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PART II: SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

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IT WAS GOING WRONG, and he knew it. What he didn't know was how to mend it.

"Bodie," Doyle began, getting only an abstracted grunt in reply. "Pay attention, Bodie," he joked, casting a worried glance at his lover whilst continuing to polish the chrome on his bike.

"What?" Bodie said, not looking at him.

It was that kind of thing that was niggling at Doyle. There had been no argument, no falling out, nothing, but now he felt as if it were all slipping away, dissolving in his hands like salt in water. He couldn't get a grip on it, couldn't even see it, but he knew it was there. Felt it, every time Bodie went off into a world of his own, or ogled some bloke-or some bird, or both together—in the street. Or when Bodie would refuse an offer of a night out, disappearing for however long their leave lasted, coming back to him some time later. Sometimes a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks, but the old togetherness was becoming worn and patchy, an uncertain rug under their feet, bare spots to trip the unwary. Well, he was wary now, had to be. Because if he weren't, Doyle had a feeling he was going to loose Bodie.

It bothered Doyle, that Bodie hadn't even noticed the long pause, that Bodie was so badly attuned to him that no comment had been made about his own moodiness and silence. "Look," he finally said, blurting it out, "there's something wrong with you and you'd better tell me what."

Bodie looked at Doyle then, a cold stare, of the sort usually reserved for commanding officers who had boot-licked their way to the top. "Been watching Agony again, have you?" Bodie went back to his newspaper, cutting Doyle out, a page turning, then he rose to his feet. "I'm off," he announced, baldly, not looking to see what effect his words had on his partner. "I'll see you at work on Thursday, all right?"

"What's wrong with seeing me tonight, or tomorrow or Wednesday?"

"We're off-duty. And I don't want to live in your pocket, Doyle." Which was approximately opposite of the truth, but safer by far to say.

Doyle polished a square inch of chrome furiously, frowning all the while, and then saying, actually coming right out and saying it. "You want out, then?"

"Of CI5? Nah. It's not much, but it's the best game in town, you know that."

"It wasn't that I meant, so don't come over all innocent with me, Bodie." Doyle looked him straight in the eye this time, defying him to either lie or say yes. "D'you want out of us?"

That pulled Bodie up short. "Want out? Christ, Ray, don't be so fucking stupid. What would I want out for? Eh? Tell me that?"

"Yeh, but that's the problem, innit? I can't tell you that, but I can see you gettin' itchy feet. You're goin' to walk soon, aren't you, Bodie? You're going to leave me."

And Bodie heard the unspoken: Just like everybody else. He groaned, turned away, stared out of the window for a moment, then turned back to Doyle. "Look, love," he said, knowing Doyle needed the comfort of words that were usually confined to the bedroom, "I don't want out. It's just... All this—" and his encompassing arm took in the flat, the cosy scene of them working on the bike together like an old married couple, the perfectly normal life outside the job, "it's not enough, not for me. And it's not your fault, there's nothing you can do about that," he rushed to reassure, "it's me."

"So I'm not good enough, is that it? You bastard, you've been going on and on about how much you love me, and all the time you want someone better? Tell me, Bodie darling, who am I when you're in bed with me? Eh? Who do you pretend I am?" The pain ripped

through the room, stripping Doyle bare, showing a depth to him that was white from being kept hidden so long and so well.

"It's not that at all, Ray and don't you go twisting what I'm saying. I'm trying to explain-

"Oh yeh? Trying to explain what? Trying to explain that I'm not enough, that I can't give you enough? Then you tell me this, Bodie. I fuck when you want to fuck, I hold you when you want me to hold you, I stick by you when no-one else'll touch you with a barge-pole. I'm the one who listens to you after a job, or when you're hurt. I'm the one you come to if you need anything and I'm the one who gives you every single fucking thing you've ever asked for. And now you're telling me that's not enough? So go on, Prince Charming, you tell me what is enough. You tell me what you need that I'm not giving you."

"You don't want to know, Doyle." Warning, loud and clear as an air raid siren.

Doyle ignored it, ploughing on. "Don't want to know? I just fucking asked you, so how can you say I don't want to know? What you mean, Bodie, is that you don't want to tell me."

"Yeh, that's it. You're right, I don't want to tell you, I don't want you to know. And if you don't like it, then tough titty, Doyle, because that's the way it is." Bodie's voice was growing bitter now, with the disappointment of a relationship that was proving false for him. No matter how much he loved Doyle, what they had simply wasn't enough to fulfil him completely. "You don't own me, mate," he said, tinged with something like sadness, "and don't you forget it."

"Now hang on just a minute, Bodie! You owe me an explanation, mate. You can't just walk out of here-"

"Can't I? You just watch me, Doyle. You just stand there and watch me!"

The door slammed shut, cutting them off, one from the other, only the echoing anger of their words left to keep Doyle company.

Slowly, he sat down, picked up the polish and began to buff a piece that was dull and tarnished, as if by shining that up, he could take the bitter tarnish off his own life.

Bodie's heart was still racing, thundering in his chest, breath fast and shallow. He walked for a long time, needing to get the anger out of the way, needing to let the pain subside. Christ, but he couldn't take much more of this! But he couldn't leave Doyle either. Caught between a rock and a hard place, nowhere to turn, nowhere to go, and all he could see was the slow acid erosion of his relationship with Doyle.

At the door of the Club, Bodie hesitated, thinking about the consequences of going in there, running the same old argument round and round again. It was this secret that had come between them, this secret that was destroying the trust they both needed. But then his mind cleared, and he recognised that it wasn't his secret that was the problem, it was the fact that it had to be kept secret, that it was something he couldn't tell Doyle about. That was where the problem lay, and there was a way out of that. He could tell Ray, lay his cards out flat on the table, and if Ray couldn't handle him having another outlet, one that Bodie knew from life-experience that he couldn't be complete without, then Ray could walk. But the choice would have to be Ray's, because Bodie couldn't make the break. Not for all the tea in China could he even contemplate leaving Ray, the furious arguments and slow dissolution notwithstanding.

It was the same decision Bodie came to every time he stood on this doorstep. Tonight, though, the metallic bite of fear filling his mouth made him wonder if this time, he might actually do it.

The thought terrified him, and so he pushed it aside, opting instead for the thing he had stormed out on Doyle for. Bodie raised his hand, knocked in the accepted code, and was permitted to enter.

It was worse the next day for Doyle, and the next, and by Thursday, his misery had worked itself up into a fine temper.

"Oh, look at what the cat dragged in," was what Doyle said by way of greeting when he bumped into Bodie in the corridor. "Glad to see CI5's finest managed to find his way to work all by himself."

"And good morning to you an' all, mate,"

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Bodie muttered to the retreating back, praying that Cowley had a ton of work for them to do, not relishing the threat of spending the day stuck in a car with Doyle if all they had to do was sit and watch some house. And hoping, frantically hoping, that this was nothing more than another of Doyle's spectacular sulks that would blow over eventually. It was one thing for Bodie to say that he could take anything, it was quite something else to bear the cutting edge of Doyle's anger.

A carbon copy of the day that had started their relationship in the first place, it was a stultifyingly routine job: one that would have been boring, but for the tension that snapped and crackled between them, the simplest exchange turned into vilification and argument. Part of Bodie wanted to argue, to fight back tooth and claw. but he didn't. Couldn't. because it was his fault. It was Bodie who had attacked Doyle's masculinity (in Doyle's eyes, anyway, Bodie knew), it was Bodie who had said that what they had together wasn't enough. And it was because there wasn't enough trust in Bodie for him to tell Doyle why it was all falling apart around them.

Their relationship was winding down, to an ending, or winding up, to a confession, and thence, an ending. Either way, it was over, or would be, soon enough. Bodie could see that quite clearly in the masked pain every time Doyle looked at him, could feel it in his own enervating depression as he contemplated coming out into the open and watching Doyle walk away in disgust. There was always a chance, of course, that Doyle would want the same things he did, or more likely, be willing to turn a blind eye. But how long would that last, with Doyle's possessiveness and jealousies?

Bodie glanced at Doyle, who was standing beside him, the perfect picture of the perfect team, but they both knew differently. The old tacit communication was gone, strangled by a lack of trust and an anger fed by pain. Doyle's face was drawn and pinched, bags under the eyes and lines there that Bodie had never noticed before. The lips were tightcompressed, clenched shut to keep God knew what bloodying comments in, words always one of Doyle's more lethal skills. It was, for

both of them, quite simply unbearable. Bodie didn't want to upset Doyle, didn't want to bring him anything but pleasure and comfort and belonging, but Bodie could see no way of accomplishing that without destroying what little they had left.

"Fancy a drink tonight?" Bodie asked out of the corner of his mouth, not turning full round, not with Cowley's gimlet glare mere vards away.

Doyle felt no such constraints. He turned, abandoning all pretence of scouring blank walls for hidden terrorists and delivered a glower of which even Cowley would have been proud.

Bodie wouldn't budge. "Go on," he whispered, "come and have a drink with me. We could go to that Indian place you like. Or even better, we could go round—

"I don't want a fucking drink with you, Bodie. In fact, I don't even want to see your face or hear you voice, d'you get me?" It was the most Doyle had said to Bodie all day, and it revealed as much agony as it caused. "Fuck off, Bodie, and find yourself some other mug to mess about."

"I'm not messing you about—"

"Well, well, well, it does have a brain after all," Doyle said with all the sarcasm at his command. "Yeh, you're fucking right you're not messing me about. Not any more. As of Monday night, if you want to be precise about it."

A fist of panic hit Bodie in the gut, Doyle's hissed fury more than the usual huff, far more than any mere temper tantrum. "C'mon, Ray," he whispered, the beginnings of desperation churning him up, "don't. It was just a fight, we've had them before-"

"But we won't be having them again."

"All right, so I won't argue with you again, that's fine. But you've got to talk to me—"

"Oh, I'll talk to you, all right. On the job. But if you come near me after work, the only thing I'll say to you is stuff you don't want to hear."

"Ray—"

"I said," and Doyle was dangerously furious now, "fuck off, Bodie."

Bodie subsided, battered by Doyle's unmitigated anger and by Cowley's frowning

stare. Silent as the tomb, Bodie stood beside Doyle, and knew that they'd never been farther apart emotionally than they were right now. Even at the very beginning, when Doyle had been hostile and contemptuous of an ex-merc gun-runner, it had never been like this. Back then, the hatred had been impersonal, simply directed at Bodie for what he had once been. But this-this was personal, intensely so, piercing every chink in Bodie's armour, cutting him to shreds. Cowley, bowing unctuously, was playing civil servant to the hilt, seeing the ubiquitous foreign diplomat out the door, the outside team taking over. Bodie and Doyle were suddenly alone.

"Ray, listen to me. Okay, so you're angry with me—"

"Always this quick, are you?" Again, aciddrenched sarcasm, Doyle giving no quarter.

"But at least let me explain."

"Oh, you want me to come and have a drink with you and waste my evening off to sit and listen to you come up with a pack of lies." Doyle laughed then, very nastily. "Why? So that you can salve my ego and get me back into bed with you? What's the matter, Bodie? Worried that your on-tap source of sex is going to dry up on you?" His gaze raked Bodie from top to bottom, concluding with a contemptuous sneer at Bodie's groin. "Oh, what a shame. My heart fucking bleeds for you."

With that, Doyle was walking, boot-heels clicking on the parquet floor, jacket flapping with the speed of his retreat. Doyle was refusing to take it any more, Bodie lying to him the way he'd seen Bodie lie to a hundred birds. he was damned if he was going to put up with it.

But there was a part of Doyle listening still, hoping that Bodie would come up with an excuse for him to stay, to mend the broken fences before his heart broke.

Bodie said, the one thing that could make Doyle stop, the one thing that Bodie had never said anywhere else before apart from in the bedroom. "I love you, you know that, don't you?"

"Do I?" Doyle said, keeping his back to Bode and his face turned away. Not letting Bodie see, not letting Bodie know how much Doyle needed him. "You've got a fucking peculiar way of showing it."

The voice was right behind Doyle now, breath stirring the lighter curls, tangling in the heavy ringlets at his nape. "Didn't know what else to do. Didn't know how to tell you, did I? I mean, I couldn't just come out and say it, could I?"

"You just did, Bodie. Or was that another bit of strategy?"

"It was desperation, that's what it was. Christ, Doyle, half CI5 is wandering round here, Cowley can hear flies fuck three miles away, and you've got me standing here telling you I love you and complaining that I'm only doing it for show? Come on," he let himself plead, more than willing to beg this man, "come home with me after work. Let me talk to you."

"Got a good excuse all worked out, have you? One of the lines you use on your birds?"

Bodie took a deep breath, exhaled, started the painful process of laying himself out for vivisection by Doyle's less than tender mercies. "No. It'll be the truth, although you won't like it."

"That bad, eh? What is it? A wife and ten kids? A predilection for kiddie-porn?"

"Bad enough."

But Doyle noted that Bodie denied none of it, leaving him to wonder and worry. Doyle was, he considered, an extremely worldly and broad-minded person, but Bodie had not only been round the merry-go-round a few times, the bastard had been on the swings, big dipper and ghost train as well. But if it were really nothing more disgusting than Bodie needing a bit of spice in his life, a variety of men, then he had to decide what he was going to do about it.

Funny, Bodie with women didn't bother him, to the point where that was something that they hadn't even needed to discuss, but the thought of Bodie needing to go to another man emasculated Doyle-and infuriated him. It was all right for some to have these open relationships, but not him, oh, no, not him. Bodie was his, completely or not at all, and Doyle neither could nor would accept half a loaf.

Unless, perhaps, it was half a loaf or none at all. It was that question, that thorn in his

side, that Doyle had to think about. And what his reaction would be if Bodie were willing to stick with him and no-one else, but only if Doyle did the same.

"All right," Doyle finally said, his display of reluctance not entirely for show. "Your house, tonight. We'll be finished here shortly, so I'll come over at seven thirty."

Without giving either Bodie time to argue or himself time to think, Doyle walked away from Bodie and outside, where he wanted to think.

"Come in," Bodie said to him, all darkly handsome in navy blue shirt and trousers, feet still bare, socks in one hand, shoes in the other.

"I'm a bit early," Doyle shrugged, not caring to put Bodie at his ease, still undecided whether or not there was room for anything but hostility in him.

"That's okay," Bodie answered, awkward, uncomfortable because they were talking to each other as if they were near strangers, politeness covering up a profound distance. "You hungry? I've got—"

"Nah, I already had something." Then added, as an afterthought as Doyle often did when he had forgotten his manners in front of strangers or mere colleagues, "Thanks anyway."

Standing marooned in the middle of his living room, Bodie was at a loss. This was, in some ways, worse than outright hostility, because if Doyle were chucking things at him-words or crockery, it made no difference-then at least Doyle was being himself, and feeling something. This indifferent chill was throwing Bodie completely off balance, and he needed something, some prop to get him through this. "A drink then?" he asked, brighter than he should.

Doyle regarded him with all the superciliousness of the mature adult for the gauche and acned teen. "Considering where we end up when we drink, no thanks."

It was like a slap in the face, and Bodie sucked his breath in, whirling round so that Doyle couldn't see his expression—and so that Bodie would resist the temptation to blubber at Doyle's feet. "Well, I'll put the kettle

on then, shall I? Former copper like you wouldn't turn down a cuppa, would you?" And Bodie cringed with embarrassment at himself. He was doing all the worst things, everything he knew he shouldn't and Doyle was going to kill him—

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But Doyle was looking at him with the faintest glimmerings of approbation.

Bodie grinned, delighted, that at least he hadn't made things worse and that he had found something that eased Doyle's rabid displeasure. He bumbled a bit more, making a show of getting tangled with shoes and socks, careful to be utterly charming in his shrugging abandonment of the attempt to finish dressing. "I'm all fingers and thumbs tonight. I think I should give up on these, don't you?"

He waited, not moving until Doyle had given him the smallest of nods, the way he did on the job, when they had to do something Doyle didn't like.

"Right. A cuppa, then?" he asked, still too bright, rubbing his hands like a Vicar at the tea tent.

Doyle said nothing, seating himself on the sofa, wishing that he could simply wave a magic wand and have everything be all right again. But he couldn't. There was nothing for him to do, according to Bodie, and that was something Doyle couldn't forgive the other man for. Doyle was well-acquainted with guilt, knew how to deal with it. And if he had done something wrong, then he could mend that, start doing the right thing instead. But to simply be told that Bodie had been lying to him all this time, and that there was nothing Doyle could do-there was no chance of him simply forgetting that.

The clatter of the cups heralded Bodie's return, and Doyle looked up at him, giving nothing whatever away, letting Bodie know that the onus of proof was upon him, that Bodie was guilty and it was up to him to give Doyle a reason for not passing the harshest of sentences.

The fact that Doyle was searching frantically for loopholes was neither here nor there, and something that Doyle himself was not about to let slip. Bodie had messed him about too much, and Bodie had lied to him, and that

was the one thing he would not forgive. "So you were going to tell me your excuse for all this shite you've been pulling with me."

Bodie didn't answer, postponing the denouement for another few moments, this the hardest thing he'd ever done, SAS, Northern Ireland, Africa all included. "Okay," he said when Doyle stirred, restless, "okay. It's just hard, y'know, to come out and say it. You know, flat out like."

"You managed that today when you wanted to stop me. Or was I right about that as well and it was all just more lies?"

"Nah. I meant what I said today. Never had the balls to say it before, that's all."

There was a long pause, which Bodie filled for himself by busying about with the tea.

"I'm not going to waste my whole evening on this, Bodie," Doyle said, sounding for all the world as if he were bored, whilst his heart trip-hammered away to itself.

Doyle was sitting opposite him on the settee, and Bodie was reminded of the day on Brownie's boat, or any number of times, when Doyle wore sun-glasses and was as frosty and welcoming as ice. Welcoming or not, Bodie knew that Doyle's patience was gone and Bodie had to tell him now.

"Okay," Bodie said again, forgetting all about role playing and machismo, forgetting about pleasing Doyle and thinking about nothing other than having to tell the truth. A lie now might get him out of this particular jam, but Doyle would turn him into mincemeat when he found out. So the truth it had to be, if he had any chance of rekindling the trust between them. "I wasn't buttering you up when I said it wasn't you. You know, me going off like that. It's nothing you're doing, or anything."

Doyle didn't move, barely blinked, completely impassive, focussed intently on analysing every word Bodie said.

"It's more...well, it's something you're not doing. Not that I blame you, or expect you to do it, or anything like that. It's just...there are some things I need and you can't give them me."

"Such as?" The tip of the iceberg indeed, so much hidden under those calm words.

Bodie looked everywhere but at Doyle,

then finally looked Doyle straight in the eye. "Power," he said.

"You what? What the hell are you going on about, Bodie?" But Doyle had an inkling, a small germinating idea, and he wanted to know the rest of it before he permitted himself a reaction. He lashed his temper down tight, and listened.

"Power. And domination. Pain, the kind that's actually pleasure."

"Are you trying to tell me," Doyle said, velvet whisper over steely ire, "that all this crap, all this fuss I've been through is because you're into S&M and were too fucking scared to tell me?"

"Yeh." Not quite defiant, wariness taking the braggadocio out of Bodie's words. "Have been for years."

Almost whispered, a test being given, Doyle asked him: "And if I told you you had to choose either me or it?"

"Then I'd choose you. But I wouldn't be able to keep away from it, and if I did, then I'd go back to being the bloody bamstick I was when I was in Africa. And I won't be like that again, Ray."

"So you're telling me that you'd lie to me? You'd spew your lies about loving me, and then go off somewhere to some big hairy bloke with tattoos and have your arse flogged and your tits clamped?"

"No, because I don't go for big hairy blokes with tattoos," Bodie snapped, regretting his outburst immediately. He didn't want to push his luck: Doyle was actually taking his admission about the S&M quite well, considering the bigotry he usually got from people. "But yeah, to be honest, I'd go back to the Club because I can't give it up any more than you could give up everyday sex."

"The Club? And what the fuck is the club when it's at home?"

Bodie shrugged, feeling like a lamb being led to the slaughter, but having to go all the same, wondering all the while that Doyle hadn't asked the usual questions or raised the usual issues of spurious morality. "It's a private members club, same as all the others, only difference is that in our place, all the members are men and all of us like some pretty specialised stuff."

Doyle leaned back, the pose he adopted during suspect interviews. "What kind of men?"

Another shrug, while his mind raced. Doyle hadn't asked what kind of specialised stuff, but what kind of men. Perhaps Doyle's jealousy was actually going to help here. "Most kinds. A lot of Service blokes, quite a few from the Intelligence Services, doctors, lawyers, Indian Chiefs. All sorts, really."

"And you let anyone who fancies it have a go at you?"

"Not anyone. But sometimes, depending on what I need ... "

A long silence, while Doyle digested this, fingers playing with a loose thread on the inner seam of his jeans. "Why'd you never tell me? Didn't you trust me enough?"

"It wasn't a question of trust!"

"Wasn't it? What else was it then? Something like this and you can't tell me about it? You'd rather fuck the relationship up, bugger the partnership, and all because you didn't trust me enough to stick by you?"

Bodie didn't know how to answer that, so he kept silent.

"What'd you think I was going to, throw up in disgust?" Doyle demanded, temper rising. "Come off it, Bodie, I'm not a shrinking fucking violet."

"Look, Ray, I hinted at it a couple of times, and you weren't interested. And it's not exactly everyone's cup of tea, is it?"

"So you were trying to protect my poor sensibilities. Nice of you," Doyle sneered. "And it must've been some bloody hinting, Bodie, because I never even noticed. What'd you do? Something subtle, like walk out on me and not tell me where you were going?"

Bodie winced, looked down at his shoes.

"I take it, by the way, that that's why you wouldn't come near me for days at a time? Letting the welts heal, were you? Waiting till the bruises had faded so that I wouldn't guess and try to make myself a part of your life there as well?"

"Ray, I've already told you, it had nothing to do with trust." Bodie was shouting, partly because he couldn't bear to hear Ray mock him like that. "Listen, mate, every time I asked you to be a bit harder with me, you'd go

all sweetness and light, and that-well, that told me everything I needed to know."

Doyle glared at him, fiercely, devouring Bodie with his eyes, demanding that all the truth be laid out on the table between them, where he could see it. "Even if you thought I wasn't interested, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you wouldn't understand, that's why! Outsiders never do."

"And what wouldn't I have understood?"

"You want it all, don't you? You want all the gory details. All right, I'll tell you. But don't blame me if you don't like hearing it." He stopped for a breath, composed himself a little against the pain and embarrassment within. "I go both ways, Top and bottom, giver and taker. But a lot of the time that's only because of the way I look. People expect me to be a Top, so I end up doing that a bit more often than I'd like. What I really like is being a bottom, Ray, and don't tell me that it wouldn't have fucked us up royally once you found out that your big tough partner liked to be tied up and made to beg to have his arse thrashed."

"So you decided to wait until things were already up the spout before you trusted me enough to say anything?" Doyle's voice was no longer unadulterated anger. There was something else in there, underneath the fury, mingling with what might have been relief. "You waited until there was nothing left to lose before you'd risk telling me with the truth."

"No. I waited till now because I didn't want to risk you." Bodie rubbed his hand across his face, worn out by emotionalism. "Ray, have you any idea how often I've lost someone because they don't understand about what I need? Because they can't see that what I am in the bedroom or someone's blackroom is only a bit of me, not all of me?"

"Oh, yeah, that's right. Outsiders don't understand." Doyle paused there, waiting until Bodie heard his silence and looked up at him. Then, and only then, he said: "But what about insiders. Bodie?"

And Bodie stared at him, astonished. He'd hoped that at best, maybe Doyle would be willing to give it a try, but he'd been sure that Doyle was the sort who had his fill of aggro

and power-plays in his work, and didn't want to come home to it as well, no matter how much love was part of it. "You?" and he couldn't help sounding utterly incredulous. "You're one of us?"

"Used to be." Doyle looked away, turning inwards, reliving something usually only glimpsed at, something best left fallow.

"Used to be?" Bodie leaned forward, elbows on knees, hands loosely clasped between his thighs. "What made you stop?"

A laugh redolent with bitterness then, and Doyle sprang to his feet, going over to stand at the window, his hand running through his hair. "Quite the night for true confessions, innit?" he said, and his voice was shaken, and there was a tremble deep inside him, as the purulent memories resurfaced, grinning at him like skulls. "Fair's fair, I suppose," he muttered, to his own reflection in the window. He laughed again, briefly, a sound sad enough to draw blood. "Grown-ups playing I'll show you mine if you show me yours, isn't it?"

"You don't have to tell me, Ray," Bodie said, not because it was true, but because he hated seeing Doyle hurting like this.

"Yeh I do, and you know it. You've done your bit, it's up to me now. You were right about the first bit being the hardest." He turned for a second, a flash of genuine amusement in his eyes, "Fancy another cuppa, do you?"

"Yeah, why not?" Bodie said, hefting his own half-full mug. "I'll have a whole fucking pot of tea, if you need a bit of time."

"Nah. Just being a coward. Hate going through this." An enormous sigh, and then Doyle spoke, his voice devoid of self-pity, a sere recitation of facts that revealed more of his turmoil than histrionics ever would. "I had a friend once, someone I've never told you about. I really cared about him. I mean, really cared about him, Bodie. You're the only person I've ever loved more than him."

The casual admission of love shocked Bodie to the soles of his shoes. He'd thought all of that sort of stuff had been pillow-talk, the kind of thing said during sex and rejected the rest of the time as sentimental codswallop. To think that Ray had meant it, all of it, but had felt that there was no place for it in their

relationship appalled Bodie and flailed him with guilt.

"This friend of mine... He was ex-Services as well, same as you. Anyway, he was a really complicated man, I never knew quite where I stood with him. He used to be a Top too, but he'd given it up, before he even met me. And he never would tell me why he'd given it up, just kept on telling me I ought to stop it. But I wouldn't, and although I kept on waiting for it to happen, he never left me."

Bodie was beginning to understand a bit more clearly why Doyle had been so upset by the silences and the secrets.

"He'd turn a blind eye whenever I went out, you know, pretended I wasn't still doing all that." Doyle chuckled, obviously remembering some of the good times he had had in the past. "I used to get into some really heavyduty stuff, serious, you know, not just playing at it-and I was bloody good, as well. Anyway, I was always a Top, never fancied the other." Another stiletto of laughter. "Never trusted anyone enough before him, to be honest. To cut a long story short, we'd been together for quite a while, and he'd stopped saying anything about what I did on the side. He even started taking an interest, you know, saying he was worried about me, saying that he wanted to make sure I was all right, that I wasn't getting in too deep."

Doyle stopped then, and simply stared out of the window, his face a picture of misery. Bodie waited patiently, knowing how hard it had been for him to simply face what he had expected-bigotry and revulsion-and thinking how much harder this must be for Doyle to confess to.

"Then he came to me and said..." Doyle swallowed hard, then went on, "he said that to be a really good Top, you had to be a bottom at least once. Course, I was thrilled-Christ, I was a right fool over him, wasn't I? I couldn't believe my luck that he'd changed his mind, that he actually wanted to get into a scene with me. So I convinced myself that it must've been that he'd got jaded before, but because he loved me so much, he wanted to get back into it. I'd never wanted to be a bottom, Bodie, always hated the idea. But I was in love with him, and he said he was doing it because he loved me. So I let him." The hand run, shaking, through the hair again, skin gone pallid, tiny beads of sweat on upper lip. "It was-Christ, it still makes me shiver if I think about it. He wouldn't stop, you see."

And Bodie felt that, deep inside, knowing the gut-wrenching fear and horror that it must have been.

"He said he wanted me to know what it was really like. Started on about all this shit about how what I'd been doing—what he used to do-was sick and unhealthy. Then he said he wanted to take me to my limits, then past them, show me what it was like, teach me what I was doing to myself and to my 'victims'."

Bodie wanted to go to him, to hold him, but he knew better. He knew Ray had to talk this out and he knew that he himself had to wait until Ray was ready for him.

"Course, I had no idea he was going to do any of that. And on top of everything else, I was always a Top, so you can imagine how scared I was about being a bottom to begin with, giving myself up to someone like that. Completely, no control. You know what it's like.'

Bodie did, of course, but from the other side of the coin, as a man who exulted in being able to take whatever someone else could dish out to him, or ecstatic at being free from having to make even the simplest of decisions. But to be abused like that, by someone Doyle had trusted... He shuddered, and held his tongue, listening to the dry catharsis of Doyle's speech.

"He hurt me, Bodie, and not the good kind of hurt. Fisted me when I wasn't readymade me bleed, ended up at the doctor because of that. But the physical pain was okay, I got over that quick enough. But, Christ, Bodie, I'd trusted him. I'd trusted him with everything, and look what he did. He betrayed me."

"He raped you. That's what he did. You didn't want it like that and he forced you, so it was rape."

Doyle was looking at him, an expression of longing in his eyes, saying something that he still couldn't give voice to, not even this many years after that nightmare.

"Oh, Ray, love, you poor bastard," and

Bodie understood what Ray couldn't tell him he needed. He was on his feet, ensconcing Doyle in his arms, holding on tight, while Doyle poured the rest of the words out.

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"He did what he said he was going to do. Took me right beyond my limits, and it was... I couldn't face it again. Couldn't face him again. And the bastard didn't understand!"

"How could he not understand? He'd raped vou—"

"No he hadn't, not according to him. He didn't see that he'd forced me farther than I could go. He thought he was curing me of something that he thought was sick.'

"No worse zealot than a convert, eh, Ray?" But despite the light tone of his voice, Bodie had a knotting urge in his belly, to kill, to murder, to maim. To destroy the man-and just because Ray hadn't told him didn't mean Bodie wouldn't find out-who had done so much damage to his Ray.

"D'you know, he couldn't see that what he'd done to me was violence, not... I don't even know what to call it any more."

"Something primitive about what we like, isn't there, Ray? It's there inside us, and it's instead of hurting people on the outside, all the people who don't like to be hurt. Nothing wrong with it, Ray."

"Then why didn't you tell me you were into it?"

"Because how many people understand us, eh? But he used to be one of us—and he shouldn't've done that to you. Bastard."

Doyle said nothing for a while, resting against Bodie, relishing a strength that was enough to prop him up for a time. "I thought I'd never mend, Bodie. I mean, I trusted him enough to let him Top me. And then he went and did that to me. And after, I was too scared to go back into again-or maybe too damaged to feel comfortable with myself any more. I'd even told him he'd 'cured' me, that I'd give it up the way he had. Maybe I did give it up for the same reasons as him. But I doubt it. As far as I was concerned, it was because I couldn't trust anyone like that again... Left him right after that, never even saw him again after that night."

"I'm not surprised. But Ray, you can't let him ruin things for you." Bodie was arguing with him now, trying to bring him closer. "It was rape, exactly like rape," he repeated, needing to make Ray understand, desperate to undo the festering damage the un-named bastard had done with his violence disguised 'cure', "because he forced you and hurt you and—"

"Betrayed me, yeh, I know. But..."

"But what?"

"But look at me, Bodie! Just look at me. All around me, everything about me is violent. My temper, my work, even the sports I likeshooting for one. And then he took sex and twisted it all up with violence and deceit and-Christ, Bodie, I was terrified that he'd corrupted me. And what if he has? What if I'm right and him bringing violence into my sex life—what am I saying, sex life? I was in love with him. And he kept on telling me that he was only showing me the truth, he was just showing me what a sick bastard I was. What if he's corrupted me about love too?"

"Ray, love," Bodie whispered, caressing Doyle's cheek, kissing him lightly, "what was I complaining about? I was saying that every time I wanted it rough, you'd go all gentle and lovey-dovey on me. Now, does that sound like a man who's got violence and love mixed up?"

"That's what people say about S&M."

"And we know the truth. And I want you to be my Top."

Even Doyle's breathing stopped, for a moment, and then started again, rough with emotion and unease. "No. I'd hurt you ... "

"I should bloody-well hope so," Bodie answered him, seductively.

"I don't mean like that, you daft git. I mean the way he hurt me. I might, Bodie. He might've screwed me up more than..." Doyle tailed off, contemplating something dreadful.

"Only one way to find out," and Bodie said, and he sounded too cheerful, too hearty, as if none of this were important and recognised it for the mistake it was the second Doyle tensed and pulled free from his arms.

"Don't you ever listen to me, you fucking twat? I can't trust myself, Bodie. And what would I do if I hurt you, eh? What would I do if I betrayed you the way he did it to me? You just tell me that."

"You couldn't, because I like being bottom,

so I wouldn't be forced into something that's not natural for me. And I want you to do those things to me, and I can take a lot, Ray, I can take—and enjoy—everything you can give me. So it wouldn't be the same, even if you did exactly the same physical things to me that he did to you, because I want it."

"Do you? Do you really? Or is just a conditioned response of your body?" Doyle was asking himself, not Bodie, but he still had no answers for himself.

"So you enjoyed some of it at the time, then, did you?" Bodie answered, putting two and two together and responding from a well of supreme calm deep inside him. He understood, perfectly, Doyle's reaction both at the time and later, and now he could see the path out of this, could see a way to keep them together forever. All he had to do was trust Ray implicitly, with everything about himself, and he'd already done the worst of that. He knew Ray wasn't going to go running off in horror or disgust because of what he liked, and fear of that was what had come between them. And the rest of it was easy, for him.

The dread was gone now, and all that was left was the trust, and the love. Bodie smiled, broadly, happiness growing in him as he saw just how rosy the future looked. "Ray, I trust you with my life every day of the week, near enough, barring days off. So it stands to reason, doesn't it? If I can trust you like that, then what's the sex, but the icing on the cake?"

"You still don't get it, do you? What he did to me, Bodie-yeh, you're right, some of it I enjoyed in a twisted kind of way, at the time, but that was only to get me through what he was doing to me. I couldn't believe he was doing that to me-god, what he did was on par with the Spanish Inquisition." One step, that realisation, that splitting what had been done to him in cruel morality from what he did for pleasure and for love, and then he had Bodie in his arms, or he was in Bodie's, the two of them holding on to each other. "It had nothing to do with sex," Doyle said, and meant it, and believed it, his own guilt disappeared and his self-loathing sinking fast. "And as for love and trust—" he whispered, to the man he loved and trusted despite all his

fears, "all he did was destroy them, for him and me. And I know it had nothing to do with what we like, not really, but...now I'm not sure I can do it properly any more."

"What're you so worried about this for?" Bodie said into the froth of hair that veiled Doyle from his sight. "Worst that can happen is you'll fuck a scene up, and god, even someone as perfect as me has been known to do that."

"That's the worst I can do?" Doyle demanded, self-contempt putting up one last fight. "Oh, no, Bodie, the worst I can do—"

"Is what he did to you, and you're not going to do that to me. I've already told you, even if you take me farther than I want to go, I'm prepared for it, so it wouldn't be the same thing. Not in the ways that matter."

Doyle leaned back, looked carefully at Bodie. "You know, going by the way you're trying to persuade me, you must be really desperate to have me do you."

"Dead bloody right I am," Bodie agreed cheerfully. "C'mon, Ray, look at it from my point of view. I've been shitting myself from the day I met you in case you found out what I get up to on the side and started looking at me funny if you did. Then I thought you were coming here tonight for me to confess my all and end up with you up-chucking all over me or reporting me to Cowley as a security risk. And what do I get? It turns out that my walking wet dream isn't disgusted by my kinky little specialities at all. In fact, he's a Top himself. C'mon, Ray, it's all my Christmases and birthdays rolled into one!"

Doyle's face remained sombre as he watched Bodie. "I suppose it is, if you look at it like that."

"How else is there to look at it? Karma," Bodie said, wiggling his eyebrows, happy as a lark and twice as giddy form the sheer relief, "that's what this is. Karma."

"You reckon?" Doyle asked him. "What about Doom? What about this being a nasty kettle of fish? This could backfire on us, Bodie."

It was obvious that it was going to take more than a quick confession from Bodie to get Doyle loose from the damage he still dragged around behind him. That worried

Bodie, because he knew Doyle-let him walk out of that door with their relationship still in two separate pieces, and it would take a miracle to overcome the guilt and the pessimism and get them back together. But there was a way round that, a very simple way, and one that would not only glue them back together, but would establish the bond of trust once and for all.

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And Bodie knew Doyle was ready for it. He was very much at his ease in this: he had never had any problems accepting that he liked to submit to other men. It was just a part of him, as basic as breathing and as necessary to him. But it didn't mean that he was of the slave mentality, not even close. Right now, with Doyle still reeling a bit from facing his own personal nightmare, this was Bodie's time to take command, his time to lead the way. So he stepped back from Doyle and slouched, just a fraction, so that the bootheeled Doyle was taller than him. Bodie lowered his eyes, staring at the floor, face totally blank and said, "That's up to you, sir. Please do whatever you want to me, sir."

Bodie should have felt ridiculous saying it, would have, within the confines of CI5, but this was separate. This had only a glancing influence on their lives outside of these walls, but everything to do with who they were. Bodie stood there, passive, waiting, hearing the sudden intake of breath with something akin to joy.

The moment stretched on and on, and still Doyle stood there, watching Bodie. Bodie, whom he trusted more than he'd ever trusted in his life before-only to discover that the one time Bodie had broken that faith was in a warped attempt at protection. Bodie, whom he loved, enough to let him go if that's what Bodie needed, and enough to own Bodie completely-or to forge a perfectly balanced relationship between them, the S&M filling the spaces they needed it to, more banal pursuits fulfilling their more banal needs. The question was not whether or not Bodie could do it, of course: that answer was patently clear. The question was whether or not Doyle could overcome his own fear and fully experience his own sexuality once more.

There was, he knew, only one way to find

out, and it was the only way left to him that would not either disappoint or betray his lover.

"Take your clothes off," Doyle said, and trusted Bodie enough that Bodie would choose not to hear the tremble in his voice.

"Yes, sir," Bodie answered, doing as he was told, stripping and folding clothes with military precision and a very Bodie-like economy of movement. Perfectly naked, he stood in front of Doyle, head still bowed, waiting for Doyle to take further command, to dole out pleasure and punishment—and was there really a difference? For Bodie, no, there was no difference at all.—as Doyle saw fit.

"Get into the bedroom."

Bodie went, a frisson of delight dancing on his spine as he felt Doyle's gaze linger on his body. There was the question of how far Doyle was willing to go, and he hoped his Top would ask him if he had any tools of the trade here. Not that he would offer the information, of course. Not unless asked.

"Kneel."

Bodie knelt, felt hands in his hair, wondered with a fierce excitement what Doyle was going to do next.

"What're your limits?" Doyle asked, needing to know, the question going far beyond mere token formality.

"No blood, no permanent disfigurement, no scat, sir." His heart was pounding now, his cock rising. He wished he had a ball-stretcher on, but he had a feeling that even without any toys, the simple fact of it being Doyle would turn this into one of the best scenes he had ever had. Love had a way of doing that, unless you were the helpless masochist type, who longed to be a slave. But that wasn't Bodie. He simply needed the release from responsibility, and the punishment for all the things he did and the power he had outside the bedroom. And the pleasure of pain, of course. Always, the pleasure of pain.

Doyle was looking down at his kneeling lover, his own excitement leaping within him, and then the control came damping down, the power coming into him, and he was a Top again, supremely in command of this man, and most importantly, himself. He put both hands in Bodie's hair and pulled, and was

relieved beyond belief that there was nothing more to it than the sweet lure of giving and receiving pleasure.

"Where are your things?" he asked, tugging on the silken hair, fingers darting down to pluck at a nipple.

"In my wardrobe, sir, the one where I keep my old uniforms. I keep it locked, sir. The keys are in a plastic bag inside the talc container. The Imperial Leather, sir."

"Oh, I like your choice of hiding place. Don't move a muscle. I may be kind enough to select a few items for my amusement," Doyle said, sliding back into the role with all the comfort of real need. He left Bodie kneeling there and went to the wardrobe, finding the keys in the ironic hiding place, unlocking the inner drawers, uncovering a treasure trove of toys. There was everything he could wish for in here, of the smaller items, of course. He sifted through the abundance for a few minutes, scenes running through his head, discarded and rejected. It had to be something very special, something appropriate for both of them, something that would fulfil the needs in both of them.

Then he decided what it would be, and smiling, picked up the beautifully crafted crop, recognising it as official issue, and he thought, possibly expensive to obtain. He weighted it in his hands, and found the balance to be perfect, but that was no more than he expected: Bodie had excellent taste, a very discerning eye, and a private source of income with which to indulge himself. Not that one asked Bodie about where the extra money came from, not unless you were Cowley.

"Does Cowley know about your trips to this Club?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he hasn't ordered you to stop?"

"Yes, sir, he has."

"But you continued to go there. Well, now I'm telling you so you won't go back there, ever. Do you hear me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Yes what?"

"Yes, sir!"

"That's better. But you still forgot. And you've been lying to me about this, and

having other men."

"Yes. sir."

"That's going to stop."

"Yes, sir."

"But I'm going to punish you to make sure you remember.'

"Thank you, sir."

Doyle paused for a second, looking at the collection of blindfolds in the drawer, deciding that Bodie was experienced enough to take a lot more than mere blindfolds and a thrashing the first time—certainly judging by the sophistication of some of the equipment in the wardrobe. But he didn't want it to be too involved today, something fairly simple, but the perfect thing to mend the broken trusts between them. He took a mild blindfold from the pile, a simple black leather one with brass eyelets for lacing up the back. He saw Bodie's cock respond enthusiastically to the first touch of the leather, and he fitted the blindfold nice and snug.

Next—"On your feet," and he took out the English cage, fitting the straps round Bodie's cock and balls, making sure the cross-strap separated his balls into two smoothly taut mounds.

Then—"Kneel, over the edge of the bed. Later, if I feel like it, I'll let you take your punishment like a man, but you don't deserve that yet, so you can cower there like a boy."

Bodie, subsumed totally into the event, didn't answer, for he hadn't been given permission to answer. He was wholly happy, for he was doing something that pleased Doyle, and the one man he had always wanted as Master was his. And he knew-knew-that he could take anything Doyle did to him. He felt his manhood swell, and his self-image preened proudly. He was well aware of how gorgeous he must look, bent over like this, the muscles in his back displayed, his skin so white and flawless, his arse raised ready. He held his breath, waiting.

"Hands behind your back," Doyle said, taking the quickly crossed wrists and binding them in a pattern of leather thong that he remembered so well from before. "Arse up higher."

Obedience, of course, instant and total, and they both revelled in it, the bonds of love and trust tighter than any leather fetish could ever be.

Doyle raised his arm, pausing on the upstroke to admire both the beauty of the tool and of the arse it was going to turn red with heat and the scintillation of pain. It whistled its admiration on the way down, then bit into tender, unmarked flesh, leaving Doyle's brand behind. He had quite some skill at this, and his arm and his rhythm never faltered as he administered a pattern of blows, welts rising redly on the whiteness of Bodie's arse. He stopped, stroking his hand across the rippled surface, following the arching lines his crop had made.

"That's better," he murmured, cock hard and needful, caught tight and tense by his jeans. "Now, turn round."

Blind, practice helping him keep his balance despite the deprivation of both his sight and the use of his hands, Bodie turned, his arse glowing with a lovely lingering pain. He waited, silent, in the dark, for his next command.

"Suck me."

A groin was thrust in his face, and he struggled with teeth and lips to lower the zip. He could normally manage this very well, with flair, even, but the jeans were too tight and the cock too swollen to allow him much leeway. He couldn't do it, so he bit instead, doing no damage but incurring both punishment and rescue. He was slapped, hard, head ringing and face stinging, and then the zip scraped open and a hard cock was thrust at him. Eagerly, he swallowed it down, no hesitation, just devouring passion. But it was taken from him before he had a chance to savour it fully, and his Master withdrew from him. In the quiet, he heard the exquisite sound of clothing being removed, and then he was shoved, toppling over onto the floor, landing heavily on his chest, his cock tormented by the coarseness of carpet and the dig of leather into his balls.

Doyle grabbed Bodie by the hair, dragging him up and shoving him towards the bed. "On your back," he snapped, standing aside to watch as Bodie struggled to position himself, arms caught underneath the weight of his body. Doyle began with Bodie's left foot and a long length of buckled leather, attaching Bodie to the legs of the bed, then kneeling beside him, reaching under to loosen the arms. Each wrist was attached by straps that matched the ankle bindings, until Bodie lay spread out across the bed, naked and blindfolded, balls stretched and cock hard. Doyle left him there and went back to the wardrobe, taking his time to make his choice, and gathering up an unopened tub of lubricant to bring with him. He said nothing to Bodie, giving him no warning.

Bodie nearly screamed at the unanticipated pleasure. His nipples were on fire, settling down to embers of heated pleasure as he adjusted to the tit-clamps biting into him. He wanted to moan, to arch and writhe, but he didn't know all the foibles of his Master yet. He held himself as still as he could, his pulse hammering in his cock, the pleasure radiating painfully from his tits. But nothing he couldn't take, not even close.

Still, it was perfect for the first time. He was at Doyle's mercy, bound hand and foot, cock and balls vulnerable, blind and dependant. Trusting, in other words, absolutely trusting. He smiled then, overflowing with love, and then the bed indented on either side of his head, and strong thumbs dug into his jaws and his mouth was opened. Then he was filled, wonderfully, orgasmically filled, the long slide of cock possessing him without pause. He thought he could die from happiness right then and there.

It was Heaven: here he was spreadeagled, tied to the bed, hand and foot and hand and foot. Doyle was astride his face, cock buried deep in his throat, balls spread across his nose, filing him with the redolence of Doyle's body. Doyle's hands, those wonderfully strong, hard hands, were tugging his nipples, pulling them tight and away from his body, brilliant pain coruscating through him. Then Doyle was slapping at his tits, hitting them hard, flicking the tit-clamps with his nails, but hard, so hard, and Bodie knew he could come just from that and the fucking of a cock down his throat. Doyle must have sensed his weakness too, for his Master leaned forward, cock going deep enough to gag even the experienced Bodie, and grabbed Bodie's cock

and balls, twisting them round, the leather biting him until the imperative to come had faded down to screaming pleasure, and he was suffused with a glow of heat to match his arse.

Doyle was well pleased with Bodie's performance. They could work together, he and Bodie, and he thought they had enough flexibility to make it work. At least, he hoped so. Carefully, he brought himself out of Bodie's mouth, getting up off the bed, slathering his cock in viscid lubricant. The crop was slippery in his hand, so he laid it down and wiped himself on Bodie's naked belly, caressing the quivering skin with the crop before lifting it, and hurtling it down to crack against the tight tit-clamps.

Bodie screamed out loud as his nipples exploded, then whimpered as the pleasure of the pain infused him with thudding desire. He wanted to come, he needed desperately to come, but he couldn't. His Master hadn't given him permission yet. So he writhed and mewled and begged, tugging on his bonds, arching his back, the movement setting his tit clamps moving, adding to the corolla of desire.

Doyle had intended to make it last, to fuck Bodie for a while and then withdraw, indulge in a few sophistications upon the oh-sowilling flesh, but with Bodie seducing him with his own lust, he couldn't. He knelt between legs that were already wide-spread for him, Bodie bending his knees like the welltrained bottom he was, but it wasn't quite enough. Doyle undid the ankle restraints and Bodie immediately lifted his legs high, exposing his arse without hesitation. A dip of hand into the tub of lubricant, and then the first finger was taking possession, and then, quickly, a second finger, dilating and spreading and opening. Doyle positioned himself, one hand steadying himself, the other generous enough to stroke Bodie's cock.

And he was taken. His Master plunged into him, slick and hot and hard, filling him up, making him a receptacle for his Master's pleasure, and giving him purest ecstasy in return. He wrapped his legs round his Master's hips, groaning in pleasure as his arse felt the harsh flat of his Master's hand, punishment for changing position without permission, but his Master was kind to him: the cock was not taken from him, it fucked into him, deep and possessive, just like his Master himself.

There was no possibility of Doyle taking this slowly, his balls throbbing with the impending of orgasm. He held on tight to Bodie, thrusting into him, letting go of everything in the world apart from himself, and Bodie. The two of them, Bodie under him tonight, belonging to him, obeying him.

"You can come, Bodie," he said, so pleased with Bodie's performance that he was willing to be bounteous and permit him not only to come, but to hear himself honoured by being called by name. "That's it, make it good, move for me, Bodie. Fuck yourself on me."

Bodie did, striving to push his arse upwards, using the strong muscles of his back and legs to pull his Master in closer and deeper, clutching at him with his arse muscles. His Master was talking to him, using his name, telling him to come, and the sweetness erupted in him and from him, his entire body a pinnacle of pleasure, the straps round his cock and balls making the orgasm last forever.

The spasming of arse round his cock was the last straw: Doyle came, streaming inside the clinging body, heat all around, pleasure drilling through him. He didn't collapse, of course, but rose up on knees that were admittedly shaky, pausing there to wipe the sweat from his face and the cum from his cock. Bodie, he was pleased to note, remained in position, although the long thigh muscles were trembling with the strain. Orgasm receding slowly through his veins, Doyle picked up the ankle restraints, attaching them first to Bodie's ankles and then to the 'D' rings on the wrist bands. Then he picked up the crop, and knelt beside the body awkwardly bent double on the bed.

"You changed positions when I hadn't given you permission to," Doyle said.

"I'm sorry, sir," Bodie answered, suitably penitent of voice, but body trembling with anticipation of the strokes that would surely come.

"I shall have to punish you for that, to make sure you do better next time."

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"Thank you, sir," and he was ecstatic next time! His Master had said next time. It was going to be all right, it really was going to be all right. He almost wept with pain and joy as the crop sliced into him at a perfect fortyfive degree angle to the smouldering welts from before. Ten strokes, ten long, hot strokes, with time enough between for the anticipation to build to fever pitch, only to erupt into flames as the blow struck.

Doyle surveyed the red arse, with the rosette of muscle at its heart, puckered and red and with a thin trail of his semen spilling from it. And he knew then: Bodie was his. His, and his alone, and no-one would ever come between them, not now. Not the vicious, violent ghosts from his own past, and not the tempting sirens of Bodie's present. Wellsatisfied, he undid the restraints, letting the circulation return before he gently undid the tit-clamps, unwilling to make it too heavy a scene this first time and determined to prove to himself that he really could go back to this special pleasure of his without the taint of real violence. He nuzzled, sweetly, at the upthrusting nipples, his saliva cooling the sting of release and then he caressed the leather around Bodie's still turgid cock and swollen balls, smoothing Bodie's own cum in with sweeping swathes of his hand from belly to balls and back again. Finally, he removed the blindfold, fingers playing in soft hair as he unlaced the leather.

Blinking rapidly as his eyes adjusted back to the light from the utter darkness, Bodie stared up and watched, wide-eyed, as his Master, now Ray again, leaned down, Ray's face filling his vision, Ray's tongue filling his mouth. Bodie gave himself over to the love, completely, fully, and for the first time, honestly. There was more trust between them than ever before, and as he kissed Ray, as Ray kissed him and they held each other close, he knew nothing was ever going to split them apart.