

SEBASTIAN

PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESS

M. FAE
GLASGOW

IONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS

HELEN
RAVEN

PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS

PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS PROFESSIONALS

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

Yes, yes, observant reader, the title has been lifted directly from the Fab Four themselves (a musical reference that M. Fae knew I'd understand, while anything from the '70s onward was doubtful), and it is directly relevant to this piece. You may wish to hum the song's closing refrain as you read. Think of it as a mantra: love is all you need, love is all you need, love is all you need... Then apply it to Bodie's and Doyle's situation and ask yourself the question they ask themselves: is it, indeed, all you need?

Well, as she was writing, M. Fae did ask herself just that. She said to me, "You know, I've reached a break point in this story and it's Murphy. Depending on what he says next, the story can go in either of two directions. Which do you want me to write?" Me, she was asking me? Well, not about to let a golden opportunity slip away, I insisted she write both. I've chosen the ending I think fits the story best—but as not everyone agrees with my tastes, I've included the other version afterwards. Read either or both. One is full of regret, the other, determined hope.

THERE WERE EVEN BIRDS TWITTERING IN THE TREES OUTSIDE, AND CHILDREN,

dimly remembered games from his own childhood, the perennial game of football erupting amongst a gaggle of boys, the girls squealing as they put paid to that idea, the street resolving back into the peaceful ebb and flow of a lazy summer's morning, until the boys came back with their water bombs and spitballs, the girls taking off after them in high dudgeon, hurling loud threats of death and destruction at the retreating backs.

Perfectly normal, in other words, so normal it dislocated Doyle's brain. Hands braced on the heated paintwork of the windowsill, he gazed out on the street, this picture-perfect community poster. The kids were back again, war either averted or armistice signed, the group devolving into sets and subsets, intersecting, separating, merging together in a cacophony of play and high-pitched voices. Outside his open window, there was a chaos of flowers in the window box, aromatic, and he wondered, idly, who had planted them: hard to imagine anyone else in the A-Squad taking the time to plant seeds and bulbs. Nearing him from the far end of his street, there were two young mothers walking side by side, one child screaming bloody murder, the other blissfully oblivious and sound asleep, the wheel of one pram squeaking in a rhythm just this side of bloody annoying. He could hear their voices now, discussing something, the words not entirely clear, either the latest scandal amongst the neighbours, or the latest power battle amongst the Tories: all he could hear was the casual familiarity of first names, and those fit either topic equally well. One of the boys booted the ball again, coming within a handspan of the squeaking pram, the mother giving him a right rollicking, the sight and sound of that bringing a nostalgic smile to Doyle's face. What had her name been? Yeh, that was it: Mrs. MacGregor, face as pretty as an angel, and a right cross that had left his ears thoroughly boxed and ringing like the chapel steeple. She was the one who'd caught him, hand in till, guilt all over his face, and made him apologise to old Mr. Gregg—and put the old man up to making him work the rest of

the summer holidays for him, gratis.

The best thing anyone ever did for him, now that he thought about it, looking back on the tearaway he'd been, the petty thief he'd been, back then. Far cry from now, post the Met, and in CI5, Cowley's finest, the Untouchables.

Now it was a pair of teenagers walking along slowly, in a world all their own: shocking, to realise that he was old enough to think teenagers too young to look like that, to dress like that, to behave like that, and in public too. Christ, he'd been nearly 16 before he even chanced his arm like that! And that had been with Peggy—God, he remembered Peggy!—in the back row of the pictures, and they'd been going steady for three or four months by then.

The sun was streaming down, liquid gold, tipping everything with gilt and beauty. The air was that treasured richness of flowers, melting ice-cream, warm ground and sunlight, heady, better even than the foreign glamour of his trips to Paris, Minorca, Athens—even the Côte d'Azur paled in comparison, to this, the glory of a perfect summer's day with all its happy echoes of childhood and contentment.

Oh, to be in England, Doyle thought to himself, misquoting, for all he knew.

Bodie would know the right quote. Would even remember the title and the poet's name, things Doyle had happily forgotten the minute he'd sat his O levels.

Strange, some of the things Bodie remembered. Stranger still, some of the things that were important to Bodie.

Doyle sighed then, and tugged the yellowed lace curtains over the window, the strength of the sun blunted, muted light arcing in wind-shifted patterns across the carpet he hated almost as much as those bloody curtains.

At least the sofa was comfortable, and there was a good nook on the left hand side of the fireplace for his music system. He stuck a tape in, one he'd made himself, one that would last a while before he'd have to get up and turn it over. Nice music, that, something

Bodie had got him listening to. There were built-in shelves over his hi-fi, the chipped paint hidden by the books he'd crammed in there and he ran a lazy finger over them. One he'd bought that day he and Bodie had found themselves let unexpectedly loose by Cowley, and one that Bodie had bought him, an expensive art book shoved casually his way in a tatty carrier bag, the first time either one of them had given the other a Christmas present. Of course, there was the motorcycle maintenance book he'd borrowed from Bodie—must remember to give that back. And another one of Bodie's books, *I, Robot*, a tattered receipt doing duty as bookmark. He really should return them to Bodie. Not, he supposed, that there was really much point, seeing as how much time they spent round each other's flats these days.

That made him sigh, too. He left the books to their own devices, poured himself a glass of whisky, raising it in defiant toast to the clock that read barely eleven in the morning. Hell's bells, if it was good enough for Cowley... Bodie-logic, that. Useful enough, sometimes, to become Doyle-logic.

Sipping slowly, he prowled the perimeter of the living room twice, still new enough to this place that he hadn't had the chance—the mischance—to memorise how many steps it took to pace this room. He counted, absently, forgot the number the minute he sat down, the sofa cradling him in comfort. At least Bodie wouldn't be complaining and walking around doing his hunchback of Notre Dame if he spent the night on *this* sofa. Bit of an improvement on his last place.

Always supposing, of course, that the next time Bodie spent the night, it'd be on the sofa and not in Doyle's bed.

And that made him sigh loudest of all.

Thoughtfully, he looked into his glass of whisky, and found no more answers written there than he usually did. Leaned back, eyes closed, and listened to the music. No answers there, just beautiful sounds washing over him with suggestions of relaxation and bliss.

Which brought him back to the question at hand. Bodie.

And what Doyle was going to do with him. To him. Or what Doyle was not going to do with him or to him or for him. Or what Doyle might do, if Bodie—

It wasn't supposed to be this difficult.

Start again. Look at the situation, start at the beginning, break it down into its component parts—

He was really quite delighted when the phone rang.

But then again, maybe not.

Bodie. Of course.

"You sickening for something?" Bodie, an edge of concern showing through the lightly mocking tone of voice.

"The only thing I'm sickening of is you, mate," Doyle told him tartly. "Told you, needed to take care of a few things—Christ, I've barely even finished moving in here, and you're moaning at me to..."

Pause, Bodie audibly smug even across the phone. "What is it you're moaning at me to do, anyway?"

"Not what, Ray, but *who*. Two lovely birds, and yours has a heart of gold—felt really sorry for you, she did, when I'd finished telling her all about you. She's willing to take pity on you, if you know what I mean."

A deaf, dumb, and blind boy would know what Bodie meant. "Yeh, well, you're a big boy, butch, you run off and play all by yourself."

"Come on, Ray, they're both gorgeous—and her face isn't half bad either. You'll like her—"

"Like that ruddy gymnast you palmed me off with? Or what about that 'lovely bird', the one who was a trainee mortician and looked like one of her own bloody victims?"

"Ah, but they were different," continuing easily over Doyle's predictable 'I'll say they were *different*', Bodie's voice smooth as silk as he poured words down Doyle's ear. "This one is a peach, a pearl, a—"

"A girl without a date tonight, and the only way you could get her sister or her friend—or her daughter, knowing you—to go out with you was by promising a friend for the other one. Well, this time, you'll have to find another mug."

"Ray..."

Wheedling, as only Bodie could be.

"It'll be fun—"

Resolve wavering, the laughter and encouragement in Bodie's voice alluring. "And you'll score, in like Flynn—"

Which changed it all. "I already said no, Bodie, and I meant it. Listen," before the pout he knew was there could be translated into blandishments that would end up in a double-date tonight, "you can come round tomorrow when you surface and I'll make you a proper breakfast and you can tell me all about it, all right?"

A moment's quiet. "Yeh, well, but if you're going into one of your broods..."

"I'm not, I just have to get this tip put in order. So I'll see you in the morning, all right?"

“You don’t know what you’re missing.”

“Oh, come off it, I’m not a virgin.”

Another moment’s quiet, then Bodie’s voice almost as quiet as the silence, Bodie breaking their own tacit rules. Perilously near seductive, Bodie all but whispered: “Oh, yeh, I know you’re not a virgin, Ray.”

Yeh, well, after last Thursday, Bodie *would* know that, wouldn’t he?

“Tomorrow, Bodie,” he said firmly.

“But she’s gorgeous, tall, tits like melons, legs up to—”

“Tomorrow,” he said, and hung up. Stood there for a minute wishing he could solve all his Bodie problems that easily.

Went back, slowly, to the sofa, and his whisky, and the sounds of children playing in the street.

Once upon a time, he’d pictured himself with his own children playing outside, his wife pretty and smiling when he came home, Detective Chief Inspector coming home from solving another major case, and hundreds more solved cases under his belt, his kids happy and healthy and doting on him—

Snapshot reality, that, pretty pictures, bearing only a passing resemblance to real life. Especially now. Especially if he was right. Which he knew he was. Which he feared he was.

Right. Look at it again. Go through it again. Add it all up. Tear it back down again. Look at it from a different angle. Turn it upside down, inside out. Come up with alternative theories. Come up with even more alternative theories.

But for every theory, there was an unexplained incident, an inexplicable look, a suspect word, a revelatory tone of voice.

Outside, the street grew quiet as the children were shouted inside for their lunches, the noise rising like the tide as they came back out again.

Still, Ray Doyle sat and tried to find a different answer, a different way of looking at it. Like a maze, he followed the ideas round and round, but there was no escape. Every hopeful premise would thunk into a dead-end, a baffle-wall pulling him up short. There was always something, something Bodie had done or said or looked. Always. Inescapably.

Silence in the streets now, children gone inside to watch *Blue Peter* and eat fish fingers, footsteps of the people coming home from work, cars, too, the empty kerbs filling with the all the colours of the vehicular rainbow.

And he still couldn’t reinterpret the facts. Still

couldn’t come up with an interpretation that would keep Cowley happy, that would keep the status quo. There was always an incident rocking the boat, Bodie making waves, all those touches and looks and comments and oddnesses. All his searching for answers today had done nothing but block off any avenue but one.

Which meant, it was the truth. Had to be. When all the possibilities are eliminated, then that which remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

Another misquote, he decided, but couldn’t be bothered trying to track down the correct version.

All that was left was the truth.

Which was absurd.

Which was terrifying.

Face it, he told himself. Put it into words. Put it into so many words.

Never do anything by half, that was Bodie’s motto, and Doyle was every inch the man Bodie was. So. Put it into words. Say it out loud.

“Bodie loves me.”

He nearly laughed. It sounded stupid—no, his honesty slapped him, it didn’t sound stupid, he just felt stupid saying it aloud like that. What it actually sounded like was something that he’d known all his life, something that had always been there, waiting patiently to be recognised. Bodie loved him.

That was what it was. Hardly surprising, really, given their lives, the way they lived in each other’s pockets, the job—of course they loved each other, even if they were too damned macho to admit it. That’s all it could possibly be.

Well, there was one more thing it could be.

No, he thought. “No,” he said, and felt stupider saying that than saying Bodie loved him. It wasn’t just that.

There was that one other thing it could be, the one he couldn’t deny any more, the one thing that a hundred small moments made pointed: the difference between him and Bodie loving each other like friends, and the way Bodie looked at him. The way Bodie felt about him. Out loud, again, before the truth could flee.

“Bodie’s in love with me.”

Now *that* was new. But not shocking. Echoed, almost, with familiarity. Resonated, deeply, with truth.

“Fucking hell,” Ray Doyle whispered into the fading sun of summer’s evening, “Bodie’s in love with me.”

After he’d said that, there didn’t seem much else to

do. Except get drunk. Get very, very drunk indeed.

Clawing his eyes open, sun raking him like acid, the pounding in his head separating into two separate rhythms, the sledgehammer inside his brain, and the thumping on his door.

Bodie.

Oh fuck.

Bodie.

The search for his dressing gown abandoned, he struggled into yesterday's jeans, yesterday's T-shirt half-way over his head before the fumes hit him: oh, wouldn't that go down just a treat, opening the front door at—fucking hell, seven o'-bloody-clock—seven on a Tuesday morning smelling like a still. Fine way to avoid Bodie looking at him askance, and Bodie beginning the dig to find out what the hell could be so wrong that Doyle would answer the door at this time in the morning, smelling drunk and looking like a natural disaster.

Of course, it was round about now that it dawned on Doyle that he wasn't actually answering the door, but sitting there on the edge of his tangled bed, jeans cutting into his overly-sensitive stomach, the offending and offensive T-shirt half wrapped round one arm.

Any second now, and that beating Bodie was giving the door would get the neighbours after him with hatchets, always supposing Bodie hadn't decided there was a serious CI5-type problem and brought half the squad round here with guns drawn and—

He still wasn't answering the door, and he could only half blame his slowness on the half-life of the booze still in his system. In the warm light of morning, yesterday's prognostications began to look a bit on the silly side, something conjured up by a mind with nothing else to worry over. That was it, he told himself. Just himself, getting himself worked up into a fine tizz over nothing. He'd let Bodie in and they'd have a good giggle over what Doyle had thought. Nah, better make it a dream: Bodie might take it the wrong way, if he found out just what his partner had been thinking yesterday.

"All right, all right, keep your hair on," he muttered, leaning on the door for a minute, the last thud of Bodie's fist reverberating through his skull, then Bodie's voice getting louder as the door opened wider.

"About time, too, mate. Another minute and I'd've been coming through your window—"

And there it was, ineluctable, right there in Bodie's eyes, that deep hunger fed by Doyle's half-nakedness.

"—with my gun drawn," the expression hidden, the desire masked, Bodie continuing on, verbally and physically, moving on down the hall towards the kitchen, his voice carrying over his shoulder as though he'd never looked at Doyle as if he could joyfully fuck him into next week, "and wouldn't that just give the neighbourhood gossips a field day? Oi, I thought you said you were going to feed me?"

Oh, Christ, so he had. Feed Bodie a proper breakfast, and sit there listening to Bodie go on about last night's sex. Definite proof: he obviously was a closet masochist.

Bodie, bent nearly double, peering in at the wan contents of Doyle's fridge. "Where's the bacon? And there's no sausage. No tomatoes—you haven't even any eggs in!" Straightening, looking at Doyle in mock horror, and under it, well-disguised, barely visible, the desire, Bodie betrayed by the way his glance flickered down to Doyle's chest, then back to his eyes, only to snatch another surreptitious look, this one aimed at where Doyle's waistband didn't quite shut, the button working loose, the zip slowly declining. "Here, you weren't going to feed me that muesli rubbish, were you or—" dramatic gulp, eyes widening in terror, "fruit and yoghurt?"

"Give me a minute," Doyle told him, turning away, unnervingly convinced that he could feel the heat of Bodie's stare against the curve of his bum, "and I'll feed you. All the artery cloggers you can eat."

"Yeah? You and who's army?"

"Me and Joe's caff."

"You paying?"

"I'm paying."

A heavy thud, Doyle turning in time to see Bodie fainting dead away, hand to fevered forehead, lashes fluttering. "Oh, the shock, the shock. It's too much for my poor heart."

"Told you all that muck was making you flabby."

And was that purely professional concern darkening Bodie's expression, or was it dismay that Doyle might think him fat?

Whatever it was, Doyle would think about it later, after he'd had a wash, and a gallon or so of good strong tea. Later would be soon enough. But never would be best of all.

Joe's Transport Café was half empty this late in the morning, the drivers long since on the road, the

builders and navvies already sweating on site, the smartly-suited office workers turning their noses up as they walked past the déclassé establishment.

“Have a nice lie-in, lads?” Joe asked them, the first cup already half-poured for them. “The usual?”

“Please. And can I have an extra slice of fried bread? And how about some mushrooms?”

“Doyle paying then, I take it?”

“Got it in one.”

“Two specials coming right up, then. Got some nice pork chops this morning too, you know.”

Doyle shook his head in resignation. “We’ll take one of the big tables today, give you enough room for all the bloody plates you’ll need to fill the bottomless pit here.”

Then they were settled at the formica table, tea steaming between them, Bodie regaling half the café with lurid details of last night’s highly improbable acts.

Doyle was proud of how normal they both made it seem, really, the backchat and the joking, the over-the-top lewd interlude giving way to the minutiae of daily life, the organising of the sort of details that always crop up when two people work together and socialise together, their turn to put on the next birthday do, looming on Thursday.

“So I’ll get the beer in, you’ll do the food, and we’ll put the word out to the rest of the lads. Sounds fair enough.”

“And if any of them want something harder than beer, then they can bring their own. You goin’ round the cash’n’carry?”

“Where else? What’re you going to cook for the starving horde?”

Doyle shrugged, grinned at the inroads Bodie had made in his massive breakfast. “Dunno. Probably a bolognese. And I’ll make something for the rest of the lads as well.”

Bodie was too busy stuffing half a sausage, a chunk of fried tomato, a wedge of fried bread and the dripping of a yolk into his mouth to get his own back for that comment, but did a good job of looking daggers at Doyle who, of course, just smiled.

Timing it just right, Bodie still manfully trying to chew, Doyle asked, “So what d’you fancy then?”

And horrified at the change knowledge had wrought between them, found himself adding, too quickly, “To eat that night, I mean.” Saw suspicion dawning. Covered his tracks with Bodiean deftness. “After sitting here putting up with you going on and on about last night, I already know what you fancy.”

Huge swallow, gulp of tea, Bodie relaxed as always. And Doyle didn’t believe it for a second. Oh, what he wouldn’t give for this to be some book, so that he could turn to the end and read the pages that would explain everything—and tell him what the hell he should do. But this wasn’t a story, so all he could do was look at his partner and friend and the man who loved him, and pretend to believe that pose of relaxation as much as Bodie had apparently believed Doyle’s own little fibs.

“Lasagne,” Bodie was saying, as if he hadn’t noticed the odd expression on Doyle’s face. “An’ a gâteau for afters.”

“Think I’m made of money, do you?” Doyle asked, predictably, but with no heat, his mind back in that maze of Bodie’s reactions, and Bodie’s motives, and what Bodie so blissfully thought he was hiding from Doyle. “I’ll get the gâteau from that bakery round from my last flat—”

“Two flats ago,” Bodie managed round the last of his bacon, eyes warm.

“Two flats ago,” absently, focussing all his attention on the remnants of his own breakfast. Not quite the artery-clogging masterpiece currently disappearing down Bodie’s gullet, but eating the rest of it was better than looking at Bodie, and at an expression that would have Bodie dying of embarrassment.

An amiable bit of arguing over whether or not an agreement to pay for breakfast was valid if extracted by the undue duress of Bodie’s moaning, and then they were strolling down towards Bodie’s car, sunshine heating their shoulders, a day merely on-call stretching gloriously in front of them. Until their RTs went, anyway.

“Christ, Lucas and McCabe pick a fine time to bugger off on holiday, don’t they?” Bodie, muttering, the tyres squealing as he hurtled them off to meet Cowley. “Lazy bastards.”

Doyle just gave him a look, and went on listening to the stream of information pouring from the radio link.

A montage of work, no time for that ‘later’ he’d promised himself to think about Bodie.

And half-ashamed, Doyle wasn’t entirely sorry.

All good things must pass, so the mad race to trace the weapons smuggler was over, and the attempting bombing had been averted, and the kidnapping had been satisfactorily solved, with lots of loss of life on the baddies’ side. Another round of CI5 successes, in other words, and Cowley happy enough to lengthen

their leash.

So now he was sitting in his flat again, thinking, again, with the voices of children providing distraction—again. The fridge was packed with food, the cooking was already started, nothing at all for him to do for at least an hour. Which meant that he'd run out of excuses. Time to think about it. Again.

Right. So he knew Bodie was in love with him. Theory proved, evidence amassing, he could get a conviction in any court in the land.

Bodie was in love with him.

Fine. Terrific.

But now what?

He was drinking PLJ today, remembering Bodie ribbing him about 'caring for that delicate, English-rose complexion, are you then, petal?'. He was on call, technically, too risky to have too much to drink, though it was tempting.

What the fuck was he going to do?

The choices prostrated themselves in front of him.

Do nothing. He could do that. But Bodie wasn't stupid, and despite the oft-evinced opinion otherwise, Bodie didn't think Doyle was stupid either. And just to make sure Doyle didn't simply ignore the whole thing until it conveniently went away, Bodie had been slipping up more and more recently, as if he—at least subconsciously—wanted Doyle to click. So doing nothing was a temporary option, stopgap at best.

Have a heart-to-heart with Bodie about it. Yeah, and if he wanted a heart-to-heart with Bodie, he'd have to arrange them a nice new Parsali situation, the only time Bodie'd come close to actually putting things into so many words. Any other time, and it was all jokes and misdirections, or if pushed enough, he'd end up with Bodie's fist in his mouth. Oh, yeh, a heart-to-heart was just the ticket.

Make it clear he was straight—as if Bodie didn't know that already. The number of times they'd double-dated, it was bloody obvious he was straight—straight as...well, straight as Bodie, who'd been on just as many double dates. Cue the next solution.

Make it clear he wasn't interested.

That was the best, yes, make sure Bodie knew Doyle knew, make sure he got the message that—

That what? That Doyle wasn't interested, didn't care about him?

Which wasn't, strictly speaking, true. He did care about Bodie. A lot. More than anyone else, really, and he certainly got on better with the stupid bastard than

with anyone else. Who had been there to pick up the pieces when Ann realised he just wasn't up to snuff? Bodie, of course, and here he was thinking about doing just that to Bodie. Except there'd be no-one to pick up Bodie's pieces afterwards, would there?

Cue the next solution.

He could leave, just walk away—but that would mean leaving CI5, and Bodie, which just went to prove how desperate he was. He turned that desperation round and round in his head until he could look at it straight on, unflinching. Interesting, the root of his desperation, considering he'd always thought of himself as being open-minded, adventurous, even.

Which led to the crux of the matter, of course: was he avoiding the thought because it turned his stomach or did it just scare the hell out of him because he needed it too much?

Unblinking, he conjured the image up in his mind, looking at himself and Bodie the way he knew Bodie wanted him—they.

Bodie. And him. In bed. Naked.

Didn't make him throw up. So far so good.

Kissing. Touching. Hard. Rubbing against each other—

Definite possibilities there, judging by the way his body was reacting. No actual erection, but at least he hadn't shrivelled to nothing and he wasn't running screaming from the room into the arms of the first woman he could grab.

He could picture Bodie's face more clearly than their bodies, the way Bodie looked at him, the way Bodie had looked at him a dozen or a hundred times before, as if he wanted to hold Doyle forever, keep him safe, kiss him all over.

Love. Gorgeous sight, that, Bodie in love. The trust involved was enough to make anyone's head spin, and add to that the loyalty Doyle knew was in Bodie, and it was hardly surprising the idea had its temptations.

So, think about it, he told himself. The two of them, in bed, having sex, because there was no way on God's green earth that Bodie would settle for platonic hand-holding, and he'd better be bloody sure he wouldn't humiliate either one of them before he laid a finger on Bodie.

He leaned against the back of the sofa, and tried to imagine what sex with a man—sex with Bodie—would feel like. How long it would take for Bodie to want to fuck him. And how the hell he would react to *that*.

Bloody doorbell. Muttering some very choice

phrases picked up from one or two of Bodie's ex-Service mates, Doyle went to the door, not entirely surprised that his partner should be standing cluttering the doormat, an army of carrier bags hanging from his person like ballast.

For a second, Doyle knew, just knew, that what he'd been thinking was written all over his face. In neon. Three feet high. But then the desire and the warmth faded from Bodie's eyes, and a line appeared between those quizzical brows, and no-one, not even Ray Doyle, could convince himself that he really had seen what he'd thought he'd seen.

"Yes? Can I help you?" Doyle asked politely, hoarding his grin as Bodie stood there wilting.

"You can fucking let me in." Flat, no twinkle in those blue eyes at all, not now, just shuttered distance and coolness to hide pain.

"Give me a couple of those bags," Doyle said, actually taking some of them, shocking Bodie no end. Going towards the kitchen, aware of Bodie following behind him, not quite at ease with the knowledge that Bodie would be looking at his bum, wanting to be inside him.

Easily enough, they sorted the drinks out, some on the table, the rest stacked neatly on the floor for easy access—especially later in the night, when not everyone would still be able to walk and drink at the same time. It didn't take long at all, and all through it, Bodie said not a single word.

"Christ, it must be bad."

"What must?" from Bodie, fishing through the pockets of his jacket for something.

"The sauce. Must be bad. If you haven't tried to pinch some."

"Oh." Blank look towards the pot simmering away to itself. Shrug. "Just not hungry."

"That's never stopped you before."

"Well, it's stopping me today. Right, I'm off, I'll see you tonight, probably not 'til about half nine though."

Bodie was half-way out the door before Doyle stopped him, Doyle's comments tossed ever-so-casually over his shoulder. "You sickening for something?"

Pause. "No more'n you were the other night."

Then the door was closed, gently, and Doyle was left to his own devices, and his ponderings over Bodie's vices.

"Christ, I've seen more room in sardine cans!" Bodie yelled into Doyle's left ear. "When the fuck did the squad get this big?"

Doyle took another long drink of lager, mind half on what Bodie was saying, the rest of his attention on the music, the beat going through him. "Always been this big, just not used to seeing everyone all together, that's all."

"And since when've the blokes started bringing their birds to these things?"

Since Cowley started looking funny at certain blokes, Doyle thought, catching the words on the tip of his tongue before they could escape. Another mouthful of lager, can shoved into Bodie's hand, and he was off, moving easily through the crowd, neatly separating Murphy from his blonde, Doyle grinning as he stole Murphy's partner away.

It was hot in the living room, the crowd a terrific excuse for dancing too close, the changing music a better excuse yet, the slow rhythm an invitation to take her in his arms and hold her close.

"Having a nice night, Susan?" he asked her, taking liberties she'd normally castrate him for, his groin pressing close against her.

"I've had better," she told him, her thigh pushing his groin farther away from her, her left hand grabbing his backside. "Much better."

"Tsk, tsk, you should wash your mouth out with soap, telling lies like that."

"Give over, Doyle, you're not God's gift to women and I'm not Bodie."

Tinglings of unease replaced the tinglings of arousal. There were probably a million things she could have meant by that, but with Bodie dancing not two inches away from his arse, Doyle couldn't think of anything but the one, single reason burning in his own mind.

Susan pulled him in closer to her again, angling him so that he was sandwiched neatly between her front and Betty's back; watched, with an expression bordering on lust as Betty manoeuvred Bodie in his turn, the two women grinning at each other over masculine shoulders now that they finally had Bodie and Doyle precisely where they wanted them.

Susan's breasts pressing softly against his chest, Doyle knew that the arse currently moving against his own was male. And it didn't take a genius to work out whose arse it was. The words almost got away from him, but he swallowed them instead, nearly choking on them. *Christ, had everyone but him known?*

Hot on their heels: *and what was Cowley going to do about it?*

"You've gone pale, Ray," Susan asked, amusement

leavening her over-done expression of sympathy.

“Do you want to sit down?”

“No, no, I’m fine,” he lied, grinning at her, distracting her with an unlawful hand on the swell of her buttocks. “It was just the fear of you not spending the night with me—”

“Trying to land me for the night, Ray—and in front of Bodie?” she muttered, applying a none-too-gentle and well-developed thigh to his tenderest spot. “Don’t be any more of a creep than you have to be, Doyle, or you’ll be singing soprano.”

“Oh yeh? You and whose army?”

“Me,” she whispered, strong fingers slowly threatening to crush his left kidney, “and George Cowley’s army.”

“For fuck’s sake—”

“Not a chance, petal,” she said, smiling ever so sweetly as she patted him on the cheek. “That’s Bodie’s department, anyway, isn’t it?”

And he was left trying not to look like a complete wally, standing there suddenly alone in the middle of the room.

“Here,” Bodie, of course, doing yet another impersonation of the 7th Cavalry, Betty thrust into his arms, “take care of Betty for me while I get us a drink, will you, mate? And—” the usual swipe of hand over arse, Bodie ending this one with a distinct pinch, “you keep your hands to yourself, mate, she’s mine, aren’t you, Betty love?”

“Chance would be a fine thing,” she laughed, walking away from CI5’s finest, leaving the Doyle with nothing much else to do but follow behind as Bodie led the way to the drinks.

The party was quieter now, much quieter—especially after the police had been round that second time—far fewer people around, lights dimmed, slow, dreamy music on the hi-fi, couples kissing on the sofa, friends talking in small enclaves around the devastation that had been two huge lasagnes.

Doyle sipped his lager, knowing himself to be drunk, knowing Bodie was probably drunk too. His partner was over by the door, laughing like a drain over something Susan had said. Definitely drunk, Doyle decided, having a good look at Bodie. Dishevelled, tie long gone, sleeves rolled up, first three buttons undone—the man was showing more skin than he did when he went swimming, near enough. Wondered, not entirely idly, if it was merest coincidence that Bodie was looking more like Doyle than himself, or if it was a case of what they said about old married couples, growing to look like each other over

time. Definitely drunk, he repeated to himself, mind beginning to loop on itself, thoughts clouding as he stared at his partner, at the man who would be his lover, given half the chance.

A dunt in his ribs, Murphy winking lewdly at him in passing, on his way to let Susan sweep him from the room and leave Bodie with nothing luscious or blonde to occupy him.

Christ, but he was surrounded by a bunch of drunken bloody matchmakers!

He wandered over and told Bodie so, expecting a reassuringly devastating assessment of the Doyle clan’s combined intelligence compared to the size of a thimble.

“Nah,” Bodie said dismissively, dragging Doyle with him so Bodie could sit himself down in the comfort of an armchair. “My feet are killing me. Our Betty’s lovely, but I swear she has two left feet. Size 12s.”

“Never mind your feet, what d’you mean Murphy and Susan weren’t matchmaking? They bloody were!”

“No they weren’t,” Bodie, patient, eyes fond as he looked up at Doyle who’d perched, unthinkingly, on the arm of Bodie’s chair. “They can’t be matchmaking because they think we’re already attached at the hip.”

Doyle opened his mouth to answer, shut it again, teeth clicking.

“This is like a fucking Fellini film,” he muttered, running his hand through his hair, aborting the gesture when he saw the way Bodie was looking at him. “C’mon, Bodie, there’s not a snowball’s chance in hell that those two—anyone in the squad—would think that and be that all right about it.”

“Oh, yeh, *Dixon of Dock Green*, that’s us.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Come on, Ray, think about it. We *kill* people for a living. We go undercover as every kind of scum the ‘man in the street’ couldn’t ever imagine, we run around risking our lives every single day—and you think the Squad’s going to care who we’re fucking? Listen,” words slightly slurred now, temper combining with alcohol, “compared to what half this Squad does to get its jollies, fucking a fella’s dead fucking natural.”

“I’m not saying it’s not—”

“But just that ‘cos you’ve got a poker up your arse, you think everyone else should be the same.”

“I’m—”

“Oh, it gave me a bit of a laugh, it really did, Mr. Open-Minded here turning puce ‘cos he realised a

bloke fancied him. An' of course, if Mr. I've-been-to-art-school Man Of The World can't handle one bloke wanting another bloke, then everyone else in the world has to be as narrow minded as him. Now am I right or am I right?"

"Yeh, but the rest of the world isn't the one with someone panting to shove a prick up his arse, are they?"

Bodie laughed at that: either that, or a nasty, cruel sound, torn from an open wound. "That's what this is all about for you, isn't it? Christ, Doyle—"

Bright, bright blue eyes, staring up at him, and then Bodie was stumbling to his feet, lurching to loom over Doyle.

"This is what it's all about," Bodie muttered. "This is what it's *all* about."

He had been so sure he was expecting that kiss. He literally saw it coming, Bodie's face coming closer, completely filling his field of vision, his own eyes refusing to close even when Bodie's expression was a mere blur of blue eyes and dark eyebrows. He felt the first touch of lips against his own, the first pressure, the first wetness of tongue against him. He opened his mouth, giving Bodie entry, letting Bodie kiss him. No different, he thought, from a lot of women he'd kissed: strong, demanding, tongue exploring him, tempting him to follow and make explorations of his own. The taste was different, and the texture of skin against his was—distracting. Roughness, where he'd only known softness before, the very faint beginnings of stubble against his own. Need to make sure we shave before we fuck, he thought abstractedly, filing that away along with all the sensations. Bodie left his mouth for a moment, then was back inside him, and under the simmerings of lust were the glimmerings of just how much Bodie adored him, of just how tenderly Bodie loved him.

And that, that was so very different from anything he'd known before.

Bodie's hands—Christ, such big hands!—were stroking his face now, brief, fluttering touches as if Bodie, even now, expected to be punched for his temerity, Bodie touching and kissing him with all the passion of Lancelot finally finding the Holy Grail.

And then Bodie was pushing him away, voice raw with emotion, words indecipherable, but the pain was speaking.

"Bodie—"

"'scuse me, too much beer, have to piss," Bodie said loudly, face averted, Bodie tense as he all but bolted, forgetting his excuse half-way across the

room, the hands that had barely touched Doyle suddenly busy gathering empty cans up, spilling ashtrays, making the room more of a disaster than it had been. Then, Bodie, standing up straight, stock still for a moment, just a heartbeat, and the smile was back, and Bodie was Bodie, no different from the way he was any other time.

It was enough to break a heart far harder than Doyle's. The kiss had lasted what, thirty seconds, a minute, two? A lifetime, more like. Painful to think of how many times he'd seen this side of Bodie, all machismo and mouth, now that he knew what that half-obnoxious façade hid.

All that love, for him.

Unconditional, too—Bodie understood the job, understood the pressures and the humour and the thrill and the everything. Understood all the things that civilians could never be expected to really grasp, no matter how intelligent nor how hard they tried.

Not many people in this world could know what it was like but Bodie, though, knew what it felt like to be a hairsbreadth away from dying. Or from killing.

Across the room, Bodie was telling one of his infamous tall tales to a McCabe who was well on his way from plastered to unconscious.

"C'mon," Doyle said, heaving McCabe up off the sofa, "you can sleep it off in your own bed. I'm not having you puking all over my good covers."

"Never get sick," McCabe declared, cross-eyed, trying to work out when Bodie had developed curls. "Never been sick in my life. Never, never even been the teensiest bit sick."

"There's a minicab on its way," Lucas put in. "I'll see him home." Adding, longsufferingly, as he hoisted McCabe's arm over his shoulders and began the delicate task of guiding his partner down Doyle's stairs to the taxi, "Yes, yes, I know all about it. You never get sick. Unless you drink lager. Or wine or whisky. Or unless you get in a car or a taxi or walk home..."

Voices fading, covered up by the rest of the stragglers yelling or muttering their farewells.

The door closed, the last voice making a last disparaging remark, the distinctive sound of a taxi's diesel engine fading fast.

Just the two of them, now, and the mess, and the memory of that kiss.

"I'll start cleaning up this lot, then," Bodie said briskly. The cans and bottles made an awful racket as he threw them into the bin bag, his forehead frowning as he made his way round the room. "This bloody

shower—born in pigsties, the lot of them, never mind bloody barns. God, I hate mucky ashtrays, and it'll take a week's soaking to get these pans clean, Doyle. Should have lined them with tin foil, made it all a hell of a lot easier—"

A pause there, the spate abating. When finally he spoke again, Bodie's back was turned to Doyle, his voice very calm, steady as his hands even in the worst of firefights. "It's all right, you know. I'm not going to make a pass at you or anything."

"Limit yourself to one a night, do you?"

Not quite a laugh for that. "If I did, you'd be in trouble, mate—after the number of nights I've never made a pass at you, I'd have a mountain of passes by now. No, cross my heart, I won't make a pass at you."

"But you did tonight."

"Yes," resignedly, almost on a sigh, "I did tonight. And I'm sorry, it'll never happen again and can we please just forget it?"

"What? Forget that my partner just kissed me in front of everyone?"

"Wasn't in front of everyone, most of them'd already gone home or were so far gone Cowley could've shagged a sheep in front of them and they wouldn't've noticed."

A long pause then, Doyle's demons nipping at his heels until the words came out his mouth. "We could get fired for what you did."

Another heavy sigh, another clunk as another can joined the army in the plastic bag. "Not if you said I did it against your will. Then it'd just be me who got the sack."

Oh, would some power the giftie gi'e us, to see ourselves as others see us. Trust a bloody Scot to turn a blessing into a curse. "You really think I'd do that, do you?"

Not looking at Doyle now. "Sometimes."

"If you think that...then why the fuck do you love me?"

Facing him suddenly, a beatific smile lighting Bodie's face. "Bugged if I know." Two seconds Bodie allowed himself, and then the smile was tucked neatly away along with the love that had so briefly showed. Back to normal, no different from any other day. "Here, if you're not going to do a hand's turn to clean this place up, it can stay like this till morning. I'm off, see you later."

No different from any other day: apart from what Bodie had done. "Wait a minute, you. You kiss me, you don't deny it when I say you love me, and then you just up and off?"

"What else d'you expect? A nice heart-to-heart straight from the pages of *Women's Own*?" Shoulder- ing into his jacket now, keys gathered into his hands, devil-take-the-hindmost smile pasted firmly in place. "So I'll see you tomorrow, give you a hand with the rest of this, fair enough?"

He could have argued the point, could have insisted that Bodie stay and sort this out right now. Could have, would have, if only he hadn't seen the pain in Bodie's eyes.

Not even his own coven of demons could make him that cruel, not to Bodie. "Nah, it's all right, you've done your bit. I'll do the rest. See you at work then."

"Fine. Right, I'm off now."

"Right."

One last look, one last shuttered expression, then Bodie took a deep breath and walked out the door, no different from any other night or any other day.

Except that Bodie had kissed him.

And Bodie hadn't denied loving him.

Doyle kicked the nearest can and headed for bed.

"He's got to be joking. He can't be serious, not this. For fu—"

"Yes, Bodie?"

"Ah, nothing, sir. Just applauding your brilliant decision to send Doyle and me in to guard Her Royal Highness."

"Aye, well, given who it is, even your mouth shouldn't get you into trouble there. But I want none of your blaspheming, and if there's a single complaint about that foul mouth of yours, you'll be counting trawlers off the Hebrides."

Bodie drew his boss' retreating back a filthy look. "The *Outer* Hebrides, Bodie."

"Yes, sir, no sir, three bags full sir," he mouthed, making sure not even Cowley could hear him. But three weeks guarding Princess Anne. They'd be up to their knees in manure half the time. Wonderful. Just bloody wonderful.

"Pet parrot died then?" Doyle asked pleasantly.

"Worse than that. Read this and weep."

Doyle read it, and while he didn't weep, his eyes did grow suspiciously bright. "That bastard. That conniving, vengeful old bastard! He did this because of that last expense chit, you do realise that, don't you? This is his idea of revenge. Three weeks trailing round Anne at horse shows and garden parties and opening children's wards—he did this on bloody purpose."

“Better than counting trawlers.”

“You’ve never had Royal duty before, have you?”

With careful condescension, Bodie’s incredulous stare took Doyle in, from the roots of his untamed hair to the toes of his decidedly scuffed trainers.

“No, I haven’t either, but I was on the sharp-shooting security detail for one of the Princes, once. It’s a fate worse than death, that’s what this is.”

“Can’t be that bad.”

“Just you wait: ten minutes after we get there, I’ll be saying, ‘told you so’.”

With an adjutant breathing down their necks every second, it took two and a half hours and a bathroom break before Doyle’s prediction came true.

“Told you so,” he said.

“Told me what?” Bodie asked, distractedly, his expression very odd indeed.

“Told you guarding a Royal was a fate worse than death.”

“Nah. Marrying George Cowley’s a fate worse than death.”

“Only if you consummated it.” He nearly bit his tongue trying to take the words back before Bodie heard them.

“Oh, God, yeh,” Bodie replied, drying his hands. “Fucking Our George—”

“Oh, hello, sir,” Doyle said loudly, covering up whatever the hell Bodie had been about to hang them both with. “Didn’t expect to see you for another hour.”

“Aye, at which point you pair would have this place tighter than an Aberdonian’s sporrán. No point in checking when you know it’s coming, is there?”

“No sir,” they chorused, edging hastily towards the door. “No point at all.”

The door swung shut, Bodie wiping his brow with exaggerated relief, turning the near disaster into just another pantomime, all personal details forgotten in the pressure to do the job and to do it right.

In fact, it was only long after dark and long after he’d out-wrestled yet another ancient spring hell-bent on murder that Doyle had time to actually think about how off Bodie had been—how odd he’d been in the loo before Cowley walked in and caught them. Embarrassingly enough, fatigue and overwork immediately blamed, it was nearly ten minutes later before it even dawned on Doyle just what that expression on Bodie’s face had been. And how much it had had to do with Doyle’s own state of undress at the moment.

Bodie, lusting after him, Bodie needing him, and

doing everything in his power not to let it show on his face.

Lovely. Just lovely. Terrific feeling, this, knowing he was responsible for hurting his best friend, the one person in the entire universe he never got tired of, the only person who mattered more than himself. The only person he’d actually gladly die for, if it meant Bodie would keep on living. Not some abstract ideal where defending that brought the risk of death. No, the personal sort of risk, a very personal death. He could, he knew, walk coldly into a room where people were waiting to kill him if it so much as gave Bodie a chance of living.

No greater love hath a man...

Doyle punched his pillow did his damndest to sleep.

There either wasn’t enough time to breathe, or there was far too much time to think. And all the time, there was Bodie, at his side, at his back, in his head.

Bodie, in love with him. Bodie, doing a nigh-perfect job of concealing his emotions. Bodie, turning away that time, but not before Doyle had seen the bulge in his trousers, the pale fabric revealing Bodie’s arousal in a long line down his thigh.

And just what the hell was he supposed to do about *that*?

Entangled in starched sheets, sweat curling lazily down his spine, the last throb of passion shuddering through him.

Must have been some wet dream, he said to himself, stretching out full length in the bed, grinning as the old memories of puberty thrust themselves into his mind.

He couldn’t quite remember who he’d been dreaming about, but... Oh. Bodie, of course. And somewhere, Ann. And then himself and Bodie, Ann disapproving, jealous, demanding that he stop kissing Bodie and come back to her, she needed him, needed him so very much...

So what was it that had given him that sweet wet-dream now so quickly souring: was it lust for Bodie, or power at having Ann, of all people, being weak and needing him?

No greater love hath a man that he should lay down his life. Or no greater love hath a man than he should lay down his body, spread his legs and say, go on, mate, take what you need, it’s all yours.

Maybe not like that. But that night, at the party, when Bodie had kissed him... What would it have

been like, if Bodie had been kissing him, and that erection Doyle had seen straining the seam of Bodie's cream cords had ended up pressing against Doyle, rubbing against him, so full of need and love and—

Not the sort of thing you could phone a mate up and say, listen, I think I might be starting to fancy you, fancy a shag? Well, he could have done that with Bodie, once. Before he'd realised that Bodie loved him.

What a mess. He should do a painting of this and call it *Life*. Be easy, just paint the most tangled Gordian Knot ever imagined. That would just about do it.

He was going to have to do something about this. Soon.

He pictured Bodie's face if they did the 'something' that they were, eventually, ineluctably, going to have to do.

Pictured Bodie's face if it didn't work out.

Could he really take the chance of hurting Bodie that much?

Oh, yes, he really needed to do something about this untidy unravelment of a situation. Just...not right this second.

Yet another headache building at the base of his neck, every last trace of pleasure from his dream destroyed, Doyle forced himself back to sleep, where he was haunted by Bodie's face as Doyle failed him.

Down time, the quiet days that were publicly complained about so bitterly, but which were privately so cherished. Nothing to do but file work and playing catch-up, time to let half-healed strains and bruises finally fade.

No children outside now, just out-dated businessmen clinging to tradition and holding their hats on as the wind threatened to catch them up and swirl them off to dance amongst the dead leaves spinning from trees. The sounds today were traffic noises, and the voices coming from the typists' room, muttered invectives from the computer room as a so-called expert resorted to using clubs and stones to thump modern technology into thick skulls.

Doyle smiled at his reflection in the window: they were still alive, he and Bodie, still in one piece—well, two, but everyone thought of them as a single functioning unit. Even that nasty bullet crease on Bodie's neck had healed, barely a hint of a scar, too.

All the reports were done, expense chits were in and for once, reimbursed with all due speed. They had done their weapons refresher course, physicals,

the lot, and now all they had to do was savour this time—and have lunch.

And sort out this morass with Bodie. But later, maybe, after that Ministerial assessment that was coming in November.

His footsteps echoed behind him like spies as he set off for the rest room. Stopped, a fraction after him, as he stood framed in the doorway. There was, really, nothing wrong with the scene.

Nothing at all. Just the ravaging of sudden jealousy and his fingers itched, suddenly, hungrily, for the weight of his gun.

Bodie, lazing on the decrepit old sofa, Murphy sitting beside him, the two dark heads bent close together over the newspaper spread on the coffee table in front of them. The Page 3 girl was all but leaping off the page at them, all breasts and white, grinning teeth.

Murphy was saying something about Everton, and Bodie, predictably, was counterstriking with praise for Liverpool's centre forward.

All perfectly normal. Nothing to get worked up about.

But he still craved the feel of his gun.

Bodie hadn't even looked up at him yet, sitting there with Murphy, wrapped up in his newspaper bird and his football.

"Having a nice time are we?" he said nastily.

"Well, we are," Bodie said lightly, "dunno about you, mate."

"Glad to hear that. Especially since I've just spent two fucking hours sorting out the mess you made of the Connery file."

Very still now, Murphy looking from one partner to the other, Bodie dangerously relaxed, the deceptive ease before the attack. "You volunteered to do the Connery file because I'd done the York paperwork."

"So now it's *my* fault I ended up with all the work? Oh, that's nice, that is. Very decent of you, Bodie—Where d'you think you're going?"

"Anywhere where you're *not*." Snarled, in passing, Bodie's shoulder hard as it shoved him out of place.

"You know," laconically, as Murphy came gracefully to his feet, "I can't understand what he sees in you."

"Maybe he gets tired of the intellectual challenge of talking football and birds."

"Oh, that's what you think we've spent the last couple of hours discussing, do you?" That lazy smile, so heavily laced with slow, hot anger. "Just you keep this in mind, Ray Doyle," standing tall now, a telling

few inches taller than Doyle, nothing lazy about that smile now. "Bodie's a friend of mine. You don't think it matters that we did our SAS training together, do you? Well it does. He's my mate too, you stupid bastard. And one other thing, before I go and see to my mate: you just remember that if *you* don't want him," an ungentle punch against Doyle's upper arm, "there are plenty who do."

Then the rest room was empty, apart from Doyle standing on the threshold, and then Doyle was racing away too, and the room was left, bereft.

Running hard, he was half way to the car before he allowed himself to identify why he'd craved his gun. Jealousy. Ugly, nasty, pathetic jealousy.

And it was only after the most liquid of lunches that he dared admit what had fuelled all that jealousy and anger. Bodie, sitting there on the sofa, with Murphy there, where Doyle belonged.

Maybe it was time to admit something else to himself.

Maybe it was time to admit he was as much in love with Bodie as Bodie was with him.

And it hurt.

The day before a sodden blur, the phone ringing off the hook threatened to knock his head off his shoulders. Hangover pounding through his head and searing through his stomach, they were halfway through Cowley's diatribe over the sins of taking an unauthorised afternoon off work, when Doyle was unceremoniously and loudly sick all over the place.

At least it had the benefit of shutting Cowley up.

And the even greater benefit of driving any last faint memories of yesterday right out of his head.

It's amazing what a man can forget when he needs to.

Himself, in love with Bodie? Nah, whoever would think a thing like that?

Sitting in the car, bored to tiredness by the routine of slow-paced enquiries, headache still lingering to keep his sour stomach company. There was a thought running circles in his head, like a half-remembered song he couldn't get rid of. The differences between love and in love, one so acceptable, the other acceptable only under carefully licensed situations. Not that he was going to ask, but he wondered when it had changed for Bodie, when it had gone from loving his partner, the man who guarded his back, to being in love with the individual man, Raymond Doyle. For that matter, he wondered if it had been a transition, or

if all that macho hostility at the start had been Bodie trying desperately not to fall in love with him.

There were times Doyle felt like a heel: today, he felt like a heel on a pair of clapped-out old work boots that had never been worth anything in the first place.

Christ, but what the hell was he going to do about Bodie?

"Scintillating, isn't it?"

"What is?" Doyle asked, scarcely paying attention.

"One firm trying to steal another firm's secrets, and Cowley's finest called in to save the day. And what for? The secret of softer toilet paper. I mean, who the hell cares about bog paper?"

"People with piles?" Not caring, too lazy to point out that softening toilet paper was the least of this chemical compound's attributes, too tied up with what Bodie had gone through to have much patience for meaningless prattle.

"Wouldn't mind if it was something important—like a nuclear power plant. Now *that's* something worth protecting."

Doyle couldn't even be bothered to stir himself for their usual pro/anti nuclear power battle. "S'pose so."

Silence.

Silence, and Bodie glancing at him.

Silence, and Bodie looking at him.

"Might be nice if you'd look at the road, once in a while," Doyle said easily, slumped down in his seat, eyes half closed, sure that Bodie had no idea what Doyle was thinking.

"Oh, I can see exactly where I'm going."

Doyle looked at him then, taking in the tight set of jaw, the clench of knuckles bleached white by the steering wheel.

Bits of yesterday came back to him in a nauseating flood.

Just what had Bodie and Murphy been talking about yesterday?

"How long've you known Murphy?"

That got a raised eyebrow, but at least Bodie was willing to answer him for once. "God knows. I'd met him a couple of times when I was still with the Paras, but it wasn't until we were paired off in the SAS that we started being mates."

Doyle could have kicked himself: he really should have expected that unfurling of jealousy in the pit of his stomach.

"Good mate, is he, then?"

Bodie took a look at him for a moment, face unreadable. "Nearly the best."

Nearly the best. Two months ago, and no-one could have come within a country mile of Doyle's being best.

Nearly the best.

And: if you don't want him, there's plenty who do.

Doyle subsided against the window, staring out as the countryside gave way to suburbs and then to city proper, and all the while, he nursed his jealousy to keep him warm.

Not much later, Bodie having taken off in a clash of gears and a cloud of exhaust fumes, Doyle was alone. Foul tempered and with a face like fizz, he bent to the odiousness of doing housework.

Even cleaning the toilet was better than sitting brooding over the emotion curdling his belly.

Fear.

Hands on hips, Doyle stood and glared at the poor defenceless telephone, its last outraged 'ping' fading. "Fine, see if I fucking care!" Doyle near enough yelled. "Too good to go anywhere with me, mate, well you just wait and see how long it is before I fucking come crawling to you, *mate*."

He took a long, deep breath, made himself calm down. Nothing to get angry about: just Bodie going off with Murphy for a bit of rock climbing this weekend.

Just Bodie and Murphy, in a tent, alone.

Nearly the best mate Bodie had.

Just the two of them.

Doyle was getting very, very tired of his old friend jealousy.

Of course, he told himself, there was a solution to all this. Sleep with Bodie. Let himself love Bodie the way Bodie loved him. How much different could it be? They'd do pretty much the same sort of things they did with women, with a few pertinent differences, of course. And queers seemed to enjoy being buggered, and sucking other blokes off, and given the number of queers there were around, there had to be *something* going for it.

For the millionth time, he reminded himself that all it boiled down to was how he felt about Bodie.

Yes. He could have sex with Bodie.

Yes. He could love Bodie. It should have been an epiphany, felt instead like defeat. If he could have sex with Bodie, if he could love Bodie, then what the hell was his excuse for dithering like a maiden aunt?

Just what the bloody hell was his problem?

Some time after midnight, he gave up in disgust,

went to bed, and spent the night dreaming of Bodie, with Murphy, and not him.

Looking at himself, in the mirror of his dreams, he couldn't find it in his heart to blame Bodie. Given a choice, Doyle would rather he was Murphy himself.

Tuesday morning. Dank, dark, miserable. Suited Doyle to a T.

"Morning, sunshine," Bodie said cheerfully, slapping Doyle on the back. "Have a nice weekend?"

"Oh, just peachy, thanks."

"That nurse of yours, what's her name, Sadie?, she come across then?"

Words too quick to catch, wounds too deep to bind. "Did Murphy?"

Silence spread around them like an abyss, threatening to swallow them whole.

"I don't think I heard you properly," Bodie said coldly.

Some perverse demon controlled his tongue, his jealousy so thick he could taste it like bile. "Yeh you did. I asked you, did Murphy come across?"

"What me and Murphy did or did not do, Doyle, is none of your fucking business. Got that?"

"I know what I've got, Bodie."

"And you think it's me? Christ, Doyle, is that what this is all about? You don't want me, but you don't want anyone else to have me? What am I supposed to do, eh? I get to stand around, waiting for someone to pick me up, is that it? But only if you're not looking because you don't want me yourself, but you like having your own little puppet to dangle. Charming, Doyle, absolutely fucking charming."

"It's not that—"

"Then what is it? You've decided you do want me after all?"

And facing that grim expression, looking at those eyes, what else was he supposed to say?

"Yes. Yeh, I've decided I want you for myself after all."

Blue eyes narrowing, shadowed almost to black. "What brought this on? Feeling randy are we? Or just a bit curious and who better to have a go with than good old loyal Bodie. He won't mind, have a bit of a fling, have a bit of a go, see how the other half live—and then once the novelty's worn off, dump good old Bodie, he won't mind, he'll still be hanging around with his tongue dragging along the ground ready to pick up your crumbs. Well, guess what, mate. Not me, not this time. You want a toy, you go out and fucking buy yourself one."

Stomping now, wrenching the door open, voice raw as it whipped Doyle. "In fact, you don't even have to buy one. Go to the right street corner and you can rent them by the hour. For that matter, go down the cottages. With your looks, you could satisfy your curiosity in ten seconds flat. Just leave me out of it."

Bodie almost out the door, his words dripping down Doyle like acid, stinging him to speech again. "So much for you loving me, then."

Bodie turned quickly then, laughter sounding more like tears. "You think about it, Ray. You take your time, and you have a good think about it."

And then Bodie was gone.

[Even the job was going wrong, things souring between them, their timing off. Concerned noises were being made, refresher courses booked, Dr. Ross' name lobbed like a grenade, ten-second warning to sort themselves out before she did it for them.

In the car together again, tension sharding between them as Bodie drove Doyle home. They were lucky to both be driving home, and they both knew it. One more second, one more mis-step, and one or both of them would have been in the hospital or the cemetery. They'd come *that* close. So close that Cowley hadn't even given them a bollocksing, just stood there, looking pale, snapping orders at them, giving them 72 hours off.

Doyle could hear the bullet going past him, missing him by a foot, missing Bodie by a millimetre.

They'd nearly died today. Both of them.

They were going to have to sort it out. Now.

Doyle, looking at Bodie; Bodie, looking at Doyle. Catching each other mid-glance, looking away quickly.

If he'd died today, and Bodie had been left alive, how long would it take the poor bastard to fall into Murphy's waiting arms? Or Susan's, or anyone else's, for that matter? And how long would it take him to get over the knowing that he hadn't been good enough for Doyle, that he hadn't been worth Doyle loving, or taking one small step forward.

How long does that sort of scar take to fade?

They had to sort this out. Now.

Tempting, still, to wait for Bodie to start it, but then, Bodie had already started it, with the touches and the looks and the comments. And the kiss, and admitting to love.

But it was hard, taking that final step into the unknown. Harder than killing, harder than anything else.

If he failed Bodie, if he hurt Bodie—

Then at least they'd have tried, at least they'd have had a chance. At least Bodie would know the fault wasn't his.

"It's your fault, you know," Doyle said, his tone of voice bearing no resemblance to the accusation of his words, suffused instead with the sort of open affection they hadn't allowed themselves in months. "If you'd shagged me when I offered—"

The car swerved, Bodie recovering so quickly it looked like no more than a good driver avoiding a pothole, rather than a good driver shocked into nearly killing them. "If I'd shagged you when you offered," Bodie said carefully, "then I'd've probably killed you by now."

Doyle slanted a glance in Bodie's direction. "I didn't know you were a black widow. Does that mean you'll say to me, come into my parlour?"

"It means I've got a fly swatter with your name on it."

A longish pause, the traffic light redly interminable. "You think I haven't sussed you out, don't you."

"If you'd sussed me, Ray, you'd've been announcing it in the paper."

"Or making a pass at you."

Bodie didn't even so much as flicker an eyelash. "You haven't the faintest idea." Confidently, stridently, even, but still not enough cover up how much this was eating away at him.

"I know, Bodie," Doyle said softly. "I know."

A quick glance from sharp blue eyes then, Bodie's smile a shadow of itself.

"You can't know. Cos you're still here."

"C'mon, Bodie, you all but admitted you loved me—"

"And?"

"And? And I put two and two together."

"Oooh, tire yourself out, did you?"

"Don't you start playing the prat, you."

"Then if you're such a fucking know-it-all," hard, bitter, jolting Doyle, "then why the fuck are we in this mess? It's all falling down round our ears—"

Audible click of teeth as Bodie closed his mouth to keep the words damned inside.

"We're in this mess," Doyle said, measuredly, "because..." Look out the window. Fidget with a shoelace, jiggle keys in his pocket. "Because I didn't know if I could do it or not."

No reply, Bodie grimly steering them towards Doyle's flat.

“Did you hear me?”

“I heard you.”

“And you’ve nothing to say?”

“What d’you expect? Sorry I’m so repulsive, hang on a tick while I run off to Denmark and have the operation?”

“I was expecting more of a fist in the face.”

“Two hands on the steering wheel at all times,” Bodie parroted, doing an excellent Police driving instructor.

They were at Doyle’s place, too soon or too late, Doyle wasn’t entirely sure. “Come up for a drink?”

Bodie sat there for a moment.

“Take all the time in the world,” Doyle said, “as long as it’s ten seconds or less, I’m freezing my bollocks off out here.”

But he didn’t move, made no real indication that he had any intention of rushing Bodie.

“This is the offer, then?” Bodie asked the steering wheel.

“For what it’s worth.”

“And what’s that?”

“A nice shiny fifty pence piece. C’mon, we can’t discuss this out here in the street. Come up for drink.”

A shrug, a deprecating grin, a self-mocking shake of his head. “Yeh, but a drink of what?” Bodie muttered then more loudly, “Glutton for punishment, that’s me.”

“Makes a change from swiss rolls, I suppose,”

Doyle said to him, leading the way into the kitchen.

“Fancy a coffee?”

Of course, they both knew it wasn’t a coffee Bodie fancied.

“Wouldn’t say no.”

Now they both knew that as well.

“How d’you like it?”

The heels of his hands rubbing his eyes, Bodie collapsed into the kitchen chair. “Thought you already had everything all sussed.”

Doyle made the coffee, dug out the new packet of chocolate digestives and offered them up, sacrificial virgin at the altar.

“If I’m right—” going on quickly over a Bodiean interruption that never came, “if I’m right, then it’s not the sex you want.”

“I wouldn’t go that far, Ray. You can tell I’m not a monk—wrong haircut.”

Doyle gave him a look for that, but at least Bodie was making those puerile comments, a distinct improvement on the last couple of weeks. “It’s the emotion, isn’t it?”

Bodie toyed with his mug. “I’m not Ann Holly,” Bodie said quietly.

“Yeh, I’d noticed—wrong haircut. Sorry. You mean you wouldn’t walk out on me?”

“I mean I wouldn’t stand for you pretending and lying to me, using me like a guide dog to take you for a walk on the wild side. She took you to literary wine and cheese dos, introduced you to people called Pippa and Cecil and then what did you do when you were tired of all that?”

“Now hang on just a minute, mate. I didn’t get tired of her, she dumped *me*.”

“But you didn’t exactly fight for her, did you? Didn’t so much as ring her up to give it another go. She beat you to the punch, that’s all.”

Doyle stirred his coffee again, an excuse not to look at Bodie. “You don’t think very highly of me, do you?”

“I’m just realistic. Even you’ve the occasional fault, Ray. Only thing is, they all seem to be aimed right at me.”

Doyle kept on fidgeting, unable to look up and expose himself in Bodie’s eyes. “This commitment you’re after...”

Bristling from across the table. “Who said anything—”

“Oh, give over, Bodie. Who is it who signs on with the Army, the Paras, the SAS, CI5—anyone waves a contract under your nose, and you’re salivating like Oliver bloody Twist.”

“Yeh, well, don’t see what that has to do with anything.” Pause. Quick look at where Doyle’s hands were slowly shredding a bit of kitchen roll.

“It’s not just me being curious either.”

“No? Then what took you so long to make up your mind?”

Shrug, confusion written in every line of his body. “It’s not that I don’t love you, it’s just... Christ, Bodie, you’re asking me to change what I am.”

“When have I ever tried to get you to change a single fucking thing about you, Ray? Go on, tell me just one. I even put up with your bloody tea slurping.”

Elbows on the table, Doyle ran his fingers through his hair. “We’re both still stalling, aren’t we?”

“Which isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

Bet your old C.O. would recognise that expression, Doyle thought at Bodie, watching as the back straightened, the jaw thrust forward and the eyes hardened. Nice to be thought of as facing a bloody battle.

“Right,” Bodie was saying, all briskness and brashness, not that it fooled Doyle any more. “Cards on the table. There’s no point me denying it: if you’re willing to go to bed with me, then I’m not going to turn you down, not this time.”

“Mind if I ask why not?”

Unreadable smile, eyes even less communicative. There were times when Doyle would give his eye-teeth to know what was going on inside Bodie’s head. “Oh, you could always say I’m overcome with your manly charms.” Charming, disarming grin defusing the truth. “Or you could say that I’ve been kicking myself since last time. I’ve always believed you should take what you can get. So whatever’s on offer, I’m taking. But—”

A longish pause, Doyle waiting for the rest of it.

“But if you mess me about,” flat, threatening, as friendly as Cowley during an interrogation, “then I’m leaving. I won’t hang around to be your punching bag, Ray.”

He couldn’t help but push, clear footing and certainly a rare treasure in this situation. “So you’re not going to insist on the till-death-us-do-part bit?”

“Be stupid if I did. I mean, look at us. We nearly got our heads blown off today, because we were so busy not letting our guard down round each other to keep our guard up against that bastard.”

No denying that, and he’d tried hard enough. “Funny how nearly dying can change how you look at things.”

“That why you’ve suddenly decided to let me have—”

Breaking in before Bodie could say the wrong thing. “No suddenly about it. I’ve been stewing over this for months. Bodie—” Deep breath, gulp, screwing his courage up: easier to face a firing squad than some of this. “It’s a lot for me, Bodie. I’ve never been with a fella before, never even thought about actually, you know, doing it till I realised what you were after. I’m still not sure...”

Bodie was tracing patterns in the spilled droplets of coffee. “Did it turn your stomach that last time, when I kissed you? Is that why you just sat there?”

Who said honesty was the best policy? He should be able to say, oh, it was just the shock of it it being so wonderful: instead, all he could offer was a truth that would hurt no matter how he dressed it up. So he left it plain, the less to draw attention to it. “More surprise than anything else, I suppose—not every night your best mate kisses you in front of the colleagues.” Taking the pressure off, admitting to his own blind-

ness in lieu of his fears. “Oh, and I did a bit of digging. You’re right about our lot—especially Susan.”

He was rewarded with a wicked smile, just the right touch of salaciousness. “Not to mention McCabe.”

Doyle matched him sour face for sour face, both of them degenerating into puerile smiles at exactly the same moment, the resonance of their old rapport both balm and bane. “I’d rather not, if you don’t mind.”

“Yeh, it is a bit disgusting, isn’t it? Well, as long as he’s not asking us to partake, I suppose.” Outflanking Doyle, hitting him simultaneously with both question and sharp blue stare. “So did me kissing you sicken you then?”

Second time round didn’t make it any prettier. “It was just...different. Not what I’d expected. You’re a bit bigger than the average blonde, Bodie.”

“Knew I shouldn’t’ve left me handbag at home. Seriously, though, Ray, what made you change your mind?”

“A lot of things.”

“Yeh? Such as? I mean, I’d given up on anything but friendship from you.”

Doyle stretched, body reminding him of the day, and of all the days and months and years before. “You said it yourself: it’s all falling apart round our ears. And then when I thought about it, well, I don’t know... It’s easier to take what we’ve already got to the next level than give it all up completely.”

“Taking the easy way out, Ray? Tsk tsk, what would Nanny say?”

“Probably dose me with cod-liver oil.”

Almost out of the blue: “I won’t try to fuck you. But—” Bodie looking away then, for the first time in years, the fairness of his skin yielding to a blush. “You can fuck me if you like.”

Doyle was looking everywhere but at Bodie. “There’s no rush, is there? I mean, it’s not that I don’t want to, it’s just...”

“Yeh.”

“Yeh.”

Silence.

Sitting there, round Doyle’s kitchen table, it slowly dawning on them that yes, they really had just agreed to have a relationship with each other. They really had just agreed to have sex.

They were going to have sex. Doyle wondered if gibbering was considered good etiquette in situations like these.

More silence, stretching taut as rubber, a band wound tightly enough to snap.

It was Bodie who finally found words. “You didn’t throw up when I kissed you that time. Want to see what happens if I try it again?”

Doyle looked around the enamelled sterility of this utilitarian kitchen. “Oh, you’re ever so romantic.”

“Bedroom?”

Deep breath. Steadying himself. “Bedroom.”

“Right behind you, all the way.”

“You’ve a real thing for my bum, haven’t you?”

The quick press of warm palm against him was all the answer he got, and all the answer he needed.

All that hunger, and Bodie had still managed to make it clear that Doyle’s bum was safe unless—until? don’t think about that, not yet—unless it was offered. Christ, small wonder he loved the bastard.

In the bedroom now, more awkwardness, overhead light too painfully revealing, fumbling now to turn on the bedside lamp so they wouldn’t trip and break something on their way to bed. Bodie stripping quickly, efficient in this too. Doyle, more slowly, tidy for once, skin prickling with awareness as he bared it to Bodie’s gaze.

Turning now, slowly, to look at Bodie.

Stupid of him not to expect Bodie to be fully erect already. Stupider to be embarrassed that he himself was still flaccid and small.

“Pleased to see me, are you, then?” Doyle asked, covering his embarrassment even as he conquered the urge to cover his genitals.

No one should sound like that, warm as lips on skin. “Very pleased to see you.”

Bodie coming towards him again, looming larger, just like at the party, only now Bodie was naked, and it wasn’t going to stop at just a kiss.

All cats are grey in the dark, Doyle reminded himself. I love him, that should be enough. And as Bodie’s large hands came up to frame Doyle’s face, as Bodie’s lips touched his, as Bodie’s tongue entered his mouth, it was enough. It was exhilarating, to feel how much Bodie loved him. Astonishing, like a living looking glass, to feel an erection against himself, an erection that was both familiar and utterly alien.

Stroking up and down the length of his back, Bodie’s hands were warm against his skin, and touchingly, endearingly, those strong hands were trembling, just a fraction.

“This okay?” Bodie was asking him quietly, giving him time. Doyle could have laughed at this, Bodie treating him like a scared virgin, but he was too busy being grateful and trying not to behave like the scared virgin he was. Pathetic, he told himself. Stupid, to be

scared—for God’s sake, this was *Bodie*, not some sick stranger picked up down the local cottages.

Bodie was stroking him, rubbing against him, Bodie’s chest too flat, muscles too big, and the need in him, drowning—

It was only sex, he told himself.

Ah, if only it were. Sex was easy, roll on, roll off, have a bit of fun in the middle, easy. But with Bodie, it was making love. It wasn’t just bodies, it was *them*, all of them, no more hidden places, no more safe havens.

He, and Bodie.

The thought steadied him. This was Bodie. His Bodie. Just the two of them, no one and nothing else.

It was right everywhere else, why shouldn’t it be right, here?

For the first time, Doyle kissed Bodie, his tongue going inside Bodie, feeling him, tasting him, entering him, Bodie’s own words echoing.

You can fuck me.

Not so different from all his times with women then, not so different at all. Doyle thrust his tongue hard into Bodie, felt the pleasure of that convulse Bodie’s hands. There was a pulse, down there, where Bodie’s cock was pressing against him, Doyle’s every caress marked by a throb in that hotness, a minute movement of the hardness against Doyle’s leg. Moistness, at the tip, sliding against the hairs on his leg, as Bodie held him so tightly, Bodie wrapping himself around Doyle, and Doyle kissing him, tongue inside Bodie’s mouth, hands stroking Bodie’s soft hair, moving lower, down Bodie’s back, lower still, all the way to there, where the buttocks flared out like a woman’s, the sweet, familiar cleft—and pulling back suddenly at the eruption of wetness against his leg and the limpness of his own cock.

Bodie, body betraying him, a reaction so precipitous as to be shameful and humiliating beyond words.

“Sorry,” Bodie was gasping even as the whiteness fled his body, “sorry, God, I’m sorry,” fingers bruising Doyle’s arms as Bodie held on as knees went weak, “didn’t mean to—”

Standing up straight now, not looking at Doyle, looking around instead, either for something to wipe them off with or for a nice big hole in the ground that would swallow him up, Doyle wasn’t sure which.

Trying very hard to cover his humiliation, trying so hard to sound ever so casual. “I’m sorry, didn’t mean to come like that. Supposed to be the big moment, not—”

But it was exciting to be wanted that much, amazingly persuasive to be on the receiving end of so much passion and love. The first stirrings of heat, the first flush of desire lifting his cock, lengthening it under Bodie's gaze, his body returning the compliment Bodie's had just given him. "So you wish you weren't so excited by me, is that it? Wish I didn't turn you on so much?" Doyle approaching Bodie now, his own awkwardness taken care of by Bodie's embarrassment. He knew he was smiling, couldn't help it, an absurdly intense wave of love washing over him as he looked at his poor Bodie, standing there like a naughty schoolboy, and for what? For loving him to distraction, that was what.

He'd known it before, but now he had seen just how much Bodie had wanted him, and for how desperately long. He wanted to hold Bodie close, kiss him forever, and take away the self-immolation of coming as quickly as a spotty teenager with his first dirty magazine. "Tell you something for nothing, I've done the same thing myself, more than once. At least you got your clothes off first."

"Yeh, it's no fun if you—"

Words breaking off there, as Doyle took Bodie's hand, thumb caressing Bodie's palm. "Didn't your mum teach you that if you make a mess, you have to clean it up?" Stopping Bodie's reply by kissing him, a small, affectionate kiss. "You could lick it off, couldn't you?"

Bodie groaned, then grinned, one hand ruffling through Doyle's hair. "I could, couldn't I? In fact, I think I shall."

Doyle was backed up against the bed, manoeuvred until he was flat on his back, legs slightly spread, just far enough to give Bodie access.

"Christ, but you're fucking gorgeous."

Doyle stroked Bodie's hair as Bodie lowered his head to Doyle's body, that first wet caress of tongue on thigh making Doyle gasp.

"Think I'm gorgeous, do you? Is that why you love me?"

A long, wet lave the length of his thigh, breath warm against his cock, but nothing else, just the temptation of a mouth so close to him, and then Bodie's words were being breathed, all wetness and warmth, between the lingering attentions of tongue on flesh.

"How do I love thee, let me count the ways, is that what you want?" Bodie said, his lips brushing against Doyle, the words stirring the hair that pointed, so needfully, towards his groin. "That's one of the things

that I love most about you," Bodie was saying round the flesh in his mouth, Doyle's nipple a hard little nub against stroking tongue. "You're the cock of the north, don't-you-all-wish-you-were-good-enough-to-fuck-me, that's you. But underneath all that," the sudden nip of teeth on nipple made Doyle jump, almost missing Bodie's next, soothing comment, "you haven't the faintest notion why anyone would ever love you. But you don't let it show, not you, too tough and too fucking strong for that."

Doyle knew he should say something then: denial, agreement, something clever or deprecating, anything, really. Instead, he tangled his fingers in the short softness of Bodie's hair, and pressed Bodie, begging, towards his cock.

"Always in a rush. Love that about you too: always trying to get every last bit out of life, never let a second pass you by." The angular thrust of hipbone was mouthed attentively. "It'd be dead easy to give up on people and life and all that, but you don't—and you won't let me either."

"Love that about me too, do you?"

"Oh, yes. And the way you walk, fuckin' hell, Ray, the way you move your arse..."

"Poetic bastard, aren't you?"

"Not me, no, pure poetry in motion, that's you."

"Turn you on, does it?" Doyle asked, even though they both knew the answer, knew the answer even before this moment, this act of carnal worship.

"You've no idea how many times you've nearly been raped, mate."

"Ah, but would it be rape?" Doyle asked, closing his eyes, fingers tracing the nearly feminine smoothness of Bodie's skin. "If I was willing..."

"This is what it's like when you're willing, Ray. This," fingers touching Doyle just perfectly, stimulating him just so, "and this," mouth moving against skin, tongue tasting the faintest traces of salt on skin, "and this..."

And then Bodie was kissing him again. Doyle kept his eyes shut, nerve-ends noting whether or not Bodie had shaved recently—he had—and mouth noting just how good Bodie was at kissing.

He moved restlessly, Bodie on top of him, not as heavy as he'd feared, but so big, almost smothering, smooth planes of muscle, too few curves, in all the wrong places—but I'll get used to that, Doyle told himself, stroking his hands over Bodie's back, fingertips lingering in the deep scar that was never explained, never mentioned. He reached lower, seeking out the delectable cleft of Bodie's arse—

—*you can fuck me*—

—as Bodie shifted, rolling them over, taking his weight off Doyle, putting Doyle back on top, and Doyle would have thanked him for that, but he was too busy kissing Bodie, thrusting into that welcoming mouth, the mouth that was so large, so...accommodating.

Bodie had obviously taken up mind-reading. He felt Bodie's hands on his buttocks, and couldn't stop the reaction in time, guilt flooding him as Bodie moved his caress up to the small of Doyle's back, the hands urging Doyle upwards and forwards, ever forward, until he was astride Bodie, canopied over him, back arching as he looked down into eyes that promised him everything. The sun, the moon, the stars. On a silver platter, if that's what he wanted.

Everything.

—*you can fuck me*—

Too soon for that, surely, too soon.

Bodie's hands were on his backside again, fingertips careful not to threaten his centre, as Bodie's strength—so different, to feel that strength used against him not in a training bout or a game, but here, in bed, and for his pleasure—urged him on that last little bit. Doyle gasped, wordless, as Bodie's mouth opened and took him inside, lips stretching wetly round his hardness, tongue caressing him, mouth and throat sucking him in, consuming him, consuming him with passion, and it was wonderful and glorious and—

He pulled out, struggling for breath, grabbing for the words that would erase the horrible doubt in Bodie's eyes.

"S all right," he managed, grinning, fatuously, he expected. "More than all right, fucking fantastic. But if you keep on doing that, it'll be all over in a second. Want it to last."

"Want it to last forever?"

And of course, it wasn't the sex they were talking about, not now. No hint now of Bodie coolly saying he'd take what was on offer. Primal need, primal hunger, and Doyle as main course.

Forever?

Till death do us part.

He stared down at Bodie, his own cock against Bodie's throat like a blade.

Forever?

What kind of fool would have ever thought it could be anything else?

"That's all right then," he said, and recognised the truth when he heard it. It was all right. And it was

forever. He and Bodie.

When had it ever been anything else?

He edged forward, his cock rising over the bump of Bodie's Adam's apple, up over his chin, there, to rest on the lips that were still wet from sucking him.

"No," Bodie whispered. "Next time."

—*you can fuck me*—

And he was being manoeuvred again, that strength turned to his pleasure again, and later, much later, his own eagerness would shock him. But right now, this instant, there was only the immediacy of it all, the suppleness of Bodie's flesh, the way the smoothness of Bodie's skin lent a sheen of femininity to the most well-developed of muscles. There was a faint dusting of hair on Bodie's chest, a constant presence against Doyle's cheek, but he focused on the feel of the nipple in his mouth, sucked on it, made it hard, made it stand out from the curve of chest, bit it as the shock of Bodie's movements hit him.

He'd known, of course. But to feel it, for it to actually happen... Bodie was spreading his legs, lifting them, wrapping them around Doyle's hips, canting himself to fit against Doyle.

"How d'you want me?"

"Willing," Doyle answered, coming up for another kiss, tongue claiming Bodie's mouth and breath and heart. "And any way that you like."

"This way, then," and for a second, Doyle thought that meant that he was to take Bodie on his back like a woman, legs spread, and there was a part of him that recoiled, was repressed, brought back to the fold by the thought of how much Bodie must love him to do that. Then Bodie was moving out from under him, going on to his knees, presenting himself for Doyle.

"Christ," Doyle muttered, knees weakening as he stared at that pale flesh and the shadowed valley he would plough, "oh Christ on a crutch."

"Yeh, well, I'm no martyr. Em..."

Ludicrous for either of them to be embarrassed at this late stage, but Doyle could feel a blush stain him and Bodie was all but squirming.

"Listen, Ray, d'you have..."

"Oh. Yeh, I think so— Something, at any rate."

Scrabbling around, feeling like an idiot with his erection pointing the way, feeling like the King of the World with Bodie kneeling on his bed, twisting round to stare at him with love and lust. Finding, eventually, a bottle of lotion, left behind by some girlfriend who'd complained of dry skin.

Seemed almost unfaithful, to use that on Bodie. Should have gone out and bought something special

for him. Something appropriate, something really butch. Would do, for the next time.

God, there was going to be a next time, and a time after that.

Forever, Bodie had said.

Doyle's hands were trembling as he put the first dab of moisturiser on Bodie's skin.

"Thought you had better aim than that," Bodie said, and Doyle supposed the comment was supposed to sound amused and worldly, rather than nervous and anxious and wanting.

He put more cream onto his fingers, used the other hand to spread Bodie's buttocks, felt a huge throb of desire as Bodie was exposed to him. Carefully, so carefully, he stroked the cream on and in, just the tip of his finger at first, then to the knuckle, then all the way, and he didn't know how to feel about his own reaction, the way he was pushing his finger in, thrusting it so hard, pushing a second finger in, watching as Bodie took the fingers inside, the small opening widening like a woman. He'd done this sort of thing before, hundreds of times, giving pleasure, making sure his partner was wet and ready for him. But not like this. Not ever like this.

Bodie groaned, and Doyle felt the sound against his fingers.

"C'mon, Ray," Bodie was saying, over and over again, and it hurt to hear him nearly begging like that.

His fault, taking too long, hesitating, when Bodie was already lost to passion. "All right," he said, benediction, prayer, supplication, "all right."

He got up on his knees, between Bodie's legs, felt the hair of Bodie's legs against him. Different, again, even the German gymnast hadn't had such hairy thighs. Cock poised at the small opening, slickness against him, flesh yielding to him, and it was the most exquisite, perfect difference of all. He sank into Bodie, and every inch of him that went inside pushed another sound out of Bodie. Small sounds, piling one on top of each other, until Doyle was all the way in, and Bodie was clutching every inch of him, different and the same, and all of it a moot point because this was Bodie, and he loved Bodie, and that was all that mattered. That, and the way his cock felt buried in flesh, buried in Bodie, milked and stroked and welcomed as he thrust in, again and again.

There was a roundness, a smoothness, and a mere touch against it shuddered through Bodie, and a long, deep stroke along it made Bodie all but moan in pleasure. A roundness, a smoothness, amidst moistness—perhaps size didn't count after all, and this was

another difference that wasn't truly different. He angled himself to give Bodie as much pleasure as he could, relishing this opportunity to take care of Bodie, to give to him. He pressed home, felt Bodie shiver under him, leant forward and licked the sweat from his nape and kissed him, at the gentle curve where neck met shoulder, the skin so soft and so smooth against his tongue.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions: Doyle was surely on the road to heaven, paved with his good intentions of making this wonderful for both of them, and of making it last forever. He could barely hold out another a minute, thrusting into Bodie, caressing that nub of flesh deep inside him, needing Bodie to come first, to know that he'd given Bodie his pleasure.

He grabbed hold of Bodie, fingers sinking into the indentation of Bodie's flanks as Bodie moved under him, thrusting back upwards to meet Doyle's every move. Breathing faster, he stroked Bodie's back, the roundness of his shoulders, reached round to the flatness of his chest, wrapped his arm around Bodie's waist, the slight softness of belly against his forearm, his other arm bracing them against the bed, although Bodie's strength was holding them up, holding them both up as Doyle thrust into him.

—*you can fuck me*—

And he did, and it was wonderful. Bodie's arm was moving against his, quickly, quickly, and then Bodie was arching up powerfully, almost throwing Doyle off even as he clenched his body tightly around the cock that was so deep inside. Surreal, to feel ejaculation from the outside, to feel someone else come, to feel the surge from deep inside someone else's body, to feel it against the outside of his own flesh. Disorientating, but then Bodie was moving again, undulating, demanding Doyle get on with it, that he move, that he come.

Holding on tightly now, burying himself inside Bodie, Doyle finally surrendered himself to nothing but his own pleasure and his own sensations. The moment built, pleasure crescendoing inside him, drawn and demanded from him by Bodie, and then he was there, pouring himself into Bodie's depths, feeling his lifeseed erupt inside this man who had gone from friend to lover, this man who was big enough to let Doyle take him. Over and over again, he pulsed, the sensations so intense he had to close his eyes, hold completely still, breath held, every muscle tense and motionless as the pleasure peaked and left him, until he was drained, and limp, and

collapsed across the strong expanse of Bodie's back.

A few seconds, the urge to sleep creeping up on him, until Bodie moved, Doyle sliding off to the side, eyes somewhat dazed.

So many things exactly the same as with a woman, so many things so very different. The moment, just then, when his softened cock had slipped free from Bodie's body—completely different, ineradicably different, and he couldn't tell if it was his body that marked the difference or only his mind.

"You all right?"

"Shouldn't it be me asking *you* that?"

"Nah." Wonderful, glorious grin, those blue eyes sparkling, laughter lurking. "You were gentle."

If he hadn't been so exhausted, he'd have laughed himself. "S'pose this is where I thank you for making my first time so special."

"Did I?"

He looked sharply at Bodie then—well, as sharply as he could, given that he was completely sated, drunk on love and well and truly shagged out.

"You've got nothing to worry about on that score, Bodie. You could've made Casanova feel like that was the first time ever, and the best as well."

Nice, to see Bodie preen like that. Could become quite addictive, really, watching Bodie being happy because of something he, Doyle, had said. Very addictive indeed.

"Good, was I?"

"Fan-fucking-tastic."

"Told you."

Doyle did laugh at that, but only a little, and only as he rolled onto his side and draped as much of himself over as much of Bodie as he could.

There were marks all over Bodie's body, from little bites barely visible on the crest of one shoulder, to the clear delineation of fingerprints marking one very white hip.

"I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"Did you hear me complaining?"

"No, but—"

"Did you notice me shoving you off me and beating you black and blue?"

A grin for that, Bodie no victim, Bodie no wilting flower. "So I shouldn't bring the whips and chains over then, should I?"

"Not unless you want to be on the receiving end of them yourself."

"Nah, not my cup of tea." A sudden speculative gleam brightened his eyes. "Mind you, that's what I used to say about shagging blokes an' all, and

now look at me."

"Well," Bodie whispered against Doyle's neck as he kissed the pulse that traced its way to Doyle's heart, "they say converts are the biggest zealots," a hand snaking down to cup the small, moist softness at Doyle's groin, "and if I give you a couple of hours, I think you just might prove them right. But in the meantime—"

In the meantime there was Bodie going off to the bathroom, coming back with a cloth, Doyle looking away as Bodie cleaned him, grateful for yet another example of how wonderful Bodie could be.

"I'll add that to my list, I think," he said out loud.

Bodie canted an enquiring brow.

"...let me count the ways."

The sun after weeks of rain couldn't compete for the radiance that transfused Bodie. "Got a list going? Really?"

"Yeh. Up to Volume 8 now. Britannica's getting jealous."

Bodie was climbing back into bed with him now, doing an excellent impersonation of an octopus, enveloping Doyle with his affection.

"You've wanted to do this for a long time, haven't you?"

"You've no idea. Christ, all those times we've been on oppos or stuck together in some titchy little place doing an obbo—keeping my hands to myself has been murder."

And before Doyle could comment: "Thought you'd murder me for kissing you."

"Too taken aback. I mean, Bodie, what the fuck possessed you to kiss me in front of people like that?"

It might have been a shrug, but Bodie was wrapped too firmly round Doyle to move that much. "Everyone already thought we were shagging each other, so they weren't going to be shocked or anything. And if I did it in front of other people, there wasn't much chance of you taking your gun out and tweeping me, was there?"

Drily, in the indulgent tone of someone who knows Bodie only too well. "Gave it that much thought, did you?"

"Only after."

"I suppose," Doyle said lightly knowing perfectly well he was setting himself up for a thumping, "that's another fine example of you going off half-cocked..."

A heartfelt groan was all he got. "I'm going to get you back for that," Bodie said to him, pulling him in even closer. "But when I'm awake and can do justice to pummelling you. In the morning..."

Tension, Bodie's embrace stiffening round him. "You and whose army?" was all Doyle said, all he needed to say.

All around him, Bodie relaxed, settling down, making Doyle's pillow more comfortable for his head, normal, routine things, but there was a glow to him, a sheen of happiness, as Bodie kissed him gently, almost without passion, and said: "In the morning then. I'll have breakfast in bed."

"Dead right you will," Doyle replied, not following their usual script. He shoved his hips forward, intention unmistakable. "Sausages, I think."

Bodie could have made any number of sharp comebacks, from references to skinless to queries as to whether said sausage should be grilled or fried—or whether said sausage was a banger or a teeny-weeny little cocktail sausage.

But all that happened was that Doyle was cradled close, his hair stroked in a way that spoke of years of denial, and Bodie's whispered promise to eat everything Doyle could feed him.

Ray Doyle fell asleep ensconced in warmth and love, and the muted haze of dreams where Bodie knelt before him and everything was all right.

Morning did not go according to plan, not at all. First off, those damned birds started making a hellish racket just as dawn was thinking about showing up, the tom cat next door decided that if it couldn't eat the birds, then it would caterwaul them to death, and the dog on the other side of the cat obviously didn't see why it shouldn't sing harmony.

Doyle, gradually getting used to this suburban nightmare, slept through it, at least until the idiot at Number 27 decided to rev his car to death before actually starting off, and the spotted loon in Number 24 started his drum practice, complete with the accompaniment of his father threatening death and mutilation if said racket didn't stop *right now*.

Doyle groaned, and stretched, and rolled over to pull the pillow up over his head.

And stopped, very still, as he realised he wasn't alone.

For an instant, he couldn't remember. Couldn't remember if this was one of the flats CI5 stuck him in, or if it was someone else's, and who that someone else might be.

Then his memory woke up to join the rest of him, and everything was all right. In fact, everything was positively coming up roses.

"Morning," he said, opening his eyes to the

wonderfully reassuring sight of Bodie, propped on an elbow, gazing at him with what was perilously close to fatuous adoration.

"Breakfast time," Bodie said, and slid down his body, shoving the covers aside as he moved, his mouth tracing every curve and plane of Doyle's body on his way down to his arcing target.

Doyle watched him, loving the way Bodie's cheeks hollowed as he sucked, the way his eyelashes were so long and dark, everything about the intensity of his friend's expression.

Noticed, then, that Bodie's hand was on his own cock.

"You should let me do that," he said.

Bodie, lifting his head, Doyle's cock wet and chilled in the early morning air, "No rush."

Doyle was ashamed of the relief that ambushed him, ashamed enough that he almost spread his legs for Bodie then and there.

"Don't push it, Ray, when you're ready. For the time being..." Then Bodie lowered his head again, and Doyle was flying high on the sensation of his cock being sucked, of the expert attentions of Bodie's tongue, of the sweet pleasure of Bodie's hand caressing his balls.

Perfect.

And on the heels of that: who taught him? How many people taught him?

For better and for worse, he thought, the love and the jealousy, all the good and bad commingling, this biting, corrosive jealousy not something he'd ever considered himself prone to. Until Bodie.

But then, everything was different this time round. Everything.

Bodie was sucking him just so, bringing him to the very peak, holding him there, teetering, on the brink of pleasure, and then, finally, when Ray thought he'd surely scream, finally letting him erupt, Bodie sucking on him still, swallowing every drop.

"Told you I'd eat everything you'd feed me," Bodie said, sliding back up Doyle's body, his blue eyes very bright as he came in closer, mouth opening for a kiss.

Nothing else entered Doyle's mind, but the idea of tasting himself in Bodie's mouth, of tasting what Bodie had just done for him, out of love.

Wasn't prepared, then, for the shock of stubble against his own, or for the sudden intimidation of lying flat on his back with this big man half on top of him, mouth open deep and wide, kissing him demandingly, tasting of semen, smelling of sex and

sweat and masculinity, that stubble scraping at his, the hard push of cock digging into his thigh, Bodie thrusting against him, dry-fucking him, cock so huge and hard, and the stubble and the taste of semen—

It was over incredibly quickly, Bodie smiling at him, half-embarrassed, half-proud, after what Ray had said to him the night before.

“Did it again,” he said. “It’s your fault for being so gorgeous.”

And before Doyle had to come up with an answer, before he had to find a path out of the strange swamp of feelings pulling at him, the alarm clock was going off, the phone was ringing, the gas bill was coming through the letter box and the day had begun.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, listening to Bodie clattering around in the kitchen, while his mum chatted on to him about Lindsay’s wedding, and Margie’s pregnancy test, and his Uncle Steve’s new job.

Talking to his mum about where she and dad were going on holiday, as Bodie came in with mug of tea and a kiss for him, that big cock swinging gently as he moved, the unmistakable smell of sex on him.

“Yes, Mum,” Doyle said, as Bodie sat beside him for a minute, arm snaking round Doyle’s waist, “I’ll nip in to *Liberty’s* today, see if they’ve got what Lindsay’s looking for.”

Bodie started sucking on his left nipple, dabbled his tongue into the curves and dips of his ribcage, nipped at one prominent hip bone, threatened to start on his cock.

“Listen,” Doyle broke in on another description of his sister’s choice of china patterns and upholstery, “I’ll be late for work. Better get going—”

Waited, squirming, through a short but thorough diatribe on that ‘nasty Mr. Cowley’ who was surely working him too hard.

Nearly blushed when she said hard. Nearly killed Bodie for choosing that moment to do something quite magical with his tongue.

“Right, talk to you tonight then, Mum.”

“You stupid bastard—”

Then Bodie leaned back, looked up at him, and smiled.

“Christ on a crutch,” Doyle muttered, “you’re mad, you know that, don’t you, you lunatic.”

Unnaturally cheerful given the time of day, Bodie just smiled all the more widely, flicked an extremely gentle finger against Doyle’s even more extremely limp penis, and said: “Completely doolally, if I thought I was going to get a rise out of that!” Then the

familiar, achingly unchanged, slap to the back, that grin, and Bodie was yelling over his shoulder, “Last one into the shower gets shrivelled balls!”

“You use all the hot water—” The bathroom door shut, complete with the sound of snicking lock, and it was a measure of his affection that Doyle didn’t even run the hot water in the kitchen. Well, not for long, anyway. Just long enough for Bodie’s squeal to be music to his ears.

It had taken them a surprisingly long time to get ready: lingering over newspapers, lingering over cups of tea, lingering over just sitting around together, knowing.

Every time Bodie bent over, Doyle couldn’t help but look at him and think, I’ve fucked that arse.

Or, the crossword being particularly obstreperous, every time Bodie’s tongue showed at the corner of his mouth, Doyle thinking that that tongue had been in his mouth and on his cock.

They did all the usual things, breakfast, washing dishes, shaving, brushing teeth, reading papers, listening to the radio, making faces at the news, everything exactly the same as before.

And profoundly, irretrievably different.

Doyle found himself grinning for no good reason at all. If one didn’t count being happy, that was.

“So what was that you were saying to your mum about *Liberty’s*?”

“Oh, shite,” Doyle muttered, jumping up from the sofa. “I’m supposed to go in and have a look at the china for her—” He rolled his eyes, made a face. “Wants some sort of server thing in a particular pattern, and there’s some fabric she needs for the bridesmaids’ dresses—or is it the ring carriers?”

“Ring bearer,” Bodie said, sounding amused. “So our first day off in ages, and we get to go into the centre of town, and traipse round *Liberty’s* like bloody—” Pause. “Tourists.”

“Or,” Doyle said, being quite deliberate, standing staring at Bodie so he could feast on the moment when it dawned on Bodie what he’d said, “like two blokes setting up house together.”

It was worth it.

“Like that, is it?”

“Could be.”

“So you weren’t lying then?”

“Of all the bloody— Look, I’ve never had to lie to a bird to get her to spread her legs before, so where do you get off acting as if I had to lie to you to get

you to spread your legs—”

Heard the words tumble from his mouth, anger fading as quickly as it had come, knowing he'd said the wrong, wrong thing. “I didn't mean it like that—”

“No? So does that mean you think I'm so fucking desperate for you you wouldn't have to say anything to get me to, as you so charmingly put it, spread my legs for you, or is this just your subtle way of reminding me I'd already said I'd let you fuck me, I didn't even hold out for the promises—”

“Bodie—”

Breaking off, then, thinking before he opened his big mouth and put his foot right in it. “Look, everything I said last night, I meant. Okay?” Trying to lighten it then, Bodie always on at him for taking everything too seriously. “It's morning and I still respect you...”

“That supposed to be funny, Doyle?”

“Yeh, and I know, I won't give up my real job.”

Held his breath as he watched Bodie thinking about, praying that he hadn't screwed things up already. “C'mon, Bodie, you know how rotten I am at all this stuff. And look on the bright side, you've always said I should take lessons from you, now's the perfect opportunity...”

Sighed, as he was let off the hook.

“Lesson Number One,” Bodie intoned, nasally, “never imply that all you were interested in was a quick fuck.”

Well, as far as Doyle was concerned, he hadn't implied that, not until Bodie had taken it that way. But this probably wasn't precisely the best moment to get into an argument over it.

“Yes, sir,” he replied in his best schoolboy voice. “I won't be interested in any quick fucks, sir.”

“I wouldn't go that far, Ray,” arms going round Doyle, pulling him in close, kissing him again. “There's a lot to be said for quick fucks.”

Doyle decided to wait a couple of years before he started teasing Bodie about just how quick a fuck their first one had been.

And felt the beginnings of excitement again, as he remembered how desperately Bodie had wanted him last night. Leaned forward, his tongue going into Bodie's mouth, fucking him again, fingers scrabbling at cloth, stopping, dead, as his hands filled with Bodie's hard flesh, the erection burning into his palm like a brand.

No different, he told himself. Just the same as his own, only this one was attached to Bodie.

Not a prick, then, but Bodie. Just Bodie, who loved

him, and whom he loved, and who must be standing there hurt beyond words by this reaction.

Slowly, he stroked Bodie, trying not to think about how different it was, trying to think only about how lovely that would feel if someone were doing it to his cock, how much he liked that particular touch, that way of pulling the foreskin back—

Bodie's hands on his, interrupting, Bodie whispering in his ear, “Not like that, too sensitive for that, slower, like this, press me just here...”

Different from his own cock, very different, although still the same. He did what Bodie wanted, was rewarded by a gusting sigh into his mouth, and then Bodie kissing him, Bodie's clever hands at Doyle's own belt, freeing Doyle, doing to Doyle what Doyle had done to him. Doing it just hard enough, just fast enough, just differently enough from what Doyle was doing to Bodie.

Pressed together, as urgent as teenagers, they kissed each other, their hands busy, stroking, caressing, neither of them able to hold back, both coming too soon, too quickly for pride.

As they clung together, each holding the other up, small, lingering kisses punctuating the aftermath, Bodie murmured, “Bad as a pair of newlyweds.”

The pause might well have been described as pregnant.

Doyle eased himself out of Bodie's arms, looked down them both, ruefully. “What we are is a pair of messy buggers.”

Another one of those pauses that might well have been called pregnant.

Doyle swore he could see what Bodie was thinking: they weren't a pair of buggers, because he hadn't given in to Bodie yet, hadn't let him fuck...

He knew he'd have to, even though Bodie had said he wouldn't try. Didn't mean he wouldn't want to. Had to want to, given the way Bodie stared at his arse all the time, touched it every chance he got.

No, Bodie was man enough to give him time, to let him come round to the idea on his own. But still...

But maybe Bodie wasn't any more ready to push than Doyle was, the only response being Bodie's giving Doyle a playful thump, and the comment, “C'mon, Professor, it's only a bit of sex, not the origin of the universe.”

“I was thinking more on the lines of the Big Bang Theory myself.”

Bodie winced theatrically. “Definitely going to have to kill you.”

“Or give me something else to do with my

mouth.”

And why the hell had he said that?

Maybe because of the way Bodie’s face lit up when he said it. Maybe because he saw the sudden flare of hunger in Bodie’s eyes.

Or maybe just because if he didn’t say it now, he might never find the courage to say it.

Or maybe, just maybe, a nasty little voice in the back of his head said, you said it now because there’s not a snowball’s chance of Bodie taking you up on it, not right now.

He hoped to hell that nasty little voice was wrong.

Sitting downstairs in *Liberty’s*, Bodie interspersing bites of cake with wickedly funny comments on everyone around them, and all Doyle could think about was what it would feel like to have Bodie’s cock in his mouth, come spurting down his throat like cream.

Would he gag? Or would he take to it like a pro?

Of course, his personal demon, Jealousy, sneered, he could always ask Bodie for some pointers, Bodie obviously not short of an experience or two. Jealousy, thy name is legion, he thought. But the words were out of his mouth before caution could recall them.

“Have there been a lot of blokes before me?”

Bodie swallowed a huge chunk of cake whole. Looked at Doyle. Drank some coffee. “Billions, I’d say—Adam was a long time ago.”

He should take that warning, let it go. Did.

Changed the subject. “Sorry, none of my business. Here, did you honestly like that godawful pattern my sister’s picked out?”

“Oh, yes, Ray, her taste’s almost as good as yours.”

“Oh. Hated it that much, did you?”

“Let’s just say, I’m glad I’m not the sort you’d bring home to meet the family.”

The words were there on the tip of his tongue: of course I’ll bring you home to meet the family.

Like a pair of newlyweds, Bodie had said.

Christ. He could just imagine his mum and dad, sitting in the parlour, the good dishes out, tea-cakes and salmon sandwiches, and in he walks with Bodie.

Bodie, very quietly, was concentrating on demolishing his cake into a mountain of tiny crumbs.

He wished he could say something to make it all better, to take away the hurt Bodie was trying so hard not to show, but he couldn’t. It would only be worse if—

Bodie smiled at him then, a sad, slow smile, his hand reaching out to touch briefly, almost invisibly,

the very tips of Doyle’s fingers. “It’s one of the best things about you, one of the worst, too. The way you won’t lie to me.”

“Still feel like a creep.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I wouldn’t take you home to meet my family either,” Bodie whispered, leaning forward conspiratorially, “the zoo frowns on feeding the great apes.”

And they slid easily into their usual banter then, but Doyle couldn’t quite escape the memory of how Bodie had covered up the hurt with a joke.

It made him wonder how many other times there’d been.

Later that evening, streetlights still glowing yellow, neither one of them in the mood to make anything to eat. They went to Doyle’s new local, stuffed themselves on pie and chips and peas, Bodie drowning everything in brown sauce, Doyle laughing as Bodie half-inched chips from his plate.

“Well, well, well, look who’s here.”

Murphy.

He really should be used to the acid burn of jealousy by now. “Murph,” Doyle said curtly, not looking at the other man, staring down at the remains of his dinner.

“Hello, mate,” Bodie, of course, much more enthusiastic, positively beaming.

Doyle felt his own frown deepen.

“Fancy a pint?” Bodie was saying.

Say no, Doyle thought, just say no and fucking-well leave us alone.

“Who’s buying?”

“Doyle.”

“Then I’m drinking. I’ll have a pint of bitter, please, Ray.”

Oh, no, Doyle thought, I’ve got all the bitter there is. He should at least look at Murphy, he thought, should at least pretend, but all he could think about was Bodie and Murphy sitting on that sofa together, Bodie and Murphy off for the weekend together, Bodie and Murphy in the SAS together, Christ alone knew what else, but Doyle had a few ideas, Murphy telling Bodie how to suck him, how to open up to let a man fuck him—

Bodie’s hand on his arm, fingers digging into him, himself looking at Bodie, a snarl lurking, jealousy eating at him.

And Bodie just nodded, half smiled, let go of him with the tenderest of squeezes and sat there, cat got the cream.

Murphy, on the other hand, was looking from each to the other. He let out a crow of laughter, slapped them both on the back. "Pint of bitter? It'll be doubles all round—on me! Bodie, you should've told me."

Christ, was it tattooed on their foreheads or something?

Or was that something just an ex-lover's surety, an ex-lover's insight—and who said he was an ex-lover?

He sat there, ignoring Bodie, ignoring Murphy. Well, that wasn't strictly true, he admitted to himself. He just wasn't responding to them, but he wasn't ignoring them, oh, no, he couldn't take his eyes off them, couldn't listen hard enough, couldn't tame the jealousy that gnawed deep in his belly.

Had Murphy seen Bodie in that most private of moments? Did Murphy know what it was like to be inside Bodie, to feel the pulse in Bodie's prostate as orgasm took him?

Did Murphy know what it was like to hear Bodie confess to love?

The first double burned as he downed it too fast, the second one merely warmed him, the third fed the heat in his stomach as his anger burned.

Then he caught sight of something in the mirror over the bar: Bodie, looking at him out of the corner of his eye as he laughed over something Murphy had said.

The bastard was doing it on purpose.

The unmitigated bastard was deliberately flirting with Murphy to—

Of course. That look of satisfaction, of reassurance, when Bodie'd caught him being jealous.

Bastard.

But part of him, darkly lit, rarely acknowledged, conceded that it was quite something to matter so much that jealousy was to be welcomed in like spring.

Well, he could rain on Bodie's parade: April showers had nothing on him.

"So Murphy," he said, pleasure curling in him as the other two men stopped dead, one glass frozen partway to a half open mouth, another hand arrested mid-gesture, "did you enjoy that climbing thing you and Bodie went on?"

"Yes, it was great. Good weather, great climbing."

"So it was," artful, meaningful pause, "good, then, was it?"

Murphy, looking at Bodie—for what? Asking which answer to give, asking what effect Bodie wanted? Or just checking to see if Bodie really had told Doyle all about the sexual athletics that had been

the whole point of the trip?

"Best trip we'd had in ages," was what Murphy finally said.

He had the perfect reply honed and ready, bared his teeth as he started to deliver it, perfectly aimed—and let it turn to mush on the tip of his tongue.

He'd seen Bodie again, in that bloody mirror, bracing himself against whatever Doyle was going to say.

Christ, and he'd promised himself he wasn't going to hurt Bodie, and now look at him! Worm, he was nothing but a pathetic little worm. "That's nice," he said, "it's great that Bodie has a good mate he can go climbing with. Won't catch me up on one of those ruddy great rocks."

For the briefest of moments, the backs of Bodie's fingers brushed his cheek, then they were all just mates again, nothing for the outside world to see, just mates. Nothing for the world to see, unless they could have peeled back Doyle's jacket and shirt to see the hammering of his heart under the thinness of his skin.

He managed to keep his end of the conversation up after that, even managed civility to Murphy, which was quite an accomplishment, really.

You see, he'd known jealousy, before, and doubt. Worry, that he might hurt Bodie. Horror, that he could drive Bodie away. Fear, even. But this was the first time, the very, very first time, that it had hit him. He might not lose Bodie. Because maybe, just maybe, Bodie already belonged to someone else.

Murphy had long since taken himself off: ever tactful, that was Murphy. Leaving them alone like the newlyweds Bodie had joked them to be.

Well, Doyle certainly had enough wedding-night nervousness to be a first-time groom. Or bride, he thought, an image searing his mind. Himself, open, spread, impaled, Bodie over him, fucking him, Doyle under him like a woman.

Oh, yes, open-minded, that's me, he sneered at himself. So open minded, so adventurous. That must be why he was sitting there, literally cross-legged, trying to come up with another excuse not to leave the pub.

"Time, gentlemen, please!"

The barman had been shouting that for what felt like eons, the crowd finally shifting, dispersing, he and Bodie sitting at their table like a wet weekend in Largs.

Bodie was the one to find the words again.

"See you at work, then?"

That brought Doyle's gaze front and centre. "What?"

Bodie shrugged. "Don't know where we stand either. But it's obvious you don't want me with you tonight—"

Hearing that cleared at least one thing in his mind. "Oh, yes, I do. I'm not having you go off tonight on your own—"

Just what they'd need: Bodie alone for two days solid, convinced Doyle didn't want him, didn't love him, didn't anything.

Cards on the table, Bodie had said—God, was it only last night? Couldn't be, surely, not for the way his world had turned upside down, the way he'd changed, the things he'd done—the whisper of skin on palm as he'd unhooded Bodie's cock, Bodie's tongue in his mouth, his cock inside Bodie, all of it, every second of every thing they'd done filling his mind until there was no room left for anything but telling Bodie the truth.

"I don't think—I mean, I want you there, I know I want you there, but—"

"But what? Ray, don't start messing me about—"

"I'm not. Yeh, I am, but I don't mean to, it's just—"
Take a deep breath. Hold it. Let it go. Now tell him. Just tell him. "It's about the fucking..." Saw at once that he'd said it wrong, that Bodie was jumping to all the wrong conclusions. "Not that—"

"Gentlemen," an avuncular voice said, casting huge aspersions on the appropriateness of the address given the men sitting at the table, "this establishment is now closed. If you'd care to leave..."

And just in case they didn't care to leave, there was a very impressive billy-club being passed, effortlessly, from one hand to the other.

Perfect bloody timing, Doyle thought, nearly running to keep up with Bodie, grabbing his friend at the corner of the street, the streetlamp leaching all colour from them.

"Bodie, come home with me."

"To do what? Sit and have tea? Planning on giving me fairy cakes, were you?"

"Stop being such a fucking prat and shut and listen, will you? What I'm trying to say is I like what we've been doin', all right? But the fucking part, you fucking me—" He couldn't say it, couldn't bring himself to hurt Bodie that much.

Bodie, drawing himself to his full height, face impassive. "Does the idea disgust you or does it just scare the willies out of you?"

Doyle smiled at him, inviting Bodie to share the

joke at Doyle's expense. "Frightens me so much my willie's likely to run away."

"Think I'd hurt you?"

"D'you think I'd let that stop me?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

"If it'd hurt me a bit, but give you something you want that much—well, goes without saying, doesn't it."

Saw Bodie digest that. Saw it hit home.

Knew the moment when Bodie saw him for the coward he was: unafraid of physical pain if it would give Bodie what he needed, but too much of a damned coward to surrender that much to another person. To another man.

Even Bodie.

"Stupid, isn't it?" he said. "I trust you on the street, no problem. But I can't trust myself enough to let you..."

Couldn't even say it. Probably for the best: this wasn't the most private of street corners, after all.

"Right, then," said Bodie, "your place it is."

And, Doyle thought in bemusement, people had the cheek to say that *he* was the incomprehensible one!

His place. Their place, maybe. Found that the small kernel of hope had become a huge lump of need. Their place. Not openly, not much chance of that—sheer stupidity, for them to set up house together. Would put paid to any chance of promotion—certainly put paid to that proposed liaison job that would suit them down to a T once they were too slow for the street. No, not publicly, no Cowley presenting them with a silver tray, or half the squad giving them sets of towels. But they could come back here, always know to look for the other one here, always know that this was where they belonged.

It wouldn't even matter when CI5 shifted them again: they'd just pick whichever flat they liked best, and that would become 'theirs' too. He could leave his favourite books there, Bodie could leave his music there, the gun collection, the lead soldier collection—bloody hell, he thought, at this rate, he *would* have them picking out curtains together and putting a formal notice in the paper.

Bodie was making them tea, by the sounds of it. Also by the sounds of it, Bodie had found the packets of crisps and was demolishing them with all due haste.

Weird, how fond of certain noises a person could become. What was that Bodie had said, something

about even putting up with the way Doyle slurped his tea. Not that he did, of course. Well, no more than the next man.

Bodie came through the living room door, filling the doorway, not as tall as Murphy, but broader, much broader than Doyle. Shoulders not really that much wider, but the rest of him, that heavy layer of muscle, those big bones: a powerful man, more so when his face was visible, when those eyes were fixed on someone or something. Strength of character, that's what Bodie had, something Doyle admired, something Doyle envied just a little bit: all of that certainty, all of those opinions and stands already made, already taken, no floundering in varying shades of grey for Bodie.

For a moment, Doyle was almost tempted to want to know how Bodie truly saw him. Tempted, but only for a moment, and then Bodie's blue eyes were smiling at him, the pupils growing larger, desire dilating them, those eyes feasting on the sight of Ray Doyle spread out on the sofa for him.

And all Bodie did, bless him, was offer him tea and ginger creams, and apologies for having finished all the chocolate biscuits off the last time.

Doyle shrugged, didn't say much. Held his mug in both hands, drinking out of it, hearing himself slurp, rather taken by the fact that the sound hadn't put Bodie off him for life.

Then wondered if Bodie had other things on his mind when he heard Doyle sucking his tea up like that.

Did Bodie lie awake at night thinking about Doyle sucking him? Was that one of the images that stroked his fantasy life?

Or did Bodie lie naked in his bed at night, hand fisted round his cock, to the technicolour glory of himself fucking Doyle?

"What do you think about?" Ray asked.

"When?"

"When you wank."

Easy smile, pantomime waggle of eyebrows, the evil villain hissing at the crowd to make them laugh in glee. "Well, if you really want to know the truth..."

Course he did. Had to. Had to know just how important it was to Bodie. "Confess all, my son, Father Doyle is listening."

"If you really must know... It's...well..." Pious expression, angels beside him would all look like Lucifer. "If you're sure you really need to know... It's Cowley."

Doyle spluttered.

"In his kilt. With his wee socks pulled up and his dirk drawn."

Doyle collapsed into hysterics.

"And his sporran loosened—"

"God, I wish I had a tape recorder, I'd blackmail you for everything you've got."

"It's already yours."

With all my worldly goods, I thee endow. For better and for worse, in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer.

Doyle was across the room before either of them had taken another breath, his mouth affixed to Bodie's, his arms wound too tightly round Bodie. He'd never meant to hurt Bodie, but what the poor bastard must've gone through—

Didn't bear thinking about.

So do something about it instead, he told himself.

Do something that would mean a lot to Bodie, show Bodie that it wasn't all one sided.

Let Bodie fuck him.

No.

Not yet.

But there was something else he could do, something that would matter to Bodie. Symbolic, even.

Unhurriedly, Doyle drew down Bodie's zip, the sound drowned out by the sudden intake of Bodie's breath. He disentangled himself from Bodie, sliding down onto the floor, Bodie's legs spreading automatically, making things awkward, cords refusing to lower properly, Bodie fumbling and hurried and over-hasty as he yanked at his trousers, standing up, stumbling, falling back into the chair as Doyle grinned up at him in impurest affection. Knowingly, Doyle reached out, ran his hands up the hairiness of Bodie's thighs, narrowed in towards Bodie's groin.

"Never been with anyone as hairy as you," he said: not the most romantic of things, but a compliment of a sort.

"Not even the German gymnast?"

"Thought you'd had her?"

"Did I say that? Me? Surely not."

"Lying little bandit," Doyle murmured, enjoying the way Bodie's breathing was becoming erratic, his nipples showing through the light fabric of his shirt. "Like this, do you?"

"Oh yes."

"Shall I go on, then?"

"Don't stop, oh, fuck it, don't stop—"

"So you don't want me to suck you after all?"

Everything went very, very still. Bodie closed his eyes, swallowed, hard, once, his cock throbbled, and

jolted, just once, and then Bodie opened his eyes again. They were very bright, and very hungry, and their gaze never wavered. “You don’t have to.”

“Don’t I?” was all Doyle said, and then he leaned forward, until he was scant inches from the pulse and throb that betrayed Bodie’s desire. He could smell Bodie: not unpleasant, but—there was that word again. Different. Closer to himself than the way he expected a woman to smell. But still, different. Not unpleasant. Just masculine, nothing of the feminine here, just the brute thrust of masculine need.

Well, he could understand that well enough. No difference there.

He took a deep breath, wondered if he should try to make his mouth wet before he touched Bodie, if he should lick first or—

Do what he liked done himself, first. Do what Bodie had done to him.

Hesitantly, he took the tip into his mouth. Choked, as Bodie thrust forward, caught his breath as Bodie pulled out immediately. Leaned forward again, mouth opening, Bodie’s flesh against his lips, Bodie’s voice loud in his ears. Bodie was hunched over, arms wrapped around his own middle, as if in agony—an agony of anticipation?—or to stop himself, perhaps, from grabbing Doyle’s head and forcing his cock all the way in, deep into the unprepared throat, holding Doyle still as he fucked his face.

But whatever it was, Bodie wasn’t touching him with anything but the moans torn from his throat or the need seeping from the head of his cock.

It wasn’t unpleasant, and it was exciting—powerful—to hear Bodie’s wordless cries of pleasure as he took Bodie inside.

My God, he thought, he’s in me, I’m not separate any more, he’s in me—

Panic, swallowed down, and in swallowing that down, he took more of Bodie inside himself. Interesting taste, not what he’d expected, and the texture of Bodie’s cock—fascinating, intriguing, making his tongue want to explore it more. Soft, like the inside of a woman’s thigh, but rippled with a vein, a pulse so heavy on his tongue.

More noises, as if Bodie were being torn apart.

At that moment, Doyle loved Bodie more than ever. How many men would hold back like that? How many men *could*?

Letting go of Bodie’s cock, just for a minute, Doyle reached out and unfolded Bodie’s arms, guided them to his back, where Bodie could stroke his flesh and caress his skin, something, anything, to stop Bodie

folding in on himself like that.

Doyle bent his head back to Bodie’s cock, captured the bobbing head with his lips, sucked it in like a sweetie, using his tongue the way Bodie had, trying to play with the withdrawn foreskin as Bodie had, but couldn’t manage it, not yet.

Not that it seemed to matter to Bodie.

Under Doyle’s chin, Bodie’s balls were drawing up tight, and Bodie’s hands had come round to pull and stroke Ray’s nipples, the fingertips running through the hair on Doyle’s chest.

Was this what it was like, Doyle thought, as the flesh in his mouth surged and grew: impossible, he knew, but it *felt* as if Bodie were getting bigger, as if every breath Doyle took filled his mouth more and more with Bodie. The head of Bodie’s cock was threatening the back of his throat, and he edged backwards, bringing his hand up to pleasure Bodie the way he’d had girlfriends do for him.

But Bodie could take him completely, could swallow him all the way down: who the hell had taught him, who the hell had he practised on?

He felt a throb against his tongue, heard Bodie’s breath catch. Used his hand to stroke harder on the flesh that couldn’t fit inside him, used his mouth to suck as hard as he could, aware that he was dismally inadequate, compared to what Bodie had done for him. Bodie was saying things now, incomprehensible, words started, never finished, sounds only of pleasure, of passion.

I’m doing that, Doyle thought, and laughed at himself for being so proud. But he was doing that, giving pleasure to Bodie, making Bodie happy. This one was for Bodie, that’s all. That’s why he wasn’t aroused himself, that’s why his body hadn’t reacted to this. But Bodie had reacted, was arching now, heels pressed hard into the carpet as he lifted himself up off the chair, obviously trying desperately not to thrust all the way down Doyle’s throat.

Ray wished he could do that, for Bodie. Would, one day, he promised his friend. Sucked him hard again, one hand on the shaft of Bodie’s cock, one hand caressing his balls, the skin so tight, all that tension waiting to explode in a burst of sweet, sweet ecstasy.

Under his hands, Doyle felt it, felt the pulse along his tongue, heard Bodie’s half-shouted warning—knew what all the signals meant, but from the inside, not the outside like this. Different, to feel someone else pulse against your palm: too little warning, too late, and then there it was in his mouth, Bodie,

flooding him, Bodie, inside him, filling him, drowning him.

His first impulse was to pull away, spit it out, wipe his hand across his mouth: but God, that would hurt Bodie. One thing that didn't change whether one was the giver or the receiver: there was something symbolic in swallowing, and something very telling in spitting it out in disgust.

Doyle swallowed, fought back the urge to gag, made himself go back and lick, tenderly, at the shrivelling flesh, nursing at it with all the love in him.

Bodie had better bloody appreciate this, came the thought before he could stifle it. Bodie had better bloody well fucking appreciate this.

Bodie, of course, did, if the way he gathered Doyle into his arms was anything to go by, or if the words he murmured meant anything, if the tender kisses he pressed to Doyle's lips meant anything at all.

"Oh, Christ, I can taste myself in you," Bodie whispered, mouth pressed against the wild tumble he'd made of Doyle's hair.

Doyle opened his mouth, pulled Bodie down for another kiss, deeper, longer, letting Bodie wallow in the taste of his body inside Doyle.

One day, he promised himself, he'd give Bodie what he really wanted. But for now, this was all he could do, and all he could give, and thank God it was enough.

Bodie's hand was caressing him, toying with his nipples, dappling through the hair on his chest, reaching lower, lower, to the gusset of Doyle's ubiquitous jeans.

Doyle moved aside, but not quite quickly enough. Looked away, but not before he caught that glimmer of...something he didn't want to name, lingering in Bodie's eyes.

"I was going to say 'I'll take care of that for you'," Bodie said very, very quietly.

"Next time," Doyle said, trying to make it all sound light and easy, no big deal. "This time I was just so busy concentrating on not biting you—"

Bodie looked at him steadily, then let it, and Doyle, go. "Fair enough, mate," he said. "Rome wasn't built in a day, was it?"

Doyle seriously considered heaving a sigh of relief, but that would have Bodie looking at him again, and wondering again. Not a good thing, not right now.

After all, hadn't he promised himself he wouldn't hurt Bodie?

He looked down at his trousers, and thought of all the times he'd been embarrassed by a certain few

inches having a mind of its own. "Where were you when I needed you, eh?" he muttered, climbing to his feet. God, but his knees hurt—and his jaw, now that he stopped to take stock. And there was still that taste in his mouth, a distillation of masculinity, suffusing him.

He went to brush his teeth.

In bed, Bodie asleep beside him, the luminous hands of the bedside clock moving in slow motion, ticking off the sleepless hours.

He told himself he was being stupid. Told himself it didn't matter. Men did that sort of thing all the time.

That nasty little voice corrected him: poofs did it all the time.

Come on, he snapped at himself, when've you ever had anything against queers?

Since you started snuggling up to Bodie.

It did have a point.

No. There was nothing wrong about what they did, nothing wrong with what queers did, either. And he didn't care what people said—as long as it didn't interfere with the job. All that mattered was that he had finally found someone he loved, and who loved him back, warts, slurring tea and all.

He moved, and thought of it, lying in his stomach. Bodie's semen. Sperm, thousands, millions of tiny, wriggling sperm, in his stomach, because he'd gone down on his knees and sucked cock. All that whiteness, inside him, becoming part of him, blending into him, uniting with his own cells.

Wonder if this is how women feel.

Imagined all those little sperm wriggling around, and was fervently glad that he'd never be pregnant, if this was what a mouthful or two of come made him feel.

He looked over at the solid bulk of Bodie, face down as always, that scar limned with shadow and dark. It was sorely tempting, to thump the bugger and wake him up, give him a bit of company while he lay here stewing like this. Unfair, maybe, but at least now he understood why his girlfriends got so pissed off when he fell asleep after sex.

There were things he wanted to ask, things he needed to know. Did Bodie go through this the first time he'd sucked cock? Or had he taken to it like a duck takes to water, with nary a thought for the passing of his masculinity.

You're being stupid again, he scolded himself. Doesn't make you any less a man. Definitely true. Unquestionably true.

Pity he didn't believe it.

Morning again, erupting again with its usual gentleness: the birds, the cat, the dog, phone bill instead of gas bill, someone's car radio too loud, and Doyle didn't mind a bit.

He awoke to the wonderful sensation of hands soothing him, of a mouth tasting him, Bodie, making love to him.

There could be no better start to the day, surely, than this. He stretched languidly under the tender ministrations, the rise to orgasm slow and sweet, the pleasure a sure and steady thing, pulsing through him until his whole body was alive, and his heart was beating fast, and his breath was catching in his throat as Bodie brought him to a perfect climax.

Time passed, and he finally opened his eyes, to Bodie gazing down at him. "Cat got the cream?" Doyle said.

"Meow."

"Puss want his tummy rubbed?"

Quick kiss pressed to his forehead. "Nah. That was for you—for last night. Bacon and eggs all right?"

"Fine. And toast too, if you're that keen."

He thought he heard 'will do' waft into the room, but couldn't be sure, Bodie having taken off like a bat out of hell.

Listening to the sounds from the kitchen, the sounds from the street outside. Domestic routine already, he realised, half-annoyed. More annoyed, because it wasn't their usual pattern: when had Bodie ever been quick to get into the kitchen and do the work—any kitchen, but particularly Doyle's. Something going on there, and it was all too obvious what.

Reluctantly, Doyle dragged himself out of bed, shoved on a pair of tatty track suit bottoms, and shuffled into the kitchen, where a steaming mug of tea was pushed into his hands.

"Should've stayed in bed, I was going to bring it through."

Breakfast in bed? "Hope you're going to clean this muck up after," Doyle said, watching Bodie carefully out of the corner of his eye.

"Course." A glance flickered in Doyle's direction, and then Bodie bent down to stick his head in the fridge. "How many slices of bacon d'you want?"

"Two."

"Middle or back?"

"Streaky."

"Shit," came the reply, slightly muffled by the fridge door. "Don't have any in, but if you hang on

just a tick, I'll nick round the pakis and get a packet."

"Bodie," Doyle said with enormous patience, "you are being a complete prat. You think I'm going to go off you if you don't do your Jeeves for me? Christ, did you think I went to bed with you because you'd skivvy for me?"

Shamefaced, or at least that's what the expression looked like, sitting so unfamiliarly on Bodie's features. "Just trying to..."

"To what?"

"You'll laugh."

"And?"

"And when have you not, right, yeh, I get it."

"Bodie, you're not getting off the hook. If you're not planning on going into service, then what the bloody hell are you doing?"

Mumble.

Doyle kicked him, hard, on the shin.

"Ow! All right, all right, bloody coppers, torturing people to get confessions."

Doyle glowered.

Bodie finally spoke up. "All right, so I'm sort of trying to sort of well woo you."

For a stupid moment, Doyle thought Bodie had stuck in railway sound effects, then separated it out into real words. Woo him?

"But Bodie," he said, meaning it, hoping it showed, "you've already got me."

"Have I?"

He could make fancy speeches, great protestations, but Bodie always liked to keep it simple. "Yes," was all he said. "Yes."

A long moment then, threatening to turn maudlin and sappy, then Bodie was grinning like a Pools winner and shoving the tea towel into Doyle's hands along with two packets of bacon, a carton of eggs and what looked like a small mountain of tomatoes. "Well, if I've already got you then, you can make the breakfast."

Pause at the door, serious voice. "You serious, Ray? You're not having me on, are you?"

"Oh, no, Bodie, I'm just kidding. I mean, I go down on my knees for every bloke I meet."

And was rewarded by the return of that smile, and the sound of Bodie whistling cheerfully.

He found himself literally counting the hours. Incredible. By the way he felt, years should have passed, but it wasn't even their whole leave. The world stood on end, his life completely rearranged, and if people found out, he'd find his sexuality rearranged too, for

that matter. And it hadn't even been forty eight hours yet. Not even two full days to upturn three decades of living.

They should slow down, he knew, but how the hell could they? Look at Bodie, sprawled out on the sofa, pretending to read the newspaper, but thinking about other things, according to the very speaking bulge in his cream cords. None of this was new for Bodie: Bodie, who was being the very paragon of patience, by anyone's standards, including Doyle's.

But it was still too fast.

He'd gone from never having touched a bloke to having a cock in his mouth, to having a belly-full of come.

He'd fucked Bodie.

That reverberated through him. He'd fucked Bodie. His friend, his partner, his mate—his lover. Boyfriend. Fuck it. He was still Bodie, just Bodie.

Wonder how his other men had introduced him. Meet my mate, Bodie, just Bodie? Did Bodie start calling himself that because he got tired of being introduced as 'meet my Willie'?

How many men had there been? And when—right off, on the merchant navy ship, when Bodie would have been a beautiful teenager with those eyes and that skin and a mouth Doyle knew just begged to be fucked? Had they forced him, or was knowing that about himself what made Bodie run away to sea in the first place? Everyone knew about sailors, right?

He had no right to ask. But he needed to know.

"Have you had a lot of men?"

He heard Bodie nearly choke on that one.

"My fair share."

The next question. The one that mattered more than it ought. "Have many had you?"

Long pause. "No. Not many at all."

"But a few."

"Some."

"What's the difference between 'some' and 'a few'? Ten? Twenty?"

Bodie was coming over to him now, frowning, but not as angry as Doyle had expected. "Does it really matter?"

"Every time you suck me, or when you let me fuck you," that still having impact, bringing him up short, the memory flashing full-fleshed into his mind, "I can't stop wondering who taught you, who you practised on..."

"Can you name and number every girl who ever taught you anything, Ray? And what makes you so sure everything I learned I got from men? The first

arse I ever fucked was a good Catholic girl who wouldn't go on the Pill."

For some pathetic reason, that made him feel better.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Bodie was saying, very close now, and Doyle knew that the reassurances were about to become physical, knew that the ultimate reassurance would be offered him again. "I'm not comparing you to anyone, and even if I did, it's different with you anyway, isn't it?"

How? he almost asked, then saw the answer for himself, saw it right there in Bodie's eyes. Wondered if it showed in his eyes just as much.

"So it's not just because this is my first time with a bloke then?"

"Not even close. Believe me, Ray, this is different from anything else we'll ever know."

And then Bodie was kissing him again, enveloping him in love once more, stroking and touching him with all the skill and devotion at his command, and Doyle succumbed, willingly, to the pleasure and the security of being with someone he loved. Bodie's back was so broad, as he put his arms around him, but his waist was narrower, fitting Doyle's arms much better. And the arse, oh, yes, that luscious curve of buttocks, the cleavage that hid the secret heart of Bodie, the hole that yielded so tenderly.

He could really get hooked on this.

Newlyweds, Bodie had called them: keep going at this rate and he'd end up down the doctor's surgery with the worst case of bridegroom's prick anyone had ever seen. And it would be worth every chafed millimetre, he decided, unresisting as Bodie pulled him to his feet, as Bodie kissed him all the clumsy way to the bedroom.

It was...different, again, to have Bodie take the lead like this, but it was a relief, too, and a pleasure, to have someone else being responsible for making things go well, someone else taking the lead. Wonderful, too, to see Bodie lose some of that tentativeness, as if his friend was finally beginning to realise Doyle was neither going to faint dead away in moral outrage nor knock his block off.

Very nice, he thought, letting Bodie lay him down on the bed, letting Bodie strip him. Ann had done that for him: one of the things he'd liked best about her, that demanding, dominant streak. Lovely, lying here, with Bodie's mouth on him, with Bodie's hands touching him all over with reverence and lust. And listening to Bodie—pure heaven, hearing all those words, the stupid, silly words that they'd both deny

in the light of day or the publicness of a crowd.

But wonderful, to know Bodie trusted him that much, that Bodie loved him that much.

And to think he'd almost not given this a go! Christ, what sort of fool would he have been then? Complete wally, that's what. To miss out on Bodie's mouth sucking on his balls like that, Bodie's hands along the inside of his thighs, hands moving up him, to his nipples, his chest, lower, to his stomach, his cock, that gifted mouth wrapping him in heat and wetness and suction. Glorious. Heaven. Perfection. And if he wanted it, Bodie would let him fuck him. Not quite as good as fucking a woman, he admitted, but what the hell: no one's perfect, right? He'd settle for back-door fucking if it meant he got Bodie the rest of the time too. Small price to pay, very small price.

Bodie's teeth caught him with delicate deliberation, just where the head of his cock flared out from the shaft, an intoxicating pleasure with just the edge of risk that was unbearably exciting to men like themselves. Must remember that, Doyle thought, sighing, as he was licked and petted and coddled and loved. He spread his legs happily, smiling dreamily as the wet caresses covered his balls, shivering sensation all the way down to his toes. Bodie's hair was so soft in his hands, almost as soft as the skin on the curve of his shoulders, or in the hollow of his spine. Lovely. And Bodie's mouth was still doing wonderful things to him, until he was hard, and fucking Bodie was losing importance in the face of all this delectable pleasure.

Bodie's tongue was laving trails along his inner thighs, uncovering erogenous zones Doyle hadn't even known he'd had. Licking him all over, right under his balls, right there—

He was sitting upright, legs crossed, hands protectively between his legs before he even realised he was moving.

"Sorry," Bodie said, looking like he could kick himself. "I should've warned you I was going to rim you—didn't intend doing anything else, honest. It feels great, just wanted to do something else nice to you..."

Doyle tried a laugh, heard the panic in it, didn't kick himself, but did thump himself on one undefended thigh. "Stupid of me to over-react like that, it's just—"

"It's just too bloody soon for anything like that and I should've fucking well known better!"

"Well, no point laying blame, is there?" Grin, to show that he wasn't upset, to persuade Bodie to ease

up on himself a bit. "Better laying you, right? Want me to? Or 'd you rather I sucked you off?"

Bodie, kneeling on the bed, staring at him, Doyle awkwardly aware that he hadn't even noticed that Bodie was hard too, hadn't thought about Bodie-below-the-belt until this second.

"C'mon, Bodie," Doyle said, voice going deep, hands going deep too, touching Bodie's hardness, one finger tracing the length of it, capturing the glistening droplet at the tip. "What d'you want?"

"I'll settle for a good fuck."

Fire rushed through him, hearing Bodie actually saying those words. Seeing how much Bodie needed and wanted him, the other man's arousal catching. "A good fuck? How about," he closed his hand around Bodie's erection, holding it tightly in his hand, "a great fuck? A splendid fuck? A fan-fucking-tastic fuck?"

"On my back, this time," Bodie said, gaze never leaving Doyle's. "So I can see your face when you come in me."

Doyle felt that in his cock, his flagging erection coming back up to half staff.

"So you can kiss me when I you put your cock into me."

Another pulse through his cock, every individual word dropping from Bodie's mouth to land on his cock like a kiss.

"So you can fuck my mouth with your tongue while you fuck my arse with your cock."

Doyle grabbed him, hauled him round, got him on the bed, on his back, legs spread, knees lifted high, that tiny bud of flesh winking at him, dilating slightly just from Bodie's arousal, Bodie's anticipation.

I'm going to put my cock in there, Doyle thought incredulously. Fucking hell, I'm putting my cock in there!

Then Bodie was grabbing in his turn, his arms round Doyle's shoulders, pulling Ray down for a kiss. "Don't need any cream this time," Bodie was saying in his ear. "Could just use spit."

Use his tongue, there, the way Bodie had on him?

Doyle disentangled himself enough to get the tube of moisturiser out of the drawer. Definitely going to need a tube of proper lubricant, and soon, at the rate they were going through this stuff. He put some on Bodie, on the outside where the skin changed colour as it disappeared inside; put more on his own cock, making it slick and smooth as—

He pushed the word from his mind.

This was *not* the time to be thinking about cunt. He

should be thinking about Bodie, and how wonderful it felt inside him, all that heat and smoothness, all that depth, endless depths to thrust into. Oh, yeh, that's what to think about, and the kisses, the way Bodie kissed him, and the way Bodie loved him, and the way he loved Bodie. He looked up, to meet Bodie's blue stare, reached one hand to stroke Bodie's cock, the other rubbing the small mouth of flesh waiting to take his cock inside.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Come down here," Bodie told him, legs lifting up out of the way, arse canting upwards. "Like this," arms round Doyle, Bodie's thighs pressed hard against his own chest, the backs of his knees over Doyle's shoulder, his mouth open, hungry, under Doyle's. "Like this," he said again, and Doyle felt himself literally taken in hand, guided to the opening, swallowed in deep, deeper, until Bodie had him, all of him, and they were joined, his cock in Bodie, Bodie's tongue in him, and they were, quite wonderfully, complete.

Doyle wished they could stay like that forever, but his body was screaming at him, his nerves atingle, and he had to move, move, keep on moving, in and out of Bodie, thrusting and pushing, leaving only for the briefest possible instant before pushing in again, and all the time his cock was in Bodie and in heaven, his mouth was being ravished by Bodie's tongue, pushing into him like a small, wet cock.

Under him, Bodie moved, opened even wider, and Doyle plunged into him, plundering the pleasure so enthusiastically offered. He felt it building inside, couldn't bear to slow down, not when it felt so incredibly right.

Came, intensely, suddenly, pouring himself into Bodie, spilling his soul deep inside his friend.

Collapsed, lay there on top, while Bodie covered his face in small kisses.

Recovered, opened his eyes, only to close them again as Bodie kissed him, and moved him, until Bodie was lying beside him, that hard cock questing through the hair on his thigh, Bodie humping him, pushing and thrusting against him, while they shared kisses, deep kisses, redolent with passion and love.

"Look at me," Bodie said. "Look at me!"

Doyle opened his eyes, smiled at the way Bodie's face was flushed, sweat spiking the usually impeccable hair. He stroked his hand across Bodie's cheek, reached down for Bodie's cock. Pressed it against his own thigh, Bodie's pulse against him, and he rubbed his hand up and down it, Bodie's hardness trapped

against him. Did that until Bodie moved, just once, and Doyle brought Bodie over him, on top of him, let Bodie thrust hard between his tightly-closed thighs, held Bodie close, stared into those passion-darkened eyes until Bodie shuddered, and went still, mouth suddenly agape, as the moment came and he spilled himself between Doyle's legs.

The last thing Doyle remembered was clambering out from under Bodie's weight, then wrapping himself around his friend, holding him close: cradling, if one could be said to cradle a man so large. But he went to sleep holding Bodie, the wetness of Bodie's orgasm still between his thighs.

Dark, and disorientation. Too hot, too close, too—

Too nothing. It was Bodie, all over him, snoring a bit. Not what had awakened him, though: nature's call could be very insistent.

Necessities done, he meandered into the kitchen, poked through cupboards and fridge, came to the conclusion that he was really going to have to do some shopping and that if he planned on feeding himself or Bodie tonight, he'd better put some clothes on and go round the Chinkies.

When he came back, laden down with tin-foil boxes and wreathed in gorgeous smells, Bodie was already awake, and up, and the smile Doyle got when he walked in the door was worth more than all the tea in China.

An evening, spent in doing nothing very much, saying not too much of anything, and then finally, back to bed, long, slow, lingering kisses, and the touch of each other's hands.

Falling asleep at last that night, Doyle had one last thought before Morpheus claimed him: that odd feeling that had been niggling around for the past couple of days. He recognised it. As his eyes closed, Ray Doyle knew himself to be completely happy.

Of course, neither one of them had set the alarm clock for the next day. In by noon, paperwork to do before they faced Cowley and the next assignment. In by noon, and neither one of them awake before eleven, and the phone ringing twice, and the neighbour coming to ask if they'd seen her cat, and the Parcel Post delivering one of Lindsay's hideous cushions for Doyle to take to *Liberty's* to match to fabric, and the geyser on the blink, and no milk for tea.

He should have been in the foulest mood in the history of mankind, would be, normally, but this was hardly the most normal of times, was it? A huge gulf

between last week and this, and he couldn't find an ounce of regret over it. Doyle looked over at Bodie, still half-asleep in the passenger seat, one lock of hair askew and sticking straight out from the side of his head. Bodie should look stupid, Doyle thought, but he just looks gorgeous.

Oh, you've got it bad my son, he said to himself, and restrained himself from reaching over and smoothing Bodie's hair down. He had a sneaking suspicion that he wouldn't stop at that, that if he touched Bodie he'd end up kissing him and if he ended up kissing him—

Well, Cowley just might frown on two of his agents being arrested for public indecency and lewd conduct. Unless it was in the line of duty, of course.

Bodie turned to him, gazed at him, didn't say anything: Doyle didn't think either of them had to say anything, the way they were looking at each other. "Better watch it, I suppose," he said.

"Watch what?" Mumbled round a huge yawn.

"The way we are with each other. Murphy sussed us in two seconds flat, and we're even more over the top now. Best be careful." He looked away, shifted gear, followed the aggravated line of traffic through the lights.

"Best be careful to—what?"

Doyle barely glanced at him, the articulated lorry ahead weaving like a Scotsman on a Saturday night, and the teenager on the moped zipping in and out like Evel Knievel with a death wish. "Not to let on we're sleeping together."

Pause. Doyle negotiated a nearly clogged roundabout, nipped down the back road that would lead them in towards the general area of HQ.

"Be a problem, you think?"

"Course it would. Think they'd let us within sniffing distance of that liaison post if they knew we were in bed together?"

"And we all know how important that promotion is."

He'd spent a lot of time thinking about that job and what it would mean to them: the two of them, maybe three or four other people, still doing a good and useful job, but safe, off the streets, good money coming in, and best of all, no one trying to kill them. No risk of a bomb going off in their hands, no risk of someone shooting them in the back. Or in their own living room. Just thinking about it made him come over all warm-fuzzies: he and Bodie with somewhere to go when they got too slow for the streets, and a job they could love, and money they could use to go on

holiday to Greece and Paris and Rome and other places where men could hold hands without being beaten up. They'd even be able to buy a flat together, the two of them—commitment, that, one that would make Bodie feel a lot more secure about Doyle.

"Yeh! Have you seen the *starting* pay scales for that? Oi, you!" yelled out the window, Mr. Macho in sunglasses and hairy chest sneering over the bonnet of his Mercedes. "Where'd you buy your license, round the back of Woolies? Watch where you're going," ID. pulled out and flashed, Mr. Macho looking suddenly less macho, "or I'll have your license suspended so quick your head won't stop spinning for a week."

Shifting gears again, round another corner, turning back to Bodie. "Sorry, what were you saying?"

"Nothing much. Just how much you want that liaison job."

"We'd be proper Jack Horners pulling plum jobs like that. Good hours, amazing wages," quick look before zipping the car between two taxis, "no one shooting at us."

"Be nice."

"Be wonderful."

Then they were almost at HQ, and their radio cackled to life, and it was back to the grind. Hours later, they'd done their stint wrestling killing carbon sheets and murderous typewriters, even done their stint of going round interviewing a possible witness. Now, they were back in HQ, mugs of detestable pseudo-coffee or possibly pseudo-tea in hand, and what seemed like the rest of the squad piling in, the rest room heading for the Guinness Book of World Records for the most people piled into the smallest space.

"Anyone'd think there was free booze for the having," Bodie said, leaning in closer when Doyle obviously hadn't heard a word he'd said over the racket.

"Better than that. Payday."

An odd expression on Bodie's face then. "You'll be looking forward to that, I suppose, but not as much as your precious liaison job."

Doyle gave him a look for that. "Thought you'd like the liaison job?"

"Or at least the money, right?"

"What the hell brought that on?"

"Brought what on?" Murphy, sticking his nose in where Doyle didn't think it belonged, but Bodie was smiling at him like water in a desert.

"Did you get those brochures on that climbing

holiday in Switzerland?”

Murphy looked at Bodie, looked at Doyle. “Wasn’t sure if that was still on or not.”

“Oh, it’s still on.”

“Honeymoon over so soon?” Said so mildly, but there was genuine concern in that voice.

“Hang on a minute—” Doyle said, knowing only that there was something going on here that he’d missed, couldn’t be what it looked like—

“Why don’t you ask Doyle here?”

“Ask Doyle what?” McCabe, whose nose belonged even less.

“You’re asking *Doyle* something?” Lucas, Part Two of the double act.

Jax was sailing into view, all ears and witty comments, and Doyle would quite happily have strangled him.

“What’s this in aid of?” Doyle asked Bodie, freezing everyone else out with the sheer force of his ‘charm’. “A minute ago, everything was just fine—”

“Think so, do you?”

“Of course I fucking well think so! What d’you think the past three days have all been about?”

“Ooh, been off somewhere together have we?”

“Having a tiff already?”

One serious glower put paid to Lucas and McCabe’s double act, the overflow taking care of Jax too. Murphy, on the other hand, simply raised an amused eyebrow and took another drink of the brown stuff in his mug.

“Did you tell them?” Doyle demanded, one finger jabbing Murphy right in the breast pocket. “Did you fucking tell them?”

“Bother you, would it?” From Bodie, in the cold, hard voice Doyle hadn’t heard since before they started sleeping together. Which wasn’t very long ago, he reminded himself. It wasn’t very long ago at all.

“Bother me? Depends on how he did it. Anyway, it’s no one’s business—”

“And that’s all it is.” Such an overabundance of doubt, positively dripping.

“You stupid, pathetic bastard! You—”

Broke off, as the words bounced off Bodie like bullets off Superman. Which meant—

He’d promised himself he wasn’t going to hurt Bodie. But the bastard was being so fucking unreasonable—

“Right, that does it,” Doyle said to the room at large. “You, mate, are coming with me.” Grabbed Bodie’s shirtfront, tugged, Mohammed meeting the

mountain. “Now, Bodie.” Brooking no argument, the same tone of voice that had carried him through years of fights and set-tos with Bodie on the job. “Now.”

“Fine,” Bodie said, shaking off Doyle’s hand, turning on his heel with a military precision that boded no good at all.

“Want to borrow my flak jacket?” From Murphy, who else?

“You keep it. You’ll need it more than me.”

“Really? He gets angrier at you than he does with me.”

“But he l—” Jax, back again, bright eyed and ears positively out on stalks to harvest the latest gossip. “Yeh, well, things are different between me and him, you got that?”

Didn’t bother hanging around to see what Murphy was going to say to that, too busy hurrying off to catch that stupid bastard before he did something even more stupid than usual.

He found Bodie propping up a wall, a pose so casual to be totally unnatural on Bodie.

“So what the fuck was that all about back there?”

Bodie folded his arms, looked down at his feet. “I was out of order there—”

“I’ll say.”

“But all that crap in the car—”

“What crap in the car? Look, I’m the first one to apologise—”

Bodie snorted at that.

“—I am too. But all I said in the car was...” What had he said in the car? Nothing much, just stuff about them being together.

“All you said in the car,” Bodie told him, quietly, “was that having your name down for this might-be job was more important than anything you and me might be. To each other. Together. Us. You know.”

Doyle ran his hands through his hair: Christ, with communication skills this highly developed, they’d be in the divorce courts before the week was out.

“Did you mean it that way, in the car?” Bodie’s voice was milder than Doyle’d expected.

At least they were *both* trying to sort it out. Doyle sighed and stuffed his temper down into the back of his mind. “If it got to you that much, and I wasn’t pissed off at you and doing it on purpose, then of course I didn’t mean it that way. In the car or anywhere else.”

“Oh, well, that’s all right then.” Bodie was sounding more like his old self, making light of even the darkest things: their usual way of coping. “I’d like to apologise for being a bit of a prat—”

“No time like the present!”

“—but don’t worry, with you giving me such fine lessons, I’ll be a big prat in no time at all.”

Doyle was grinning with him, laughing, “You saying it was my fault? Just because you—” until he actually thought about what Bodie had said, “What *did* you do?”

Bodie didn’t look at him, but the calm in his voice hinted at old tensions. “You were going on about the job, about keeping quiet about us so we’d be in line for it.”

“And you got your knickers in a twist over *that*? What the hell else are we going to do, take out announcements in the *Times*?”

Bodie was matching him for fire now, Bodie’s voice escalating. “No, but there’s a bit of a jump from that to skulking around like lepers.”

Doyle was nearly shouting now. “Yeh, and there’s a bit of a jump between going around carrying bloody bells in front of us and going around telling everyone in CI-fucking-5 that we’re—”

Real danger, in the quietness of Bodie’s voice, as he asked, too, too, calmly: “We’re what?”

Take a breath, he told himself, get a grip on your bloody temper, don’t fly off the handle at him, don’t ruin already.

Bodie, toning his own voice down, neither one of them exactly racing happily into battle. “We’re not telling everyone, just Murphy, and he’s a mate of mine, Doyle, and he’s been my mate for years—”

He really didn’t intend to sound so much like a wounded puppy—albeit a vicious wounded puppy intent on spreading rabies. “And years, longer than you’ve known me.”

“Don’t sound like that!” Low-voiced, as if it pained Bodie as much to see Doyle hurt as vice versa. “You and Murph—it’s apples and oranges.”

Not the best time to ask. In fact, if this were a romance novel or a ‘how-to’ book on good relationships, he’d shut his trap and just get back to what this had all been about in the first place. Not the best time to ask, but when would there ever be a ‘best time’ for a question like this? “Have you slept with Murphy?”

“Don’t ask me that, Ray.”

“In other words, a big, fat, resounding yes. With bells on too?”

“Not the way it is with us. Why d’you keep harping on about that anyway? D’you hear me asking for the dirty linen on you and Ann?”

“You already know all that. You were there—or ’ad you forgotten that? Anyway, I didn’t exactly keep

it a deep, dark secret, did I?” He subsided into silence, looming, brooding silence cold enough to cut off the world.

The silence stretched.

Then finally, abruptly, just as Doyle was about to concede defeat, Bodie burst into harried, hasty speech, “Okay, all right, I’ll tell you. Yes, I’ve slept with Murphy, but no, I’m not—”

“Not what?”

Bodie looked decidedly uncomfortable, as if he half-expected saying it loudly at work would turn him into a reject from a romance novel. “I’m not in love with Murphy.”

“But you are with me.” Slow, steady warmth spreading through him as Bodie’s words permeated him. Knew it had to be written all over his face “Wasn’t just pillow talk—”

“Hope not. Never fancied Doris Day.”

Punch to the arm, for the kiss he couldn’t give here in the corridors of CI5. “Prat.”

Bodie leaning forward, their breath mingling, then whispering into Doyle’s ear as if they were discussing a sensitive case. “Want to fuck you right now, right here, up against the wall.”

And instead of a shiver of desire, all Doyle could think about was having Bodie inside him, up inside him there. Bodie was big, far too big for his mouth, how the hell—

“Not literally, Ray—already told you I won’t try that. But I’d get you up against that wall and I’d kiss you and touch you—”

Now that was better, especially the darkness of arousal in Bodie’s eyes, and the whole idea was sounding better and better. “Tonight. My place. Eight.”

“Oh, no, Ray. This afternoon. *My* place. Fourish.”

“You in a hurry again?”

“Not like the first time. But near enough.”

“Your place, then. Fourish.”

Then it was a shared smile, Bodie copping a quick feel of his bum, and back to the rest room, where the crowd had dispersed and another bit of work was waiting for them.

Fourish, and he was nowhere near Bodie’s place. For that matter, he wasn’t even anywhere near Bodie. He was, instead, stuck behind the steering while of Cowley’s car, while Cowley sat in the back with some German muckety-muck discussing policy and Interpol and a dozen other tiny details, none of which were of the slightest bit of interest to Doyle.

He kept his mind on the job, or as much of his

mind as a routine security drive through London required, which wasn't a whole hell of a lot. The rest of his mind was occupied by thoughts of what he and Bodie had done today, in bed, later, at HQ, in the corridor, that stupid argument over what he still wasn't entirely sure.

Going too fast, that was their problem. Far too fast, and any driver knows what happens when one takes the corner too fast. Splat. A big mess and some poor bastard left to scrape the remains up off the ground. They needed to slow down.

Correction. *He* needed to slow down: Bodie seemed quite happy to do his Stirling Moss, probably be quite happy to take the corners on two wheels. But then, Bodie'd done this before. Quite a few times before.

With Cowley droning in the back, with another agent in the passenger seat beside him, Doyle sat there and gave himself a good talking to, all about the stupidities of jealousy, and the sins of nosiness.

Didn't help. Still couldn't get it out of his mind. All that business with Krivas—that had been a bit personal, hadn't it? Then there was Keller, that had been well over the odds. Merchant navy, mercs, the all-male environment of the Army and the Paras and the SAS. And all of that led to other things, thinking about Bodie in the military, where he would've gone to avoid being caught—or was that why the SAS had been so happy to get rid of him? Now, back in mufti, did Bodie go to the queer pubs? Discos? Nah, couldn't imagine Bodie in discos. Until he remembered that he'd *seen* Bodie in discos, had gone to more than a few, he and Bodie and their dates.

Bodie, flirting with some complete stranger, going home with him, doing to him what he'd done to Doyle. Letting someone fuck him.

No. Bodie'd said there hadn't been too many who'd had Bodie.

Which could still leave several legions and a battalion or two, depending on how Bodie was counting it. Stupid, stupid, stupid, he told himself, a thought echoed from the back seat.

"Left here, Doyle, your other left."

"Yes, sir, sorry, sir, avoiding the suspicious car behind us, sir."

Kept driving straight, until the perfectly innocuous red mini had turned down the next side street.

And a perfectly innocuous yellow morris minor had swung into place behind their car.

"Shit," Doyle muttered. Just what he needed: the job actually needing him to concentrate on it today.

Brilliant, just bloody brilliant.

It was all routine, in the end, just MI5 checking up on the German team who had been checking up on the MI5 team, who had been checking—well, it was the usual circuitous norm. Whatever it was, it was gone ten before he was off duty, and his backside was sore from sitting on it all day.

Not a chance of Bodie getting his arse tonight, not when he had the perfect excuse.

He thought longingly of hæmorrhoids, and he was only half-joking.

There were plenty of parking spaces on Bodie's street, and a light on in Bodie's window. Doyle was whistling under his breath, the same tune Bodie'd been whistling so much recently. He took the stairs two and three at a time, pleased with himself that he wasn't out of puff by the time he got to the top.

Which was just as well. It made it all the more impressive when he had the wind knocked out of him. Doorbell rung, thumb pressing down hard the whole time, until the door opened to reveal—

Murphy.

(Editor's note: The following is the main ending of the story. For those who are aware of M. Fae Glasgow's tendency towards unhappy endings and would prefer something more 'positive,' may I suggest going directly to page 99 and reading the alternative ending instead.)

MURPHY.

At Bodie's place, at this time of night.

"He'd better be at death's fucking door," Doyle snarled, pushing past the colleague at Bodie's door.

"And if he isn't," Doyle's arm was grabbed bruisingly, "you'll put him there, is that it? Well, Ray old chum," Doyle's arm released, but Doyle held fast by the sheer threat in Murphy's glare, "before you go in there and rearrange his face, you just keep in mind that anything you do to him, I'll do to you—double. And while you're at it, you had better remember what I told you in the first place. If you don't want him, there are plenty who do. And some of us..."

Doyle blinked, once, as Murphy came in closer. And closer.

"...some of us are well able to take him right out from under your nose. Some of us..."

Closer still, impossible, unless Murphy was going to—

"...are positively bloody gifted..."

—kiss him—

“...aren’t we?”

Under the anger and the outrage, was the enormity of relief that Bodie was the only man he enjoyed kissing, Bodie the only man he *wanted* to kiss.

Doyle, without an ounce of shame, took great satisfaction in the sound of his fist decorating Murphy’s jaw in shades of blue. “Don’t you *ever* do that to me again!”

There was a flash of unbridled anger in Murphy’s eyes, then the shutters came down again, and all Doyle had to look at was a very urbane, very cultivated amusement. “Don’t do that to you *ever* again? Why not, Ray? Like it too much, did you?” And then, perfectly timed pause on the doorstep, moving quickly enough that there was no time to yield to the temptation to brawl, “Tell Bodie I’ve gone home for the rest of the night. I’ll see him soon enough, won’t I?”

Not if Doyle could help it. He kicked the closing door. Hard.

“I see the door bit you again.”

Bodie.

Well, of course, it was, after all, Bodie’s flat.

Where Murphy had answered the door as if he were used to it. As if he lived here. As if he had the right to.

Doyle looked Bodie up and down, from the shininess of his untidy hair to the bareness of his feet, and paid special, impertinent attention to the black expanse in between, Bodie black-clad from throat to wrist to ankle. Ready for a funeral, Doyle thought, and shivered, as someone walked over his grave.

“Have a nice time with Murphy, did you?” Doyle winced as he heard the shrewishness of that tone.

Bodie just stared at him, his very calm an intimidation. “We had a very nice time, as it happens.”

“And what else did you have?”

Such small changes, but speaking large volumes to anyone who knew Bodie.

And who knew him better than Doyle? Doyle, who swallowed, and whose mind skittered, trying to take stock of what the hell was going on, Doyle whose heart started to pound and race.

Balanced on the balls of his feet, expression shifting toward the truculent, Bodie looked ready for a any kind of fight available. “I would’ve thought,” Bodie said, sounding nothing much more than mildly curious, although Doyle saw the way the hands were clenched. “you’d’ve been more interested in what Murphy had.”

The nascent good intentions didn’t stand a chance,

suspended by the images that shoved in front of them. Doyle had expected the jealousy to surge through him: hadn’t expected the hurt to bite so deeply. “You think it matters if Murphy shagged you?”

“Doesn’t it?”

It was on the tip of his tongue, scraping at his teeth in its enthusiasm to get out, to fly and wound and leave Bodie bleeding. But there was something else, too, his own determination that he wasn’t going to destroy this and there, something in Bodie’s eyes, something—

Christ, the same as when Bodie’d been going on about Ann. The barbs were bitten back, bile rising as Doyle swallowed those poisoned words. “Course it fucking matters.”

But all Bodie said was: “Does it?”

Left flatfooted, Doyle stumbled after Bodie’s retreating back.

The living room was a tip, take-away food, empty beer cans, crisp packets and mugs cluttering everything. Bodie’s shoes and socks were an untidy molehill amidst the mountain of mess. The chaos drew Doyle up short: one thing for Bodie’s bedroom to be a bit of a mess, but never, never his living room—not the room that Cowley might walk into, not the room that years of living on base had trained him to keep spotless to divert inspection from the more private areas. Very slowly, Doyle looked around, really looked around, and wondered.

“Want a cup of tea?”

The panacea for all ills, or in this case, a nice hot drink to give them both time to cool down.

“That would be great.”

“Fine. It’ll just be a minute.”

Doyle shoved the evening paper off the sofa, flopped himself down there. To think, the two of them, reduced to the polite mouthings of strangers. D’you want tea it’ll only be a minute—Christ on a crutch, next it would be do you take milk.

Maybe taking that next step hadn’t been such a good idea after all. Might be best if they let it drop—just look at them, look at *Bodie*. And all right, he’d be honest: just look at himself. Not exactly at his best. In fact, if he were this shaky on the job, Cowley would have him round at Dr. Ross’ before he could say trick-cyclist.

“Here you go,” Bodie said, back already with the tea.

“That was quick.”

“I’d already put the kettle on when you showed up.”

Doyle slurped the none-too-hot tea, didn't even grimace over it, and answered Bodie's unspoken question. "Ended up chauffeuring Cowley around all day. He had a load of meetings, and the last one took forever."

"Supposed that was what it was."

"Then—"

"Then what?"

"Nothing."

"Don't start that with me, Ray Doyle. What were you going to ask?"

"If you weren't pissed off with me or worried or something, then—"

"You thought that was why Murphy was here? For fuck's sake, what d'you think I am? Eh? D'you think my brains go out the window as soon as you fuck me in the arse? I'm not one of your fucking girlfriends—"

"And I never said you were—"

"Then why're you saying I was sitting here worrying or stewing over you being late? I'm in the Squad too, you know, I *know* how the job works."

"I never said you didn't—"

"But you forgot it, didn't you?"

Doyle wished he were an American and could take the Fifth.

"Didn't you."

Not a question now, hard, flat statement. "Course I didn't. It was just—"

All of a sudden, Bodie was there, right there in front of him, hands digging into the back of the sofa, his arms prison bars around Doyle's face. "Don't you dare fucking lie to me. I know you, Raymond Doyle. I *know* you. And I know when you're lying to me."

Captured, caught, trapped, any number of words for it, but nothing came close to describing the feeling, mouse gone after the cheese, the trap coming down on him, cutting into him. "I thought you might be worried, 'cause of the way things've changed between us," oh, nice choice of euphemism, he sneered at himself, "especially since I'd said I'd be here about four and didn't turn up."

"Unlike the proverbial bad penny?"

"What is it, Bodie? Something's changed..."

A flex of muscles, and Bodie was gone, pacing slowly across the room.

"Something's changed. That's one way of putting it, isn't it? Something's changed." Half a laugh, an entirety of hurt.

"Stop messing me about—"

"Messing *you* about? Christ, you've got a fucking cheek!"

Not the time, Doyle knew, to leaven the atmosphere with even the most puerile of jokes. "So you think I'm messing you about then?"

"Yes—maybe. That's the thing, Ray, I don't know. I just don't fucking know."

"But you spent the afternoon here in a blue funk, thinking the worst, you and Murphy—"

"Will you leave Murphy out of this? He's got nothing to—"

"Leave him out? Wish you would. How d'you think I feel, showing up here this late and there he is, opening the door like lord of the fucking manor?"

"I'm not one of your birds, I don't have to answer to you every time one of my mates comes over."

"Not even when that 'mate' is one of your lovers?"

"Wrong tense."

"Since when?"

"About six, seven months ago. Before you gave any inkling you might bring yourself to let me touch you."

"So what's he doing over— Hang on a minute. The way you just said that—" Deep breath, calm down, stop trampling all over Bodie with borrowed size 8 army boots. "You still think I don't like the sex bit?"

"*Still* think? You make it sound as if you've spent weeks persuading me otherwise."

"I have—" Stop, think about the passage of time. "Christ, I haven't, but it feels like weeks."

Saw just how wrong the words were as they thudded into Bodie.

"I didn't mean it that way. It's just..." Run his fingers through his hair, wish wholeheartedly for a bottle or two of whisky or vodka or anything else of real potency. "It's been a bit on the quick side for me, that's all."

Doyle watched, fascinated, as the tension ebbed from Bodie's shoulders, watched, as the dark eyes lost some of their bleakness. Watched, as Bodie came back to him.

"Head reeling, is it?"

"Any faster and it'd fall off."

"Suppose it is a bit much for you. You really hadn't done it with another bloke before?"

Remembering being on his knees for Bodie, failing miserably. "Thought that'd been a bit obvious."

"Practice—"

"—makes perfect. It shows, you know, that you've had a lot of practice."

Muted flare, the anger merely banked, not gone. “D’you want a list, is that it? And what I did with each of them and when?”

“Keep your hair on. I was only trying to give you a compliment.” Bodie just looked at him. “Yeh, yeh, and fish for details too. C’mon, Bodie, how would you feel if you found out I’d been doing it with blokes? You already know about most of the women, wouldn’t you be just a bit curious and a bit jealous about the men?”

Bodie sat down heavily, the sofa cushions dipping under his weight, drawing Doyle an inch or two closer. “I’d be a bit curious, I suppose, but I’m not as jealous as you.”

“Yeh, well, I didn’t think I was as jealous as me either. It’s come as a bit of a shock, I can tell you.”

“So...” A look laden with uncertainty glanced off Doyle, then was gone before he could read more. “Why d’you think you’re jealous with me and not all the rest?”

“Because—”

He’d feel a right wally sitting there in an untidy living room face to face, lights on, nothing between them but a half-resolved issue. “Because—it matters more this time.”

Bodie sat silently, waiting.

“Because—Christ, Bodie, because every time I think of you letting one of them do you, I want to cut their pricks off with a blunt penknife, that’s why.”

Now it was Doyle who sat there silently, waiting, wondering what he’d said wrong this time.

“So it doesn’t bother you what I do to them?”

“Course not.” And why the hell had *that* brought on the storm clouds? “Bodie, what you do them... Well, it’s no different, really, from doing it to a bird or your own fist, but when you let them do *that* to you...” Was unaware of the expression drifting over his own face. “To let them do *that* to you, they must really mean a lot to you.”

Bodie shook his head, rueful disbelief written all over him. “You’ve always got to judge everyone by your own standards, haven’t you? Ray, my son, let me tell you all about the birds and the bees. Some bees like doing it. Some bees, though, like getting it. That’s it. Nothing complicated or meaningful, it just feels—incredible.”

“And that’s why you let them do it to you? It doesn’t mean anything?”

“I thought wanking was supposed to knock you blind, not deaf.”

“But to let someone inside you like that—”

“—can be because there’s nothing better than a hard cock rubbing against the old gland in there, or—”

“Or?”

Words mumbled towards hands clasped so tightly the knuckles were shroud-white. “Or because you love him.”

And that was what mattered.

Bodie loved him. All the rest of it, the arguments, the insecurities, whatever the hell else was going on, all paled to insignificance beside that one simple, salient fact. Bodie loved him. Doyle couldn’t help but smile, and he reached out, twisting round, unnoticing of the discomfort, until he could hold Bodie, until he could kiss him.

It was wonderful, just the way he’d imagined it, before Murphy had opened the door and everything had gone sour. Himself wrapped round Bodie, Bodie’s arms tight around him, and their mouths open, kissing, tongues touching and Bodie bathing him in love.

Wonderful. Pure heaven, to feel so loved—and to love so much in return. Bodie’s hands were on him, and his own hands were burrowing under that annoying black jumper, finding the white skin nestled within. Firm nipples rose under his touch, and he kneaded the ample muscles under them. Almost as good as a handful of tits, he decided, and ran his hands back down Bodie’s stomach, and round, to his back, to the dimples that lured him to the small of Bodie’s back, and the lush, ripe curve of Bodie’s buttocks.

“Can’t get at you,” he mumbled against Bodie’s cheek. “Let me touch you—”

“Better adjourn this to the bedroom, then.”

They did, Doyle stopping Bodie for kisses now and then, his hands full of Bodie’s arse.

The bedroom, eventually, the covers already in disarray, Bodie bending over to pull the bedspread off. “God, I love this arse,” Doyle said, cupping Bodie with both hands. “Most gorgeous arse on the face of the planet.”

For the briefest of moments, he wondered that there’d been no come-back, but then Bodie was standing up, and stripping, the sweater coming off to reveal the pallid skin, the hands dropping lower to unbutton and unzip the trousers. Doyle busied himself with his own clothing, hauling off shirt, kicking off trainers, pulling at the rest of his clothes.

“No,” Bodie said, “let me...”

So Doyle did, standing there, while Bodie went

down on his knees. The socks first, and then Bodie ran his hands up the length of Doyle's legs, following the inner seam, following that ridge of double stitching over the impressive bulge, the buckle being undone, the button pushed through its small hole, and then the zip coming undone as if by magic, Bodie's mouth following its path.

Then the jeans were slipped down, and the briefs were mouthed, wetly, Doyle's cock rising blindly towards the tantalising heat.

Bodie withdrew, looked up at Doyle with darkened eyes. "This is what you want, isn't it, Ray?"

Doyle wrapped his hands round the back of Bodie's head and drew him forwards, inwards, until the open mouth was back on him. One handed, he pulled his underwear out of the way, until the elastic cradled his balls and Bodie's open mouth was cradling his cock. He thrust, once, slowly, not too deeply, and felt the answering response. Thrust again, and again, Bodie giving him this exquisite pleasure.

Was bereft, when Bodie turned his face away from him, and went back to stripping him.

"It's all right, Ray, you'll get what you want."

Doyle allowed himself to drift on the sensations: Bodie, touching him, Bodie, undressing him, Bodie, sucking him. Perfect.

Bodie's mouth was all over him, licking and sucking and kissing, taking him inside the moistness of his mouth one testicle at a time, tongue caressing him, and then going back to his cock itself, incredible expertise made all the more wonderful by the knowledge that Bodie loved him. Loved him enough to let him fuck him.

Felt, at that moment, Bodie's finger against him, tip barely touching his most private part.

Knew, then, what Bodie wanted.

Knew, then, where all the talk of love had led.

He'd said it himself: letting someone do *that* to you meant you loved them.

One action, one word of permission, and he could prove to Bodie that he loved him. Loved him enough for this to work, for this to be forever. One small thing, and all Bodie's doubts and uncertainties and false truths would be swept away.

One small thing.

Only Bodie wasn't small. Bodie was huge, if it was going to be stuck in *there*.

But if he let Bodie do that, if he let Bodie inside him...

It wouldn't make him any less a man, of course

not. Wouldn't have him shopping for high heels and handbags.

It *would* have Bodie at his side. Forever.

A small price to pay for forever.

"All right," he heard himself say. "All right, you can do it."

Bodie's finger abruptly withdrawn, Bodie's mouth lifting from his cock, Bodie scrambling up his body until they were face to face and Bodie's cock, heavy with sudden arousal, was hard against his own softness.

"I wasn't asking—"

The fuck he hadn't been. "Not intentionally, maybe."

"I promised you I wouldn't try to fuck you."

"Good. That means you're going to succeed then, doesn't it?"

Doyle wondered if his nervousness was as audible on the outside as it was on the inside, his voice unsteady in his throat, his heart thumping, his pulse pounding, and every nerve thrumming.

"You don't have to do this—"

Oh, but he did, and he knew it. He could feel the necessity in Bodie's cock where it dug into him, could see it in Bodie's eyes, knew it deep inside—oh, fuck, a small voice in him whimpered, the rest lost in wordless fear—that if he didn't do this, sooner or later, then Bodie would never really believe there was love on both sides. And if he left, then 'later' might be 'too late'.

Could he face the future without Bodie?

Yes.

But did he want to?

No. His whole being recoiled from a life without Bodie. He'd get used to the sex, he knew he would. Would even grow to love it as much as he loved Bodie. An adjustment, that's all it was, give him a bit of time and he'd adjust to it completely.

Yes. He would let Bodie inside him. And do it now, before it was too late.

He looked into blue eyes that were staring at him anxiously. Grinned, to take the pressure off, knew his voice betrayed his attempts at confident jokiness. "Be gentle with me."

"Oh, I will," Bodie breathed, "I will."

And then Bodie's mouth claimed his, and Bodie's arms were around him, and Bodie was on top of him.

He fought off the feeling of suffocation, found instead the pleasure in Bodie wanting him this much, relished Bodie's need to hold him and cosset him.

Bodie's fingers were on his nipples now, teasing

them, making them erect and tingling with pleasure. Lower now, the fingers moved, taking Doyle's cock and stroking it, bringing back some of the lost tumescence, making his flesh rise and respond to the loving caresses.

All of this went on for some time, washes and waves of pleasure, until Doyle had relaxed, forgotten what this was all foreplay for, until Bodie kissed him once, hard, and then moved down him, kissing and licking all the way, until he had Doyle's legs raised, and that mouth, that hot, wet mouth was at the opening of Doyle's body, teasing him, caressing him there.

All Doyle could think about was if that was how big Bodie's tongue felt trying to get into him, then how the fuck would his cock feel? His erection flagged, so he moved, telling Bodie he wanted to roll over onto his knees. To give Bodie better access, of course.

He knelt there, face in the pillow, as Bodie's tongue laved him. He could feel his muscles relaxing, fought the urge to tighten them up. It's natural, he told himself, necessary: can't get a cock inside if you're all tight down there.

Relaxed, until the press of finger invaded him.

"Shh," he heard, "it's all right, we can stop—"

And all but tell Bodie he didn't love him? Not a chance, not a fucking chance. Deliberately, he relaxed his muscles, and pushed against Bodie, as if there were nothing in this world he wanted more than Bodie's finger inside him.

It wasn't as bad as he'd thought. Strange, to be stretched like that, but not unpleasant. Just not—great.

But Bodie and a million other queers loved being fucked. Give it time, he told himself, give it time.

Another finger, even slicker than the last, the excess of lubricant bringing it to Doyle's attention. He concentrated on it, trying to think what it reminded him of, focussing on that to distract from the discomfort of two fingers inside him, moving, moving—

He relaxed again, and pushed back, and felt the first stirrings of arousal when he heard Bodie's involuntary moan of pleasure. And need. An incredible amount of need in that broken murmur.

Doyle reached behind him with one hand, fumbled until he found Bodie's cock. So hard—so fucking huge, panic howled in the back of his mind—and the balls drawn up so tight. Must be nearly painful by now, and close to the edge, going by that hissed intake of breath.

Realised, too late, what it would mean to Bodie to feel Doyle take him in hand like that.

There, at his opening, the hugeness, the thickness of Bodie's cock.

No, he wanted to scream, don't, please—

"You don't have to," Bodie said, voice hoarse with unexpressed lust.

I don't have to, Doyle thought, and knew, that if he said no, even now, then Bodie would withdraw. Control flowed back through him, and he pushed, just a little, against the cock that was so desperate for him. "Do it, Bodie. C'mon, Bodie, fuck me, be inside me—"

And then it began. The first inch hurt, more than he had ever imagined, horrible, invading pain, taking him over—

A lessening of pain, an increase of pressure, more cock inside him, more—

More still—Christ, how much of it was there, ten feet? It went on and on, Bodie being so careful, so gentle, it was killing them both.

Doyle lunged upwards, impaling himself in one swift movement, the cock suddenly inside him, Bodie pressed to his back, Bodie whispering words of love, whispering again and again how much he loved Ray—

And now it was Bodie inside him, not just a cock, but Bodie, filling him with heat and hardness and bulk. It wasn't wonderful, it wasn't glorious, choirs of angels didn't sing the celestial chorus. Doyle prayed that Bodie wouldn't reach round to touch him, humiliated by his cock's softness. Bodie was too busy holding on to him, it seemed, and pouring those gorgeous words into his ear. Within him, he felt Bodie move, and waited for the magic moment when Bodie rubbed against his prostate.

No magic moment. Just an odd feeling of being near orgasm, when the rest of his body was a fractured glass of sensations, of thought, of emotions.

Bodie's movements were faster now, each thrust deeper, lunging into Doyle's insides, spearing him on Bodie's pleasure.

It's not unpleasant, he told himself. It's not. Just think about Bodie, and how much he's loving this—

Of how it had felt, when he'd been inside Bodie.

Bodie, feeling that, and knowing, every single second, that all this was because Ray Doyle loved him.

It was enough, it was more than enough. Pinned by Bodie's weight, Doyle moved as much as he could, pushing back to meet Bodie's thrusts, circling his hips

as much as he could, giving Bodie as much as he was able.

Then—

Bodie, inside him, swelling, going still, and—

The splash of Bodie deep, deep inside him, the most indescribable of sensations, Bodie, spilling his soul inside him again, and again, and again, until there was nothing more to give.

Quiet, then, save for their heaving breaths, joined, eventually, by the counterpoint of Bodie's voice, and this time, the love poured into Doyle in the form of words.

Another moment beyond description: Bodie's body growing small and soft inside him, leaving him, his own body slow to close in the aftermath.

He had the most unfortunate feeling—

With some delicacy and a touch of brute strength, he pulled out from under Bodie, started to bolt, then stopped, as the feeling receded.

He felt...odd, inside. Both lonely and violated.

Bodie was touching him again, pulling him back down onto the bed, back into Bodie's arms. Doyle went happily, needful of this simple affection.

"Thank you."

'Don't mention it' didn't seem like quite the appropriate response, so he just held on a bit tighter, pressed himself a bit closer.

Regretted that, just a moment later, when he felt Bodie's hand travel south.

"You didn't get hard."

No question there, just Bodie's certainty. "Too much else going on for me to think about. Anyway, what did we need *me* hard for?"

"Lots of blokes don't get hard at first."

Of course, that's the reassurance Bodie would naturally assume he would need. Doyle, on the other hand, didn't need any reassurance at all: he was just glad that he hadn't run, or thrown up, or rejected Bodie or any one of a dozen other things that could have gone wrong.

"Now you know how I feel about you," he said, kissing Bodie's neck.

A pause, far longer than the comment warranted.

"That the only reason you did it?"

"Christ, isn't that enough?"

It was, unless Bodie had wanted the same sun, moon and stars he'd offered Doyle.

The silence was telling. Very telling.

"Come on, Bodie, what else did you expect? I'm not going to change overnight, I'm still fucking straight, and you're still the first bloke I've ever even

kissed, let alone *this*. It's not going to be number one on my hit parade for a while, is it? Give me time—"

"Same way you need time to get used to sucking me or touching me?"

"Yeh—"

Heard that go down like the proverbial lead balloon.

Lay there, for a while, in silence, until Bodie got up from the bed.

"Where're you going?"

"Bathroom. Need to clean up."

Doyle was furious with himself, blushing over a thing like that. Bodie hadn't meant anything by that remark, just a fact of life for him, something Bodie probably did by rote.

The thought wasn't in the least bit comforting.

When Bodie came back with a cloth for him, he lay on his side, one leg drawn up, his eyes firmly closed, forearm draped, purely by coincidence, of course, to cover his face.

The touch on him was gentle, the stroking of cream completely unexpected. Bodie must have felt him flinch, for his voice was tight.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to rape you. Just some ointment to make sure you don't hurt and that everything's all right in there."

He was too mortified to thank Bodie, thinking about how he hadn't done that for Bodie, of how he'd left everything to Bodie the last time. Every time, really, no matter what they did, he left it all to Bodie—

Who hadn't come back to bed.

Who, half an hour later, still hadn't come back to bed.

He tried to tell himself that it didn't mean anything, that this wasn't some dark, foreboding omen. But he was reluctant as he threw his clothes on, uneasy as he walked through to the living room, his spine crawling with spiders of nervousness.

There was no light coming from under the closed living room door, but Doyle could hear the faint sound of the radio or a record Bodie had put on. Not sure what, couldn't quite make out the song. The doorknob twisted under his hand, and he mocked himself for behaving like an extra in a Hitchcock film. But he still didn't like this, all of his instincts on alert.

The music had stopped before Doyle had got halfway into the room, Bodie, in his tatty old dressing gown, fiddling with the record player arm, dropping the black vinyl back into liner, then sleeve, filing it away with a meticulousness that would make the CI5

office staff sigh in envy.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to wake you up.”

“Never went to sleep.”

“Oh.”

Pause. Very uncomfortable, a million miles from the usual easiness between them.

“I meant what I said in the beginning,” Bodie said abruptly.

“What—”

“About taking what’s on offer for however long it’s offered.”

“So all that talk the first night we fucked—all that crap about forever, I’m just supposed to ignore that?”

“Pillow talk,” Bodie said, turning round with a very bright smile plastiqued across his face. “I get a bit stupid sometimes.” Disingenuous shrug, that irritating smile still firmly in situ. “Carried away in the heat of the moment.”

But Doyle remembered that moment, remembered the other times too. “That’s a lie and you know it.” The flood of light was painful, and he stood blinking as Bodie switched lamps on to add to the brightness from the overhead light, and went round, tidying up and chatting away as if nothing had happened, nothing been said. Or done.

“There are times,” Doyle said evenly, “when I can’t decide if I’d rather give my right arm to find out what’s going on in your thick skull or if I’d rather shoot you.”

“Cowley’d probably complain.”

“I didn’t think you cared much if Cowley knew about you.”

“If Cowley knew? What makes you think he doesn’t?”

“You can’t have told him!”

“Didn’t have to.” A sigh so laden with patience it was a study in impatience. “Why d’you think I left the SAS? Cowley knew all about it before he signed me on. Not officially, mind, but he knows all right.”

“But if you had to leave the SAS—”

“I had to leave, that way there wouldn’t be any official enquiries or statements, nothing permanent on my record.” Bodie shrugged, but Doyle could see the tensions and conflicts that the shrug belied. “They just made it clear when it was time for me to sign on again that I’d best clear off instead. So I did.”

“Murphy too?”

“Nah, our Murph’s smart enough to keep his nose clean. He just wanted out of uniform—he’s too vain to put up with the haircut.”

Doyle applauded slowly, until Bodie stopped

fidgiting about and looked at him. “Nice one, mate. Would’ve got me well and truly sidetracked, usually. But not this time. Come on, Bodie, tell me what’s going on.”

“Nothing much.”

“You call sleeping with your best mate—your partner—‘nothing much’?”

No response to that, Bodie going back to his tidying up.

Doyle picked up the nearest newspaper and hurled it across the room. A cushion next, then Bodie’s jacket, and an empty crisp packet, that proved half-full as the crisps fluttered down like leaves in autumn.

Bodie glared at him.

Doyle stalked him, crossing the room until he was close enough to see every individual eyelash. Finger punctuating his words on Bodie’s chest, he was nearly snarling. “I’ve tried being reasonable, I’ve tried being nice, but I just let you fuck me, Bodie, and what do you do? You come in here and do the fucking tidying-up! What’s wrong with you? I let you fuck me! And we both know what that means—”

“Yeh, we both know what that means. Only problem is, it means completely different things, doesn’t it?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You ‘let’ me fuck you. That’s what you said, right?”

“It’s what I did.”

“But you ‘let’ me fuck you. You didn’t want me, Ray, you didn’t want me in you, you didn’t like it—Christ, Ray, you lay there and every time I touched you, you *flinched*.”

“Told you, it’s going to take time—”

“But until then, I’m supposed to be happy about you flinching or looking like you’re going to be sick?”

“What d’you expect—”

“You want to know what I expect?” Bodie grabbed him, slammed him up against the wall, pressed in against him until every breath he took was dependent on Bodie breathing too. “I’ll tell you what I expect. I expect—”

Bodie swallowed, and Doyle could have wept over the pain in Bodie’s eyes.

“You’ve done your bit, no one’s going to say you haven’t. But d’you know what’s going to happen, Ray? I know you don’t like doing anything to me, and I know you hate having me inside you—”

He wanted to break in, to tell Bodie he loved having *Bodie* inside him, it was just being fucked he

hated, but Bodie was still talking, and his thumb was rubbing gently, hypnotically, across Doyle's lips, blockading the words inside.

"So I'm not going to ask you to do any of that, I'll stick to the rest of it, and then every so often, you'll do your guilt routine, and you'll offer. You'll go down on your knees for me, you'll 'let' me do whatever it is I need, because that proves something. It proves you love me..."

That couldn't be tears he saw glistening there. But then Bodie blinked and his eyes were just overbright, and Doyle could see himself reflected in Bodie.

"That's the worst part, you know. I mean, you honestly do love me. It's no one's fault you don't love me the right way."

"I do love you in the right fucking way! How can—"

The thumb came back pressed his lips closed, gave Bodie time to speak.

"When you look at me, Ray, does your heart beat faster? Does your mouth go dry?"

"All right, so I don't react like a romance book when I see you. We're real people—"

"Do you get hard when you look at me, Ray?"

Such a brutal question, so gently asked. His silence spoke for him.

"No, you don't. D'you lie awake at night and think about me?"

"Yes—"

"But when you think about making love to me, I bet you don't end up all hard and aching for me, do you?"

"No, I don't, but give me time—"

"D'you remember the first time we had sex?"

Every second burned into his mind and his body, returning to haunt him now, coloured by the dawn-ing horror of just how different all of this truly was. Not different because it was with a man. Not different because it was done out of love. Different, because he and Bodie were an abyss apart.

"I couldn't wait, I was so keen I embarrassed myself like a raw teenager. But you—"

He hadn't even been excited.

"Looking at you had me so worked up, but you didn't even look at me. I don't excite you, do I?"

He had only one defence against this. "I love you."

Those were tears he had seen, was seeing right now.

"I know you do. You just let me fuck you to prove it, didn't you?"

He had. And he'd thought it would mean some-

thing. Thought it would make it all right.

"But Ray, how long can that last, eh? What's going to happen the first time you go out there and some busty blonde wiggles her tits at you?"

He willed his body not to react, tried to will away the ineluctable side-effects of earlier, when Bodie had stroked him inside, when that physical reaction had faded, and his body had been left unfulfilled and restless, the echoes of Bodie's passion nagging his body like toothache. Tried, so desperately, not to react. But failed, and was greeted by Bodie's sad smile.

"See? Mention jiggling tits, and you react. Is that what I'd have to do, Ray, after a while? Share you with some bird, or talk dirty to you? Talk to you about tits and cunts, sliding into all that wetness..."

He hated himself for his reaction, but he couldn't help it, his body remembering how it had felt to have his prostate massaged, and the images flooding his mind, word pictures painted in vibrant lasciviousness, Bodie's voice a seduction itself. "It's only turning me on because it's you saying it." He pressed his hips forward, until his groin was hard against Bodie's. "It's because you're touching me—"

"No," Bodie whispered, leaning closer, rubbing himself against Doyle, "it's because you're straight and I should've known better than to let myself ever hope for anything."

He felt Bodie's lips against his own, then, Bodie's hips grinding into his own, Bodie's fingers pinching his nipples, Bodie's mouth laving his neck, his ear, Bodie's mouth whispering obscenities into his ears, describing things they'd done with women, talking about it, using the gutter words that were all the more arousing for their lewdness.

He came, joylessly, into his jeans, Bodie's hand cupped hard around his groin, Bodie's eyes staring into his as every pulse of semen bled from him. He stood there, gasping for breath, unable to look at Bodie, unable to let Bodie go. More words whispered into his ear, different now, these words not designed to careen him into lust.

"How long will it be before that's what it takes every time? Tell me, Ray, when you fucked me, did you close your eyes?"

God help him, but yes.

"Who did you pretend I was?"

"No one. I knew it was you, I wasn't trying to make you into someone else. The way you're trying to make me into someone else. You can't expect me to change overnight—"

"I don't expect you to change at all."

But that would mean—

"I couldn't stop liking women if my life depended on it—and I like men just as much. So how could you change that about yourself? I don't expect you to change."

"Then you don't expect this to work, do you?"

"Do you?"

"I did." Heard the past tense, tried to erase it. "I do."

"Honestly? Do you really see us together fifteen years from now? Doing what? Living quietly apart, so we don't jeopardize promotions. Keeping up the façade of girlfriends so no one asks awkward questions. The thing is, though, it won't be a façade for you, will it?"

Had they discussed fidelity? Had they had *time*? He'd made assumptions—

Which were tumbling down round his ears, castles built on sand.

"You were the one who said it was forever—"

"Wishful thinking. I got carried away, that's all. But Christ, Ray, you let me fuck you, and it didn't work, did it? You hated it, just like you hated all the rest of it. And all the time in the world isn't going to change that."

"I'll get used to it—"

"But I don't *want* you getting used to it. I want you wanting *me*. And you don't and you can't, and I was a fucking idiot for forgetting that. It'd've been easier if you'd just been curious, and I'd just been randy."

"Oh, that's nice, that's just dandy, isn't it? I love you, I even fucking say it, and all you can do is wish we didn't even like each other. I suppose the next thing'll be that you wish we'd never even met each other."

"Got it in one."

"You ungrateful bastard! We've got a chance here, a once-in-a-lifetime chance, and you're trying to throw it away over sex! There's more to this than sex—"

"Exactly. But the way I feel about you—you can't take the sex away from it. And the way you feel about me—the sex doesn't really belong in there at all, does it?"

Doyle took a deep breath, uncomfortably aware of the dampness in his jeans, and of the dampness in Bodie's eyes. He'd promised he wouldn't hurt Bodie, and look at what he was doing. And all by loving him.

He squared his shoulders, making an offer he

fervently hoped Bodie would refuse. "D'you want me to leave?"

He watched Bodie toying with the idea, watched the conflicting desires flutter behind Bodie's eyes.

Bodie didn't want this to go wrong any more than he did. If he could just find the right thing to say, if he could come up with the right argument, he'd bet Bodie would be willing to try again. If he could just reassure him enough—

"You know, we'd never've got to this stage if you hadn't been so busy running away before I could leave you. Listen to me. I'm going to say this and I'm going to keep on saying this till you believe me. I'm not going to leave you. I let you fuck me—that means something, Bodie. All right, so it's not the same as a wedding ring, but it has to mean something."

Bodie walked away from him, quick, jerky motions, as if he wanted to punch something, anything, but preferably Doyle.

"Now what've I said?"

"Nothing, Ray, nothing at all. Look, we're both tired, why don't you go home and I'll see you tomorrow?"

He'd offered that himself, but that had been different, Bodie was supposed to say no, please stay, we'll sort this out together, not yes, go home, get out, get lost.

"Go on, Ray. I'll see you in the morning."

Yes, but at work, cold, calm, distant work, not the tumbled confines of a warm bed redolent with sex.

Maybe seeing Bodie at work tomorrow was a better idea. At least until he could sort out what had gone wrong, especially with the one thing he'd thought had been going best.

"I'll see you in the morning then." Automatically gathering his jacket, checking for his keys.

"Right."

"Fine."

He went then, slowly, glancing over his shoulder to where Bodie, face downcast, followed him.

At the door, one last look, Bodie still avoiding meeting his eyes.

"Tomorrow, then."

"Yeh. Bright and early."

And that was it. Without even really knowing how or why, it had gone wrong, all wrong, or wrong-for-right-now, so that he was leaving alone when he'd thought himself to be staying the night.

When he'd thought himself to be staying forever.

"Goodnight, Bodie," he said. As the door closed, he thought he heard something, thought

Bodie had said something.

Thought that something had been goodbye.

It was definitely early, but far from bright. Doyle wasn't exactly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed himself. Too many hours, in the dark of night, to lie alone in bed and worry.

Pack it in, he told himself. You've been asking Bodie for time, he just needed a bit of time himself, that's all.

He'd been telling himself that since twenty past three, and he still didn't believe it.

So he moved on, consoling himself with Bodie's motto: take what you can get when you can get it. Well, while Bodie was doing that, he, Doyle, would make sure that Bodie finally got to the point where he believed that Ray Doyle wasn't going to leave him, honestly did love him and that love was all they really needed.

They could work it out. Given time.

He wandered into the rest room, and stopped, dead.

Bodie. Sitting on the sofa, laughing, as if all was well in his world. And right there, right there beside him, Murphy. As if he belonged. As if he had every right to be there. Just like last night, when he'd opened Bodie's door.

Doyle grinned at the joke Susan had just tossed his way, pinched Jax's mug of coffee on his way past, looked every inch at ease as he went over to his partner.

He leant down, close enough that not even Murphy could hear.

"What the fuck's going on? This you taking what you can get, or is this you giving me a hint as subtle as a sledgehammer?"

He was taken by the arm and ushered from the room, while Bodie kept up their usual banter, not a single eyebrow raised at their exeunt.

"Look, Ray, I'm not going to cut off the rest of my life—"

"Who's asking you to? But after last night, to walk in here and there you are, just about sitting in his lap—"

"What am I supposed to do? Jump up like an outraged virgin every time someone sits down beside me?"

"Murphy's not 'someone'. Murphy's..." He'd almost forgotten that Bodie had said it, but now it came back, hauntingly. *Nearly the best*, that was how Bodie'd described Murphy. *Nearly the best*. After last

night's odd little scene, the 'nearly' might be obsolete. "Murphy's my..." He couldn't even bring himself to say the word replacement.

"He's not your rival, for God's sake."

"Better tell *him* that, cos he thinks he is. So if he's not my rival, what is he?"

Bodie looked away, then looked back, and Doyle wished for once that they could lie to each other, just a bit. Just enough to take away the edge of the pain.

"Insurance."

"For when I leave you. Someone for you to fall back on—"

"Not like that, but...near enough."

He'd said it himself: if he weren't there to pick up the pieces, who would there be?

Well, he had his answer now.

Not that he wanted it.

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm not leaving you?"

"And how many times do I have to tell you we don't stand a chance? I've been thinking about it—"

"So have I. And we've got something terrific here—"

"Listen to me, Ray. We've tried, Ray, we've given it a go and it's not going to work. A blind man could see that."

"Well, I'm not fucking blind, and I can see that it *is* going to work. If you'll just give a go, a proper go, not this half-hearted running-in-place crap."

"Ray—"

And Doyle couldn't decide who Bodie meant that wealth of pity for. All he knew was that he couldn't take seeing that much pity and that much despair in Bodie's eyes.

"We can work it out, Bodie."

"No, we can't. Not when it hurts this much already."

Oh, no, he hadn't gone this long without someone permanent in his life to give up easily now. "So you're scared. You think I'm not? We'll sort it out, you'll see."

"Will you listen to me for a minute?"

"So you can try to back off because you're afraid I'm going to leave you? After last night, how can you say that?" He dropped his voice even lower, a whisper so quiet the most assiduous eavesdropper couldn't hear. "You *know* what I let you do last night, you know what that means—"

"I'm trying to tell you what that means—"

"If we try, if we give ourselves enough time, things'll turn out all right. You'll see."

The backs of Bodie's fingers trembled as they stroked down Doyle's cheek. "Why won't you listen to me?"

"Because I'm not giving you up. I'm not giving up on us. If you'd just stop running away, if we both just try—"

"I'm sorry, Ray, God, I'm sorrier than you'll ever know—"

"I'm telling you," fierce now, fighting for what they could have, for what they already had, fighting against the nothingness he feared, but Bodie was turning and walking away already, and there was only the empty corridor to hear when he said it, and only the corridor to echo it back.

"We *will* work it out."

And he believed it. He kept right on believing it the first time Bodie was too busy to come over. Believed it even when Bodie turned down his offer to come over to Bodie's place. Believed it even when a day, a few days, a week, had gone by and they hadn't had sex. Hadn't done anything but spend the odd bit of time together. Hadn't even been on the same oppo.

They were busy at work, but they weren't *that* busy. No one was.

Not even Murphy.

He'd seen Murphy, in the corridors, in the rest room, always polite, always pleasant, nothing untoward, nothing out of the ordinary, and never ever with Bodie, not after that first day.

He told himself Bodie just needed a bit of time—they both did. Things had gone too far too quickly, until everything was spinning out of control, neither of them knowing which way was up. That's all it was, he told himself, and tried to be as patient for Bodie as Bodie had been for him.

It was just Bodie easing off a little, cooling things down from flashpoint. And it was just an ordinary busy time at work, they'd had that before, they'd even gone weeks before without working on the same things. So what was a few days? Nothing to worry about, he told himself.

So why was he panicking?

Because it wasn't so much that he could see Bodie slipping away. It was as if Bodie had never been there.

He came home one night, late, an evening stuck standing at the back of the room as bodyguard while some politicians discussed the most boring things in the world. A bath, he thought, then he'd phone Bodie. They needed to get together, to talk about this, find

out what was going on...

Bodie's spare jacket was gone. And the motorcycle boots he'd left that last time. Drawers were rattled open, clothes tossed everywhere, but none of them were Bodie's.

Bath forgotten, he was in his car and on his way to Bodie's before the last sock had come to rest.

He stood there, finger pressing down the doorbell, not letting up for a second.

For a moment, just a second, he wondered what he'd do if it was Murphy who opened the door. But it was Bodie, who said nothing, simply opened the door and walked away, expecting Doyle to follow him.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"All your things are gone from my flat."

"That's right."

"Don't you think you could've told me?"

"I tried—"

"Oh, yeh, right. When did you try, Bodie? One of those nights when you were too busy to come out with me?"

"That first day back at work when I tried to tell you in the corridor."

"A corridor in CI5? Perfect spot for a heart-to-heart, mate, a perfect—"

But Bodie had dragged him off into the corridor, had said, 'I've been thinking', that it wouldn't work, that they couldn't—

Doyle swallowed, cleared his throat, didn't look at Bodie.

Couldn't look at Bodie.

After all they'd done, after all they'd felt for each other, to end—like this? Fizzling out like a damp squid, not so much as a whimper.

"It's over, just like that, because you've decided it won't work?"

"It's over," and Bodie had never sounded so sad in all the years Doyle had known him, "because I decided that... Christ, Ray, it was tearing me up already, and look at what it was doing to us. I thought I could take it at first, I honestly did, but I'm sorry, I'm not that tough. I thought I was, I thought I could be cold enough to cope but—" Breaking off there, starting again, bitterly. "I used to be cold that way. Funny thing is, it was you who changed that, you got through to me, then when I needed to keep cool, so we could have a bit of time together before it fell apart completely, it—just wasn't there. You'd taken it out of me already and when I needed it..."

"You're still running away, aren't you? What's it

going to take—”

“It’s over, Ray, didn’t you hear me? Over, finished and done with. You didn’t leave me, I left you. All right? It’s over.”

“No.”

Bodie closed his eyes, leaned against the wall. “It has to be over.”

“Give me one good reason *why*.”

Bodie looked at him then, and he could see that reason written there clear as the light of day. “Because it *hurts*.”

Doyle stared at him, self-loathing churning. To see Bodie—big, brave, bluff Bodie—reduced to *this*. And he’d promised. At the very beginning—before the beginning—he’d promised. And look at what he’d done. He just stood there for a second, dazed, trying to take it all in, trying to sort it out, trying not to remember all the tiny clues Bodie had given him, trying not to hate himself for not seeing the huge, great big signs Bodie had held up to his face. Stumbling a little, he turned to leave, stopped when Bodie started to speak, the last tiny flicker of hope dying as he heard what Bodie had to say.

“There’s no kind way to say this, so...I’ve asked Cowley for a re-partnering.”

Doyle closed his eyes, trying to make it all go away, turn it into a nightmare he could awaken from.

“It’s for the best, Ray. You’ll see.”

“Will I? Will I really?”

And with his bitterness hanging in the air like a tattered rainbow, Ray Doyle shut the door behind him, and walked away.

“Hold all my calls,” he said on the intercom, not even waiting for Miss Carruthers’ acknowledgement. She was a good secretary, one he’d miss, although there was a chance he’d be able to have her promoted so that she could continue working for him. That would be considerably better than having to break in someone new to his foibles and habits.

His desk was clear, the drawers already emptied, contents divided between wastepaper basket and neatly labelled boxes. Incredible, how much junk a person accumulated over the years: all this, and he still had the bottom drawer in his personal filing cabinet to do. Knees cracking as he crouched down—another legacy from his over-active years in CI5—he took out the small key that fitted this last lock, and opened the drawer.

Ephemera in here, and memories, things he’d put away because he hadn’t been able, yet, to throw them

out. Ah, but that was much water under the bridge ago: he was a different man now, and the old memories might hold embarrassment, but who was there in here to see his blushes.

He took out the first manila folder, one of the ones he’d pinched when he’d been promoted sideways from CI5 into the liaisons office. Quite a feather in his cap that had been, something he’d been well proud of.

He dusted the folder off, although there was nothing on it but an old label misidentifying the contents.

He opened it up, and there they were: he, and Bodie, arms round each other after some bike meet, laughing.

He, and Bodie.

He had thought the pain long since put to rest.

He, and Bodie.

Oh, we never stood a chance, did we? he thought, as he went through the photos one by one. Never stood a chance.

It wasn’t only the folder he dusted off, the pictures dusting off old memories too, memories he’d forgotten, carefully, methodically forgotten.

The first day he’d gone into HQ, when everyone had known Bodie had been repartnered, and no one could quite look him in the eye. Murmured words of sympathy, noises of enquiry, all of them drifting round him, substantial as fog.

Going into Cowley’s office, being told he was a solo agent now, the sympathy and questions in the tired old blue eyes making it hurt all the worse. Blurting it out, then, too early, his request to be transferred, put into something other than CI5.

He hadn’t needed to tell Cowley why, and the shame still burned, even after all these years.

He looked at the photos again, each one a catalogue of memories, of places they’d been and things they’d done: of the people they’d been.

For once, he allowed himself the luxury of imagining where Bodie was now. What he was doing—what he looked like, for that matter, running his hand over where the once-abundant curls of the ’70s had given way to the neat crop of the ’90s. Would Bodie have gone grey? Or heaven forbid, bald?

He laughed out loud at that—Bodie, bald! The world wouldn’t have survived Bodie’s outrage.

Of course, for a while, he hadn’t been too sure he could survive Bodie’s absence.

Water under the bridge, now, all in the past.

There was a knock at his door, the movers come

for his boxes and the bits and pieces he'd provided over the years out of his own money, the comfortable chair that made up for the back trouble that was another CI5 legacy, the plants that lined his window sill, the hatstand he'd inherited when Cowley retired.

Quietly, not allowing himself another look at the pictures or the memories they held, he put the manila folder in with all the other parts of his life to be discarded, closing that door forever.

But still, that afternoon, as he stood looking out his bedroom window at his children playing in the garden, as he heard his wife calling them in to wash their hands before tea, he couldn't help but wonder.

Would he have given all this up, if he'd had Bodie?

He thought about how much he loved his children, how fond he was of his wife, of how his life was the perfection most people could never even hope for.

Considered, what life would have been, in a homosexual relationship, unable to go to the right sort of place and be seen with the right sort of person. They would've stayed in CI5 until Thatcher disbanded it—Cowley far too tough for her to control. Then what?

He heard his wife calling him down, thought about the disappointment he'd been to her as everything but a father and a provider. Thought about how little sex there was between them, and how half-hearted even that was. Thought, again, of how it had been with him and Bodie.

They'd just needed time, both of them. Time for him to adjust, time for Bodie to trust him. That's all it would have taken. They'd just lacked the courage.

He leaned his forehead against the window, caught a whiff of the flowers he spent so much time on each weekend, flowers that blossomed in profusion this time of year. So much like that flat he'd had then, the flat where he and Bodie had made love, the flat where it had all gone so badly wrong. So much of it his fault, so very many things he would do differently now, all those wishes still clinging to his heart, until he couldn't deny it, not any more.

If Bodie were to walk in through his front gate right now, if Bodie were to knock on his door and ask him to walk away from all this, leave everything and everyone behind, to finally take the chance, grab it with both hands, would he do it?

Yes.

Without a second's hesitation.

Even his children, God forgive him, he'd even

give up them for Bodie.

Oh, Bodie, he thought, looking out at the trees, hearing the birds singing and the children playing, his life the perfect suburban dream, if only you'd given us a chance.

And if only I'd listened.

If only...

If only the suburban dream didn't feel so very much like a dreary nightmare

—September 1995

(Editor's Note: The following is the alternative ending to the story.)

MURPHY.

In Bodie's flat. At this time of night.

Doyle didn't give a flying fuck how unreasonable his reaction was: he wanted to rip Murphy's eyes out and feed them to Bodie, then shoot the pair of them.

Murphy, who had come out into the hall, all the better to slam Doyle up against the nearest wall. Oh, all right, Doyle conceded, it wasn't exactly a slam, more a gentle urge—no excuse for a fight there, more's the pity.

"Before you say something you'll regret, Ray," Murphy said, covering Doyle's mouth with his hand, "the reason I'm here is the hospital wanted someone to pick Bodie up."

Now Ray wished Murph and Bodie *had* been messing about: better a bit on non-marital infidelity than Bodie with so much as a skinned knee.

"What happened?" Clichéd and trite, but Doyle wasn't much interested in how he sounded.

"Stupid accident. We'd gone to pick up—"

But Murphy was already completely forgotten, Doyle disappearing through the door, on his way to Bodie. Nothing serious, the mantra sounded again and again in his head: nothing serious because Bodie was home. Nothing serious, nothing serious—but there was still that shiver of fear, that worry, the terror of what if this time they'd sent him home and it was serious... Stupidity, he told himself, but he didn't catch his breath again until he found his partner lying on the couch, every visible inch of skin covered in marks as if God had been playing noughts and crosses with crayons. But he was alive, no parts missing, and Doyle had had more than enough experience of injury to recognise some nasty contusions that would hurt like hell but do no permanent

damage. “Thank God,” he breathed, and meant it, for that single, heart-felt second. Then: back to business-as-usual, no mollycoddling, play it down the way they always did, everything was okay, Bodie was all right, jolly him along—business as usual, never mind that everything and nothing had changed.

“Lovely colour-scheme. Who’s your decorator?” Still not exactly scintillating or thrilling, but Bodie didn’t seem much bothered. Bashful as well as bashed, Bodie just grimaced. “Murphy said you were on a pick up—that foreign bigwig?”

“You could say that.”

“God, that one—” all intentions to play it Bodie-cool forgotten under the impact of a red patch that was slowly blossoming into a glorious bruise, “must hurt like hell.”

“Not half as much as the one on my bum.”

“Your bum? Bodie, what the hell happened?”

“Well, it was a foreign pick-up.” Bodie looked up at him through what were going to be a pair of beautiful shiners. “From the Chinese takeaway. You know that zebra crossing? The one we all—”

“Use as target practice, yeh, I know the one. And I know what’s coming too.”

“You tell me what you think happened, and then I’ll tell you if you’re right.”

“Yeh, but if I do that, you’ll change the story on me.”

“Would I do a thing like that?”

“You? You’d lie to the Pope if it would get you a pint.”

“I’d lie to the Pope if it cost me a week’s wages.”

From the doorway, Murphy laconic and lean: “I don’t believe you two. At least Laurel and Hardy only kept it up in front of the cameras.”

“He’s asking for a comment for that, isn’t he?” Doyle, quite expansive now that Bodie wasn’t seriously damaged and Murphy, poor rejected bastard, had been nothing other than a glorified taxi driver. “Should we give him one?”

“Nah, let him get his own, he’s old enough to know how to use it now. Speaking of which... Thanks for the lift home, Murphy...”

“...but why don’t I bugger off now instead of standing here turning into a gooseberry. I’ll leave you two lovebirds alone, then, shall I?”

Doyle could hear the challenge and the concern under the light tone, was almost hit over the head with it as Murphy continued.

“I can leave you to do your Florence Nightingale, can’t I, Doyle—mop his fevered brow and all that.”

Just because Murphy was once—Doyle refused to succumb to the nasty voice that added *and still was*—Bodie’s lover was no reason to want to decapitate the poor soul. Should feel sorry for him, having to watch Bodie go elsewhere. Must be tough, to stand back and watch Bodie happy with someone else. “Not only will I do my Florence Nightingale—”

“Ooh, I bet you’re a real treat in your frock and cap, Ray.”

Doyle was ignoring Bodie, it seemed, unless one were as sharp-eyed as Murphy, who couldn’t shift his stare from the way Doyle’s left hand was stroking the inside of Bodie’s wrist. “—but I’ll even render aid and succour to the injured.”

“And I’m not stupid enough to touch *that* with a barge pole. I’m off then. You’re definite you don’t need me for anything else tonight, Bodie?”

Simple enquiry, meaning so much more.

“I’ll be fine, now.”

Something going on there, Doyle was certain of that: oh, to have been a fly on the wall, to hear the conversation that led up to that particular scenario of looks, comments and meaningful tones of voices.

Bodie was still looking at Murphy, but the fingers of his hand had curled around Doyle’s, making a statement as loud as a gold band. “Thanks, Murphy.”

Doyle wasn’t—quite—cruel or elated enough to grin as Murphy got that message loud and clear.

“That’s it, then.”

“Fraid so.”

With one last, surprisingly dignified, nod, Murphy was gone, and it was just the two of them at last.

Later on, he might ask about Murphy. Might. Or better yet, just might let sleeping dogs lie. “What hit you anyway? A bloody great artic?”

Bodie looked remarkably shamefaced. “Ice-cream van.”

“An ice-cream van? You know, it’s customary to wait until the van’s stopped before you get an ice.”

“Never did get any.”

“Want some?”

“Would you go and fetch me some if I did?”

“Not a chance. But I’ll make you a nice cuppa, bit of toast, if you’re really lucky.”

“Thought you were going to render succour?”

Doyle gave him a good looking-over, from the bruise on his forehead to the black eyes to the scraped forearm to the bandage-festooned ankle. “You up to that?”

An elegant *moue* of regret, spoiled by the way the stitch on his lower lip twisted everything. “Wishful

thinking.”

“Bloody hell, you must be really knackered to come clean that quick.”

“Ah, that’s just your influence, Ray. I spend half my life round you coming quick.”

Even keeping up the banter—never mind keeping up anything more pertinent—was obviously wearing Bodie out. Back to the old routine then, the one they’d gone through any number of times, from serious injury to a Cowley-sized rollicking. “If you’re going to start on puns like that, I’m making tea. D’you want toast?”

“With butter *and* jam. And there’s a bar of Fruit and Nut in there as well—”

“Chocolate, with tea? You’re really disgusting, you know that, don’t you?” But he made sure his affection showed, made sure that Bodie would have to be deaf and incredibly dumb not to hear the warmth in his voice. A thought struck him, and he headed back to the living room door. “Fruit and Nut, eh?” he asked the reclining mummy that had opened one bloodshot eye to look in his general direction. “So which one are you?”

He hadn’t expected an answer, hadn’t known how much the question had bothered him until Bodie put it to rest, or exhumed the corpse, depending on how one looked at it. “Thought that was obvious,” Bodie said quietly. “I’ve always been a bit...fruity.”

“But you like girls too?” Somewhere between brain and mouth, the definite statement had become a question. “I mean, I’ve seen you with them...”

A shrug, and Doyle winced in sympathy at the pain that flickered across Bodie’s face. “I’ve always liked girls too. Equal opportunity lech, that’s me. But you...”

“But me...”

Not much to say, or too much to say: either way, the words were impossible. A few seconds passed with all the haste of eons.

“I’ll make you that tea then.”

“Don’t forget the toast.”

Half-hearted at best, but better than it might have been.

Fruit and nut case: how many times had he heard that bloody jingle? He couldn’t get it out of his head now as he went through the soothing routine of making tea. One of the great lessons of police work, he thought: the restorative powers of a cuppa. And chocolate, of course, for Bodie.

Who’d ‘always’ been an equal opportunity lech. A teenaged Bodie, let loose in all-male world—small

wonder he was such an expert in bed. Of course, it wasn’t as if Bodie had stopped practising either, was it? There’d been Keller, probably, and Murphy, definitely. And now himself.

How long did Bodie’s boyfriends usually last?

A week, a month, a year? Longer than the girlfriends, who were changed more frequently than sheets in a five-star hotel?

And how much time did Ray Doyle have left in Bodie’s little calendar?

But this time was different, Bodie had said.

Different.

Different enough that Bodie had sent Murphy packing.

Doyle decided that he really ought to be ashamed of the little glow of pride over that. But still, Murphy was gone, he was here and Bodie had made his choice, maybe even made his commitment.

The idea didn’t scare him half as much as it had. In fact, the idea didn’t scare him at all. No baggage to go with it, except for that horribly embarrassing sentimental glow that was slowly converting every cell in his body.

Fucking hell, Ray Doyle thought, slathering jam over Bodie’s toast, licking an extra blob from his thumb, but he was actually feeling hopeful. And loved. Not to mention secure. Maybe they did stand a chance together. Maybe all his early fears had been right, that this was the Real Thing for Bodie, his one big chance at real, permanent happiness. Settling down.

Forever, Bodie had said.

And Doyle smiled, quite beautifully, turning the mundane act of pouring tea into a ritual of glory.

Forever, Bodie had said. Settling down, the two of them, till death do us part: and there was nothing in him but happiness, and contentment, and hope, and a million other emotions that had seemed so far out of reach at the beginning, when first he’d thought about this.

He and Bodie. Together.

Yes.

Oh, yes.

He took the tea into the living room, and couldn’t have cared less that it was written all over his face.

Pity Bodie’s eyes were firmly shut. He was tempted to let Bodie sleep, but if he left the poor bastard on that sofa all night, Bodie wouldn’t be able to walk come morning. So, with a tenderness even his mum would have thought beyond him, he shook Bodie awake. “Hate to wake you up, but you

need to be in bed.”

“Need to take these pain tablets the doc gave me as well.”

“I’ll bring ’em in a minute, let’s get you through and into bed first. Upsa-daisy, you great lump. Christ, look at you. Drop his lolly on you after he hit you with his ice-cream van, did he?”

“Felt like it. Oh, that’s nice. Could you shove my pillow—”

“—where the sun doesn’t shine? That’s my preserve, mate. Right, you lie there for a minute and I’ll fetch the tea through.”

The bustle of setting things down and putting food in Bodie’s hand took a few moments, and through them all, Doyle was aware of Bodie’s gaze locked firmly onto him.

No point in poking at him: Bodie would say what he had to say if and when he felt like it. So Doyle left him to it, busied himself reading the label on the little cardboard pill-box and whistled under his breath. Small wonder Bodie was being so pliant and restrained, if he hurt enough to take these. Powerful stuff, this, and not something Bodie normally admitted to needing. Unpleasant side-effects too, in Bodie’s books, although in Doyle’s days on the drug squad—his mind provided the perfect memory of Bodie snoring—people paid a small fortune for these pills for those very same side-effects.

Without protest, Bodie took the two tablets, grimacing as the nearly cold tea still managed to start dissolving the pills before he’d swallowed them down. “Give us a bit of chocolate,” he said, opening his mouth with a touching display of trust.

For just a second, Doyle wished, really, really wished that he had a tablespoon of mustard handy. Oh, well, time enough for their usual carryings-on tomorrow. Or perhaps next week: some of those bruises and scrapes were quite spectacular. Might be a while before Bodie was up for messing about. Or for Messing About.

The guilt came so quickly, it almost superseded the relief. Almost.

Come on, he told himself, it’s not as if the sex is bad or anything, is it?

Just wasn’t quite as good as with women. But he’d get used to that, or find other things that they both liked better than anything they’d done with anyone else.

Which brought him back to something they hadn’t done yet, something that made him ashamedly grateful for Bodie’s current crop of minor injuries,

something that was explanation in full for that hateful relief.

In the small light from the bedside lamp, they sat in silence for a while, Bodie under the covers, Doyle sitting on the bed beside him. The clock ticked loudly, Doyle wondering how Bodie put up with that racket, until he realised that his own pulse was louder in his ears. For Christ’s sake, get a grip, he told himself. Anyone would think something big was going to happen, not just Bodie settling down for the night.

But there it was, at the back of his neck, rising like hackles: whatever it was that Bodie hadn’t said.

“Penny for them?”

Doyle managed a wan smile, fooling neither of them. “They’re worth at least a tenner, Scrooge.”

“A tenner for them then.”

“Nothing much,” Doyle told him, veiling the moment by stroking Bodie’s hair back from his forehead. Under his hand, Bodie was warm, so vibrant and alive, and despite the bumps and bruises, so gorgeous. Bodie, who’d sent Murphy away tonight, wanting Doyle instead. “D’you mind if I stay the night?”

“I won’t be up to much.”

“That’s all right.”

Undressing, his back towards Bodie, freezing into utter stillness for one awful moment as he heard the pain in Bodie’s voice. “It’s more than all right, isn’t it? You wouldn’t much mind if we never had sex again, would you?”

“Come on, Bodie,” he said, smile carefully pinned in place before he turned round to face those troubled blue eyes. The pupils were dilated, huge, darkness eating away at Bodie’s eyes: the drugs, Doyle hoped. “It’s as plain as the nose on your face how much I enjoy the sex bit with you.”

“Yeh, it is. How else d’you think I know you’d rather give it a miss?”

“What’s brought all this on? You know I like sex with you—”

“You like when I do things to *you*,” Bodie corrected, and drugged or not, those eyes were too sharp for Doyle to meet their gaze. “When it comes time to do anything to *me*...”

“What d’you mean?” Wanting to hear, dreading hearing, the awful feeling of truth looming over him like death.

“When you fucked me—you didn’t even touch me.”

“How could I not touch—”

“My cock. My chest, anything that made me into a

bloke.” Voice so soft now, so sad. “Did you keep your eyes closed, Ray? Did you pretend I was someone else?”

“Christ, Bodie no, I—” What *had* he done? He could remember being inside Bodie, touching him, hands moving—seeking curves and finding none, instinctively avoiding the hard planes where there should be soft peaks, not touching the hollowed flanks or the hard thrust at groin. Arm around Bodie, as if he were in a woman. But he hadn’t pretended Bodie was someone else. Not even for a second. “It was more...it was more that I was concentrating on nothing but you being Bodie. Every time I thought about you being a man...” The unnoticed depletion in his arousal, the instant need to bolster the passion, to find something else to turn him on—his thoughts constantly returning to Bodie, and Bodie, and Bodie. “All I thought about was it being you I was inside, and how wonderful it was and how much you loved me—”

Slightly fuzzy now, that voice, as if walls had been lowered and all the structures and strictures that held Bodie in place had softened, going slightly out of shape, letting loose things that would never otherwise be said. “And when you sucked me off? You looked like you were going to be sick.”

No denying that. “Bodie, I’d never done anything like that before—”

“And you didn’t much like it, did you?”

“I liked giving you pleasure. Loved it, in fact.”

“Is that what made you offer in the first place?”

Some remnant of pride or fear wanted to turn all this into a bit of a joke, make it lighthearted and meaningless, but then he looked at Bodie again, and remembered the promise he’d made to no one but himself. He would not deliberately hurt Bodie. And he wouldn’t throw this chance of happiness away on mere pride.

“I offered...” Pause, to remember, to relive. There were any number of things he could say, any number of reasons he could give, from the way Bodie sounded to the pettiness of giving head to postpone being on the receiving end of buggery. But in the end, the only thing that really mattered was the barest, plainest truth. “I offered because I love you.”

“No greater love hath man,” Bodie intoned, “than that he get down on his knees for his friend.”

Grinning, Doyle accepted the somewhat wobbly embrace of Bodie’s arm, leaning into it, the pillow behind him, Bodie beside him. “Something like that.”

The sombreness that bled from Bodie was unex-

pected, the seesaw swing of emotion uncomfortable. “You don’t ever want to let me fuck you, do you?”

Doyle pleated the top sheet, ran his fingers down Bodie’s forearms, fascinated by the way the small hairs rose in his wake. Definitely a topic to obfuscate as much as humanly possible. “C’mon, Bodie—”

“Ray,” said very softly, but impossible to ignore, “don’t lie to me. Not when I can tell.”

Doyle gusted a sigh, and went back to pleating the sheet, stopping only when Bodie’s unsteady fingers took his hands in thrall. “All right,” Ray said. “I won’t lie to you. But don’t ask me questions that’ll hurt you.”

He didn’t look at Bodie, could see in the open door of the wardrobe, in spite of the age of the spotted mirror, that Bodie wasn’t looking at him either.

Bodie, still sounding so very melancholy it made Doyle’s heart ache. “Would the answer hurt me that much?”

“Maybe it won’t hurt you at all, if you give me long enough.”

Slow, sad smile, the medicine blurring all of Bodie’s sharp edges. “I’ll give *you* enough time, no problems there.”

“I’m not going to clear out.”

“Yeh, Ray, you’re going to stick around forever and a day.”

Bodie’s bitterness flayed him like acid. “I told you, I’m not—”

But Bodie didn’t seem to be listening. “It’s all right, you know. I told you, whatever we have for however long’s fine. Life’s too short, and all that stuff.”

“Look, Bodie, I’m not going to dump you next week. You said it yourself, we’re like a pair of newly-weds. And you’re the one who said this was forever.”

“Wishful thinking. Wish I could have some wishful thinking now, but I can’t.” An abrupt frown, some of the old, familiar mask redescending. “Am I drunk? Don’t remember drinking...”

“The hospital gave you some tablets.”

“Oh. Doped. Stoned out of my skull.” A very unBodiean giggle. “That mean I can say whatever I want and then not remember any of it? Here, does that mean I can tell you you’ve got the prettiest arse I’ve ever seen?”

“You can tell me anything you want.”

“Yeh,” Bodie agreed, with every appearance of happiness. “In here I can. Not out there.”

“What d’you mean?” Challenging, that, denial bristling in anticipation.

“Can’t tell you you’ve got a gorgeous cock in front

of all the lads, can I?" Another giggle, Bodie curling himself round Doyle, the laughter warm and gusting against his chest. "Oh, c'n just imagine poor old George's face!" Laughter dying, sobering immediately, the melancholy that was a normal aspect of Bodie's rare bouts of drunkenness transforming the looseness induced by the medicine. "C'n picture your face. Face like fizz. You don't want anyone knowing, shhh, got to keep it secret else Ray'll be pissed off with me. Can't tell anyone, you know, not even Murphy."

"You've already told Murphy."

"I know, I know and the way you looked at me, oh, that was horrible. Didn't like that, Ray, hated it and you looked sicker'n when I came in your mouth. Don't like that either, do you, Ray, don't like any of it, not really, do you?"

"I told you," Doyle said very slowly and clearly, hoping this was getting through, "I liked getting you that worked up."

"But you don't like getting it. You're never going to like it, are you, Ray and then you'll find a nice girl you like and you'll leave me."

"That's not going to happen—"

"Tis."

"It's not—"

"Tis too."

"It's not—"

"Tis too!"

Doyle gazed heavenwards and then turned back to exasperation personified lying in bed beside him. "I haven't had a conversation like this since Primary Three." He turned over onto his side, wishing Bodie weren't so banged up, for then he could have wrapped himself around his friend and convinced him of how much he really meant it. "I've told you, I love you and I'm not going to leave you."

Bodie sounded like a five-year-old reciting the new rules. "As long as I keep quiet and don't try to fuck you."

"Bodie, it's not like that at all!"

"So I can tell the Squad then, can I?"

"And lose our jobs? I don't mind Murphy knowing—" No choice there, make the most of it, and anyway, Bodie had sent Murphy off all alone and kept Doyle here with him. "But we can't go blabbing all over the place about this."

Bodie's eyes were very readable now, and Doyle craved the old lies.

"So that's it, then? I can have you, forever—as long as I don't get greedy. As long as I don't expect to ever

let anyone know, keep it under your hat." Pause, Bodie's eyes closing heavily, opening again, the huge pupils focussing entirely on Doyle's face. "An' as long as I don't ever, ever try to fuck you or ask you to suck me off ever again or anything horrible like that."

"If it bothers you that much—" but it was him it bothered, Bodie too big, Bodie tearing him apart, making a woman of him— "then we'll just forget the fucking altogether. We can hold hands and snog—"

He could feel the sharp welt of Bodie's cut lip where it pressed, very carefully, against his. "Don't get angry with me, Ray, please don't get angry. There's not much time, don't..."

"We've got forever, Bodie."

"No we haven't." Said, with the certainty of a child to whom all things are black or white. "Haven't got long. Ann didn't have long, did she, and you were going to marry her. Can't marry me." A stifled giggle, the edges of Bodie's stitches dragging against Doyle's face. "Look awful in white. Wouldn't mind seeing you in a long frock, though and you could throw your bouquet and maybe Murphy would catch it." It was Bodie's breath that was caught, now, in the back of his throat, and for a dreadful moment, Doyle thought there were going to be tears. "Poor Murphy. Poor, poor Murphy. He knew, you know."

This was another of those questions Doyle wasn't sure he wanted answered. "Murphy knew what?"

"'Bout you. Knew I was in love with you—told me 'fore I'd worked it all out myself. Hated him for that. Didn't believe him neither. I don't fall in love. Hurts too much."

"It won't hurt this time," Doyle promised, ready to sell his soul to the Devil himself to make it true. "It'll be all right, Bodie, it won't hurt this time."

Bodie dug a finger into Doyle's ribs. "Stupid prat. 'Course it hurts. An' you'll hurt me."

"I won't—"

"'Course you will—already do." Tsk-tsking at Doyle's disbelieving expression, fingers missing as he tried to count off the reasons. "Don't love me, won't let me fuck you, don't want anybody knowing..."

Doyle closed his eyes tightly, shutting out the light, shutting in the pain, the answer to the first thing already given, no answer to the second, only the third something he could bring himself to talk about. "Bodie, we can't go blabbing all over the place. We'd lose our jobs—"

Bodie was shaking his head, rolling to a gradual stop, hands going to hold himself against the dizziness. "Couldn't fire us. Union won't let him."

“What?”

“Don’t tell me you’re not in the union, Ray? Christ, d’you even join the fucking library? The Union, Ray, the *Union*. The Society—we’re down as civil servants, right?”

Yes, their old joke, all of them sitting round the armoury laughing at their job designations.

“The Society won’t let anyone fire anyone for anything ever, you know that. They’ll just dump us sideways. Into the DHSS or the tax office or something.”

Bodie looked suddenly sick, and Doyle wished he’d had the foresight to bring a basin. Or, given what Bodie’d been saying, the foresight to thump Bodie hard, on the head, and knock him out before all this started.

“Fucking hell, c’n you imagine being in the DHSS? ‘S a bit worse’n the tax office.” Another pause, Bodie’s eyes closing again, fooling Doyle into thinking he’d been granted respite. “Still don’t see why we can’t tell anyone. One job’s as good as another and we wouldn’t get shot at if we worked in the DHSS would we? Might though, if we were in the tax office.” Huge great breath, Bodie frowning ominously. “But if we were in the tax office—”

“Shh, Bodie,” Doyle said, cutting him off before he got started on one of his rambles, “it’s time to go to sleep.”

It never took much to distract Bodie at this stage of the game, the drugs well and truly through his system now. “Is it late?”

“Yeh, it’s very late. Close your eyes, that’s it...”

He settled himself under Bodie’s weight, found a band of skin that showed no damage, and held Bodie as close as he could.

Lay there, light still on because he knew what would happen if Bodie woke up from drugged sleep into darkness, Bodie’s heartbeat slow against his own, Bodie’s breath damp against his throat.

Lay there, in his own gathering darkness, and counted himself amongst the lucky that he’d been able to stop Bodie talking, had put an end to those scalding, painful words. He’d been shot, he’d been stabbed, kicked, beaten, burned, and he’d take any of them over what Bodie had just done.

He’d already hurt Bodie. Not something he hadn’t known, somewhere in the dark of his own mind, but to have it brought out into the light as if it were an everyday fact...

But then, that was precisely what it was.

In his arms, Bodie shifted, one clumsy hand

turning Doyle’s face until he was looking into Bodie’s eyes.

“Still here?”

“Still here.”

A look of utter satisfaction spread across Bodie’s face. “Good.”

Then Bodie’s eyes were closed, his breathing slowing, becoming deep and steady.

Doyle was very still beside him, and his eyes grew gritty and bloodshot, as he lay there, thinking about the future.

He’d get used to the sex, he told himself. Just needed a bit of time. He’d even—shifting uncomfortably, rejecting the instinct to cross his legs—get used to the idea of Bodie fucking him. One day, he’d let Bodie do just that. He’d let Bodie spread him and enter him with that big cock; he’d go on his knees or on his back, wide open, let Bodie do that, to him.

He would.

One day.

And then Bodie would be happy. Then Bodie would know he meant it when he said this was forever.

He’d get used to the idea. He’d even get to like it. After all, there were millions of queers in the world who took it up the arse every day of the week: how awful could it be? Bodie loved it—and he loved Bodie, so how long could it be before he liked being on the receiving end too?

Bodie was willing to wait, was willing to settle for half a loaf right now, the rest—later. And give him time, he’d even convince Bodie that he did love him in the ‘right’ way. He would.

Dawn was creeping shyly over the rooftops, and his mind was still going round in circles. Sleep, he told himself for the thousandth time that night, better get some sleep.

He shifted, uncomfortable, a small trickle of sweat running down under his arm, his body too hot from Bodie’s too close embrace. Doyle stroked Bodie’s hair, fingers finding yet another bump, there, just behind Bodie’s ear. Poor bastard, he thought, and his lips found Bodie’s forehead and kissed him, gently enough not to disturb Bodie’s rest.

God, he loved this man.

He knew what people would call him for that.

Even though his body didn’t stir for any other man, even though the mere glimpse of a shapely breast still made his heart pound, he knew what the world would call him.

And he didn't like it. Not one little bit.

Tough, he told himself: you've never given a flying fuck what people said before, why start now.

Good point.

But the whispers, the comments, half the Squad already thinking he and Bodie were having it off...

He pushed it from his mind. He had Bodie, that's all that mattered. Bodie, whose name was shorthand for love and being loved, for belonging, for a friend-

ship that would never wane, for all the bright spots in his life. Bodie.

How could he lie here and think about sex and what people would say, when he had Bodie?

Stupid, he told himself again. Complete prat.

Mindful of Bodie's hurts, Doyle gathered him in close. The fine details didn't matter: after all, they had love.

And love is all you need.

—September 1995