





needs, his cock stretching out to touch the other man's faintly tanned skin, his mind trying to pull away from this *liaison dangereux* and back into the security of his tidily compartmented life.

But that moment was when the handsome young man took the decision for him. Intensely blue eyes never blinking, the man smiled, slowly, a half-quirk of invitation, and peeled the foreskin back from his cock, revealing fully the tender, moist head. His hands were darker than his belly, tanned by daily exposure to the elements, and so different a colour from the sun-protected cock.

Another moment, another movement of beautiful hand on beautiful cock and the attraction was too strong for him to resist. Knowing he should be running from this, instead Doyle lowered his trousers enough that the handsome man could cup his buttocks, palm to the cleft, fingers pressing between, index finger finding his hole unerringly. He sighed, lifting up on his toes, dropping his head back so that the long curls tickled through the thin shirt that stretched across his shoulders, breath quickening as his body was stroked. Then the hand was taken away from him, and he clutched at common sense as arousal subsided marginally, and he told himself again, like a child reciting the useless history lists of monarchs, that he should leave, run, seek refuge in the smothering consolation of his special, discreet friends.

But the man was still smiling at him, confidence seeping from him like precum, slicking Doyle, making him ready for fucking. And almost before his mind knew he was going to yield to the temptation, Doyle had dropped to the hard, cold tiles, mouth wrapped around the hard, hot cock, immobile marble pressing into his knees, mobile flesh pressing into his throat. His own hands were trembling as he splayed them, slow moving, on the supple motion of the handsome man's hips, the sharp point of pelvic bone filling the arch of Doyle's hands, each forward thrust into his hands matched by the thrust into his mouth as he opened, ever wider, taking in more and more of this man. Half grudgingly, he left the lissome belly, one hand sliding round to the litheness of buttock, fingers delving into the crease, brushing against hair that hinted at such an exciting secret. His right hand was tight on his own cock now, pleasuring himself as he sucked the pleasure out of his partner, his hand neither tight enough nor wet enough

on its own, but such a libidinous feast when in counterpoint to the delight of having a cock in his mouth again.

There were hands in his hair, controlling him, pressing him down harder, telling him what this man wanted, letting him give what was needed, hands that were clutching at him, syncopating the muttered obscenities of arousal being poured over him. Those hands, those cries, the convulsive thrusts into his mouth, all warned him that the man was going to come soon. Visceral decision taken, Doyle had no intention of letting his partner pip him at the post, and then, perhaps, walk away and leave him curling in on himself in an agony of uncompleted desire. His hand blurred on his cock, thumb sliding quick and sweet over the slitted head, his own orgasm rushing in on him, his cum splattering out to glitter, white, viscid, on the polished blackness of shoes seconds before hot wetness splashed the back of his throat, tide ebbing as he swallowed, again, and again, until he had taken everything his partner could give.

The hands gentled a path from his hair to cup his face, and Doyle closed his eyes, not wanting to reveal himself to this man. Sex was one thing, a physical convenience for mutual benefit, but he was too open after, too many barriers lowered in the aftermath of orgasm. The man had only one hand on him now, thumb rubbing the slick, wet evidence of his sucking into Doyle's skin, sliding a stray droplet of cum between his lips. Doyle nipped the thumb between the sharpness of his teeth, laving the small hurt with his tongue, languorousness still tingling through him.

"Aren't you going to look at me?" he heard the man say.

Doyle smiled, released the thumb with a last, lingering lick, and opened his eyes. The blond was smiling also, tracing his wetted thumb over the faint sheen that ringed Doyle's mouth.

"Guess what?" the man said.

"What?" Doyle asked, playing the game, readying his next card, deciding whether to play a trump and take another chance with this appealing man, or whether to let his brain kick in again and give the bloke the brush-off. "Go on, don't be a tease, tell me!"

The blond tapped him playfully on the cheek, reached into a back pocket, black wallet falling open before Doyle's widening, horrified eyes, as the other man's smile widened viciously. "You,







now, too much already said for him to retreat back, to claim the unsafe sex as momentary madness or confusion brought on by a job that turned morality on its head. Well, he'd said it now, he wasn't going to crawl away with his tail between his legs, apologising for what he was, for what he had always been. "Anyway, it's not as if it's new, is it? I've been like this all my life..."

He waited for Cowley to say something, to admit that it was all on file somewhere, safely tucked away until it had been pulled out tonight, and the dust blown off it. But nothing was said, no lifebelt was thrown to him; Cowley wasn't going to give him so much as a straw to cling to. Doyle laughed, an ugly, painful sound. "Oh, come off it, you're not going to claim you hadn't the faintest idea, are you?"

Cowley sat back, his emotions wiped from his face, impassive professional bureaucracy a mask for him to hide behind. "Regardless, I'm telling you not another word of CI5 business."

"In other words, you've known from the start, and ignored it as long as it didn't interfere with the job, is that it?" Doyle voice was a shout shot through with hoarseness, and the hurt of having Bodie sit by silently whilst he fought his last desperate battle with Cowley. "You know the names of every woman I've ever slept with, including some that I'd forgotten, so how the fuck can you pretend you didn't know about the blokes as well? Can you tell me that much at least, or is that all covered by the Official fucking Secrets Act an' all?"

"We're not here to review CI5's security checks, we're here to get you to do what little you can to make up for the damage you've done."

"The damage I've done? The damage I've done? What did I do? Oh, yeah, sucked some bloke's cock in a toilet. Not the cleverest thing ever, I admit, but at least I didn't trick him into it just to bugger his life up. All I'm guilty of, *sir*," and the last was a sneer, such an agonised sneer, all the tearing and rending of this ugly end twisting his voice and his face, "is being taken in by a pretty face, and I'm not the first man in this department to to that, am I?"

"No," cold, damning, "but you are the first to do it with a man."

He leaned on the desk in front of Cowley then, the battle long since lost, nothing left him but the dregs of revenge. "Don't you mean that I'm the

first one to get *caught* doing it with a man. Sir."

Doyle had the briefest of satisfactions: Cowley looked away. But then Bodie shifted behind Doyle, and without thinking, new habits not yet learned to break the old habit of trust and friendship, Doyle turned round, and was impaled by the bleakest distrust.

"The statistics aren't what matter, Doyle," Cowley was saying, the unexpected use of his name calling Doyle back to his boss. "What matters is that we can't afford the scandal. The Minister's already had to answer to the PM, and to head off a full-fledged investigation of Departmental security, he promised her that you'd be out on your ear before morning."

"Before Fleet Street get to hear about it, isn't that what you mean?"

"Aye, it is—and before the Opposition get their hands on it, and before the budget makers get a whiff of it, before the do-gooders can use it to bash us over the head with more accusations of corruption and moral turpitude."

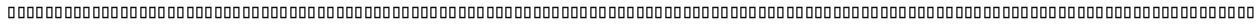
Doyle sat back down again, all the fight gone out of him, his belligerence shown for all the bombast it was. "In other words, I'm to be made an example of. Nice to know how special I've been to you all these years. Glad to've been able to risk my life—"

"For God's sake, man, can't you see?" and Doyle did see, for a moment, the conflict in Cowley's eyes, the distress that all this mess was causing him. "We're CI5. The Untouchables, incorruptible, never outside the law, never above the law, but beyond the law. And beyond normal human weaknesses and temptations, because we're the only ones that can't be bought or blackmailed. We're the last defence, Doyle. We're the only ones who are beyond reproach, lily-white and perfect."

"And smelling ever so faintly of roses? As long as you don't scratch the surface, that is."

"Aye," Cowley said, sadly, fingers flipping through page after page of Doyle's file, exemplary reports glowing upon exemplary reports. "Aye, as long as you don't scratch the surface and expect to find Eden before the Snake."

Then, eventually, to fill the emptiness of Cowley staring so bleakly at so many years of excellent service and even more years of aborted promise, Doyle spoke, grasping at straws: "So because of one thing about me, just one thing, you're going to



turn on me? You're going to write me off as worthless because I'm not poker straight?"

Cowley wiped his hand across his eyes, his face abruptly etched with every second of his age. "I'm going to write you off, Doyle, because you're no use to me with a stain the likes of that against your name. And for being so bloody stupid, I have to write you off as a bloody bad risk for the department."

"So nothing I've done matters, compared to one moment of weakness today? That one thing is going to change how you see me that much?"

There was silence then, angry, bitter, furious, from Bodie, old, cynical and sad, from Cowley, and the immobile silence of defeat from Doyle. An ending, then, and one he'd known would come from that first lurching instant when his handsome young stranger had said, so blithely cheerful, 'you're nicked'.

"Is there anything I can do?" Doyle asked, not hoping, knowing too well the politics that hounded CI5 and the politicians that hovered like vultures over Cowley. "Anything at all?"

Cowley shrugged, looking at the words written about Doyle's past instead of at Doyle himself. "There's only one decent thing you can do."

Doyle laughed again, and this time, looked straight at Bodie when he spoke. "Why, do blokes like me still shoot themselves?"

Bodie blinked, slowly: yes.

"You—" Doyle started, hot anger burning through the pain. But what was there to be said? Nothing, with Cowley sitting there, and the truths too caustic to be heard.

Cowley was speaking again, coming between what had become a former partnership. "Will you do it, Doyle, or are you going to force me into a very public and very messy dismissal proceeding?"

There was an echo of the old gleam of Doyle's smile. "Do I have a choice?" He answered himself, as he began going through his pockets, keys and ID and security tag piling on Cowley's desk. "Haven't had a choice since I bollocksed things up this afternoon, have I? D'you need it in writing?"

Unspeaking, Cowley edged a small pile of printed forms across the desk to him.

"Always prepared, eh, sir?" But for all his attempts at joking, his hand wasn't entirely steady as he signed his name, in triplicate, often enough to sever all ties. His fingers fumbled, going to unbuckle a gun that wasn't there, unworn because

off duty, and then, because arrested, and now, no longer his to claim.

"I know a car's out of the question," Doyle was saying, his voice exceptionally steady, only the very placidity of his expression betraying his utter turmoil, "but how long do I get before I have to get out of the flat?"

Cowley, for the first time in all the years Doyle had known him, looked ashamed. "The Minister..."

"The Minister?" Doyle prompted, resigned even to this, knowing that CI5 took care of its own, and losing CI5 meant losing everything.

"It's to be immediate. The Minister's adamant that you should claim all small personal effects immediately, furnishings and the like by the end of the week."

This was already Thursday—no, Friday by now, morning too short a time away. "The Minister," Doyle muttered, "should fucking apply for a job as fucking Santa." He was digging his house keys out of his pocket, tossing the metal in his hand, looking at it instead of Bodie's arctic presence.

"Your pay will be docked for the usual expenses. I'll make sure the wages clerk gets his skates on." A pause of awkward delicacy. "You'll be in a hurry to get your money?"

Doyle smiled a little at that. "Oh, don't you worry yourself about me, sir," Doyle said, the bitterness in his voice flailing Cowley. "It's all right, I don't need a loan. Anyway, the only thing you can do safely is spit on me, isn't it? Wouldn't do to let anyone get the wrong idea and think CI5 cradles queers to its macho bosom, would it?"

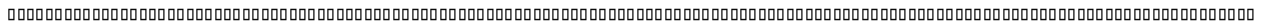
It was getting worse, too much coiling round them all, entangling them in things they should say, hanging them with words that should never have been spoken.

Doyle got to his feet, the keys clattering too loudly as he dropped them onto the desk: relinquishing control of Government property, handing them over to be taken by whichever escort Cowley gave him, now that he was no longer CI5. "D'you think it would compromise CI5's pristine image if I used your phone to get a taxi?"

Cowley was obviously reigning himself in, had, perhaps, decided that he deserved far worse than Doyle was throwing at him, the vitriolic joke no subtle reminder that Doyle was supposed to be rushing to leave before he soiled the department any further. "Bodie'll take you back to your flat







given the figures released just this morning. Just *yesterday* morning. Tomorrow had already come.

A car pulled up at the kerb beside him, an unsmiling Bodie leaning across the front seat to push the passenger door open.

Doyle stood there, impassive, waiting until he had some idea of what Bodie was going to hit him with.

“Look,” Bodie said, “I’ve got my orders, and I’ve had my lecture from Cowley, so just fucking get in and let’s get this over and done with.”

Only, Doyle didn’t want to get this over and done with. How many years had he sat on his desire for Bodie? How many years had he allowed common sense to rule his passions and his emotions? His entire time with Bodie had been dictated by the need to not rock the boat, to not chance his arm and end up getting his hands cut off for his efforts. No, Doyle didn’t want it to be over and done with: if he had to give up CI5, then he was going to be bastard enough to try to take Bodie with him and grab a long life for both of them. Always supposing Bodie could be persuaded, by fair means or foul, to leave CI5. And, perhaps, to share his bed with Doyle. There had to be something in all the hair ruffling and bum-feeling, hadn’t there? Had to be something real behind all the affectionate nicknames, and the risking everything to get Doyle out of a tight situation. Had to be more than just the job.

Or was he clutching at straws now he didn’t have CI5 and Bodie to lean on?

“So you’re going to be glad to see the back of me, then?” he asked, ever so casually, while his fist was clenched by his side and the muscle in the side of his jaw jumped.

“What do you fucking think? Oh, but I forgot, you don’t think, do you?” From silence to full spate, no middle ground, a flood of words spewing from Bodie. “You just open your mouth and swallow, don’t you? What was it you said? Oh, yeh, that’s it. You fell for a pretty face. A pretty face.” Gears crunched as the car was wrenched round a corner, headlamps sliding light across net curtained windows. “And any pretty face would do you—as long as it’s attached to a prick, of course.”

“Then how come I haven’t had you?”

Bodie spared the contempt for a glance at Doyle, making a point of ignoring that Doyle was calling him both a pretty face and a prick. “Because I’m

not bent the way you are, am I?”

“That a question?” Doyle asked, the anger in his belly warming away the chill. “Aren’t you a bit on the old side not to’ve worked it out yet?”

“You’d twist anything, wouldn’t you. Well, if you think you’re going to get me wondering about myself, then you’ve got another think coming, mate. I know what I am, and a poofter like you isn’t one of them.”

“Ooh, what a shame, and here was me thinking you wanted to sweep me off my feet and take me away from all this.”

Bodie took the roundabout too fast, tyres protesting, Doyle bracing his foot against the dashboard to save him from landing against Bodie. “I’ll knock you off your feet and sweep you under the fucking carpet.”

“Like it rough, do you, butch?”

The car came to an abrupt and noisy halt. “D’you want to walk the rest of the fucking way, or are you going to shut your trap and leave me alone?”

Real danger, there, in the way Bodie was looking at him. Serious threat, serious risk, the kind of eggshell-framed violence usually reserved for real scum. “Sorry,” Doyle muttered, looking out the window, withdrawing as far as possible from his erstwhile partner, the man he had once been able to trust with his life. “Just get me home, will you?”

“And let’s not forget on to a hotel after, shall we?” Bodie bit out, hurling the car forward again. “Orders are orders.”

And sitting beside Bodie in the fraught quiet, Doyle began to ponder just precisely why Bodie was quite so angry and why there was such an enormous well of hurt roiling under the surface.

In the car outside his flat, the streetlamps gleaming on the carved profile of his partner, Doyle admitted that he hadn’t given up completely after all. Painstakingly, he dredged up the last of his strength, returned to the fray, and began gluing together all the jumbled puzzle pieces: the excessive anger, the lowering silence, the simmering violence, the hurtfilled, betrayed looks that were so quickly cemented over.

It was, he confessed to himself, as he walked up the stairs behind Bodie, a faint hope, but it was better than nothing. In front of him, Bodie was using the keys, opening the door, doing his official duty as minder to a former CI5 agent, fulfilling his







be it?"

"You do one thing for me, and yeh, that'll be us even."

Bodie was thinking about it, his gaze never leaving Doyle. "How can I trust you?"

"You what?" Doyle couldn't believe his ears. "I've risked my fucking neck for you and you—"

"Yeh, and you lied to me, Doyle, you lied to me for years, pretending to be one thing when you were the opposite. I trusted you, and you fucked me over royally. So yeh, I think I'm entitled to ask how I can trust you."

"Suppose you've got a point there. Look, I wasn't deliberately lying to you—Christ, I thought I was being sensibly discreet. And I honestly thought you knew."

Bodie's expression was a *magnum opus* of disbelief.

"For fuck's sake, Bodie, you met Simon once, outside that pub!" Doyle shouted and watched, interestedly, as that hit home.

"Simon was one of your..."

A hellbent grin for that one. "Don't know what to call him myself. Boyfriend sounds a bit limp, and lover's a bit grand for what we were, so... Well, anyway... I've never broken my promise to you, have I?"

"No, don't suppose you have."

"Then I promise you, do one thing for me, and that's us finished."

Bodie was still watching him, measuring him. "One favour then, and that's it, that'll be us quits?"

"All I'm asking for is one thing. And it's not something impossible, either."

The tension abruptly left Bodie, and Doyle caught his breath when his partner smiled at him for the first time in far too long. "So you want me to get hold of some of my old mates, get you a job, get you an in somewhere—"

"Oh, no, I can stand on my own two feet, mate, thanks all the same for the vote of confidence. I'll find my own way when it comes to jobs. Anyway, I've given you my promise, you going to give me yours?"

"I'm not the one who fucked up here, Doyle."

Hard-eyed, wild and demanding. "Promise me, Bodie."

"Always after more, that's you, isn't it, Doyle? Greedy, demanding little bugger. But to shut you up, you have my word as an officer and a gentleman."

"And d'you give me your oath as an SAS man?"

Bodie shrugged, honour not a matter of degree with him. He had already given his word once, he couldn't go back on it anyway. "I swear on anything you like, Doyle. Right, you've got my promise, so what is it then, this huge favour?"

A silence then, as Doyle volunteered nothing, and Bodie refused to ask. Time stretching, tension building between the two men, an almost tangible bond.

"Come on, Doyle, I've not got all night. What is it you want?"

Still no answer, just Doyle looking at him with knowing eyes and half smile. Then Bodie went to walk away, as if the conversation were over, as if the reckoning had been met.

"Bodie."

Bodie turned, slowly, more unnerved than he cared to admit by that odd timbre to Doyle's voice, and held his peace, not participating, so that he could pretend, later, that it was all Doyle's fault that things had gone so sour, all Doyle's fault for being a queer and lying to him.

"You knew what I wanted the minute I opened my mouth."

A laugh, nervous; eyes, wary, and Bodie was still trying to run away, even as he stood facing Doyle down. "Don't be daft—how could I know what was going on inside that mop-top?"

"Because you've known from the very start, haven't you?" So bland a voice, so disassociated from the fear that was running down Bodie's back, so unrevealing of the terror in Doyle that he might lose.

"Don't know what you're going on about—"

"Don't you?" Doyle said sharply, killing all attempts at levity. "Never took you for that much of a fool, Bodie."

"You're the fool, Doyle, sucking a fucking copper off in a toilet. Christ, what got into you?" A sudden redness on the pale skin, then almost stammering: "Apart from the obvious, that is. Look, will you just cut the crap and tell me what the fuck I have to do to get rid of you?"

Eyes warm, gaze flickering over his ex-partner, Doyle smiled, and his voice was very gentle when he spoke. "Bodie."

So little. Just his name, but turned into a caress, which made it the greatest threat Bodie had ever faced. "Ray?" he whispered.

