we want, you and me. Two sides of the one coin, eh, Bodie?”

He took Bodie's hands, wrapped them around Bodie's cock, started them moving the way he liked to see Bodie do himself, shoving Bodie then until he was supine, Doyle enthroned over him, buttocks hot against the solid flatness of Bodie's belly. “Go on, do yourself. Remember how we started? You needing it that night we were on obo, stuck in the car, you squirming about as if you’d sat on a fucking tack. An’ me pretending to fall asleep so’s you could have a wank and I could get to watch. Remember, Bodie?”

“Yeh.” Bodie's hands were moving now, smoothing foreskin back and forth, each time able to cover ever less of the head, cock lengthening and hardening under his hands and Doyle's rapacious stare. “An’ the first time you let me see you do it, that night at HQ, waiting for Cowley to come back. Was dead hot and you said you were going to have a shower.”

“An’ I stripped for you. An’ you wanked yourself silly while I was in the shower having a go. Well, we’re going to do something new tonight, Bodie. I’m going to fuck you, whether you want me to or not. I’m going to take you and you’re going to belong to me. You’re going to kneel for me, Bodie, kneel for me and beg me to fuck you hard.”

Bodie's eyes were wide, pupils drowning out the sea of blue, gaze hanging onto Doyle for all he was worth. “Like Africa. Just like Africa all over again.”

“C'cept there won’t be anyone else but me.” The slap cracked around the room, echoing, the vivid mark of Doyle's command standing out bright as the red hand of Ulster on Bodie's white belly. “D'you hear me, Bodie? Just you an’ me, I won't have you buggering off with another bloke. Unless I tell you to and unless I'm watching.”

Bodie opened his mouth to speak, but a hand covered him, shutting him up, banking the words inside, Doyle's fingers following them. Wet as a sucked cock, the fingers explored his face, closing Bodie's eyes with their touch, closing Bodie's senses to everything but the sound and feel of Doyle mastering him with such ruthless tenderness. “Don’t want you to say anything, don’t want you to think. Just feel, Bodie, feel what it’s like to have someone else in control.”

Face glistening, mouth gaping, hunger written large upon him, Bodie lay under Doyle, completely inert, responding with languorous preciseness wherever Doyle moved him. And Doyle watched him, experiencing not only his own body, but every sensation in Bodie, also. It was obviously such luxury for Bodie to give it all up, as he had before, but to do it in safety, with a man he could trust. It was up to Doyle to prove that he wasn’t going to take advantage, to show that he wasn’t laughing at him behind Bodie's closed eyes.

Doyle stared at him in rapt fascination, so attuned to Bodie that it was as if he could hear his thoughts, feel his pleasures, know his fears.

A hot mouth was on him, following in the path blazed by the wet fingers, tongue dipping into his mouth far too briefly, the scantest of kisses. Then he was shivering, uncontrollably, as limber tongue caressed his ear and warm breath set his nerves dancing and gambolling with delight. The old addiction made his belly hollow with need, physical manifestation of an emotional weakness he was too leery of confessing here in the real life of London, far away from the Dali-esque melting of Africa. But the risks, letting someone in like this, letting someone see him exactly as he was, no machismo beneath the surface bravado, just a little man wanting to be led and pampered and cared for—balance for the cruelty and strength he was in his career. But when it came to his emotions, not an atom of machismo remained, and that was what terrified him beyond endurance. Until Doyle…perhaps. Unless Doyle…

The mouth was back, sucking on him, a finger was pressing into his body, touching him inside where no one had dared since he’d come back from Africa and that touch was demanding response, demanding that he yield, that he offer that which Doyle considered to belong to him and him alone. No time, then, for philosophizing, no time for serious consideration, only feelings, only
the moment, and to hell with the consequences. Let them be whatever they wanted to be, let whatever would happen, happen. CI5 could go take a flying fuck with the rest of the world, for all he cared. He had Doyle, and Doyle was at the helm, steering them both, just like his fostered dreams. Suddenly, the finger withdrew, then came back, bringing a friend with it and he was wonderfully stretched, gloriously stretched and he knew what was coming. He wriggled, trying to tell Doyle, trying to express with his body what his mouth was too busy to say. Harder, he wanted to scream, harder! Make it...

“Harder!” Doyle grinned as Bodie shouted it, perfect harmony with what he had seen on Bodie’s face. “Like it hard, do you?” He really didn’t need to ask, but he couldn’t keep the words inside, needing to talk to Bodie. “That’s good, cos that’s how I like it as well. None of this pussyfooting we’ve been fat-arsing around with, eh, Bodie? Get on to the real thing now, can we, go at it like real men. Yeh, squirm when I shove my fingers up you.” He scissored his fingers, spreading them, opening Bodie up, stretching him painfully wide. “Feel that? I’ve got you spread so wide your arse looks like a cunt, all pink and pretty. And waiting for me, isn’t it? It’s mine now, not yours, and I can do whatever the fuck I want to with it. Give it away, keep it all for me, plug it up when I’m not in it to make sure you don’t forget who the boss is. Pity we don’t have any tricks of the trade around here, though. You’ll have to do something about that, Bodie, if you want to keep me happy.”

Bodie’s hands were dragged away from his cock, set to work on his nipples instead. Hungry, Bodie obeyed him, keeping his eyes closed, listening to his heart’s memory of Ray’s face. “Pull on your tits, mate. Too flat for my taste, I like something I can sink my teeth in.” Doyle laughed, sultrily, sexily, at the arching of Bodie’s body as the words registered in Bodie’s brain. Laughed again, as Bodie writhed, hands tugging at himself, arse pushing up to trap Doyle’s fingers in deeper.

Doyle pulled himself free, Bodie’s body slurping shut behind him. “Say it,” he whispered, a satyr in the garden, leading the far from innocent farther astray. “Tell me what you want. Beg me, Bodie.”

“Christ, Ray, don’t fucking stop. Don’t leave me empty…” Fingers traced with cruel delicacy down Bodie’s inner thigh, promising, promising. “This what you want? What we’ve been messing about with the last couple of months?”

“Shite, no. Want it hard. Want you to fuck me, Ray.”

“You want any Tom, Dick or Harry to fuck you?”

“No, has to be you, mate. Has to be…Can’t trust anyone else that much…”

The fingers were pressing harder now, skimming the sensitive line leading from tight-drawn balls to lonely arse. “Why not, Bodie? Why can’t you let anyone but me do this to you? What’s this all about, mate, that you can’t even let someone else see you like this? Lots of blokes get fucked all the time.”

“But they…”

The words dried up to desert, a sere wind cutting between the two men, bed becoming battlefield.

“Tell me.”

“No.”

“Tell me, Bodie.”

“Can’t.”

“Yes, you can. Tell me!”

“Won’t.”

A silence so deep, a dropped stone couldn’t cause a ripple. Doyle felt the strands beginning to unravel, felt Bodie retreat, shutting himself away, rebuilding the castlements that stopped the pair of them from ever getting beyond a relationship of congenial fucking. He watched as Bodie’s face stilled, expression fading like dusk into the featureless night of the city sky. And the body grew still, too, arousal dimming, becoming limp and flaccid, all the tension drained and strangled by fraught emotions. Fear muddied everything. For Bodie, not for Doyle. Doyle’s fear cast a harsh glare of clarity on what they had and how little that would become in a matter of a few years. If he couldn’t force Bodie into honesty, if he couldn’t bare the secrets and let the darker desires bond them long enough for them to really trust…then love would lie fallow, seed cast upon the proverbial stony ground. And he was having none of that.

Roughly, angrily, he tipped Bodie over onto his belly, positioning him in the humiliating...
As a boy, not a man. Over his knees, he wanted him, and he pulled and hauled until Bodie landed across him. Bodie’s cock was trapped between Doyle’s thighs, his own cock digging into the vulnerability of Bodie’s belly. Blue eyes glowered up at him with the cutting edge of sapphire, but Doyle grabbed hold of silken black hair and shoved, forcing Bodie to face forward into the icefloe of the bedding. It was an incredible feeling, being so much in command, feeling so much the man, with his bigger and heavier partner ensnared. He raised his hand, pausing, holding it on high, waiting, waiting, spinning the moment out until it was as fine and brittle as decorative sugar and then what his subconscious had been waiting for—happened.

“For fuck’s sake, Ray, do it!”

An explosion in his chest, a great upwelling of feeling: love, tenderness, dominance, a huge knot of cherishing desire at this eruption of need from Bodie. It was what he had wanted, what they had both needed, acknowledgement of the unique layer that Bodie and he could share to make them both whole, and one, forging them together on this particular anvil. Doyle brought his hand down, a stinging pain shooting up his arm as the pleasure from it shot through Bodie, flashflooding all the way to Bodie’s cock, springing there, rising, between not Bodie’s legs, but Doyle’s, where Ray held Bodie’s manhood in the ultimate trust. With every cracking slap of his hand, rose-red bloomed on Bodie’s white arse and the rose-red delight of arousal bloomed between Doyle’s legs, the hard fact of Bodie’s willing submission.

The light dappled on them as if they were painted by Renoir, but the only art Doyle cared for was the exquisite stroke of his hand, painting red pleasure on Bodie’s arse, painting the most sensuous impressions of ecstasy through every vein of his body. Doyle was so alive, it was dizzying. Every corpuscle was awake and feeling pleasure, his nipples tingling as though a wet, wet mouth was sucking them, his cock tight and hot, pressing into Bodie as he could feel Bodie pressing into him. It was almost as if he had two cocks, his own, with its familiar, tightly coiled pleasure, and Bodie’s clenched between his thighs where his own usually snaked. Two cocks, both hard and haughty, both filled to overflowing with lifeseed, both a multiplicity of pleasured nerves.

But he didn’t want to come like this, joined only by skin on skin and sweet hardness on muscle. He wanted to be in Bodie, wanted to be part of him, take him, own him, win him to have and to hold forever... Wanted to feel the butter-soft flesh melt before him, letting the hardness of his cock cut through it, parting Bodie, splitting him in half with only Doyle able to put him back together again, Bodie useless without him, Bodie needing him forever, a place where Bodie could finally belong and put an end to the gypsy wanderings that had begun their scarring tattos long ago when he was only a frightened, underfed child.

Roughly, he shoved Bodie off, grinning in feral sympathy as Bodie plunged against the sheets, rubbing so hard, so terribly hard that it had to hurt beautifully. One hand on the arse over which he claimed dominion, Doyle scrabbled about in the bedside cabinet, grabbing the tube that had only ever been used to make himself slippery and accommodating for Bodie. Now, he was going to make it serve as it would serve best this night: he’d use it to mark Bodie’s submission to him, physical and emotional. Shaking fingers fumbled the cap, but then the crystal-clear gel was dripping onto his fingers like a cascade of diamonds, all bright and shining, drawing his eyes to the glitter, the shine of it tantalising, making him starve for the aching pleasure of seeing Bodie’s flesh glimmer so, ready for him. Wet for him, open for him, as hungry for him as he was for Bodie.

Bodie was suddenly very still as the trembling hands touched him, was utterly motionless as he felt the slickness smoothed onto his skin, covering his buttocks with a sheen of light, massaging him with proprietorial strength, fingers tracing the outline of the spanking that lingered there. Then the fingers were rimming him, dipping into him, forcing him to open his heart even as he opened his body.

“Oh, Christ, Ray,” he muttered, everything but the names of deities fled from his mind, “oh, God...”

The abject desperation in that voice steadied Doyle’s hands, suffusing him with a profound confidence. “Like that, do you?” he whispered, kneeling over until his breath disturbed the

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hairs on Bodie’s nape. “More where that comes from, mate. Got a lovely big prick waiting for you, and you’re going to take it, aren’t you? I’m going to fuck you, I’m going to own you and you wouldn’t have it any other way, would you? All you want is me, in you, isn’t it, Bodie? Nothing but you and me, me up you, you under me, flat on your belly.”

He spread Bodie’s legs, reaching between to grab hold of Bodie’s cock to pull it down where he could see it, a painful purple, weeping from frustration. The balls were small, tight ovals, drawn so high he could barely see them in the shadow cast by Bodie’s body, quivering with every pant of breathless excitement Bodie took. Doyle loomed over him, loving the hoarse obscenities guttering from Bodie, pressing forward, downward, the head of his cock shoving into the mouth of Bodie’s arse, the tight ring of muscle biting down on him, sucking at him, and then Bodie was pushing out, relaxing, just a fraction, enough to make the entry possible, abruptly tightening, enough to make it hurt.

Ruthless with love, Doyle responded, ramming home, thrusting in with one long, viperish strike, plunging into the heated darkness. He heard himself shout, heard Bodie echo him, felt Bodie shudder as the sheer enormity of being fucked overwhelmed him, making him come, orgasm blinding through him, whole body shuddering, arse clenching and milking Doyle.

Doyle held very still, biting his lower lip bloody, frantically holding onto his control by sheer force, waiting until the racking tremors had ceased and Bodie was once more still beneath him. Then, and only then, did he begin to move, fucking Bodie hard, his body shouting his message that Bodie was his, to be done with as Doyle pleased. Harder he thrust, spine almost cracking with the strength of it, muscles rippling and bunching in the dance of passion. There was nothing in the world except himself and Bodie under him, Bodie yielding, Bodie giving him his pleasure, Bodie giving him his power. The cum was rising in him, filling his belly, plundering through him, stealing all awareness from him until all that remained was the pleasure, flooding him, flooding from him, a damburst. The cum shot free of him, into Bodie to chain him to Doyle, the liquid life reaching all the way up to kiss his heart.

And then it was over, the cataclysm, replaced by the lingering warmth, emotions running together even as his cum seeped from Bodie’s body to mingle together with Bodie’s cum where it lay, pooled, upon the bed. For a long time, the two men lay tangled together, with lazy kisses lavishing benedictions upon the pallid beauty of Bodie’s neck and even lazier wriggles and squeezes holding Doyle within, where Bodie needed him. Where neither of them could envision him never again being...

Words had never been their strong point, discussion reserved for matters pertaining to the job and nothing else. It just wasn’t the their way to talk about feelings and longings and hopes, not for two men of their age and background. So they left it all unsaid by the mere paucity of words, and allowed the moment to cement around them. Eventually, Doyle slipped free of Bodie’s reluctant body, both of them moving with languid ease until they were comfortably cradled and cradling, hands moving in slowly restless caresses, all unwilling to let the feelings go. No words, perhaps, but then, words would have only scuttled the communication.

He wondered if Robin Day would appreciate him writing to thank him and the rest of the Panorama team for giving him that first insight, the edge he had used to wedge open Bodie’s barriers.

He touched, briefly, the tender spot where his body had been joined to Bodie, where their union had had its physical manifestation. A good beginning, something they could build on, for there was no foundation stronger than love and that was what they had each one of them unleashed tonight.
He leaned heavily on the doorbell, old habit and older training making him automatically scan the street, checking out every bit of movement, even if it were only the unthreatening sight of an Old Age Pensioner raising her brolly to castigate the mannerlessness of youth today. The bell was still buzzing like a bee in a bottle, with not a sign of life from inside, which was irritating to say the least. His breath was plummeting in the cold air, his feet were getting numb and his neck was decidedly soggy from the rain dripping off the lintel. Ever the personification of patience, he kicked the door. The cat, nestled warm and broody on the inside window-sill, opened one vituperative eye at him, then huffed back to sleep. So he hammered on the door with closed fist. Even the cat ignored him for that. A quick look around to protect his dignity—and to make sure none of the nosey-parker neighbours had reported this violent loony to the local cop shop—and finding himself alone, he bent down, like a child missing his mummy, and shouted through the letterbox. Perhaps ‘shout’ isn’t quite the right word. Perhaps ‘below’ would be closer to the truth.

“All right, all right, I’m coming!” finally came back at him, muffled by door and weather, the wind kicking up and right through Bodie’s clothes. “I always said you were a bit wet, Bodie,” Murphy said, opening the door to the dripping, scowling man, “but this is ridiculous. Come in, and mind where you drip. Stain this carpet and Cowley’ll dock my pay.”

“No, thank you—I’ll have a proper drink, after.” He shed his wet jacket, kicked off shoes and peeled off socks as if he were in his own home. Something on the mantelpiece caught his eye: a piece of shrapnel, obviously tucked quietly in a pocket before Jack from Forensics had arrived yesterday. Lightly, his face dark with the recurrence of thought, Bodie fingered the sharp-edged fragment, turning yesterday’s events over and over in his mind as he turned the metal fragment over and over in his hands. “You wouldn’t happen to have any of your mum’s angel cakes in, would you?”

“Oh-ho, should have known there was a reason you were turning down a drink. Well, you’re out of luck, Bodie. But,” at the look of comic disappointment that was hurriedly plastered all over Bodie’s face, “she did pop over earlier this morning and left me one of her jam rolls.” With his trademark quietness, Murphy took the twisted memory from Bodie’s hands, dropping it behind the polished wood of his grandparent’s wedding photo. He didn’t mention the metal, nor the trouble that was crowding into Bodie’s eyes, but kept on, breezy as the weather outside, though with none of the sting. “She said if she’d known you were coming over, she’d have brought a dozen, but you’ll have to make do with that. And,” he said, nudging Bodie over to the sofa, pointing at the high-piled plates lading the coffee table amidst the litter of the Saturday papers and Radio Times, “gingerbread and scones and sausage rolls.”

“Sausage rolls from your dad’s shop? Christ, I wish my dad had been a butcher.”

“You wouldn’t be saying that if your first Saturday job had been helping your dad clean the carcases out for hanging. Anyway, I used to lie awake at night, wishing my dad had been in the Navy—’a life on the ocean wave’."

“More like escape from Alcatraz in my house, Murph.”

Murphy forbore to comment, knowing from past experience that Bodie would tell him what he felt like telling, when he felt it. Only Ray Doyle had the right to push him, to drag blood from a stone and make Bodie talk. Name, rank and serial number was all anyone else got, but Murphy had seen Ray make Bodie spill his guts with nothing more than a particular look. And sometimes, sometimes he envied that intimacy, wished that he had such a vast pool of complete trust at his disposal. Then he would shrug,
and remind himself of the futility of crying over spilt milk and settle down to count his blessings.

“Who d’you fancy for the game this afternoon, then?” Bodie was asking him, clearly demarking the lines of conversation for the day, and Murphy slid with ease into the pleasantries of chat, leaning back against the cushions, enjoying watching Bodie, enjoying listening to his piquant wit—counting his blessings, ignoring the debits.

“…top of the league this season, not without—Bodie?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you listening to me, or are you too busy having fun dissecting that poor biscuit?”

“What? Oh, sorry. Was miles away…”

“In Wapping, by any chance?”

A sharpness of movement, and Bodie was on his feet, stalking behind the couch, staring out the window, twitching the net curtain back. The cat glared at him and he stroked it, his mind elsewhere. His touch matched his thoughts, and the roughness made the cat hiss and swat at him, arching to escape the heavy hand on its back.

“Yesterday really got to you, didn’t it?” Murphy said, still lounging on the sofa, used to Bodie, used to his moods and the paths he took to peace.

A convulsive swallow, the tense hunching of shoulders. “And I suppose it didn’t get to you? Not Ice-Man Murphy—”

“Don’t start, Bodie. You didn’t come here for a fight.”

The shoulders sagged, Bodie leaning against the wall beside the window, the streaming grey of rain reflecting on his face. “No, don’t suppose that’s what I ever come here for. But it really got to me, yesterday. Standing there, holding that bloke with my gun at his head, willing those bastards inside to let that family go, knowing they could toss a grenade or a dead kid at me any time they felt like it… His nickname was Wombat, did you know that? He said they called him that because he was always bouncing around, full of energy. He was trembling, Murph, shaking like a leaf, because I had him. I had him and I was pressing my gun into his head—left a big red mark on him, right here…” He tapped his forefinger to his temple, becoming very still as the reliving of the day before grew in him. Restlessness consumed him, until he was pacing around and around the room, fingers rapping the back of the sofa, the sideboard, the hi-fi, always moving, moving, words pouring from him unchecked and uncensored. “And you should’ve seen the hard-on he got, Murphy. He was huge as well, judging from the way his trousers were sticking out, and he was all-go like that because he thought I was going to kill him. Honestly believed I was going to shoot his brains out. Kept on pleading with me, begging me and begging me, promising me everything under the sun if I wouldn’t kill him.”

He paused then, back at the window, peering out to examine the day. Murphy sitting silently patient on the settee, hearing him out with neither question nor judgement. “He’d’ve sold his granny for me, if I’d told him to.” Then he was moving again, more measured prowling, each step a deliberately controlled fusion of fight with flight. “You’ve known me long enough to know what that did to me, Murphy. I couldn’t get enough of it. Kept on digging the gun in a bit harder so he’d squirm more. And you should’ve heard him squeal when I twisted round behind him and let him feel my prick. He hadn’t expected that. I mean, it was obvious then that he’d got hard just cos he was that scared. I was scared and all, but I wanted him, Murph. Wanted to fuck him hard right there, in front of everyone, just to show them who’s boss. And he’d’ve let me. Even though he was near enough shitting himself, he’d’ve let me.”

Murphy sat quiet as a priest, listening to Bodie’s confession, waiting until the spate had abated. They’d been through this before, he and Bodie, had suffered through the maze of emotions, hammering at it time and again until they had found the only two paths out. He picked cat hair off his trousers, giving a single thought of joy to the day his sister came back from her holidays and took the animal back. But it was only a small thought, a pebble of calm in the ripples that were being cast by Bodie’s endless movements around the sitting room.

In front of the mantelpiece, Bodie stopped as if rooted, reaching behind the photo to pick up the sharp metal that Murphy had already tried to take from him. “D’you know, when it all went wrong yesterday, the first thing I thought was what a rotten fucking shame it was that I had..."
to let the Wombat go? That was it, Murphy. Didn’t care about the wife and kids inside—not at first. Didn’t care about all the innocent bystanders. Wasn’t until those pricks lobbed that bloody grenade at us that I even started to think about it again.”

The picture of calm, Murphy waited tensely, knowing that this was the moment of truth. Something was coming, as obvious as clouds harbouring rain. So he waited, looking like his usual placid, phlegmatic self, while his heart raced and the breath caught in the back of his throat and the blood pounded in his ears.

“I tried to fuck Ray last night.”

Murphy didn’t say anything, knowing perfectly well that Bodie was only half-speaking to him, most of the words directed inwards, to explain. To excuse... “He didn’t want to, not the way I was after. So I grabbed him. Got a half-Nelson on him, started choking him, talking to him the way I had that poor sod yesterday afternoon. Wanted Ray on his knees to me, licking my boots...”

The breath exploded from Murphy, a great surge of arousal and elation. So that was how it was to be! God, and it was what he wanted most himself, what he needed most himself to cope with yesterday, to stuff all the aggression and war in himself back into the part of his life where it belonged. He felt his own taut-string tension ease, the pose of relaxation becoming more a reality. Apart, of course, from the slow build to the sweet tension of sex. It was going to be good, today. It always was, when Bodie was this wound up and he himself was this afired.

“I really pushed him, so you know our Ray. Kneed me in the balls and told me to go to you and not come back until I’d got myself sorted out again.”

Murphy stretched, making the cat twitch with envy. “So Ray sent you to me, did he now?” he said, voice so level and smooth, while his stomach fluttered and his groin tightened, his own darkness rising silken heavy to have its hour in the light. “And what do you expect me to do that he can’t?”

Bodie was looking at him now, straight on, no excuses, no lies, no evasions. “You know Ray. Doesn’t like any of this kind of stuff, doesn’t understand it unless it’s someone else and then he can say live and let live. But I need to...” and his voice honeyed, sweet and bitter as dark chocolate, the liquid path to his inner truths, leading Murphy in, using what was to be to illuminate the darkness within, “I need what you give me. Listen, Murph, I dreamt last night that I was back at the siege, except I wasn’t me, I was shotgun Tommy. Ray was standing in front of me, right in front of me, closer than you are now, and he was telling me I had to stop, I couldn’t kill these people, I couldn’t make them do what I wanted them to. He was saying over and over again, don’t make me kill you, Bodie, don’t make me kill you. He had these tears rolling down his face, big fat tears, but he didn’t sound upset, just sounded so sad. He kept on telling me, too, that he was sorry he hadn’t been enough for me, apologising for not liking some of the stuff I do. You should’ve seen his face, when he was standing there, holding his gun on me and wondering if it was his fault I’d got hooked on the violence cos he wouldn’t let me do what I need to do elsewhere.” The spate of speech had run out, trickling to a halt as the nightmare had. He straightened, blinked, once, slowly, as if to clear his mind not his sight. “I can’t give it up, not even for him and he knows if I don’t get it from you, I’ll end up lying to him and going to one of the clubs and doing it with a stranger. And that’s what scares him. It’s never going to go beyond where it is with you and me, but... I could lose myself in it if I start going out and doing it again, the way I used to.”

Murphy’s own voice was seduction itself, rich and mellow, fire flickering. “Need it, do you? After you got a taste of some of it yesterday, you’re craving the other, aren’t you? Can’t get it out of your mind, how it feels?”

“Can’t keep it where it belongs any more, Murphy. It’s getting out of hand again.”

“So you need me,” he whispered, so that Bodie had to lean forward to catch every nuance that was sliding in to colour what he was saying. “You need me,” he said again, so that Bodie took a step forward, both men staring at each other, barely blinking, never losing focus. Then, the final time for their ritual to be fulfilled—“you need me.”

“Yes...” sibilant, low, empty-belly hollow, Bodie answered him.

Very much at ease now, Murphy unfolded himself from the sofa, stretching again, turning
away, not needing to look to see the hunger booming in Bodie’s eyes. He closed the curtains, without hurry, switched on the standard lamp so that there was light to see by, but without the harshness of brightness. Still without looking at Bodie, ostentatious in his calm, he returned to the sofa, shoving the coffee table partially aside, settling himself as comfortably as a child waiting to hear a favoured story.

But when he spoke, this was no once-upon-a-time.

“Strip,” is what he said.

Bodie sighed: it was begun. Already, he could feel some of the demon aggression slither from his shoulders, the burden easing. It mattered not one whit whether it was the job that made him so addicted to power and its abuses, or if it were that quality already in him that made him so perfect for the job. All that mattered to him right now was the steeliness of Murphy’s eyes and the hardness of his cock.

“Yes…” he said again, this time exultant, voice not yet begun the journey his mind had already begun, back to the luxury of submission, where punishment was in exquisite counterbalance to the lure of power. He loved doing this, and had done it many, many times before he had ever heard of CI5. It was only now, as the years grew in number, that he had found that this one aspect of his life made it possible for him to keep the rest of his life in some semblance of order.

He had known, on his way over here today, in a car with condensation crying down the windows, that he would submit. It was yin and yang, all over again. With deliberate pleasure, he stripped himself naked, until he was bare and exposed for Murphy to see.

“You’re giving me a pain in my neck, Bodie,” softly spoken, but with a thrilling bit of iron to them.

Bodie knelt, relishing his rôle in this most serious game of theirs, playing his part with gusto, lowering his eyes, eyelids veiling the gleam of intense pleasure. The carpet was digging at him, hundreds of tiny claws, nylon pile to irritate with small hurts and the draught was sizzling around the edge of the curtains to tickle along his ribs and the rounded sheen of flank.

Murphy remained seated, letting the moment stretch, watching as anticipation made Bodie’s cock stretch also, as if the blind head was reaching out for what Bodie had been forbidden to do. It was a pleasure for Murphy, and for Bodie, too, this knowing what was and was not permitted: they had done this for what seemed an age of their souls and now, everything followed one of the two paths they had cleared, with only the details altered. For a time, Murphy contemplated Bodie—the way the light shivered on muscle every time Bodie breathed, the way the hair under his arm peeked out as coy as a maiden, the way the bent head left his nape unprotected, the way his cock was slowly arching up to kiss his belly, without having so much as been touched. The small sound of Murphy crossing his legs was loud in the room and Bodie quivered from even so minute a stimulation. That made Murphy smile. He recrossed his legs, putting his feet up on the coffee table, shoving a cushion behind his head, smile broadening with every tiny noise that made Bodie’s body leap with the reined-in need to touch. He checked his watch, let his hand come to rest comfortably on his groin, stroked himself, then watched Bodie strain to hear, for Bodie was his now and not allowed to look, not without express permission. And he wasn’t about to give that, not yet. Not quite yet...

For a hundred beats of his heart, all Bodie could hear was his own blood pulse and the faint shh, shh of Murphy’s hand on cloth. His neck was aching from resisting the temptation to raise his head and look—just sneak the tiniest of peeks—to find out if Murphy were doing what he thought Murphy was doing. He could picture those hands rubbing on the rising hardness of prick, a sight he’d seen many times—a sight he’d demanded many times, when the path they’d needed was for him to be the one who held the power and the sceptre. He licked his lips, hoping that the insurgence was small enough to escape real punishment, which for him was the denial of Murphy’s control, but a large enough rebellion to elicit the sharp sting of hand on his face.

There was only silence.

A ream of his heartbeats, and then his punishment was commuted. There was a sound, solitary, sibilant, lasting forever: the throaty rasp of a zip being undone. He could hear, then, the sounds of hand seeking flesh, then of skin on skin. A moist sound, and with reflexive jealousy,
Bodie swallowed: that wetness had been Murphy spitting, to what his hand and thus, his cock. It would be wet now and if Bodie closed his eyes, he could see it in his mind, all aglister like rain on glass. His mouth was watering, his libido drooling, and all he could do was wait. And wait.

Then, finally—

“Into the bedroom.” The voice was hard now, and Bodie, of course, correlated it to the hardness that would be standing, prowlike, from Murphy’s body. With a hunger that was abruptly dizzying, he wanted that cock in him, slamming into him, making him submit, taking all the power away from him. Deliver us from temptation, he thought, not in the slightest bit religious, God having died in his eyes many, many years before, but rather, the sarcastic bite at piety and at the multitudinous faiths that had been unable to offer him either shelter or answer. Most of them couldn’t even cope with his questions, and he had turned on them with bitter fatalism, brooding off in another direction to find some answers there.

“I said,” one of his answers snapped at him, “into the bedroom.”

On his knees, head still lowered, he shuffled forward, the carpet scraping his knees, stinging at them like gravel path on grubby boy.

“That’s too slow, my lovely, and I’m in a hurry today. On your feet. Let me see that pretty arse drooling, and all he could do was wait. And wait.

A frisson of pleasure and he was obeying, consciously emphasising the roll and sway of muscle, harking back to his early days at sea when first he’d learned how to go with the yaw and buck of life. In the bedroom he stopped, a pool of absolute serenity as he waited to be told what to do. He didn’t even have to think, for that would be done for him, too, every last burden removed from his shoulders.

“Suck me,” Murphy said, legs akimbo, a Colossus standing astride the gulf that separated the average person from those, like him, who had more...specialised tastes. The helplessness he had been swamped by yesterday was being secreted from his pores as the power seeped in through the soles of his feet. The heat in him was rising, charging him up, as he siphoned off the tyranny that was struggling to enthrone itself in Bodie. Very deliberately, relishing every second, he set about taking everything from Bodie, turning him into nothing more than a creature to be commanded for his sexual whims. With that thought, his cock pulsed, the slit dripping a drop of pre-cum, the translucent pearl hanging there for Bodie to lap up.

The first touch of tongue on his cock head made him arch his back, letting his head loll back so that the muscles of his neck crunched with the sudden outflow of tension. It wasn’t just tongue on him now, but lips, then mouth, the polished marble of teeth, the limber strength of tongue pressing at the nexus of nerves on the underside of his prick. He allowed himself not so much as a whimper of satisfaction, withholding that approval from his acolyte, although the mouth sucking him was perfect in its skill. He thrust forward into the wetness, fucking Bodie’s face, opening his eyes to look down and see it: Bodie, on his knees before him, face pressed into his groin, the rose of his cock being sucked into the tight-O of mouth. He thrust again, and felt the satisfying spasm of throat as Bodie gagged and saw the even more satisfying sight of Bodie closing his eyes in purest delight. His hands were large and steady as they came round to hold Bodie’s head in close, keeping him there, fucking him harder, again and again, deeper and deeper, taking him to the very edge of choking and only then, only when breath was cut off, did he pull back. He grinned, feral and brutish, feeding on this, revelling in the knowledge that Bodie couldn’t even breathe without his permission.

Nostrils inundated with the languorous musk of Murphy’s groin, Bodie let his throat and his will relax, letting go of the last vestiges of pride that made him his own master. He tried to follow his new master’s dictates, swallowing as far as he could, opening up as much as he could, loving the feel of cock banging against the back of his throat as he gagged. Of a sudden, he felt the panic come into him, shaking his bones, his breath cut off by the bigness of the prick in him, and he struggled, pushing back against the hands...

Which were implacable, holding him still, not allowing him to move. Black pubic hair was rustling against his face, skin was whispering against his, and the hands wouldn’t let him go, the cock wouldn’t let him breathe. He fought it, his own hands coming up to shove against...
denim-clad thighs. The hands on his head knotted in his hair, bringing a rain of pain to his eyes. Warning, then, reminder that this was for real, this was no holds barred.

“I told you to suck me,” filled his ears, command tone, ringing out, drill-sergeant loud.

“Yes, sir,” he mumbled more in his mind than aloud. He opened his mouth wider, closed his eyes tighter, searched blindly for that place inside himself where the hunger to control was banned. He struggled to breathe, to swallow, to obey, sweat clouding his skin. And then, without warning, he was there, without subterfuge, without self-deceit, without the vanity of pride hiding behind his submission. He was at peace, and he was in Murphy’s hands, and Murphy knew what he wanted him to do. He could take him in now, without effort, now that the last vestige of resistance had fled, and he flowed with the movement of Murphy’s hands, allowing himself to be moved this way and that, allowing the movement of Murphy’s hands to control his ability to breathe. There were groans of pleasure trapped in his throat, waiting for his Master to give him permission to show his enjoyment and to pay his homage of arousal.

He was jerked away, left to kneel, swaying, a leaf in the wind. Perfectly still, he awaited his Master’s pleasure.

“On your feet,” he heard again. “Strip me.”

Murphy stood pliant, neither hindering nor helping as Bodie, with eyes downcast, carefully denuded him. He indulged the smaller man, letting him steal his little would-be secret caresses, allowing him this small infringement of the rules. He could afford to be generous, knowing, as he did, what was to come later. He put his hand on Bodie’s bent head, using that as his anchor while each foot was lifted in turn, sock and shoe removed, then lifted again as trousers and underpants were slipped from him. With Bodie doglike at his feet again, he sat himself down on the edge of the bed, taking his time, for all his cock was shouting at him to hurry.

One hand on the back of Bodie’s neck, and he was on all fours, licking and kissing Murphy’s feet, doing to him what he had tried to—figuratively, or literally, it mattered not here—to get Ray to do the night before, when he was hot from the near kill. He gave it all his attention, rejoicing in the yielding of power and in the sensation of skin soft against his tongue. If he bowed his back, if he twisted a little, then the floor was hard against his cock, rough pile scraping back the delicacy of foreskin. He couldn’t keep it in, had to let some of the pleasure out or he would surely burst. A groan bubbled up from him, getting louder, rising in pitch until it was almost words. Then his cock jolted with the sudden snapping influx of pleasure.

The sound was beyond what was permitted. Bodie knew he was supposed to be quiet until freed from the yoke of silence, so Murphy lifted his hand and brought it down with a satisfying crack, slapping Bodie full across the small of his back. His handprint glowed on the alabaster skin and the sweetness of pain glowed on Bodie’s face. Murphy reached out, sliding his hand caressingly the length of knotted spine, until his fingertips came to the rising warmth of where that same hand had landed. Yes, he whispered to himself, oh yes, this was what they both wanted... Bodie was squirming at his feet, arching to get Murphy to touch the reddened area again, licking frantically at him, begging for attention.

“What do you want?” Murphy asked, not giving him a name.

“You, Master,” Bodie answered, not permitted to use his name.

“Do you want me to fuck you?”

Another groan, then Bodie answered when spoken to, as he was supposed to. “Yes, Master. I want you to fuck me, hard.”

“Why should I do something so nice to a cunt like you?”

Murphy didn’t give him a chance to speak, grabbing him by the hair, hauling him forward until Bodie’s mouth was open and sucking in his cock again. Taller, with longer reach, Murphy could still grasp at Bodie’s arse, spanking him hard, first the curved whiteness of the right, then the left, again and again until all the white was gone and all that remained was the mark of his hands. All the while Bodie sucked him, slurping at him as if he had been a man lost in the desert suddenly festooned with oasis. Murphy smoothed his palms over the flesh that now belonged to him, bearing his sigil as it did, gentle in his possessiveness. And felt the scrape of teeth, where no such liberty had been granted. He raised both hands and brought them down...
Bodie had nothing in him that could express what it felt like, so he kept silent, obedient, while his Master rose with self-contained grace and then lowered himself, with that same elegance that denied the heated rutting of what they were doing, to crouch beside Bodie. Not kneeling, Bodie noted with relief; his Master wouldn’t kneel at times like these when they were taking this path to returning the addiction to despotism back to the small corner where it would reside, seething and snarling, but obstreperously quiescent. His mouth sagged open in empathy with his Master’s, joining them intangibly, as if he were doing this to his Master as his Master did to him. Do unto others, indeed. “Oh, god,” he said, invoking no deity, only singing praise to this man who was cascading pleasure through him, “oh, god…”

The words were caress in and of themselves, adding to his delight, making the act worthwhile regardless of its own intrinsic appeal. Murphy rapped his cheek along the distended silken skin, his fist still clenched around the fragility of balls. He took particular care with the head of the prick, using his teeth—with just the right amount of dangerous pleasure—to peel the foreskin back, smiling to himself as the crested glans conspired with him to hold the whispering skin back in its place. The small slit was exposed now, and despite all the conventions to the opposite, it was this that was the most carefully guarded part of the male body. The arse, now, that was easy enough to gain, he thought, for as he well knew, once the initial fear of penetration was overcome, there was satisfaction and completion and the undeniable ecstasy that being fucked brought. After all, as he had argued to more than one nervous novitiate, if they weren’t meant to fuck, why was the prostate stuck right there, where the only way to get at it was to fuck with cock or fingers—or toys, but he was always slow to mention those to the skittish. But this pert little slit, so small, in such common and frequent use, exposed so casually in public toilets, this was the one part that was truly guarded. Atavistic fear ruled a man’s cock, his animal instinctive fear of being unmanned, considered...
ing what it meant to another man, taking his decision with care. Yes. Again, it was yes. He’d do it today, although this was not something they did often and it was not something that Bodie liked. But it was something he himself needed and Bodie was his to do with completely as he willed. Slowly, he lapped the hot flesh, aware with peripheral acuity of the rippling pleasure marbling Bodie’s belly. Then, equally slowly, he brought the tip of his tongue to that slit, and pressed against it, feeling the minuscule parting of flesh. He pressed harder, at this most secret part of Bodie, then pursed his lips against it. A few drops of his saliva flowed from his mouth onto Bodie, so he withdrew to watch as part of him seeped out over distended flesh and to watch, bright-eyed, as a few cells of himself were absorbed inside. He glanced up then, catching sight of the almost-horror on Bodie’s face, understanding perfectly well that this was on the razor’s edge for the other man and he grinned, letting Bodie see it, reminding Bodie of who was Master here. He knew, having seen that look in Bodie’s eyes, what was the next barrier to self-knowledge. In a few months, perhaps, when they had need to, when they had worked a little closer to it, it would be time to introduce some of the…refinements he had been reading about. But for now, there was the moment, and Bodie, both so taut he could almost hear sinews sing.

“On the bed,” he said, for his own sake, not sparing an ounce of pity for Bodie who was almost at the end of his tether, dragged there by both arousal and the sting of fear that Murphy had introduced. He knew that fear himself, that anticipatory dreadfilled pleasure of the next new discipline. He toyed with the idea, while he absentely toyed with Bodie’s cock and balls, tugging nice and hard, but finally rejected it. It could wait, and be all the better for it, once they had played all the little games of mind and flesh that would bring them there as inexorably as time brings death.

Assiduously obedient, Bodie got himself onto the bed, careful not to disturb his Master’s grip on him, sly enough to move so that the pressure was increased until the agony became the sweetest of pleasures. He knelt on the bed, awaiting his Master’s voice, tingling with the wonder of whether he would be taken on his knees like a dog or on his back like a slave. The images crowded his mind and his body, until he was hard-pressed to remain still and silent, the only thing keeping him properly subdued the dread of his Master’s punishment. He couldn’t bear it if He were to deny him now, if He were to make him sit, gagged and unfulfilled, while his Master jerked off in front of him, spilling all his manhood, keeping it from Bodie, rejecting Bodie’s need for final submission. It was only seconds, but his body and his need insisted that it was hours before his Master had chosen.

“Oh your back.”

His cock was released, interrupted blood flow bludgeoning back to normal, suddenly cold where his Master no longer held him safe. With alacrity, he lay on his back, hooking his arms behind his knees, lifting himself up to lay his arsehole open to his Master’s vision. He stretched a little more, contorting himself until he could reach his own arse and spread it wide, so that his Master could see inside him, all the way inside him, to all his truths. A single finger, sure, strong, shoving inside him, sliding on the suppositoried lubricant he had put in himself before getting in his car to come here. The intrusion of real-time memory was jarring, shocking him, reminding him beyond the pleasure, of why he was here, like this, with Murphy looming over him. Murphy, one of the few men he could ever trust, the only man he could trust with him. The only other empathetic soul who shared this sunless need of his. The finger was pulled from him and a harsh smack stung the overly sensitive arsehole, a none-too-gentle reminder to keep his mind in the gutter and be slave, not thinking man. They weren’t here to think, only feel, to stuff the visceral aggression back into the unlit corners.

“That’s better,” Murphy said, seeing the self-will fleeing Bodie’s body, “that’s much better. I’ll forgive you, this time, but if you ever do that again, I shan’t fuck you after.” He slid two fingers in this time, without warning, scissoring them round the gland suspended inside. He pressed, twisted a fraction, and watched with the fierce pleasure of possession, the jump and leap of Bodie’s cock. He could control even that, now, as he had controlled breath and dominated will. A third finger, to stretch anxious flesh, then a fourth. He thought, for a moment, about us-
ing his fist, but that wasn’t what he needed today. No, today he needed to fuck Bodie, plunge into him without mercy, let himself flow from his body and into someone else. “On your knees.”

Bodie obeyed him, clambering round quickly, presenting himself like a bitch on heat. “Oh, very pretty,” Murphy praised. “Pretty enough to be fucked. Is that what you want, bitch?”

“Yes, sir,” Bodie said, all hoarseness and passion. “Yes, please, sir, fuck me…”

There were hands grabbing him, hard fingers digging into him and then Bodie let out a scream of pleasure as a hard cock dug into him in a different way, piercing flesh, routing him, rutting him like an animal. He thrust back upwards, was rewarded with a painful smack on his right cheek, so he thrust again, turning the other cheek, again gaining his reward. He was moaning now, careless, heedless of how he sounded, existing only as a body being plundered by his Master. Will-less, pliant, he was moved, the invading cock huge and hot and overbearing inside him. “I’m going to come,” he whispered, hoping his Master wouldn’t hear, so that he would be allowed to come with Him inside.

“No, you’re not,” his Master told him, implacable. “I haven’t given you permission, yet. Who owns you, bastard?”

“You do, Master.”

“Who dictates your body?”

“You do, Master.”

“Then you’ll come when I tell you and not before.”

He could feel the sharp jut of hips cutting into him and the frantic need of his body to come, but he knew he wouldn’t. After all, he couldn’t, his Master wouldn’t let him. At this moment, it never occurred to him to wonder at his body’s obedience, for there was no reason to wonder. All there was was his Master’s will and that was not to be disputed. He drowned himself in sensation: the sting of hand on his arse, the club of flesh distending his own, the peak of pleasure standing hard and arching at his groin. He could hear his Master, the panting breaths, the coarse words, the faintest sound when his Master’s teeth fastened on his shoulder, giving him one more radiating home of pleasure. His hips were gripped now, the stroking inside him erratic now, bespeaking what was about to happen.

There! Over him, canopying him, he felt the sudden stillness of his Master’s straining body, and inside him he could feel the sudden convulsive movement of his Master’s cock, bucking, seed erupting to overflow within. And still he could not come, and although his mind felt the orgasmic rush, his body still cleaved to his Master’s will.

“All right,” breathless, but never weak, the command was given. “Up on your knees, facing me. Let me see you come.”

Asprawl on the bed, his cock limp with pleasure and wet with his own cum, Murphy lay back and watched the incredible beauty of Bodie, kneeling, hand blurring on his cock, face blurring with passion.

“Look at me,” he said, wanting to have that pleasure to devour for himself, “look at me.” Dark blue eyes opened, pupils wildly dilated, staring at him, the gyring pleasure spiralling into him from Bodie. He played with his own nipples, faint echoing sweetness, as Bodie’s fist pumped hard and fast until a loud groan burst forth, in synchronicity with the first burst of semen that landed, still inner-body hot, on Murphy’s belly. He dappled his fingers in it, lifting the streamers to his mouth to taste, lingering over it with lowered lids, appreciating the sight of Bodie coming down off his high. Arms open, he brought the smaller man into his embrace, cradling him until the intensity of feeling had passed. Satisfied, body and soul both sated, he allowed them to drift off into sleep.

When he woke from his quick sleep, he was alone, as usual. He got up from the Gordian knot mess of a bed, loping into the bathroom, cleaning himself up, checking his arse for the unlikelihood of damage, wincing as he peed, the slight abrasion of his cock a welcome reminder of the afternoon’s activities. He rubbed his hand, roughly, over his cock, smiling at the memory of what Murphy had done. It was all right, now that they were finished, to fantasize about it in a small way. He wondered, briefly, if that kind of cock-play was what Murphy had in mind for them, then shrugged. He’d find that out, sooner or later, depending on what the job and life threw at them. A quick shower, to wash off the sweat...
and the cum and let him subdue the recalcitrant waviness of his hair. His clothes were, of course, neatly piled on the clothes hamper, his watch topmost, shoes on the bottom. As he dressed, a catch of button here, a rasp of fabric there, brought it all back, residual aches—or for him, pleasures—to be clutched fiercely to him, a child with his beloved teddy. He took the time to shave, using the bottle of his after-shave that he left there. It was funny: Ray knew what they did, recognised the necessity of it, accepted it as payment for his guilt at not being able to give Bodie everything he needed, but still hated it if Bodie came home smelling of Murphy. Hence, one bleakly bitter Thursday night, on his way out the door, there had been a small package stuffed into his pocket and a small kiss just there, at the corner of his mouth, and that had been both Doyle’s benediction and confession.

In the living room, the telly was on, football crowd roaring, Murphy sprawled over the settee, the supposedly hated cat purring on his lap. “Finally surfaced, did you? There’s a drink poured for you.”

“Ta much. Who’s winning?”

“Who d’you think? And by a mile. I think the bloody ref’s on their side. Look at that! How could he say that was offside? That goal should’ve stood…”

Bodie took his drink up, reclining into a chair, aware with every cell of his being just how utterly at peace he was. In a half-hour it would be time to be on his way, else he’d be late for going to the pictures with Ray, but he still had time enough to wrangle with cheerful venality. “Goal? It wouldn’t even have come close if your bloke hadn’t been offside. That bunch play football like my granny—and she’s been dead ten years. Look at them, right bunch of wallies…”

“What do you know? You can’t see beyond bloody Liverpool. Just because you’re a Scouse…”

They settled in for the rest of the match, Bodie letting time slide, hanging on another minute, just to see what would happen in the last minutes of overtime, staying on for the sudden-death penalties, letting out a yell when he realised the time.

“Christ, I’d better get my skates on, Murph. I’m supposed to be at Ray’s in twenty minutes.”

“If you get another ticket, the old man’ll kill you.”

“Yeah, well you can send flowers to my funeral, cos if I’m late, Ray’ll beat him to it.”

A flurry of bustling haste, car keys found, coat grabbed up and shrugged on and then he was at the door, racing out. At the last moment, he turned, leaning into Murphy, kissing him briefly.

“Thanks, mate,” was all he said, all that needed said. And then he was gone.

Closing the door quietly, Murphy tidied away the evidence of their tea and drinks, then went into the bedroom to tidy away the evidence of their sex. Putting the spare sheets on, he was humming to himself. He was, he told himself, content with their arrangement. It would, he reminded himself, only spoil everything if they tried to make it an arrangement that was the central core of their life. Bodie, he reiterated, only needed this kind of thing sometimes, when loving Ray and being loved by Ray wasn’t enough to quiet the dragons of his soul. It really would wreck it, he repeated to himself, all the while going round his house with outward placidity, clearing away every atom that could betray Bodie’s presence here.

“It’s for the best,” he said out loud, meaning it.

All the same, that night, he had to be drunk before he could get into that bed alone...
BRASS FARTHING

These stories are both part of what we like to call Nanny’s Teddy Tales and Other Bedtime Stories, and well, there are teddies and there certainly are times in bed—but frankly, these stories aren’t meant for children. The Glaswegian and her editor share a not particularly favorable view on the topic of Bodie and Doyle and assorted stuffed animals. We would prefer to see either Bodie or Doyle—or both—stuffed, and that takes us back to the bedroom. Oh well, just remember that the Glaswegian’s mind is a bit twisted and perverted...

NANNY’S TEDDY TALES

AND OTHER BEDTIME STORIES:

EXEUNT

EMMA SCOT

He shut the door very quietly behind him, not disturbing so much as the staleness of the air with its weight of Doyle’s blood still hanging in it. The stain on the carpet was untouched since the forensic men had taken their scrapings and samplings and filled their little bags with the bits and pieces of Doyle’s life. He took the long way round the living room, stepping over shredded brown paper and exploded milk, breathing through his mouth to try to keep the smell of soured milk and fetid blood out.

And all that did was to make him taste it, as if he’d knelt down to where Doyle had fallen and placed his tongue there and let the loss seep into him. As it was seeping into his bones with the chill quiet of the flat. The coffee mug was still in the sink, the cupboard door still lying open the way the forensic team had left it, the Desiderata still lying where Cowley had left it. Unchanged, all of it, as if the past 32 hours had never happened. As if time had stopped when Doyle had been shot and then shipped off to hospital.

As if Ray hadn’t died.

Bodie’s knuckles whitened, his fingers gripping the lip of the sink, his teeth sinking into his own lower lip, drawing blood to bead, whereas the gun had drawn blood to pump, life beating out of Doyle too fast, too much lost, too much strength bled from him for him to survive the trip to the hospital and the first cut of the surgeon’s knife. Four hours it had taken them, to tell him. Four hours when Cowley had started him on the search to see who had shot Doyle, the old bastard knowing all the while that Doyle hadn’t made it, would never know or care who it was who had been behind the whole fucking mess. Ray. Gone, for good. Not just for a while because he’d flown off the handle and had walked out on Bodie again, not just for a while because he simply needed time to be by himself. Gone.

He stared at the Desiderata, hating it for its maudlin sentimentality which had no place in a world that could kill the way it had just killed Doyle. He straightened up, going over to the cupboard where he knew Doyle hid—had hidden—his best booze, away from the gourmand appetites of his partner. There was other stuff in the house that would do the trick just as well, but it was in the cabinet in the living room, beside the stacks of records, surrounded by the books, and in the bottom drawer was the old wooden case that still held Doyle’s oil paints, with the dried out tube of white and crumpled cadmium, and he couldn’t face such a tangible presence yet. He had once threatened to use the linseed oil as lubricant, one wild and happy...
Tuesday afternoon, the day he had discovered just how much Doyle wanted him, bouncing on Bodie’s stomach to the strains of Handel... First time they’d had sex, that afternoon, the first time of so very many... And most of them in Doyle’s flat, wherever that had been at the time. So very rarely in Bodie’s house, both of them so much more comfortable in the places that Ray made home.

He filled a tumbler with Laphroaig, Doyle’s own favourite whisky, the special bottle Bodie had bought him that time they had to go up to Islay and had rounded the work off with a quick holiday touring the distilleries. There was no burn as the peaty malt slid down, only a growing glow filling his belly. He’d once told Ray he felt the heat all the way into his belly when Ray came inside him...

His fist clenched, threatening to break the glass the way his pain was threatening to break his control. With great deliberation, he put the glass in the sink, gnawing at his bones like rats. If only they hadn’t had that last argument. If only he hadn’t been pushing Doyle away, his own fear overruling his needs. He’d thought Ray understood, had been sure of it... But what if he hadn’t? What if part of the reason he’d—died—had been that the stupid bugger hadn’t known how much Bodie loved him and hadn’t been fighting hard enough to live? What if he’d been too tired of the fighting and the struggling and the slogging to make their relationship work in spite of the scars Bodie carried?

What if it had been Bodie who had killed him, simply by not being here?

He took a deep breath, the life shuddering through him, and abandoned the kitchen. He’d told Cowley he’d clear Ray’s things out, go through them, sort them all out, and he’d best start with the bedroom. If he was feeling like this just standing in the kitchen staring at a mate-less coffee cup, then Christ help him going through the stuff in the bedroom. But that was what needed going through without other hands being on it. He’d protected Doyle’s privacy from the forensics mob; it’d be stupid now to let strangers go through it just because he couldn’t face the memories. He had to get the bedside cabinet cleared out, get rid of the tubes and the toys and the magazines. They weren’t the kinds of things a straight CI5 man would keep within easy reach of his bed. And what if that was part of why Ray hadn’t fought, part of why Ray had been so fucking careless as to leave the locks unset? Tired of hiding, tired of the constant pushing at Bodie to acknowledge them, tired of keeping up the façade of chasing women...

He shied away from the rest of his own thoughts and the nagging guilt they heralded. Even clearing out the bedroom would be better than facing himself on this. But to get there, he had to cross the living room again, with its blazon of death and stench of betrayal. Shoes shining reflections of the scattered shopping, he picked his way through the debris, avoiding touching anything that bore the contamination of death. He made sure that he was blind to the brown stain, with its outline drawn in black, the shape that Ray had left behind. A heavy sigh escaped him as he finally crossed the threshold into the bedroom.

Which was no better.

There was no smell of death here, just a faint linger of after-shave and overalls, the odour of life, a ringing blow to the pit of his stomach, winding him. Nothing here out of the ordinary, just the reminders of everything Doyle had been. And what Bodie had lost.

Doyle.

The grief began then, filling and emptying him in enervating waves of discord. To have had as much as they had, with all the tacit promises yet unfilled, and to have lost it all—a single stroke of the brush, a single blow and it was all gone, just as Doyle had always said it would be. Ray had always said Bodie would be the death of him, but always in the tone of a joke. Bodie collapsed onto the edge of the bed, fists clenching the covers, eyes clenching shut over the tears, holding them and the pain in. And wasn’t that the problem, wasn’t that why he was here, now, with Doyle already cold and dissolving into no more than memories? He’d held everything in, good bad and indifferent, shutting Ray out, making Ray shut him out in his turn. Keeping them apart, despite all the intimacies of sex and love. But a love he’d never let show, not really. A love he’d always run from, even when he’d
made such a show of accepting it. He’d been full of the *bonhomie* and the teasing titillation of touching, but he’d still always been one for the girls. Even when Ray had, in a sense, called his bluff by becoming involved with that Holly woman, he’d still kept up the façade of camping, hiding the truth in plain sight, so that no-one would ever think the elaborate charade to be anything other than light-hearted fun of dubious taste.

He wondered now if Ray had thought that was all there had been to it. Wondered if Ray had fallen prey to the games Bodie had made them play. Wondered if Ray had seen through all of it to the fear that undermined everything. Their last days together came to mind, and he stopped wondering.

Ray had seen the truth all right, in all its complexities and distorting convexities, and that would explain his almost melancholy understanding, his gentleness even as he began the slow untieing of the bonds that had held them together. Oh yeh, Ray had known...

Face bloodless, eyes sightless, his head full of memories too heavy for him to carry, he faced the ceiling, only to turn away from that, too, when his eyes focussed and made him see the familiar cracked-ice pattern in the plaster. He’d memorised that, without even realising he was seeing, in many a night spent under Ray, Ray over him, Ray in him...

Frantic for escape, his gaze darted round the room, wounded animal hunting succour. But all he found was a softness with the power to wound ever more deeply.

That stupid fucking teddy bear, the bone of many an argument, the point of many a barb, the one chink in Doyle’s armour that he had used with cruel accuracy. He got to his feet, slowly, terribly slowly, not knowing how leaden his limbs were, not knowing that he was moving like a man in the middle of Sartre’s worst nightmare. The teddy was rough in his hands, all the plushness of fur worn away by a lifetime of comforting. Both eyes were in place, sewn on firmly, but they were different, one the amber of a real teddy, the other a navy-blue button stolen from school uniform for surreptitious surgery. Now that it was too late, he found the tolerance to smile at the image of toe-rag Doyle, too tough to be caught dead with a teddy bear, sitting up at night, giving back the sight to his old teddy, torch propped up on the bedstand, tongue tipping out the corner of his mouth, eyes squinting in concentration. Oh, yeh, he could smile benevolently now, but that had been an effective weapon in one of their arguments, a great way to wound without exposing his own vulnerable flank.

Bloody bear. Knew as much about it as he did Doyle. It was still in his hand when he sat himself back down on the bed, unconscious of the fact that he had climbed under the covers, as if he were getting in beside Ray, careful not too steal all the blankets, leaving enough space on the right hand side of the bed, beside the alarm clock... Pillows behind him, he sat and stared at the bear where it rested in his hands. Small, compared to the largeness of his hands, small the way a child’s bear should be, smaller than ever, the bear growing smaller in comparison to the years that a man had kept it and carried it with him. Doyle’s one concession to sentimentality, his one enduring symbol of home, his one memento from the past that he would never yield, and Bodie held it in his hands, draped with the black ribbons of bitter argument. How he’d mocked Doyle for this bear, not that Doyle had ever let that defeat him. The bear had never been hidden, never put away, no matter how often Bodie had used it to laugh when that would keep an argument flaring and any possibility of exposing his own weakness far, far behind a solid wall of obfuscation. So that left him with a threadbare stuffed toy in his hands and a mate under the dirt.

Not much to show for all their years together. Not much to show for his own lifetime thus far.

His knuckles were white again, where he was crushing the teddy, the old, oft-mended seams bulging. Small white gaps began appearing, grin-ning teeth to mock as he himself had mocked. He loosened the grip of his right hand, reaching for his knife, bringing it out to where the light could shine on it bright as sun on water, and as beautifully. Face set and blank, he turned the bear around, slipping the tip of the knife into the back, up high, where the second bullet had taken Doyle. He was careful to get the position-ing just right and satisfied, he turned the silent accuser around, measuring where the heart would be, if it had a heart.
Like me, the words whispered around the room, breathed by his lips, and he wasn’t sure if he meant that the bear had a heart, like him, or if he were heartless, like it.

No matter. The curved point of his blade would take care of that little detail. He cut, precisely, the exact spot where the first bullet had bitten into Doyle, the wound that had eventually taken his life.

But no, it wasn’t that that had killed him, was it? If Bodie had been there, or got there in time, the doctors would have had time to fix him, put him back together again, like Humpty Dumpty. He’d taunted Doyle with that, too, nasty joking that it was only natural that a man who still had a teddy bear would like fairy tales, especially in his position. There was a grimace twisting his face as he twisted the knife, making the blade go all the way through, turning the back of the bear into a collage of carnage, all the insides pushed out, to hang there, dripping like blood. Bodie leaned back into the pillows, holding the bear up so that it intruded between himself and his view of the ceiling. Natural to do that, really. He’d used the bear to get in all sorts of nasty digs at Doyle, and of course, the nastiest of all were after he’d let Ray fuck him, flat on his back, under this ceiling, under Doyle... Oh, yeh, he’d always made Ray pay the piper for making him need someone the way he needed Ray.

Made him pay, in blood, this time...

Muscles aching from lack of sleep and overwork, he stretched across to balance the bear on Doyle’s bedstand, just behind the alarm clock, on top of the book that Ray had left, open and unfinished, facedown.

Facedown. Ray had been facedown when they’d found him, too much of his blood seeped into the carpet, that rotten, fucking thick-pile carpeting that would never come clean, not with all that blood in it...

There was a code, far older than Bodie, going back farther than he could trace his family, but it was the kind of thing that was bred into the bones, down where the mind has no control, for there is no thought involved, only the instinct. And he knew the one thing that honour demanded, the one thing he could do that would appease whatever mad force had forged the world he lived in. Bred into him, from the marrow out, layered year upon year of childhood with its tales of chivalry and Arthur, Robin Hood and the Battle of Britain, noble men atoning for ignoble deeds. The decent thing to do... The gentleman’s way...

The way out.

Exeunt, he thought, with a smile all the smaller for its contained wildness. Not exit, but exeunt, the way Shakespeare always did it, clearing the stage, wiping the slate clean to start again with the next scene, the next act, the next play. A new cast of characters, a new plot, a new beginning and middle and end.

Yes.

The decent thing to do.

Yes.

Yes.

The only way, the only way out, the only light there could be at the end of the tunnel, now, after what had happened...

He took his gun out from his holster, where the muzzle had been digging into him, so common a feeling that it no longer registered any more than the flex of muscle against bone registered when he walked. He held the gun, cradled it, turned it this way and that, appreciating the glint and the gleam of it, this thing he’d carried with him as long as he’d been side by side with Doyle. This gun had saved his life, and Ray’s, more times than he could actually remember.

Perfect, then, that it should finally end that life. Those who live by the sword...

He put the muzzle into his mouth, tongue circling it the way he had Ray, those few times he’d sucked Ray. Eyes closed, he caressed the metal, slowly, with endless patience, until the metal was no longer chill against his lips, but as warm as he was, his body heat stolen away from him by the inanimate, unfeeling metal.

Unfeeling, unthinking.

That’s what he wanted to be: as unfeeling and unthinking as the gun and the machismo he’d lived his life by.

He couldn’t get it out of his mind, the feeling and thinking of Doyle, in a grave, eaten by worms and earwigs, his fingernails still growing even as his body rotted. Unfair that Doyle should end like that, clay back to clay, ashes to ashes...

He wanted to be ashes, had always wanted to be burned and then scattered, where the
creepy-crawlies couldn’t get him. But he’d settle for burying. Only fair, since that was what he’d done to Doyle.

The gun was warm and round and phallic in his mouth, the trigger crooning to him, seductive voice of escape, enticing voice of oblivion.

The ultimate pain-killer.

His finger trembled, faintly, as it never had before, not on the trigger of a gun. But this time, there was a tremor there, as his eyelids flickered, as the tears he had never in his life spilled flickered and threatened to fall.

A deep breath, and with it, the serenity of knowing it would be his last.

His fingers tightened.

His body slumped.

He shut the door very quietly behind him, disturbing not so much as the staleness of the air. The stain on the carpet was untouched, the chaos still scattered underfoot. Polished shoes shining, he picked his way through the miserable debris, heading instinctively for the bedroom. He knew, had perhaps known even before Bodie had walked out of his sight, that he would find him here.

And how he would find him.

His face falling older and more haggard as he saw no more than he expected, Cowley turned away to begin the processing of death all over again.

for Weed from Bill and Ben
“Oh, come on, Doyle, show me!”

“I’ve already told you, Bodie, you don’t have a snowball’s of seeing my teddy, so just give it a rest, will you?”

“But Doyle, we’ve been mates for years,” Bodie shouted, breaking into a sprint to catch Doyle up. “I’ve stood by you—”

“Stood behind me, more like,” Doyle muttered in response, breath clouding the air in front of him.

“Stood by you,” Bodie repeated, loudly, startling an old wifey picking her way between the rills of slush and rivulets of ice, “even faced the Cow for you—” the militant feminist with the crew cut glowered at him, unnoticed, “I’ve even,” he paused dramatically, “risked my life for you!”

Doyle, unfortunately, was in the process of dodging a homicidal taxi at this point and so missed the heartfelt and dramatic declamation.

Bodie caught up with him again, splashing both of them with the crusted black-grey slush as he grabbed Doyle by the arm, spun him around and neatly slid him off the pavement and into the kerb—just in time for the No. 9 to go past, right through the puddle. The big puddle. The one the size of the Red Sea but a hell of a lot colder. Shivering, Doyle glared at him, shaking off the offending grip and clinging slush whilst muttering dire invectives, not so much under his breath, but more at the top of his lungs. Unable not to hear the imaginative recital, the Salvation Army General offered to pray for his soul. We shall not record what reply was given to that, shall we now?

Bodie, trained to resist enemy torture and defeat the dirtiest fighters the world had to offer, simply changed tactics. Pathos and guilt hadn’t worked, so now it was down to England’s best weapon, the one thing destined to always bring the staunchest of Englishmen to heel. Bribery and corruption...

“I’ll buy you these new handlebars you’ve been after.”

“Oh, that’s rich. You wouldn’t get me new ones when you f*cked the old ones up, but you’ll buy new ones so you can get your paws on my teddy. Charmed, I’m sure.”

A quick pause for thought, then— “I’ll steal Murphy’s collection of Dutch video nasties for you.”

That one didn’t even get a response. Time for the big guns, then.

“I’ll steal Cowley’s collection of Swedish videos…”

“Cowley’s collection of Swedish…” A flare of interest, then a look of disgust. “Nah. That’s what you bought me off with last time, when you almost got me killed when you set fire to the bonnet of Cowley’s car that day out at the Army training. Pack it in, Bodie. You’re not getting my teddy.”

By this time, they were at the corner where they should, by rights, have parted, Doyle to go
to his flat, Bodie to pick up his car and drive himself home. Bodie however, having absolutely no idea of what the welcome mat looked like when it was well and truly worn out, invited himself back to Doyle’s place, using the unarguable logic of there being no food in his own flat, but Doyle’s flat being where there was a mound of delectable delicacies. It was also, purely coincidentally and having no connection whatsoever with his decision, the home of the famous—but never seen—teddy.

And he wanted to see the teddy that would get Doyle to hang on to it, year after year, all the way through art school and the Met and into CI5. It had to be something very special indeed, and Bodie couldn’t bear a mystery. Especially not when the mystery also promised to be the best source of slagging and blackmail he’d come across in years. He rubbed his hands in equal measures of glee and chill, wincing as the circulation returned to his fingertips, the blue beginning to fade. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on your bent—the blue was not about to fade from his language. In fact, it was just getting started.

“Come on, Ray,” he mumbled round the last of the After Eights that he’d unearthed from the kitchen cupboard, “what harm can it do to just let me see the bloody thing?”

Doyle gave him an extremely old-fashioned look, accompanying it with an extremely modern two-fingered gesture.

“But listen,” this time mumbled round the last of the tangerines and said to Doyle’s back, Doyle’s front being busy with throwing together some semblance of a meal, “I’ll make you an offer you can’t refuse. If you show me your teddy, I’ll tell you anything you want to know.”

That gave Doyle pause, then common sense kicked in and kicked the last remnant of gullibility out. “Oh, yeh, I believe you, mate. Thousands wouldn’t, but I do. What is this, anyway?” He hefted the tray and went into the sitting room, plonking everything down on the coffee table, grabbing what he wanted for himself and leaving the mounded piles for Bodie to devour, which he did, and with an acrality that made Doyle’s head spin and stomach churn.

“Toast cheese with tomatoes,” Bodie answered, looking at him decidedly askance as the last of the food was crammed into the space left by his words, “with piccalilli and spring onions. And what’re you asking me for? You’re the one that made it.”

A heartfelt, long-suffering sigh, more theatrical than real—rather like Bodie’s promises. “Not the food, you great wally. This crap about me showing you my teddy and you telling me your darkest secret. As bad as a kid, you are.”

He twisted his face into a perfect replica of a snotty-nosed brat down the back of the bicycle shed, his voice going high and whiny. “You show me yours an’ I’ll show you mine.”

“Tut, tut, Raymond, my boy. I’d never dream of doing a thing like that.” A pause, just to make sure the next comment had the desired impact. “Wouldn’t want to give you an inferiority complex, would I?”

“Inferiority—! I’ll inferiority complex you, Bodie! Don’t forget, I’ve seen you, mate, and you’re nothing to write home about, are you?”

“Course not! You shock me, old chum, even suggesting that you’d write home about my manly accoutrements. What a thing to do to the poor Widow Doyle! Give her a fit of the vapours, that would.”

Doyle snorted at him, well aware of his mother’s many...men friends. “More like a fit of the giggles. She’s used to better than you, mate.”

Another pause, this one to wait until Bodie had a mouthful of lager. “Not to mention bigger.”

The result was most satisfying, even if it was disgustingly messy. “You’re no priapus yourself, mate. Bigger! If I was any bigger, the only thing I’d be able to get it into would be the Mersey Tunnel.”

“I thought that’s what your last bird was?”

“Oh, hardy ha-ha, Ray. I,” he did his Lord Bodie of the Manor House on the Moor routine, “at least had a bird, which is more than can be said for you, you pathetic little worm.”

Doyle looked down at his jeans, and the overfilled crotch that tested the poor zip to its absolute limits. “Worm? Nah. Serpent, that’s more me.”

“Pull the other one, it’s got bells on.”

“The other one?” He made a great show of feeling himself, fingering both the delineation of his cock and the fecund swell of his balls. “Nah. Haven’t got bells on one nor on either of the pair of them. Knew a bloke once, though, that had his scrote pierced.”
You what? He’d put an earring through his balls?” The wince was entirely untheatrical, Bodie’s line of work having led to more than one knee in the balls. “Christ, the very thought brings tears to my eyes. Hang on a minute. How’d you get to see his balls? Have you,” he minced, wrist suddenly broken and hand hanging limply, “been keeping thecrets from me, dahling?”

Laughing— “Shut up, Bodie. Nah, was when I was with the Drugs Squad. We had a sure tip about this bloke, but when we picked him up, we couldn’t find a thing. So we had to strip search him and I was the lucky feller who got to check his bum, which is where I found the biggest butt-plug I’ve ever seen. And when he stood up, there it was. Crotch was all shaved, and he had this gold ring through the skin, right there,” he pointed on himself, despite the fact that his denims rather spoiled the effect. “And,” he went on, “he was tattooed as well.”

“On his balls?”

Doyle leaned back in his chair, grinning happily at the falsetto squeak that had just erupted from Bodie. It wasn’t often he managed to shock world-weary, done-it-all Bodie. “Not on his balls.”

“Well? Come on, Ray, don’t just leave me hanging. Where was he tattooed?”

A long, thirst-quenching drink of his lager, then a careful wiping of the mouth, then a glance from under lowered lashes. A few more moments, until Bodie was suitably on tenterhooks, and just barest seconds before his partner wrung his neck for him, and then he continued. “Not on his balls—”

“So you’ve said, Ray. Where the fuck was this bloke tattooed?”

“You’re having me on, aren’t you?”

“Scout’s honour. Honest, right along his prick. A blue serpent, all coiled. Until he got hard, anyway.”

There was something in the way that was said. “See it, did you? When it wasn’t all coiled, Ray?”

The longest pause of all.

“Yeh.” Blunt with bravado, the challenge inherent in the single word. It could almost be heard, the unspoken and what’re you going to do about it?

“Thought you were an honest copper. Offer to let him off if he let you fuck him, was that it?”

“Don’t be so fucking insulting, Bodie. We’re not all jungle rats, you know. And for your information, he started getting hard just standing there in front of us and then got really worked up when I had to look inside him the second time.”

There was an edge between them now, beginning to cut into them, to sever the ties that they had been weaving between them. Time to joke, time to leaven the atmosphere, time to stick an elastoplast on this scratch before the air could get to it. “Bet he wasn’t bigger than me, though.”

Doyle snorted at this display of modesty. “Delusions of grandeur, that’s you. A blue-arsed fly’s bigger than you, Bodie.”

“Is not!”

“Is too! Don’t forget, I’ve seen you, mate.”

“Oh, yeh, coming out of the shower when it’s been bloody freezing. Any man’ll shrivel away to nothing in that fridge they put our showers in. Bet I’m bigger than you, anyway.”

“Not going by what’s been revealed by the showers, not by a long chalk.”

“Just cos you’re permanently half-hard doesn’t mean to say you’re bigger than me. Just means,” he sniffed derisively, “that you’re not getting as much as me and where I’m all relaxed and satisfied—”

“And tiny.”

Bodie ignored that with the contempt it deserved. “And satisfied. You’re running around like a dog on heat, desperate to shove it into anything. Should buy you a packet of polo mints. The little hole in the middle’s just about right for you.”

“Yeh? Well, you’d need a packet of polo fruits, wouldn’t you, Bodie?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Oh, get off it, Bodie. Every chance you get, you’re checking all the blokes out—”

Discomfited, face reddening, shifting in his seat. “Natural curiosity to see if anyone’s anywhere nearly as big as me.”

“—calling me ‘sweetheart’ and feeling me bum up.”

That was harder to dismiss, the unease beginning to creep up from Bodie’s feet to hollow his belly. “Just messing about, that’s all. Just a bit of harmless fun...” he hoped, oh, how he hoped. This joke had suddenly gone very seri-
ous, filling him with dread. They’d never mentioned sex between them before. That wasn’t to say that they hadn’t talked about sex: it would be an unnatural situation indeed for two such puerilely, prurient natures not to discuss sex, and at length, but they’d never mentioned sex that had anything to do with them, together, doing sex together, or feeling anything sexual. And the dread was abruptly settling on Bodie’s shoulders, the dread that Doyle knew precisely what was behind all the matey questions and dirty jokes and camping. Typical of Doyle, though, to pick an evening of light-hearted fun to hit him between the eyes with this seriousness, this ripping open of the shroud he used to hide what was going on behind his ever-so-butch façade. He ground his teeth together, preparing himself for the worst, readying his denials and his jokes and all the things he could use to deflect Ray and keep them together. His palms were wet, his upper lip beaded with the cold dampness of fear, a trickle of sweat tickling its way down the valley of his shoulder-blades.

“Harmless fun? That kind of harmless fun could get you shoved up against a wall and raped in a dozen pubs in London, mate. You ought to be careful what you do, you know, Bodie.”

And the voice was nearer, harder, colder, carrying a threat like the snow clouds that had loured over the city, all the playfulness fled, deathly seriousness oppressing him. Frantically, Bodie cast around for a joke, a smart alec comment, anything that could get them back to matey companionability, but Doyle was still going, not giving him a chance, bulldozing him.

“D’you know why you ought to be careful what you do, Bodie? Cos if you don’t, you could get yourself in a lot of trouble. You could give a bloke the idea that you’re coming on heavy with him, and he might not like that. Might even put your prick—” a hand, flashing white in the lamplight, clamping down around his cock, pressing the black fabric in and around him, fingers moving until his balls were caught up in the strong grip “—in a sling for you, mightn’t he? Or,” hard, lethal knee coming to press between his thighs, threatening gelding and pain, “he might,” sudden move of the hand, the grip loosening, fingers cupping, volte-facing the atmosphere with dizzying speed, sitting room become seraglio, “take you up on what he sees as an offer, mightn’t he? And what,” voice gone soft, far softer than Bodie’s prick, “would you do,” breath brushing his lips, pink flicker of tongue “then? Eh, Bodie?”

Staring at the mouth so close to his own, his nerves a-jangle, Bodie moistened his own lips. And found his tongue touching Ray’s. His mouth fell open to let his groan of need ing out, letting Ray invade his body, letting them fall easily into a kiss that was hard and demanding. He was making noises, he knew, the kind of sounds that would be embarrassing in the light of day—but this was hardly the light of day. This was nighttime, with its veils and secrets and permissive indulgence. This was fantasy, not reality, for in reality it could never be so simple. Ray—confronting him for his passions, his ill-disguised passions, bringing what he had believed to be secrets out to be aired like so much dirty linen? And then doing nothing less than kissing him, wanting him, coming to him without a word of condemnation for his lust-filled deceits? Oh, no, this could not be his reality. And if it were reality, then death would be a minor sting compared to the pain of rejection that was sure to follow. For Ray to be accepting him like this, seeking him out like this, tongue delving into his mouth like this, oh, this would have to be one of Ray’s infamous revenges, that cruel streak of his tied up in the pretty ribbon of desire only to hide the barbed noose that awaited behind. Yes, that would be it. That would be how his Ray would do it, this man who had never once forgotten an enemy, had never once forgotten who owed him, and for what reason. Ray would never let him off so easily. It had to be a trick to top the tricks he had played these past few months, with his pretence of ‘just good mates’ messing about. His mind was reeling, but his body had no such uncertainty, hands groping under fabric to find the subtlety of skin and the voluptuosity of nipple rising from the warmth of hair. Doyle wriggled, and his lap was suddenly overflowing with the heat of a body, all arms and legs and kisses, covering him, enveloping him.

Ensnaring him.

Setting him up for the kill, trapping him into making the final move, the one that would declare him as more than merely curious or randy. The one that would claim him lover. There wasn’t even the faintest echo of their humour
left, all gone, chased out by the sickening dread of what Doyle was trying to do to him. Fear flashed into anger, as it is wont to do when whipped by insecurity and hurt, so that he heaved upwards, toppling Ray off him, tipping him onto the coffee table, from whence he slowly slid to the floor.

“What the fuck was that in aid of?” Doyle demanded, wiping his lips, not of blood, but of the wetness of their kisses.

“Isn’t that my line, Doyle? Shouldn’t I be asking you that? I mean, one minute we’re just sitting here and the next thing you know, you’ve plonked yourself in my lap and stuck your tongue down my throat. You’re the one that’s got some explaining to do,” he paused for breath and to gather his vitriol into one globule of bitterness, “mate.”

Doyle stared up at him, dignity not in the least bit tattered by lying there on the floor, mouth swollen from kisses, trousers half-open—and that sight shocked Bodie, for he didn’t even remember doing that, hadn’t realised that he’d been so far gone in passion that he didn’t even know what he was doing—and his shirt splayed and dishevelled, nipples peaking upwards. Bodie stared back down at him, benumbed with his own frantic effort to hold onto his own dignity, desperate not to break in front of Doyle, desperate not to be found out in his weakness. Even with all that, his cock was still aching, his hands still itching to reach out and hold, his mind screaming at him to take what was on offer. But he dared not, wasn’t about to set himself up for the fall of Doyle’s laughter and Doyle’s vicious tongue and...

“You berk. You absolute fucking berk. You’ve got to be the biggest idiot I’ve ever come across in my entire life, Bodie. Or maybe I should call you Willie, eh? Nice little boy’s name for a man who’s a total prat. Can’t ever let your pride go, can you? You’ve always got to turn it into some kind of contest, haven’t you?” He glowered up at him, all hair and daring, “And don’t you tell me I’m wrong, either.”

Bodie was getting used to these roller-coaster changes, the sudden alterations in mood. He eased back in his seat, allowing a little sprite of delight dance inside him as it began dawning on him that maybe it really was as simple as a dream. Perhaps it was as simple as Ray wanting him as much as he wanted Ray. He could get to like this particular reality...

“I never disagree with a man who’s got his gun on,” he whispered, flicking a finger at the article in question, smiling when nimble fingers hauled it off, sending it under the table with the socks. “That’s better. Ray...” question colouring his voice a watery grey, “This really is genuine, isn’t it? I mean, you really mean to go through with this. You’re not going to leave me hanging, or make a fool of me or...”

Ray’s eyes were glinting with a mixture of humour and ire, but Bodie launched into more speech before Doyle could deliver his comments.

“It’s just...well, it’s just that, well, I like you, and I do fancy you—fancy you something chronic, to tell you the truth—but...”

“But it’d hurt you if I were just winding you up?”
“Yeh. And if you go on with this now, Ray, and then I find out you didn’t mean any of this, I’ll kill you. I promise you, Ray, I’ll kill you.”

Doyle knew his Bodie, knew when threats were red warning flags and when they were simple statements of facts. He held himself very still, listening, watching warily, held in thrall by the sheer strength of this man, whose power equalled his.

“This is it, Ray, point of no return, mate. You can back out now, and we’ll just toss all this off as a joke that got out of line, pretend it was nothing more, nothing less. But if you keep up with me, if you sleep with me, and if we start this... God help me, Ray, if you pull a fast one on me, then I’ll kill you. If you’re messing me about...

Even Cowley had been known to back down from this mood of Bodie’s, but Ray Doyle was nothing if not Bodie’s match.

“You know, you really should take one of these assertiveness class things, Bodie. Learn to express yourself and stop kowtowing to everyone around you. Anyway, d’you think I’d go around risking my job just to risk my neck winding you up? No chance, mate. I leave doing stupid things to you. Now,” he got to his feet, started taking his clothes off, Bodie’s eyes widening with every inch of flesh uncovered, “I’ll give you your last chance, sunshine. Now or never. You either take me up on my offer,” his thumbs lingered under the waistband, “or we can just…”

Bodie grabbed him, stoppering his mouth by the sheer strength of this man, whose power equalled his.

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Bodie grabbed him, stoppering his mouth with his tongue and pulling him in close, until they were tangled together in an ungainly heap in the wide chair. Bodie couldn’t believe his luck, that he was about to question it right now, not when it seemed that this time reality was actually going to be better than fantasy. His inherent doubts struggled to be heard, but he gagged them, filling himself instead with the intoxication of holding Ray, of pulling him in close, until they were chest to chest. Hands were denuding him of his shirt, plucking at his trousers, and he joined the contortions to doff his clothes, never allowing his mouth to leave Ray. Mouth to mouth, or his lips on Ray’s skin, tasting him, sucking at him, it didn’t matter, as long as he didn’t let go. He didn’t want to lose this, not for a second, not when the sensation was washing over him until he felt like a barrel going over Niagara. A child in swaddling clothes had never been held more tightly nor cherished more dearly as he was, with Ray all around him, the lithe body sitting astride his lap, lush backside a home for his cock to nestle in. He cradled Ray, his hands cupping buttocks, his chest rubbing against Ray’s, his mouth on a level with the vulnerability of Ray’s throat. He sucked him there, leaving his mark, making the blood blossom under his tongue and lips until Ray was moaning, rubbing his face in Bodie’s hair, his hands kneading and roaming all over Bodie’s back.

Feet braced firmly on the short pile of the carpet, Bodie balanced himself on the edge of the chair, the hard edge cutting into him just another in the cornucopia of sensation. He was a convexity of muscle that was supporting Ray, their bodies curving together perfectly, with Ray kneeling astride him, pressing them close together within the confines of the upholstery. Bodie breathed deeply of the scent of them mingling, his sweat with Doyle’s, his musk rising to blend with Ray’s, all of it quite, quite wonderful to him. He licked, the movement suddenly delicate amidst the rawness of passion, and Ray went still, concentrating his entire being on that one single inch of him that was being caressed. Bodie hands still on him also, as his tongue moved, roving the hot flesh, lapping at the deliciousness of being buried in someone else’s body, of plundering someone else’s flesh, of being part of someone else.

And Bodie, looking, thought of how it would feel to fill that throat with the length of his cock, then the thought of that shot through him, making him want even more. Making him want the deliciousness of being buried in someone else’s body, of plundering someone else’s flesh, of being part of someone else.

Ray. This wasn’t someone else, this was Ray, who was already so much a part of him. This was Ray, and he was already under Ray’s skin. To be part of him...might be asking too much. It had been so terribly, frighteningly easy for them to start this sex between them, and any-
thing so easily started, anything so easily given, might be just as readily shucked as a snake’s useless skin. But how he wanted it! His back arched, without him telling it to, forcing his cock hard against Ray’s belly, forcing Ray’s cock to butt at him with single-minded intensity. Ray’s hands were on him too, gripping him with the same commanding insistence. The grip, and the words, penetrated him the way he wanted to penetrate Ray: in a single plunging stroke, filling him until he was overflowing, bursting with the glory of it all.

“F**k me,” he heard, in his ears and his mind. “F**k me, hard, come on, Bodie, shove it up me, f**k me, f**k me…” He heard that in his body. “Come on, you bastard, don’t make me wait, waited long enough, come on, love me, love me…” He heard that in his heart.

He stopped Doyle’s undulation, wrapping his arms around the slimmer body, pulling him in so close, his heart was beating against Ray’s. “What’d you say?”

Eyes glassy with passion, Doyle stared at him for a moment, utterly blank of anything but his feelings. And that, was all the explanation Bodie needed, answering every question that had threatened him with its doubts. It really was as simple as all that, as simple as Doyle facing him with all the camping and flirtation; facing him not with rejection but with the gumption to do something about it. So simple, so simple that it had never ever occurred to him that it might even be possible. Ray, in love with him.

As he was with Ray.

Fingers burying themselves in Ray’s hair, tongue burying itself in Ray’s mouth, he closed his eyes until he could see the thought written on his mind. Him, in love. With Ray. So simple, really. So terribly simple, to love when one is loved in return. So simple, to face that fear of loving when there was someone that he knew he could trust. Ray’d made it plain that this was no vicious one-upmanship, made it plain that it was something he wanted as much as—no, more! flashed across his inner eye—Bodie himself did. So simple, and so right, that they should have come to love each other. Made such perfect sense, considering how they lived and worked. Like a marriage, Cowley had said, and that old boot knew more of life than either one of them ever would.

Yes, he thought, a vast calm rising in him, counterpoint to the frenzy of passion that was jangling his nerves. Us, together, properly. No holds barred. Not even, he thought, hands skimming Ray’s spine, this one.

“You want me to f**k you, Ray?” he whispered, although he knew the answer. He wanted, suddenly and quite desperately, to hear it again. “Yeh…” long drawn out, on a sigh of pleasure as Ray dragged his cock through the line of hair that stood out, stark black, on the whiteness of Bodie’s belly.

Certain questions still needed answering, before they could go on, no matter what their bodies were squirrelling together to do. “Been f**ked before, have you?” he asked, thumb circling delicate flesh,

“Oh, yeh,” Doyle groaned, pressing back, letting Bodie’s arms support his weight as he tried to entice the broad thumb inside.

“So I see, sunshine. Oh, you are hungry for it, aren’t you? And you know what this is all about, don’t you, Ray?” this last as his thumb eased inwards. “No need for us to go ferreting around in the bog for some cream, is there? Fuck, but you’re perfect, Ray. Come on, lean back a bit more, up on your knees a bit, let me get my prick wet.” With Doyle curving over him, thigh muscles quivering, mouth covering Bodie with biting kisses, Bodie spat into his hand, using the saliva to whet his cock like a knife. He took Ray’s weight on his hands, holding him up while Ray reached down to grab Bodie’s cock and guide it, quickly, too quickly to his hole.

There was a keening cry as Ray lowered himself, fighting both Bodie’s strength and the tightness of his own body, but there was no denying him. As Bodie entered him, Ray still guided him, muscle dilating and flesh parting until Bodie was completely inside him.

Awed, Bodie watched his face, measuring every change of sensation that was engraved there. He watched as the initial pleasure turned to pain, then as that pain burned out and the pleasure returned, transforming Doyle’s face, bringing the translucence of ecstasy to him. Watched, as the sweat sprang out to bead his skin, and as muscle flexed. Watched, until the sweetness of being clenched tightly inside Ray’s body drove him to move, to thrust upwards, even though he could barely move. Ray, however, was
not constrained by the weight of a man on top of him, and so he began to lift himself up on his knees, rising up until it was only the tip of Bodie's cock that was still in him. Bodie hissed his pleasure as Ray lowered himself, forging them together again, encompassing him in the heat of another body, devouring him completely. Again and again he was absorbed, his cock caressed and Ray's body held him tighter than his own fist ever could. This was better than anything he'd ever known before, male or female, no-one had ever touched him so deeply.

He'd never touched anyone so deeply, either. It was there on Ray's face, and in the flush that stained him, and in the marks of passion that Bodie's mouth had left on him. It was there, most of all, in the rapt expression on his face, as if he was folded in on himself, savouring nothing of life but the feeling of having Bodie inside him. Bodie fastened his mouth to Ray's nipple, biting and sucking, trying to fill his mouth as he filled Ray's body. He wanted to kiss him, but to do that, he'd have to withdraw, separate them and he couldn't, absolutely couldn't do that. Instead, he clenched his hands on Ray's waist, using his strength to control the rhythm, pushing them faster, making Ray groan with the pleasure of it, pumping him up and down.

Orgasm was gathering inside his belly, with Ray's cock bumping the outside of him there, begging for his attention, begging for release. Bodie thrust up harder, fucking Ray, Ray rising up on his knees, the long, lean muscles of his thighs trembling, then Bodie grabbing him, his own strength and the weight of Ray's body plunging him down until Bodie was sunk in him up to the hilt, his thighs sticky against Ray's arse, his hands clutching at flesh, his mouth open and ravaging on Ray's chest. Bodie held him there, held him still, while he pulsed upwards into him, tiny, small movements that rubbed him with exquisite finesse on the sweet bump of gland buried inside. Once, twice, he did that, shivering over every inch of his body as he felt the tremor start inside Ray, felt the ripple of orgasm in Ray, spreading outwards to him like a stone dropping in a pond. He didn't hear himself, nor Ray, didn't hear what they said, nor the roughness of their voices as they said it. Didn't hear the words of devotion lap from him, waves in echo of the rippling effect of their pleasure. He didn't need to hear it, for he already knew how he felt about this man in his arms. And he had seen, there, on Ray's face, just how much Ray felt about him. As the intensity faded, his hands were broad on Ray's strong back as he gentled him with caresses and his mouth was soft and sweet on Ray's face as he declared himself without another word being spoken.

For a long time, it seemed to them, lost in each other, they sat like that, although in real time it was only a matter of minutes before the cramping of muscle and the awkward crush of the chair made them move. There was a flurry of motion, of straightening of limbs, of rearranging themselves so that both could breathe and neither would fall.

In the end, Ray got to his feet, and with that separation, unease crawled in. Bodie looked away as Ray bent to gather clothes, made fumbling youth by the vast vulnerability he had just displayed to this man with such shocking lack of caution. One thing, to know it was all so simple, in the throes of passion, another to apply that lack of complication to the complexities of real life. Butterfingered, he fumbled around for something to say, for the right thing to say, for something that wouldn't spoil this, or turn it into something that would fizzle and die. Although it wouldn't die, not for him. He'd known that the minute he'd seen inside himself to the bed-rock well of emotion he had for this man. And he thought he'd seen the self-same certainty in Ray, but that had been in lust and he knew how men lied when sex was at stake. And he knew how men lied when they were on the verge of getting what they so desperately wanted. After all, how many times had he told some girl that he loved her, just to get to fuck her? Or just to make it a bit special for himself, a dream come true? Oh, he knew how often and how well men lied when sex was at stake. And he was too insecure to believe what his own eyes had shown him: there were too many women—and men, for that matter—in his own past who'd seen love and devotion all over his face, when they were lost in lust. He jumped, startled, when fingers touched his belly. Ray's fingers, gathering up his seed where the heat of Bodie's body was turning the cloudy white into translucence. Fascinated, Bodie watched him, entranced by the beauty of this man as
he tasted his own semen, licking his fingertips with the delicacy of a courtesan.

"Saltier than usual," Doyle murmured. "Must be your sweat, sunshine, mixed in with me."

"Yeh?" Bodie hesitated a moment, then did something he’d never quite cared to do before: he dappled his fingers in the cloying semen, bringing it to his mouth, taking it inside, tasting another man. And finding that he didn’t particularly like it, although it was definitely a taste to which he could become very accustomed. Eyes fixed on Ray’s, he gathered some more cum, licking his fingers lasciviously, making a meal of the tiny fragment that was left.

Doyle exuded confidence and contentment, taking hold of the moment, handling it deftly, moulding this new sexual and emotional dimension until it fitted perfectly into the fabric of their partnership. "You know something, Bodie, I think we’d better adjourn to the bedroom. You could break your back on that chair, with what I have in mind to do to you."

"Promises, promises," Bodie said, his tone aggrieved, his face alight with anticipation as he followed a naked Doyle into Doyle’s bedroom, his hands itching to grasp those buttocks as they teased him into the other room, wholeheartedly embracing the quiet settling back into what they had always been, singing inside at the way everything was clicking together with such pleasing finality. "Here, speaking of promises, you were going to show me your teddy."

"Teddy bear?" Doyle stared at him with patiently honest confusion. "What teddy bear?"

"What d’you mean, what teddy bear? Your fucking teddy bear, that’s what fucking teddy bear I mean."

"Bodie, I haven’t had a teddy bear since my old Rupert died when I was seven and me and Mum buried him down the allotment." Realisation lit his eyes like Oxford Street at Christmas and the laughter gurgled from him. "Oh, Christ, that bloody Murphy, I’ll kill him!"

The teddy in question, Mr. Bodie, he said, in his best boys-in-blue voice, "is the one I nicked when I was 14. Stolen, I might add, from the woman two doors down, the night—"

"—I lost my virginity. This, you stupid sod, is my teddy."

And it was. A froth of powder blue chiffon and ribbons, with a few feathers still clinging round the décolletage.

"That’s never a teddy—they’re baby dolls!" Bodie yelped, astounded by the evening’s second unexpected turn of events.

"Is too a teddy! She was a Yank, married to one of their servicemen over here. An’ if she wanted to lead me astray showing me what she called her teddy, who was I to argue?"

"You were fourteen? And she fitted this?" Bodie looked up at him with new respect—this had to be at least a 38D. He felt a proper fool, though, considering what he had thought—a grown man, an ex-copper who was tougher than old boots, still clutching his beloved teddy to him? He deserved the snickering laughter Ray was covering him with. He pasted on a look of fatuous adulation over the genuine adoration he felt, even if the little bugger was being such a pain. "Oh, Raymond, darling," he simpered, proffering the frills, "wear it for me, darling, do."

When Doyle had picked himself up off the floor and regained some of his composure, hysterics subsiding to mere hiccoughs, Bodie found himself taken firmly in hand and dragged by the—firming quite nicely—prick to the bed. "Get in, you great berk, and let me at you. Teddy!" he snorted. "As if I’d have one or wear one, American or otherwise."

Bodie pulled him in close, abruptly impatient with the light-hearted talk and needful of Ray, kissing him with a quiet intensity that stole both their breaths away and stole Ray’s heart.
“Hang about,” was muttered at him, somewhere in the vicinity of his ear, where a tongue had been so busy turning his knees to jelly. “You said you’d told me your deepest, darkest secret. I must’ve missed that bit, been—” an indrawn breath as Bodie’s hand found the hardness of cock and Ray’s finger found the suppleness of flesh that was willing to part for him, “—otherwise occupied. So what was this godawful secret of yours then, Bodie?”

And Bodie found that he could actually say it, when it was true and meant something, not just a lie to spread someone’s legs. “Not sure you’re old enough to hear it, sunshine. It’s really awful, enough to make even Cowley’s hair curl.”

“I’m a big—” Bodie’s hand fistèd around him, pumping him, proving him right, “—boy now, I’ll cope.”

Bodie held his face very still for a moment, so that they could see each other, so that this first time said in truth could be remembered and marked, before he closed his mouth over Ray’s, sealing them together.

“My deep dark secret, sunshine? I love you.”

And he did, even if Ray would never understand about Pooh-Bear still tucked away in the bottom of his wardrobe...
SILVER THRUPPENCE

Sooner or later it seems that every Pros writer sits down and does a Christmas story, or two, or three... Well why not? Christmastime is the perfect time for tales of love and romance. And despite what you might expect from the wee Scot, this piece is no more, and no less than a romantic love story.

I SAW THREE SHIPS

GAEL X. ILE

He could smell the coldness of the air, the reek of frost and the aching need for snow to siphon off the worst of the cold, all of that overwhelming the fainter aromas of plum pudding and goose. And that grimy smell—the one that always seemed to cling to eight year old boys—the unpleasantly familiar odour was rising from the lower bunk. He rolled over, shoulder shrugging quickly back under the Star Wars duvet, face turned towards the beauty of hoar frost pliing across the window, back-lit by the streetlight outside. It would be dark for hours yet, and quiet, for not even the rapacious greed of children would be awake until at least five. Here it was, barely four, and he’d had all the sleep he needed. Exercise and fitness, that’s what it was, keeping him from sleeping his life away like the rest of the family.

Family, he thought to himself, almost muttering it aloud. Bloody presents and games and playing charades, not all of the latter in the living room for the family’s laughter. No, most of his charades came when he smiled pleasantly and lied about what he did for a living. These people, his flesh and blood, were what he risked his life for and typical of the whole bloody nation, the family disapproved of violence and guns, tut-tutting over the American police shows with their ‘excessive violence’. He’d show them excessive violence, if he could persuade Cowley to let them come on an oppo with the rest of the squad. Now that was violence and none of it dubbed in later complete with jangling music and jiggling tits.

A peculiar noise interrupted him and he tensed, waiting, until he recognised it: old Petra, snuffling and growling in her sleep, dreaming of chasing next door’s cat. He missed that old dog, sometimes, but only when he was getting maudlin and needed reminding of why he wasn’t over-fond of dogs. He still had the scar on his hand from when she’d nabbed his choc ice from him that day.

Of course, now that one noise had caught his attention, all the other little night time sounds started intruding.

That rustle had to be dear old Aunt Agatha, tucked up, dead to the world, in the back bedroom. He snorted faintly in amusement: small wonder she could boast that she slept like a log. After sampling the sherry for the trifle—‘have to make sure it’s sweet enough, dear’—and the brandy for the plum pudding—‘can’t let that skinflint uncle of yours get away with using some cheap rubbish and keeping all the good stuff for himself, can we?’—and every type of Scotch in the house—‘well, I never have been able to resist a mystery, you know that, dear. Absolutely must find out which one they used to flavour the whisky cake, won’t rest until I’ve tracked it down’—and every other, even vaguely alcoholic drink in the house—‘you know I’m not a drinker, dear, but I live in hope that I’ll find something to let me join in the sociableness of it all’—it was a wonder the old tart wasn’t dead from alcoholic poisoning, instead of just sleeping like the dead. And that snoring had to be the beloved Uncle Frank. With the racket he made, maybe it wasn’t so surprising his wife hit the bottle as much as she did—probably the only way she could ever get any sleep at all, with the Flying Scotsman rattling away in her ear.

Creaking bedsprings. That was none other than his delightful little sister and her lout—
sorry, husband, but it was so hard to tell the
difference. Nice enough bloke, he supposed, if
you went for the chinless, witless wonder type
who never thought beyond the game on Satur-
day and his pint of an evening. Any evening.
And any match, just as long as he got to sprawl
on the settee to watch it, complete with action
replays to fill in the blanks his pathetic little
brain had missed. Thinking of pathetic little
brains, his Aunt Brenda would be up and about
by five, sallow face fallen with not sin but mis-
ery, because there would be no-one else up for
hours to appreciate her sacrifice and her hard
work and how badly she’d done her back in,
lugging that great big goose into the oven be-
cause there wasn’t a single one of these ungrate-
ful toe-rags willing to get up out of their nice
cosy beds to help her struggle through the bit-
ter chill of morning, up before dawn—never mind
that dawn wouldn’t show its overcast face until
eight at least—fingers numb with the cold, and
her ‘dying of the ‘flu an’ all’... Oh, the joys of
Aunt Brenda, M.B.E.—Martyr of the British
Empire, with bells on.

Bells, oh christ, Cousin Maggie and her brood.
She’d be showing up with Denis to play cha-
rades and her unruly squad would insist on
having a party game of tolling bells, not one of
them the expert bell-ringer they claimed to be.
Last time he’d been home for Christmas, he’d
had to spend half-an-hour admiring the full set
of hand-held bells they polished for so many
hours. Pity they hadn’t spent any of those hours
practising how to play the damned things. And
little Sarah would be 18 by now, and if she came
with the brood, he’d not have the excuse of her
being underage to escape her clawing clutches.
Maybe he could come up with a girlfriend be-
fore Sarah and her giggle could arrive...

They really weren’t a bad lot, he conceded,
burrowing right in under the duvet, hiding him-
self from both the cold coming through the win-
dow and the rather disturbing noises that were
coming from the bottom bunk: they should know
better than to feed baked beans and cabbage to
young Eddie, even if it was his favourite meal.
No, they weren’t a bad lot, and that was half the
trouble. The other half of the trouble was that
they were all so bloody petty. Petty problems,
petty secrets. Not a deep, dark secret amongst
them. His mum was the only one who had been
interesting, running off up North to marry the
man she loved, not the man she ought to marry.
Without her around any more, there really didn’t
seem to be much point in hanging about this
banal little house with its banal little people.
He’d’ve forgiven them if they’d at least had a
few interestingly nasty vices, but their idea of
vice was two choc-ices at the pictures topped
off with a drink of Kia-Ora. Christ, none of them
ev en knew what he did for a living, small minded
and lack-lustre enough to believe his pap about
the civil service and paper pushing. Him! As wild
as he’d been, they honestly believed he’d settled
down into a nice little civil servant, quietly and
pedantically working his way up the ladder, say-
ing yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir and tugg-
ging on his forelock with the proper obsequi-
ousness.

He rolled onto his back, stretching, toes
pressing against the bottom of the bed, creak-
ing the bedstead, making the whole rickety tower
shake. Eddie snuffled and rumbled and sounded
like a pig after a truffle, then descended into
silence again. Distant door opening, door clos-
ing, footsteps, door opening, door closing, faint
noises, toilet flushing, door opening, door clos-
ing, footsteps, door opening, door closing...

He wanted to scream, to rave and rant like a
lunatic, wave his gun around and wake this
bunch of zombies up. But all they’d do is look
at him blankly, and tell him of how they disap-
proved of guns and violence, then turn away to
watch Dirty Harry again, eyes glazing, minds
blanking...

A whole day of it, with no interruptions. A
whole day, which was ten times longer than the
time he’d spent with them last night and only
an hour before Aunty Brenda started her moan-
ing and complaining and clattering in the
kitchen so that everyone could appreciate what
a good-hearted, self-sacrificing soul she was...

He almost fell, he got out of the bed so quickly,
his training turning the fall into a light-footed,
secure landing. Shivering in the cold, skin blued
by the night-time and the chill, he threw his
clothes on with the long efficiency of being ready
to go racing to wherever Cowley was sending
them this time. The few things he’d brought with
him were stuffed into his carry-all, flopping to
the bottom of the bag, tons of space left behind
by the presents that had joined the obligatory
pile of unimagination under the tree. The emptiness gave him an idea, making him grin. Silently, he crept downstairs, into the kitchen, far more quietly than Brenda would ever manage. The light from the fridge highlighted his face as he raided it, grabbing a bit of this, a taste of that. There was so much food here, they’d never miss a bit of it, and if he was going back to his empty flat, he’d need a bit of food in, wouldn’t he? Not even Ali would be open until mid-morning, and once he got in, he’d not be going back out again, not in this weather. So he filled his bag, Santa in reverse, ladying himself with the one thing he always thoroughly enjoyed about Christmas.

Tiptoing to the front door, he glanced in at the living room, forlorn in the dark before morning. He had presents under that tree, but he wouldn’t miss another pink shirt or packet of socks, would he? Still, it didn’t seem right, leaving the tree like that, not on Christmas morning. His mum had always made sure the tree was lit before the rest of the family got up. To make the magic of Christmas shine, she’d always said. To capture some of the angels’ glitter before they went back up to Heaven, keeping some here on Earth for her own little boy...

Funny, how you could still miss someone, even after all these years.

Sure footed in the dark, he found the plug, shoved it into the socket, flicked the switch down and the fairy lights came on, all twinkling in the cold air, the old magic feeling of Christmas morning stealing his breath, just for a second, the way his mum said it always would, because that first breath on Christmas morning belonged to the Baby. He’d lost his—her—faith long, long ago, but still, she echoed in him, sometimes.

As he got into the freezing car, he looked back at the tree glittering away happily in the window. He was glad to see the back of his terminally dull family, but the sight of that tree made him less willing to go home to his own flat and spend the day on his own. There was always one other place he could go, one other person who’d not be surprised to see him, not even at 5 o’clock on Christmas morning. And he knew he’d be welcomed, filling an otherwise solitary day, Doyle not being one to even go through the motions when it came to family, preferring integrity to insincerity. Yeh. He’d go knock up Doyle, wake him up as if they were kids and it a sin to sleep past five on Christmas Day. He found carols on Radio 4 and he sang along, gleefully anticipating rousing Doyle from his nice warm bed at this unholy hour. He thought of bare feet on cold lino, of a sleep-tousled Doyle making him a cuppa, and almost blew the roof of the car off as he joined the King’s College Choir with “I Saw Three Ships.”

The buzzer was delectably loud as he pressed on it, the frost cutting into his lungs as the noise from the door cut into the morning. He still found the wherewithal to smile, though, even though his feet were at that painful stage just before numbness sets in and his nose was threatening to drip and his eyes were stinging as badly as his lungs. The thought of Doyle being dragged out of his lovely warm bed was enough to make him grin even if Cowley were to show up. (I saw three ships come sailing in, reduced to a soft, gleeful whistle)

“Who the hell is it?”

Oh, better and better, if Doyle was already so miffed that he wasn’t saying hello. Didn’t sound sleepy, though, which was a pity. “Ho, ho, ho,” Bodie boomed, trying to sound fat and bearded and jolly.

“Ho, ho, ho yourself,” came back, almost drowned out by the buzz of the door-release.

Bodie covered the small garden in absolutely record time, slipping and slithering on the crunchy frost, a million stars twinkling beneath his feet. Doyle was already at the door, hauling him into a breathtaking warmth that stifled him for a second, stealing his breath. A proper Christmas morning, then, if he’d already given a breath to the Baby and to the memory of his mother’s Christmases... He made a face at himself for being so stupid and falling back to the habits of childhood, comfortably ignoring what some would see as the less than mature behaviour of turning up on a friend’s doorstep at five in the morning.

“If seeing me makes you feel that sick, what’d you come over for then?”

“Wasn’t making a face at you. Here, take one of these bags, will you, while I start bunging things in the fridge.”

“Rob Sainsbury’s on the way, did we?”

“Nah. Just borrowed a couple of things from dear old Aunt Agatha, that’s all. We can give...As a £3 Note
them back if you want,” he said, sounding hopeful, “after we’ve eaten them, of course. Might
liven that lot up, you know. It is the day for
miracles, isn’t it?”

“That bad, eh?”

“Worse. Aunt Aggie’s been at the sherry again,
so that means no-one’s safe until the mistletoe
comes down. Brenda’s thicker than usual—had
a Very Meaningful Discussion with her on the
subject of Snow Stains on Suede Boots and How
To Avoid Ruining Boots. Uncle Frank’s dead, but
his body still doesn’t know. Keeps on telling jokes
worse than the smell from your socks.”

“Oh, thank you. Here, give me that. Cheese
shouldn’t be kept in the fridge, Bodie, you’ll ruin
it. What,” he added, juggling the Edam and the
tin of custard, “about your darling little sister
May?”

“Unfortunately, despite what she said last
week, she and the louse managed to get there
after all. Would you believe they parked his
bloody artic on the street, right outside the house
like a bloody lay-by café?”

“Ooh, ducky,” Doyle whispered, batting his
eyelashes, leaning into Bodie in a wickedly funny
parody of May, “you didn’t tell me ‘e was a trans-
vvestite. ‘Ow thrilling. ‘Ere, d’yer think I could
get ter meet ‘im?”

“Can’t,” Bodie said, also muffled, this from
trying not to laugh at Doyle’s contortions, which
were only ensnaring his watch more firmly.

“What d’you mean, can’t? Get off me, Bodie.”

“I’m not on you, sweetheart.”

Wish I was,
though, he thought, Doyle’s face pressing against
his thigh as they stumbled up against the cup-
board. A hand had grabbed onto him, round
his outer thigh, the right leg, the pocket where
he’d stuffed his car keys, and he could feel the
hardness of metal surrounded by the firmness
and heat of Doyle’s hand. Was so aware of that,
of the hard hand on his thigh, the hard ridge of
cheekbone on his other thigh. Even believed he
could tell that the cheekbone was the smooth
one, the hand the one that bore the bracelet.
And while his body was inhaling the sensations,
his mind was making his mouth speak, as
brusque as it knew how, hiding, always hiding
just how much he loved touching Ray. “Stupid
watch’s caught on one of these bumpy, patterny
bits on your jumper. Stop squirming!”

Please,
before you move that last inch and feel how hard
I am… “Can’t get it undone with you squirrelling
around down there. Hang on… There, that’s it.
You can stand up now,” but his hand rested,
lightly, on the curve of back, fingertips moving
just a breath, sneaking an extra touch.

“Thanks, mate,” sarcasm heavy, but that was
more, perhaps, to cover the flush in his cheeks.
Doyle shied away, turning too quickly back to
the worktop, egg box in hand, abruptly concen-
trating on making breakfast.

It was turning on them, the way it always
did, changing from the sweet lightness of camp-
ing it up with each other, to this, this congeal-
ing silence. There’d be an argument next, split-

I SAW THREE SHIPS

Gael X. Ile
I SAW THREE SHIPS

On Christmas Day, On Christmas Day)
You should've told me you wanted pyjamas from Santa, I'd've had a word with him for you.

Doyle didn't look at him, seemingly too busy, carefully turning the bacon under the grill and sliding the bread into the pan. "What're you going on about now, Bodie?"

"You, sleeping in your good Aran instead of blue pyjamas from Marks."

Doyle didn't answer immediately, picking up a fork and slowly turning the sausages so that the crisp browned skin was on top, the pallid pink underneath. There was a sudden hissing and spitting as the softness was seared. Bodie watched him, abruptly patient, with the familiar calm of waiting for Doyle opening in him. He knew that lack of expression, that sedate precision of movement. Doyle was turning the moment on them with the same deliberation he was turning the sausages, round and round and round. No argument this morning, but something, definitely.

Wasn't sleeping.

Still a kid at heart, then, sitting by the fire listening for Father Christmas." He took a step, so that he was standing right behind Doyle, feeling the heat from the cooker on his face, the heat of Doyle's body on his chest, the curve of Doyle's buttocks on his groin. "So that you could nick him for B&E, if I know you, eh, copper?"

Under the humour, the coils of their friendship were flexing, like the gyre of snakes in the sun. Doyle didn't answer him, not needing to bother with words, instead transferring the food to the oven plate, his body brushing against Bodie, neither one of them shying away this time. Bodie reached round Doyle, steadying the frying pan while Doyle cracked the eggs into the sizzling fat. They stood like that, Bodie ever so casually hooking his thumbs into the loops of Doyle's jeans, his hands resting on Doyle's flanks where he could feel every minute flex of muscle.

It only lasted another couple of minutes, then everything was ready and their excuse gone.

...As a £3 Note
As soon as he was finished with his breakfast, Doyle would ask him—about turning the tree on, about leaving his family early. And it would be up to him, to answer or to joke: to open them both up to each other or to put them back to being just friends who worked together in a job that foisted closeness upon them.

His choice. *(On Christmas Day in the morning)*

All up to him, on Christmas morning, in a room filled with the glow of the fire and the twinkling glitter of the tree: the light skittered across tinsel and blown-glass ornaments, then moved to the reflected firelight shining from the Christmas cards where it melded and mingled before returning to glimmer on the tree and begin it all again. Outside, there was nothing but the blackness of winter’s morning and the coldness of starlight shining on frost under the heatless light of the streetlamps. And inside: utter silence, apart from the tiny sounds of the living in this room and the even fainter whisper of the fans running in the electric fire.

He put his plate down; Doyle stretched an arm across him, his body touching, taking the plate and putting it out of the way, not on the carpet where Bodie had left it to be trod on. Bodie could almost see the question in the air, and took a sip of tea, frowning, looking at where he was and what there was outside for him and what there was for him with his family. *(And who upon those ships shall be, On Christmas Day)*

Closer or farther apart: his choice. *(On Christmas Day)*

Doyle took a drink of tea, slurping it as usual, the sound achingly charming for its very ugliness made appealing by the love Bodie felt for this man. So much they’d never, ever spoken, this love and this attraction not the least of them... Too much, to be said all at once; too, too much to be heard all at once. So start with something that was small, in comparison... *(In the morning)*

He answered the question that hadn’t been said yet. “Always get a kick out of turning on the lights, you know,” voice low and quiet, as intimate as the room, as secret as the morning. “Every Christmas morning, when I was little, Mam would come and get me out of bed, wrap me up in her dressing gown and I’d smell her perfume. Lavender and roses, that’s what she wore, always had lavender water and rose soap that she’d use for special occasions and Christmas...magic. Everyone else’d still be asleep, snoring away, dead to the world, dead bloody boring, except me and Mam. We’d come down the stairs, and I’d be trying not to laugh and she’d be whispering ‘sssh!’ at me and then she’d open the sitting room door. She always had the fire lit, so that the coal would be cracking and roaring, and the tree’d be in the window. Didn’t matter if we were skint, she’d always have that fire lit and the tree up. We’d be looking at it for days before she’d let us light it up. Never before Christmas morning, not even by a minute. She’d sit me in front of the fire, against the fireguard, and then she’d go over and turn the lights on. Pure magic.” He stopped then, relaxing into Doyle’s comfortable and comforting silence, letting himself go back and remember his mother and the magic she wove for him.

A glass was put into his hand, amber whisky catching all the lights, trapping the colours inside, like his memory. “And once the tree was lit, we’d get all the parcels Santa’d left for the family and arrange them under the tree. She’d let me get one thing out of me stocking and I always picked the tangerine. Can still remember how that smelled when she’d pull the skin off for me... And before she had to go and start making Dad’s breakfast, she’d sit me by the fire and tell me the Christmas story and we’d sing carols, but dead quiet, so that we wouldn’t wake anyone else up. Didn’t want to share ‘our’ Christmas with anyone.” *(I saw three ships)*
He drank some of the whisky, the heat inside matching the heat from Doyle’s body pressed against him. Then he told Doyle the most precious secret, the one that anyone else would laugh at, the one that it would be all right if Doyle laughed at, because Doyle wouldn’t do it for cruelty. “She was beautiful, Mam was. Always laughing and glowing and... well, bright. She wasn’t dull and boring the way the whole family was. She had this thing, every time we put the tree lights on, about being able to watch me when I got to see the tree for the first time. You know how it is when you’re a kid, and the tree goes on? Always catch your breath. She used to say that was the angel stealing a breath to take back up to Heaven, cos the first breath belonged to the Baby...”

Silence, like snow, blanketing him.

“Why didn’t you stay with them today, Bodie?”

(Come sailing in)

He shifted, uncomfortable. This was getting too close to actually saying the big things, the ones they weren’t ready to hear yet. But still... “She was the only one who wasn’t dull as ditchwater. Being back with that lot… Christ, Doyle, watching Cowley wash his socks would be more fun. And it’s not really my family, if you stop and think about it. I’ve been gone for so long, ever since me Mam and Dad died in the accident and they moved me and May down to London. D’y you know that it was when Mam died that I ran off to sea? All the excitement and all the fun went when she died, and I couldn’t get her back, so I went running off to find the fun instead.” He chuckled, echoing Doyle. “Found more than even someone as handsome and as well-endowed as me could handle.”

The reference, vaguely sexual though it was, hovered between them. Another thing, almost, but not quite, spoken.

More silence, almost a minute, before Doyle said anything.

“It’s funny, innit, Bodie? All the blokes at work, all our birds, they all think you’re the one who can do the Gothic Family routine, don’t they? And all that’s wrong with your lot is they’re boring. And then you’ve got me. Hate my family, ’specially Dad. What he did to my big sister, I’ll never forgive him for that.”

It seemed the most natural thing in the world, to Bodie, to stroke his thumb along the side seam of Doyle’s denims and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that Doyle, in their little cocoon of quiet, captured that hand and ran his own thumb across its smooth palm. Silent, Bodie watched as Doyle traced the calluses left by hours of gun practice and killing, and traced the long life-line, going from birth to death and back again.

More words then, from Doyle, not quiet at all, no sanctimonious pseudo respect for the season, but a voice filled with all the anger and bitterness usually kept behind a very high wall. “And my sister, mind you, she’s not much better, is she? After what she went through, does she stay away? Nah, not her. She has to go and marry a man just like me dear old dad an’ let him batter her an’ keep her pregnant...”

A pause, while Bodie reversed the entwining of their hands, his fingers soothing Doyle’s pulse, easing the heat of anger, fuelling the heat of arousal. He was waiting, unknowing of the details, simply knowing that there was something still to come, more words that had built up inside Doyle and were, finally, ready to be spoken.

“Never told you why I don’t spend Christmas with me mum, ’ave I?” A quick smile tilted up at Bodie, warming him, brightening the morning despite the darkness of the words. “It’s nothing major, Bodie, just that I can’t stand watching her with them all, letting them get away with their crap, letting the shite keep on happening, when she could stop it, if she’d put her foot down... Every Christmas, it’s always the same. Place looks like Santa’s Grotto and ends up feeling like a constipated Scrooge. Dad gets drunk and hits Mum. Jacko gets drunk and hits Peggy. I get drunk and hate them and then I want to kill the lot of them...”

The words simply sat there, waiting for response. Doyle stared straight ahead as though a small part of him was horrified that he’d finally come right out and said it, spoken the unspeakable. Bodie stroked his fingers along the minor rills of Doyle’s wrist, thinking.

“S’pose it’s better to spend Christmas on your own then, isn’t it? Laze about, watch the Queen and old films...”

“Carols from King’s...” (On Christmas Day)

Both of them were very careful not to mention the continuing ‘absent-minded’ caresses,
nor the physical closeness, nor the tingle of desire rippling through them: these were not the kinds of things one mentioned, not the kinds of feelings one spoke about. Instead of speaking, they sat, backs to the fire, using silence as their cloak of excuses to keep on touching, to keep on wanting. It was all right, as long as it was never spoken: nice and uncomplicated, so simple, with risk of neither rejection nor ruination of partnership. Of course, unspoken, it all stayed secret, a bond to hold them closer than mere friendship could. Fear, too, played its part, sometimes splaying them apart until they stood akimbo, each one proving how much of a man he was and how the other was ‘safe’ with him. Better than losing a friend, better than losing a partnership and having to explain the sordid disaster to Cowley.

But sometimes, for both of them, the ache of wanting was no sweet secret pleasure, but a bone-numbing pain that worried the spirit until acrimony stung like smoke. Then the arguments would start, more protective smoke to hide what neither one had the courage to say. Easier by far to face death than to face living with its risk of having and then losing all that life and loving.

Bodie felt the thrum of Doyle’s pulse racing through him, his thumb pressed to the blueness of vein, making the skin there flushed and bright in the orange glow of the fire and the rainbow twinkle of the tree. He could even feel the moment when the tension grew too much and the fear began to twist the vulnerable intimacy. Soon there would be words spoken in haste and unease, pushing them apart to live and work another day. He shifted, edging away from the burn of the fire, a physical rift coming to match the recurrence of the emotional one.

Doyle’s voice as he spoke was rough, deliberately gruff, calculated to both dispel the danger of intimacy and the palpable affection they both knew had been too clearly displayed. It took a conspiracy to keep such excess silent and unseen, a wilful blindness that was consummate.

“Well, you might still be green around the gills and wanting to stay up to see what Father Christmas looks like coming down the chimney,” a breath, giving Bodie the chance to grab the life-saver of their usual back-chat, with bawdy comments about Santa ‘coming’ and strange men coming to visit in the night, but the pause was as ignored as the stroking fingers had been before. Doyle cleared his throat, and Bodie felt himself to be watched, with himself as the stoat; his own gaze returned across the short distance, unblinking and powerful. He knew what he wanted, knew what he hated giving up, yet again.

Doyle was glancing at him, carefully casual. “Don’t know about you, but I want to go to bed.” Bodie blinked at that. Then his eyes were unflinching, all his courage piled high to build either bonfire or pyre: one or the other—it no longer mattered which—but he had to bring it out, had to let it out to say to Doyle, to show him what they could be. He was too tired of being lonely in crowded rooms, too tired of being alone when he was fucking his girls, and so tired that he was exhausted of all fear. He warned Doyle with the expression in his eyes, meeting Doyle’s caginess with a cutting honesty of his own.

“Yeh, I’d like to go to bed.” A heartbeat. “With you.” (On Christmas Day in the morning)

There. Spoken. Finally admitted, the desire between them out in the open, lying there bare and unadorned. Said, out loud, the secret they’d carried and cradled in stolen moments of sweetness; years of silence broken.

Doyle simply stared at him until Bodie couldn’t face him any longer, turning his gaze from the greenness of eyes to the whiteness of wrist, remembering how that pulse had tripped and tumbled like a flood. Surely that had been reason enough to speak, to expose it—but to what, fear whispered gleefully. To silence. The words from his tongue and from his heart, and all the words between them this strange morning now were made to nothing by the deadening silence of Doyle’s wordlessness. Bodie took a deep breath, preparing the pyre: there were other things that needed saying, then, apologies and farewells and ‘don’t-tell-Cowleys’.

But oh, he should have known better than to expect Doyle to just leap in with a witty comeback and groping hand.

A long, tapered finger drew a line of desire from his mouth to his heart, fire lingering behind. “Better come with me, then,” Doyle said simply, giving no more than that.
He rose lithely to his feet, walking away without a backwards glance, pulling his sweater up as he walked, the beauty of his back revealed by the peeling away of the heavy snow of his Aran. It took Bodie’s breath away: nudity they had had before, but he’d never dared allow himself more than a furtive feast, a storing-away — until later — to be gleaned for every second’s pleasure. It was different, universally different, to see that bare skin and know that now it was there for him to touch and kiss and taste. To see it under him, inches from him, as he sank into Ray’s body, as he took Ray, made him his, made him belong to him, made them belong together...

His cock was caught uncomfortably in his underwear, arousal becoming pain. The sound as he began undoing his zip was embarrassingly loud, a venality that belonged in the fairground where there were quick knee-tremblers in the vans of lorries and discarded toffee-apples to be found stuck to your shoes afterwards. He didn’t want to be all common and bestial, not with Doyle, not when this morning was like magic, a time out of place, filled with dancing lights and shining fires, pockets of warmth in the cold. More than anything, though, he didn’t want to put Doyle off: he himself had done this for that — thought he was going to have to take it all slow and romantic.

They were in the bedroom now, the bed looming behind Doyle, white sweater a heap on the floor, visible only because they had adjusted to the dark. A click and a flood of light, blinded him. Then he could see Doyle, and the uncertainties that filled his face. So nice to know they were matched on this. He couldn’t help it — had to look. Doyle’s trousers were taut-filled, his arousal blatant and need-filled, mouth-wateringly displayed. He swallowed, once, in convulsive anticipation, as Ray slowly unzipped, fabric parting to show the silk of hair and no more. They stood there, face to face across the distance that was still between them, both staring, both looking, neither truly sure of what the other was searching for. Bodie took a step forward, hands at his sides, his body saying what lay behind his words.

“I want you,” was what his mouth said. I love you, is what his body was saying, arousal on display but not a sexual move made.

A shout of laughter from Doyle, a flinch of pain from Bodie, then there were arms hugging him tight, and chilled flesh pressing against the front of his jumper, a mouth laughing and kissing and it dawned on him what the laughter had been: joy. He had just heard Doyle—Ray Doyle—laugh with joy, because he, Bodie, wanted him. There was no laughter in him for that, but a sweet eruption of happiness, hope bursting through him to fan his desire even higher.

“D’you want me, too?” Stupid question, but he had to ask, had to hear the words actually spoken.

“Oh, no,” reply laconic and dry, “I do this to everyone — dentist, physio, Cowley...” Then a rib-cracking hug, a tongue darting into his ear, warm breath flowing behind. “Course I want you, wanted you for ages, just too bloody scared to be the one to say it.” Another laugh, the breath tickling across Bodie’s neck while hands were smoothing frantically over his chest, pushing wool and cotton out of the way. “Bloody typical, innit? We’ll go in there, face terrorists, ask Cowley for a rise, but will we say, ‘oi, mate, I like you?’ Nah, not us, not big brave CI5 agents. Too busy hiding behind our birds, weren’t we?”

Bodie already knew the answer to that, so he didn’t waste his energy on saying a thing. Instead, he withdrew barely far enough to get his
sweater and shirt off, arms going round Ray, dragging him in close, so close, he could feel Ray's heart beating.

He felt Ray's breath catch, and found the time to smile, thinking about how childhood's echoes can sometimes bring happiness to ease the scars. Then there was no time, nothing, for Ray's mouth was open on his skin, wetness of tongue playing with his nipples, turning his body into a triangle of pleasure: nipples and cock. When he could open his eyes, he saw the tangle of curls, so rich a colour against the palest pink of his chest, saw the pinkness of Doyle's tongue as it danced across the different pinkness of his nipples. The sight engorged him, but left him even hungrier, desperate for more of this incredible beauty, this sight of Ray making love to him.

Oh, christ, yeh. That was what he wanted. Call it for what it was; forget the euphemisms of affection and friendship and lust. Love. That was what they had here and he was going to say so, was going to bring it out to where they could both see it and 'aah!' over its perfection.

But then Doyle, eyes slitted, stood straight, hands going with strength and resolve, excitingly masculine, to hold Bodie's head, positioning him, keeping him still while Doyle leaned closer, closer, fraction by fraction, time slowed to a stop, until he was kissed, and kissing, and all the words were driven out of him by the gesture that washed over and through him, telling him that it was more than just lust for Doyle, too. It could never be mere lust, not with this feeling that was flowing back and forth between them, filling up all the little empty hexagons of his mind, the tender touch of flesh soothing his soul. It was wondrous to have so much trust that he could relax into Doyle's strength, letting the situation transmute itself from the fantasies of his mind into the reality that was making him so hard. When he'd allowed himself his guilty secret, lying alone on top of his bed, lights out and door locked, it had always been with himself as seducer and controller, bearing the brunt of the responsibility. But instead, oh, how bone-meltingly perfect to have Ray take the helm, steering them over to the bed, stripping Bodie of both clothes and inhibitions. Bodie couldn't fill his hands enough with the pliancy of Doyle's flesh nor could he catch his breath from the sheer thrill of being able to let some-one else lead, to let someone close enough to love him like this. The words were in his mouth, along with Doyle's tongue, both filling him until he thought he would have to overflow with it all.

He put the words into Ray's mouth. "I love you," he said, not quietly, proud of his own courage for saying it.

He felt the words being drunk in, felt them reach into Doyle and take root. Felt the completion tendril out, coming back to touch him in the trembling caress of Ray's fingers.

Unspoken, but shouted loudly for him to know. It should have scared him, this loving and revealing, with a veil of seriousness covering them. No jokes, not this morning, not quite yet. It was all still too new and fragile to risk jokes and the hiding behind those jokes that they would always do, a lifetime's automatic survival tactics coming to play. No, he'd be serious this morning, and as sombre as a man could be when his whole being was singing a pæan to the man kissing him.

His trousers were tangled around his feet and he was tangled round Ray, so he withdrew back into the solitariness of his own body long enough to doff shoes and socks and all the other impedimenta that were stopping his skin from knowing Ray's. It was a shivering pleasure to be naked standing in front of Doyle; a quivering excitement to stand over that bed with its sprawled occupant, arousal arrogantly demanding Bodie's attention. He gave it, coming forward to kneel on the bed between Doyle's spreadeagled legs, all his focus on that rigid manhood that was thrusting up to meet his mouth, blunt head butting his lips, pre-cum making his lips shine as he opened to take Ray inside for the first time anywhere other than in dreams.

The taste of him was intoxicating, inciting, bursting into him like famine faced with feast, making his mouth water and his body growl with all-consuming need. He fluttered his tongue around the glans, finding the shape, memorising the texture, his taste-buds finding the sweetness, swallowing, the salt-taste hitting the back of his tongue, the moment of discovery stretched so long the two sensations were separate.

Knowing him now, Bodie pushed forward, bringing Doyle in deeper, plundering himself
with pleasure. Hands were on the back of his head, clutching at him; words were in his ears, enflaming him. To hear that, from Doyle... More than he had expected, more than he had ever expected. Hips shoved upwards, an uncontrollable urge answered by the rippling of his throat and the massaging of his hands, Doyle's arse finally his to caress and own. There was a quiver of belly and he knew that Doyle was on the verge, knew the ecstasy that was gathering, his whole body alive to what Doyle was feeling.

He didn't want it to be this mundanity of sucking cock: there'd been too many of those already—meaningless blow-jobs in meaningless places, rarely a face to go with the cock, never a name. There had to be more, for Doyle, for it to mean something. He was afraid in the superstitious shadows of his mind that if he left it at this, then it would never be any more, would degenerate into meaningless blow-jobs in meaningless places.

Possession. He needed to possess, or be possessed. Thy will be done, in Heaven... Yes. The result would be different, irrefutably, from the results intentioned by the prayer that had been repeated every single night under his mum's watchful silence, but there was depth to the meaning now, not merely childhood's obedience. The need for it was cutting fierce: to be possessed by Ray, to give up his sovereignty to the one man he would ever trust enough to do that out of love and not because he lusted after the feeling. And god forbid, not because he'd been beaten into it by someone stronger, by some pick-up for the night. Fighting Ray's hands, pushing down on Ray's hips, he withdrew his mouth and sat back, his body curled in tight and tidy amidst the passionate sprawl of Ray's body. He ran his hands the length of Doyle's trembling thighs, hair springing up to caress him, cock straining to find the mastery of his hands. He resisted temptation, looking up to meet eyes feral with desire.

“If you think you're stopping now,” Doyle muttered, voice as hard as his cock, “then you'd better start running, cos I'll kill you for it. After I've fucked you into next month.”

“Not stopping, slowing down, that's all. No point in hurrying it, is there?”

Doyle look down, pointedly, at his cock, which was arching upwards, pointedly. “Speak for yourself, mate. We,” he nodded at his weeping cock, “are in just a bit of a rush, you know.”

Abruptly, Doyle was sitting up, legs and arms wrapped around Bodie, cock digging into Bodie's belly, mouth hot and wet on Bodie's neck. “S all right, Bodie,” was whispered to him, “s all right. Don't be scared, mate. It'll work, it'll all be fine, you'll see. I'll make it okay. Just don't let it stop...”

And that was almost as thrilling to Bodie as the feel of Doyle's frantic body rubbing against his, this hearing the words spoken and the need roughening the voice. And the fear, his own fear spoken for him by Doyle—they were in perfect harmony as always, nothing screwed up by this cavalier change. For all they'd let things be tacit between them, for all they'd conspired to keep their attraction secret even from themselves, now that it was out he couldn't be content with less than everything. “It's never going to stop, is it, Ray? We won't let it, not ever.” There was the familiar, uncomfortable feeling of someone walking over his grave, although this time, it was only the echo of walking away from his mother's grave, and the confused agony of adolescence. “I think it'd kill me if you let it stop...”

Hands framed his face; eyes burning blind to the world outside stared at him. “We're going together, you and me,” the talisman was spoken, the vow made. “The pair of us, together or not at all. And don't you forget it, Bodie.”

His own hands were strong upon Ray's back, kneading him, needling him, pulling him close for kissing. “Want you to fuck me,” he said, taking one of Ray's hands and leading it down to his arse, to where the flesh parted. He lowered himself again, trapping Ray's hand, letting the simple weight of his body keep Ray where he wanted him. “Not many I've let do that, Ray. None of them I've wanted to, not the way I want you. Want you in me, where I can own you, mate.”

A bite on his neck, then a sucking kiss and he knew he was being marked. He revelled in it, throwing his head back, wanting the seal that his hands were in just a bit of a rush, you know.”

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A bite on his neck, then a sucking kiss and he knew he was being marked. He revelled in it, throwing his head back, wanting the seal that would show he had been branded by possession where it would not show. His blood was rushing up to meet Ray’s mouth and his cock was blindly seeking Ray’s heat, nudging at the flatness of belly and the roundness of cock. All his muscles were turning to tense jelly, weak
and strong all at once, an overload of sensation as the tip of Ray’s finger began the claim on his body, began the new partnership. They’d be equals in this, too, but he wanted to be the first, needed to make this commitment, now, before they could find some fear big enough to drive them apart. He leaned back a little more and the finger eased into him a little farther, making its presence felt.

“Just a minute, Bodie. In the drawer, some stuff we can use...”

He groaned as his body was abandoned to air so cold and unfeeling in comparison. Then kisses were showering upon him, hands darting and touching, twisting his nipples until the pleasure made him want to scream. “Getting too close,” he said, straight-arming Doyle, giving himself time enough to breathe and to let building pleasure recede to manageable proportions. Chest heaving, eyes roving addictedly over Doyle, he stretched out on the bed, not letting go with his eyes as he hooked his arms behind his knees. Even over the flush of arousal, he knew his face was reddening as he exposed himself, his buttocks so white on the blue of the duvet, his arse-hole so pink. Vulnerability flooded luxuriously through him, and with it, a question. “You ever done this before, Ray?”

A confident grin. “Yeh. With a couple of birds, and a couple of blokes, back when I was on the Drug Squad and going through my wild and woolly days. Told you it’d be all right, Bodie. Know what I’m doing.” Index finger pressing in, slick-coated with gel, “Know how to make it feel great as well.”

A second finger was pressed in, and Bodie relaxed, letting the muscle stretch, enjoying the feeling and the intimacy. How much better it was to have Ray doing this instead of himself, twisted and awkward, pretending that the hands touching him were not his own, but Doyle’s, that the hand that trembled on the skin of his arse was Doyle’s, not his own. But the reality was so much more, so much farther beyond even what he had ever dared dream.

He murmured approving pleasure at the touch, encouraging with both movement and smile, his eyes half-closed as he watched the rapt expression on Ray’s face. He felt rapt himself, and wrapped, the love between them translucently tangible—even if only half-spoken. After all, he himself was the only one who had actually dared say it.

He shoved the insidious doubt aside, scaring it along with his trepidations for the future. It would all be all right: Ray had said so and he himself was hell-bound and determined that nothing, neither the world nor themselves, would ruin this. Not now that they had come this far. He told himself, as Ray’s fingers were inside him, touching him with knowledgeable perfection, that there would be plenty of time for Ray to get round to saying it. He’d make sure of that...

He looked down, to where Ray was kneeling, body taut and trembling, a soft sheen of sweat diamond-glitter amidst the hair of his chest and belly, face flushed and eyes bright as night-frost. But warmer, oh, how much warmer. The heat from that gaze was like a song to him, ululating into his soul, saying what he realised needed not a single word.

Ray was leaning forward now, cock arching forward hungrily, so Bodie squiggled on the bed until he could reach down and take hold of the flesh that would so soon be a part of him. He heard Ray’s gasp with his skin, with every nerve of his body, and felt the leaping pulse of desire fill his hand where it was overflowing with Ray’s cock. Then he saw his own feral grin mirrored on Ray’s face as skin touched skin, as hardness touched softness, as one flesh yielded to another. There was the expected moment of discomfort, but his body remembered how to let a man in and his mind was desperate for that, for the having of Ray Doyle inside himself and part of himself where he could never be taken from him, not by gun, nor villain, nor their own fears.

He watched Ray’s face, enraptured by the blurring of his features, until it dawned on his passion-fuddled brain that it wasn’t Ray who was blurring, but himself, becoming lost in all that Ray was doing to him and in what he, in his own turn, was doing to Ray. There was a weight on him, sharp hipbones digging into his hamstrings, a pressure as pointed and hard as the cock inside him. His body clung, inside, as Ray pulled out, his nerves weeping for their loss, until Ray plunged back inside, wiping their tears with an influx of pleasure. He wrapped his arms, tightly, around Ray, hugging him close, forcing him inside, to stay there, to bond to him, to make...
their flesh fused into one single being. Every time Ray breathed, he felt it, chest hair tickling his nipples, balls stroking the exquisitely sensitive skin of his buttocks. There were lips kissing him, tongue caressing him, words whispering in his ear.

"Love you," he heard said, in Ray’s voice, from Ray’s mouth, coming into him. "Love you..."

He moved them, surging upwards, no longer 'Midas'-ing up treasure, but living it, loving it, craving the movement of flesh inside him, bumping hard and delectably where it made his pleasure soar up through his cock. Ray’s belly was rippled with muscle and slickened by sweat as his cock-head butted there, snub head transmitting ecstasy to every fibre of Bodie’s being. There was a storm gathering in them, waves of delight and fire blustering round them, fireworks of pleasure and slashes of lightning that made him shake with the prescience of orgasm.

He knew it was going to be over soon, from the burning pleasure in his belly and from the rasping gasps that were breathing against his neck where Ray had buried his face, sweat dropping wetly onto Bodie’s own damp skin. He slid his hands lower to cup buttocks that were hot and slick and hollowing with every pumping thrust into him, and it was as he touched, hard and hungry, one promissory finger to the tiny circle of muscle there, that he felt the splash of cum inside him, felt Ray fill the endless depths of his body, casting out loneliness and demons and insecurities alike. He arched himself up, his own body spasming, dissolving, and blending with Ray’s, fluid commingling, joining, and reforming, making him no longer alone.

Sleep came: brief, rejuvenating, and dreamless from the perfection that he’d had. He was warm and comfortable, as secure as a child when he awoke to a tangle of limbs and the aroma of sex and masculinity. Absently, not quite awake, he stroked his hand down Ray’s back, the faint rime of sweat tipping his fingers. Smiling, he remembered the elation of having Ray inside him, both of them lost to anything and everything but each other.

And then reality re-commenced, with its pointed comments on strained muscles and aching backs, of cold nipping at toes and chilling sweat-damp skin and post-coital reactions of a man who had, perhaps, been seduced by his own loneliness at what was, for Doyle, the most painful of seasons. Bodie was shivering now, but no longer from the overload of pleasure. Part of it, at least, was from the bitterness of reality’s icy touch: all very fine and well to be suffused with romantic notions with Ray inside him, with Ray’s face buried against him, with Ray’s words flooding into him even as his life-seed had. But now, in the grim greyness, with the faintest hiss of early morning traffic this Christmas morning, it was different. He found himself slapping sheets of steel all around, building a bunker to defend what had been so thoroughly exposed, trying desperately to hide the humiliating extremes of his need and love before Doyle could turn away, or turn it to joking or pretend that it had all been nothing more than fucking and all the whispered words had been pretty lies to make his bed-mate yielding and co-operatingly spread-legged, sweet nothings to get a randy man something...

Hands, touching his shoulders, tentatively, as if aware of the pre-fab armour plating that had been thrown up with such despairing alacrity.

It was, it seemed, one of those times to be eternally grateful for the rapport their vicious work had forged between them, for when Doyle finally spoke, it was to say the only words that could stop this dream from becoming nightmare.

"Never said that to anyone before, mate, ’d you know that? Never told anyone I loved them and meant it before, y’see." A sudden grin, bright in the gloom of winter’s morning. "Never expected to have a chance to say it to you, either."

(And all the bells on Earth shall ring, on Christmas Day) Bodie rolled over, caressing Ray’s body anew, letting the love show, unblinking and unfettered.

"Hear that?" Doyle said, as pealing bells began sounding from the chapel up the hill, and fainter, sweeter, from the church over beside the shops. "Always reminds me of that old carol—you know the one they make you sing in Primary School, ’I saw three ships come sailing in’. Can never remember past that bit, though."

"Yeh, it was on the wireless on my way over here earlier. And all the bells on Earth shall ring, on Christmas Day, on Christmas Day. And all the bells shall ring on Christmas Day in the morning’." He wasn’t really singing it, more...
mouthing it breathily against Ray’s skin. He made a face as one of the bell-ringers at the chapel made a teeth-edging mistake. “They weren’t half kidding, either! Listen to that racket! D’you know,” he said, letting his fingers do the walking, going all the way from chin to cock, “they’re supposed to be ringing them for Christ’s coming, right?” He cupped his hand possessively around Ray’s cock, fingers squeezing as he leaned forward and traced the lines of Ray’s smiles, lingering to kiss him deeply, with all the

mastery of loving and being loved and the flash-flood rush of lust. “Well, in that case,” and he was all innuendo and glittering humour, his prick pressing into Ray’s thigh with insistent enthusiasm, “d’you think we should see if we could get the bells to ring for a second coming of our own?”

The flesh in his hand twitched, the very first intimation of imminent arousal.

“Why stop with the second one?”

So they didn’t.

*I saw three ships come sailing in,*
*On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;*
*I saw three ships come sailing in,*
*On Christmas Day in the morning.*

*And all the bells on Earth shall ring,*
*On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;*
*And all the bells on Earth shall ring,*
*On Christmas Day in the morning.*


*for Snow White*
A SHILLING SHOCKER

Yes, the next story is a bit of a shocker. We doubt that anyone has really dealt with this theme in this particular way in Professionals stories. It was originally inspired by the common enough Bodie and Doyle tale which, in its search for romance, feminizes Doyle. Fair enough: a love story is romantic and it is often easier to believe the storyline if the characters follow familiar patterns. Thus, Bodie is given the ‘masculine’ role of the couple and Doyle the ‘feminine’ one. ‘In Flagrante Delicto’ is M. Fae Glasgow’s reaction. She takes the idea of feminizing Doyle and sets off in a very different direction. Undoubtedly, the result will not please all readers, so don’t worry if you include yourself in that category. But do take the time to read the story; it is worth the effort. And remember M. Fae Glasgow does not wish to convert you to her way of thinking with this piece. It is only an exploration of human desire and sexuality. It is only a what if…

IN FLAGRANTE DELICTO
M. FAE GLASGOW

In the mirror, his image licked its lips, just as he did, with lascivious detail and solitary pleasure, the moistness cool and tingling on his skin. His hands, on his body and in the mirror, caressed skin and teased nipples, making small round peaks that crested with enjoyment. Balancing his weight carefully, he thrust his hips forward, appreciating the way his erection tented the black of his underwear, every inch of him lovingly delineated, his balls heavy and oval, his cock long and faintly, so very faintly, damp at the tip. His fingers trembled as he lifted the waistband away from its clinging around his hips and he arched his back as those fingers teased tousled hair and sensitised skin without once touching the aching need of his prick. He was too aroused to make it last, standing here watching himself in the mirror, so he slowed down his self-stimulation, pausing, flattening his hands on the fabric to frame his cock, rotating his hips with active memory of how his muscles slid and bunched when he was fucking. Eyes wide and clear, he stared at himself, flaunting his masculinity, revelling in it.

No-one could ever possibly recognise the tune Bodie was whistling, as he levered himself from the car, balancing carrier bags and tin-foil boxes, trying not to spill his take-away or crack the wine on the car door. It was freezing tonight, and after spending three days in the wilds of Bristol, he couldn’t face sitting in his ice-cold flat waiting for the heating to dispose of the ice on the inside of his windows. Ray’s place, now that would already be warm, condensation streaking the windows. No heart-felt shrieks of agony when bare feet hit the linoleum on the bathroom floor, not in Doyle’s flat. And hot water—gallons upon gallons of piping hot water, scalding, steaming in the bathtub, Ray’s collection of fancy natural loofahs and sponges just waiting to slough the grime off him. Knowing perfectly well that this was the Friday night Ray had tickets to take—Pamela? Sharon? Sue? the blonde tennis player, whatever her name was—to the theatre, Bodie let himself in the front gate, cursing as he dropped Doyle’s evening paper, cursing even more when he dropped the pineapple fritters on top of it. Eventually, his repertoire of swearing well aired, he got the glass door opened.

He walked along the hall, going into the bathroom, looking at himself in the small mirror...
there, then going back to the bedroom. There was no reason for it, save that he loved the feeling of walking when he was like this, and that it extended the pleasure for him. He gloried in the roll of movement and the slight bobbing of his prick as his steps carried him the length of his corridor, fabric caressing him with minute frissons. Too aroused to wait for the mirror, his hands were busy on himself even as he walked, going from room to room upstairs, unwilling to risk being seen through the wide windows downstairs. His music was blaring, sexual beat pulsing into him through his tightly-shod feet, rising up to fill his cock. Every inch of the upper storey of the house was covered by his languid tread, as he experienced each room at the height of his sexual heat. There was a trickle of sweat down his spine, absorbed by his underwear, the dampness making the cloth cling to him all the more voraciously.

Once a policeman, always a policeman, Bodie thought to himself, dumping the stuff in the kitchen, glancing around at the empty room that was made all the emptier by the blast of music and the blaze of lights. He shook his head at the absent Doyle, grinning at that instinct that made him leave his house looking as if there were a crowd living there, should he need to go out. Doyle, for reasons never explained to Bodie, hated coming back at night to a house that was starkly devoid of life, and would leave radio or TV on, lights bright, often even the upstairs light and bedside radio blasting. Bodie shrugged off Doyle's little foibles: he had enough oddities of his own that Doyle put up with. Such as coming over to his friend's flat in that friend's absence, without invitation, to use his dishes and his heating and his bath, just to save himself a spot of discomfort. Well, Doyle wouldn't mind—as long as he was well out of the way before Doyle and the lovely Debi or Pam or whoever returned from the theatre. It was the one thing they never shared, for all their backchat and intimacy: apart from the most general enquiries and the most specious of slagging, sex lives were taboo.

The mirror loved him as much as he loved himself, casting his reflection back at him clad in the golden glow of the small bedside lamp. He reached under the thin strip of elastic, one fingertip stroking the moist tip of his cock as the tip of his tongue stroked his lip, flesh moistening flesh. Slowly, with infinite care, he slid the elastic down so that his cock peeped out, winking at him, giving him the come on, enticing him, inciting him to do more. Underwear was slid lower, until the elastic was under his prick, lifting it up, buoying it to stand free and proud in the air. He narrowed his eyes, all the better to seduce himself, all the better to focus his gaze on nothing more than the pulse of his blood through his cock. The priapic mouth was drooling with anticipation, awaiting the touch of his hand, the tight haven of his fist. He obeyed the imperiousness of desire, conceding the ineffectuality of the intellect when defied by the libido, giving his cock his hand, stroking himself.

The food didn’t even get to the table, most of it consumed on the run in the kitchen whilst catching up on the newspapers that Doyle had left on the worktop. The white wine he had bought as olive branch for using Doyle’s flat with such impunity was still chilled from the journey from Oddbins to here, but he put it in the fridge so that it would be the perfect end to Doyle’s evening—might even be enough for Doyle to unbend enough to tell him a juicy detail or two the morning after. He stretched tiredly, all the aching bones of his back clicking and clacking at him to protest the cold, the long drive and the even longer hours he’d been working. Oh, well, there was Doyle’s bath, with all-natural bath salts that had been known to work miracles, even to the shocking magic of easing the agonies of Macklin’s ‘refresher’ course. The house was warmer than an Indian summer, the perfect climate for a winter night’s bath. He started up the stairs, not bothering to go against Doyle and turn off either lights or cassette, plodding upwards with no thought in him bar the hedonistic lure of Doyle’s bath.

Two fingers scissored over the head, holding the foreskin, sliding it back and forth, revealing himself to his voracious vision, hiding himself for seductive appeal; he licked his lips, arching his hips forward, his free hand sliding round to
rub his own flank, fingers seeking out the small hole that lay there, still covered by the softness of fabric.

It was typical of Doyle, who worried about ecology, waste, coal-burning power plants and atomic produced electricity to leave every light in the house on and the place heated enough to wilt a hot-house orchid. He had already dumped his jacket in the kitchen and now he was working on tugging a recalcitrant sweater off over his head. A bath was definitely required: nude was the only way a man could be comfortable in this cloying heat.

He rotated his hips, mimicking the movements of fucking, watching with eyes glazed as his cock thrust into his fist, into the tight tunnel of flesh, lunging forward towards his reflection as if that rampant cock was going to fuck his reflection. He was fucking himself, mouth open, guttural sounds of pleasure coming from him, one hand pulling on his nipple, the other hand pulling on his cock, until his whole body was a peak, a mountain of pleasure piercing the distance that separated himself from his reflected self.

His watch had managed to get itself caught in the rib of his sweater and he was tied up like a Bavarian pretzel, struggling to free himself from the prickling heat of wool, the heavy Aran he'd borrowed from Murphy stifling him, blinding him as he found his way around from habit.

He was going to come soon, soon, but slowly. No hurry, no rush. He loved loving himself, taking the time to make it extra special, as he had tonight, with his lies to everyone about the theatre or working, depending upon which sphere of his life the person inhabited. He let his cock go, running just the very tip of his pinkie along it, gathering the droplets at the crown, bringing them to his lips to taste his own seed, his own life-force. Languidly, he licked his fingers clean, stroking the wet hand down his chest, through the glistening hair to close, once more, on his cock, the touch enough to cast aside any thought of taking it slow and easy. He was hungry now, starving, wanting it hard and fast and now, there'd be time for more later. Staring at himself in the mirror, he began moving his hand faster and faster.

With a muffled curse and red face, he got the sweater off at long last, by the simple expedient of pulling the damned thing off with no regard for painstakingly knitted pullovers. Balling it up in his hand, he went to Doyle's room to borrow a dressing gown for after his bath. Hand on door—

—oh, yeh, that was how he liked it, standing in front of the mirror in privacy and secrecy, pleasuring himself as no-one else ever did, and his hand was so perfect and he was going to come, he was coming, coming—

—and saw Doyle.

Who was standing in front of the mirror, cock hard as steel and sticking out from his body like a weapon. Shocking, yes, to come across a friend in flagrante delicto.

More than shocking to come across his friend standing there like that, the symbol and personification of manhood jutting so proudly from him, large and thick and hard, startling in contrast to the slim masculinity of hips.

More shocking still in contrast to the black silk underwear. Women's underwear, black silk panties pulled down low to frame the prominence of masculinity, the merry widow loosely laced with chest hair peeking free. Black stockings, thigh high on legs that looked suddenly slim and shapely, moulded by the highness of heel and the shimmer of patent leather. Sweater dropped and forgotten on the carpet, Bodie stumbled to a halt, suddenly needing to lean against the door jamb, knees shocked into weakness by the sight in front of him. Doyle, his partner Raymond Doyle, in drag.

Eyes bright and pupils dilated, cock still rock hard and seeping, Doyle turned to face him, hand still blurring in motion, the cum spurting from him in arcing jets to land not on himself in the mirror, but uselessly, unwanted, on the carpet between him and Bodie.

“Christ, Ray...” was all Bodie could say, head full of the cotton wool of sudden shock. He was prepared, excessively well prepared by a life in the military and in violence, but this was beyond him. He’d had no inkling, no idea. Hadn’t
even expected Ray to be home, let alone standing there in fish-net stockings and high-heeled shoes, a fairy queen fallen from the pages of a kinky magazine.

Doyle's voice showed the signs of orgasm, even as his body did not, cock staying tumescent, still arching away from his body, pushed forward by his panties the way breasts are by underwire bras. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I think I’m the one who should be asking you that, Doyle. What’s…” he waved his arm in general distress, as he took in more than just the sight of Doyle. “What is all…this?” He stared in helpless confusion at the things left lying in careful ritual around the bedroom, slowly yielding up the support of the door to walk over to the bedside unit, pointing an accusing finger at the plastic shape that was lying there already glistening with some form of lubricant.

Doyle answered the question in a monotone, giving away nothing, only the most basic of answers. “I’d’ve thought that was obvious.” Then the echo of Bodie’s voice began its discolouration of Doyle’s, accusation and betrayal of trust layering everything granite grey stone. “It’s a butt-plug or a bung-plug or an arse-plug, depending on what you fancy calling it.”

“But why, that’s what I want to know!”

There was something in that plaintive cry, some unspoken ‘how could you do this to me’ that pierced Doyle’s skin, something that smacked of a Brontë heroine. Something that carried with it the carrion stench of judgement. “What’s it to you? You weren’t exactly invited, were you, Bodie? It’s not as if I asked you over for tea and then brought out the whips and chains.”

“Prancing around in a black corset and frilly knickers makes you feel more masculine? You expect me to believe codswallop like that? And for god’s sake, cover yourself up. Here, get this on you.”

The familiar old blue dressing gown was shoved at him, with Bode staring at the drawn curtains where the windows were hiding with the rest of the world. If the words and the look had helped, then the cover shoved at him positively hindered. “Codswallop? What do you know about why I do this? Well, Bodie? If the look on your ugly mug’s anything to go by, you wouldn’t understand even if I did explain it to you.”

“How can you expect me to understand the man I trust to watch my back dressing up like a woman? How the hell am I supposed to go in on some job when my life’s on the line, and all I’ve got to back me up is a fucking queen?”
“And how the hell am I supposed to go in when all I’ve got at my back is some provincial yokel who can’t see beyond what a man does in the bedroom?”

“Oh, don’t come it with me, Doyle. This isn’t your standard little quirk here. This is weird, Ray, downright fucking weird.”

“You know,” Doyle said at his most nasty, “if I didn’t know better, I’d buy your act lock, stock and barrel. But I do know better, Bodie. You’re no vicar’s pious son, you’re a hard nut who’s seen more than I’ll ever want to see. So don’t play outraged innocent with me, else I’ll have to think you’ve got a few odd kinks of your own to hide.”

“I’ve got a few kinks, Doyle, but nothing like this. And for god’s sake, will you fucking cover yourself!”

“You give me one good reason why I should.”

Bodie looked at him with patented disbelief. “You’re standing there in women’s underwear, high-heels and stockings. You’ve got dildoes and christ knows what else all over the place, and you want me to give you a reason?”

“I’ve done nothing to be ashamed of, Bodie.” His tone warned Bodie to back off in the dangerously calm voice reserved for the streets.

Bodie scanned him from the roots of his hair to the tips of his high heels, pausing at the corselet. “Oh no? Nothing to be ashamed of?” He, pointedly, did not look down at Doyle’s groin, where cock still arched in the mindless pleasure of afterglow. “This is something to be proud of, then? Going to add it to your list of skills for the old man, are you, right after your talent for fucking women. Or is that a lie, too?”

“Don’t you go calling me a liar—”

“Why not? Eh, mate? What else would you call it, going on double dates with me and my bird. Look at you, for fuck’s sake! Are you going to stand there and tell me you’re straight as a die? Well, why not? I mean, why stop lying now, why break the habit of a whole fucking partnership.”

“I haven’t been lying to you, Bodie, I just haven’t been telling you all the truth. Anyway, you’ve admitted you’ve a few kinks of your own, Bodie, so what makes them all right and mine sick? Cos that’s what you think, isn’t it? Go on, admit it, it’s written all over your face anyway. You think this is sick and perverted, don’t you? Well, go on, admit it.”

“Yeh, I think this is fucking sick.” He turned round then, in time to see the expression flee from Doyle’s face. Under all the shock, one truth remained unshaken: he had cared for this man, more than he had anyone in years. “Oh, fuck, I don’t know, Ray. I don’t know what to think. It’s just…well, look at you!”

“I have been looking at me, that’s half of why I dress like this. Bodie, I’m doing no harm, I’m not forcing anyone into anything.”

“But it’s not normal.”

“And killing people for a living is? Or what about those magazines you’ve got hidden away, eh, Bodie? Bit young, those girls, weren’t they?”

“You watch your fucking mouth, you—bitch.”

Doyle drew himself up to his full height and in his high heels, that was taller than Bodie, making the other man look up at him, discomfiting Bodie even more. “No, you watch yours. Don’t call me names, Bodie, don’t you dare call me fucking names! Look at me, you keep on saying, Well, you ought to try looking at yourself. You’re standing there, holier than thou, passing judgement on me, and for what? Something harmless, something that I get a kick out of. Something I need, Bodie. And as for me being a liar, what’d you expect me to tell you? Pass the sugar and oh, by the way, I like to dress up in women’s underwear? And what would you have done if I had told you? I’ll tell you,” he stalked closer, exuding the danger of an animal trapped in its lair, backed into a corner, “you’d’ve done exactly what you just did. You’d’ve gone spare and started looking at me funny and jumping to all sorts of stupid conclusions. You’d’ve let it ruin the partnership, Bodie, that’s what you’d’ve done and that’s why I never told you.”

“I’d never ruin the partnership, Ray.” He looked at him again, this time not looking away from his cock. “It’s you that’s doing that, sunshine.”

“Oh, I’m not going to let you get away with that, Bodie. You—”

“Just tell me one thing,” Bodie broke in, suddenly desperate to know, suddenly desperate to get out of there, away from this new version of Ray, away from the insidious lure of underwear and high heels, of stockings and black lace, of masculinity counterpointing femininity. “Just
tell me this: are you straight, Ray? Yes or no, that’s all I want to know.”

Doyle paused a second too long, the answer nothing so simple as a yes or no, nothing that could be explained with such a paucity of words.

“You should have told me.” And it was loud in the room that the usual ‘mate’ or ‘sunshine’ or even ‘you randy toad’ was missing from Bodie.

“You should have told me.”

“Why? So you could do this to me sooner rather than later? What do you think I am?”

“A fucking queer, that’s what. A kinky, pathetic bastard who gets his kicks in a sick, disgusting way.”

Doyle reeled as if struck, his face going whiter than if a blow had landed. He turned away, the muscles on his back bunching and clenching over the low line of lace trim that framed the bulk of musculature. His breath was audible, ragged, the sound either of incipient fury or tears. Bodie stood stock still, as shocked by Doyle’s distress as by the real pain behind his own words. Then: Doyle’s long fingers settling the black underwear, the glint of a ring bright on his hand. Stockings were straightened, rump presented to Bodie in insulting disdain, as if Doyle were alone, as if there were no one else in the room to be considered. Then: Doyle’s dildoes picked up, and the jar of gel, the lid being unscrewed, shouting louder than any word ever could that Bodie had no right to judge, that Bodie had no right to dictate. That Bodie had no right to be here.

The feeling in the pit of his belly he named disgust and revulsion and fury, but still, when he ran from that room, it wasn’t just Doyle he was fleeing, running off into the cold, bath and sweater forgotten, no room in his mind for anything other than finding out that Doyle, his best friend, the only person he truly trusted come hell or high water, Raymond Doyle a drag queen. Ray, lying to him, deceiving him, tricking him. Ray, letting him camp it up with him, touching him, being close, sharing rooms, sharing beds, sharing birds, sharing their lives and all the while the bastard had been laughing up his sleeve at him, going around with a secret life that he had kept from Bodie. A secret without justification, a secret held close and deliberately silent, a secret that shattered them. He couldn’t think, couldn’t work out what he felt, save the outrage and the betrayal. Couldn’t get rid of the sight of Ray dressed like that...

As the door slammed, he slumped, sitting on the edge of the bed, leaning forward, listening as the car revved and raced away, hurrying Bodie as far and as fast as he could. Doyle wasn’t surprised, had always known that this would happen if Bodie had ever found out. He had even known what his own reaction would be, had had no doubts that he would react with defensive anger to Bodie’s unnerved judgement. But still, being prepared for it hadn’t lessened the horror of Bodie’s reaction, of watching Bodie shut him out. And no-one could ever be prepared for the moment of betrayal when friend became outraged moralist. The anger and the pain erupted, his arm flashing overhead, the dildo slamming into the far wall, where it lay on the carpet, unwanted, unneeded, rejected. Like Doyle himself...

Nothing. There was absolutely nothing. Nothing to tell of what had happened the night before. Nothing to show that they had ever so much as met each other before this time of staticky silence. They were so physically close to each other, hedged in by the metal walls of the car that raced on hissing tyres over the frosty road, the world outside obliterated by their motion, the buildings and the trees elongated and twisted by speed. And in the smallness of the car, Bodie felt that they would be closer emotionally if he were here on Earth and if Doyle were up there, on the Morning Star. Perspex rigidity towered between them, invisible, intangible, measurable only in the dimension of damage to what both had thought to be a friendship that transcended mere mortal details and the keeping of a few secrets.

They were comrades, brothers-in-arms, allies against both the evil and the righteous of this world, caught in the limbo of those who do wrongs in order to protect right, back to back, guarding each other always, never even needing to speak.

But on this morning, there was need to speak, but neither had any words. Bodie didn’t know quite where to look, nor where to cast his thoughts. He couldn’t even bring himself to look
at Doyle who was beside him in his usual untidy sprawl, for all the world as if nothing about him had changed. Apart, of course, the clothes, they had changed all right, he thought with bitterness, seeing with utter clarity, Doyle as he had been the night before, dressed as if he were some woman epitomising their culture’s idea of feminine sexuality.

How could he do it? That was the thought that ran through his mind incessantly, ‘to me’ whispering counterpoint like decay on a shroud.

Doyle, for his part, seemed engrossed in the banality of scenery whizzing past at breakneck speed, the car hastening them on as if it knew how much these calm-faced strangers wanted to escape each other. Changing gear, Bodie’s hand inadvertently brushed Doyle’s knee, shocking his hand away, the gear box grinding its protest at his clumsiness. Doyle looked at him then, a single searing blaze of his eyes, cauterising Bodie’s wounds before they had a chance to bleed the poison out. Bodie felt his anger crawl up his spine to knot in his shoulders, mean-spirited voices devilling his mind with the replaying of that look from Doyle, and how it was precisely the same look of betrayed contempt he had loosed on his partner the night before. If Doyle felt now as he had then, then there was nothing that could possibly be said between them, no point in trying to break past this icy barrier that loomed between them, cutting off the air, making the car a stifling coffin where what they had been together was buried in silence.

Even at HQ, Doyle exited the car without a word, as he had a thousand times before, but then, it had always been a companionable silence, or a distracted silence, or even an angry silence, revenge for some harm done him. But this morning, it was the silence of distance, of an ending. Bodie was outraged: after all, who was it who had been caught done up like some French tart? Who was it who had lied, who was it who had betrayed whom? Who, indeed.

Through the swing doors, flash of their ID’s, past the lift that was out of order again, up the stairs, Doyle running up them two at a time, Bodie coming behind. And watching, and wondering. Watching Doyle’s denimered rump, wondering what lay underneath, whether it was the simple normality of Y-fronts or the frill of panties. He stared, realising there was no raised line to betray frilly knickers, but that didn’t mean that Doyle wasn’t wearing women’s underwear, did it? Something plain and tasteful, pink silk, perhaps, the kind with a lace inset at the front? He couldn’t help it, couldn’t clear it from his mind. And look at those shoes: boots, stacked heel, nowhere near as high as the black patent leather of the night before, but still high, higher than many women wore. Was that why Doyle wore them, and not for fashion? Not for the purposes of intimidating would-be informants, but for the purpose of continuing into daylight what he did in the secrecy of the dark? Doyle was really going up those stairs quickly, Bodie hard pushed to keep up with him, but he was determined. He wasn’t going to be bested by a drag queen, not even if it was the man whom he had conceded was his better in many things. That was yesterday, before he’d found out the truth. It was different now, even if Doyle refused to concede that, even if Doyle insisted on continuing this charade of machismo. The sun from the half-landing window got tangled in Doyle’s hair, bringing out the autumn gold, gilding the curls. The long curls, Bodie found himself thinking. Curls and long hair that looked perfect with corset and stockings, hair that could pass for a woman’s, given the right accessories. And was that why Doyle defied Cowley and wore his hair long enough that an opponent would be able to grab it and use it as weapon against him? As Bodie, in his shock, was doing?

Top floor, Cowley’s office, Doyle going in as if this was just another day...

If Bodie didn’t stop looking at him as if he were a cross between a child-killer and a freak, he was going to belt him one. It had been horrible in the car, with Bodie sitting there as if the world had turned into a nightmare while they slept. He couldn’t understand it: after all, it wasn’t as if either one of them had changed, was it? All that had happened was that Bodie had found him out, and not in the best of ways. He couldn’t kick himself for last night, for getting so tied up in his pleasures that he hadn’t even heard someone coming into his house. He hadn’t wanted Bodie to find out, and most especially not by walking in on him—while he was actually coming, for god’s sake. If he’d been trying for a worst case scenario, that was second from
the top. At least Bodie’d come in last night and not last week when he’d had that bloke over. Christ, but that would’ve been bad. Would’ve made last night look like Mary Poppins’ jolly holidays. But today was bad enough, with Bodie sitting beside him like that, looking as if he’d just swallowed a rat that was eating him alive, from the inside out. It was making Doyle angry, this martyred attitude of Bodie’s, making him furious. Where did Bodie get off passing judgement on him? Wasn’t any of his business, was it? Wasn’t as if they were lovers or anything, was it?

No, he answered himself with a wash of sadness. It wasn’t as if they were lovers or ever likely to be. He’d always suspected that Bodie, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, had the sexual morals of his lower middle-class background, complete with all the lessons he’d learned in Sunday school before ever he’d had a chance to understand the world and make up his own mind. He’d never thought the larking about was anything more than that, which is why sometimes, it got right up his nose so much.

To tease like that, with never the possibility of following through was bloody typical of a man who claimed live and let live then had run screaming like a nun when he’d seen Doyle last night. At that moment, his train of thought was interrupted by an almost involuntary tightening of Bodie’s body and a muffled exclamation.

“What’s the matter with you now, Bodie? You’ve been sitting there like a great lump and I swear you’ve barely heard a single word I’ve said.”

“Em, no, sir, I heard you. Talk to MacLean, find out where the drugs are coming from, who’s getting the money and whether or not that money’s then being sent overseas or kept here in Britain.” Even as he finished speaking, he was thanking his lucky stars that years in the Services had taught him how to listen to commanding officers while his mind was a million miles away. He was still, on some subliminal level, listening to Cowley, aware of the keen observation in those pale eyes, aware that he was going to have to watch himself or he’d have some very uncomfortable questions to answer. But in the forefront of his mind, there, where it showed on his face, there, where it had alerted Doyle who was staring at him, there was really only the one thing. It was a tiny mark, one he’d taken to be a freckle, something he’d not noticed before, for there were so many other parts of Doyle that drew the attention: his eyes, with their fire or their bleakness; his hair that carried with it always a lingering hint of freedom, of wildness; the cheekbone that had never been explained, not even on the medical forms, being dismissed as ‘facial trauma’ and nothing more; the mouth that could range from sweetness to a gutter flowing with sewage. So much else, then, that would camouflage the mark—unless it was that it was new. That was possible, after last night, if Doyle were getting more and more into...that kind of stuff. He looked again, making sure. Yes. Definitely, unmistakeably, the tiny mutilation of a pierced ear. A bubble of hysteria was rising up again, and he almost got to his feet to circle Doyle as he had the exhibits in the Black Museum in New Scotland Yard. Fascinating, but morbid, the desire to see that which we can’t understand.

That to which, perhaps unwillingly, we are drawn. He found himself wondering if both ears were pierced, like a woman, or only one, like a queer. Or gay, if he was to use the new terminology. It didn’t do to call what was queer queer, just as it didn’t do to call a spade a spade. Under the drone of Cowley’s voice and the gimlet glower of Doyle’s stare, he sat there, in the dry overheatedness of Cowley’s office, watching the pot plant wilt, thinking about Doyle, about all the things he knew about this man. All the girls... Double dates, one couple in the bedroom, one in the sitting room, sound travelling, the murmurs and moans of sex unmistakeable, cycling round and round. There was no doubt there: Doyle had had sex with women, so he wasn’t queer. And last night, he hadn’t actually said he was, had he? So what if he was just one of those men you read about, what was the name they had? Cross-dressers, he thought, while answering Cowley’s question about the capabilities of the old Chieftan tank. Yeh, cross-dressers. They weren’t queers, didn’t fancy men at all. They were just normal blokes who had to dress like that to express the other sides of their natures. Not lesser men because of that, of course not. And he’d worked with Doyle for years, been friends with him for ages, he’d’ve known if Doyle hadn’t been a real man, wouldn’t
He was sore from the feet up, a direct line of pain from his heels all the way up his back. Hands pressing into his coccyx, he stretched, easing some of the ache out. A bath was wonderfully appealing, hot water, salts, sloughing his skin with the loofah, scouring all the dead cells off. Who knew, it might actually make him feel alive again. Christ, but he’d forgotten how punishing it was to spend the entire day pounding the streets of London—and to make matters worse, these bloody boots were not exactly designed for that kind of thing. Still, a meal and a bath and he’d be as right as rain. As long as he didn’t think about Bodie... Easier said than done, his meal spoiled by remembering the few contacts they’d had with each other today. The Hammer House of Horror trip in the car this morning, the stiffness in Cowley’s office, the clawing wariness for that five minutes when they’d bumped into each other at HQ before Bodie’s report to Cowley. Normally, he would have waited for Bodie, gone for a bite to eat and a drink together, going over the day with each other, almost like a married couple, this compulsion to share their experiences. Apart from one, that was. Apart from one... He was as depressed as the weather, so he shut his curtains, turned all the lights off, put Sibelius on the tape deck and wandered upstairs. The bathroom was a cave of darkness, the tub a subterranean pool, redolent with the odours of mineral salts, soothing his mind as well as his body. Still, he turned the problem over and over in his mind, pressing the bruise to see if it still hurt.

It did. Funny, how until last night he honestly hadn’t realised just what Bodie had become to him. He was everything, excluding lover, and that absence was Bodie’s choice, not Doyle’s. That desire had been recognised and accepted a long, long time before, then put aside to be brought out only when the temptation of daily living alongside Bodie became too much to ignore. Then, he would lock his doors, set the lights and the music, and make love to his body, pretending that it was Bodie loving him, or that it was Bodie watching him, not merely his own reflection. Only when he couldn’t deny the loneliness any more, or when he had come perilously close to responding to Bodie’s naif teasing. The bathwater was cooling now, his skin beginning the prickle of goose-pimptles, the uneasy restlessness sinking into his marrow. He scrubbed himself viciously with the soft towel, understanding the urge that drove some people towards scourging themselves, wishing he had one of the stiff, scratchy towels his gran had had when he was a child. Those had left the skin glowing red and stinging and he wanted something that would abate this melancholy. There was an underlying uneasiness, one that he recognised as his body responding to his moroseness, the physical need rising to sublimate the emotional pain. His cock was beginning to quicken, slow flow of blood, sombre rise of his flesh, the reaffirmation of life over the brooding depression inside. Absently, he stroked himself, feeling no real pleasure, going then to pumping his cock. The restless desire remained, but he was still limp as a dish-cloth. A dollop of lotion, slicking his cock, fist pumping, turgid response, flesh reluctant, needing more from the mind than this loneliness.

God, but he missed Bodie. Losing him was going to be harder than anything he’d dreaded, far harder. He went into his bedroom, stopping in front of his wardrobe, opening the door, staring at the pale nudity that was reflected back at him. He looked like a wraith, a banshee come to wail his own death—or the death of his relationship with Bodie, incomplete as it had been. For him, he reminded himself. Bodie had everything from it that he’d needed. Until last night.

Anger flashed through him: what the hell did he think he was doing, standing here like some Barbara Cartland heroine? What the fuck did it...
matter what Bodie thought? What did it matter whether or not Bodie could handle Doyle’s foibles? They were grown men both, and if Bodie didn’t like what he’d seen yesterday evening, that was Bodie’s problem, not his. After all, it wasn’t as if they were lovers... Oh, how that phrase haunted him, shrieking and laughing at him, mocking cruelly. Narrow minded Bodie, not someone to approach with a proposal for a homosexual liaison. Bodie, who tended to see black and white, not bothering with the subtleties of grey, not in his own life. Spades were spades, all of them bastards, until he met one he fancied, then suddenly blacks were wonderful people. Poling on the river was for toffee-nosed pansies, until he’d met a girl who went in for that kind of thing, then the river and the countryside were the only places to spend days off. And queers were weak, undependable and flighty. That was it, final. Too risky to chance their partnership—and their friendship—on him being the right one at the right time to change Bodie’s mind. Anyway, he didn’t want being labelled as queer, didn’t want being stuck into a tiny pigeonhole that only half-fitted him.

He was still standing in front of the mirror, a pale shape in the darkening dusk. He switched on the lamp, watching himself, the way his muscles moved as he walked back into the small world contained in the mirror. There wasn’t much to look at, he thought. An average body, bit on the skinny side, hairy, knees he’d always hated, legs that he saw as ugly, the shin muscle prominent and stringy, the thighs heavy from running. Not much, he thought, not much at all.

His body was still itching with the gloom of his spirit, depression yawning at him with bored patience, just waiting, like a big cat. He could feel himself going towards it, his mouth turning downwards, his eyes sombre, no spark of life to them. He stroked his cock again, to see if that would help. It just hung there, limp, foreskin covering the head and even that suddenly struck him as unattractive. Disgusted with his body and his attitude, he turned aside, carefully nurtured anger coming to his rescue. He damned well would not let Bodie get to him like this. He wasn’t going to hang around, miserable and guilty, for something that wasn’t wrong, no matter what Bodie thought. And what did Bodie know anyway? All he knew was how to pull birds, no imagination, missionary position all the way.

Well, all right, so he was being unfair, but he absolved himself, knowing he had to burn this out of his system before the guilt and depression started the vicious cycle all over again. It had taken him too many years to come to terms with who and what he was to simply throw it all away because someone else didn’t like it. Even if that someone else was someone he seemed to have fallen in love with... Perhaps that was why they called it falling in love: it happened when you weren’t looking.

“Pack it in, Doyle,” he said to his reflection. “Get a grip. It’s not the end of the world. Bodie, calm down, he’ll get himself in order. And it’s nothing to be ashamed of. It doesn’t hurt anyone, it doesn’t do any harm. It’s not as if it’s paedophilia or anything like that, is it? Get on with it, don’t let Bodie get to you…” But his face, when he looked at himself, was still miserable, his body still as ugly. Slowly, he went over to the tallboy, to the bottom drawer, where he kept his special things. He had to do it, the compulsion overwhelming, the intellectual need to prove that it was all right pushing him on. First, the silver bracelet, heavy on his wrist. Then the neck chain, resettling it as it caught on the hair of his chest. An earring, next, the one he always wore when he did the clubs. Then the silk, the fabric whispering onto his skin, black glistening in the lamp-lit glow. He seated himself on the bed, slowly rolled the stockings up his legs, covering his legs, making them look long and perfect. Finally, high heels, shiny and stiletto, altering his centre of gravity, changing the cant of his walk. Facing himself in the mirror, feminine contrasting masculine, the balance in his soul settled. This time, when his hand cradled his cock through the caressing hold of the silk, he felt a throb of response, pride surging through him. He wasn’t ashamed, he would never be ashamed again. He had promised himself that, when he finally faced up to the lingering afterburn of the day his dad had caught him sniffing around his big sister’s underwear, a pair of her pink ones on, his prick stiff under the softness of the cotton. He’d carried that shame with him for years,
far too many years, until he’d been able to shed it, piece by piece. And he wasn’t going to shoulder any more guilt or shame over this, not even for Bodie.

This time, he wasn’t about to just barge in. He stood at the front door, patient for Doyle’s permission to come in. It came, finally, and he couldn’t blame Doyle for giving him wariness instead of welcome. Doyle was in his old dressing gown, the one Bodie had tried to get him to wear the night before, to cover a shame that should not exist. They were as silent and as strained as they had been in the car that morning, eyeing each other, each speculating as to what the other was up to. Bodie couldn’t help wondering what Doyle was wearing under the dressing gown. He had his suspicions, for it was almost unheard of for Doyle to wear pyjamas and slippers and then top it all off with the dressing gown, so probably, under all the masculine trappings, lurked the feminine.

Bodie took a deep breath and spoke into the awkwardness that chasmed between them. “I’ve been thinking, Ray,” he began, looking at his hands, not Doyle. “Been thinking a lot. And I think I owe you an apology. What you do in the privacy of your own home is up to you. And now that I’m over the shock, I’ve realised that just because you wear women’s clothes, it doesn’t mean you’re queer. I mean, lots of men do it, don’t they? Judges, generals, parsons... It’s called cross-dressing, isn’t it? I’ve been reading up about it, about how it’s non-sexual, just a way of showing the feminine side of your nature, like. Not that there’s anything wrong with having a feminine side, mind,” he hastened to reassure his silent audience, “they say we’ve all got that to us. And it’s just that some of us need to dress the part, cos we don’t let it out properly the rest of the time. So...” he paused, still not looking at Doyle, part of his mind still in foment over what Doyle had on under that bloody dressing gown. As if hearing his thoughts, Doyle leaned forward and as he did, Bodie looked up, seeing the explanation of the long delay before Doyle had let him in, catching sight of Doyle’s chest—his naked chest. And feet that were bare in the slippers, no stockings, no women’s things as far as Bodie could see. He refused to name the pang in him disappointment. “Well, I just wanted to come over and tell you that it was all right by me, if you, well, you know, wanted to dress like that.”

“All right by you?” The anger in Doyle’s voice cracked through the room, bouncing off the walls, ricocheting through Bodie. “Big of you, mate, fucking big of you. You’re giving me your permission, are you? Well, I’ve got news for you, Bodie. I don’t need permission from you or anybody else to do what I fucking please. You understand, do you?” he scoffed, the contempt drawing blood as Bodie’s revulsion had drawn Doyle’s the night before. “Let me tell you something, you great stupid prat, you don’t understand shit! Cross-dressing? Read about it in a book, did you? Well, I fucking live it, mate. And it’s not cross-dressing, not for me. I don’t do it to express my feminine side, I do it because it turns me on. That’s right, look shocked. You must’ve known that, Bodie, from what you saw. What d’you think I was doing last night, eh? You walked in on me when I was actually coming, for christ’s sake. You call that being feminine, do you? And what about my toys, what about them, Bodie? That a non-sexual thing as well? I’ve known you to blind yourself to the truth before, but this is bloody pathetic.”

The chair he was sitting in was turning to quicksand, sucking him in, suffocating him. He had to get up, to move, to get away, to not hear what Doyle was saying. It couldn’t be true, it couldn’t be true, it couldn’t...

“Face the facts, Bodie. Your partner’s bisexual and he gets some of his kicks from what’s known in the trade as gender-fuck. I don’t expect you to understand this, you ignorant bastard, but I’ll tell you anyway, then you can get out of my sight and take your fucking platitudes with you. Non-sexual.”

The scorn was like acid in Bodie’s eyes, blinding him so that he could hear every minute sound—the tick of the clock, the hiss of the hi-fi where the tape had ended, the heave of his own breath, the furious hiss of Doyle’s—but see nothing. He got to his feet, went over to the window, unable to stay still, powerless to leave the force of that inexorable voice.

“It’s very sexual for me, Bodie. It turns me on something fierce to stand there like that. All the women’s stuff, it just contrasts with me, makes me look even more masculine. Don’t you see,
Bodie? I don’t do it to be feminine, I do it to be more masculine. And it’s exciting, feeling that silk on me, it’s so delicate and fine, and I’m so hard and muscular.” The averted face was getting to him, this display of outrage and horrified disbelief. “Shoo, you, does it? D’you want to be really shocked, Bodie? Well, I’ll tell you something to scare you shitless. I think about you sometimes, when I’m standing there in my things. I think about you and I fuck my hand, and I pretend it’s your arse I’m fucking.”

He came right up behind Bodie, until Bodie could smell his after-shave and the underlying musk that told him what Doyle must have been doing prior to Bodie’s arrival.

“I do it for a special treat, Bodie, when I want to feel really sexy, when I want to do something extra good for myself. Look at me, Bodie, you bastard!” He grabbed Bodie’s arm, forcing him round, shaking him. “Look at me, Bodie. Don’t you hide from me. Don’t you do this to us, you stupid prick. Why does it make a difference, eh, tell me that. D’you think I’m a different man from the one you’ve known all this time? Bodie, I don’t even remember when I started doing this, I just know that I’ve always done it. I’ve always liked it. Used to steal my big sister’s knickers and wear them to school under my uniform, and it was best of all when we did sports, running around being all tough and playing football or rugby, with my panties rubbing me all the time. Oh, Bodie,” and the anger was like him, utterly spent. “Can’t you try to understand? It doesn’t change who I am, it shouldn’t change what we’ve got.”

Bodie wouldn’t look at him, white around the mouth, body rigid.

“Bodie, don’t you dare do this to us.”

Bodie wrenched himself free, finally looking at Doyle. “What the fuck do you expect from me, Ray? What can you expect?”

Then he was gone again, whirlwind leaving, hollowness setting up home in Doyle’s belly. Going upstairs, he fingered his lovely things, but even they were unwelcome, a symbol of all the trouble gone before, of all the trouble yet to come. He thought of all the things he could do with what was left of the night, then tried to think of a single thing he actually wanted to do. Alone and lonely, all he did was turn the lights out and go to bed, pulling the blankets up over his head, the way he had when he was only a boy, caught in the middle of his parents’ divorce.

He had intended to go straight home, but he couldn’t, everything Doyle had said to him revolving around his head like a deviant carousel. For hours he drove, returning to the solitude of his flat only when he was so tired that he began to make mistakes in his driving. In his own home, he undressed, resolutely refusing to think about what Doyle had said. Not another second would he devote to it, brushing his teeth, washing, going to the bathroom, climbing into his bed with jaw clenched and muscles jumping with tension. He wasn’t going to think about it any more. Not at all. Not for a second.

But Ray had said he thought about him sometimes, when he was doing that. Ray, thinking about him, wanking. His mate, a poof. No, he thought, be fair. Bisexual. Someone who could screw anything that moved.

He’d been like that, once. He rolled over, pulling the blankets up over his ears, screwing his eyes tightly shut as if that would blot out what his imagination was showing him. He wasn’t going to think about that. He’d given all that up when he’d got back to civilisation and women, didn’t do it any more, didn’t need it any more, didn’t want it any more.

But Ray did. A lot, if the pain in those green eyes had been anything to go by. Christ, how long had Ray wanted him? And why had he never said anything?

But he had, his memory supplied with inconvenient honesty. The night Bodie’s girlfriend had stood him up and Doyle had suggested that as his girl had hinted more than once that she’d like a three-way with him and Bodie, then why didn’t they go ahead and do it? He remembered his own reaction: rebuttal, vicious and beyond arguing, the instinctive reaction to something that scared him. He had wanted men before, when he was at school and first at sea. And when he was in Africa, of course. But it was one thing to want men when there were no women around; it was something else entirely to be afraid of a threesome because you just might be more interested in the other bloke than the girl.

He rolled over again, onto his back this time, then onto his front, punching his pillow in lieu...
of his willful memory that wouldn’t shut up or let him go. Doyle, saying that he thought of Bodie when he was masturbating. Bodie knew what it was like, to stand and watch a man beat his own rhythm stick. Knew how exciting that could be, knew how it could build anticipation until the sex itself became a desperation that had to be filled.

And that compulsion for sex, was it any different from what Ray did? He tossed again, the sheet entangling him in a sticky sweatiness, adding to his annoyance, fraying his nerves even more. He wasn’t going to think about it, wasn’t, wasn’t...

Ray, turning towards him, seed spurting from him, arching towards Bodie even as Bodie had stamped out the fire that was threatening to ignite his groin. And from what Ray had said, he would have been thinking about Bodie, at the very moment Bodie had stumbled upon him. He rolled over on to his back, trying to ignore the hope-filled stirring of his cock. He wasn’t like that, not any more.

But Ray was. And without any kind of guilt, nor shame, nor any real difficulty. So why shouldn’t Bodie? Why should he deny himself something he had once enjoyed? It wasn’t smoking, which he loved, but had given up for the sake of his health and surviving Macklin. The old man must know about Doyle, even if he hadn’t seen fit to tell his partner. A new thought occurred to him then, a realisation fed by months upon months of minuscule clues that had added up to absolutely nothing until this moment: what if Cowley hadn’t said anything to him because he thought Bodie knew? Not, perhaps about the cross-dressing—or gender fuck, to use Doyle’s terms—but about the bisexuality? They were the butt of many a joke round the Firm, cat-calls and comments, most of which they replied to in kind, camping it up like a row of tents. What if people already thought...

And it didn’t bother him at all, much to his surprise. It was, rather, as if the worst had already been survived, for if everyone already thought it, then he wouldn’t have to face the knowing sniggers. If everyone already knew...then there were only a couple of the mob who didn’t enter into the spirit of the jokes, a couple of the staff who looked askance at them. If it was already common knowledge...then Cowley didn’t care, knew them well enough to trust them not to be security risks.

Yet he had thrown things at Doyle that accused him of being lower than low. And for what? For doing something that the poor sod obviously couldn’t resist, something that was as much a part of him as sexual desire was of Bodie? He twisted back onto his stomach, pillowing his arms under the pillow, resting his cheek on the softness, feeling the hardness underneath. Was this what Doyle felt when he dressed like that, the intriguing differences, the congruity of pleasurable sensation, but delivered in such contrasting textures? He pressed his cock into the bed, into the softness of sheet and the hardness of mattress and felt the goodness of it surge through him. How many times had he done the same kind of thing, similar, but different?

And unbidden, the image came to him again, of Ray, standing there so tall and with his masculinity spearing out from the femininity of his...‘things’ as he had called them. Such contrast, such a richness of textures... And a confluence of those things convention had always told him meant sex. How many men could remember the first time they’d seen the image of ultimate sexual attraction: the woman in black lace, fish-net stockings and high heels? Bodie tried to remember, but it had come as no surprise to him when he had seen them in the magazines his dad had kept hidden under the mattress. Already familiar, already recognised as something that spelled the ultimate in desirability. Long legs sheathed in stockings, arching over pointed-toed shoes, enticing silk displaying rather than hiding the lure of genitalia...

And the other symbol of sex that he had seen. It all came down to the other thing, it was always the central focus of fuck-scenes in videos, or in porno mags, or in graffiti scratched on the walls of public lavatories. The erect phallus. Penis, prick, dick, cock, John Thomas, willie... There were so many words, but the image was always the same, hardness rising demandingly from the curve of balls and the thatch of pubic hair.

He bolted upright, shoving the covers off, all hot and bothered. For a moment, he rested on the side of the bed, mind and pulse racing, pic-
tures tumbling through his mind, acrobats of perversity, filling him with erotic images old and new, all of them bringing his blood to a boil. And at the centre of it, the hub of all this hungry revelation, was Ray.

Christ, how could he ever have been stupid enough not to see what was happening to them? Just because he had told himself it was inconceivable was no reason for him not to have seen it. As Ray had said, he could be willfully, destructively blind sometimes. He was on his feet now, throwing clothes on, cramming his bare feet into shoes, not bothering to tie the laces, tearing out of his flat and into his car. At this point, their flats were no more than ten minutes away and that was in traffic. At a quarter past two in the morning, there was only a lone panda car disappearing down a side street, freeing him to speed. He had no idea what he was going to say to Ray when he got there—always assuming he'd be allowed in after the stupidities he'd come out with earlier.

The door buzzing didn't wake him: the endless hammering echo of his confrontation with Bodie had been doing that. Without having to ask, he knew who it was and he dragged himself, wearily numbness, down to answer the door. At least they weren't working tomorrow—today—which was just as well. The way things were between them, probably the only thing they'd be good for would be getting themselves killed. Always providing, of course, that Bodie didn't kill him for what he'd said. God, he couldn't believe he'd actually told Bodie he wanted him. And if he'd had to say it, why the hell couldn't he have been a modicum less stupid about it? The quintessential lesson in how not to make a confession to your friend and to someone you loved.

He'd never seen Doyle look like this before, so worn and defeated. Not even after Ann Holly had he been close to this faded raggedness of spirit. He took a leaf out of Doyle's book and felt guilt lade his shoulders. Even acknowledging that there had been hastily-spoken cruelties on both sides, the original sin had been with him, for breaching Doyle's privacy, for setting himself on the Bench over him, for casting the first stone. “Ray...”

“You coming in or is what you've got to say quick enough to be said on the doorstep?”
“I'll come in.”
Silence again, twisting to add to this rope that could hang them if they weren't careful.

Doyle, still well-wrapped, as if the cold had whistled through the walls of his house and Bodie the big bad wolf come to devour him, propped himself on the arm of the sofa, one leg swinging like a pendulum, marking the time as it passed.

“I've come to give you an apology.”
“No, thanks, Bodie, I've already had one of your apologies tonight, I'm not up to another one.”

“Yeh, well, this one's different. Just a flat out 'sorry'. Shouldn't've said and done the half of it, so I've come to say I'm sorry.”

Doyle stared at him for a minute, as if weighing his sincerity. “Yeh, well, I should be apologising to you an' all, I suppose.”

A silence notable for its awkwardness, neither one of them able to do more than fritter glances away on each other. Then Doyle sighed. “Are you going to be able to work with me still?”

“Yeh.”

“That's it? It won't be that easy, Bodie. You know that.”

“Of course I know that, just how stupid d'you think I am? Oh, all right, so I'm going to be looking at you wondering, but not about the job, Ray. I know I behaved like a complete prat, but I was a bit taken aback. Can't think why, mind.”

He grinned, inviting Doyle to share the mild humour, start getting them back on an even keel.

A long, thoughtful look, then the faintest of chuckles. “Okay, okay, so you'll be fine on the job. All we have to worry about now is the rest of it.”

Bodie couldn't meet his eyes, turning instead to his watch, taking it off, putting it back on. When he looked up, his gaze was steady and clear as a summer's day. “When you said you thought about me when you...”

“Put my things on?”

“Yeh, when you put your things on. When you said that, Ray, were you just saying it to wind me up or do you really think about me like that?”

It was Doyle's turn to look away, to take a breath, a moment out of time before returning...
the bright wariness of his eyes back on Bodie. “That depends on you, mate.” The sadness bled from him like clouds at dusk, barely visible, completely beyond reach, but so terribly melancholy. “Whichever answer makes it all right between us, that’s the answer I’ll give you. If you want me to think about you like my old grannie, then I’ll tell you that’s how I see you.”

The very atoms in the air held still, frozen, waiting for the words that clung, fear-filled, on Bodie’s lips before they spilled, tumbling helplessly from him, tumbling them both helplessly into an immutable future. “And if I don’t want you to do that, Ray? If I want you to tell me the truth, no matter what, then what would you say?”

In years to come, Bodie would always say that this was the greatest moment of courage he’d seen in his life, sitting there watching Doyle hand his heart and soul over on a silver platter to a man he feared held a scalpel.

“If you wanted the truth? Then I’d tell you I think about you all the time, every day and every time I look at you, I want you. And sometimes, when I’m having sex with someone else, I’ll pretend it’s you. Or when I’m in bed on my own, I’ll close my eyes and make it you touching me.” He got to his feet, going over to the hi-fi, picking up a tape and discarding it when he saw that it was the same music that had been playing before, when Bodie had run from him. “And sometimes, when I’ve put my things on, I make love to myself because you’re not there to do it for me.”

“What do you want, Ray? If your fairy godmother came through the wall at you right now, what would you ask her for?” It seemed so easy to ask these questions, in the balm of darkness, the only light a single halo beside the window. “Go on, Ray, tell me.”

“Same as anyone else, Bodie. Love, happiness, health, wealth.”

The room was a womb, sussurating silence guarding them as they felt their way, blind, along this new path, a ribbon of light that was thin enough to cut like a blade if a single step went awry. “Who d’you want the love from? Tell me, Ray.”

“Thought it’d be obvious after these shenanigans.”

“Tell me, Ray.”

“You really want to hear me say it, don’t you? All right, I’ll put it in so many words. I want you to love me. That clear enough? I’ve put my head on the block like a good little boy, now it’s your turn, Bodie. Why’d you come back here tonight?”

Bodie came to his feet, walking slowly across the room until he was directly in front of Doyle. “I couldn’t stop thinking about it—seeing you like that and all the stuff you’d said. Ray…hear me out, will you? Listen, I’ve been round the merry-go-round a few times, when it comes to blokes.” He kept on talking, right over the sudden shocked jerk of Doyle’s head and ignored the hungry fierceness in the green eyes. “Not for years, mind you, a hell of a lot of years, but I used to. I had a million excuses and to be honest, I’d always choose a woman over a fella any day of the week. But seeing you like that, thinking of you thinking about me… I just couldn’t get it out of my head.” He grabbed Doyle’s hand, holding it between his own, aware as always of how physically warm Ray was. “I know how you feel about me—couldn’t really miss it after all this, could I? And I think I could feel the same way about you.” He brought the hand to his lips, turning it, licking lightly where the pulse leapt in Doyle’s wrist. “But the real question is whether we want to do anything about all this.”

“I can tell you here and now what I want, Bodie.”

“Even if I don’t know if I can handle a long-term relationship?”

“Who said anything about long-term?” Hearty—as hearty as the traditional breakfast brought the condemned man. “Stop pretending, Ray, there’s only me here and since when have you been able to get anything past me? Come on, you’ve never done anything by halves, why’d you start it now? Look, I’m not saying that this’d just be a quick fling, I’m not saying that at all—”

“Then what are you saying?”

“I’m saying I’m pretty useless at staying with someone. If they don’t get killed, then something’s always happened and I’ve been able to get out before I get too involved. I can’t promise you anything, not a thing.”

Anger so hot it had burned cold flashed through him, words spitting from him. “What do you think I am, Bodie? Some poor shrinking violet? Some poor little thing you have to talk
sweetly to get her to open her legs for you? Don’t you try this with me, mate, don’t you even begin to start on that. All right, so I like to wear women’s underwear but that’s only once in a while, when I need it. But even if I did it every fucking night and every fucking day it still wouldn’t make me into some Victorian virgin. I’ve told you, Bodie, I don’t do it to make me into Little Miss Muffet, I do it cos it makes me feel as butch as hell. So you get your stupid notions out of your thick skull and—”

“Give over, Ray, I never said anything anywhere near that! All I was saying was that you’re better at belonging than I am. That’s all, just trying to lay all the cards on the table. So don’t bite my head off.”

Doyle turned away from him, wresting his temper under control, forcing himself to listen to words and not his own insecurities and fears. “Okay.” Fingers tangling through hair, wiping his face, trying vainly to knead out some of the tension in his neck. “Okay. What’re these cards of yours then?”

Bodie shrugged, even though Ray couldn’t see him, then reached out, watching as the shock of his touch rippled down Ray’s spine. He felt the repercussions in his own flesh, the prescient knowledge of what was to come commingling with the sudden bolt of desire, that moment when he realised that he honestly did want Ray, wanted him with a fierce need that verged on the frightening. “That we start this and go into it with our eyes open. We want each other, there’s no gainsaying that. We neither one of us wants to split up, but I can’t make you promises I don’t know I can keep. But I will promise to try, Ray. God knows, I’ll try.”

Doyle leaned back into Bodie’s strength, resting against the broadness of Bodie’s chest. Oh would that it were all so simple. To go from horrified disgust to desire to commitment. Would that it were... “It’s a bit sudden, isn’t it? Tuesday last, you were as straight as a die and now here you are proposing shacking up with another bloke, and one who dresses up in women’s things at that.”

“How the hell d’you think I feel? Christ, Ray, I thought I’d left all that kind of stuff behind, given it up for civilisation, but when I saw you like that, actually coming... Can’t get it out of my head, Ray. It won’t go away.”

Doyle faced him again, incredulity dominating his face. “Are you trying to tell me what I think you’re trying to tell me? You honestly expect me to believe that you’re this—a contemptuous snap of his fingers “—far away from being in love with me? You’ll be selling me forests in the Hebrides next.”

“Straight up, Ray—although I don’t suppose that’s the best way to put it, given the circumstances.”

“Yeh, exactly. Look, how can you just do a U-turn like this, eh, Bodie?”

“I could say the same to you about the fucking corset!”

“But that’s different, I’ve been doing that for years—”

“And that’s what I’m saying to you, Ray. I’ve done it with blokes before, right? You just didn’t know about it, the same as me and your undies. You’re really important to me, it just hadn’t dawned on me how much until all this made me stop and look at it properly. Anyway, what does it matter when it started or whether or not you can believe what I say? You can believe what I do, can’t you?”

And standing looking at him, handsome in the light of the single lamp, Doyle suddenly couldn’t care less what had brought Bodie to him like this. What difference did it make if it were for curiosity or kinkiness or pity? He’d have Bodie, at least for a while. Quite a long while, if he played his cards right, if he kept Bodie happy.

“Come upstairs,” he said, not realising how desolate his invitation sounded, nor how defeated.

This isn’t how it’s supposed to be, Bodie wanted to shout even as he followed Doyle upstairs. In the bedroom, Doyle began methodically removing his dressing gown and pyjamas, as if this were no more important nor sexual than a doctor’s examination. Automatically taking his own clothes off, Bodie couldn’t forbear to comment. “I’ve just handed you my heart on a fucking silver platter and you make it sound like I’ve offered to pay you! What’s wrong with you, Ray? That chip on your shoulder affecting your brain?”

“Don’t let’s start arguing, Bodie. Get into bed and I’ll get the stuff.” With that prosaic banality, he disappeared off into the bathroom and Bodie couldn’t help but compare this joyless
lump with the feral beauty of the man he’d walked in on with such unexpected result. It wasn’t right, it just wasn’t right...

Doyle barely glanced at Bode when he came back through, setting towel and cream down on the bed-stand, pulling the covers back to get in beside Bodie. Words, seductive and low and dripping meaning, halted him.

“Get your things on, Ray.”

His gaze snapped upwards, pinning Bodie like a butterfly for display. “What?”

“You heard me. Get your things on, Ray. I’d like to see you like that.”

Eyes narrowed, voice narrower still. “Why?”

“Because I didn’t get a chance to look properly before, that’s why. And because it makes you feel sexy and gorgeous. And because it’s something you want. Let me see you, Ray.”

A very long pause, lingering stares and lingering thought and then, in silence, Ray got to his feet and went to the chest of drawers, pulling open the bottom drawer, the familiar creak squealing at him. Item by item, he drew his things out, and then, item by item, never for one moment looking away from Bodie, he drew his things on, the lusciousness of fabric and the taboo of his indulgence stirring his desire. Item by item, transforming himself until he was clad, head to toe, in his special things, his cock hardening with every hint of arousal from the man in his bed.

Bodie couldn’t believe his eyes: this was not how he’d expected it to be. Oh, there was an ambivalence there, corkscrewing around his emotions, but it was all overshadowed by the scene unfolding before him. With every article that Doyle put on, he layered femininity over his masculinity, layer upon layer, male sandwiched with female, building and building until it was a composite picture of neither male nor female, but one thing only: Raymond Doyle. It was the perfect juxtaposition of all the things he’d always been expected to find sexy, but it was Ray who was turning his bones into liquid lust. Ray was sex personified, desire beating from him in flammatory waves, pummelling Bodie, turning him on something fierce. He was finding it hard to breathe as Doyle came over to him, hips swaying with the cant of his high heels, cock swaying in equal measure. He was transfixed by Doyle’s gaze, as he reached for him, pulling him down on the bed, turning him onto his back so that he could straddle the black-clad body, but Doyle had other ideas.

Doyle twisted, transposing them until it was Bodie on the bottom, Doyle kneeling astride him, dominant, in control, showing them both that he was still as much a man as Bodie. Then the issue was not one of who was on top, or who had the more machismo, for a look passed between them and there was no room left for anything else but the emotions of being together. In that look lay a truth, as small as the pea in the princess’ bed, so small a thing to offer proof. Doyle saw it in Bodie’s eyes, saw the love that lurked there, too shy and insecure to show its face in the brightness of day. But here, in the secrecy of the dark, it peeped out, making sudden, glorious sense of everything Bodie had been doing. Even the outrage in the beginning was quite reasonable now: seeing Ray like that had pulled the carpet out from under Bodie and look what had been hiding there. Small wonder the poor man had lashed out and then run, only to bury the facts even deeper so that he could cling, by his fingernails if need be, to a world that was so much less complicated. Doyle leaned down to kiss him, saw Bodie’s mouth opening to him, but instead, there was a gossamer kiss on translucent eyelid and a sweetness so intense it made heads and hearts spin.

Then Bodie moved under Doyle and sent a snarl of pleasure through them both, and Doyle kissed him again, but fiercely, possessively, grinding the hardness of his cock against Bodie, caressing him with the softness of silk. Hands raged over body, Doyle frantic to touch every inch he had imagined so often, Bodie filing himself up with the endless contrast of wispy fabric and the strength of maleness underneath. A whisper of sound, and the panties ripped, the head of Doyle’s cock pushing through, tapping against Bodie’s, pushing at him. In unison, mouths forged together, tongues sucking on each other, the two men hauled Doyle’s things off him, careless of anything but the feel of each other. Then, a moment of profound stillness as they lay together, skin on skin, flesh on flesh, their hearts beating together. Bodie hadn’t turned on this quickly since he’d been a teen, overflowing with that frenetic need to come, to be part of someone.
DOYLE FELT THE UPSWELLING OF DESIRE, FELT IT AND MATCHED IT, HIS OWN BODY WEPTING ITS PLEASURE, SWEAT POURING FROM HIM, PRECUM SEEPING FROM HIM. HE WAS SLICK ALL OVER, AND HOT, AND HUNGRY AND ALL HE WAS WAS THE DRIVE TO BURY HIMSELF IN BODIE’S DEPTHS. FINGERNAILS SCRABBLING, HIS MOUTH SUCKING ON THE FRAGILE PULSE IN BODIE’S NECK, HE FOUND THE TUBE OF LOTION, SQUIRTING IT ONTO TREMMING FINGERS, SLITHERING IT ONTO SHIVERING COCK. BODIE WAS ALREADY SPREADING HIMSELF UNDER DOYLE, WRAPPING LONG LEGS AROUND STRONG HIPS, ARMS PULLING DOYLE IN TIGHT AND CLOSE.

TWO FINGERS, SLICK WITH LOTION, GOING INTO HIM BUT TOO MUCH, TOO QUICK, BODIE’S FLINCH OF PAIN FORCING HIM TO SLOW, TO BREATHE AND TO THINK, HOLDING BACK A LITTLE, SO THAT THIS WAS AN ACT OF LOVE AND NOT OF RAPE. HE KNELT, SO THAT BODIE’S LEGS WERE SPACED COMFORTABLY AROUND HIS WAIST AND THEN HE SLID HIS PINKIE INTO BODIE, SO SLICKLY, SO SLOWLY, WATCHING BODIE EVERY INCH OF THE WAY. NO DISTRESS THERE, ONLY THE BRIEF CLOSING OF THE EYES, TO RE-OPEN AND STARE WITH UTTER TRUST AT DOYLE. SO. THE INDEX FINGER THIS TIME, GENTLY, CAREFULLY, EASING THE PUCKERED MUSCLE, STRETCHING, STRETCHING, TAKING HIS TIME, LETTING BODIE ADJUST.

NO LONGER AN ISLAND, BODIE LUXURIATED IN A FEELING HE HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN, THIS HAVING SOMEONE ELSE A PART OF YOU. AND THIS SWEETNESS WAS ONLY THE VERY BEGINNING. HE COULD FEEL HIS ARSE RELAXED AND WISHED DOYLE WOULD GET ON WITH IT, BUT HIS MOUTH WAS STOPPED BY DOYLE’S KISSES MAKING HIM SOAR.

ANOTHER FINGER, TWO OF THEM, SIDE BY SIDE, DEEP INSIDE BODIE, SPREADING HIS ARSE TO LET HIM IN. HE ROTATED HIS FINGERS, PULLING BACK SO THAT HE COULD WATCH BODIE’S FACE THE MOMENT HIS FINGERS FOUND THE BURIED PROSTATE. BODIE’S COCK JERKED AS DOYLE’S FINGERS FOUND HIM INSIDE AND ECTASY FLOODIT HIM. BODIE FELT, SUDDENLY, ON THE VERGE OF COMING AND FELT, EVEN MORE KEENLY, THAT HE WAS EMPTY INSIDE. THE FINGERS WEREN’T ENOUGH, NOT EVEN CLOSE. HE WANTED DOYLE’S COCK UP HIM, WANTED TO FEEL THAT PLUNDERING MASCULINITY POSSESS HIM. WANTED RAY...

THE PRETTY PINK HOLE WAS GAPING WIDE FOR HIM NOW, A MAW WAITING TO BE FILLED. CAREFULLY, HE POSITIONED HIMSELF, BODIE’S HAND COMING ROUND TO GUIDE HIM, LEADING HIM. THERE WAS A MOMENT OF SNUGNESS, THEN HIS COCK WAS TAMPERING BODIE’S ARSE, FILLING HIM UP, FILLING DOYLE WITH SENSATION. HE HEARD, AS FROM A DISTANCE, THE KEENING CRY THAT ERUPTED FROM BODIE, THE INTENSITY OF HIS PLEASURE DRIVING THE SOUND FROM HIM EVEN AS DOYLE DROVE HIMSELF DEEP INSIDE. SO TIGHT, SO INCREDIBLY TIGHT, HARDNESS IN SOFTNESS, PERFECT BALANCE, AS HE NEEDED IT TO BE. HE THRUST, HARD AND FAST, BODIE PUMPING WITH HIM, BODIE’S COCK SLICK AS A MOUTH ON HIS BELLY. HE LOOKED AT BODIE LOOKING AT HIM AND KNEW THAT THEY NEITHER OF THEM COULD WAIT. THERE’D BE TIME ENOUGH LATER FOR THEM TO BE ALL SLOW AND SWEET AND LOVING, BUT FOR TONIGHT, FOR THIS MOMENT, THEIR LOVING WOULD BE FIRE AND HURTING ECSTASY. HE COULDN’T MAINTAIN CONTROL, FUCKING BODIE WITH ALL HIS HEART, POUNDING INTO HIM, THE CHANNEL OF FLESH FUCKING HIM BACK WITH THE TIGHTNESS OF ITS GRIP. THE CUM WAS GATHERED IN HIS BELLY, HOT AND TRANSCENDENT WITH PLEASURE. HE THRUST AGAIN, FEELING BODIE SHOUE UP TO MEET HIM. AGAIN, AND BODIE’S MOUTH FASTENED TO HIS, BREATH MINGLING, SWEAT BLENDING. AGAIN, AND THE CUM SHOT FROM HIM IN A HOT STREAM TO SPLASH ON THE HOTTER YET FLESH OF BODIE’S INSIDES. THERE WAS A MOMENT OF MASSIVE STILLNESS, AND THEN BODIE SHOUTED, BACK ARCHING AND MOUTH FALLING OPEN, HIS CUM EXPLODING FROM HIM.

FOOLISH, REALLY, TO BE SO DISAPPOINTED THAT IT WAS OVER SO SOON, BUT DOYLE WISHED IT HAD LASTED FOREVER. HIS WHOLE BODY WAS STILL TINGLING WITH THE FEEL OF BODIE CLUTCHING HIM, ENSNARING HIM IN A TRAP HE HAD NO DESIRE TO LEAVE. HE HELD BODIE CLOSE, CRADLING HIM IN HIS STRENGTH, HANDS STROKING SOFT SKIN UNTIL HIS COCK WAS READY TO LOVE BODIE AGAIN. HE DROPPED SMALL KISSES ON EVERY AVAILABLE INCH OF BODIE, CAressing HIM, KEEPING HIM CLOSE, KEEPING HIM SAFE.

FOR OTHERS, IT WOULD, NO DOUBT, HAVE BEEN A SMALL PLEASURE, BUT FOR BODIE IT WANTED BEYOND MEASURE. THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANYONE TO HOLD HIM QUITE LIKE THIS BEFORE, GIVING HIM THIS UTTER CERTAINTY THAT HE WOULD BE PROTECTED AND CARED FOR, SHELTERED AND SUCCORED. HE NESTLED ALL THE MORE COMFORTABLY INTO DOYLE’S ARMS, LETTING HIMSELF DRIFT ON A SEA OF TRANQUILLITY, HIS NERVES STILL SINGING THEIR PÆAN OF PLEASURE. SOMETHING WAS SCRATCHING HIM. HE IGNORED IT. IT BOtherED HIM A LITTLE MORE. HE STILL IGNORED IT,
preferring instead to concentrate on the softly coarse hair that covered Ray’s chest. It was so wonderfully masculine, redolent with their combined musk, dappled with their combined sweat. The itch would not go away, so he finally yielded and moved, getting a muttered complaint from Ray for his troubles. The culprit that had irritated his skin dangled from his fingers and it took him a second to recognise what it was: a ragged piece of silk torn loose in their desperate hurry to get Ray naked. Bodie yawned, dropping the tattered remnant onto the floor, snuggling in closer so that he could sleep. Eyes almost closed, his languid mind recognised the expression he had seen in Doyle’s eyes: wariness, reluctance, an edge of fear.

There was a solution for that, he knew, a very simple one, if he could get it out before he fell asleep. “Need to buy you a new one of these, Ray.”

The words sunburst inside him, filling him with light. It seemed to him, in that brightness of hope, that perhaps Bodie had meant what he’d said. Perhaps it really was going to be the way they wanted it to be. He hugged Bodie to him fiercely, muscles bulging with the effort. He’d make it happen, he would. He absolutely would. If his world could turn itself upside down over night, then nothing was impossible.

Especially not him and Bodie, especially not with Bodie’s acceptance and desire to fuel him.
TWO COPPERS TO RUB TOGETHER

These two humorous pieces have at least three things in common. First they are both sports stories—sexual and otherwise. The first, “Own Goal”, is the second in M. Fae Glasgow’s ongoing sports themed series—Number one was “Sticky Wickets”—while the second begins with a more intellectual game before things begin to get out of hand. Or should that be out of foot? The second commonality is the presence of Glaswegians. Surely that isn’t surprising! And finally, both tales get down to the having of tails—so to speak—in public places. Oh my!

OWN GOAL
M. FAE GLASGOW

It was when they were being buffeted by the tartan hordes that suspicion first began to dawn: he hadn’t seen any other Englishmen since Aikenhead Road and those few had all turned right and gone along Prospecthill Road. All the English, that is, apart from him and Bodie. Bodie had assured him that this was a shortcut, that this was better than going along the Cathcart Road, that this was the best possible way. Doyle, awash in a sea of guttural Glaswegians was having his doubts about that. Everywhere he looked were men, all chuntering away from the excitement of seeing the national football team take on the Auld Enemy on their home ground, every one of them gleefully hopeful of smashing the English to bits, a fact that gave him no end of reassurance. There seemed to be millions of them, all shapes and sizes, from the weasel to the colossus, and all with tartan scarves round their necks and flags in their hands, every man jack—every man jock?—of them speaking with the unintelligibility that marked the Glaswegian to his English ears. Ears, which by the very dint of being so Auld Enemy-ish English, he was thinking of keeping well-covered. But still, he and Bodie were only on the road leading up to Hampden, it could simply be that he was jumping to conclusions and that for once in his misbegotten life, Bodie was innocent. He looked up at his companion and rephrased that: for once in his life, Bodie wasn’t totally guilty. That face had never been innocent—he had probably winked at the midwife. Or the doctor, if he’d thought he’d get a bigger rise out of that.

The police were shepherding them, complete with the muted roar of the Tartan Army, towards a copse of turnstiles: the turnstiles that led to the wrong end of the ground. Swept along by the lumpy mass of men, he turned a full glower on Bodie: definitely not innocent then, as if there had ever really been any doubt. He should know better, either than to trust Bodie with buying tickets or to trust him farther than he could spit. Especially when Bodie had been in his naughty schoolboy mood all week, actually managing to get a reluctantly indulgent chuckle out of Cowley. But still, Bodie’d be disappointed if he just let him away with this fiasco—and Doyle was never one to miss a good argy-bargy if he could help it. Or cause it...

He opened his mouth to give Bodie a rollicking, then shut it again. Up to his neck in Scotland supporters was probably not the best place to broadcast an English accent, especially not considering this was a Scotland v. England game, for the Cup. And most particularly not considering some of the less than diplomatic comments made about this fair city and its inhabitants by members of the England squad who had obviously found nowhere else to pack their boots but bang smack in the middle of their mouths. No, this was one of those sticky situations where discretion was the better part of valour, and as he had tumbled to Bodie’s little scheme, he had possession of the ball. He’d keep...
his mouth shut for the time being and get Bodie later. When it didn’t mean running the risk of having his head separated from his shoulders...

Bodie was leading the way, looking for all the world as if he’d been in the Scotland end of Hampden a million times. He even looked the part, which wasn’t really surprising considering the black Irish were of the same stock as the maniacal Celts that had plundered and pillaged their way through the history of this country. And judging by some of the faces around him, he’d be plundered and pillaged himself if he was found out, a traitor behind enemy lines. Despite the bitter cold and the rain dripping down his neck, he was suddenly glad that he didn’t have an England scarf with him—this ravening horde would probably use it to hang him with.

But Bodie, snotty Bodie, grinning and confident and smug, he still deserved an earful. Doyle hesitated a step, getting trod on and cursed at for his rank stupidity. He caught Bodie up, still considering giving him a bollocking in public. And why not? He could do a Glasgow accent with the best of him. He’d ‘done’ Cowley often enough, hadn’t he? He’d fooled the Minister over the ‘phone that day, hadn’t he?

He cleared his throat in preparation for a performance the West End would be proud of. “An’ whit did ye dae wi’ oor money, Bodie? Ah gaed ye plenty ta buy us a pair o’ tееects, didn’t I the noo?”

It appeared that he might be able to fool a Whitehall minister, but as any civil servant could have told him, that took no talent whatsoever. A tartan bedecked behemoth turned on him, blocking out all light and bringing Doyle’s heart to his mouth. “Wiz ‘at meant tae be funny, pal?”

“Don’t mind him,” Bodie was saying, gathering him up, doing his 7th Cavalry bit, steering him around the monster, shouting back over his shoulder as they made good their escape. “He’s a bit touched, you know,” he made the universal gesture for ‘round the twist’, “simple. Just goes around repeating everything he hears.”

And despite the unmistakeably South of the Border accent, no one put the boot in, which was surprising, considering some of the comments he’d been hearing round town all day. Well, if Bodie could open his big mouth with impunity, then so could he. Poured onto the terraces with the rest of the mob, he found a space directly behind his erstwhile friend, raising his voice to make sure the bastard heard. “You rotten bugger! I gave you good money to buy us tickets for this game, and you didn’t, did you? You took those ones Cowley didn’t want and pocketed…”

It’s very unnerving to be standing in the middle of a crowd, all of whom have gone quiet, listening to you. And all of whom look as if they’re wondering which rock you crawled out from under and if they could put you back under it. With a bulldozer...

“Shh!” Bodie was hissing at him, leaning back, talking out of the corner of his mouth. “You’ve been watching Jimmy Cagney films again, haven’t you?” Doyle said, but quietly, lest his accent was overheard and his head wound up on the pitch instead of the football. “Any road, how come they’re after my guts for garters, but you can get away with being English?”

“Because, Raymond old chap,” this last part muttered very quietly over his shoulder in the general vicinity of Doyle’s right ear, “I’m not really English. Up here, I’m Liverpudlian, which doesn’t really count as English, as far as they’re concerned. You, on the other hand, are a marked man. You might even say you’re a wanted man.”

He glanced round, batting his eyelashes and pouting passionately. “You’re ever so lovely, ’andsome. Come ’ere often, do you?”

Doyle took a good look round at the gallus Glaswegians beginning the primordial chanting in praise of their national side. “Not bloody likely! Bodie, what’ve you got us into this time? What possessed you to bring us up the Scotland end?”

“Oooh, ducky, I like getting it up the end,” more batting eyelashes, the come-hither effect rather wrecked by the incipient giggles that were threatening to choke him—like Doyle’s hands, now that we stop to think about it really. “Listen, sunshine, the Cow had those tickets going begging…”

“The way you did when it was time to come up with the money to get us into the match?”

“Raymond! Accusing me of begging? How could you say such a thing to me? I’m too sensitive…”

“Too sensitive? You’re about as sensitive as Maggie’s knickers. Too much of a skinflint, more like.”
That, obviously, pierced Bodie to the core, for he gave a display poor Juliet would have been proud of. Or embarrassed by. But still, all the borrowed money Doyle had never repaid and all the drinks never reciprocated cut an edge into the lisping campiness when he hissed his reply back. “Me? You’re the one who’s as tight-fisted as a Scotsman’s arse!”

Bodie fought not to blush, succeeding in looking instead as if he’d just discovered what haggis is made of—after he’d eaten it. “Get off it, Ray. You know I was doing a job for the old man last night.”

A less than gentle pat on Bodie’s backside, and the whispered words: “I thought that’s what I said you were up to."

It took a couple of seconds for the implication to dawn on Bodie, but when it did, he forgot himself enough to turn full around to face Doyle’s sniggering face and let fly. “Don’t be so fucking disgusting!”

“Considering what you got up to last night, isn’t it you that was fucking disgusting? Or were you fucking something else?”

He didn’t quite manage to suppress the blush this time, knowing full well that Doyle would be cackling like a hen if he saw Bodie’s red face. “I wasn’t fucking anyone, Ray Doyle, and you should know, seeing as it was your room I was stuck in last night.”

Doyle, the man who could make the phone directory sound like an erotic proposition, managed to make this sound filthier than Soho and Blytheswood Square all rolled into one. “If you weren’t fucking anything, disgusting or otherwise, what was all that heavin’ and sighing that was going on then?”

That got Bodie to turn around, facing the pitch, keeping his blushes to himself. It was all fine and well, in fact, it was a barrel of laughs, to make comment—preferably loudly and in a crowd—on Doyle’s sexual antics, it was quite another to have even the most oblique hint made at his own. He didn’t even like it when his girls kissed him in public, and that was something society had a tendency to look on with benevolent approbation, not to mention encouragement. Had to keep those little feet pattering, else the Empire would fall. Flat on its face like Doyle, if he was to have his say.

And he would, he decided, peved. He’d get the little bastard back for turning the tables on him. Deserved everything Bodie could give him, didn’t he, for spoiling the game. After all, it was a tradition, that Bodie teased Doyle and Doyle took it. It was established procedure, for Bodie to embarrass Doyle in public. He thought back to the last time he had done something to embarrass Doyle in public and amended that to it being established procedure for him to try to embarrass Doyle in public. Rotten toad wouldn’t even blush, not even that time he’d managed to get him running out of the loo, RT in one hand, prick in the other, in attack stance looking for the terrorist cell that had infiltrated CI5 HQ itself. He snickered to himself, wickedly, rightly placing that at the top of his considerable lists of accomplishments, directly above the time he’d got Ray to actually pay for dinner.

Yeh. He’d get the rotten bugger for this, he thought, mentally rubbing his hands in anticipatory glee. Oh, this was going to be fun. Plus, he could always claim that it was because no one embarrassed William Andrew Philip Bodie—well, not since the Vicar at the Font, landing him with the stupid name of Billy Bodie. And people wondered why he never used his first name… Oh, well, at least the other hoodlums at school hadn’t known that his mum, in an innocence so profound he couldn’t fathom how she had ever managed to get pregnant, had called him Willie. And, being not only naïve but as thick as two short planks nailed together and completely unaware of the niceties of Australian English, the stupid cow had called his sister Wendy, thus neatly covering both ends—so to speak—of human anatomical details, but making sure that no speaker of Strine would have any doubt that when it came to children, she’d had one of each. He’d nearly died the day he’d one embarrassed William Andrew Philip Bodie—well, not since the Vicar at the Font, landing him with the stupid name of Billy Bodie. And people wondered why he never used his first name… Oh, well, at least the other hoodlums at school hadn’t known that his mum, in an innocence so profound he couldn’t fathom how she had ever managed to get pregnant, had called him Willie. And, being not only naïve but as thick as two short planks nailed together and completely unaware of the niceties of Australian English, the stupid cow had called his sister Wendy, thus neatly covering both ends—so to speak—of human anatomical details, but making sure that no speaker of Strine would have
ticular bout of embarrassment had been worth it, in the end, so to speak. That night hadn’t been all bad at all. He’d learned to play two up, won a fortune. And when the Aussie’s money had run out, well, that had been fair dinkum as well. In fact, getting all bets paid off in the back room had made him go right off good hard cash for a while, in favour of good, hard shagging.

“Penny for them,” Doyle said, wanting to know what the hell was putting such a smile of self-satisfaction on Bodie’s face when the prat should have been as red as a beetroot. He knew what Bodie had been up to—and ‘up’ was the operative word—in bed last night. He’d had to slip off to the lavatory for a quick wank himself, after. But Bodie should not be looking so pleased with himself: a smug Bodie was a dangerous Bodie. A swift kick and Bodie turned to look at him, an expression of outrage all over him, his next-door-neighbour’s bovril all down his leg.

“Doyle! Watch what you’re doing. Christ, what are you, a bloody boy? Someone find your funny spot, did they, Rover?”

“You managed to find a bit of a funny spot last night, didn’t you, Bodie?” Doyle whispered with the puerile glee of a sex-starved schoolboy. “All these men swishing around in skirts getting to you, eh? Always knew you were a leg man, but I never knew you liked ’em hairy.”

Bodie decided that now would be a really good time to bury the cheeky sod.

“That why you got us into the Scotland end? Hoping to be able to cosy up nice and close to some strapping big fella in a skirt?”

Bodie decided to bury him alive.

“Course, now the great mystery can be solved, can’t it?” Doyle hadn’t enjoyed himself this much in years: well, not since last night, listening to Bodie wanking his little heart out—or something in years: well, not since last night, listening to Doyle had come. Made life a lot coarser and a hell of a lot more fun. “Go on, Bodie, tell us. What does a Scotsman wear under his kilt, eh—Willie?”

“Better be careful,” he said, with a carefully calculated regret, turning back to the game that was unfolding in front of him while his own private game was unfolding behind him. “Better be careful,” he said, rather glad that the maniacs around them were only interested in the entertainment they had paid good money for and completely oblivious to the entertaining spectacle that could have been had for free. “Can’t let anyone see, petal.”

And then he reached behind him with his right hand, unerringly homing in on that rather prominent part of Doyle which had nudged him with such pointed insistence earlier. He was trying to goose Doyle, but it sounded more like a cock-crow squawking behind him.

“Bodie!” this, loud enough to draw the attention even of Scotsmen involved in that most sacred of pursuits, namely defeating the English in battle, albeit the civilised mayhem of football.

“Bodie!” hissed, this time, goose-like, Bodie thought delightedly. It was working, oh, how it was working! He risked a glance over his shoulder and had the utterly, profoundly soul-inspir-
As a £3 Note

OWN GOAL

ing sight of Doyle, Raymond Doyle, blushing red enough to put a lobster to shame. Well, under the circumstances, there was only one thing to do, and he did it. Under cover of the open flaps of Doyle’s winter coat, he squeezed, and not innocently, either.

“Bodie…” whispered this time, close to him. He realised that Doyle had leant forward to hide what he was doing, perhaps to protect them both from a fate worse than death—discovered in a crowd of Glaswegians, sullying the sacred glory of beating England by being English and beating something else entirely. He squeezed again, imagining in lurid detail the look of fury and embarrassment that must have been turning Doyle puce by now. A burble of laughter escaped him, coinciding rather well with the English on the field losing possession of the ball to the Scots and the English behind him losing possession of his balls, too.

“Bodie…” Christ, if Doyle got any closer, he’d be on top of him. He chortled: he’d never seen Ray Doyle this embarrassed before, never. Oh, wait until he told Murphy. There was a good fifty quid riding on this.

“I've got you now, Ray,” he said, triumphant. “One up to me, right?”

“Oh, yeah, definitely one up to you,” Doyle breathed in his ear.

And that was when Bodie realised it really was one up to him: and that one up felt surprisingly like a prick. Tentatively, his fingers did a bit of walking and found, sure enough, that he didn’t have Doyle by the short and curlies as he had thought—he had him by the long and straight. Actually, he amended, his fingers doing a rather more detailed reconnaissance, long and curved to the left a bit...

Doyle pressed harder into the hand that was exploring him with all the confidence of a convent girl, grinning to himself at the expression that must have been written all over Bodie’s face. The bugger should know better than to feel him up like that; that would never embarrass him. It wouldn’t get a rise out of him, but not precisely the kind of rise Bodie was after. Unless, of course, there had been a kernel of truth in Bodie’s limp-wristed lisping. He wiggled a bit, for if the wrist was limp, the hand certainly wasn’t and neither was his cock. He bent his knees as much as his libido, so that his groin forced Bodie to cup the sweet hardness of his cock.

Bodie pulled his hand back as if burnt, only to discover that with Doyle leaning forward like that and his own hand twisted up behind him, he couldn’t move. Every time he wiggled his hand to get it free, Doyle wiggled his hips to keep him trapped. How the hell was he going to get out of this? They were marooned in a sea of heaving bodies, not one of which was heaving for the same reason Doyle was heaving and humping against him. The hair on the back of his neck prickled up—rather like Doyle, if you think about it—when the small, square man of the spilled bovril turned to look at him. Bodie swallowed, hard. Doyle pushed against him, hard, and in more ways than one.

“You little prick!” he hissed at Doyle.

“We'll have less of the little,” answered Doyle, playing right into his hand, filling it with something that was less a little prick and more a huge cock. This was the best game they’d ever had, even beating that time Bodie had goosed him in the back of Cowley’s car all the way from Whitehall to suburbia, trying to make him squawk. Not that he had had any intention of doing so: Bodie would’ve stopped if he had.

Another frantic Bodie glance around. The rumbling, roaring crowd was blessedly more obsessed with the action on the pitch than the action on the terraces. Bodie breathed a sigh of relief, for once in his life glad that England were having the pants beaten off them—which was probably not the best turn of phrase, considering the position he was in. Then he noticed that the bovril bearer was sneaking furtive glances at him and he became acutely aware of the fact that he was standing in the middle of forty thousand people, live television cameras and swarms of blue-clad bobbies. With another man’s denim-wrapped cock in his hand. “Where are your brains, Doyle?”

Doyle lifted up a little, then resettled himself, Bodie’s hand fitting his balls like a glove. “You’re holding them, mate.”

“Yeh, that’s fucking obvious. Get them back in your head, mate.”

“Nah, like them better where they are.”

And to prove his point, he rotated his hips, undulating his balls in the palm of Bodie’s hands like worry eggs. And like worry eggs, Bodie
couldn’t resist rolling them, rubbing them, smoothing them—realising what he was doing and jerking forward, instead of jerking off Doyle.

The man beside him was still glancing round furtively, but now he seemed to be trying to either dance a jig or do some other bizarre Scottish ritual. And behind his back, Doyle seemed to be doing a bizarre dance of his own, bucking and rubbing, trying to find Bodie’s hand.

Bodie, with some of that common sense Cowley claimed he didn’t possess, was having none of it. Which was, in a way, precisely the same situation Doyle was in, although Ray was trying very hard to do something about that. Almost groaning, Bodie wondered how the hell he’d managed to get himself into this pickle, even as his hand itched to grab Doyle’s gherkin again.

“Bodie…” whispered into his ear, Doyle’s groin pressed into his back, and it certainly wasn’t either a pen or a roll of mints in his pocket. Bodie considered stepping forward, but there were two disadvantages to that. The first was that it would expose Doyle, so to speak and the second was that if he were to step forward in this sardine tin of a crowd, then he was going to be doing to the man in front of him what Doyle was doing to him. The bovril man chose this moment to bend down in a funny corkscrew kind of motion, grabbing a large and empty bottle of what had once been the kind of wine that doubled as a paint stripper.

The movement caught Doyle’s attention for a second, then he realised what he was seeing. The funny little man beside Bodie was surreptitiously—and with the willfully blind co-operation of the people around him—unzipping his fly and pulling his prick out. Now this seemed to Doyle to be an excellent idea. Making sure he was still close to Bodie, he pulled his open coat forward, less for privacy and more as a windbreak. Then he followed the best local custom he’d seen in his life and unzipped his fly, his hand leaping in to grab his cock, although the relief he sought was quite a bit different from the bovril man.

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Bodie, having no idea what he was about to land himself with, decided that this was the moment to get the situation in hand, before he submitted to the temptation and got himself in hand. All this humping the small of his back with a big prick was definitely getting to him, and if he didn’t stop it right now, he was going to end up on his knees. And not in prayer, although it was a form of worship... “Doyle!” he hissed.

Doyle’s reply was lost in the sudden agonised roar of the crowd as England took possession of the ball and went streaking down the pitch to try to score.

“Doyle!”

Doyle answered, not in words. He grabbed Bodie’s right hand and hauled it round Bodie’s back with the practised ease of an ex-copper and shoved his cock into it.

Bodie, like the English team, was left rather unexpectedly in possession of the balls and on his way to scoring...

Doyle, unlike the Scottish team, was more than happy to lose possession, under the circumstances. He leaned forward, looking simply as if he were as drunk as a puggy, collapsing forward onto the poor sod in front of him. The poor sod in front of him was wondering how he was going to get out of this without being sodomised in front of forty thousand people. As the cock thrust through the tunnel of his fist to nudge the small of his back, he started wondering how he could get through this and be sodomised in front of forty thousand people without also being arrested. Doyle’s cock was hot in his hand and Doyle’s breath was hotter in his ear, his own cock refusing to be ignored. He might be able to tell his brain that this was just a joke that was getting too far out of hand—or should that be too far into his hand?—but he always did his best thinking with his balls and they were very busily telling him that this was a very satisfactory position to be in, indeed.

Doyle, on the other hand, was finding Bodie’s hand to be less than sufficient and the position considerably less than satisfactory. There was a bitterly cold draft snaking icy fingers round to pry into the warmth of Bodie’s hand and every rain-laden tendril was putting a considerable damper on his passion, not to mention his cock. All in all, the whole situation was in danger of collapsing, and that was something he wasn’t about to let happen. After all, it wasn’t every day that one of Bodie’s jokes backfired so...handily, as it were. Public sex had always been one Doyle’s little hobbies, indulged in on those rare occasions when a man could get away
with it without being caught. And in a crowd of Scotsmen besotted with their team playing a game with a ball, they weren’t about to be paying any attention to a team of two playing with balls, were they? Especially not if he were to stumble back from Bodie thusly, then stagger forward with drunken sway, coming to rest nice and cosy and hidden flat against Bodie’s back.

Bodie heard the sigh of relief against his neck and groaned as his brief moment of relief went running gaily out the door. He had, for a foolish instant, thought that Doyle pulling away like that—he refused out of hand to use the term ‘withdraw’, just in case Doyle read his mind and got any more ideas than he already had—signalled the end to this particularly excessive joke. To do this, in public, when they could wait until they got back to the safety and privacy of the hotel room, where all they had to worry about was Cowley hearing them... Maybe Doyle had a point. Well, judging by the prong poking his back, Doyle certainly had a point, and a considerable one at that, but perhaps he also had the right idea: Bodie would take his chance in a crowd this size any day, before he risked the beady, all-seeing eyes of his boss. But then, Cowley wasn’t likely to have them arrested and—Doyle moved, once, a sinuous slither of his hips, and that was when Bodie realised that whilst he had been off weighing the pros and cons, Doyle had been weighing anchor, pulling Bodie’s shirt free from the moorings of his trousers. It was also when he realised that where to have sex had become a moot point the instant that Doyle pulled away like that—he refused out of hand to use the term ‘withdraw’.

Doyle grinned into Bodie’s shoulder when he heard the sigh of relief against his neck. He had, for a foolish instant, thought that Doyle pulling away like that—he refused out of hand to use the term ‘withdraw’, just in case Doyle read his mind and got any more ideas than he already had—signalled the end to this particularly excessive joke. To do this, in public, when they could wait until they got back to the safety and privacy of the hotel room, where all they had to worry about was Cowley hearing them... Maybe Doyle had a point. Well, judging by the prong poking his back, Doyle certainly had a point, and a considerable one at that, but perhaps he also had the right idea: Bodie would take his chance in a crowd this size any day, before he risked the beady, all-seeing eyes of his boss. But then, Cowley wasn’t likely to have them arrested and—Doyle moved, once, a sinuous slither of his hips, and that was when Bodie realised that whilst he had been off weighing the pros and cons, Doyle had been weighing anchor, pulling Bodie’s shirt free from the moorings of his trousers. It was also when he realised that where to have sex had become a moot point the instant that blunt point slid against his bare skin.

Christ, but he couldn’t believe it! The randy toad was fucking him, as near as spit. And was that spit making Doyle so slick or was it precum? If the bastard came on him... Actually, forget all thoughts about killing him, he’d probably come himself. He shifted, trying not to cut off the circulation to some rather important bits of his anatomy, even that slight movement sending waves of pleasure through him. His groan blended in perfectly with the bereft sigh of the crowd as the game took a turn for the worse, but Bodie’s game was taking an even bigger turn for the worse. Doyle was pressing into him, the feel of his body a joy and delight, and something that was in danger of sending him over the edge into making an extremely embarrassing mess of the front of his trousers. The bovril man had put the now half-full bottle back down on the concrete terrace and Bodie wondered about it. After all, if it was socially acceptable in the déclassé world of football to use a bottle when Nature called when someone was about to score, why couldn’t Bodie do the same thing when he was about to score himself? Biting his lip, he conceded that wouldn’t work, a discreet pee being a lot less noticeable than some bloke standing there wanking. Of course, Doyle didn’t seem to be having any problems on that score: he didn’t seem to be having problems with scoring at all. Bodie shuffled from right foot to left, from left to right, and realised that not only was that not helping him any, he was doing it in rhythm with Doyle, who was draped over him like a flag, all droop and no zest—if you were to exclude what was going on under that greatcoat.
The crowd were making loud booings at the English back, while Doyle was making some loud noises into his personal Englishman’s back. He could feel himself on Bodie’s skin, the shirt and jacket tucked down over him to keep the heat in and to hold him snug and tight. Bodie’s skin was satin smooth, the shirt crisp cotton, contrast for his cock. He nibbled on Bodie’s neck, enjoying the taste of him, enjoying the smell of him—loving that he was doing this out in the open, in public, a huge crowd unwitting witnesses to him and Bodie. This was something he’d fantasized over many a night, picturing himself and Bodie, but never quite like this, with a crowd cheering them on…

He felt Doyle fall more heavily against him, felt the teeth nipping at him, fulfilling something he hadn’t dared even acknowledge, always making sure that Doyle thought the camping up and the goosing to be just good mates having a lark. Unless he was very much mistaken, he was about to have a lot more than a lark spilled down his back. He wiggled, bouncing on his feet as if he were trying to see over the short man in front of him, as if he were interested in the passing of the ball back and forth in front of him, when all he could think about was the passing of cock and balls behind him, lush and ripe and hot on his skin. His cock was fit to burst, aching to be touched, so he shoved his hands into his pocket, only to find that there wasn’t enough room in those tight cords to play pocket pool, not after all those plates of shortbread and Athole brose. He bounced a bit more, giving Doyle all the friction he needed, luxuriating in the play of cock across his skin and the only flanking play he was interested in was the game Doyle’s hands were playing with his arse. His own cock was threatening to split his cords, caught tight by the fabric and he was aching with the need that was being fed by the feel of Doyle all around him, Doyle muttering in his ear, Doyle lolling in ‘drunken’ proximity, Doyle hard against him, Doyle’s hands promising him where his cock would come later… A strangled groan bled from Bodie, as the same sound rose from this half of the ground. The mass were upset by the loss of action on the field, as control passed from the home side to the England squad, but Bodie didn’t even see that happen, his eyes glazed as his own control slipped perilously from his hands and into Doyle’s, as Bodie stood there, helplessly unable to touch himself, helplessly unable to resist the mounting pleasure.

Unfortunately, mounting was out of the question, although if it hadn’t been for the difference in their heights being compounded by the lay-out of the terraced stand, Doyle would probably have tried that. In that case, they should be thankful for small mercies and insurmountable difficulties. Still, Doyle thought it a pity that they couldn’t ball at the football: it would have been the cherry on top. Although, with his wealth of experience, it might be closer to the truth to say that the cherry would be on bottom…

The idea of Bodie being on bottom, fucked, set him on fire. He thrust harder, letting the heat of Bodie’s body stroke him, letting himself get closer to coming, letting Bodie feel every inch of him. He was promising Bodie what he’d be getting when they had the privacy to do it, showing him every fraction that would end up in his hole. He knew he was moaning, knew he was making a terrible racket, but so was everyone else. It sounded as if he might not be the only one about to score, nor the only one about to shoot for the goal. Another second and he’d be there, just another second…

The roar went up from the crowd as the cum went up Bodie’s back, drowning out Doyle’s shout of triumph. The burst of semen seared there, just another second…

Doyle, however, having regained his senses was calmly standing up, even if his knees were trembling. Casually, under cover of the coat, he tucked himself in, tugged Bodie’s shirt and jacket down, grinning as he thought of how itchy and sticky Bodie was going to be in about three seconds flat.

Right on the mark, Bodie started scratching at the icky patch on his back, where his shirt was sticking to him. “Give us the coat, Doyle,” he muttered, hands crossed in front of his trousers to hide the bulge, his face as morose as the disappointed football fans all round them.
“With my delicate health? Chance’d be a fine thing.”

“Doyle...” and he was just about jumping up and down on the spot, his cock making a display of itself, a tiny circle betraying where it was leaking pre-ejaculate. “Come on, Ray, don’t be a rotten sod.”

“Oh,” Doyle said, leaning forward to whisper into his ear, “I’ve no intention of being a rotten sod, Bodie. I fully plan on being a fan-fucking-tastic sod.”

A quick squeeze of Bodie’s buttock and then Doyle turned as if to leave, coming back to say one last thing, to have the last word in their old game that had covered new ground for them today. He nodded at the disaster on the pitch where the Scotland left-half had just kicked the ball back to a goalie who wasn’t there, then reached round and sneaked a surreptitious feel of Bodie’s trapped cock, “This is definitely the day for own goals, isn’t it, sunshine?”

And whistling, he made good his escape, doing a count-down in his mind: five more seconds and Bodie would be after him, chasing him all the way to the hotel. Where he fully intended to be caught, for by then he’d’ve recovered from his own goal and be ready to score again.
Bodie checked his cards again, frantically searching through a mis-spent youth full of card games to remember the rules of the refined art of bridge. Unfortunately, it was looking as if it wouldn’t matter one whit what he remembered—Doyle had never known anything in the first place to remember. They were relying on their undetectable patented shorthand, Bodie telling Doyle what to play and when, but as the level inside the decanter had fallen, so had Doyle’s comprehension, dropping rapidly to match Bodie’s skill at the game. A filthy chuckle from North startled him, making him lose track of the play for a second.

Mind you, he really didn’t know why he was even bothering trying to keep track of the game: if Doyle was rapidly succumbing to the wonderful world of alcoholic haze, then Cowley was quite rapidly succumbing to his own personal decanter of whisky. Which was, Bodie noted with a not altogether theatrical gulp, almost empty. Pity the poor liver, he thought to himself, as he did a quick action-replay of the day, cataloguing when and where they—meaning Cowley—had eaten and drunk. Lunch was supposed to have been at one, but that had been cancelled because of that bloody emergency security meeting. He really wished these people would get their timing right and at least wait until after he’d had a bite to eat. But instead, there had been all that information leaked by some turncoat inside the People’s Party...Something Grandiose and Important. There had been so many names and pseudonyms and changed titles flying round the meeting that he’d actually lost track of who was threatening whom. At least two European groups and one Irish group were currently after Cowley, which was more animosity than event that immovable mountain could ignore. It seemed that they were less than thrilled with the way Cowley had managed to put several political cells out of business before
the bombing season had even started. They seemed to think it just wasn’t cricket to stop them before they’d even been able to blow anything up. The fact that Cowley had been crowing over the coup like a well-laid rooster hadn’t exactly helped, either.

He grinned to himself, unnoticed by the increasingly befuddled occupants of the table. Missing lunch—and tea, now that he stopped to think about it—had been worth it, just to see Cowley’s face when the order—the order—had come from On High to assign himself a pair of minders, especially on tonight of all nights. He glanced, carefully inconspicuous, around the room, satisfying himself yet again that none of these few old farts still nodding over their nightcaps was capable of even peeing unassisted, let alone assassinating Cowley. And Cowley, he snickered into his own properly non-alcoholic—someone-had-to-stay-sober-on-duty drink, dour, unfappable Cowley, was getting well-oiled and letting all sorts of secrets slip out...

“Och, it was never like that,” he was saying now, interrupting Bodie’s train of thought. “Thon yin was never sly enough to pull the wool over my eyes like that, Allan.”

_Thon yin?_ Bodie thought to himself. _Thon yin?_ Cowley was getting seriously pickled if he was coming up with things like ‘thon yin’ instead of ‘that one’. If the old language was creeping back out, then perhaps a few juicy secrets would be as well...

“...but that’s not what happened, is it though, George?” was being said by the other man at the table, Cowley’s old friend from days of yore, Allan Jenkinson. Bodie looked at him carefully, trying yet again to place what it was that he recognised in the man. He knew that he didn’t actually know him, but there was something on the tip of his tongue… Jenkinson was a big man, making even Bodie feel a bit on the delicate side, inundated by ripples of muscle and excellent tailoring. His hair was greying now, but it had once been a rich auburn, all the red fading away with age, as it had with Cowley. He looked back and forth between the two friends, wondering about all the tales of derring-do he’d heard about their days in the organisation that didn’t even have a name.

Another helping of rich laughter, Cowley’s voice now deeper and far more Scots than any- one usually got to hear this many years into his exile South. “Oh, aye, he had us well an’ truly taken in, there’s no a doubt about that. But I’ll tell ye something,” Cowley said, leaning over to pat Bodie’s arm in the manner of a confidant, albeit a rather soused one. “Aye, I’ll tell ye something for nothing. The one that had us all fooled was this yin here. There’s me, stuck ahint the border in a country that’d give its eye-teeth to get their hands on me, an’ the only passport our lot’ve got is ane for a wumman. So they get me all dressed up like a dog’s dinner, wi’ all our contacts donating all sorts o’ wee bit bauchles, till I ended up lookin’ like somethin’ that belonged underneath the arches, not even on the streets!”

Doyle’s foot was nudging his under the table and Bodie suddenly found his cards absolutely fascinating, even if everyone else had forgotten theirs. He didn’t dare look up, for he knew that if he did, he’d burst out laughing and then he might never hear the end of what promised to be a story that he could get free drinks out of for a month. Murphy alone would keep him floating in beer just to hear what the Old Man had looked like tonight, with his tie pulled askew and his hair all over the place. He sensed Doyle’s own rising hysteria and vowed not to look. He could feel Ray staring at him, willing him to look up, to let them share the joke. But he didn’t dare. He was perilously close to losing all semblance of control and one of them had to stay on duty until Lucas and McCabe showed up at midnight to take over the obbo from the boring safety of their car.

He wasn’t going to look, didn’t matter how much Doyle fidgeted or wiggled or willed him, he wasn’t going to look. Not when Cowley was getting to the good bits...

“I mean, c’n you credit that? Me, doin’ thon, an’ in public, all dickied up to within an inch o’ my life? But it gets worse, doesn’t, Allan you sly devil, you. He waits until we’re oan the train, a matter o’ hours yet afore we c’n get aff in a place where they’re no after my guts for garters. We’re locked up in wan o’ thon tiny wee cabins they call sleepers, wi’ wan bed. We were baith fair worn out, so we agreed to squeeze ousrel’s intae this wee bit bed. So there I am, still wi’ this wig an’ a’ the rest on, when this yin here decides tae tell me that he’s a poof.”
Jenkinson was chuckling into his claret, remembering the incident with obvious glee. Bodie could hear the muffled laughter coming from Doyle, the last remnants of sobriety obviously keeping him from yielding completely to utter hilarity. He could just picture how Doyle would be looking, knew that expression from old and he knew, too, what would happen if he dared give in to temptation and let himself look. He wasn’t going to look, he wasn’t going to look, he was going to just keep on listening to Cowley, filing it all away and not stopping the flow of true confessions by falling apart at the seams. He was not going to remind Cowley that he was with two of his agents. There was no way on God’s green earth that he was going to risk shutting Cowley up, not now. And he absolutely, unequivocally and irrefutably was not going to look at Ray.

That was when he felt the foot that had been nudging his slither up to tickle at his knee. He bit the inside of his mouth. He stared at the table. He took a deep breath. He pretended to play a card in a game that had been abandoned by everybody else, and most of all, he willed Doyle to pack it in and Cowley to keep on going. At least part of his prayers was answered.

“So I’m lyin’ there, my backside hinging out the bed, rigid wi’ fear that this hulkin’ great lummox had designs on my virtue…”

“Oh, never your virtue, George. Just your bum!”

“Aye, an’ the way your hands were wanderin’, I was beginnin’ tae think ye might end up gettin’…”

“Getting you in the end, eh, George? I know it was wicked of me, but it was worth it just to see the expression on your face! I’ve never seen anyone blush so red, never! And when I put my arm around you to stop you from falling out of bed when we were coming into that station…”

Cowley spluttered, the whisky trying hard to do the impossible: go down the wrong way when a Scotsman is the one doing the drinking. “I nearly jumped right out o’ my skin, didn’t I? First time in ma whole life I actually screamed, och, but it was funny, now that I’m lookin’ back on it. No’ tae mention,” an all-embracing sweep of his hand showed off the grandeur of his clothes, so appropriate for the occasion, “dressed like a woman.”

That was almost Bodie’s undoing; Cowley, as befitted this being Burn’s Night, was wearing his kilt.

Then something happened that was Bodie’s undoing: the foot that had been tickling his knee slipped higher. A lot higher. So high, in fact, that Doyle was in extreme danger of becoming extremely indiscreet. As Bodie determinedly controlled himself, the foot continued perilously upwards, no longer in danger of becoming indiscreet, but actually being so. The only danger, Bodie realised, was if Doyle tickled him now, Bodie was liable to end up in a most embarrassing situation. Which is what the wicked little toad has in mind, Bodie thought to himself, knowing his partner only too well. Bodie, hanging on every incriminating and sotten word that was pouring from Cowley’s mouth, glanced over at Doyle, expecting to meet an expression that matched his for amusement.

Instead, he found that Doyle was staring at him with a hunger usually reserved for stacked blondes. Obviously, Doyle had decided that here in Cowley’s stuffy club with Cowley’s old friend who happened to be gay and a horde of terrorists possibly outside the door waiting to twep their beloved boss, it was the perfect time and place to indulge in one of their endless games of camping, of one-upmanship to see who would chicken-out first. Doyle, his bloody partner, was looking at him as if he were prime beef still on the hoof. And Cowley, his bloody boss, that bastion of normalcy, was red-faced and laughing, Jenkinson hanging onto his arm like a limp-wristed wall-flower.

Doyle’s bare foot pressed into his crotch, massaging him like a hand, daring him to back down or up the ante, sense of humour let loose by too much booze. It occurred to him, in the surreal reality of this situation, to wonder how—and why—Doyle had got his shoe off. Of course, the rational part of his mind gibbered at him, trying to deny the bizarreness of the evening: Doyle’d been wearing those new leather mocassin things he’d found in Sacha’s. They’d be easily enough slipped off. And he’d been fidgeting enough all night to have worked a sock off without anyone being any the wiser. Bodie was just assuming that the sock was gone—it seemed the kind of thing the hedonistically wicked bastard would do, all the better to be able to get
Bodie going enough for Bodie to embarrass himself thoroughly. Another one of Doyle’s bloody jokes, one that would get Bodie in trouble but leave Doyle to come up smelling like roses.

The little bastard never tired of dropping him right in it, did he? Although that was patently clear the way Doyle was getting at him like an amorous octopus—octoped?—so that he’d wind up leaping six feet into the air, squealing about having his virtue attacked while the boss was sitting there relating the same story and with the man who had played that particular joke on Cowley also sitting there as innocent as a newborn babe. And Bodie would make his protests and Cowley would land on him for making stupid jokes at the expense of his friend and Doyle would sit there nice as bloody ninepend, laughing himself sick. Typical bloody Doyle joke...

Bodie glanced over at his partner, taking in the flushed cheeks and bright eyes, not to mention the ostentatiously fatuous ‘I really fancy you, darling’ look on his face. He shifted slightly, wondering if Doyle was still sober enough to have any idea of the risk of what he was doing, or if the idiot hadn’t got past the fun of making his partner squirm in front of Cowley.

Toes flexed against him, the rounded ball of foot pressing into his balls, perfect pressure under the table. No, the stupid prat didn’t know. The idiot was just tickling him the way he’d been doing before, trying to make him laugh and since he wasn’t laughing, Doyle would just get more outrageous until Bodie made a bigger fool of himself. Well, maybe he’d teach Doyle a lesson, the little prickleaste. Turn the table, turn the joke back on him, the way they always pounced around until someone cried ‘uncle’. Yeh, that’s what he’d do.

He looked up, to let Doyle catch the matching glint of humour in his own eyes, to let him know that he knew what the joke was and that the game had nothing to do with bridge, not now. The foot moved again, until its instep was lifting his balls up to be held tightly by his trousers, Doyle’s toes burrowing between his cheeks, teasing and taunting and promising. Bodie gulped: he’d never expected Doyle to take the joke this far. It was one thing for them to goose each other, the way he’d been doing all week since that bloody gun had been nicked. He felt a bit of outrage rise in him when he thought about the very old-fashioned looks he’d been getting from Doyle, for doing things like pinching him when they were boarding Brownie’s boat or when Cowley had been driving away when they’d been talking to ‘Forensics’ after the geriatric car had been blown to bits. And here was the little prick trying to press his pants up his arse with his toes, and playing with his cock and balls, all with Cowley looking on. Oh, unfair, Raymond my lad, he thought, that’s just not on.

But he wouldn’t think about just why it was bothering him so much, wouldn’t let himself acknowledge it was anything more than a natural genital reaction to direct stimulation that was getting him hard. He’d had that reaction before, on bikes and that time he’d gone riding out in the country with Doyle and those two girls. Just his brainless cock thinking for him, that was all. Just a joke getting out of hand, and he’d turn it on Doyle, he’d teach Doyle to tease him like this. Yeh, he’d teach Doyle to give him a taste of something he was too scared to admit he wanted; then he could hide it away again, where he could pretend it didn’t exist. For once he admitted he wanted it, it would kill him to have to work beside Doyle day after day after day and never touch more than as a mate messing around for a joke.

Yeh. He’d definitely show Doyle. And that way he could concentrate so fiercely on it that he’d never even see why his heart was beginning to ache harder than his balls were. His eyes went cold, the way they always did when he was going to pretend that it was all in fun, but was actually going for the jugular. He remembered his face feeling like this, this same set expression, when he’d been toying with Preston’s wife. He shifted violently, crossing his legs, displacing Doyle’s foot from its cosy reconnoitring of his cock. Face cold, he looked up, ready to kill Doyle with his own hurtful joke.

And got the shock of his life instead. Doyle’s eyes were at half-mast, his mouth half open, shirt half undone, debauchery-in-waiting. This was not the kind of look one expected to see on one of Her Majesty’s agents, but then again, this muzzled haziness was not what one expected on Cowley’s face either. Flustered, Bodie looked away from the people at his table, taking in the rest of the room, suddenly feeling like a waif in
a Fellini film—a film that Fellini had made while definitely under the influence. The four of them at the table were now the only people in the room, the others either departed or finally nodded off and snoring with polite quietude in their high backed winged chairs. There wasn’t even a member of staff around to lend some credence of reality to a situation that was making him as dizzy as the booze had obviously made his other three bridge partners. Casually, he glanced back up at Doyle, no longer at all sanguine as to what he was going to find. He was prepared for either the familiarly filthy chuckle with an expression that proclaimed ‘gotcha!’, or for a look that would have made Marge Harper run for the bedroom, whips and garters in hand.

He got, instead, the truly baffling sight of a drunken Doyle rapidly composing himself, visibly willing sobriety back in to the wine cellar his brain had become.

“Ray?”

He was ignored, Cowley swapping tales with Jenkinson, Doyle too busy shuffling cards and fidgeting. He was, Bodie realised, putting his shoe back on. It ran through his mind that Doyle was going to be embarrassed as hell, having to leave with one sock on and one sock off. It was, after all, one thing to prepare oneself to play footsie under the table, but quite another to hide the evidence thereafter. Smugly pleased with himself, he tallied up the running score they had of who had out-brazened whom in their recurring game of teasing each other. Checking his watch, he was even more pleased to note that it was twenty to two, which meant that shortly Lucas would be outside, sitting in a chilly, stuffy car and he’d be able to go home. Not to mention get Doyle into the car and crow about how he’d won this particular little skirmish. He grinned to himself, knowing full well that Doyle would sulk and huff for a while, but then they’d start the game all over again.

He could afford to be magnanimous, for after all, he’d won.

On the verge of looking up again, he thought that over again. He’d won, by doing precisely nothing. Not like Doyle to just give in like that, without so much as a dirty joke or a last ditch effort to go that last step beyond anything Bodie had the brass neck to do.

And there was that look on Doyle’s face. Bodie turned it over and over in his mind, examining it, trying to pigeon-hole it into a nice tidy little box. It didn’t fit, not one of them. Oh, he knew the look of arousal, had seen it often enough when they’d double-dated, but... Wait a minute. He had seen it before, that time, what, a couple of months ago, when they’d ended up taking both their birds back to Doyle’s because Bodie had just been forced to flit again by the sadists who ran Accommodations. He’d caught that look on Doyle’s face when they’d all been in the living room together. He’d been on the sofa with his girl, kissing her, her skirt up around her waist, her legs around his hips and Doyle had been on the other settee, his own girl wrapped around him like a second skin. But Doyle had been staring, eating Bodie alive with his eyes. At the time, Bodie’d simply stared back, feasting equally on the eroticism of seeing Doyle so close to having sex. He’d even caught a glimpse of Doyle’s hard-on, before Doyle’s blonde had had a fit of the coys and dragged him off upstairs. But that’s where he’d seen that look before, the night when Doyle had been staring at him while making love to someone else.

No. The night when Doyle had been staring at him while he was using someone else’s body to make love to Bodie. That’s what that look was.

“Fucking hell!”

Even Cowley straightened his drunken sight to look at him for that one. “I beg you pardon, Bodie?” he muttered, voice thicker than whisky ever was.

“Em, nothing, sir. Just sort of, well, slipped out, sir.”

“Which is more than we can say for that night I tried to get you to come back to my flat with me, eh, George?” Jenkinson said. “Oh, George, George,” he went on, in the best Pirates of Penzance voice Bodie had heard in years, “when will you make my heart glad and come live with me a life of debauchery and sin?”

“Ach, Allan, you know fine well we’d never be happy thegither. I mean, man, how could I ever leave my beloved for you?”

If he’d had the attention to spare, Bodie would have fallen off his chair in shock at the sight of Cowley camping it up. It was obviously true what they said about the Scottish sense of humour then—they only let it show after you’d known...
them at least 5 years, and then only on Burn’s Night and other state occasions. But he was, despite the danger of injury when Murphy found out what he’d missed, too concerned by what he’d just realised about Doyle.

It wasn’t a game any more. If it ever had been, he acknowledged. If it had ever been just mess- ing about and nothing more, nothing less. He was beginning to realise just how much more it had been, and just how much less they had been settling for. Think, he shouted at himself, in the privacy of his own skull, think! Ray wants me. Really wants me. Not just fiddling about in the dark, or playing silly tricks under the table. Ray wants me.

The question is, do I want him?

His cock twitched, lonely, reminding him of where Doyle had touched him. He was still warm there, from the blood that had flooded him with Ray’s…caresses. Caresses. He touched the word in his own mind, trying it on, seeing how it felt to think of it as being caressing between them, not goosing or cupping a quick feel or trying it on for a joke. Caressing. Him, caressing Doyle. Ray, caressing him. His cock twitched again, putting in its tuppenceworth on the subject of Ray Doyle and caresses.

Bodie looked longingly at the claret that still twinkled merrily in the decanter, wishing it was good it had felt to have Doyle touching him like this. Unless, of course, your partner fancied you just as much but had the balls to do something about it. He uncrossed his legs, sitting slightly asplay, thinking about just how good it had felt to have Doyle touching him like that. Definitely. He definitely wanted more. As soon as they were off duty, he’d take Doyle home, have a drink with him, tell him he knew what Doyle was after and that...

An abrupt movement from across the table startled him, drawing him away from his rosy and ever-so tidy plans. Doyle, sitting there, with a face like fizz, temper thundering away under the surface. Oh, shite, he’d forgotten how it must have looked to Ray, what with him suddenly crossing his legs and shoving him off and then swearing and then going off into his own little world. By now, Ray would have worked himself up into a fine temper, him not being one to suffer with the meekness of a born pacifist. Oh, no, his Ray was much more likely to lash out and decapitate anyone who had been stupid enough to hurt him. Of course, he’d go on a guilt trip for a month afterwards, but that wasn’t exactly a clarion of comfort to the poor sod whose head was bouncing in the gutter. And if he, Bodie, didn’t do something and bloody quick at that, it’d be his head bouncing in the gutter and Doyle storming off to have a good fit of depression.

But what the hell was he supposed to say? When Ray got started like this, you could beg forgiveness and all he’d do would be to prolong the agony for your cheek. Nothing you could say would be right, all of it just more faggots on the fire of Doyle’s righteous indignation, to keep him warm until the chill of pain could wear off. Christ, but look at the set of that jaw! Bodie, wasn’t being rejected.

So if he couldn’t say something, he’d have to do something. And they say that lovers always do what they want done to themselves, so he’d just heel his shoes off and play footsie with Doyle, doing unto him as he had done unto others and... He was wearing lace-ups, brand new, tight lace-ups. The only way he’d get them off would be if he were to go under the table and undo them, and even Cowley, soused as he was,
would notice that. ‘What are you doing?’ he’d be asked, and he didn’t much fancy having to answer, ‘Making arrangements to seduce Doyle into sodomy and fellatio, sir.’ Although judging by the tolerance being shown to old Jenkinson, that might not be the problem he’d always thought it would be. But even if Cowley let him off with that, Doyle’d brain him, thinking it was just an utterly nasty joke, mocking him for his attraction.

He stared at Doyle, willing his partner to look at him, as Doyle had done to him earlier. The difference, this time, was that Doyle responded, glowering with all the ire at his command, which was about equal to the entire NATO forces, if Bodie were any judge. Refusing to bow before the fury, he let it show on his face that he wasn’t messing about any more, and that there was more than a little heat in him too, although it had nothing to do with anger. He reached out with both of his well-shod feet, ignoring Doyle’s attempt to pull away, trapping Ray’s right foot, rubbing clumsily. But the message was getting through. He could see it, as the suspicion was born amidst the temper. Could almost see the thoughts written in the green eyes.

Funny, he noticed inconsequentially, how green Ray’s eyes go in dim light like this. You’d expect them to end up all washed-out grey, but they don’t. Probably temper, making his eyes so green. And he has got sexy eyes, hasn’t he? Makes me think of what he’d be like in bed, every time I see his eyes so green. Want to see if they’re that colour when he’s coming…

Those green eyes were staring back at him, suspicion and temper both damping down, being banked and then all the heat allowed to go out of them. Bodie felt the shoe his feet were squeezing go soft and hollow, then there was heat on him, softness and hardness grazing him, following the curves of the muscles on his leg. The eyes were still watching him, warily, while the foot was caressing him, warmly. Both promise and denial, in the touch and in the look, a warning that Doyle would ram his tonsils out his arse if Bodie were just winding him up.

Fanning the cards out, Bodie made great show of mixing them, picking them up, shuffling them, keeping up a display of mundanity while his whole world changed. Jenkinson was talking, telling scurrilous tales of past friends, while Cowley laughed and made sure, with unexpected gentleness, that Allan knew that his attitude hadn’t changed, that there would be no seduction between them. And all the while, Bodie sat there, making sure that Doyle knew that his attitude had changed and that there would be a seduction here, albeit mutual.

The foot was kneading his groin again, strong toes pressing him just so. He looked at Doyle, made sure that Ray was held by his gaze, and then he shifted in his seat, echoing the move he’d made before, but trapping Ray this time, his crossed legs holding Doyle tight against him whilst the arousal grew. He could see it in Ray’s eyes as it registered that Bodie was getting hard, his cock pulsing up underneath the arch of Doyle’s foot. He spared a thought for how the hell they were going to get out of this room and into the car without someone noticing that he had a pole playing tents in his trousers. He decided he’d worry about that later. All he was concerned about for the moment was reeling Ray in, hooking him, making sure that the anger was erased by arousal.

That, and not being caught by Cowley.

Doyle flexed his foot, and Bodie flexed his spine as pleasure flooded through him, all of it radiating from the taut pressure on his cock, and from the hardness of Doyle’s heel pushing against his balls, sweet, sweet pressure. He shifted again, trying to rub himself a bit more, trying for more contact, more stimulation. Doyle grinned at him, wickedly, with humour, but mainly with lust. The foot slid along him, hard, the inward curve of arch withdrawing until it was the outward curve of instep, and the lasciviousness of toes teasing at his arsehole. He’d never regretted anything so much in his life as sitting there in public with Doyle out of reach. All he wanted now was to grab him and fuck them both into oblivion. He didn’t care where, not any more. Didn’t matter if it were in his own bed, Doyle’s bed or some bed in a shop window, but he wanted this man. And for far more than playing footsie with beneath a game of bridge. Not even Cowley sitting beside him, blue eyes awash in whisky, mattered compared to the need he had for the promise in those green eyes to be fulfilled.

But Doyle was looking away now, saying something in reply to a comment from
Jenkinson and leaving Bodie with nothing but
the enflaming pleasure of that sure touch of foot
 teasing at the zip of his trousers. And that was
when Bodie realised that it wouldn’t be enough
just to have the body: he wanted the man, too.
He wanted the personality, wanted the passion,
wanted to possess more than just flesh, gorge-
ous though that flesh surely must be. It was
so much less, with Doyle turned away from him,
and he had to find a way to get him back.

He checked the table, working out trajecto-
ries and remaining unclaimed space beneath
it. It would be disastrous to miscalculate and
get Cowley, but Jenkinson was just the type to
say nothing and then take him up on his ‘offer’
when he least wanted him to. Leaning back in
his seat, ever so casually, he stretched his leg
out, his knee pressing into Ray’s inner thigh.
He poured another drink for Cowley, wanting
the man well and truly pickled, so that nothing
that happened here could ever be used to black-
mail him into some job he really didn’t want to
do—such as the Balmoral duty that was com-
ing up next month. A fate worse than death,
that, to be stuck out in the middle of Scottish
countryside with Doyle right beside him and not
able to touch. For he knew, quite categorically,
that by the time next month rolled in, he and
Ray would be what the Americans called ‘an
item’. He liked the sound of that, the way it made
it seem that they were a single unit. Just like
the professional partnership, really, carrying
over into the private. Doyle squirmed a bit as
Bodie rubbed him with the hard roundness of
his knee, returning a little of the teasing Doyle
had been giving him. Feral, Bodie grinned across
the table, waiting for Doyle to look up. Green
eyes met his, and Bodie’s breath stilled.

He was being eaten alive, mouthful by mouth-
ful, by that gaze. Doyle said nothing, could say
nothing, not where they were, but it was a tan-
gible certainty between them, just precisely what
was going to be done to Bodie. Ray licked his
lips, white teeth nipping delicately on lower lip,
tongue tip coming out to catch a droplet of sweat.
Bodie gulped, gasping like a guttered fish, his
cock threatening his zip, as Doyle threatened
his sanity. Christ, but he had to have him. Now.
Not later, not in half an hour, not when they
were safely in the privacy of someone’s flat. He’d
settle for down the back of the bushes in the
garden, or on the stairs. Glancing at Cowley’s
drunken laughter, he decided he’d even settle
for under the table. And if Doyle didn’t stop
pressing his arch against him like that, there
was a good chance that he’d be coming under
the bridge game itself. Floundering for distrac-
tion, he heaved a sigh of relief when his RT went,
McCabe’s tinny voice informing him, with ill
grace, that they were outside and in position.

Bodie would kill to be in position right then
and there. He’d kill to be thrust up to his balls
in Doyle’s arse, or rammed down to the tonsils
in Doyle’s throat: he wasn’t fussy, not any more.
He’d even settle for sitting right here and com-
ing in his trousers, as long as he could do it
quietly enough for no-one to notice. But, with
McCabe outside, it meant that he could drag
Doyle off somewhere and fuck him blind. Al-
ways providing he could stand up without cut-
ting off the circulation to somewhere very,
very important to him at this moment in time.

Jenkinson, drunk enough to have long since
left discretion behind, looked at them both with
eyes bright with vicarious desire. “Listen, you
two,” he whispered, leaning forward, scattering
the forgotten bones of their game, “I don’t stand
a chance with old Cross-legged Cowley here, but
if I did, and I didn’t want to have to wait until I
could get him home, I’d take him up onto the
third floor, to the gents. No-one goes there but
the likes of me and thee, so you’re safe enough,
especially at this hour of the night.”

The men’s toilet wasn’t exactly the romantic
trysting spot of the year, but at least he could
get there without coming. He hoped...
Jenkinson’s words had barely been uttered be-
fore Bodie had grabbed Ray by the wrist, drag-
ging him to his feet—his still half-shod feet—
and hauling him away from there, cards float-
ing off like butterflies behind them, and Cowley,
ready to sting like a bee. Bodie caught sight of
the look out of the corner of his eye, and it sud-
denly hit him, just what a fool he had been.
Cowley, the wiliest of all the old foxes, getting
stinking drunk, when there were several ter-
rorist cells after him? Christ, but maybe he did
need a refresher course with Macklin, if he had
thought that. On the threshold, he hesitated,
glancing back at the man who had seconded
him out of the SAS before his CO could wreak
havoc on him for his ‘insubordination’, and saw
the slow, sly smile. He swallowed, hard. The last time the Old Man had turned a blind eye to something as major as this, he had ended up joining CI5. God help him this time.

But then Doyle bumped up against him, hard cock nudging at Bodie’s arse, hot breath tickling the back of his neck. All thoughts of the future fled him, leaving him with nought but the moment, and Ray. Without speaking, they got on the lift, waiting until the doors had shut before they fell on each other, hands shuddering under clothes, mouths sucking on skin, cocks grinding together. With a sickening lurch, the lift stopped, then settled and shifted a bit, its old bones creaking before the doors opened on a corridor dim and musty, smelling of the ages and of polish, rich wood gleaming under the brass lights and the small-paned windows. There was a sign, beckoning them discreetly with its promise of privacy, and it was Doyle who led them as they hastened towards the gents.

Inside, it was a vision from a time gone past, when Empire ruled and ostentation was second only to quality. Marble pillars, malachite and slate coloured, soared up to the ceiling; gilded mirrors hung above brass-appointed marble sinks. There was a mahogany screen for gentlemen to hide behind whilst they adjusted their carved false teeth or trimmed their moustaches. The cubicles—large enough even for a lady in a hooped skirt, if women had ever been admitted to this club, let alone to the public toilets—had bowls of fine white porcelain and overhead cisterns of marble to match the pillars. Even the pull chains were works of art, formed as Gordian knots, with Medusa heads as handles.

The door swung shut behind them, shutting out the modern world and cocooning them in their own world with all the fineries of the past. Getting there had given Bodie time to catch his breath, and his thoughts. His hands, when he took hold of Doyle, were gentle, encouraging rather than demanding, kind instead of dominant. He dropped light kisses on heavy curls, his hands framing Doyle’s face, one thumb stroking softly over the damaged cheekbone.

Doyle put his hand firmly on the centre of Bodie’s chest, where the shirt buttons were undone and the skin gleamed faintly in the light from the wall sconces. Startled, Bodie yielded to the pressure, backing off in the face of the leashed fury on Doyle’s. “You can pack that crap in right now, Bodie. I’m not one of your birds, and if you treat me like a woman, you stupid sod, I’ll cut your balls off and feed them to you for breakfast. You got that?”

As the hand on his chest lowered, grabbing him through his trousers in a grip that was thrillingly strong, Bodie grinned. He’d always liked the lack of softness when it was man to man, always liked the fact that he didn’t have to hold back. And by the look of him, Doyle was more than his match. A tiny tube of vaseline lip salve was shoved at him, and words with it. “Get that on you, mate.” Doyle hissed at him, stopping long enough to bite-kiss him, his free hand massaging Bodie’s cock through fabric. “You’ll need it for where you’re going.”

Bodie yanked his trousers open, shoving them and underwear down and out of the way, to cling, cloying, at his knees. It didn’t matter, for his cock was free, bobbing blindly, searching for somewhere nice to bury itself. Doyle was watching, tongue wetting his lips, as Bodie wet his cock with the glistening gel. “Get your fucking clothes out of the way,” Bodie said, one hand on his cock, the other tangling in Doyle’s hair, “get your sodding clothes out of the way so I can fuck you.”

The trousers were pushed down, and there was no underwear to mar Bodie’s first sight of Doyle, hard, rising up to tap at his belly, cock red and long, the very tip of the head peeking out from the heavy cowl of foreskin. Bodie’s hand was rough on him as Doyle was turned, abruptly, without ceremony, to face the paneled wall. Knees came between his, to spread him, as he had so many criminals and hard men in his day. It was a delectable game between them, one allowing a soupçon of submission, the other allowing a dash of dominance to spice this encounter up far beyond the usual fare.

Doyle’s buttocks clenched and hollowed, as he gyrated them, a wanton begging for despoilment. But nothing could ever spoil this moment, Bodie thought, hands glittering with gel palming Doyle’s round arse. His thumbs sank between the cheeks, and Ray arched backwards, spreading his buttocks, displaying himself to Bodie’s hunger. The pink hole waited, winking coyly with every swivel of Doyle’s hips. So Bodie
impaled him with his finger, holding him still, fingering him while the muscle loosened. A second finger, now held rigid, racing in and out, making the muscle gape with need and Doyle whimper with impatience.

Positioning himself, Bodie used one hand to steady Doyle, the other to steady himself as he pressed his cock home. A stifled scream of sheer pleasure ripped from Ray’s throat as Bodie shoved himself in, and Bodie heard himself echo it. He wasn’t much taller than Ray, but it was enough. As he thrust upwards, Ray was lifted up onto his toes. And if Bodie thrust hard enough, if Bodie let the lust carry him, each forward snap of his hips lifted Ray up off his feet, until it was Bodie’s strength, Bodie’s cock that was supporting him.

Face pressed against the panelling, hands flat and white on the wood, Bodie thought he’d never seen anyone so beautiful as Doyle was at that moment, transformed by the rapture of having Bodie up him. He couldn’t last, not seeing Ray like that, not with Ray’s body so hot and tight around him. But he wanted to bring Ray with him, wanted to time it so that it would happen all at once. His right hand clenched itself around Ray’s cock, pumping him hard and fast, as his own cock was doing to Ray’s arse, filling him, leaving him empty, only to ram back up him. Rough, certainly rough, but all the better for the trust between them that they could let passion have its rein. He was biting Ray’s shoulder, could taste the skin and feel the bone, while his cock was buried so deep, he couldn’t feel anything at all at the tip, save the channel that led straight up to Ray’s heart. He thrust again, and again, hand flying, body soaring, as he pumped and pulsed deep inside Ray, the whiteness of his cum lighting up Ray’s insides.

Sated, they leaned there, neither one of them able or willing to move, until Bodie finally turned Ray round, lowering the curly head until Ray’s mouth was sucking on his nipples, a softly sweet reprise of the pleasure that had thundered through him.

Ray straightened up in front of him, taking Bodie’s face between his hands exactly as Bodie had done to him earlier. “Time for gentleness now,” he said, voice hoarse in the aftermath. “Now that I know you’re not going to treat me as if I’m fragile. I’m not the little woman to be left at home, Bodie. I’m your partner, and it’s me who guards your back when we’re on the streets. You patronise me, Bodie, and you won’t see me for dust.”

“Didn’t mean to patronise you, Ray. Just like a bit of kissing and cuddling as well as the rough stuff, that’s all. Anyway, patronise—you? Sooner chance my arm with Macklin.”

“As long as you’ve got the message, then…” And Bodie was kissed, with such tenderness and love that it made him dizzy. Being tall and broad, being a hard man, the ex-merc, ex-SAS sergeant, no-one had ever cherished him completely, but he’d never been made to feel so small and safe and serene. Tenderness was drawn from him, slowly, to feed Doyle, who fed it back to him, soothing him, elating his spirit the way the sex had elated his body.

He could definitely, definitely, get addicted to this. In fact, as the kiss finally ended, he already was. He leaned forward, unhurried, for another kiss, and then another, stopping only when they were both so cold that dressing had become a necessity. Bodie shocked himself almost into running, when he realised what he was doing: holding Doyle by the hand whilst using one of the soft cotton towels to wipe the seeping cum—his own—cum—from Ray’s bum and thighs. He’d never been so far gone in his life, not even when he’d been a teenager caught in the first insane throes of love.

It took quite some time, despite the cold, to get dressed again, for there were so many lonely little places that just had to be touched or kissed or held, but eventually, they were decent again. Apart, that is, from Doyle’s left foot. Which was naked, markedly so. Whose sock and shoe were still lying, in mutely snickering knowledge, under the bridge table downstairs.

Bodie looked down at the bare foot, then back up at Doyle. “We could always say that you had this really chronic case of athlete’s foot and had to take your shoes off.”

“On doctor’s orders, you mean?”

“Yeh. I mean, it’s only McCabe who’s out there, it’s not like it’s Murphy, or someone with a brain, is it? Lucas and McCabe, they’d fall for a story like that. Wouldn’t they?”
“Probably. If it wasn’t for the fact that you,” he ran a finger round the perfect outline of Bodie’s lips, “look like you’ve just had a lovely time and I look like I’ve just been shoved up against a wall and fucked legless.”

“Pity I didn’t fuck you footless, that would’ve solved the problem, wouldn’t it?”

There was a very discreet tap at the door, followed by an even more discreet cough. Footsteps—from someone who was wearing two shoes—faded down the corridor, disappearing into the geriatric lift. With raised eyebrow and a glance of shared suspicion with Doyle, Bodie opened the door with suitable caution. Nice as ninepence and considerably more expensive, lay Doyle’s shoe, black sock tucked tidily inside. Bodie looked at the shoe, gloomily, then at Doyle, gloomily.

“He’s got us by the short and curlies, you do know that, don’t you?”

“Who has?”

“As if you don’t know! Cowley, of course. The old bugger’s up to something, Ray, and we’re the ones who’re going to end up to our armpits in shite, if I know him. He’s really got us this time.”

“That a fact?” Doyle muttered, unconcernedly sitting down in the middle of the corridor to don his abandoned footwear. “You really think he’s got us where he wants us, cos we, members of the security forces that we are, had sex in a public place?”

“Oh, and you think he hasn’t? Listen, Ray, last time he got me like this, he got me into CI5. He’s already got me body and soul, what the fuck does that leave for this time?”

A grin of wicked delight, and a micro-cassette tossed in the air. “Leaves us this, doesn’t it? A bit of judicial editing of our illustrious leader’s confab with old Fairy Godmother Jenkinson shall make all our dreams come true—and Cowley’ll be offering us holidays for a year, won’t he?”

“With pay, you little genius,” Bodie scrooged, rubbing his hands in glee. “And overtime. With expenses...”
GUINEA TO A GOOSEBERRY

Guinea to a gooseberry is a reference to long odds. Here it refers to the chance for a happy ending after the stormy finish to “A Summer’s Outing.” Yes, yes, the Glaswegian swears up and down that she hates to do sequels and happily—ever—afters; you’d be a fool to believe everything she says. Devices and Desires picks up the story about ten years later. This places it in the late ’80s—a very different world from the decade before, as you shall see...

DEVICES AND DESIRES

M. FAE GLASGOW

For his own good—who were they trying to kid? For his own good—fat bloody chance. If this was supposed to help lower his blood pressure, then it looked like it was going to be a complete waste of time—not to mention money. He was leaning on the railing, watching with abstract anger as the dockers unleashed the ship, setting it free to sail upon the blue sea. It was a glorious day, hot sun blessing him after the dankness of an English spring, cloudless sky of deepest blue, pretty hillside villages of the picture-postcard variety, but instead of easing his tension, all of it was just adding to his simmering fury.

He didn’t want to be here—he really didn’t want to be here. It was absurd, typical bloody bureaucratic crap to order him off on holiday—after all, if Cowley, at his age and with his duff leg could keep up with the work load, then it was downright stupid to send a man half his age and the picture of health off on some useless holiday. His body had more sense than his head, though, choosing that moment to send a twinge of pain across his chest, an unnerving reminder that all was not well, regardless of his protestations of the opposite. Absently, he rubbed at his chest, unable to ignore the pain or to forget the day it had happened. Funny—it was the one time his strenuous excising of Bodie failed him. He invariably had that moment of doubt, of wondering if it would have been different if he and Bodie had still been partners, if Bodie had been there to watch his back. Death had almost got him that time: another half inch and he would’ve been dead before he hit the floor. Or if disturbed by the banging and the thumping, that old bat who lived downstairs hadn’t gathered her ire to her large bosom and come upstairs to moan at him about the noise he was making, only to find his door open and him lying in an ever-widening puddle of rich, heart-red blood. If only...

But rubbish like that wouldn’t get him anywhere, would it? He prowled along the deck, neatly sidestepping white-jacketed stewards, scowling at their professional smiles, keeping a predatory eye on a nicely turned buttock or well-filled crotch. It was the one good thing about this holiday, he supposed, grudgingly conceding even a modicum of benefit to this farce. Good looking men everywhere he looked, and if they weren’t available, they were at least just as bent as he was. Rounding a corner, he stopped, propping himself against the railings, staring at the cornucopia of flesh displayed in front of him.

The pool—another stupid idea, he thought, considering they were in a bloody boat floating on a bloody sea—was already beginning to fill with gambolling men too anxious to start their holiday to even wait until they had cleared the harbour proper. Scraps of red and black and white dived and surfaced, precariously wrapped around lean hips, genitals perfectly delineated, there for anyone who chose to window shop before deciding what to take home. Laughter was rising, a little self-conscious, the over-loud enthusiasm of the newly released. The whole thing reminded him of the seconds after the bell rang to signal the end of term and roiling hordes of
youth would cheer the onset of freedom for a whole summer. The difference this time, of course, that the freedom here, the release here was from the strictures of societies that barely tolerated their sort, frowning on them if they did anything so uncouth as to display affection for each other in public. But here, on this particular ship, with this particular shipping line, there were no such constrictions.

An exceedingly Adonis-like steward gave him the eye and Doyle wondered if everyone on this bloody boat was gay. And if they were? He took his white jacket off, rolling his shirt sleeves up, tugging his silver bracelet back into place over a wrist that was, like the rest of him, too pale. Face turned to the sun, he considered what it would mean if everyone on this ship were gay. No coming across someone who disapproved. No-one asking if he were married yet. No-one wondering why he was still a bachelor. No-one to pat his hand and assure him that not to worry, he’d meet the right girl one day. In other words, no explanations to be given, no excuses to be made. For once, every single person he met would assume the truth and not bat an eyelid over it. And there would be no minor skirmishes engendered by him proving to straight people that he was just as much a man as they, or just as good as they, or just as undeserving of discrimination.

There was, he conceded, a slim chance that this holiday might actually be good for him after all, especially after the exceedingly vicious battle with the new Minister. He felt the nip of the sun on his nose and recognised that if he weren’t careful, he’d end up doing nothing more on this holiday than lying in his cabin covered with camomile lotion. So down to his cabin then, off with his light-weight suit, on with the suntan lotion and then back up on deck.

His suitcases were already stacked neatly in his cabin, with a list of ship rules laid on top. He scanned them quickly, noting all the usual information, quick mind automatically memorising the emergency procedures. One item brought the frown back to his face, a quick flash of anger at the last thing on the list, at the end of ‘General Comments to Further your Cruise Experience’: a reminder that condoms were placed ‘for your safety and convenience’ in the bathroom and that more were on sale in the gift shop, in the public toilets and that the stewards would be happy to bring some to one’s cabin at any time of day or night. He shoved the stark rectangle of laminated cardboard into the nearest drawer: he was here to escape ugly realities, not to be reminded of them. And as if he needed reminding: he’d heard the reports, seen the statistics. But even as he packed his clothes into the shallow dresser-drawers, he forced himself not to ignore it, to stop shoving it to the back of his mind. He had never thought the day would come when he’d be glad of the discretion the job had forced on him, but it had kept him off the gay circuit, making him stick to people he knew very well, men who were just as careful as he was, thanks to positions in the Ministry or the Department, or whatever other ‘sensitive’ situation they were shackled to. Plus, as the man who was grooming himself to one day take over from Cowley himself, he had to be very careful. Oh, they all knew he was gay, had done ever since that débâcle too many summers ago, but it was political—and promotion—suicide to rub any noses in it. So no living with someone less than perfectly presentable, no public displays of affection, no effete young men hanging on his arm, no whooping it up at nightclubs or baths. All that loneliness had paid off, with slow but steady promotion, until the only thing keeping him from heading CI5 was Cowley’s continued existence—and that certainly wasn’t something he wanted to change, not by a long chalk. Old bastard he undoubtedly was, but Cowley had become the truest friend he’d ever had in his life. One other person excepted...

He took his clothes off, standing naked in the heat drifting in through his open port-hole, slowly covering his winter skin in lotion, paying considerable attention to the job, paying more attention to the changes in his body. The scars on his chest from the shooting were effectively covered by his body hair, the pattern permanently disturbed now, always looking as if someone had just run his fingers through it. He had never thought the day would come when he’d be glad of the discretion the job had forced on him, but it had kept him off the gay circuit, making him stick to people he knew very well, men who were just as careful as he was, thanks to positions in the Ministry or the Department, or whatever other ‘sensitive’ situation they were shackled to. Plus, as the man who was grooming himself to one day take over from Cowley himself, he had to be very careful. Oh, they all knew he was gay, had done ever since that débâcle too many summers ago, but it was political—and promotion—suicide to rub any noses in it. So no living with someone less than perfectly presentable, no public displays of affection, no effete young men hanging on his arm, no whooping it up at nightclubs or baths. All that loneliness had paid off, with slow but steady promotion, until the only thing keeping him from heading CI5 was Cowley’s continued existence—and that certainly wasn’t something he wanted to change, not by a long chalk. Old bastard he undoubtedly was, but Cowley had become the truest friend he’d ever had in his life. One other person excepted...

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grey that so often accompanies red or auburn, but he always thought that with him, it had rather more to do with the pressures and adventures of life itself. He'd never be fat, he preened, stretching, but his muscles had massed with the passing of the years, most of the fawn-like liteness disappearing beneath a layer of slender strength. Facing himself in the mirror, he looked at all the lines and wrinkles that could tell his life story to anyone who cared to take the time to read them. He, obviously, knew every tale and thought with an uncommon pang of self-pity how clearly they showed the smallness of happiness he’d had. Oh, there were laughter lines aplenty, but there was also the furrowing of his brow, the deeply delineated frown marks standing like soldiers between his eyebrows, the faint droop of his mouth. But most of all, there was that hollowness of his eyes he always found so depressing, for it reflected what was left when you subtracted his job.

For a while, he thought that he and Mark might last, but not even Mark had finally been able to understand the hours and the secrecy and the constant, all-seeing security. But Mark was part of the past now, over—he looked at himself in sudden shock—a year ago in the past. That year had slithered by without him even marking upon its passing, another year with nothing but the job and pleasant friendships that were never quite enough, nor ever quite right. And if nothing was ever quite right, compared to Bodie, where did that leave him then? For look, he said to his reflection, where that right. And if nothing was ever quite enough, nor ever quite right, nor ever quite enough, nor ever quite right, nor ever quite enough, nor ever quite right, nor ever quite right.

Resolute, he turned his back on his own face, not choosing to see the answer to his question, refusing to think about Bodie. That was the worst thing about the prospect of having 10 whole days of nothing but free time on his hands: he knew he’d end up spending an inordinate amount of time thinking about relationships gone awry, and a love that had been drowned at birth like an unwanted kitten.

But the first day of a cruise—no matter how resented—was not the time to spend regurgitating the past. There were attractive men up there, and this was a closed environment from whence no tales could be carried to Whitehall to ruin all the work he and Cowley had put into his career. Whistling, focussed entirely on the present, the past and the future bedamned by the prospect of pleasure and he was on his way to the top deck, where his speedos would garner approval, albeit far less than the goodies they so scantily concealed. On his own in the lift, almost at his stop, he adjusted himself with studied intention, lifting his cock so that the long length of it was displayed as a separate enticement from the heavy roundness that showed where his balls were cradled safely by bright red lycra. His fingers found the small mesh pouch inside the briefs, one which he had always used before for keys he was unwilling to leave behind, but he realised, as the door opened on a banquet of attractive men, that it could have been designed as a place to stash a condom or two. And judging by the looks he was harvesting, it might be a hell of a good idea to make sure he carried some. He grinned to himself, just imagining himself asking for a ‘gin and tonic—oh, and a couple of condoms, please. Pre-lubed and ribbed, if you have them’. Christ, this was a gay cruise run by a gay cruise line aimed exclusively at the gay market; they could probably supply the damned things in your colour of choice. There was an extremely handsome man, very tall, very dark, propping up the pseudo-Caribbean bar and Doyle flaunted himself, making his interest as apparent as the bulge in the other man’s swimming trunks. He doubted he was going to do anything quite so precipitous, quite so unwise, as to fuck the bloke five minutes after meeting him, but this freedom to flirt was intoxicating. He glanced around, marvelling on at the fact that every single man he could see was gay, that there was no need on this ship for the ultra-discreet, semi-secret code that was used in the world he inhabited. There was no reason here to check out the name of a favourite pub, to establish if there was even the minimal knowledge of the gay world, and therefore the possibility of what was euphemistically termed ‘mutual interests’.

Casting around for a free lounger, he stopped for a moment, shocked into rudeness to stare at the couple. They were lying side by side in matching briefs, reclining on matching towels on matching loungers, their unity worn like a banner. But what had made him stare was the sight of one of them leaning over to kiss, lingeringly and very passionately, his hand
slipping down to press lovingly over the swell of crotch. In public—and he just come from the arrested stuffiness of Whitehall, where not even married couples did more than peck each other on the cheek. Small wonder he stared, unable to believe his eyes, his body reacting helplessly. With that throb of interest, his paralysis passed and he moved on, glancing around in furtive embarrassment that someone might have seen his gaucherie. Some had, but the reactions were more those of sympathetic comprehension, apart, of course, from those who were hawk-like, staring at a possible chicken. A direct glower and that idea was dispelled: he might be a wee bit rusty when it came to the etiquette of public and enthusiastic homosexuality, but he was no virgin nor anyone’s bottom.

There was a clump of empty lounges over by one of the gangways, so he headed there, claiming one and then standing beside it to scan for a steward. He might not be ready to order his condoms, but he could use a drink right now. The only word to describe the young man responding to his beckoning finger was pretty. Doyle found himself smiling in response to the sweet smile and the approving assessment of his body. Even if it were for the sake of a generous tip signed at the foot of the bill, it was still pleasant to be so openly desired. Someone else in the interim, however, apparently was dying of the thirst, too, and the steward paused, lowering himself with a grace that drew a pang of embarrassment that someone might have seen his gaucherie. Some had, but the reactions were more those of sympathetic comprehension, apart, of course, from those who were hawk-like, staring at a possible chicken. A direct glower and that idea was dispelled: he might be a wee bit rusty when it came to the etiquette of public and enthusiastic homosexuality, but he was no virgin nor anyone’s bottom.

He almost regretted turning him down, watching that tight little bum twitch away in response from Doyle: he had been that limber and graceful, once. Oh, he was hardly a lumbering elephant now, but there were one or two things creeping into his workout now that he couldn’t do as well as he once had. There were things that were taking a few seconds longer for him to do, the inexorable push of time nudging him towards the grave.

Such morbidity, he reminded himself, was exactly the kind of thing he was on this stupid bloody cruise to escape. He lay down on the lounger, sighing in relief as the sun warmed him like the hand of a lover, tingling immediately into his muscles, beginning to work magic on joints he hadn’t even noticed were stiffening. Age, he supposed, frowning again, that and all those years on the street, getting pounded, running and jumping and fighting on concrete. All that damage: he was lucky he had so few reminders. But the day was beautiful, and the young man peering down at him with that smile was also beautiful, so he set his mind to enjoyment, trying to truly discard his work and the politics that made it both challenge and sewer.

“Gin and tonic, please.”

Booze, at ten o’clock in the morning. He had an urge to sit here all alone and laugh, proving the old saying about mad dogs and Englishmen having rather a lot in common. Suppressed, the humour showed up as nothing more than a smile of singular satisfaction, reflecting his mood. He felt all of a sudden, as if all the the strings and ties and chains had been severed. G&T at ten in the morning—he really, honestly and truly was on holiday. Even if it was an enforced medical leave, he was still on holiday, on a glorious cruise that he wasn’t even paying for.

A shadow didn’t bring any coolness, but the chinkle of ice in a glass did. “Your drink, sir. My name is Philip, sir, so please don’t hesitate to call me if you need anything, anything at all. And remember, sir, this is an all-found cruise, so everything is on the house. Everything, sir.”

A blind, dumb and deaf cabbage would have got that message, loud and clear. Doyle smiled at him, kindly, but making it clear that he would flirt but no farther. “Everything? Then you’ll be too busy to get up to much trouble on a ship this size, won’t you? Thanks, Philip. I’ll make sure you’re the one I call when next I need a drink.”

He almost regretted turning him down, watching that tight little bum twitch away amongst the loungers and tables, but if Philip were so willing with him, then god knew how many other men he’d been willing with. And in this day and age, he sighed, you had to be so bloody careful.

Eyes closed to keep out the sun and those interested in getting to know him better, he whiled away the time, doing nothing more than drifting with the sound of the sea and the rise and fall of laughter. He started, realising then that he must have fallen asleep, ambushed by overwork to which he would not own and by the long flight out from London to meet the ship. Sitting up slowly, rather welcome knowledge dawned on him: he wasn’t stiff. He sprang up now, bending down to finish the disgustingly weak, warm but at least still wet drink, then he
stopped. There was something... A reawakening of instincts and training he no longer needed on a daily basis, but the prickling awareness was there, full force, without warning. Without him thinking about it, his hand had reached for the gun that wasn't there, and that was when he realised that it wasn't the situation, it was the personality. A split second, all this, and he was straightening, turning at the same time as the name burst into his mind—

—and he turned, full tilt into him. “Bodie!”

Hands smaller than he remembered grappled him to steadiness, his near-nudity plastered to Bodie’s well-clad body. After that single word, they neither of them seemed to know what to say, Bodie holding him dumbly, staring at him, and he himself staring back, almost falling headfirst under the spell of the past.

But the cold voice of old betrayal disguised as ever-so reasonable rationality reminded him, the past was the past, dead and buried, over and done, long gone, kicked the bucket...

So why was he still standing there, to all intents and purposes in Bodie’s arms, staring at him, to all intents and purposes in Bodie’s arms, staring at him as if this were an old Trevor Howard film? Because, his honesty whispered at him, because the past was the past, dead and buried, over and done, long gone, kicked the bucket...

Like a refrain from a half-forgotten song, a memory filtered into his mind: Bodie, that time they’d gone out to the country and travelled up the canal on a barge. He had ended up as brown as the proverbial berry, but poor Bodie had ended up like a raspberry, almost purple with sunburn and wincing in agony every time he moved. That had been, the sadness of it ambushed him with unexpected intensity, only the weekend before they’d been outed, although they hadn’t had that word back then. The weekend before, when it had seemed that time had only happiness to promise and that the biggest threat to their eventual romance was a stray bullet.

“You’re looking well,” Bodie was saying to him, fingers tugging suddenly, sweetly at one of his curls as if the temptation was too great to be resisted, “even if you have gone a bit grey. All brass and silver now, aren’t you?”

He couldn’t lie: Bodie did not look well. In fact, he remembered this look of old: exhaustion, emotionally drained, more than half defeated. “You’ve been all right, though?”

“Not only was he sinking in the quicksand of undead emotions, he was slipping back into the kind of language he hadn’t used since the ‘70s—since his time with Bodie. And how very much water had flowed under the bridge since then. Time had been less kind to Bodie than it had been to him, or perhaps it was just that life had been more of a bastard to his ex-partner. There were lines on Bodie’s face, and he took the time to read them, as he had taken the time to look at his own, earlier. He didn’t like what he saw. Too much pain had lived on this face, with too little laughter and too much anger. Subtle changes, too, adding to the distortion caused by the wrinkling of skin that had once struck him as the most beautiful skin he had ever seen. Jowls were beginning, minutely, faintly, but for the first time, one could see how Bodie would look as an old man. All the signposts were there, as they were in his own face, but so much more clearly. The skin was still as white, still as prone to sunburn, which was probably why Bodie was the only man on board this ship who wasn’t exposing at least his legs to the sun.

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He couldn’t lie: Bodie did not look well. In fact, he remembered this look of old: exhaustion, emotionally drained, more than half defeated. “You look like you’ve been having an interesting time of it,” was what he said, wondering if the old communication was still there between them after its long hibernation or if it had starved in the fallow winter.

“If you were Chinese, I’d say you were spot on.”

“You’ve been all right, though?”

“Couldn’t’ve been better.”
And the aching bitterness in that made him regret all the times Cowley had tried to talk to him about Bodie but he’d refused to listen, too afraid that he would end up lost again. It had hurt beyond bearing at the beginning, when Cowley had offered him reports and by the time the pain had receded to levels he could grit his teeth and bear it, the habit of mentioning Bodie had been broken, the name become taboo, the information lost. In the meantime, what was there to say to such a bald display of disaster? Nothing that was neither banal nor useless. So he settled for the trivial and the cautiously friendly. “The lunch bell just went. You coming?”

Even as he said it, he could have kicked himself, but Bodie let it pass, giving no reaction at all. “Yeah,” was all he said, leading the way to the dining room. “All this sea air makes me starving.”

They kept it up, the impersonal chatter of strangers coming across each other on a boat, as if it were no more than two Englishmen of similar ages and backgrounds bumping into a kindred soul amidst the racket and intrusive friendliness of foreigners. But it was less than that, listened to less than even the usual expatriates’ conversation, and it was far more than that, too. They were watching each other constantly, with a kind of morbid subterfuge, trying to find signs that the other had been missed, that life had been less worth living in the absence of the other.

“So what’ve you been up to?” Bodie asked, the first to yield.

“The same old mob. I’m Cowley’s second now and when the Old Man retires, it’ll be my hands on the reins.” Said so blantly, with such apparent unawareness that his news could sting, Doyle didn’t even hear the echo of Cowley’s voice in his own.

“That’s nice,” Bodie agreed, sounding like a man offered three root canals without anaesthetics. “How is the old bastard, anyway?”

Doyle toyed with his food, feeling like one of the clocks in a Dali painting, melting into surreality. He’d stopped allowing himself to think about this moment, this re-meeting Bodie, but the cream-tea politeness was so bizarre, it was making his bones bother. And the hair on his chest was bothering him, as if it had woken up to the fact that it was lying all wrong, as if the scars were bothering it, reminded of the time before by the sound of Bodie’s voice. Then he actually thought about the question and his face darkened with the worry he had no-one to tell about. “Cowley? Old, and still a proper bastard.”

Bodie looked at him with quick, bright eyes, the once-dead rapport slowly reborn. “And? What’s the matter with him?”

And it was as easy as sitting with him at the Black Boar, discussing the latest gossip, passing on juicy titbits, worrying a problem like a bone. “His heart. It’s been dicky for years, but it’s getting worse now. Angina, tiredness, all that sort of thing. But you know the Old Man, he’ll outlive the lot of us. Only…”

“Only what?”

He ate the last of his meal first, neatly balancing flaky fish and nubby wild rice on the back of his fork with all the finesse he’d learned over the years of working with Cowley and facing down those born with silver and gold spoons in their mouths. “Only,” he finally answered, not looking up, “only George doesn’t seem to agree with us. These past six months—Christ, anyone’d think he had a direct line Upstairs and God’d told him when he was expected.”

There was a visible reaction to the use of Cowley’s first name, a blush of pain, but it was gone before Doyle looked up. “Could be he’s just making sure everything’s all in order, you know Cowley.” This time, Doyle did see the minute tightening around the eye, the faint compression of lips as the name was said. There was a wash of guilt over him, slow and deceptively mild before the undertow threatened his balance.

He’d basically managed to never think about how Bodie’d felt, losing CI5 and Cowley, only going as far as comforting himself with the knowledge that if Bodie had really wanted it, he would have stayed and fought. Beside him, at his back, where they belonged, together…

He strangled that snakelike hope, telling himself that they had bumped into each other—literally—and that was that. There were too many years between them, and Bodie’s marriage to consider. Regardless of the fact that Bodie was on a gay cruise, there was the fact of his marriage. The one and only fact he’d ever asked Cowley for, the one and only fact that had cut him dead cold and buried any chances he
thought he and Bodie might have had. “No,” he said, bursting into speech, words tumbling quickly from him, trying to cover up the suddenly long silence when he’d been lost in thought, “no, this time’s different. It’s as if George’s making his peace, tying up all the loose ends, the whole bit. I mean, look at what he did just last month. D’you know, he looked up an old army mate of his—from Korea—to pay him back money he’d borrowed way back when? Now that’s obsessive. No, it’s not just his usual—” the Scots accent had improved with age and much exposure to the real thing “—’a place for everything, and everything in its place’. I don’t know, blame it on the old copper’s nose. George doesn’t seem to think it’ll be long before he pops his clogs.”

“It’s hard to imagine George Cowley being dead. He’s like the Queen Mum, been there forever.”

Doyle looked at him again, watching the faint clouds of emotion scud over Bodie’s face in muted contrast to the blandness of his words. He didn’t know what to say: sorry for doing something I’d do again, sorry you ran away like a coward instead of facing yourself? “I don’t think I’m going to bother with dessert, I’ll have a swim instead. See you later.”

And he was gone, out of there, where he couldn’t see Bodie any more, plunged into the almost-silence offered by the pool water, swimming deep, under the surface, all the colours cut sharply by painter’s knife, all the other bodies twisted and distorted by the folding and pleating of the water. He touched bottom, holding out for as long as he could before going back up and facing the world again. Actually, the world was a breeze: it was himself he didn’t want to face. Under the water, he was buffered by the liquid satin, able to give himself over to the concentration of the physical: keeping himself on the bottom, how much air he had left, how his lungs were feeling, the way the water felt swimming through the hair on his head and chest and legs. His time was up. Left to the last second, his resurfacing was spectacular, his body shooting up to let him gulp in air. With the sting of air, with the heat of the eyes staring at him, came the anger. He was livid, unexpectedly so, almost unable to control the urge to take Bodie by the neck and shake and strangle and curse him until the bastard was dead. Face impulsive, he began swimming, back and forth, back and forth, a serious, intense discipline that had no place in this pool of dolfihnesque Davids. Every lift of his arm, every kick of his feet, was like a blow thudding into Bodie, satisfying, heavy blows. He kept on going, trying to exercise a demon by exercise, trying to face something he hadn’t known about himself.

He hated Bodie for leaving him like that. Hated him with a passion. And loved him with a passion, still. Christ, he thought to himself, what a state to be in. So much for reducing stress and lowering my fucking blood pressure. He had never, ever been so angry in his life as he had been when Bodie had said that about George. An odd combination of insider talking about the head of his department and an outsider sticking him up on the pedestal of public admiration. And to say it in that tone of voice, as if nothing had ever happened, as if he’d never run out on him, leaving him to carry the can all by himself, clawing and fighting and struggling to prove that even poofs could be reliable, could be good operatives. Of course, he thought to himself with an ulcerating bitterness, getting married almost straight away played right into our hands. Look, we said, he wasn’t really queer after all. Just playing at it, just playing at it…

The burn of tears took him completely by surprise, for he’d never shed a single one over Bodie, not even when he’d been told about the embarrassingly hasty marriage. The swimming pool was proving useful, chlorine the perfect cover for eyes that were uncommonly red and bloodshot. He had lost the rhythm of his swim, some of the vengeful anger subsided, replaced by this stomach-leadening misery. He pulled himself out of the pool, grabbing one of the spectacularly garish towels provided by the ship and dropped onto one of the loungers. Forearm over his eyes, he lay there like the dead, missing only the coins to cover his eyes. His bracelet was digging into his forehead, but he ignored it, not needing to be reminded about Mark, not right now. Not when he had Bodie to cope with. Not when he was being pierced by the emotions that he had stuffed under the metaphoric carpet a decade ago. Something, the old sixth sense, the one that had warned him that Bodie was nearby prickled behind his eyes to join the tears. With
due caution, blinking rapidly, as if his eyes were a touch watery from chlorine and too much sun, he glanced around with patented casualness.

And there he was, standing in the shadow of the coiled, open-work staircase that led to the upper deck. All in white, which struck Ray for the first time, for Bodie had never been one for dressing like that. White shirt, very modern, white trousers, very well cut. Not expensive, not really, but not cheap or common looking either. Even the shoes were white, on a man who, when last he’d known him, despised white shoes for anything other than exercise or cricket. But these were soft leather shoes, the kind he’d normally expect to see on a dancer. Or a gay man. He’d come back to that. The question he hadn’t asked over lunch, preferring instead such comments as the weather and how much hotter it was here than back home... Casual conversation or not, he had gleaned that Bodie had been abroad, only returning to England in the past year or so, that he’d had hard times, but was hoping that things were getting better, had come into some money recently from a relative he hadn’t even known.

And was standing there in the shadows, the poor boy from the village staring through the drawing room window at the Earl’s daughter, eyes so full of hopeless longing it cut Doyle to the quick. But his anger was there, at the core of him, festered away to the bone, and it met the look with harshness, with a gaze that said, ‘you should’ve thought of that before you ran away and left me’. He closed his eyes again, covering them with his arm, pulling the towel up over that, a multi-layered barrier with huge ‘keep out’ signs bristling from it. The only problem was that he hadn’t been quick enough. He’d taken a quisling into his little den: the expression in Bodie’s eyes upon seeing the hostility in Doyle’s.

It occurred to Doyle then, that perhaps he might have a hard time forgiving himself for what he was doing to Bodie. But then, his anger shouted at him, bursting the staves that had held it in for these many years, won’t you have a harder time forgiving Bodie? It was probably the marriage that rankled most, second to the leaving itself. He’d always hated cowardice and always admired Bodie for his courage, so to have the one betrayed by the other and to abandon him to face the wolves alone while Bodie went off and joined in with the rest of Society, oh, he’d be hard put to let that lie.

Even if Bodie had looked at him that way, hiding beneath the stairs, as if he had no right now to so much as look.

Always quick to tan, Doyle was turning the colour of sultanas already. Physically, he was aware the benefits of rest already beginning, but his mind was a rollercoaster tied in knots. One thing led to another, hurtling on at breakneck speed, only to come to a clattering halt at Bodie walking out on him, or on Bodie walking back in on him, with that secret look, hidden under the stairs. It was time to get dressed, he decided, closing the rollercoaster down for the night, go in to dinner, meet some nice guy, flirt a little, play a little, perhaps even find out if the stewards really are happy to deliver a condom to your cabin, any time, day or night. Bodie’s disappearance had soured much of his life, but he’d be damned if he’d let this reappearence spoil his holiday. Spryer than most men half his age, he got to his feet, turned quickly—and caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye. Someone, moving, stealthy speed dissolving into the shadows of the ship. But if he could recognise him with his back turned, then he could recognise him by a brief glimpse. Bodie. Stood there, watching, all afternoon? The implications shivered down his spine and took up residence in his boots, along with his heart. Bodie was back. Christ, not just bumping into him on a boat and letting it go at that. No, watching him like that, Bodie must want him.

And what the hell was he going to do about that?

There was the marriage to consider, and although he knew many a gay man married for camouflage and familial duties, he made it his policy never to get involved with them, unable as he was to put up with the lying and subterfuge and shame. He’d gone through far too much to ever skulk around in shame-filled secrecy again. But then, what if he’d been right after all, a decade ago? What if Bodie really were gay, but simply too scared and too repressed to admit it? What if it had been a knee-jerk reaction—run away and get married, that’ll prove that you’re not one of them.
And what if it were? It didn’t change a single fucking thing between them, the thought bil-
lowed through his mind like the smoke from burning tyres. It didn’t change a thing.

Dinner could best be described as an experience. He was seated at at a table with five other men,
one Irish, one Dutch, one other Englishman and a couple who were overflowing, unfortunately
for Doyle, with talk of their ‘marriage’, a union taken in their church with the blessing of a God
in whom they believed. They kept conversation going throughout every single course, not even
beginning to wind down by the time coffee and liqueurs were served. Doyle was grateful to them:
a single, small question from him and they’d be off and running, talking for ages, freeing him to
ponder the man sitting three tables away. All he could see was the profile, a canvas both fa-
miliar and new. The chin was different now, heavier, the neck showing the passing of years.
Self-consciously, he touched his own chin, feeling in himself the slight loosening of flesh that
was beginning, just beginning to sag. Like Bodie.

We’re getting old, he thought incredulously. My god, we’re getting old! It had always seemed
to him that life had stopped, to a degree, when Bodie had left. That part of their life, being part-
ners, the sweet anticipation of becoming more, had always seemed to Doyle to simply exist, as
if it were trapped in one of those glass, brass-
topped Victorian viewing bottles Cowley had
collected. To see that those times had passed,
was the discomfiting recognition not of his own mortality—he had accepted that years ago—but
for the first time, of the inevitability of it. And the creeping knowledge that before he died, he’d
have to grow old first. Like Cowley, struggling
every day against the hardships of increasing age, refusing to concede, refusing to yield—but
getting his affairs in order. Perhaps, he thought,
it’s not that George thinks that Death is going
to get him. Maybe it’s that he knows that old age will.

He grabbed his brandy balloon, downing the
heat in a oner, needing that sudden explosion
of life inside him. The stupid things men do in
mid-life crisis were suddenly beginning to look
quite sensible to him, very reasonable responses
to a shakingly unreasonable life. Keeping his
head downcast, he took another look at Bodie,
seeing past the changes time had wrought,
realising that to most people, the differences
would be barely visible. It was just that he’d
spent so much of his time memorising that face,
staring at it, examining it in minute detail. He
knew the profile better than the full face, the
result, naturally, of many hours sitting side by
side in the cramped confines of a car. His eyes
closed, shutting out the present, taking him
back to the past so completely that he could
actually smell the old silver Capri, that odd com-
bination of gun oil and food, after-shave and
the fustiness of car heater. And Bodie, always
Bodie, who managed to smell positively cordon
bleu, despite summer’s heat or winter’s damp-
ness. He took a deep breath to relive the memory,
but instead caught whiff of discarded coffee and
empty brandy glass. Not scents he associated
with Bodie, but the view...

He went back to his contemplation of Bodie’s
profile. It was subtly altered, and not merely by
time. There was something about the set of the
mouth that was different, the slope of the nose...
Yes, there, the tiniest change, a mark that
showed the nose had been broken at some point
in the last decade, up near the bridge, where
the frown lines spilled over from the forehead.
He couldn’t see the eyes, but there were differ-
ences there, too, almost as if they were more
deeply set than before. Well, that usually hap-
pens when you get older, bags start, eyelids sag
and, thinking of his own face, you get to the
point where people start saying your face has
‘character’. He hoped he didn’t end up with as
much ‘character’ as Cowley...

Bodie was leaning forward, listening with
every evidence of intense interest to the man
seated on his right and Doyle could see enough
to recognise that expression: Bodie was bored
out of his skull and about to start in with the
pithy comments and sarcastic remarks. God,
but that brought back some good memories! He
could just picture old man Jackson, that day
they’d been stuck bringing the ancient and
 cranky boffin in to CI5. Some of the comments
that day had been really ripe, but no one could
top Bodie when it came to saying the filthiest of things without actually putting a foot out of place. Reprimand him for his comments and he would pin seraphic innocence on his face and leave his accuser feeling like they had a sewer of a mind, taking such harmless remarks as such terrible double entendres. He wondered what the poor blond was going to get pinned with. He found himself sinking back into the old habit without so much as a nod to the present, relaxing into his seat, waiting for Bodie to go into his usual routine. In the meantime, he would simply enjoy the pleasant view, watching the way he used to.

He could have Bodie, if he wanted to. The thought came, full-fledged and unbidden, echoing an afternoon long gone, razor edged with dreams longs since dead and ashen. He could. He could have him, right here and now. After all, if Bodie were on this cruise, if he’d booked himself on board, then he had to be available. ‘Ready, willing and able, that’s me’, was Bodie’s once frequent boast. Thumb rubbing his lower lip, Doyle considered that. Ready, willing and able. Then the bitterness brought him back to the present, to the man he was now, to the man Bodie had become: willing, all right, but just don’t tell the wife. He could see it quite clearly in his mind’s eye: the wife, very pretty, very blonde, a very good cook—Bodie would insist on that—a couple of kids, nice car. The motorbike rallies were probably a thing of the past, although he probably still played cricket with his old mob. He’d take the wife and kiddies with him, the blonde wife drinking white wine while the kids consumed orange squash, all of them preening because they were with big, handsome Bodie who could charm Brigadiers and babies with equal ease. Oh, yeh, he could just see the nice little house, three up, two down, well-kept garden, toys put away before Daddy came home at night, everyone waiting at the front door when they heard the car drive up—he pulled himself up short, surprised by his own bitterness, not to mention fancifulness. Apart from anything else, he reminded himself, Bodie’d only been back in England for about a year, and no mention had been made of the family. But then, he didn’t suppose sitting having lunch with an ex-almost-lover on a gay cruise surrounded by gay men was quite the place to pull out holiday snap-shots of the children. He didn’t suppose the breakfast table had been quite the place to tell the wife that you were going on a gay cruise, either. Two separate lives, the way he always had. The bastard hadn’t changed, not one bit, not where it mattered.

But then again, Doyle thought, fingertip tracing the silvered edge of brandy glass, listening as carefully to the sound as if it were his own inner voice speaking to him, it wasn’t exactly fair of him to jump to conclusions, was it? Maybe Bodie was just another one of those blokes who swept half their lives under the carpet and then trod on the lumps when they became too embarrassingly visual. But maybe he wasn’t. So a gay cruise wasn’t the best place to discuss family, but what if the family wasn’t there any more? The only actual fact you have, laddie, he said to himself in friendly mockery of his boss, is that Bodie married shortly after you and I forced him into a corner and elbowed him out of CI5. Which was nothing less than the truth, albeit spoken only once, the day before he’d left on this cruise.

His eyes narrowed in sudden suspicion and the man opposite him started casting around for an alibi for whatever it was he was supposed to have done. Belatedly noticing the fair-haired man’s squirming discomfiture, Doyle gave him his most reassuring, civil CI5 smile. Which probably explained why the man harriedly recalled that he had something terribly urgent to do.

The empty space he left behind left a tunnel of vision that ended at Bodie’s solid form. He was in the well-known fawns he had worn so often, but these clothes were elegantly casual, a far more mature style than anything Doyle had ever seen him in. He was even, shock of hair, wearing sandals, feet bared to the world. And it was hard, Doyle confessed, to remember why he was angry, with Bodie sitting there, lost in a world of thought, his mouth so sad and his back bowed. It seemed so unlike him, so much an attitude of defeat, where before there had never been anything less than bravado radiating from him. Then the more familiar body language returned, Bodie straightening up, spine and upper lip stiffening, the perfect picture of the stoic Englishman. Apart, Doyle noted, apart from the sadness around his mouth. It would be so easy, he knew, to go over there, invite Bodie to share a drink, sit together, reminisce, slide
easily and comfortably into sex: the very fact of being here was loud enough proof that they neither one of them was either innocent or unwilling. So easy... As easy as it should have been that summer? As easy as it all was, before Bodie made it clear that men were for fucking and nothing else? As easy as it all was before he realised that whatever his own feelings, whatever his own fantasies, Bodie's feelings for him were as shallow and pure as a puddle in rush hour.

Easy? Oh, yeah, that was always the word used to describe sexual conquests, wasn’t it? He’d be easy all right—but the where, when and with whom were very much his own choice and no-one else’s. No matter the temptation, he wasn’t going to fall, panting, at Bodie’s feet. And, he hoped with all sincerity, if he told himself that often enough, his balls would actually get round to listening to his brain. A few metres away, Bodie stretched his left leg out straight, the one he’d injured that first week on the job. He’d always loved Bodie’s legs, envied the heavy musculature and the smoothness of the skin. He used to dream what it would be like to start at the long toes and work his way up, licking every inch until he got to the cock, which would be beginning to rise, filling with the heat of Bodie’s arousal, and then he could take him in his mouth and—

—and if he didn’t get out of here now, as in **right now**, he was going to embarrass himself. Not to mention fall, panting, at Bodie’s feet. Thanking heaven and WilliWear for baggy trousers, he slipped from the room, not missing Bodie’s quick start of reaction.

Across the plastic bamboo that bedecked the outside bar, a lush young thing had draped himself, the pose so provocative as to be almost absurd, were it not for the immediate response it evoked in Doyle’s cock.

“Hi, honey,” the young man, or not quite so young man, given closer inspection, called out to Doyle, cocking his hips and displaying his cock a little more. “It’s the first night of the cruise, what say you we don’t waste a single second?”

Temptation incarnate—were it not for the man sitting in the dining room all evening. Were it not for the man who had spent the better part of the day doing nothing more with his life than watching an old comrade. Were it not for the fact that there was a man here who could turn his knees to jelly and his cock to steel by doing nothing more sexual than breathing.

“Sounds like fun, but I’m otherwise engaged.” Doyle told him, giving the answer he would probably have given whether Bodie had been there or not. Sick humour being the only outlet, he and some of his clique in Whitehall, bemoaning the decorum their jobs required, used to joke at the beginning about how AIDS had put the final nail in the coffin of their sexual revolution. Now, he found that not even the sick jokes could make it funny for him. And nothing, not even a desperation for sexual release, not even the fear of throwing himself at his past in the form of Bodie, could induce him to risk a total stranger.

“Oh, come on, do. I’m really quite clean and very, very nice to know.”

Doyle laughed at the way positively theatrical come on.

“I even,” the man continued without missing a beat, hamming it up, encouraging the fun, “come complete with—” an abracadabra of his hand, a ribbon-wrapped condom flashing, “—accoutrements. I used to be a Boy Scout, you see. Always,” he cocked his hips forward, showing off just how prepared he was, “ready.”

“So I see. And very nicely ready at that. But...”

“But nothing. Come on, there are lots and lots of things we can do that are safe enough. We could...”

But Doyle was gone, chasing after a shadow he had seen, a wraith slipping off into anonymous darkness. There was no reasoning behind his actions, just the gut-level instinct that had always made him watch Bodie’s back, right from the first day. It wasn’t something that had grown, nor something that they had built up layer by measured layer, it had simply been there, as natural as Bodie’s instinct to guard him had been. And he knew on a level he had rarely tapped in the years of Bodie’s absence, that there was something wrong.

The first corridor was devoid of life, the second holding only a couple secluded in a door recess, mouths busy on each other. The Cabaña Bar was crowded, but Bodie wasn’t part of the gyrating mass, nor was he one of the moon-glowed bodies knifing into the pool. The amusement deck was equally useless, the gym deserted
by all but the most obsessed body builders. By now, he had slowed his search, walking calmly around the ship, checking all the public places, gradually accepting that Bodie had gone to ground. And when Bodie did that, there was nothing to do but wait until he showed himself again.

There was so much to do on the ship, everything from classic films being shown in the cinema to public, if cautious, sex on the aft deck. He backtracked his own perambulations of the evening, looking at everything going on, mind too distracted to become involved in any of it. He had ignored Bodie for almost ten full years: it was time to stop long enough to think about him. Most daunting of all, it was time to face his own rôle in what had happened between them. Self-righteousness is all to the well and good, he was thinking as he put his key in his lock and went inside to begin the bedtime ritual, and it'll even keep you warm, if you handle it properly. But it isn't much use when you're trying to sort things out, is it?

He got as far as teeth-cleaning, face-washing and using the toilet, but stopped before picking up book or getting into bed. Elbows leaning on the open porthole, he turned his face to the zephyr that was mild and warm, even at this hour of the night. There was a wonderful combination of aromas, of the sea and flowers, of three of the world’s four elements combining. The island off the starboard bow was prinked by the lights of small, bleached houses, the sea scudding past him was star-sparkled by the party lights of the ship itself. The air was heavy with moisture and scents, tying everything in together. It was, in spite of his inner turmoil, endlessly calming. He was an island-dweller, no matter how large the island, with the lure of the sea a part of his genes, enforced by the treat of holidays beside the sea, the ultimate treat for a child. Very calm, very serene, but without a single answer for him. He just didn’t know what to do about Bodie. Oh, he knew quite clearly what he wanted to do about him, but then, that probably wasn’t feasible. Bodie looked quite a bit too big to be swept off his feet and carried over the threshold.

And that was a thought that stopped him dead, the breath jammed in his throat. Christ, he thought, wishing he believed, wishing it would help to pray, that really is what I want. Forever and ever, Amen, even after what happened before. All because he’s shown up on a gay cruise. And it’s not as if he ever denied fucking blokes, it was the reasons behind it that got to me. Get involved with a bloke like that and you’re in as much trouble as a battered wife.

He’d seen it before—in Bodie, for one—the inability to admit to being gay. Alongside it, graceless as an unfed cur, came dissatisfaction and loss of self-respect, snarling and curling round and round till any semblance of a happy relationship was purely accidental. When he’d met him, Mark Ferguson was still unyoking himself from the aftereffects of precisely such an imbroglio, starving for approval and distrustful of it when it came. Even experiencing it as second hand as Doyle had, had served to rationalise and entrench the visceral reaction he had had to Bodie’s rejection of him as anything more than a bum-boy.

The zephyr had become a breeze, ruffling through his hair, cooling him, telling him it was time for bed. Between the ubiquitous crispness of white sheets, he lay stiff as a board, mind circling endlessly on the past and on Bodie. As clear as the light of day, he could see Bodie’s profile, softened by the romantic table-top lanterns. With greater clarity yet, he could see the trouble in that face and the woes, all the images of lunchtime and evening swirling around in a kaleidoscope that always settled into the pictures from the days when they were together. He could recall, with perfect detail, sitting with Bodie in the car, or side by side on the sofa, watching the match on a Wednesday night or the late film on BBC2. There were all the times on stakeouts, in grotty little flats or squalid cafés. There were the endless bum-warmings, sitting waiting for Cowley to finish some meeting or other. Double dates, too, sharing a table with a couple of girls, his real attention focussed on the other man, on the way the lights made his hair shine, the way his eyes shone when he laughed or seduced. Wondering what the reaction would be if he were to propose taking the girls back to the one flat and not splitting up when they got down to the serious action. Dreaming of suggesting picking up a single girl to share between the two of them, and where that would lead. Seduction was a fine art, one
he had mastered when he was very, very young, but he’d never tried any of his games on with Bodie. It had always been too important with Bodie to warrant messing about. Of course, he recognised with bitter mockery, it had taken him until Bodie left to realise exactly why he’d never wanted to play around with Bodie. Love really was blind, wasn’t it?

Love. Bloody stupid thing to do, falling in love with my partner, he sneered at himself, left hand serpentina way under the covers. Even more incredibly brilliant to fall for a bloke who can’t get the guts up to admit he’s gay: this, as he grasped himself, long slow strokes bringing languid arousal. But at least I had good taste: as he pictured Bodie at dinner, hand moving faster. Best looking bloke aboard: as he pumped himself faster, spreading his legs to give his right hand room to stroke his balls, his own musk flooding him. Unless the leopard had changed his spots, it was going to be a bloody horrible arousal. But at least I had good taste: as he pictured Bodie at dinner, hand moving faster.

Best looking bloke aboard: as he pumped himself faster, spreading his legs to give his right hand room to stroke his balls, his own musk warming the air under the summer blanket. Gorgeous, the way his hair’s got that bit longer, and the way the muscles in his arms move, and his skin’s as perfect as it used to be: this, as he stood fully erect, hips rolling, rubbing his buttocx on the sheet, hand rubbing cock.

Bodie, as he had walked away from him. Bodie, making it into nothing more than rough trade with him, Doyle, as the supplicant at the feet of the straight man. Bodie, big-mouth Bodie, ex-merc from an unpopular war, caring more about society’s mores than he did about Doyle...

The movements of his hand were harder now, faster, desperate, the coming a joyless release of his body, cum spurting from him as misery flooded him. Unless the leopard had changed his spots, it was going to be a bloody horrible cruise. Snapping the bedclothes aside, he sprang from the bed, standing under the hot shower for the eon it took to rebuild his calm and to wash away the most minute residue of his wanting Bodie.

He was, he decided, going to avoid Bodie for the entire day. He’d have breakfast on deck, for Bodie wasn’t one for getting up at six in the morning, not even for food—especially not when the food was available all day and he was on holiday. So breakfast would be undisturbed, then there was going to be a port of call, he could spend the day on that, perhaps with the American couple from dinner who had invited him to join them. Lunch ashore, probably dinner as well, back to the ship a few minutes before sailing time and bob’s your uncle—no Bodie. A whole day, without temptation, without the opportunity to make a fool of himself, without the time to get himself even more hooked than he already was.

And also, a small voice that sounded suspiciously like Cowley asked him, no time to hear Bodie’s side of the story?

“All right, so I’m being bloody unfair and downright judgemental. It’s not one of our operations, is it?” he shouted at his shirt, which looked at him blankly. “Oh, fuck it,” he muttered, shouldering into the uncommunicative clothing, buttoning it up haphazardly and inadequately, scrambling to shove sun-screen and money into the small holiday clutch he’d bought at the airport on his way out. He’d skip breakfast, grab the first boat off the ship, buy some bread or something on shore. He wanted out of there, fast, before temptation could bite his head off and get him to do something stupid.

Or simply something he was scared of doing? the insidious voice asked again.

He slammed the door to his cabin with unwarranted violence, waking up half the deck, starting up a cacophony of annoyed shouts that drowned out the sounds of his footsteps as he half ran topside.

It had been an unmitigated disaster, of course. Oh, he hadn’t seen Bodie, in that respect he was completely successful. But physical absence did not a day without Bodie make. Every time he’d turned round on the island, he’d caught sight of something he would, in times gone by, have told Bodie about: the beach that begged nude sunbathing, the water that begged swimming, the handsome men who begged buggery. An hour on the island had displayed with bawdy enthusiasm why it was called ‘greek style’. He could have spent a fortune on the glory he had mastered when he was very, very young, but he’d never tried any of his games on with Bodie. It had always been too important with Bodie to warrant messing about. Of course, he recognised with bitter mockery, it had taken him until Bodie left to realise exactly why he’d never wanted to play around with Bodie. Love really was blind, wasn’t it?

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skin, dark eyed, broad-chested, lean hipped and with prick and balls lying in bas relief under painted on trousers. The kind of come hither that was going on between them had nothing whatsoever to do with language of the spoken sort, although it was certainly oral, judging by the way the local licked his lips. So easy, of course, to go with him, up to the room that would be small and clean and face the sea, as every house in this village seemed to, as if scorning the former magnificence that frowned wrecked and pathetic upon the brow of the hill.

A narrow bed, under the window, sun streaming in... And, he reminded himself with marked reluctance, I don't have any French letters with me, and much though I fancy him, I don't much fancy sleeping with everyone he's been to bed with. Stricken with the restlessness of unaimed anger, he strode from the taverna, money left behind to pay for the meal he hadn't finished, the locals left to mutter about how it was better in the old days, before the foreigners came and left their manners at home.

Hands stuffed in pockets, he eschewed all the places one was supposed to visit, descending down the steep hillside to the beach, finding a small inlet where he could sit disturbed only by the cruelty of Nature busy feeding birds. He poured the white sand into little cones that melted away with the first slight meander of air over them, watching as it all came to nothing. Sometimes, no matter how hard he tried not to let it get to him, no matter how he tried to take some time off away from it, all the news reports and letters and sad, sad stories imprisoned him in bleakness. Even here, idyllic island in an idyllic sea, there was no room for dreams, only an ugly fact growing uglier. Use condoms, they said, because the failure rate was so high. But go right ahead, trust your life to a sliver of control because the failure rate was so high. Condoms not be used as the sole form of birth control. But they recommended that condoms not be used as the sole form of birth control because the failure rate was so high.

Fat chance—he wasn’t about to give up living for the sake of a bit of sex.

Oh yeah? he asked himself, thinking about Bodie. And what would you do if he invited you into his bed?

Go. The answer was complete in and of itself, not needing him to think it before it came to mind. He dug a hole in the sand, buried a pebble, made a cairn on top. No matter how he looked at it, the sad fact was that he'd go, running at that, if Bodie asked him. And hell take the consequences, because he wouldn’t think about them until later. He drew circles in the sand, decided they looked like planets, added more circles until he had the solar system there, the stars at his fingertips. Well, he wasn’t exactly surprised that he’d fall into bed with Bodie at the drop of a hat—or trousers, as Bodie wouldn’t be caught dead in a hat—so the next question was what he would do after, when the ship docked and they made their disparate ways to the airport and London. Always supposing that Bodie was living in London again, that is. For all he knew, he could have gone back to Liverpool. For all he knew, he admitted quietly, he could be divorced.

A single swathe of his hand and the universe was gone. If Bodie were divorced, and just said ‘see you’ when they docked, that would make it all the worse, wouldn’t it? It was one thing to be fucked and left, when there was a wife and children and suburban propriety to consider, but when there was no barrier bar the disinclination of Bodie himself, oh, that was so much harder to take. And going by his reaction ten years ago, he wasn’t much likely to take it at all.

Which brought him back to Bodie’s attitude to having sex with men, which brought him back to their near-miss back then, which brought him back to his own reasonable fears, which brought him full circle, nothing resolved, nothing answered, nothing sorted out, least of all himself. He kicked the small cairn to pieces, scuffing sand as he walked, head bowed, paying little attention to the vista around him. The spring had gone out of the day for him and he regretted now the panic that had driven him from the ship before he had the chance to lose himself in a crowd, burying himself in the chatter of strangers.

A clamber up the hill, full concentration on the job of getting back up to the path in one piece and preferably with his clothing unripped, gave him pause from his mental contortions, the convulsive and compulsive worrying that gave him pause from his mental contortions, the convulsive and compulsive worrying that had gone out of the day for him and he regretted now the panic that had driven him from the ship before he had the chance to lose himself in a crowd, burying himself in the chatter of strangers.
started off towards it, a decision made. If it was inevitable that he was going to leap into bed the second Bodie suggested it, then he’d be damned if he’d hand all the control over to him. Inevitable, yes, but not beyond his control, not entirely. He’d simply nod graciously to that which he could not evade and take the reins firmly in his own hands: he was going to be the one to do the inviting here. He’d be the one to inveigle Bodie into bed, not the other way round. The choice would be his, and that way, at least, he’d be able to keep some of his own pride intact. No whistle from Bodie and him coming running like a grateful puppy. Not for him. He’d take the lead in this, the dominant rôle and haul Bodie to bed—by the hair if need be.

It was quite a while, according to his impatience, before there was a boat to take him to the ship, him chafing at the bit the entire time. Now that the decision had been taken, he was churning inside, desire turning his guts liquid, his cock already beginning its hopeful journey, lengthening along his thigh. All sorts of questions were clamouring at him for answers, their sharp little voices banshee wails at the back of his mind. He shut them up, firmly, battening down the hatches, pouring the concrete of wilfulness upon them. He knew perfectly well what he was doing, he didn’t need any screaming nineties reminding him. Always one for a risk, always one to weigh up a situation to determine if the penalty was worth the prize, this situation, this cruise, had become a nice tidy box in the future, when it arrived, could take care of itself.

He was sick to the back teeth of being mature and responsible and sensible: he’d been like that since the time he’d cut that other kid up and given himself such a scare. I’m going to have Bodie. Finally, after all these years when he had never—quite—been able to forget him, despite his loud protestations to himself. The sculpted lines of Bodie’s physique had always made those more muscular unappealing to Doyle, and those more slender had always seemed effete. Before Bodie, he had always had a thing for blonds, but of course, after Bodie, it was the dark Celtic looks that had drawn him, hungry as a mouth for a flame.

Flame. Heat was licking at his groin, tingling along his fingertips, tickling at his nipples, all the places where the fieriness of desire took him first. At least, it occurred to him, on this ship no-one was going to complain if he walked around half-hard, were they?

I’m going to have Bodie. It went round and round his mind, a triumphant madrigal, spinning and spinning until it had sucked all his doubts and fears into its whirlpool, drowning them with the possibilities of the present. The future, when it arrived, could take care of itself. He was sick to the back teeth of being mature and responsible and sensible: he’d been like that since the time he’d cut that other kid up and given himself such a scare. I’m going to have Bodie. All of him, spread out for me, and I can touch every last bit of him...

Making the decision hadn’t been too difficult, love and libido doing that particular job for him, but finding the object of his desires proved to be considerably more challenging. Eventually, he admitted defeat and approached the Purser. Only to find that Bodie had gone ashore, missing Doyle’s boat by about five minutes.

He was going to have Bodie—always supposing someone else didn’t get there first. There were a hell of a lot of mouthwateringly beautiful men on that island, and if Bodie’s attitudes were the same as they had been before, the bastard
would be shagged out before he got back on board. Worry danced the clogdance on his spine: and what was he going to do if Bodie had been heedless of the warnings they’d all been overwhelmed with, until they got to the stage where they didn’t want to hear the word AIDS again? What if Bodie had got the bit between his teeth and ignored it all? For that matter, what if ‘it’ll never happen to me and if it does, all that happens is you die’ Bodie hadn’t cared enough to give up so much of what made gay sex fun? If it was nothing more than spurious sodomy to him, then he wasn’t likely to have let concern for the other bloke stand in his way, and Bodie would never believe himself to be at risk. What was it he had said to Bodie, one of the many accusations that had festered, undenied? Oh, yeh, that’s right. it’s not as if you kissed them or any of that queer stuff, is it? And in that case… That’s what our neatly packaged Durex is for, isn’t it? It’d be all right, he’d be careful. There were a lot of things they could do that were safe or at least, not overly risky. Lots of things. Except...he wanted to bury himself in Bodie, up to the hilt, fucking him hard, able to feel himself. And often, when he looked closely, very closely, at himself, there was nothing for him to believe in at all.

By the time Bodie came aboard, Doyle was leaning over the railing, lost in thought, all the joy of future seduction drained away. Wind was barely disturbing his short hair, the curls cut severely short so as to offend the stuffiness of Whitehall. Usually, he even blow-dried his hair into some facsimile of conformity, but the sea air and the damp breezes waylaid that, taking him close to what he’d been before, the first time he’d met Bodie, hair still policeman short. He was thinking about that first day, of the way they had simply fitted together as if they had always been each other’s better half. Thinking about the way he had wanted Bodie from the first, but Bodie had always seemed too skittish to take him up on anything more than flirting. Thinking about the roots that had been growing, tangled, between them, making life together more deeply lodged, more a certainty. Thinking about the pain that must have been in Bodie to have driven him off so thoroughly...

“Ray?”

“I was a right bastard to you, wasn’t I, Bodie? Not much of a mate in the end.”

“Same could be said of me, couldn’t it?”

Bodie was coming up beside him now, proping dark-sleeved arms on the balustrade, a pose of ease, tension pouring out of him, the faintly heard footsteps silenced. Behind them, there was the glittering glow of deck-top party, music blaring, and even that was part of the gay statement of this cruise, all the artists beloowing their lungs out known to be as gay as the men dancing to them. The festooning lights were swaying as the wind carolled through them, tossing shadows to and fro all around the two men standing, in their own pocket of silence, staring over the side of the ship, all the long way down to the sea. Doyle didn’t look at Bodie, knew that Bodie wasn’t looking at him. It seemed so much simpler that way, to speak and not look. Seen him would make the needing start, and seeing him would expose his own eyes to Bodie’s perception. That was something he didn’t need, not until after what needed saying was finally said.

“I couldn’t forgive you for leaving me, you know that, don’t you?
“D’you think I could forgive you for forcing me out? But don’t let’s get started on all that old crap, Ray. You always were one for blaming yourself for everything under the sun, but not this one. We were both of us as bad as the other with this one. I had good reasons, Ray, and you must’ve, too. Let’s just leave it at that and get on from there.”

“You haven’t changed, have you? Sweep it under the carpet and if we pretend it doesn’t exist, perhaps it’ll go away?” His voice sharpened with all the painfilled implications of life, if Bodie really hadn’t changed. “Is that how you still work, Bodie? Christ, after this length of time, I’ve thought you’d be past that by now.”

“Get your claws back in, Ray. I didn’t come all this way to get into an argument with you.”

He had actually forgotten that tone of voice, the mildness soft as butter to hide the whetting stone beneath. A glance over his shoulder, to the merry mayhem, revellers twisting and gyrating in movements that really hadn’t changed much since their ancestors had danced round the fire. “Okay, I’ll be reasonable. So if you didn’t come here for the aggro, what did you come here for?”

Tenterhooks pause, then Bodie answered him. “You always said I was all balls and no brain. This is sort of…it’s a kind of…”

He was intrigued by this, Bodie stumbling visibly over words. To think this was the man who could casually quote Blake or Donne whilst ducking bullets astonished Doyle. “Come on, Bodie,” he said, donning the remembered camaraderie with the comfort of old slippers, “it can’t be that bad. Any road, anything you’ve done, I’ve done worse.” No response, save a small smile glimmering in the coloured lights of the party and the audible swallow of nervousness. Another effort, from Doyle, consumed with the need to know. “Now, I remember, when I was with the Drug Squad…”

On cue, Bodie lowered his head, a resounding snore ensuing. Then laughter, as quick and bright as the moon on the sea. “We had some high old times back then, didn’t we, Ray? Some of the things we got up to, make your hair curl. Not that you needed any help.”

Doyle saw the aborted gesture of hand, the secret, then stifled, movement to reach up and touch his hair. Bodie always had loved doing that. “Need to look the part, else Cowley won’t be seen dead with me. Hated getting it cut, mind you.”

“It suits you.” Diffident, unsure, the compliment hesitating before Bodie could say it without buffooning it into meaninglessness. “Listen, Ray, I feel a right wally just saying it like this, but it’s probably the only way you’re going to hear it. This cruise…” He seemed to change tack, the promised directness obfuscated. “I’ve never been one for facing things head on, you know that. Well, after a while of sweeping things under the carpet, you can’t do that any more. Just isn’t enough room. And I used to do that so I could tell myself how well I was coping, when I wasn’t even looking at things, let alone sorting them about.” It was Bodie’s turn to look behind him, raucous life roaring away, while he whispered truths into the dark. “It got so bad, Ray, I needed to get help. Yeah, superman Bodie, needing a trick cyclist.”

“No shame in that, Bodie.”

“Yeh, some of your best friends are psychiatrists. It’s taken me a long time to even admit I go to a doctor. Anyway, one of the things I finally realised I had to do was start meeting things head on. Stop running away. Had to.”

Doyle had to strain to hear the next words. “I had no where else to run.” A straightening of the spine, a suspiciously emotional sniff, then Bodie went on, voice large and casual. “And that’s what brought me here. Decided that I might as well do it in style, so here I am.”

Doyle stared at this vision of pride, then burst the proverbial bubble. “Decided to do what, Bodie?”

A long, long pause. “Hadn’t I said that bit? Decided to finally stop pretending to myself and everyone else and come out.”

“Come out? As in admit you’re gay?”

“Nah. Come out and admit I admire Kylie Minogue’s musical abilities. What other coming out is there? I’m a bit old to be a deb—not to mention a bit on the butch side, chuck.”

“So this is the big event? Trust you, Bodie, oh, trust you. The rest of us do a person at a time, a little bit here, a little bit there. You—you go on a fucking cruise!”

“I did do it a bit at a time. Most of the people I work with know.”

“What about your wife?”
A drawing away, big signs reading ‘don’t touch’ erupting like boils. “Divorced four years ago. Don’t even know where she is.”

He shouldn’t ask, he knew; should respect the tangible cloak of discomfort. But he had to know, had to… “Children?”

“Two. Boys, right pair of tearaways from what I hear.”

“You don’t see them, then?”

He thought he wasn’t going to get an answer this time and when it came, it wasn’t what he expected. “Look, I don’t know about you, but my feet are killing me. Spent the whole day traipsing over that bloody island looking for you. And it’s getting a bit cool for me. D’you mind if we go in for dinner?” He must have seen Doyle’s slight withdrawal, and read it for the reaction it was. “I’m not going to clam up on you, Ray. Just… It’s a bit much, all at once, and with us standing here where people might overhear. Why don’t we go to my cabin, have the steward bring us something?”

A case of condoms? Doyle wondered, as he acquiesced, leading the way to his own cabin, not Bodie’s. Home ground had its advantages, even if it were only a rented cabin. Uneasiness was stirring sluggishly, memories intruding of the time before, when they’d torn their partnership apart. He wanted to trust Bodie, in fact, were he to be honest, he did trust Bodie, but his head was screaming caution at him, throwing so many bitterly lonely nights in his face that he was in danger of being blinded to the prospects in front of him.

They were in the cabin, small table set up, meal—but no condoms—delivered, the two of them perched on the small folding chairs that matched the table for their ability to engender a serious attack of insecurity. The steward had been dismissed with dispatch and a hefty tip, leaving them to set the table and serve themselves. The domesticity of it all was soothing, harking back to once well-established habits, Doyle dealing with the food, Bodie dealing with the cutlery and wine. As he dished up his own plate, Doyle noted the hair-trigger tremble of Bodie’s hand on the wine, then it was gone, the burgundy poured with panache and unexpectedly flawless French.

“It’s bloody good, this, mate. Aren’t you going to have some?” This, after Bodie had quietly put his wine glass back on the serving cart, taking a tumbler instead.

“Gave it up.”

“For Lent? They put you on those little pink pills again? Or,” with sudden comprehension and genuine concern, “are you off it permanently?”

“Only for today, Ray, only for today. Course,” wry humour, the once-loved quirk of the eyebrow, “I’ll be saying that first thing tomorrow as well, won’t I?”

Doyle watched him, eyes clear and unblinking, knowing that he had to make Bodie say it. He wanted everything laid out on the table before them, no more playing poker the way they had when they were younger and more foolish.

Bodie said it. “I’m an alcoholic.”

“Does it bother you if I have a drink?”

“Doesn’t make it any easier.”

That admission seemed to cost Bodie a lot, an admitting of weakness that was obviously, painfully obviously, difficult. It occurred to Doyle, watching the tense man across the table, that he wasn’t exactly making it easy on Bodie. Here he was, expecting Bodie to have completely changed everything about himself to make it better for Raymond Doyle, and he himself was repeating the badgering mistakes of the past. “Well,” he eventually said, “in that case, your sparkling water looks just the thing, doesn’t it?” He went and poured the wine down the bathroom sink, running the water after it, remembering how much Bodie had loved the bouquet of wine. Reseating himself, he was startled by the expression that was, fleetingly, in Bodie’s eyes. Before he could be sure, before he could pin it to anything other than wishful thinking, it was gone.

“But fair’s fair,” he warned, setting them back on an even keel. “I won’t drink, and don’t you go eating the stuff I can’t have.”

“Have you got religion or something?”

“Dodgy heart. And you can wipe that look off your face and all. I was on a case, got careless, they got into my flat and almost took me off the job permanently. The bullet nicked the heart, invalided me out of active duty and got me kicked upstairs as Cowley’s right hand.”

“And all you have to do is watch your cholesterol and all that?”

Doyle shrugged, minimising something he lived with every day until it had become nothing.
ing much to him. “And take the pills—little blue ones, foul tasting things. Don’t look so worried, Bodie. I’m in better nick than blokes half my age.”

“Apart from a bad heart.”

“It’s not a bad heart,” he repeated in the same voice of barely surviving patience he used on his superiors and doctors, “it’s a minor condition that requires preventative medicine. That’s it. Like your drinking.”

He was surprised by the sudden flood of red rising to cover Bodie’s face.

“My drinking wasn’t something minor, Ray. D’you think I’d give up booze just for a minor problem?”

“Is that why your wife left you?”

“Oh, still the copper, eh? It’s obvious which one of us left CI5, isn’t it though? You’ll be pleased to hear your interrogation techniques are better than ever.”

“Now who’s starting?”

Silence, ostensibly while they ate, in actuality, while they buried the hatchet. Picking at dessert, Doyle conceded that it was wonderful to be this close to Bodie again, to be this sure that they were going to be lovers, if only for the duration of the cruise. Not even the glare of the overhead light could diminish Bodie’s attractiveness for him, the signs of age adding interest to the handsome face. Every time he looked up from his plate, Bodie would be watching him, a shuttered expression that revealed almost nothing. He pushed the culinary remains aside and poured them both coffee from the elegant white carafe. “Are you going to tell me about your children then?” The question felt strange on his lips, a surreal topic to be discussing with Bodie of all people.

Bodie drank half his coffee in slow sips before he began to answer, hands flat on the table in front of him. “Two boys, one’s almost nine and one’s almost eight. Both of them call someone else ‘dad’ and there’s a restraining order against me seeing them.”

Such bald facts to cover such bitter self-hate. “Want to tell me the rest of it?”

A surge of energy and Bodie was on his feet, piling crockery and cutlery on the dinner trolley, pouring un-drunk drink down the sink, folding the table out of the way all the while he spoke. “Same story as my own dad. Drink. Couldn’t handle my life, so I started drinking. Got worse and worse, started lifting my hand to Claire and she did the clever thing—she walked out on me. Came home one morning and the house was empty. No make-up in the bathroom, no toys on the stairs. No baby crying in the back bedroom. Next thing I heard from her was her solicitor sending me the papers. Went to court, denied drinking, of course, even though the judge could smell it on me. She got custody. She also had a boyfriend by that point, and the boys were already calling him dad instead of me.”

No emotion in the words, but the voice was hoarse, the movements jerky, a cup cracking on impact. “I wouldn’t admit I had a problem with drink, blamed everything on her. And the boyfriend. Went berserk. Went over to her house one night, kicked the door down—at least that’s what the police say—and ended up in the local cop shop with a hangover and an emergency order against me seeing my kids again.”

“Is that when you went on the wagon?”

“The first time, yeah. But it only lasted a couple of weeks—I can stop any time I want to, is what I always said. And I could, you know. Could stop any time I wanted to. Only problem was, I couldn’t stay stopped, could I?”

Doyle sat on the bed, letting Bodie fold the chairs, watching while he tidied up with compulsive concentration. “If losing your family didn’t stop you, what did, Bodie?”

“Went to France,” Bodie was saying, as if he hadn’t heard Doyle. “Had an old mate there from the Service. He had one of those security consulting firms and I went in on it with him. Course, France is the last place you should go if you don’t want to drink. Mind you, I didn’t want to stop, not really. If I stopped, I’d have to start thinking and I’d have to start living and feeling and I didn’t want to do that. Couldn’t do that, I don’t think, not then. Anyway, showed up for a job with a drink in me—not drunk, but I’d got to the point where I didn’t get drunk much any more. Just never got sober, that’s all. Almost got myself killed.”

He sat down then, on the foot of the bunk, hands dangling between his thighs. Ray’s hands were itching to touch, to hold him close and tell he didn’t need to say any more, but he didn’t, stuffing his rebellious hands in his pockets out
of harm’s way. It would only be being kind to be cruel, in the long run, if he stopped Bodie talking. He knew himself, from one or two never discussed nights with George Cowley, just how healing it could be to let it all cascade out. There was something else he had perfected in his association with Cowley, and that was the fine art of starting someone off talking and then just sitting back and listening. He pummelled a couple of pillows into a comfortable contortion and propped himself up on them, never once taking his eyes from Bodie, both fascinated and entranced by the man. He had never seen this side of Bodie, not fully, and he was falling farther and farther inside the man.

Bodie was frowning as he spoke, the words tumbling from him and into Doyle. "After that, I did what any exile does when he’s failed—I ran away from my new life and came running home to England. Except England wasn’t home any more. I was miserable, absolutely bloody miserable, but I blamed that on the rotten weather we were having and the rotten luck I was having, anything but on me and my drinking. I couldn’t get work, my money was beginning to run low, and the worse it got, the more I drank, and the more I drank, the worse it got. Then—" a huge breath, and Doyle watched as sturdy fingers laced themselves together as if to hold some horror within their grasp, the knuckles turned white. “Then, I woke up one morning, face down in a back room of some old warehouse. I had no idea where I was or how I’d got there. Didn’t know what I’d been doing. But there was blood on me, my knuckles were all skinned and I’d a broken bone in my foot. I’d been fighting, I knew that much. Just didn’t know who, or why. And I was sitting there, Ray, covered in someone else’s blood and I didn’t know if I’d killed him or not. I could’ve, of course, my training with the SAS would’ve seen to that even if Cowley hadn’t. I just didn’t know. Then I realised that some of the wet on me wasn’t blood, it was piss. Imagine, me—me—so drunk I’d peed myself! And my head felt like it was going to explode, I was sick as a dog and my kidneys were giving me gyp. And that was the morning that finally did it. Not knowing if I’d killed someone and not even really caring. I was more worried about peeing myself than twepping someone.”

“So then what?”

“A.A. of course. Couldn’t face a clinic or a hospital.”

“Too much like admitting defeat and letting someone else dry you out?”

“Dead right. First night there, it got through my thick skull that this was going to be a hell of a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. And that I was going to have to mend what was bothering me so badly that I started drinking in the first place.”

“Which is where the trick cyclist came in?”

“Yeh. And this cruise, eventually. I decided that I really needed an event, something that I could look back at and say,” he took on the voice of Black Rod rapping on the door of Parliament, “on this day, I, William Andrew Philip Bodie, did stop hiding and lying and let the world see just what they’d been missing.” He drooped suddenly and Doyle was reminded of Pinocchio after his strings had been cut. “That covers me. What about you, Ray?”

Doyle shrugged. “Not much to tell. Stayed on. Ran the gauntlet, stuck out the publicity and the laughing behind my back, gave as good as I got when the nasties started, the whole bit. Got shot, George stuck me behind a desk, started getting me ready to take over for him when he retires. That’s it, really.”

“What about…” the delicacy of the question seemed to be giving Bodie difficulties, the bedspread being pleated and unpleated before he actually asked it. “What about… relationships? You settled down with someone?”

“Was, for a while.” To the look of interrogation and hungry curiosity. “Mark Ferguson. Nice bloke, was with him for a couple of years.”

“What went wrong with him?”

“What always went wrong, Bodie? The bloody job, that’s what. The hours, the security, having people more or less in your bedroom making sure you’re not sleeping with the enemy, you remember the routine.” Bodie simply looked at him and Doyle remembered to whom he was speaking: this wasn’t one of the new recruits or one of the friends he’d made in recent years. This was a man who had known him better than anyone else had, in some ways, in the ways that Doyle had known himself. Sometimes, the lies that fooled himself hadn’t fooled Bodie, who had never been slow to stick in his tuppenceworth. “Okay, okay, so it was more than that. He got
tired of always coming second to the job, he got sick of the way I was closer to my mates in CI5 than I ever pretended to be to the people we knew outside our mob.

It wasn’t until he saw the odd expression on Bodie’s face that he replayed what he had said and heard it properly: our mob. Not my mob, not Cowley’s mob, but our mob. Revelation can be done with such simplicity sometimes that it ambushes the most triple-thinking of plotters. He snorted with laughter, picturing Cowley’s reaction to him claiming triple-think for this cruise. And speaking of Cowley... “Hang on a minute. You said you’d got a bit close to the wire when it came to money, and then you got an inheritance from some relative you didn’t even know?”

“Yeah, my Aunt Fiona. I thought she’d kicked the bucket years ago, but the solicitor got in touch with me a couple of months ago with this bequest and instructions that I was to spend some of it on a holiday. So when the brochure dropped through my letter-box—what’s so funny, you?”

It took him a minute, but he was finally able to control his rampant hysteria. “Us, that’s what’s so funny. Cowley, I’ll bloody kill the old bastard. D’you want to hear something really funny, Bodie?”

“Oh, do tell. Did he set us up? Cowley?”

“The doctors’ve been after me to watch the stress, cos they claim it plays havoc with my heart. And lo and behold, a month ago, George walks into my office, tosses this packet of travel stuff on my desk and informs me that the cruise starts on the 14th and it ‘had better not be leaving without you, laddie, or it’ll be me you’ll be answering to, not they bloody doctors’. He even paid for it, Bodie!”

He sobered quickly enough when he realised that Bodie didn’t seem to be sharing his amusement.

“Pull the other one, it’s got bells on. George Cowley’s a Bible thumper, there’s no way on God’s green earth that he’d pay to get two fairies together. Don’t come it with me, Doyle. If you’ve been up to something, then just tell me, don’t lie. Cowley playing Cupid—what is he, our fairy godmother?”

“I’ll tell you what he is, Bodie, he’s a man with a guilty conscience. I got him drunk one night—cost me a pretty penny, he’s got hollow legs—and it all came out. You remember how he feels about getting one of his ‘boys’ killed or hurt? Well, he knew every move you made and he could see every move I made. He knew perfectly bloody well what we went through, and all because he didn’t want the Minister screwing up his department. Oh, some of it was George and his crusades, him and his bloody tolerance, but a lot of it was for the department. Wasn’t just us he’d’ve lost, you know, Bodie. You’d be surprised how many queers we had back then. Then there’s his brother, and that’s probably most of it.”

“His brother died in the War, didn’t he? What’s he got to do with us?”

Doyle stretched out, his foot brushing Bodie’s thigh: neither one of them withdrew, but neither one of them acknowledged the contact. It simply lay between them, silent as a mouse hoping not to be noticed. “His big brother died after the war. Alastair Cowley had a bit of a secret and someone found out. They went after him to get him to pass on some of the codes and stuff he had access to in his job in one of the intelligence departments—George never said which one, but I got the impression it was Army. Anyway, the senior Cowley wouldn’t be a traitor, but he couldn’t face being found out and he couldn’t face his family finding out about him. Their dad was dead by now and the family honour was all on Alastair’s shoulders, poor sod. You know how the Scots are about their bloody family name and all that shite, so you can imagine how he felt about being threatened with a letter to his church minister. One night, he went out to one of the bridges and jumped off it. The blackmailers didn’t know he had done it until after they’d sent off their latest billet doux and it was our George that opened it. The rest is history. He went off his rocker and swore up and down that he’d never let anyone he knew go through that again, not if he could help it.”

“And I came bloody close to topping myself, so he...”

“Stepped in and mended it as best he could. You know what he’s done, don’t you? Seen that you’d got yourself sorted out and put us right back to where we were before he fucked things up royally by forcing us out.”
He forgot to breathe, for a second, when Bodie looked at him then. “And where does that leave us, Ray? Where were we ten years ago?”

“On the verge of something big.”

“You should be so lucky, darling.” A sudden quirk of humour, taking the solemnity, leaving the seriousness.

“I would, you know. Be lucky, if we got together.”

“You reckon?”

“Yeh.” He made a great show of checking Bodie out from the roots of his longish—by Bodie standards—hair to the toes of his summer shoes, pointedly lingering at the important little places. “I’ve seen worse.”

“What are you looking for, Ray?” Such seriousness, intensity as hard as agate, the need a vortex in his eyes.

“Happiness.” Unequivocal, he merely said it flat out, neither yielding nor attacking. “And failing that, then...”

He nodded at the bell-push that was to summon the stewards. “It’s not just food they deliver, did you know that?”

“What—do they have a nice line in marital aids or something?”

“They’ve got a nice line in another kind of AIDS. Bodie...” Always the awkward moment, the shuffling around to find a way to ask.

“I’m negative. You?”

And he wondered what Bodie’s reply would be if he said positive. It would tell him everything he needed to know about what Bodie wanted, about how Bodie felt for him. Everything, revealed by that one small answer. But the temptation passed as soon as the philistine thought crossed his mind. It was, after all, not the kind of thing to lie about: be careful what you wish for. “Negative, as of three weeks ago. Funnily enough, it was one of the things George got on at me to do for this cruise of his.”

“A week ago for me. Haven’t had many since it started, been too busy running away from being gay to have the balls to do anything about having blokes, bar buggering a few willing bodies. No exchange of body fluids, not into me, any way.”

Doyle fiddled with his watch, taking it off and stuffing it under the pillow, his bracelet coming off to be played with by restless hands. “Bodie, you never actually got round to saying it, but all your problems, I mean your marriage and drinking and all, that all came from you trying to pretend to yourself that you weren’t gay, didn’t it?”

“Who, me? Nah, nothing like that. It was just too much for me, being so modest and yet having to cope with being so absolutely, divinely perfect.”

Doyle erupted in laughter, his filthy chuckle warming the room. To be sitting here, with Bodie camping it up great guns, made him ridiculously happy. Bodie wasn’t the only one who had spent too many years trying to deny to himself a fact that was irrefutable. For Doyle, that fact was not the question of his sexuality, but rather the question of his emotional ties. He was bound to Bodie, had seemed to be even before he laid eyes on him, that first meeting of theirs having an audible ‘click’. “Something I’m curious about, though, Bodie and be serious, you great prat. Are you gay or bisexual?”

“According to my shrink I’m functionally bisexual. But I’m a disaster with women when it comes to emotions and they say you repeat the patterns you learned as a kid, so if that’s the case, it’s best if I don’t ruin any poor cow’s life the way my dad did for my mum. Anyway, I finally stopped running away from it and admitted I like blokes better. And you know what people are like: you’re either one or the other, you can’t be both. But that’s not the real reason. My body works both ways, but my feelings are hooked on a man. So in my books, that makes me gay.”

“Aren’t you going to ask me?”

“You? You’d fuck anything moving. And you get infatuated with women, but when push comes to shove, you’d rather have a man.”

They sat and looked at each other in the unexpected silence, abruptly awkward with each other. “Now what are we supposed to say? I mean, actually putting it in black and white, abruptly awkward with each other. “Now what are we supposed to say? I mean, actually putting it in black and white like that, I half expect my dad to come in and ask your intentions. It’s like one of these encounter group things, isn’t it?”
“Except they don’t expect to go to bed together, do they, Ray?”

The fumbling words that had been falling over his foot to get out of his mouth stopped. “We are going to, aren’t we? Tonight?”

“Yes.”

The silence was not awkward this time, but it was long and filled with looks and questions unsaid. Neither one of them seemed able to take the final step, to take the final risk, until Doyle moved the foot that had been resting, dormant, against Bodie’s thigh.

Then Bodie was upon him, inarticulate noises coming from both of them, Doyle holding him tight while Bodie kissed the world away. He flattened himself on the bunk, pulling Bodie in on top of himself, cocooning himself in the heat of the other man’s overwhelming presence. There was nothing for him to be aware of, apart from Bodie: all his eyes could see, all his ears could hear, all his mouth could taste, was Bodie. It was better than it had ever been, even in the furtive dreams that lurked in his bed waiting for his guard to fade, far better even than the guilty nights when it had been Bodie with whom he had made love, although the person there had had another name outside the bed. He’d never before been comfortable with letting someone else cover him like this, not even with Mark for whom he’d made such protestations of trust and equality. It was terribly hard for a man who lived by the gun and the vitriol of politics to hand power over to someone who ruled his life with the mundanities of intellect. He spread his legs, looking for Bodie’s weight to settle on him, so that their cocks could be pressed together. Under the circumstances, even their summer clothes seemed oppressively bulky, tyrants keeping them apart. He reached down between them, fumbling to shove fabric aside, his hands colliding with Bodie’s. His fingers were taken, held tight and brought upwards and he was filled with a shivering tenderness when he watched Bodie turn him palm upward and kiss the soft skin. He felt that kiss and what it betokened, through all his body, waking those few cells that still lay fallow, pleasure rushing into him. He wanted to return the gesture, to reciprocate the meaning, but there was nothing he could do that would speak with such simple honesty. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Bodie’s broad shoulders, and kissed him with all the passion he owned. The shirt was too rough, when compared to what he imagined the skin to be, so he removed it, his mind barely aware of what his hands were doing until the exquisite moment when he touched the warm expanse of Bodie’s back. He arched up, and his cock surged into volcanic contact with Bodie, making him writhe with desire.

He opened his eyes to see what Bodie was doing, pulling away from him like that, then relaxed into an embrace he trusted above all else. He lay as Bodie arranged him, as spreadeagled as the bunk would allow, and watched through half-closed eyes as Bodie began the serious task of making love to him. His shirt was lifted, minutely, aside, the skin of collarbone revealed and kissed, small, damp kisses. Inch by inch, his body was uncovered and with each revelation, there were tiny kisses, bedecking him like stars, tangling themselves in the hair of his chest, climbing the peaks of his nipples. He was loved, and thoroughly; there was no room for doubt when it came to that, so he cast aside that burden from the past, that empty space filled by the tightly-controlled cherishing that Bodie was lavishing upon him. His feet were laid bare, the arches and the insteps laved, the toes sucked, the tingle shooting all the way to his scalp.

In the brightness of the cabin he lay, sprawled and naked, cock rampant and hard over his belly, as Bodie stripped for him. He devoured the sight, for watching Bodie had long been one of his most favoured pastimes. The long cock, rose-dark, tip glistening, made his mouth ache to be filled. He wanted to taste him, suck him in, feel the cum explode on the back of his throat and slide down into his belly. He wanted lick and nibble and suck until his jaw hurt, or until Bodie was slick enough to put it inside him, to fill his arse with pleasure. As he ate him up with his eyes, Bodie swallowed, Adam’s apple bobbing, eyes fixed on the handsome cock that tapped against Doyle’s belly.

“I want you to fuck me, Ray.”

That brought his fantasies to an abrupt end.

“You want me to what?”

“Fuck me.”
“I thought you didn’t do that, Bodie.”

The unease and the fear were blatant, vying for dominion over the passion and the need. “I don’t, not usually. I’ve never wanted to before. Christ, Ray, I was scared I wouldn’t want it with you.”

“Bodie,” he whispered, gentle as he knew how to be, “are you telling me you’re a virgin?”

“Yeah. And no.”

“What d’you mean, yes and no? Hate to be the one to break it to you, but you have to be one or the other.”

“I’ve never let anyone do it to me before, but I’ve been…playing with myself, you know, there, and I sort of liked it. A lot. But I’ve never let anyone inside my body before.”

“And that’s fucking terrifying, isn’t it? Come here, Bodie, come on, relax. No-one’s said we have to fuck. It’s not as if there’re any rules for this kind of thing. Come on, we can fuck another time, when you’re ready.”

“No we won’t, we’ll do it tonight. It’s important, Ray, it means something to me.” Doyle shivered at Bodie’s words and in the wake of the finger that lifted his cock, stroking it once, then letting it go to stand at attention again.

“I’ve never really wanted anyone to do me like this before, but I want you—when I’m not scared shitless about it. And it means something about us, doesn’t it? If we don’t do it, then this’ll never amount to anything over a good shag, a convenient bonk between mates. It has to be everything, Ray.”

Doyle caressed the satin mound of rounded buttock, twisting himself round a little until he could butterfly his finger against the hole that opened Bodie’s body. Canopied over him, he saw Bodie arch and close in on himself as the pleasure ricocheted through his body. He pressed again, more firmly, the very tip of him going inside Bodie. “Yeh, that’s it, that’s what you really want, isn’t it?” he whispered, with something close to awe. In all his ponderings, it had never occurred to him that fucking Bodie would ever be more than a fabulous fantasy, for he had believed Bodie to be one of those men who simply could not let another man violate the sanctity of his body. But this sighing pleasure seeping from Bodie promised something else. He moved round, quickly, easily man-handling the pliant Bodie into position, until it was no longer Doyle who was flat on the bed, but Bodie. He spanned him like a bridge, knees between Bodie’s thighs, mouth lowered to kiss the mouth that devoured him. Without hurry, exerting all his control to make this first time last, to make his body listen to him and not explode in three seconds flat, he traced with lingering tongue-tip, the inner contours of Bodie’s mouth, relishing every texture and every taste, every caressing jost of Bodie’s tongue. Hands were cradling his head, holding him still, while Bodie drank his fill from him, until Doyle’s cup of pleasure overflowed.

Under him, Bodie was pushing up, trying to rub them together, the very tip of his cock grazing Doyle’s belly, dappling pre-cum in the hair there, sending little nuzzling jolts of arousal through him. He lowered himself, suddenly, heavily, a puff of air from Bodie filling his mouth, then the indrawn breath when their cocks touched, rubbing hard one on the other, Doyle rotating his hips to better feel the delicacy and the hardness under him. He tweaked at nipples that were already mountainous, stroked skin that already shivered, kissed a man who was already hungry for him. The tide of pleasure was rising in them and he was in danger of being swept away: he couldn’t allow that. Tonight meant something, tonight was important: he’d not throw it away just because simply being this close to Bodie felt too good.

“Let me up,” he said into Bodie’s mouth and felt himself kissed all the harder, a rain of hunger over his face and neck, with the thunder of his own pulse ringing in his ears. “I’m serious, Bodie, let go a minute.”

Blue eyes came into gradual focus, startling him with the unbridled warmth. “Only for a minute, mind. I’m enjoying this…”

Standing beside the bunk, memorising the sight of utter hedonism, Doyle thought that was probably the understatement of the century. Bodie was flushed rosy at his neck and rosier still at his cock, pre-cum glittering in the light, languid limbs sprawled in a beautiful clutter of flesh. As he watched, Bodie’s hands couldn’t keep still, reiterating the pleasure that Doyle had been giving him, pressing on cock, pinking at nipples, rubbing the sensitive skin of his belly. Stuff retrieved from the drawer, Doyle climbed up beside him again, gracelessly twisting to grab
one of the pillows from where it had fallen to the floor, stuffing it under Bodie’s hips. The angle was better then, setting him higher on Bodie, making sure that he’d be able to kiss him while the fucking was going on. That distraction, that display of affection would be important, if Bodie had any fear left in him about this. He settled himself between Bodie’s legs, lying down as if Bodie were the most comfortable of feather beds. He kissed him again, sucking on his neck like an edentate vampire, licking the reddening mark with gentle benediction. He suckled on a nipple, and while Bodie was arching and gasping at that, slipped a finger down to the small hole that hid, coy, between the richness of buttocks. There was no shrivelling of fear at that, so he took some of the spermicidal cream and smoothed that inside, his finger going deeper now. Bodie seemed to pause, listening with rapt attention to the sound of what Doyle was doing inside his body, then there was a spasm, a shiver, and Doyle felt him relax with determination.

“It’s all right, Ray. Like it…”

He withdrew that finger, sent it back in again with a friend, ladened with more cream, the passage becoming slick and inviting. Great heaving breaths helped calm him, giving him pause enough to regain the control he needed to have, so he left off sucking on Bodie’s nipples and licked down his torso to suck on his cock. The taste exploded through him and he thought he might die if he didn’t take this man into him, have his cum erupt, sliding down his throat. His scars were traced by the tip of Bodie’s tongue, again and again, Bodie’s face as closed as his eyes. “It’s all right, Bodie,” Doyle said, his hands kneading the muscles of Bodie’s shoulders. “It’s not your fault you weren’t there to stop me being stupid. Anyway, guilt’s my department. Now get up here and let me kiss you…”

He tumbled them back to the bed, his control suddenly exhausted and fled. That last kiss, the love that had been in it, had gone to his head, making him dizzyly intoxicated with the sheer joy of making love with Bodie. There was a part of himself standing off in the corner, propped against the wall, arms folded, staring on in utter incredulity: this was not something he had ever expected, not in a million years. He had ever expected, not in a million years. He feasted on it, his common sense in the corner there fearing a famine that could follow, but for the moment, all he was interested in doing was forging them together with the heat of their passion, fusing them into one Möbius strip of endless delight.

His cock was nudge at Bodie, reminding them both of how lonely it was. Mâneuvring them closer, he felt his cock press against the bud of flesh that guarded Bodie, felt the body yield, himself press home—and the sudden rigidity of once supple flesh, the clawing tightness of muscle hurting him, Bodie suddenly, frighteningly distant although their skin still touched.
“Don’t!”

He stopped, waited, giving command of this over to Bodie, letting Bodie call all the shots, forcing himself into passivity when all he wanted to do was spread Bodie’s legs and shove himself into him as deep as he could go. Instead, he dabbled a single finger tip against the anal bud, reminding Bodie of the pleasure, helping him over the moment of fear. He knew what was going through Bodie: fear, certainly, to allow one’s body to no longer be inviolate. Fear, also, of losing one’s manhood, of suddenly becoming less, becoming eunuch. Fear, probably, echoing from some of the things he’d seen as a merc and a soldier and from too many wickedly gleeful tales. Most of all, though, for Bodie, the final confession to himself, the final moment from which there could be no return. He had never counted himself queer, because all he had ever done was bugger other blokes. It was the other men who had been queer, to his way of thinking, it was the other men to whom all the vicious invective learned over a lifetime applied. And here he was, lying flat on his back, legs splayed like a woman, letting himself be buggered. Sodomised. And even as those words sent a thrill of arousal through Doyle himself, he recognised that the thrill they sent through Bodie would be coloured with fear and doubts. Give him time, he told himself, hands caressing, give him time...

“Okay. Go ahead. Slowly…”

Very carefully, making sure that everything he did was in response to the minuscule cues from Bodie, he took his time rimming flesh that was so pink and tender, it made him want to kiss it. He did, plunging his tongue inside Bodie’s darkness, hearing a shout of pleasure as he did. The spermicide was bitter on his tongue, but the flesh was pliant and luxuriant and most importantly of all, it was Bodie. His own cock was as desperate as Bodie’s, nagging him, threatening him with coming too soon. Bodie was ready, a faint frown marring his forehead, but that was less than he had expected. He positioned himself, hooking Bodie’s knees over his shoulders, angling himself so that he would slide in nice and easy. Right hand to guide himself, he pressed the head of his cock to Bodie’s arse, feeling the flesh part, feeling the final, convulsive tightening of fear, and then that was gone and his cock was going inside. Muscle clung to him, stopping him and he waited. Bodie may have been playing with himself, but that was a world away from the impact of the real thing. Doyle was caught in flesh, virgin-tight, holding him hard, squeezing him, squeezing him...

He couldn’t wait a single second longer, Hips pushing forward, inch by slow inch he penetrated Bodie, taking his body for his own, joining them, locking them together. Bodie’s face was transfused with pleasure, broken phrases tumbling from him, his body undulating under Doyle, pulling his cock in closer. Strong arms reached up to grab Doyle, to pull him down until their mouths could cling together, while their bodies clung as one. Bodie’s cock was digging into his belly, snub head rubbing, in perfect harmony with the snub rub, rub, rubbing of his own cock deep inside flesh that was so perfectly hot.

Drawing back a little to catch his breath, he caught instead the sight of Bodie, his Bodie, transfixed upon his cock, penetrated, no longer a completely separate human being, but conjoined until there was no marking where one began and the other ended, save for the physical line where his cock stretched Bodie to his limit. He couldn’t resist the beauty of it, plunging in, pulling out, watching his body be absorbed and consumed and renewed by Bodie, watching as they were in such complete union. Bodie was wild under him now, muttering at him, cursing him, saying words of what sounded like love. Doyle opened his mouth to Bodie’s, taking the words inside the way Bodie was taking his cock inside, sucking him in, feeding on him. There was a plash of heat against his belly then a profound stillness in Bodie as the explosion of pleasure took him, muscles contracting once, twice, thrice around Doyle, holding him as still as Bodie, making him stop to watch.

Then he was held tightly, Bodie surging under him, Bodie’s words hot breath in his ear, Bodie’s mouth devouring wet on his, Bodie’s tongue claiming his, Bodie’s hands pressing down on his arse, moving him to the rhythm Bodie wanted, the control taken from him and pure pleasure refunded in its place. He let Bodie move him, pistoning him in and out, Bodie’s hands large and hot on him, damp with their
sweat combined. He was soaring, high as a kite on feelings, then Bodie’s finger found him, entering him, and Bodie’s mouth was on his, Bodie’s tongue in him and the cycle and circle was complete. He came, a cry wrenched from his throat to be absorbed by Bodie, cum wrenched from his cock, to be absorbed by Bodie.

Exhausted, he could do nothing more than lie there and feel fingers stroking through his hair, eliminating the waviness that had been such hard work but the closest he could come to Whitehall respectability.

“Prefer it curly,” the voice murmured, all cotton wool and dreams. “Like it best when it’s all long and just begging to be touched. Used to day-dream about running my hands through your hair and holding it to keep you still when I kissed you. Scared me shitless, feeling like that about another bloke, specially my partner. Suicide to need someone that much, that’s what I used to tell myself. Not good to owe someone that much either. Look at me and my mate Keller... Like kissing you, Ray. Like all of it with you...”

Doyle stirred himself enough to move, reluctant though he was to break Bodie’s dreamy confessions. The condom was dropped into the lined wastepaper basket so wisely provided, then he got on with the rest of it. The towel was within reach and he mopped their bellies, lulling Bodie so that he could examine him without there being so much as a blink of anxiety. No trace of damage, just a blushing pinkness that spoke volumes. He dabbed the towel there, wiping off the residual seepage of spermicide, dumping the towel in favour of the tactile pleasure of touching Bodie.

“Should have a tattoo put on down there,” Bodie was mumbling into the pillow, eyes at half-mast. “Ray Doyle was here. D’you know,” a huge yawn, “I c’n still feel you inside?” A wiggle that dislodged Doyle’s hand from the cushion of buttock. “‘S nice. Could get addicted to that, you know.”

Doyle settled down beside him, draping himself half over the recumbent form, cooing in close, not bothering with blankets even though he knew the cold later would wake them up. It was, after all, as good an excuse as any for making love again.

“’M glad Cowley’s an interferin’ old bastard. Missed you, sunshine...”

Then Bodie was gone, sound asleep, all shagged out, as Doyle thought to himself with giddy humour. He could hardly believe it: to come this far, only to go back to the beginning again. He stroked a fingertip along the lush eyelashes, watching the eye twitch in sleep. To think they’d finally made love, and to think that he could concede it was love and not just sex without so much as a second’s pause. His finger found and explored the quirk of Bodie’s left eyebrow, something he had wanted to do from the moment he had seen him. It had been a long time coming, the road there convoluted and without signposts, a road that was far from finished. But they could traverse it, he hoped. They would get there in the end, come hell or high water. Oh, there would be problems, bushels of them, there always were in a relationship where feelings ran deep. But they could sort them out better than they could have ten years ago. There were, however, still so many questions to be asked, so many answers to be given, so many truths to be laid bare. But they could do it, he knew they could. They wouldn’t repeat the mistakes of the past, he wouldn’t let them. Going by what Bodie had had to say, Bodie wouldn’t let them either. If Cowley’s devices had split them up, then their own desires would hold them together.
GOLD FOR THE FERRYMAN

Yes, this is a death scene, a vignette rather than a full-fledged story. It was inspired by the movie, Long Time Companion, and deals with the great and terrible plague of our times: AIDS. There is no requirement that you read it.

SILENCE = DEATH

M. FAE GLASGOW

The raddled body on the bed mocked him. Where was their pride now, with all their strength de-based to this, a hollow shell with racking breath and putrid sores. Flesh melted down to skin, cows to tallow, that's all they were become. Nothing more than this bed, with its burden of agony, instead of all the love and laughter. Arguments, even, had had a home in this bed, cosying up to the passion, snuggling down with the cuddles. They'd lived in this bed, gone through everything here. This was where they had almost come undone; this was where they had forged unbreakable links.

Unbreakable. He could almost laugh at their youth and folly. Almost, but not quite. His knuckles were white on the bedstead, but still they were not as white as the skin that yet clung to the living skeleton in that bed. He forced himself to straighten, to let go, coming instead to sit on the bed, as he had done a million times in health, and a million more in sickness. Singing softly under his breath, for that seemed to soothe some of the pain away, he picked up a bony hand to hold in his own two strong ones. Such beauty, these hands had always been to him, and even now, his memories erased some of the ugliness that decay had brought.

The man in the bed shifted, feeble movements to protest the torture, and suddenly, there were tears again, where for weeks there had only been the dry eyes of coping. Another movement on the bed, and a few more tears spilled, to drip, one by one, on their hands as they lay entwined. He felt the wetness of his tears upon his own hand, and wondered if his lover could feel them too. He had been so lost to feeling, this last episode, gone adrift in the dementia that struck so many, stealing their minds from them as the disease stole their vitality.

And life.

Still stroking that cool hand he held, Doyle looked at the pain lying in the bed he had shared with Bodie. That was all Bodie was now, pain, and pain, and more pain. Screaming in the night as the agony of his body tormented him or the breaking of his mind filled him with terrors unholy. He’d had to give up work to stay home with Bodie, although nursing him through the night had only been an excuse, there being more than enough helping hands, from nursing visitors to home helps to friends. But he hated the risk of leaving, hated leaving even for the minutes it took to go to the bathroom, or for the breathers that kept him sane in the face of this horror. Hated leaving, because he had nightmares of his own. When little he slept, his own terrors would haunt him: leaving, to tend to the needs of his own still healthy body, and coming back, to find that Bodie had died, alone. Alone. He’d never let Bodie die alone, never. It was the first promise Bodie had made him make, that day coming out of the doctor’s office. The stunned, terrified silence had been exploded by that dreadfully quiet, small voice.

He’d never heard Bodie beg before. Nor since, for that matter. Just that once, that Ray wouldn’t let him die alone. And he wouldn’t. He’d stayed there, side by side, fighting this as they had fought the enemies they had been able to see. They had refused to yield this battle: they had never given in to terrorists before, they wouldn’t this time. But this was a war without weapons, without battlelines, without rules. So blind they had been, and there had been so little to pick...
up and use to destroy before the disease could destroy Bodie.

And every day the disease would mount its flanking action, trying to undermine them with every new illness that struck Bodie and with every new day that dawned without Doyle so much as sneezing. It was as hard to watch your lover living, perhaps, as to watch him dying. That was what they had to do, every single day. Snatching at happiness, while watching the other die. Even with Doyle’s body so healthy, they both knew it was a matter of time before HIV+ became ARC, as it had in Bodie that bright summer’s day. And then it was only time before ARC became AIDS and AIDS became this lying on a bed, body lost in agony, mind lost in dementia.

There was a movement on the bed again, but this was not the mindless stirrings of the body. Doyle leaned forward, very close, giving his breath, his life, for Bodie to take in, to give even another second of living to this man he loved beyond himself.

“Ray?” Scratchy, unused, as sepulchral as the body.

“Yeh, I’m here. Promised, didn’t I? Wouldn’t leave you, Bodie, never leave you, love. I’m here...”

No more words, for there wasn’t the strength for them, but there was the brief blessing of respite, the mind coming back for a second or a minute or an hour. Doyle hoarded it to him with the single-minded greed of an infant, hugging it to him, treasuring seeing Bodie back. He kept close, watching him, face wet as he stared at Bodie.

Bodie’s eyes were empty of all, save the one thing Doyle didn’t want to see: the desperation for it to end. Doyle’d never had to actually face it before, for Bodie even in illness had kept that from him, always turning away before his eyes could betray them. But today, God help him, Bodie was too weak to turn away, to hide the fear. Not of death, not now, when life was such purgatory. Somewhere, in the long dark days and the abyss of night, Bodie had made a truce with Death. He would go, if Death would take the pain away. And he was begging, too weak to speak, begging Ray to give him to Death, to take away the pain that the medicines couldn’t defeat.

Rough, hand shaking, Doyle wiped his face clear of tears. He wouldn’t let Bodie’s last sight be one of tears. He clenched his jaw, pushing himself and what he needed back and away and down: Bodie would leave with love around him, not tears. He forced a smile, his tear-dampened hand stroking tenderly down Bodie’s cheek, unable after all to rid himself of all the tears. “I love you,” he whispered.

But it was too late. Bodie had gone again, although his body lived on, flailing weakly, fighting death with the mindless instinct to survive, no matter the cost. There was the faint smell of urine rising from him, another sign of the mind’s absence from the body’s struggle. Automatically, Doyle got to his feet to change Bodie as he had done for so long now... Then he stopped. He would have to let go of Bodie to change him, to go and get the new package of pads. He stared down at the ashen face, and thought of Bodie, of Bodie being left.

Of Bodie, dying.

It had to come. If not today, then a week from now. And all that life offered his Bodie now was the continuation of suffering and the humiliating loss of control. Doyle saw, bright lit with the neon glare of memory, the first time Bodie’s bladder and bowel control had failed him. Remembered the bitter, helpless rage. Remembered the fear, the gnawing, rat-like fear.

He sat down again, fingers trembling on soft hair that had grown longer and thinner with the passing of the illness. It had seemed criminal, almost, to cut off a part of Bodie when so much was already dying in him, so Ray had let it grow, teasing Bodie when Bodie was well enough to get up and about, caressing it when Bodie was trapped in bed. He was caressing it now, with all the tenderness in him, with all the love.

Thinking about Bodie, about him living, and loving, he smiled, for all the goodness they’d had, the high spots that had made the low points something to be worked through, even if the effort had drawn blood.

He shouldn’t think of blood, not when he was trying to remember how good their life had been. Blood, inescapably, made him think of the disease, the one that was killing Bodie, the one that was lurking somewhere inside his own cells, waiting, just waiting, to get him. He was too
exhausted to be angry now, although he knew the fury would come soon enough, when Bodie was...gone, and he had to face the future alone.

He wondered, idly, as he sat loving Bodie, if there might have been a cure found in time, if the governments had seen this for the threat it was, and not just some disease that was riding the world of poofs and a load of wogs in Africa. Still, he didn’t know if it would have made any difference if people had been warned, or if he and Bodie were already infected by then. The doctors simply kept on extending and extending the incubation period, until it seemed that there was no-one left who hadn’t been exposed. Even now, with Bodie in front of him, these thoughts stirred a bitterness in him which threatened to choke him. But he swallowed it down, determined not to let it destroy.

He had a virus in him which was going to do that without any help from him. Bodie had gone very still, his breath rasping, his chest rising with vile shallowness. Doyle wanted to rage, to scream that Death couldn’t have them, that he was keeping Bodie with him, that he was never going to let him go.

But he remembered the expression in the eyes that had looked at him with such pleading honesty.

Slowly, with infinite care lest he should cause any more pain where there had been more than enough, he got into bed with Bodie, sitting up against the pillows, cradling Bodie in his arms like a child. He was so light, so heart-rendingly light, this man who had always seemed so solid and strong to him. Now, he was no heavier than a feather, as light as a soul that the Egyptians said could enter Heaven. Doyle hoped there was a Heaven, hoped that there was, at least, absolute oblivion, where there would be no pain. Holding Bodie carefully, stroking his face, he began whispering to him, loving him in the only way left to him.

“Let go, Bodie. Just let go. Stop fighting, love, and let go. It’s time to die, Bodie, time to make the hurting stop. Let it go...”

Blue eyes fluttered open, faintly, but there was no doubt: the dementia was gone for the moment and Bodie was with him. Doyle smiled at him, refusing to cry, letting Bodie go with nothing but love. He leaned down, kissed the dry lips, his breath soughing gently into Bodie. There was almost no response, the lungs too damaged and the heart too weakened to bring enough breath in or out to disturb the air around them. In stillness they sat, Bodie draped across Ray’s lap, Ray’s arms around him, one hand stroking his face, endlessly, a continual caress to tell Bodie he was still loved, that he was still beautiful.

They were in a silence all the more profound for the smallness of the noises that broke it: the rasp of Bodie’s breath, the whisper of Ray’s voice.

“Let go, Bodie, let go. Time to make the hurting stop, love. Let go, sunshine. I’m with you, you’re safe, sunshine, you can let go now, I’ll take care of you. I’ll be there, watching your back, mate...”

He could cry now that it was over. Bodie wasn’t there to see him, so he allowed himself the luxury of tears, of sobs that ripped his heart apart, even while part of him was thankful that for one of them, at least, the suffering was finished. Now that he could hug Bodie without bringing more pain, Ray still caressed him, stealing what he could before Death stole all the heat from the man he held so closely to his heart, but there was no strength to be gained from holding Bodie, not now. Not now the flesh was beginning to chill and the spirit that had been Bodie was gone, and he was left behind, bereft.

Eyes finally dry, he got up from the bed that he had shared with Bodie for what had become a lifetime, though all too bitterly short a lifetime it had been. Still moving with tender respect, he straightened Bodie out, giving him back the dignity the disease had tried so hard to steal. It was time to phone the undertakers, to let them know that the arrangements should go ahead now. There were other people waiting to help, waiting to be there for him the second he told them he needed them.

But it wouldn’t change anything, not with Bodie lying there so still and dead. Without Bodie, when his own time came, there would be no-one for him to beg not to leave him alone. For he already was.

Alone.