## AMBUSH THOMAS

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

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

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

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

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

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

And how was he going to be sure if they had even made it? No, no, they were waiting on him. Had to be. He visualised each of them as he knew they would be at this moment, Owen stolid, impassively awaiting the signal, Murphy cool-eyed and tense, Bodie all charged up, impatient to get to it. Probably just about

pawing the ground. Loved this sort of thing, Bodie did, Doyle thought in disgust, remembering the glitter of excitement in his partner's eyes as they headed out.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All right," Anderson replied.

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

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

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

Anderson just laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

countryside with them.

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

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

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

"I don't believe it."

"You'd better believe it. sunshine."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

first place."

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

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

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

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

"What's that supposed to mean?"

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

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

"If I have to."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anderson waved them over.

"Move," Bodie said, and pushed him.

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

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

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

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

"I told you before. Forget it."

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

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

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

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

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

Doyle heard the hammer click back.

"Sorry, Ray—"

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

Three shots cracked out, exploding the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That was different."

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

"Life's tough all around."

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

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

"You-"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Murphy shrugged and stood up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Murphy edged away.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If you weren't so bloody self-righteous—" "Enough!" Cowley's bark cut them both off.

They glared at each other, two strangers who had once known each better than anyone else.

Or pretended we did, Doyle thought bitterly.

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

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

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

"Perfectly, sir."

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

"Dismissed," Cowley said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doyle stared at the weapon.

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

"Drop dead, Bodie."

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

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

Bodie shrugged.

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

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

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

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

"Like hell you're sorry."

Bodie's gaze faltered, then fell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Forget what?" Bodie said blandly.

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

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

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

"Come on, it was a joke."

"I'm not laughing."

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

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

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

Doyle glanced up at him in disgust.

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

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

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

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

The more he thought about it, the better he liked it. He couldn't lose. If Bodie refused, he'd

be shown up for the coward he was, and if he accepted, then he'd have to admit to a crack in his armour.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, you can stop right now."

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

"The score?" Bodie repeated ominously.

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

"Not exactly a state secret, is it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Have you gone crazy or what?"

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

"You think I enjoyed it?"

"On the nose, sunshine."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You're sick."

"That's rich, coming from you."

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

Doyle took a step back.

"Very wise," Bodie remarked.

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

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

"Oh, and then what?"

"I'll hit you."

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

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

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

"Gun's not loaded." Bodie said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After a moment, Bodie closed his eyes.

The only sound in the room was their breathing.

Then Bodie lifted his hips slightly, far

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His hands had gone clammy with perspiration, and fear—what kind of sickness was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'What?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doyle smiled mirthlessly. "Make me."

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

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

Cruel and unloving, it was a mockery of a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He flung himself down, pressed his face into the pillow, shivering uncontrollably. Fear wound its clammy hand around his gut when Bodie touched him, deft, curious fingers spreading his buttocks, transmitting an erotic thrill to every nerve, quickening as he felt something cold and slick nudging inside. He gasped, and smiled a secret smile to himself. Bodie was wrong. He was going to like it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christ it hurt.

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

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

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

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

courage, Doyle thrust upward.

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

Pain and pleasure tangled together in the darkness of his heart as the sweet friction of the sheets brought him closer and closer, but he needed more. "Tell me now you don't want it," he said, writhing against the bed, pressing

his hips back to meet Bodie's. "Come on, admit it. You love fucking me, don't you? Feels good, better 'n anything you've ever done. Right?"

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

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

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

"Tell me, Bodie."

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

He gave a convulsive shudder and was still.

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

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

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

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

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

to haunt his heart.

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

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

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

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

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

"It's your turn," he said through his teeth.
"I'm ready," came Bodie's gibing voice.
"Any time you think you can take me."

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