## ALONE AND PALELY LOITERING

## M. FAE GLASGOW

HE DIDN'T KNOW IF HE SHOULD KILL COWLEY OR THANK THE OLD BUGGER. It had been years since last he'd been in this city, this 'dear green place' of concrete and asphalt, sandstone and slate, the dear green places now no more than multitudinous pockets of grass and trees and flowers that polka dotted the city. Glasgow. A place of beginnings, and endings, the place where so much had finished for him. It was here that William Arthur Broderick had finally died, to be resurrected to some form of life as William Andrew Phillip Bodie, hard man and soldier of fortune. He'd learned a lot in this city and, blessedly, forgotten even more. Forgotten, even, what his father had done to his sisters, and whom his sister had blamed when she had woken up pregnant one morning. Forgotten? Well, mislaid the memories, perhaps.

Sixteen months ago, when first he had been made 'operational' in CI5, he had checked the old records of the youth he had been, only to find the official file marked 'open', as if anyone were still looking for one 14 year old boy who had been accused of raping his 13 year old sister and beating his 16 year old sister to within an inch of her life. He had actually mustered a chuckle, albeit bitter, as he had read the file, until he had brought the image of his father to mind. Small wonder, really, that his sisters had pointed the finger of guilt at him, saving themselves from the fury of their father. Even Bodie had been terrified of the man, especially after his mother had died. With her gone, and Gran in the old folks' Home, there was no one to stay his father's hand, no one to protect the innocent as the virulent man had tarred and feathered his children with his own brush, making them feel soiled and dirty, isolating them in guilty silence from the community, marking them and leaving them beyond the pale. And so they had suffered, ignored by those who should have protected

them best, until a swelling belly had grown too big to be simply shrugged off, the way blackand-blue on a tearaway boy had been dismissed as an argument with a door or a clumsy trip down the stairs. The heavy brown belt had ensured that Anne had kept her mouth shut, apart from when it opened to tell lies about who had put her little sister in the club and who had given Anne herself those bruises and cuts. He had kept his own mouth shut out of fear and in some feeble attempt at protection, for no matter what Arthur Broderick might do to them all, the night-sweating terror of what he *might* do if thwarted was always far, far worse. Therefore he had held his tongue, bewildered and sullen, for who would believe a troubled and troublesome teen anyway? No one, and finally, as the questions and accusations and disgusted contempt had mushroomed to suffocate him, he had run. Run, as fast and as far as he could, which could never be far enough. Last bus, walk to the motorway, any motorway, too depressed to care where it led, just as long as it went somewhere other than Liverpool, mile after mile hissing through the rain-dark night as he ran and ran, sitting in the dashboard-glow of a warm lorry. It was only later, as morning rose to his right, that he had learned where he was going, and it was later still when he had learned what his fare was to be.

It was far too late, by then.

So he had run, to find that it was only to exchange one dockland for another, one prostitution for another, continuing the endless cycle, and all of it to put food in his belly and a roof over his head. Coming after his father, none of it, truly, seemed so out of the question.

It was over there, by the big warehouse that now lay moribund in the dying of the sun, that Bodie had first paid his way with his body, repeating the lessons he had learned on his father's knee. The lorry driver who had given

him his escape from the harsh reality of Liverpool's docks had introduced him to the equal callousness of Glasgow's reality, demanding payment in kind for the transport, making Bodie kneel in the doorway's dark and damp, enveloped by the rain-borne smells of the city, diesel and smoke and grit. Just another dock, and after the lorry driver there had been just another docker, like his own father, the man whose name he had slowly asphyxiated with a kind of slow-boiling joy. He had spent over a year in this city, growing up as hard and as calloused as his hands, the tough skin his only protection against the softness inside. Skills learned here and in his home town had carried him far, first here to Glasgow, then all the way to Africa and back, thence to the well-bred cannibalism of the City, pin-striped suits and umbrellas, paper weapons concealed in well-tooled briefcases. Oh, you needed to be hard to survive Whitehall, but the callouses had to be on the inside for that, far from what he had learned when he was growing up.

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And now he was back up North, back to where it had started and ended, following Cowley's orders and waiting to see if the Scottish contact would come forward to inform on his co-conspirators and confess their sins. Cowley wanted them, wanted the gun-running to Ulster stopped, wanted the money stopped, wanted the foreign contacts stopped. Wanted the whole mess cleaned up before the Troubles crossed the water to his own homeland, and wanted Bodie to be the one to do it. Oh, the Old Man knew it was pie in the sky to stop it all completely, but at least this one organisation would be stymied and there would be a breather before the ugliness began again. It would stop, if only for a day, but stop it would.

"He's going. Alone," the old man had said, glowering at Doyle, knowing perfectly well why that young man had wanted Bodie to stay, or for himself to go with Bodie: knowing perfectly well and liking it not one jot. And what Cowley didn't like, stopped. Just like that.

Bodie stared up at the broken-tooth

windows of the old warehouse, the old memories tangling with the newer ones, snaring his feet and bringing him to a halt. Doyle. They were getting careless, too openly sexual with each other, too blatant. Mustn't forget the rules: do whatever the hell you like, just don't get caught doing it. And they were perilously close to getting caught in flagrante delicto, so to speak. Too casual, too friendly, too complacent. So Cowley had done the best thing: split them up for a while, cool them down, make them appreciate what they had too much to risk losing it all for the coveting of an open life.

So he was here, in a city that harboured too many ghosts for Bodie, and above all the echoing whispers came the banshee wail of what he had been and what he might have become.

The picture chilled him to the bone. The man he would have become... Staying with his family, taking the blame, going to borstal, learning his lessons there... Better this school of hard knocks than that hard school.

He walked on, going past all the derelict monuments to past glory, down to where the city was still alive, joining the Saturday evening hordes rippling down the Gallowgate, the richness of language surrounding him amidst the absence of wealth. On, he walked, through the city centre with its fancy pedestrian precincts, up past the motorway flyover that stopped midair, a modern day Folly. Fancy buildings now, all imbued with the sheen of money, all of it overlain by the patina of pollution, the sand-blasting companies not yet come this far. And then the newly refurbished beauty of the old city, all sandstone and sunset, rose bushes in bloom, heady fragrance filling him with affection. Children still played the game named after this country, although none here called it that. Hopscotch, north of the border, became 'peever' or 'beds', and he remembered some tightly passionate nights spent playing a rather more adult version of the game. His group had been as multi-racial as the children marauding these streets, and their voices just as indistinguishably Glaswegian. But when he had 'played' round the

back of Woodside Comprehensive, his goal had been far different from the cries of these children.

The park now, trees older than many cities, rhododendron bushes taller than a man, a wonderland wrapped around the 'cottages', the public toilets Victorians had disguised from their delicate sensibilities. He hesitated a moment at the foot of the Great War memorial statue, pausing, remembering, then finally moving on. Too dangerous, now, for a CI5 man to have sex in the bogs. If Cowley didn't kill him, Doyle would—for the sheer stupidity of it, if nothing else. Bodie smiled, not nicely, earning himself a wide berth from the locals, who knew how to handle a hard man.

No, Doyle would be furious with him for doing something that thick, but wouldn't allow himself to care that Bodie had been having it off with some stranger in the toilet. It always struck Bodie as hysterical that it was Doyle who was forever thinking about marriage, but it was Bodie who was forever signing on the dotted line of commitment: Army, Paras, SAS, CI5. Doyle, for all his talk, had never signed a thing in his life before, until Cowley had finagled him into it, and even then, Doyle was the only agent with a 6 months contract. No, Doyle would fight settling down tooth and nail, no matter how much...

Bodie stopped dead, cheeky comments passing unnoticed right over the top of his head. A dunt, and he moved on, joining the exodus as night slid ethereal dark into the park. He simply went with the flow, finding himself buying a ticket at Byres' Road subway station, then going down the labyrinthine steps to the platform, the unique smell bringing back so much more of his past to war with the sudden ambush of the present. Mechanically, he stepped onto the royal red carriage, grabbing a pole, letting the old wifies sit, parcels and carrier bags heaped on the floor in front of them, as the younger women sat with children piled all over themselves, prams propped precariously beside the doors. He let the talk eddy around himself, listening not to the

content, but to the rich melody and cacophonous tones. He wanted Doyle. No surprise that—he doubted many people who had seen them together could ever not realise that—but it was what he wanted from Doyle. What he wanted with Doyle. Commitment. Settling down. Cleaving unto each other and to no one else. Ever. For ever and ever amen so help me god, he thought, a fine sweat beginning to chill on his skin.

He clung onto the stainless steel pole as the subway 'shuggled' and swayed, hurtling through black tunnel, the train lights flickering out for a breathless heartbeat every time they went over a set of points. In each fragment of darkness, he could see his own reflection, a white face swimming, lost, in the dark. Oh what can ail thee, knight at arms, alone and palely *loitering*, he thought, mocking himself. To want to settle down, in his line of work, and with a man as skittish as Doyle, with a man who ran like the wind from every mention of conforming and belonging... Just look at the way Doyle dressed: silently thumbing his nose at everything that could declare his commitment to CI5 and the civil service. Shall just have to wait until he starts dressing proper before I propose then, shan't I? But there was no smile for that thought, barbed as it was, for it would hurt even more being removed than when it had taken root.

Commitment. With Doyle. Risking letting Doyle know just how much Bodie needed him. Risking telling Doyle the truth about his past, when he knew the reaction the prettied-up version had gleaned. The doubts started crawling in then, turning his stomach, twisting round and round like cats settling down for the winter. Moments, always easily explained away as just Doyle being Doyle, just Ray being a funny bugger when it comes to relationships. But what if it weren't? What if the awkwardness was because Bodie's feelings made him awkward? What if his reluctance was because he simply didn't feel as much as Bodie thought he did...as much as Bodie *hoped* he did. What if it were so much more one sided than he already realised?

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What if that were what the Old Man was trying to tell him? Cowley must know the truth, must know how much time he spent in Africa, as opposed to how much time he spent in the Merchants, sailing the Glasgow/Continent freight route. Cowley probably even knew how long he'd turned trade, when he'd stopped. The old git probably even knows something I don't how many men I've had. Bastard probably knows the whole truth. Now that was something that would destroy everything he and Ray had now, such as it was.

And what do you have now, my lad? You've been getting in deeper and deeper until you've fucking well drowned, and you never even noticed it. But Cowley, the old bastard, noticed, didn't he? You've been so bloody sure he sent you up here to give both of us a chance to cool off a bit, but what if it's because he can see the trouble coming, what if it's because he can see that I'm in deeper than Ray? What if it's that? What if it's to slow me down enough that I don't make a complete prat out of myself panting after Ray like a lovesick teenybopper? What if it's that?

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> People pushed past him, and every last one of them had a comment for the 'ijit' getting in the way. Idiot he might be, but not for the reason they were accusing him. Doyle. He could just imagine Doyle's face, when he found out Bodie's romantic notions. God, the bugger would laugh, wouldn't he? Be easier than dealing with it—just laugh at pathetic old Bodie, and get himself out of it as quick as he could, that'd be Doyle's way. And I couldn't take it, not from him. Not laughing. Not making fun of the way I feel. And not being embarrassed, nor running away either. Couldn't take it if I chased him away... Can't do that. Can't need him that much. Can't need him enough to lose him... Won't. That's all. Just won't need him that much. Prove it to him and me that I can handle it, just being lovers, not living together, not exclusive.

> More people were pushing past him now, getting on the subway, shoving him out of the way, drawing him dirty looks. He looked up,

and the name plate on the tunnel wall struck him. He'd been here before, more times than he could remember. Been here when his ship had been in, when they'd been in dock, when he'd needed sex, no questions asked. No commitments. No emotions. No risks...

He made his choice, jumping off as the driver blew his whistle and the doors started to wheeze shut, racing for the stairs, taking them two at a time until he stood on the street, the last of the day faded into the long-awaited descent of night, the unhurried sunset finally over. He'd always loved that part of being so far north, that the summer day's went on forever and the sun took a lifetime to sink into the gilded sea, the water only slowly fading to grey once more. Small recompense for the bitter, brief winter days, but the nights in summer were as glorious as a rose.

And he was standing in a decrepit street, thinking poetic nonsense, almost back where he'd begun...in more ways than one. There was a place, or at least, there used to be a place, where he had gone when he needed something to keep the daily pain away, whether that something was lust or simply the comfort of a warm body to hold close under the guise of sex. Just a few streets, just a bit of a walk, and he'd be there. If it were still open, if the building itself had even managed to survive both urban decay and the voracious enthusiasm of urban renewal. He began walking again, quite willfully ignoring the pricks of his conscience. The only pricks he was interested in right now were, hopefully, mere minutes away, in the safe danger of a semiprivate pub. Hang Cowley, and his bloody job. Hang the gun dealers and the terrorists and the money lenders. Hang Doyle, and all the doubts and fears that that body held. Hang himself, by his own hand, if he went running to Doyle full of half-baked delusions of happily-ever-after. No, time to pull back, time to breathe, time to assess...time to think. But later, once he had his brain back in his skull and not in his balls. A taste of what he had once feasted upon here, and that would get some of Doyle out of his system. Just

a taste, a soupçon, a wee dram of the hard stuff, and he'd be able to laugh at his own needs. He would realise that he didn't need all that crap with Doyle. Just the sex. Just the friendship. Just the fun. He wasn't drowning, only waving...

Not only had the old pub survived, it hadn't changed, not deigning to give so much as a nod to the passing of years. The outside was the same, black, glossy wood with only a tiny patch of thick, leaded windows, their light gleaming off the black in minute specks of liveliness. It still looked more like a funeral parlour than a pub, and the door was still as heavy and creaked just as loudly. He took a deep, deep breath, filling his lungs with the remembered air of dockland dirt, a swimmer about to take the plunge. Not drowning, only waving...

There was a wary silence to greet him, hostility barely leashed under the surface, the unspoken 'an' who the hell are you?' swelling around him. So he put on his toughest face, his best sneer and strolled in, a slight sway to hips and shoulders, the 'gallus' walk recognised in docklands all over Britain. And they saw him, saw his strength, saw the way he was eyeing them back and they knew, relaxing into another one of them come home to this pub, another man here for company, another body here for pleasure.

As perfect as the mating ritual of the big cats, a space cleared at the bar and he took it, accepting them as they accepted him. As a newcomer, it would be several minutes before he'd be served, so he spent his time renewing his memory of this place. The walls were ancient, moulded mahogany, arches curling and soaring up to the dark ceiling, neither paintings nor photographs here, just the gleam of the years lingering in the wood. Tables, round and small, equally dark, equally old, even if they had been bought only last week, for everything here was of a muchness, as were the people, the instant they walked through that door. To come here, you had to know someone, for there were no signs, and no locals living nearby to drop in unexpectedly. The bar was, in and of itself, all

the art any pub needed. Long and curved, gilded foot rail glinting softly to itself, myriad elbows polishing the bartop to an almost living shine, the overhead lights casting their glow with generosity. Against the wall were the bottles, dozens and dozens of them, every kind of spirit and liqueur and whisky glittering away merrily amidst the curling carvings and liquid lines, art from a bygone era when MacIntosh was king. Even the pump handles were the originals, shaped first by master craftsmen and then by the hands of those who pulled an ocean of pints. And the publican was standing before him, eyeing him up, folding back his sleeves to display his tattoos, a double check that this bloke knew just exactly what kind of pub he'd got himself into.

A tiny crinkle laughed at the corner of Bodie's eyes, for it wasn't often you saw a burly 6'4" hard man with a loveheart tattooed on his arm—and a man's name reclining on blue ribbon encircling it. "I'll have a pint of heavy, please," he said, making certain to emphasise his old Liverpudlian accent. Sassenachs were never Page particularly welcome in this city, but Liverpool was considered to be a sister-city, almost Scots, and therefore tolerable. If Doyle had come in here...

"One pint coming up," and with that, so simply, he was forgiven the accident of his birth that had made him English.

A miraculous conception, a man appeared at his elbow, eyes bright with interest. "No' seen you around here afore. You jist get here?"

"Yeh. Used to live here, though."

The man sipped his own drink, never letting his eyes stray from tonight's prey. "Oh aye? An' where was it you were living?"

"Up Maryhill Road," he answered, careful to use the proper language, careful not to risk his entrée into this milieu. He needed to forget Ray for a while, needed to purge a little of the dangerous longings from his system. "Just off the Garscube Road."

"Oh, aye," came the reply, same words, completely different intonation. "Aye, I know

where you were. My cousin used to live by there, back when we still had the gangs. Used to be terrible then, mind, but it's gotten much better these last few years. By the way," he said, leaning forward a little, blue eyes bright and shining, "you are aware just what kind of a pub you're in, are ye no'? I mean, I wouldn't want you to be going to the toilet and getting yourself a wee surprise."

Bodie grinned at him, open invitation. "Oh, I wouldn't want it to be a wee surprise either."

The other man straightened up, leaning on the bar, sipping his lager. "Just wanted to check."

"Ta much. Used to come here a lot, when I was living here and when I was at sea."

"Not back to Liverpool then?"

"Had good reason not to."

"Fair enough. D'you want a half to go with that pint of yours?"

"Wouldn't say no."

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"Gie's a hawf doon here, will ye, Jimmy!" He leaned back a little from the ambient glow of the bar to wait for the whisky to be brought. A glance back at Bodie and the hostility was back, full force. He didn't like being laughed at. "And what d'you think you're laughing at, pal?"

"It's just that now I know I'm back in Glasgow." That comment was greeted with dangerous blankness. "Everyone," he went on, quick to explain, "is called 'Jimmy'."

"They are not! I'm not called Jimmy. Not twice, anyway."

"What are you called?"

"Jim." A broad smile and a proffered hand.

"Bodie." Matching smile, matching offer, hand taken.

"Oh, come on! If you're going to use a fake name, then you might as well think up something halfway decent. 'Bodie'. Bloody stupid name, that. Go on, tell me another."

"I've got three more."

"Blood out of a stone, you are. All right,

pal, what're the other three?"

"William, Andrew and Phillip."

"Oh, my, aren't we dead bloody posh?" Bodie stroked the back of his hand along Jim's groin. "Only when I'm faking it."

"Well in that case, I'll take it as a backhanded compliment." He drank some more of his drink, watching Bodie, being watched in his turn.

And Bodie stared, and stared and stared. He was hungry for this, hungry to bury his need for Doyle in this compact body opposite him, starving to lose himself in sex that meant nothing more than fleeting satisfaction and where emotional involvement was limited to joking about names. And this man was perfect for that, bearing no resemblance to Ray at all: Jim was shorter, stockier, blue-eyed, hair bright enough to make a carrot blush with envy, milk-white, paler even than Bodie himself. Perfect. Absolutely perfect for a one night stand, absolutely perfect to relive the days of his youth. Good memories, culled from the bad, mixed in with the good of what he had today. Ray. And he was going to keep him, was going to keep his own independence, was going to give Doyle his. In the future, perhaps, his scallywag would settle down, could be gentled from this skittishness of his, could, given time, catch up to Bodie's emotions. Perhaps they had a chance. But they had none whatsoever if Bodie didn't find a way to make it light again, give Ray time to breathe, time to find his feet. And then, maybe, if he were to be patient, they could get it all worked out together. Then, maybe, he could have what he'd obviously been craving all along, but was just too bloody scared to admit. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and Doyle was half dissolute already, so to hand him so much power over Bodie, by admitting what he himself had only just realised... He smiled warmly at his panacea, delivering another back-handed compliment, Jim's cock twitching sweetly under his hand.

"After all that beer, I'm bursting for a pee." As seduction, it was, for this place, perfect. No frills, no ties, no emotions. No open, awk-

ward declarations, just a simple offer, couched in terms that could be misunderstood with deliberate ease. But both men wanted the same thing, so Bodie simply nodded and followed through the throng, under the whimsically red light and through the heavy swing door.

It was dimmer in here, the intricate patterning of tile all-but lost in the twilit anonymity of the back corridor. A different smell here: not the aroma of generations of beer and tobacco and back-slapping good humour, nor any hint of the constant, underlying tension that riddled this city. Here, there was the faint lingering scent of Domestos and Dettol, carbolic soap and cigarettes, and under it all, Bodie could smell sex. So subliminal a scent, but so instantly potent. He could feel himself swell to press against his underwear, could sense his own scent cloud around him, could feel his self-imposed restraints loosen and the beast within begin its snarl. There were the familiar scents of danger and violence here too, to add spice and piquancy, to lure and seduce, and for men like him to succumb under. He smiled again, aware of how he would look in this stuttering light, an almost vampiric cast to his features, catching on his arched brow, making him the spitting image of his father. The man he had refused to become the man that part of him still ached to become.

As he walked along the long corridor, past the cellar door and the boxes of smokey bacon crisps and Irn-Bru, he spared a thought for his sisters, whom he had loved, despite it all. He hadn't yet dared check the system for them, to find out what had become of them. Hadn't dared check to see if his father were even still alive. Too much, too close, all that. Too easy for it all to come and sour this life he had carved for himself, and he wasn't about to let that happen. Allow the past purchase on his present—he might find himself sinking back into the mire, and he had fought too hard and far too long for that. And fought even harder to close off the darkness his father had fostered in him.

So. Tonight. He'd have the arse that was walking ahead of him, bury himself in that flesh and forget his past, forget his present, buy his future. Bury his father and mortgage himself to Doyle, doling small bits of his heart out on a monthly basis, until Ray got used to it. Step by step, just like Jim strolling jauntily in front of him. Two lights, white 'gents' sign on his right for those who wanted nothing more than a quick pee to get rid of the beer, but there, what had once been the 'Ladies', in those long-gone days when ladies still came here, there, high on his left, there was an echo of the door that had led him in here: again the red light, again that display of wry humour, and then all thoughts of humour left him as he stepped through that door.

So nondescript a room, just your basic pub toilet, cleaner than most. Old fashioned table piled with towels. Urinal along one wall, the water whooshing quietly through the trough. Sinks, a line of them, original porcelain, fancy handles blooming, petal-shaped, in the bright light. Stalls, old mahogany warm and rich, space enough below to see if the cubicle were occupied. One door, open, propped that way, to display the neatly incised hole inside where a man could stick his cock through to be sucked or fucked.

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And then the lights were fading, switching out, one by one, until only three remained lit, reflected in the wall length mirror that ran above the sinks. Jim stepped away from the lightswitch, no smile on his face now, only the heavylidded stare of a man wanting sex. He walked past Bodie, going to stand before the urinal. Bodie stared at him in the mirror, stared at the broad back, stared at the wide-legged stance, listened to the splashing. Waited, with mounting impatience, until the sound stopped and Jim stood there, silent, and then turned to face Bodie in the mirror, his cock still out, still cradled in his left hand.

"Did you come in here for some prick, or jist to turn your back on me?"

Bodie was about to speak, but the silence was filled with the sound of the door opening. Another man came in, young, Asian-dark, slim and tall, making a pretence of using the toilet.

Bodie didn't mind, not one bit. If he'd wanted private sex, he'd have waited for Doyle. He wanted this to be meaningless, nothing more than a good screw, and if you came to a place like this, you accepted whatever came your way. He spoke to Jim, hanging his own jacket up on the curled, brass wall hook, beginning the slow unbuttoning of his shirt. "Came in here so you could turn your back to me."

"Not a snowball's, pal. Not something I do."

"No? I could always try to change your mind about that."

"Try it, pal, just you try it..." Invitation, deliberately clothed as threat, and Bodie was upon him, mouth open, forcing the other man to surrender to the invasion, filling Jim's mouth with his tongue, thrusting in deep, claiming him. Bodie's hands strove to contain the other man, to subdue him with the strength and force of his lust. And as he felt the other yield to him, as he felt the other's muscles turn liquid with arousal, as he felt his power over the other man, confession dawned in him: he wanted to do this to Ray. He wanted to force him, wanted to make him to submit. Wanted to hurt him, a little, for the all the small hurts of the day when he wanted so little from Ray, for all the days when a smile or a touch would suffice, when the giving would be emotional, not sexual.

And so, infused with this, he bent the other man, arching him back over his forearm, knees between the other's legs, his free hand pulling and tugging at fabric until it parted unzipped or ripped, he didn't give a damn—and he held his own hard prick in his hand and his hard hand was on Jim's rich buttock. It no longer mattered at all that the man he had was called Jim, nor that he was an individual. All that mattered was that he could do, here, that which he could not do with Ray.

He kissed the other man again, but tenderly this time, even as the touch of his hands was rough, mouth giving his love, hands giving him strength enough to cow another man. He moulded the man, shaping him, forming him

into what he wanted him to be: a willing victim for his harshness, a willing recipient of all the possessive, acquisitive love that lurked in Bodie. And to see another man bent beneath him, submitting and submissive, oh, what an aphrodisiac that image was, spurring him, inflaming him. The body in his arms began its struggle, but he ignored it, wrenching at the clothes that hampered him, recognising the struggle for what it was: token protest to sweeten the conquering. Token, the action added to the words, an old game played to the measured moves of sex, the excuse for one victim of machismo to surrender to another. And Bodie felt the power of it surge through him, the heat of it centring in his cock, settling in his balls, making him full and fecund and ready.

There were hands writhing with his own clothes, and as he pulled away long enough to breathe, he saw that the hands were brown and slender, those that tugged his trousers lower to bare the down of his thighs, but the hands that hauled his shirt open were white and spatulate, trembling in their eagerness. He didn't trouble himself with the clothes of his sexmates—Bodie wasn't the slightest bit interested in such minor details, for they did nothing but distract from the visceral feeling of having a man under him. He bit his way down a white chest, tugging sharply at nipples and red hair, marking the skin with the crescent brand of teeth. A breathless gasp of pleasure at that, from himself, from the other, from the mouth that was leeching the life from his cock, it didn't make any difference: he gave pleasure, pleasure was given him, he was pleasure, and it was all flowing together in an endless circle.

He thrust his hips forward, burying himself in wet mouth; he thrust his tongue forward, burying himself in a different, equally wet mouth, their heat becoming his, his fire inflaming them. The third man knelt between his feet, sucking so deep, with such intensity, Bodie heard himself groan in his other man's mouth. A hand was pressing against his arse, a finger probing, and then the man on the floor was

stretching up, his brown hand splayed and hot as it slid the length of Bodie's spine, coming in to a fist to rub, hard, against Bodie's arse, the exquisite delight of it shivering through all three of them.

They were hard, all of them, and Bodie felt himself the centre of the Universe, omnipotent, omnipresent. He lifted his hand, and felt jolt run through three bodies as he slapped one man, felt the skin under his hand warm as it reddened, felt the tremble when pain turned to pleasure. He thrust again, but this time, the wetness of mouth wasn't even close to enough. With an anorexic moan, he wrapped his arms around the man whose mouth he plundered, lifting him up, towels scattering hither and yon, turning him, settling him on the table so that he could plunder his body as well. His cock was so hard, so hot, it craved the cooling fire of another body. A hand came up to guide his prick, a tongue came up to lick at his arse, and he pulled down, pushed up and abruptly, with a thrill of strength, he was home, sheathed, pillaging, cock up an arse, tongue up his own, filled and filling.

He looked down, and saw what he loved: a man under him, bending to his will, submitting, white back sweat-pearled, all the muscles quivering. Bodie shouted out loud for the joy of it, Ray coming into his mind as he rejoiced in the simple complexity of sex.

The wetness sucking on him left, and he felt a void, an ache where the circle had been complete, but then it was there again, a hardness promising him all he wanted. Hard slickness pressed against him, and he tensed, deliberately, wanting it to hurt, wanting it rough and hard and callous, all the things—like love—he never had with Ray. All the things he missed from his illspent youth and dissolute adulthood, all the things frittered away on dinner and dancing with the birds, and the 'all good fun' romps that seemed to be all Ray would allow. For now. And for now, when he needed something more, or perhaps—if you looked at it askance—something less, well, he could come to places like this, and men like this, where it was all bone and

muscle and hot skin, sliding into him, as he poured himself into another man. He thrust, and his cock surged, and the cock inside him surged. His back arched, and his belly pressed against the muscular knob of spine, his own spine curving against the hairless smoothness of belly. As he looked down, he could see where his red cock was engulfed by white skin, and where long brown fingers pressed into the black hair that arrowed on the whiteness of his own belly. With every gasp of air he dragged in, he dragged in the old, familiar scent: males in rut, he most of all, his own odour intoxicating, mingling with the other two men, a symphony of sex.

The hands on his belly had pressed lower, one hand stopping, splayed fingers framing Bodie's cock, feeling it as it plunged in and out of the white arse. The cock up his own arse was insistent, pounding at him, slick and heavy, driving him on, whipping him up, taking his mind away and leaving him only the voluptuousness of three men entwined together in lust. A mouth nipped his earlobe, a tongue snaked into him, fucking his ear as a cock fucked his arse as he himself fucked arse. It was wonderful, this completion, and he thrust harder, the pleasure building, compounding the insatiable need that was devouring him from the inside out, hurtling him on, ever faster in the race to orgasm. Teeth dug into his ear as wetness splashed inside him, and he groaned in echo, feeling his own seed rise, pushed out by the semen filling him. He came, hands clutching desperately at the man under him, pulling him up as he plunged in deeper, back clenching as he came, great pulses of pleasure streaming from him.

Weakened, he collapsed to the side, sinking to the floor, propping himself against a tableleg to watch as the man who had fucked him sucked the man he had fucked. He watched, entranced, too sated to rouse, as the pale cock was swallowed; watched, entranced, as the faces contorted once more with pleasure. To them, he was now superfluous, nothing more than the added fillip of a voyeur. The dark man was kneeling now, pressed into Jim's white arse, his

black hair grinding into the faint dusting of ginger hair that softened there, his long cock sliding in and out of milky skin, back and forth, the movement of pleasure almost hypnotic.

Bodie stared and stared, thinking of himself and Ray, thinking about the differences in what they needed. And what he had to do to keep them together. And what form that 'togetherness' would take, until Doyle was ready for the same thing Bodie was. But the primal motion of the two men fucking continually drew him away from thinking about Doyle, bringing him back to the chill of tile and the heat of sex, the heady aroma and the satin skin. His fingers began itching to touch the muscles of that arse as it moved. He wanted to press the palm of his hand on the arching curve of buttock and push his fingertips into the flank as it hollowed with each deep thrust.

Sex. He could have all he wanted here, of that, could have the anonymous camaraderie of blokes who all suffered from living the same lie outside these walls. But he couldn't have any of what he truly craved: Doyle, and love, and knowing that Doyle would always be there, no matter what.

It was as he sat there that the condemnation was born: so much for needing just the sex and the friendship. He had had the sex here tonight, and incredible as it had undoubtedly been, it wasn't enough. He needed Doyle, God help them both. Needed love from him too, and that wasn't on the cards, not for many a long year. So. Wait, then, it was to be. Wait, and watch, and love in silence, until Ray stopped running from the one thing Bodie had always run to: commitment. It all came back to the same thing: he was all merchant navy, Army, Paras, SAS, every one of them a sign-here-for-thenext-X-years, and Doyle was all police and art school, neither of which he finished. Time. That was all it would take, for Doyle cared about him, liked him, thrived on sex with him. Just give it all time. Just find a way to keep his own dreams

alive but chained, until he could give Doyle the key. And he had found a way to do just that...

He watched the other two for a moment, until the door opened and nice-looking man entered, immediately unzipping his fly and coming over to join in. Bodie fielded the look of hungry enquiry, a small headshake, a tacit 'no', for this man's hungry desperation reminded him all too strongly of how hungry he was and why. Perhaps this man was even less well-off than Bodie himself, perhaps he loved a man who was straight and couldn't give him even what Doyle could give Bodie. He had woes enough of his own: to allow another's adit would only destroy his own chance to make this placebo work for a while.

Slowly, quite casually, he pulled his clothes into tidiness once more, covering up his lovebites and vices, hiding himself with fabric. With a civil nod, he left, traversing the long corridor in silence to emerge into the noise and subdued bustle of the bar. There were knowing looks, and envious looks, and lustful looks, and he knew that all he had to do was wait until his body caught up to his mind. Then he could either pretend he was loving Ray, or pretend that he was screwing Doyle to within an inch of his life, or simply pretend that Ray didn't even exist. Perfect. Defuse the situation that was brewing like a tempest in a teapot between them. Calm himself down, slow the pace down a bit, hang on to what they had. A few more nights of practice, and he'd have the whole thing down pat, protecting himself—and Ray—from feelings he was unhappily certain neither one of them was ready to handle. But he cast a pox on such serious thought—contemplation was for bookworms and philosophers and he'd already done his share of thinking this night. He was a man of action. And that man over there, the one with curly chestnut hair and green eyes...he looked like precisely the action Bodie needed. Drink in hand, best smile on his face, unslaked predator in his eyes, Bodie began to buy himself a future...