BENT COPPERS

This is a serious story, a bitter, nasty tale dealing with the problem of recognizing and accepting who and what you are. It is also our bow to the oft written theme of Bodie and Doyle operating undercover as a gay couple. Several of those stories make for fascinating reading. We hope you will find this story just as fascinating, and above all compelling, although be warned that its approach, development, and conflict resolution send our boys in dark directions. The story was intended from the very first to be complete by itself. But if you're an incurable Bodie and Doyle romantic, take heart. The companion piece, or sequel, is also in this issue and it will lead Bodie and Doyle from darkness and despair to light and love.

A final word. "A Summer's Outing" is set during the late '70s. This means that the title is anachronistic. Outing is derived from a late '80s term "to out"—literally to force a gay person out of the closet against his or her will. Anachronistic yes, but a highly appropriate title.

A SUMMER'S OUTING M. FAE GLASGOW

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

BOREDOM HAD LONG SINCE SET IN, CURIOSITY GIVING WAY TO THE ENERVATION OF WAITING. They simply sat silent now, not even bothering with banter, the heat having dried all the witticisms up. Bodie was half-dozing, Doyle staring out the window, the frame making a picture of the city-scape that flourished outside, blue sky burnishing grey sandstone and glinting off the purple moire of the pigeon preening on the window sill. Eventually, the bird settled down, chest puffing up, coos dying down into quietude. Doyle's gaze slowly came back into the room, to the plant, to the polished gleam of desk and the matte of manila folder. He'd already read the contents, tossing the interesting bits over to Bodie to scan quickly before the Old Man came in.

But Cowley hadn't come in, not at nine when the briefing was supposed to start, not at ten when Betty had brought them tea, not even at eleven. Now the street below was filling with the muted roaring murmur of the lunchtime crowd, hundreds of office girls in their translucent summer frocks on their way to spend their luncheon vouchers, hundreds of business men ogling the flash of leg illuminated by the brightness of the sun.

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And they were stuck in a stifling office, awaiting his lordship's pleasure. There wasn't the usual frustrated anger in them at this being left sitting like schoolboys outside the headmaster's office: it was too simple a pleasure to be skiving off after the helter-skelter of this month past. Doyle settled his bones a little more deeply into relaxation, allowing himself the luxury of letting life pass by unhurriedly and unchecked.

Listening to the occasional ripple of laughter that rose above the flow of the crowd, Doyle ran the files through his mind again, finding them even more boring this nth time through. Just a list of the many civil servants whom MI6 believed subverted over to the other side, whichever side it was in whichever case. Just a list of names, with photographs to go with some of the names, jobs done, positions held, sundry things in common... And not a single common thread to tie them all together into uniform rope, as far as he could tell, nor any hint either of what kind of investigation was going on into which kind of skulduggery. Which is why they were sitting there waiting for Cowley $\mathfrak{s}_{\mathfrak{S}\mathfrak{S}\mathfrak{S}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{I}}$ to come in and tell them what the connection **6** was and where they fitted in.

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

He was going to have Bodie, one day.

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

keeping it light and easy and free, letting the bond beneath the friendship slowly weave itself into reality.

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

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

Needed, for that matter, to get a grip on himself and stop wallowing in fantasy. If Bodie caught him at this... He straightened in his chair, looking anywhere but at Bodie. It was too

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A SUMMER'S OUTING

easy to see all of Bodie's messing about as invitation, when it really could be nothing more than the camping up that graduates of the Services were wont to do. Addicted as he was to adrenalin, the danger itself was tantalising, but it was, he reminded himself, sternly gazing at a cloud as if it harbinged thunder and not glorious summer, danger pure and simple. If he was wrong, if Bodie were just piss-arsing about and then Doyle himself took him up on an offer that had never been given...he'd be picking his teeth up for a week. Too risky, just yet.

He stretched again and despite his stern warnings to himself, he couldn't keep up his glower at the clouds, turning his attention back to Bodie. It wasn't often he got a chance to watch him like this, all supine and supple and bare, if not physically, then emotionally. All the armour was off, here in the safety of their own HQ, Bodie's face softening to a moue of sleep. Gorgeous, he was absolutely gorgeous, and the heat gathering in Doyle's groin had less and less to do with the sultriness of summer. He wanted, with a gnawing hunger and a burst of mouthwatering tactility, to taste that exposed banner of skin, where it beckoned, pale and cool and mysterious. To know if Bodie tasted salty, or sweet, or if the faint hint of musk that surrounded him was on his skin or only in the after-shave he used with religious, martinet efficiency. Of a sudden, he was as tight-coiled as an overwound spring, the need to move-now!threatening to drown him. But moving would wake Bodie and an awake Bodie would see the bulging in his jeans and tease him about it, endless jokes about poofters and shirt-lifters, arses and pricks. And God knew how he would react to the teasing this time, with the way his mind had been wandering, as substantial and sane as the clouds he'd been watching.

Yet again, he turned away from looking at Bodie, clasping his hands behind his head, a self-made stock to keep his idle hands from doing Devil's work. His neck was hurting, from the pressure of his hands, clenching together, each to stop the other from reaching down and undoing zip and fingering inside, where he hadn't worn any underwear, because of the heat. Because of the heat—what rubbish. Because of the hope that if Bodie were seriously testing the waters between them, then the sight of Doyle

unfettered would inveigle him in-and all of this was getting him nowhere fast, unless you counted encroaching arousal. Cowley's office, with Bodie snoozing at his side, was neither the time nor the place for a quick wank. Not when he could get caught, anyway. So. A way to get his mind off what his body was shouting at him. Consequences. Yes, consequences would surely do it. Just think about what would happen if Bodie weren't working up to anything other than building the better queer joke. All his circumspect, cautiously neutral questioning, dispensed over casual pints and the dull routine of obbos had been turned into comedy routines, laughed into oblivion. Carefully, with a policeman's attention to detail, he listed all the things that Bodie did that could be considered precursors to sex. Then he listed all the things that could just be pratting about. And then he listed all the perfectly innocent things that a man who fancied another man might just manage to misinterpret out of sheer wishful thinking.

The process was so depressing, his cock wilted more than the poor pot plant, there being not one thing that could point, irrefutably, fafaes at any real desire on Bodie's part. And yet, the 7 temptation to have Bodie was almost palpable, £3£3£3 drawing him closer to the edge of action, a tumultuous rush to the precipice that would change them irrevocably from friends to lovers.

Not lovers, Doyle thought, sober yet from his brush with reality. Not yet. It'd just be sex and once we got that out of our systems or got into the habit of it, it'd never get beyond that-always supposing I'm not completely off in reading Bodie. Be nothing more than a bit of shagging and thenpfft! Nothing.

And Doyle was nothing if not greedy, voracious for more than what he'd had before. There'd been his share of and his fill of anonymous encounters in 'discreet' clubs; there'd been more than his share of 'favours' as a copper, blow jobs and spread bums laid out before him in return for a blind eye being turned. He snorted in laughter, jolting Bodie awake, noticing Bodie's abruptly questioning stare, not that he was about to illuminate him. No, until he was sure of his reception, Bodie didn't need to know quite yet that his partner was queer, fond of women but fonder yet of men. Nor did Bodie need to know just how this particular ex-copper had

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managed to end up with so many informants owing him so many favours. It wasn't even that he had been corrupt-not in his own eyes, anyway. He'd never accepted money, nor gifts. Never turned aside when real crime was going on. But if a bloke had a few funny ciggies in his pocket and wanted to keep his record clean by opening his mouth or bum, well, that was different. And it had given him access to some truly useful insider information: he'd caught many a big fish from letting the little fishies go. He heard Bodie move, heard the creak of stiffened bones as Bodie stretched, heard the groan of leather as gun was settled less uncomfortably on heatprickled body. Yeh, he'd had men, more than Bodie'd had hot dinners.

And that worried Doyle. It was written all over him-or at least it was, to men who liked menthat he was available. And that meant he encountered more than his share of gay or bi men, and that, in its turn, meant that it brought him back round in a full circle: did Bodie fancy him, or was it just his own 'bent', so to speak, that was making him parlay innocent camping into an offer he had no intention of refusing? He 8 glanced over again, to see Bodie staring at him £3£3£3 with intense, uneasy scrutiny, so he looked away, unwilling to face him. He wasn't quite ready to answer questions that Bodie wasn't quite ready to ask. Time enough later, always supposing Bodie shared this attraction...

Giving himself something to do, he picked up a tattered copy of the News of the World, raising his eyebrows that Cowley of all people would have a slag rag like this in his office, but that thought soon went out the window. Another headline in a very long list of headlines, all the news that was fit to print, read all about it and thus make him more skittish than any grown man had the right to be: another civil servant caught in a love-nest with his boyfriend, shocking pictures on p.3. He wasn't about to look at Bodie, not when he was sure that the guilt was written all over him. The sweat broke out under his skin, where it made his flesh creep with the memory of the old, old fear. He'd come to manhood before '67, with all the anguish and fearfilled discretion of those days. He read the lurid prose of the so-called newspaper, with its condemnatory and inflammatory choice of words, with its po-faced self-righteousness that allowed

itself to use queers the way other idiots used blacks or Jews, and felt his stomach clench with the dismaying knowledge that the Law had changed, but nothing else in this sceptr'd isle had. Christ, if Bodie found out about him! He scanned the rest of the story quickly, reading details that perfectly echoed the details he'd been reading for months now, in story after story after story. It could be him, plastered all over the papers, if he weren't careful. Or more than likely, it'd be him plastered all over the pavement if Cowley caught him breaking his word and fucking around with men. In this day and age, in this climate, he'd be hung by his balls and left out to dry-if he were found out. That was the golden rule, of course. Do whatever the hell you wanted, especially if you wore the right old school tie, but don't ever, under any circumstances, get caught. For then the very people who most closely shared your ... predilections would be the first in line to rip you to shreds, lest the mud slung at you should stick to them.

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

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

"Jeremy Thorpe," Cowley said, without preamble, setting off a sudden rumble of prescient fear in Doyle's belly. "Elton John. The Right Honourable Sir Robert Forsyth. Mr. Duncan MacPherson. Sir Geoffrey Percival. Mr. Michael Symington, defence contractor. The Right Reverend Hugh Pym. All men who have been victimised by allegations of homosexuality by those after money or power or secret information." He sat at his desk, sloughing jacket and loosening tie, slapping a new file on the desk top in front of himself, his voice never once pausing, but becoming sonorous, a minister delivering Sunday sermon, his tone as smooth and

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doleful as the funeral bell. Bodie was sitting up now, taking notice, the fragile stillness of the man at bay, one quick glance telling Doyle that whatever the reason, Bodie shared his sense of impending disaster.

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

With the first name, Doyle's stomach knotted in sickening knowledge. He couldn't spare a look for Bodie, too concerned with staring in wide-eyed horror at Cowley's implacable face as each condemning name was enunciated.

"Ewan Evans. Derek Jackson. Michael Potter."

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

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

Cowley rose to his feet, hand going to the small of his back and then to the thigh that ached so badly, despite the heat and the relief that should have brought him. Other men suffered headaches and backaches brought on by their stresses and tensions: for him, it was the resurgent reminder of the sufferings of war. And this was, he argued with himself once more, a war, and in war there were always casualties. Even if the wounds weren't always physical, or honourable.

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

The room fell frigid. The much-vaunted communication between Bodie and Doyle came crashing down, all lines severed, all the links lying cut and bleeding on the carpet between them. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, or so it is said, and there was an over-abundance of danger in that room, the silence threatening. Threatening what, none of them could say, for time was suspended, breathless, while the world continued its merry way outside, the office girls still laughing, the workmen still whistling their rude appreciation, the pigeons still 9 cooing in broody contentment. But in that of- £3£3£3 fice, there was nothing, just waiting. Bodie moved, restless, his mouth tight, his skin whitening. Doyle wanted to look at him, but didn't dare: he had too many demons riding on his own shoulders to confront any of Bodie's. And beneath it all, unacknowledged, unheard in the clamour of rising uncertainty, was the stilettosmooth question slicing into him: and why hadn't Bodie told him the truth?

Nestled in with the reason why he hadn't told Bodie his own little truth, that insidious nagging buried itself under the sound of Cowley's voice.

"The Minister," he was saying, "has laid down his own brand of the law. He wants all security risks removed."

Fired. He-they-were going to be fired. The anger began, the old St. George against the Dragon, his own crusading zeal instigated not for some abstract nor for some underdog, but for himself. "You can't fire us! You know as well as I do, we're less of a security risk than the Minister, with his bit on the side in the City while the little wife keeps the home fires burning. I've

been queer from the start, you know that. And if you think that just because the Minister knows that I'm going to turn into some limp-wristed poof who'll hand over every secret he can get his hands on, then you're a fucking idiot."

Cowley stared at him, gimlet blue cooling him down.

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

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

Doyle opened his mouth, but Cowley spoke first. "Shut up, Doyle. And you, Bodie. Come on, the pair of you. Here you are, threatened with losing your careers, of being blacklisted as undesirables by the security review board, and all you can do is shoot each other in the back? 10 I thought I had trained you better."

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

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

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

"And where's that, sir?" Bodie asked for them both.

Cowley hesitated for a moment, visibly choosing his words. "You two are going to—I believe the expression is 'come out'?"

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

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

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

"No." Bald, unadorned, the word lay on the desk like a gutted fish, until Cowley spoke again. "Getting this bunch won't solve the problem any more than firing all the homosexuals would. No, we have to go to the root of the whole thing." Another pause, another drink, then more words, these ones delivered only after Cowley had risen to his feet and turned towards the window and away from them. "You two will have to stay public, and prove that even homosexuals can be good agents. You'll have to be above all the usual criticisms that are levelled at...your sort, of course, but that's certainly not a problem for you. After some time of this, I shall be able to go to the Minister with proof that it would be unwise to weed people out for one flaw in their character. Which means you two will keep your jobs instead of being turned out with 'unstable' stamped all over you. And I won't have to watch a considerable amount of money being thrown down the drain. Not to mention a considerable amount of effort on my part."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Now," Cowley was saying, watching them both very closely, "I don't want any sudden changes in you. This has to be done slowly and carefully-are you paying attention, Bodie?-for

we don't want to scare this bunch off. No real changes at first, apart from cutting down on the number of girls you go out with. Get a little bit careless, you know the kind of thing, the things that get you pair ribbed unmercifully round here. Oh, aye, no need to be so surprised. I know all about the rumours and the joking that goes on about you two."

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

"What rumours?" Bodie, barricaded.

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

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

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

Bodie whipped round to stare at Cowley, refusing to believe what he had spent so much time and effort refusing to see or hear. "Who? ESESES Who the fuck's been coming to you with lies like **11** that? Me and Doyle haven't done a thing, not a £3£3£3 single sodding thing and not one of them can say any different. Never laid so much as a finger on him, not for sex, anyway."

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

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

"Och, what d'you think I am, Bodie? All the nights when you've slept at Doyle's flat and vice versa, all the times you've gone 'to the country' with one another, when neither one of the pair of you ever showed the blindest bit of interest in the countryside before I paired you off. Aye, I

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know what I did, when I put you two together. I said at the time that a good partnership is like a marriage and never a truer word was said. You know fine well I've never cared about what you did, as long as the doors were locked and you didn't take out an advertisement in the Times. Now we're wasting time because of your fit of the vapours, Bodie, and I've got far too much to do to be raking over this time and again. I want the bastards that are going through our security teams like worms through an apple. And you two are the best means at my disposal and I do mean disposal, Bodie. You'll leave this department when I damn well please, and not a second before, so you can just wipe that look off your face and get on with your job-before you end up so blacklisted that not even the Americans will employ you. Here, take these files and study them, they'll give you all the background you'll need on the pattern of blackmail. And this one, too. While you're convincing everyone that you've gone decidedly lavender, you can be running this arms dealer to ground—I want to discuss a wee matter with him and he's £3£3£3 being less than co-operative."

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Bodie sat in his seat, a louring Sphinx, while £3£3£3 Doyle gathered up the various files. A scant glance in Doyle's direction, and then Bodie was on his feet, a storm of hermetically sealed anger, the fury wiped from his face and his eyes, bespoken only by his excessive display of control. "Will that be all, sir?" he asked, making Doyle snap round to stare at him, this mild military blandness unexpected.

> Cowley nodded, watching them both like a zoo keeper at the lion's den. "For the time being, Bodie, ave, that's all."

> "Then I shall be on my way, sir. After all, I do still have a job to do, haven't I?"

> Even the door was closed with quiet decorum, leaving disquiet blooming. "Go after him, Doyle," was all Cowley said, forbearing to comment upon the insult that had shouted so loudly from behind the quiet of Bodie's words.

> "In a minute. There is one more thing, sir," this, as he draped himself with studied insolence on the rim of the desk. "And that's the question of why you're sticking your neck out on this. Altruism's not exactly your style, is it-sir?"

> "You had better not be accusing me of altruism, Doyle. If I get rid of all the people the pow-

ers-that-be decide are too risky because of whom they choose to...dally with, then that's just the thin edge of the wedge. What shall they come up with next, the Minister and his cronies, that I'll have to sack someone for? There's not a single person in this department who'd stand too close an examination, not if you're going to be politically righteous about it. Get a move on, Doyle, before our young Mr. Bodie has waylaid every woman in London just to prove his point."

"On my way." But he paused going out the door, sheaf of folders under his arm, hand on doorknob, eyes on Cowley, his old copper's instincts digging for whatever the Old Man was hiding. "The long-term benefits of the Department then, sir?"

Cowley didn't acknowledge him, bar a mumbled "What else could it be?"

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

"Hold your horses!" Doyle yelled over the gunning of the engine, wrenching the door open and hurling himself in over the stench of tyres burning themselves on concrete. "Christ, like a bat out of hell, you are. Where are we going in such a hurry anyway?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Get out."

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

"I'll break your neck if you don't."

"Threatening Her Majesty's agent? Tut, tut, Bodie."

Bodie turned towards him, a smile full of vicious promise making him ugly. "Threat? Who said anything about a threat, Raymond old chum? Friendly warning. Just count it as a friendly warning."

The last time Doyle had seen such friendly warning, he'd had his cheekbone shattered by steel-capped boots. The anger from then rose, suddenly, an eruption from a wound never healed, the unvented fury from his helplessness that night. "Yeah? Well, let me give you a friendly warning right back, Bodie. You see this?" he grabbed Bodie's hand, forced it to touch the disfigured cheek. "You feel that?" as Bodie grabbed his hand back, stuffing it into his pocket as if to hide the memory of that broken flesh. "You've always wondered where I got that, haven't you? Queerbashers gave that to me one night when I was walking home. And d'you know what I did about it, Bodie? Nothing, absolutely sweet F. A. I let them do me, because I was too fucking scared to stand up for meself and too fucking ashamed as well. Told my dad it was one of the local bully boys that did it, after my money. Shame, Bodie, that's what that lump on my faftafa cheek's always meant to me. Shame that I never 13 stood up for myself and shame that I was queer. ${\tt £3£3£3}$ And if we do what you want to do, it'll be no different from me running home with my tail between my legs the night they did this to me. It's the same thing all over again, Bodie. Except this time, I'm not running. This time, I'm going to get them back for what they did to me. D'you hear me, Bodie?"

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

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

"Don't you call me a coward, you bastard. I'm not going in there like a lamb to the slaughter, which makes me clever, not a fucking cow-

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ard. Anyway, you're the one that let them do you over the first time, not me."

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

"All right," he said, "all right." He ran his hands through his hair, then propped his arm in the open window of the sweltering car, his mouth resting on his fist. "We're going to kill each other at this rate, aren't we? Which means we'd better get this sorted out—and bloody fast £3£3£3 as well."

"Nothing to sort out," Bodie muttered, look-14 £3£3£3 ing straight ahead, his body language denying Doyle's very existence. "You're a queer, been one from the start and never told me. Let me mess about with you, thinking you were just a mate and all the time—"

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

> "Look, Doyle, I don't know what you get up to when you're with blokes, but for me, it's purely physical. Sometimes I don't feel like being all gentle and romantic, sometimes I don't feel like whispering sweet nothings and spending a for

tune on dinner and flowers and the theatre and what-have-you. And that's when I'd go to one of the clubs and pick a bloke up. Someone who knew the ropes, someone who wouldn't complicate things like a bird or a fairy would. It was just for hard shagging. And I'm not going to let them label me as a queer for the rest of my life just so's they can catch a few measly blackmailers."

"What about the chance to let other blokes like us not worry about being kicked out if they're caught?"

"That shining armour of yours must be absolutely roasting in heat like this. Gone to your head, has it? Or've you just found yourself another bloody crusade, Lionheart?"

There was silence for a minute, then Doyle turned to look at him, willing Bodie to turn round, pouring all his will into it, into the movement it would take for Bodie to turn his head, face him, look at him, let him see those deep eyes...

Very slowly, the sun kissing the milkiness of his skin, casting jaggy shadows where his eyelashes cut the light, Bodie finally, inch by inch, yielded to the dark spell Doyle was working on him. There was no speech, only the barrelling sounds of traffic going by and fractious children whining after a too-hot day at the park. Doyle looked at him for long moments, while families straggled past their open car windows, until there was enough hubbub outside to give them privacy.

"You really are worried over this, aren't you?" was what he finally said, his own temper subsided under the difficulties he could see plotted out for years ahead, all of it revealed in the darkness of Bodie's eyes. "It really bothers you that people are going to call you a queer."

"Don't tell me it wouldn't bother you? Give over, Doyle."

"Course it bothers me. But being listed as 'unstable' bothers me a hell of a lot more. Look, Bodie, face it. If we do this job, the worst that can happen is that they'll fire us for being homosexuals. If we refuse to do this job, you heard Cowley. They'll say we're as mad as hatters and security risks to boot. And we won't be able to get jobs as lollipop men if that happens. Anyway, the way this is being done, after it's all over, we can claim we were just undercover.

Claim it was all one of those hush-hush jobs MI6 is so in love with."

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

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

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

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

"Why d'you do it?"

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

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

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

"So... So why do you sleep with blokes? You didn't seem to think much of my reason."

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

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

"What's that supposed to mean?" Stung, Doyle lashed out, biting sarcasm dripping as caustically as the acid disillusionment gnawing his belly raw. "Oh, how could I forget. That's right. The great butch Bodie's not a queer. No, not him, he's no fairy. He just buggers men, that's all. What's the matter, Bodie? Have I got GARAGE hold of the wrong end of the stick, is that it? It's **15** not that you bend blokes over, it's that you lift £3£3£3 your knees for anyone who'll ask, isn't it? And you can't handle people finding out that great big butch Bodie, the stud of CI5 is just another ginger who claws and miaows and spreads her legs for a fella. What's your name, sweetheart? Wilhemina? Or Phillipa? Yeh, you look like a Phillipa. Call you Pippa when you were in the Army, did they? Call you—"

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

Doyle didn't move.

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

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

"I swear I'll do you, Ray, if you don't get out."

It took them a moment to register the sound, training taking over as Doyle snagged the radio. "4.5"

"17 Wickham Street and on your bikes! Stewart's got Fergheal Malloy and O'Riordan and they've got an entire family at gunpoint. Move!"

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

HE WONDERED IF THE STAINS WOULD EVER COME OUT OF THE PARQUET FLOOR, or if there'd always have to be a rug casually scattered there to cover the splatter of blood. It had been messy, hideously messy, making his bones ache with man's inhumanity to man. He had wanted to kill that bastard where he'd found him, wanted it so badly he could taste the blood in his mouth and smell death on the vicious little man who had done what he'd done to the young girl. His gun was still dangling from his fingers as he stared out the window, his back to the room now as the others finished the ugly task of mopping up the mess. There was that unmistakeable sound, fafaes the wet cabbage noise of head hitting canvas **16** stretcher, another dead body on its way to the £3£3£3 mortician's knife.

"Ray?"

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

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

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

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

"This time." Doyle wiped the sweat from his forehead, his weary hand leaving a smear of blood to brand him. He stared at his hands, the gun in one, the blood on the other. "Out, out damned spot, Bodie? It's called winning when

you wanted to kill, you just didn't do it? Not much of a world, is it then?"

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

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

Doyle caught the quickest glimpse of what Bodie had seen on McCabe's face and cursed, not quietly. He went after Bodie, as he had done just the afternoon before, although that felt at least half a lifetime ago. "Bodie!" he bellowed, hoarse from lack of sleep and the length of report he'd had to give Cowley. "Bodie! Slow down, you half-Irish idiot!"

He was, not surprisingly, ignored by Bodie, although all the lingering CI5 people paid him the fullest attention. Like brush fires, flurries of gossip erupted in his wake as he ran down the stairs at full tilt, chasing after and shouting at someone who had seemed even more distraught than he. The rumour mill went into overdrive. small words beginning their slow meander from mouth to ear to mouth, from CI5 rest room, to the pub at lunch time, to the ear of the 'casual' listener, to the mouth of the man who was always willing to pay for such intriguing information on government men falling from a state of grace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'LL DO IT." That was it. The sum total of further discussion on the subject, then Bodie shut his mouth and kept his own counsel, stonewalling every attempt Doyle made to thrash the situation out. Conferences were held, strictly, coldly business, stratagems were refined, specific times and places were set up, until they had a timetable for this 'coming out'. And the armed neutrality between them was as comfortable as the trenches at the Somme and as murky. All the old easy familiarity was gone, replaced by a calculated control of contact. It was a mirror now, of what had been before. Now, it was Doyle who would touch, repeating what Bodie had done to him. They were seconded to a very hush-hush department, the kind that hadn't been discovered by the Press and thus had no name yet. They knew they were being watched, playing to fatas their unseen audience, Bodie filling the rôle with **17** panache, but always from a distance, as if his £3£3£3 mind had nothing in common with what his body was doing. And always, always, with that moment of tautness, when he would turn, and catch one of his own, one of CI5 staring at him...

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

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

"THREE WEEKS. THREE FUCKING WEEKS AND NOT A SINGLE NIBBLE." Doyle threw himself down on a chair, tugging his tie off, shedding his jacket

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and kicking his shoes off with a grace of motion that drew Bodie, until he reminded himself that this was just a job, just a set-up. Just a way of being blackmailed to stop other blackmailing.

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

"You'll hit them with your handbag."

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

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

"Then I won't make you anything, will I? And before you think it, you can forget getting up in the middle of the night for something to eat. It's bad enough you having to spend the night here without having to listen to you banging and clat-£3£3£3 tering around at all hours."

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Doyle went in to the kitchen, pulling his socks $\mathfrak{L3L3L3}$ off and tossing them into the corner where the launderette bag lurched against the wall, dropping his belt over the back of the chair, whistling to himself as he washed his hands. He concentrated, fiercely, on the tune, leaving no room in him for the tension. From the living room came faint noises, of Bodie making himself less uncomfortable in a house where he'd always been so much at ease. The tension began creeping into Doyle again as he thought about these past few weeks and how much they were both paying just to keep the Minister off their backs. And to keep himself from running, the way he had the night he'd had his face kicked in. The humiliation could still ambush him, when he least expected it, even in the cheery brightness of his kitchen, the sound of Panorama filtering tinnily from the television in the sitting room, the food hissing and sizzling away in the pan. Funny, in a way, how he couldn't for the life of him remember the bloke's face. But he could still remember how he had tasted, shoving into his mouth, while he had knelt there, taking it, hoping to escape a beating, shit-scared and sweating, horribly aware that this bloke was

built like a tank and could kill him without getting out of breath. So he had stayed there, knees aching and cold in a puddle, in a doorway that stank of stale urine, sucking someone out of fear, his mouth filled with humiliation, his ears filled with even more, as the other fellow had put him in the gutter. He'd remembered that night, over and over again, more since this operation had started than he had in the years before. He laughed at himself, not gently, mocking his own Sir Galahad notions that had driven him to join the Police when that night on his knees had taught him that being tough was nowhere near enough. He never had caught the bastard who'd done his face in, even after he'd sucked him off, but he'd put away enough bastards in his place.

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

He took an inordinate amount of time over putting a simple supper together, using the ritual of cooking to ease him from the outside world into the security of his own home. If all were to go according to his hopes, Bodie would look through the books, getting more and more turned on by the pictures he saw and the words he read. The harsher memories of this evening would fade under the onslaught of sexuality, then a little careful seduction, the pose in the doorway, the right degree of sexual heat exuding when he sat beside Bodie, and they could

begin. They could touch and kiss, let this grow between them. Use the sex to go back to the beginning, when there had been the tingle of anticipation between them. Before being forced into it had made Bodie run a mile.

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

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

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

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

Bodie hated to be trapped. Bodie hated to be tied down. Bodie hated to not be in control of his life. Ergo-give that control back. Stamp on his own temper, his own inclination to bend the

world to the way he saw it, and give Bodie the lead. Within strict limitations, of course. Bodie swallowed and Doyle watched the ripple of flesh, thinking how it would be to be in Bodie's mouth when he swallowed like that. If he swallowed like that, the voice of caution muttered, reminding Doyle of Bodie's attitude to sex with men. The voice was ignored, completely routed by the sensual delight of watching Bodie and the imaginings of what it could be between them. Oh, yes, that's how he would do it: let Bodie take the lead, prove to him that it could work between them, give this form substance. This coming out hadn't been anywhere near as bad as he'd expected, nothing more really than some nasty comments and vicious jokes. Less, really, than he'd had either as an art student defecting to join the Establishment or as a policeman shopping his fellow officers. And he had his haven where he belonged: with Bodie, with CI5, with Cowley unchanged towards him. There was a part of him, too, that was revelling in the thumbing his nose at everyone, enjoying immensely the ripples of shock that spread in his wake, laughing at those who tried to mock him. £3£3£3 He wanted Bodie to have that, wanted him to **19** enjoy the freedoms they were buying, instead of £3£3£3 this constant living on tenterhooks. Look at him now, sitting there tense and stiff, uneasy instead of relaxed. Stupid, really, to fight it so, when they could be having so much better a life. He had no idea what the television was burbling, doubted very much if Bodie knew either. The air between them was beginning to thicken with the draw of attraction and Doyle feasted his eyes on Bodie, willing him again to turn, to look, to open up...

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

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

Brusquely, he began setting the room up for occupation, but Doyle wasn't about to accept those battle lines. "Got a better idea," he said, arousal making his voice deeper. "Go upstairs together, leave the curtains open, as if we'd just

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forgotten about them, and give anyone watching an eyeful."

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

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

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

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

A back, silently, eloquently turned towards him.

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

"What d'you want me to say, Ray?" Bodie E3E3E3 erupted, pivoting round to face Doyle, going half-20 way into defensive stance. "What d'you want to £3£3£3 hear? That I fancy you? All right, so I fancy you something rotten. So now you've heard it. Stick poor Bodie in a situation where he can't have any sex and he'll pant after anything under 50 and still breathing."

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

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

> "Christ, yeah," Doyle breathed, eyes dilating as if drugged, shutting out everything but the sight of Bodie, willing, finally willing and waiting, for him. A few steps and he was there, right there, plastered to Bodie's front, his prick pressing against Bodie's, feeling his own erection grow against the heated movement of Bodie's cock, lengthening, hardening. He ground himself against that, hardness on hardness, hands grip-

ping convulsively at the ripeness of arse, clutching Bodie to him, mouth marking the translucent whiteness of skin. "Want you," he murmured, and Bodie's hands came round to hold him. "Want to suck-" he took a tempting earlobe into his mouth, delivering on his promise, "-your cock down until you're screaming to come in me. Want to be under you, on my knees, you fucking me till I can't stand up. Or on my back, so I can see you when-" he took one of Bodie's hands, shoved it into the seam in his jeans, at the back, where the fabric pressed onto his hole, making him squirm, making Bodie's cock leap in helpless lust, "-you shove your prick up me."

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

"Want you, Bodie. Want to hold you and never let you go."

And abruptly, suddenly, they were alone, separate, disparate, isolated, even in each other's company. Doyle heard himself all over again, heard what it was that he had said. The words were a fulcrum, the declaration forcing upon them the moment when he would have to choose to be what Bodie had called all the other men he had had sex with, or the moment he would risk it all and go for broke. He had waited for so long to have Bodie, the ache more than merely physical, although his body was protesting loud and long at its abandonment. From the first, almost, he'd wanted more from Bodie than the anonymous or casual encounters he usually had to settle for. He had always wanted to build on their partnership, not around it. Or

under it, where it would erode the foundations until one day, suddenly, they would turn round and discover they had nothing left.

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

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

Because hell may have no fury greater than a woman scorned, but he'd take that over a furious Doyle any day of the week. And Doyle had spoken the verboten word. Love. Not in his dic-

tionary, as Bodie was so fond of saying, not in his book at all. To have Doyle, loving him...

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

And it never even occurred to him to wonder at the way he looked at Doyle, nor the way he risked his life for him, nor the way he already fatas put Doyle first in everything. It never occurred **21** to him at all, for then he would have to question £3£3£3 that most intrinsic of things, his own self-identity. Only queers loved other men. Only queers actually set up home with other men. Only queers were sweet and soft and romantic with other men. And he wasn't a queer. Not a cream puff, not him. Fucking men occasionally didn't make a man queer, didn't even make him bisexual like Doyle claimed to be. Just made him a man who couldn't do without it, even if it meant fucking blokes.

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

"Coward? Coward am I? I'll show you-" Doyle was inundated by him, his weight, the

smell of his skin, the press of his hands, the thrust of his hips. So sudden and so extreme, Doyle was on the floor before he knew what hit him. His discarded shoe was digging into the small of his back, the coins in Bodie's pocket were cutting into his hip. Bodie was forcing him, turning him, using superior weight to change this into a bout of rude, rough sex. and Doyle was having none of it. He brought his knee up, sharp, cruel and very, very effective. He saw without satisfaction, the tears spring into Bodie's eyes as hands clutched protectively around his manhood.

"If that's how your idea of a good time, mate, then it's a wonder you've still got a prick to use." He was rising to his feet, nimbly tidying clothing till there was not the slightest hint of what they had come so close to doing before he had opened his mouth and had Bodie leap in with both feet. "Doesn't say much for you, does it? Jumping me like a bull in a brothel. What do you think I am, just another convenient hole for you to fill? Just another arse to be buggered, never mind who's attached to it? Pathetic, that's what you are, if $\mathfrak{L3L3L3}$ all you can do is resort to what amounts to rape. 22 Well, I'll tell you something, *mate*. I've had it up £3£3£3 to here—" he bent down, chopped at Bodie's throat, "-with you. All that flirting at the beginning, that was never meant to get anywhere, was it? All you wanted was to cop a quick feel or have a good grope. You were never interested in taking it beyond that, were you? Too much of a fucking coward. Well," he whispered, right into Bodie's face, giving no sympathy for the sight of pain-sheened skin, ignoring the wheezing bellows of Bodie's breathing, "you might be ashamed of being queer, but I'm not, not any more. You wanted to sleep on the sofa? You go right ahead, mate, don't let me stop you. Because d'you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to be a good little fairy, Bodie, and I'm going to go out and pick up the first half-way decent bloke I can find. Then I'm going to bring him back here, and I'm going to take him upstairs. He's going to fuck me, Bodie, while you sit down here, nice and quiet, and listen to us. Sound travels in this place, so you should be able to hear every single noise. And you can sit there and think that it could've been you up there with me, if you hadn't been such a wally. Nobody forces me, Bodie, not even you can get away with that."

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

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

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

"Why—make you jealous, would it?"

"Don't be disgusting."

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

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

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

"Emm, don't mean to be nosy, but who's he?" pleasant voice, pleasant accent, West Country by the sound of him.

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

Doyle put the lights out as he went past, switching others on as he progressed upstairs. Anyone outside, watching, would think they had struck a goldmine-not just two queers in the

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department, but ones prone to adventuring, too. And from the noises beginning to filter down from upstairs, Doyle was no cowering mouse in bed. Bodie's skin crawled when he heard the first shoe hit the floor. His stomach clenched into a knotted, ulcerous fist when he heard the first low moan. And his heart stuttered when he heard Ray laugh-

"Him? You've got to be joking! Queers scare the shite out of him. Anyway, I want a man to fuck me-"

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

MORNING WAS ALREADY WELL UNDER WAY, HEAT AND CAR FUMES RISING IN EQUAL MEASURE WITH THE TEMPERS of those unable to escape the city's cage before they saw each other again. As if from behind battlements, they stared at each other, Bodie poised on the way out, Doyle standing his ground in front of him. They met each other eye to eye, but there was nothing in the look, only the stonewalling set up for both protection and attack. A long-stretched moment crawled past leadenly, yet neither one spoke, each knowing, in his heart, that the other should speak first, should apologise first. Should first admit the pain...

A tumult of bodies, tumbling through the door in vociferous abandon, bumping into Bodie, shoving him out of the way with good-natured curses, coming to an abrupt stop as they saw who else was there, and as the turgid atmosphere hit them. Not even the prospect of a long, cold pint down the local could re-inflate their spirits, so they were muted, words banal and cautious as they stepped past, on their way to hurry round the corner where the speculation could begin.

Bodie felt the whispers of unsaid gossip pluck at the hair on the nape of his neck. He didn't want this, refused the intrusion, refused to be made public domain like so much flotsam. The decision had been made, last night, to stop being pushed hither and yon by the flow of the river. He'd never just drifted in his life, now was far too late for this old dog to fall into that old

trick. But still, he waited for Ray to say something, anything, that he could answer. Something that he could toss a flip comment at, turn the second around, get them talking again, perhaps get them to where they could perhaps at least take a look at this whole tangled skein. It wouldn't take much, really, just a couple of words, although it would help tremendously if one of those words was 'sorry'. Just an opportunity to go back to what they had had before that godawful day in Cowley's office. Wipe the slate clean, start all over again, and this time, not let himself touch at all, ever, and not let Doyle start all this crap about them being together and never letting go.

Doyle could see nothing of what was going on behind Bodie's imperturbable mask of disdain. His instincts had failed him, the lines of communication severed weeks ago, the minute Cowley had opened that folder and read from its list of names. Under his own burning betrayal, understanding was fledgling rising, reminding him of how deeply and how well he felt for this man frowning at him from the door. All it would take was for Bodie to wipe that look off fatas his face, the expression that asked from under 23which slimy rock Doyle had crawled. All it would £3£3£3 take was some indication of regret for going at him like that. A simple sorry, that was all that was needed, and then he would be able to let go of his defensive fury, to see what drove Bodie so far away from the minutest hint of love.

"Bodie," he began, surprising himself with his own willingness to open negotiations, "listen ... " But that having been said, there didn't seem to be much to go with it, until he counted up how many times this man had hinted at affection, or involvement, only to run when he was finally offered it. Forced into it, his conscience kicked him. "About what you did last night... Look, I'm willing to let it pass, if—"

"You're willing to let pass what I did? After all your belching about this fucking oppo, you go out and blow everything? Including that whey-faced turd last night, I'll warrant. But you're willing to let pass what I did? All I did, Ray Doyle, was give you what you've been after from the start."

"What I've been after? Who was it who was always feeling up who, eh, Bodie? I couldn't turn my back on you but you turned into a bloody octopus."

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"Only after you ponced around in denims like those, complete with strategic holes, of course. Oh, yeh, Mr. Look-but-don't-touch Raymond Doyle. Pricktease, that's what you are. You're lucky I stopped when I did last night and didn't just give you what you were really after."

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

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

"That's easy enough done, isn't it? All I have to do is disconnect my brain and think with my balls. That's about as deep as your view of life f3f3f3 goes, isn't it, Bodie? Well, you can keep it, mate. **24** Christ," he said, horror slowly dawning in the £3£3£3 back of his mind telling him what they were doing here, what was happening here, but his mouth streamed on, his anger too hot to let him slow down enough for his brain to catch up to it. He was hurling the words at Bodie, vicious from his pain. "And to think I actually used to believe that the biggest problem was working out whether or not you'd have sex with blokes. The biggest problem, mate, is that you're a pathetic little poof who's too scared to even admit that to himself."

> "And the biggest problem with you, Doyle, is that you're a selfish bastard who refuses to see beyond the end of his own nose. Here," and now

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

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

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

This time, he let Bodie go.