A SHILLING SHOCKER

Yes, the next story is a bit of a shocker. We doubt that anyone has really dealt with this theme in this particular way in Professionals stories. It was originally inspired by the common enough Bodie and Doyle tale which, in its search for romance, feminizes Doyle. Fair enough: a love story is romantic and it is often easier to believe the storyline if the characters follow familiar patterns. Thus, Bodie is given the 'masculine' role of the couple and Doyle the 'feminine' one. 'In Flagrante Delicto' is M. Fae Glasgow's reaction. She takes the idea of feminizing Doyle and sets off in a very different direction. Undoubtedly, the result will not please all readers, so don't worry if you include yourself in that category. But do take the time to read the story; it is worth the effort. And remember M. Fae Glasgow does not wish to convert you to her way of thinking with this piece. It is only an exploration of human desire and sexuality. It is only a what if...

IN FLAGRANTE DELICTO

M. FAE GLASGOW

In the mirror, his image licked its lips, just as he did, with lascivious detail and solitary pleasure, the moistness cool and tingling on his skin. His hands, on his body and in the mirror, caressed skin and teased nipples, making small round peaks that crested with enjoyment. Balancing his weight carefully, he thrust his hips forward, appreciating the way his erection tented the black of his underwear, every inch of him lovingly delineated, his balls heavy and oval, his cock long and faintly, so very faintly, damp at the tip. His fingers trembled as he lifted the waistband away from its clinging around his hips and he arched his back as those fingers teased tousled hair and sensitised skin without once touching the aching need of his prick. He was too aroused to make it last, standing here watching himself in the mirror, so he slowed down his self-stimulation, pausing, flattening his hands on the fabric to frame his cock, rotating his hips with active memory of how his muscles slid and bunched when he was fucking. Eyes wide and clear, he stared at himself, flaunting his masculinity, revelling in it.

No-one could ever possibly recognise the tune Bodie was whistling, as he levered himself from the car, balancing carrier bags and tin-foil boxes, 71 trying not to spill his take-away or crack the wine £3£3£3 on the car door. It was freezing tonight, and after spending three days in the wilds of Bristol, he couldn't face sitting in his ice-cold flat waiting for the heating to dispose of the ice on the inside of his windows. Ray's place, now that would already be warm, condensation streaking the windows. No heart-felt shrieks of agony when bare feet hit the linoleum on the bathroom floor, not in Doyle's flat. And hot water-gallons upon gallons of piping hot water, scalding, steaming in the bathtub, Ray's collection of fancy natural loofahs and sponges just waiting to slough the grime off him. Knowing perfectly well that this was the Friday night Ray had tickets to take—Pamela? Sharon? Sue? the blonde tennis player, whatever her name was-to the theatre, Bodie let himself in the front gate, cursing as he dropped Doyle's evening paper, cursing even more when he dropped the pineapple fritters on top of it. Eventually, his repertoire of swearing well aired, he got the glass door opened.

He walked along the hall, going into the bathroom, looking at himself in the small mirror

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there, then going back to the bedroom. There was no reason for it, save that he loved the feeling of walking when he was like this, and that it extended the pleasure for him. He gloried in the roll of movement and the slight bobbing of his prick as his steps carried him the length of his corridor, fabric caressing him with minute frissons. Too aroused to wait for the mirror, his hands were busy on himself even as he walked, going from room to room upstairs, unwilling to risk being seen through the wide windows downstairs. His music was blaring, sexual beat pulsing into him through his tightly-shod feet, rising up to fill his cock. Every inch of the upper storey of the house was covered by his languid tread, as he experienced each room at the height of his sexual heat. There was a trickle of sweat down his spine, absorbed by his underwear, the dampness making the cloth cling to him all the more voraciously.

Once a policeman, always a policeman, Bodie thought to himself, dumping the stuff in the kitchen, glancing around at the empty room that £3£3£3 was made all the emptier by the blast of music 72 and the blaze of lights. He shook his head at £3£3£3 the absent Doyle, grinning at that instinct that made him leave his house looking as if there were a crowd living there, should he need to go out. Doyle, for reasons never explained to Bodie, hated coming back at night to a house that was starkly devoid of life, and would leave radio or TV on, lights bright, often even the upstairs light and bedside radio blasting. Bodie shrugged off Doyle's little foibles: he had enough oddities of his own that Doyle put up with. Such as coming over to his friend's flat in that friend's absence, without invitation, to use his dishes and his heating and his bath, just to save himself a spot of discomfort. Well, Doyle wouldn't mind as long as he was well out of the way before Doyle and the lovely Debi or Pam or whoever returned from the theatre. It was the one thing they never shared, for all their backchat and intimacy: apart from the most general enquiries and the most specious of slagging, sex lives were taboo.

> The mirror loved him as much as he loved himself, casting his reflection back at him clad in the golden glow of the small bedside lamp.

He reached under the thin strip of elastic, one fingertip stroking the moist tip of his cock as the tip of his tongue stroked his lip, flesh moistening flesh. Slowly, with infinite care, he slid the elastic down so that his cock peeped out, winking at him, giving him the come on, enticing him, inciting him to do more. Underwear was slid lower, until the elastic was under his prick, lifting it up, buoying it to stand free and proud in the air. He narrowed his eyes, all the better to seduce himself, all the better to focus his gaze on nothing more than the pulse of his blood through his cock. The priapic mouth was drooling with anticipation, awaiting the touch of his hand, the tight haven of his fist. He obeyed the imperiousness of desire, conceding the ineffectuality of the intellect when defied by the libido, giving his cock his hand, stroking himself.

The food didn't even get to the table, most of it consumed on the run in the kitchen whilst catching up on the newspapers that Doyle had left on the worktop. The white wine he had bought as olive branch for using Doyle's flat with such impunity was still chilled from the journey from Oddbins to here, but he put it in the fridge so that it would be the perfect end to Doyle's evening-might even be enough for Doyle to unbend enough to tell him a juicy detail or two the morning after. He stretched tiredly, all the aching bones of his back clicking and clacking at him to protest the cold, the long drive and the even longer hours he'd been working. Oh, well, there was Doyle's bath, with all-natural bath salts that had been known to work miracles, even to the shocking magic of easing the agonies of Macklin's 'refresher' course. The house was warmer than an Indian summer, the perfect climate for a winter night's bath. He started up the stairs, not bothering to go against Doyle and turn off either lights or cassette, plodding upwards with no thought in him bar the hedonistic lure of Doyle's bath.

Two fingers scissored over the head, holding the foreskin, sliding it back and forth, revealing himself to his voracious vision, hiding himself for seductive appeal; he licked his lips, arching his hips forward, his free hand sliding round to

rub his own flank, fingers seeking out the small hole that lay there, still covered by the softness of fabric.

It was typical of Doyle, who worried about ecology, waste, coal-burning power plants and atomic produced electricity to leave every light in the house on and the place heated enough to wilt a hot-house orchid. He had already dumped his jacket in the kitchen and now he was working on tugging a recalcitrant sweater off over his head. A bath was definitely required: nude was the only way a man could be comfortable in this cloying heat.

He rotated his hips, mimicking the movements of fucking, watching with eyes glazed as his cock thrust into his fist, into the tight tunnel of flesh, lunging forward towards his reflection as if that rampant cock was going to fuck his reflection. He was fucking himself, mouth open, guttural sounds of pleasure coming from him, one hand pulling on his nipple, the other hand pulling on his cock, until his whole body was a peak, a mountain of pleasure piercing the distance that separated himself from his reflected self.

His watch had managed to get itself caught in the rib of his sweater and he was tied up like a Bavarian pretzel, struggling to free himself from the prickling heat of wool, the heavy Aran he'd borrowed from Murphy stifling him, blinding him as he found his way around from habit.

He was going to come soon, soon, but slowly. No hurry, no rush. He loved loving himself, taking the time to make it extra special, as he had tonight, with his lies to everyone about the theatre or working, depending upon which sphere of his life the person inhabited. He let his cock go, running just the very tip of his pinkie along it, gathering the droplets at the crown, bringing them to his lips to taste his own seed, his own life-force. Languidly, he licked his fingers clean, stroking the wet hand down his chest, through the glistening hair to close, once more, on his cock, the touch enough to cast aside any thought of taking it slow and easy. He was hungry now, starving, wanting it hard and fast and now, there'd be time for more later. Staring at himself in the mirror, he began moving his hand faster and faster.

With a muffled curse and red face, he got the sweater off at long last, by the simple expedient of pulling the damned thing off with no regard for painstakingly knitted pullovers. Balling it up in his hand, he went to Doyle's room to borrow a dressing gown for after his bath. Hand on door—

—oh, yeh, that was how he liked it, standing in front of the mirror in privacy and secrecy, pleasuring himself as no-one else ever did, and his hand was so perfect and he was going to come, he was coming, coming—

—and saw Doyle.

Who was standing in front of the mirror, cock hard as steel and sticking out from his body like a weapon. Shocking, yes, to come across a friend *in flagrante delicto*.

More than shocking to come across his friend standing there like that, the symbol and personification of manhood jutting so proudly from him, large and thick and hard, startling in contrast to the slim masculinity of hips.

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More shocking still in contrast to the black silk underwear. Women's underwear, black silk panties pulled down low to frame the prominence of masculinity, the merry widow loosely laced with chest hair peeking free. Black stockings, thigh high on legs that looked suddenly slim and shapely, moulded by the highness of heel and the shimmer of patent leather. Sweater dropped and forgotten on the carpet, Bodie stumbled to a halt, suddenly needing to lean against the door jamb, knees shocked into weakness by the sight in front of him. Doyle, his partner Raymond Doyle, in drag.

Eyes bright and pupils dilated, cock still rock hard and seeping, Doyle turned to face him, hand still blurring in motion, the cum spurting from him in arcing jets to land not on himself in the mirror, but uselessly, unwanted, on the carpet between him and Bodie.

"Christ, Ray..." was all Bodie could say, head full of the cotton wool of sudden shock. He was prepared, excessively well prepared by a life in the military and in violence, but this was beyond him. He'd had no inkling, no idea. Hadn't

even expected Ray to be home, let alone standing there in fish-net stockings and high-heeled shoes, a fairy queen fallen from the pages of a

kinky magazine.

Doyle's voice showed the signs of orgasm, even as his body did not, cock staying tumescent, still arching away from his body, pushed forward by his panties the way breasts are by underwire bras. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I think I'm the one who should be asking you that, Doyle. What's..." he waved his arm in general distress, as he took in more than just the sight of Doyle. "What is all...this?" He stared in helpless confusion at the things left lying in careful ritual around the bedroom, slowly yielding up the support of the door to walk over to the bedside unit, pointing an accusing finger at the plastic shape that was lying there already glistening with some form of lubricant.

Doyle answered the question in a monotone, giving away nothing, only the most basic of answers. "I'd've thought that was obvious." Then £3£3£3 the echo of Bodie's voice began its discolouration 74 of Doyle's, accusation and betrayal of trust lay-£3£3£3 ering everything granite grey stone. "It's a buttplug or a bung-plug or an arse-plug, depending on what you fancy calling it."

"But why, that's what I want to know!"

There was something in that plaintive cry, some unspoken 'how could you do this to me' that pierced Doyle's skin, something that smacked of a Brontë heroine. Something that carried with it the carrion stench of judgement. "What's it to you? You weren't exactly invited, were you, Bodie? It's not as if I asked you over for tea and then brought out the whips and chains."

"And are you into that as well?"

Definite this time, and that tone made it sound as if Doyle had been judged and found wanting. "And what if I am?" he asked, walking forward, making it a point of pride that he did nothing to hide himself, that he showed that he was not ashamed, despite the implication in Bodie's voice and the distaste on his face. "What if I like pain as well as silk, eh, Bodie? What if I like to hurt people? You going to run and tell Cowley what a naughty little boy I am?"

"You're a fucking security risk, that's what you are. I mean, look at you!" It was as if he listened to himself for he did, suddenly, look at Doyle. He did, suddenly, stop averting his eyes. He did, suddenly, acknowledge that not looking wouldn't make it all go away. "Look at you," he said differently, his chaos audible. "What's this get up supposed to be?"

Doyle looked down at himself, at the ultrafemininity of his underwear and the ultra-masculinity of his cock. His first impulse was to let Bodie have it, right between the eyes, pay him back for that Mary Whitehouse tone, but he bit those words off, controlling his temper, turning it down to a low simmer. It was tempting, so tempting, to tell Bodie the whys and wherefores, or at least those he'd been able to decipher himself. To metaphorically lean on Bodie's shoulder, as he had the night he had confessed to his constant battle not to enjoy the kill, confessed the lone thing which more than any other kept him moral and different from the people he killed. "Why do I do all this?" quietly, almost as if he were alone and musing aloud to the accoutrements littering the bedside table. "I honestly don't know, Bodie. Don't know why it started. Just-it makes me feel more masculine." Without conscious thought, he tightened the ribbons that laced the bustier together, catching Bodie's reaction out of the corner of his eye.

"Prancing around in a black corset and frilly knickers makes you feel more masculine? You expect me to believe codswallop like that? And for god's sake, cover yourself up. Here, get this on you."

The familiar old blue dressing gown was shoved at him, with Bode staring at the drawn curtains where the windows were hiding with the rest of the world. If the words and the look hadn't helped, then the cover shoved at him positively hindered. "Codswallop? What do you know about why I do this? Well, Bodie? If the look on your ugly mug's anything to go by, you wouldn't understand even if I did explain it to you."

"How can you expect me to understand the man I trust to watch my back dressing up like a woman? How the hell am I supposed to go in on some job when my life's on the line, and all I've got to back me up is a fucking queen?"

"And how the hell am I supposed to go in when all I've got at my back is some provincial yokel who can't see beyond what a man does in the bedroom?"

"Oh, don't come it with me, Doyle. This isn't your standard little quirk here. This is weird, Ray, downright fucking weird."

"You know," Doyle said at his most nasty, "if I didn't know better, I'd buy your act lock, stock and barrel. But I do know better, Bodie. You're no vicar's pious son, you're a hard nut who's seen more than I'll ever want to see. So don't play outraged innocent with me, else I'll have to think you've got a few odd kinks of your own to hide."

"I've got a few kinks, Doyle, but nothing like this. And for god's sake, will you fucking cover vourself!"

"You give me one good reason why I should." Bodie looked at him with patented disbelief. "You're standing there in women's underwear, high-heels and stockings. You've got dildoes and christ knows what else all over the place, and you want me to give you a reason?"

"I've done nothing to be ashamed of, Bodie." His tone warned Bodie to back off in the dangerously calm voice reserved for the streets.

Bodie scanned him from the roots of his hair to the tips of his high heels, pausing at the corselet. "Oh no? Nothing to be ashamed of?" He, pointedly, did not look down at Doyle's groin, where cock still arched in the mindless pleasure of afterglow. "This is something to be proud of, then? Going to add it to your list of skills for the old man, are you, right after your talent for fucking women. Or is that a lie, too?"

"Don't you go calling me a liar—"

"Why not? Eh, mate? What else would you call it, going on double dates with me and my bird. Look at you, for fuck's sake! Are you going to stand there and tell me you're straight as a die? Well, why not? I mean, why stop lying now, why break the habit of a whole fucking partnership."

"I haven't been lying to you, Bodie, I just haven't been telling you all the truth. Anyway, you've admitted you've a few kinks of your own, Bodie, so what makes *them* all right and mine sick? Cos that's what you think, isn't it? Go on, admit it, it's written all over your face anyway.

You think this is sick and perverted, don't you? Well, go on, admit it."

"Yeh, I think this is fucking sick." He turned round then, in time to see the expression flee from Doyle's face. Under all the shock, one truth remained unshaken: he had cared for this man, more than he had anyone in years. "Oh, fuck, I don't know, Ray. I don't know what to think. It's just...well, *look* at you!"

"I have been looking at me, that's half of why I dress like this. Bodie, I'm doing no harm, I'm not forcing anyone into anything."

"But it's not normal."

"And killing people for a living is? Or what about those magazines you've got hidden away, eh, Bodie? Bit young, those girls, weren't they?"

"You watch your fucking mouth, you—bitch."

Doyle drew himself up to his full height and in his high heels, that was taller than Bodie, making the other man look up at him, discomfiting Bodie even more. "No, you watch yours. Don't call me names, Bodie, don't you dare call me fucking names! Look at me, you keep on saying. Well, you ought to try looking at yourself. You're standing there, holier than thou, £3£3£3 passing judgement on me, and for what? Some- 75 thing harmless, something that I get a kick out £3£3£3 of. Something I need, Bodie. And as for me being a liar, what'd you expect me to tell you? Pass the sugar and oh, by the way, I like to dress up in women's underwear? And what would you have done if I had told you? I'll tell you," he stalked closer, exuding the danger of an animal trapped in its lair, backed into a corner, "you'd've done exactly what you just did. You'd've gone spare and started looking at me funny and jumping to all sorts of stupid conclusions. You'd've let it ruin the partnership, Bodie, that's what you'd've done and that's why I never told you."

"I'd never ruin the partnership, Ray." He looked at him again, this time not looking away from his cock. "It's you that's doing that, sunshine."

"Oh, I'm not going to let you get away with that, Bodie. You—"

"Just tell me one thing," Bodie broke in, suddenly desperate to know, suddenly desperate to get out of there, away from this new version of Ray, away from the insidious lure of underwear and high heels, of stockings and black lace, of masculinity counterpointing femininity. "Just

tell me this: are you straight, Ray? Yes or no, that's all I want to know."

Doyle paused a second too long, the answer nothing so simple as a yes or no, nothing that could be explained with such a paucity of words.

"You should have told me." And it was loud in the room that the usual 'mate' or 'sunshine' or even 'you randy toad' was missing from Bodie. "You should have told me."

"Why? So you could do this to me sooner rather than later? What do you think I am?"

"A fucking queer, that's what. A kinky, pathetic bastard who gets his kicks in a sick, disgusting way."

Doyle reeled as if struck, his face going whiter than if a blow had landed. He turned away, the muscles on his back bunching and clenching over the low line of lace trim that framed the bulk of musculature. His breath was audible, ragged, the sound either of incipient fury or tears. Bodie stood stock still, as shocked by Doyle's distress as by the real pain behind his own words. Then: Doyle's long fingers settling the black underwear, the glint of a ring bright £3£3£3 on his hand. Stockings were straightened, rump 76 presented to Bodie in insulting disdain, as if £3£3£3 Doyle were alone, as if there were no one else in the room to be considered. Then: the largest of the dildoes was picked up, and the jar of gel, the lid being unscrewed, shouting louder than any word ever could that Bodie was cut out, removed, no longer existed. That Bodie had no right to judge, that Bodie had no right to dictate. That Bodie had no right to be here.

The feeling in the pit of his belly he named disgust and revulsion and fury, but still, when he ran from that room, it wasn't just Doyle he was fleeing, running off into the cold, bath and sweater forgotten, no room in his mind for anything other than finding out that Doyle, his best friend, the only person he truly trusted come hell or high water, Raymond Doyle a drag queen. Ray, lying to him, deceiving him, tricking him. Ray, letting him camp it up with him, touching him, being close, sharing rooms, sharing beds, sharing birds, sharing their lives and all the while the bastard had been laughing up his sleeve at him, going around with a secret life that he had kept from Bodie. A secret without justification, a secret held close and deliberately silent, a secret that shattered them. He couldn't think, couldn't work out what he felt, save the outrage and the betrayal. Couldn't get rid of the sight of Ray dressed like that...

As the door slammed, he slumped, sitting on the edge of the bed, leaning forward, listening as the car revved and raced away, hurrying Bodie as far and as fast as he could. Doyle wasn't surprised, had always known that this would happen if Bodie had ever found out. He had even known what his own reaction would be, had had no doubts that he would react with defensive anger to Bodie's unnerved judgement. But still, being prepared for it hadn't lessened the horror of Bodie's reaction, of watching Bodie shut him out. And no-one could ever be prepared for the moment of betrayal when friend became outraged moralist. The anger and the pain erupted, his arm flashing overhead, the dildo slamming into the far wall, where it lay on the carpet, unwanted, unneeded, rejected. Like Doyle himself...

Nothing. There was absolutely nothing. Nothing to tell of what had happened the night before. Nothing to show that they had ever so much as met each other before this time of staticky silence. They were so physically close to each other, hedged in by the metal walls of the car that raced on hissing tyres over the frosty road, the world outside obliterated by their motion, the buildings and the trees elongated and twisted by speed. And in the smallness of the car, Bodie felt that they would be closer emotionally if he were here on Earth and if Doyle were up there, on the Morning Star. Perspex rigidity towered between them, invisible, intangible, measurable only in the dimension of damage to what both had thought to be a friendship that transcended mere mortal details and the keeping of a few secrets.

They were comrades, brothers-in-arms, allies against both the evil and the righteous of this world, caught in the limbo of those who do wrongs in order to protect right, back to back, guarding each other always, never even needing to speak.

But on this morning, there was need to speak, but neither had any words. Bodie didn't know quite where to look, nor where to cast his thoughts. He couldn't even bring himself to look

at Doyle who was beside him in his usual untidy sprawl, for all the world as if nothing about him had changed. Apart, of course, the clothes, they had changed all right, he thought with bitterness, seeing with utter clarity, Doyle as he had been the night before, dressed as if he were some woman epitomising their culture's idea of feminine sexuality.

How could he do it? That was the thought that ran through his mind incessantly, 'to me' whispering counterpoint like decay on a shroud.

Doyle, for his part, seemed engrossed in the banality of scenery whizzing past at breakneck speed, the car hastening them on as if it knew how much these calm-faced strangers wanted to escape each other. Changing gear, Bodie's hand inadvertently brushed Doyle's knee, shocking his hand away, the gear box grinding its protest at his clumsiness. Doyle looked at him then, a single searing blaze of his eyes, cauterising Bodie's wounds before they had a chance to bleed the poison out. Bodie felt his anger crawl up his spine to knot in his shoulders, mean-spirited voices devilling his mind with the replaying of that look from Doyle, and how it was precisely the same look of betrayed contempt he had loosed on his partner the night before. If Doyle felt now as he had then, then there was nothing that could possibly be said between them, no point in trying to break past this icy barrier that loomed between them, cutting off the air, making the car a stifling coffin where what they had been together was buried in silence.

Even at HQ, Doyle exited the car without a word, as he had a thousand times before, but then, it had always been a companionable silence, or a distracted silence, or even an angry silence, revenge for some harm done him. But this morning, it was the silence of distance, of an ending. Bodie was outraged: after all, who was it who had been caught done up like some French tart? Who was it who had lied, who was it who had betrayed whom? Who, indeed.

Through the swing doors, flash of their ID's, past the lift that was out of order again, up the stairs, Doyle running up them two at a time, Bodie coming behind. And watching, and wondering. Watching Doyle's denimed rump, wondering what lay underneath, whether it was the simple normality of Y-fronts or the frill of panties. He stared, realising there was no raised line to betray frilly knickers, but that didn't mean that Doyle wasn't wearing women's underwear, did it? Something plain and tasteful, pink silk, perhaps, the kind with a lace inset at the front? He couldn't help it, couldn't clear it from his mind. And look at those shoes: boots, stacked heel, nowhere near as high as the black patent leather of the night before, but still high, higher than many women wore. Was that why Doyle wore them, and not for fashion? Not for the purposes of intimidating would-be informants, but for the purpose of continuing into daylight what he did in the secrecy of the dark? Doyle was really going up those stairs quickly, Bodie hard pushed to keep up with him, but he was determined. He wasn't going to be bested by a drag queen, not even if it was the man whom he had conceded was his better in many things. That was yesterday, before he'd found out the truth. It was different now, even if Doyle refused to concede that, even if Doyle insisted on continuing this charade of machismo. The sun from the half-landing window got tangled in Doyle's hair, bringing out the autumn gold, gilding the curls. £3£3£3 The long curls, Bodie found himself thinking. 77 Curls and long hair that looked perfect with £3£3£3 corset and stockings, hair that could pass for a woman's, given the right accessories. And was that why Doyle defied Cowley and wore his hair long enough that an opponent would be able to grab it and use it as weapon against him? As Bodie, in his shock, was doing?

Top floor, Cowley's office, Doyle going in as if this was just another day...

If Bodie didn't stop looking at him as if he were a cross between a child-killer and a freak, he was going to belt him one. It had been horrible in the car, with Bodie sitting there as if the world had turned into a nightmare while they slept. He couldn't understand it: after all, it wasn't as if either one of them had changed, was it? All that had happened was that Bodie had found him out, and not in the best of ways. He could kick himself for last night, for getting so tied up in his pleasures that he hadn't even heard someone coming into his house. He hadn't wanted Bodie to find out, and most especially not by walking in on him—while he was actually coming, for god's sake. If he'd been trying for a worst case scenario, that was second from

the top. At least Bodie'd come in last night and not last week when he'd had that bloke over. Christ, but that would've been bad. Would've made last night look like Mary Poppins' jolly holidays. But today was bad enough, with Bodie sitting beside him like that, looking as if he'd just swallowed a rat that was eating him alive, from the inside out. It was making Doyle angry, this martyred attitude of Bodie's, making him furious. Where did Bodie get off passing judgement on him? Wasn't any of his business, was it? Wasn't as if they were lovers or anything, was it?

No, he answered himself with a wash of sadness. It wasn't as if they were lovers or ever likely to be. He'd always suspected that Bodie, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, had the sexual morals of his lower middle-class background, complete with all the lessons he'd learned in Sunday school before ever he'd had a chance to understand the world and make up his own mind. He'd never thought the larking about was anything more than that, which is why sometimes, it got right up his nose so much. £3£3£3 To tease like that, with never the possibility of 78 following through was bloody typical of a man £3£3£3 who claimed live and let live then had run screaming like a nun when he'd seen Doyle last night. At that moment, his train of thought was interrupted by an almost involuntary tightening of Bodie's body and a muffled exclamation.

> "What's the matter with you now, Bodie? You've been sitting there like a great lump and I swear you've barely heard a single word I've said."

> "Em, no, sir, I heard you. Talk to MacLean, find out where the drugs are coming from, who's getting the money and whether or not that money's then being sent overseas or kept here in Britain." Even as he finished speaking, he was thanking his lucky stars that years in the Services had taught him how to listen to commanding officers while his mind was a million miles away. He was still, on some subliminal level, listening to Cowley, aware of the keen observation in those pale eyes, aware that he was going to have to watch himself or he'd have some very uncomfortable questions to answer. But in the forefront of his mind, there, where it showed on his face, there, where it had alerted Doyle who was staring at him, there was really only

the one thing. It was a tiny mark, one he'd taken to be a freckle, something he'd not noticed before, for there were so many other parts of Doyle that drew the attention: his eyes, with their fire or their bleakness; his hair that carried with it always a lingering hint of freedom, of wildness; the cheekbone that had never been explained, not even on the medical forms, being dismissed as 'facial trauma' and nothing more; the mouth that could range from sweetness to a gutter flowing with sewage. So much else, then, that would camouflage the mark—unless it was that it was new. That was possible, after last night, if Doyle were getting more and more into...that kind of stuff. He looked again, making sure. Yes. Definitely, unmistakeably, the tiny mutilation of a pierced ear. A bubble of hysteria was rising up again, and he almost got to his feet to circle Doyle as he had the exhibits in the Black Museum in New Scotland Yard. Fascinating, but morbid, the desire to see that which we can't understand.

That to which, perhaps unwillingly, we are drawn. He found himself wondering if both ears were pierced, like a woman, or only one, like a queer. Or gay, if he was to use the new terminology. It didn't do to call what was queer queer, just as it didn't do to call a spade a spade. Under the drone of Cowley's voice and the gimlet glower of Doyle's stare, he sat there, in the dry overheatedness of Cowley's office, watching the pot plant wilt, thinking about Doyle, about all the things he knew about this man. All the girls... Double dates, one couple in the bedroom, one in the sitting room, sound travelling, the murmurs and moans of sex unmistakeable, cycling round and round. There was no doubt there: Doyle had had sex with women, so he wasn't queer. And last night, he hadn't actually said he was, had he? So what if he was just one of those men you read about, what was the name they had? Cross-dressers, he thought, while answering Cowley's question about the capabilities of the old Chieftan tank. Yeh, cross-dressers. They weren't queers, didn't fancy men at all. They were just normal blokes who had to dress like that to express the other sides of their natures. Not lesser men because of that, of course not. And he'd worked with Doyle for years, been friends with him for ages, he'd've known if Doyle hadn't been a real man, wouldn't

he? It would show, the same way it had that gunner sergeant he'd been stuck in billet with.

The briefing was over and blessedly, Cowley had split them up for the day, Bodie being sent off to pump his old army cronies and contacts for leads on who was getting their hands on the weapons, Doyle to check with his informants from all the way back to his drug squad days always supposing any of them were left alive by their habits. He heaved a sigh of relief, getting out of that office and out of the aura of hostile confusion that was still bleeding from Bodie. And away, too, from the far too keen perception of his boss. The last thing he needed was Cowley asking questions.

He was sore from the feet up, a direct line of pain from his heels all the way up his back. Hands pressing into his coccyx, he stretched, easing some of the ache out. A bath was wonderfully appealing, hot water, salts, sloughing his skin with the loofah, scouring all the dead cells off. Who knew, it might actually make him feel alive again. Christ, but he'd forgotten how punishing it was to spend the entire day pounding the streets of London—and to make matters worse, these bloody boots were not exactly designed for that kind of thing. Still, a meal and a bath and he'd be as right as rain. As long as he didn't think about Bodie...

Easier said than done, his meal spoiled by the remembering of the few contacts they'd had with each other today. The Hammer House of Horror trip in the car this morning, the stiffness in Cowley's office, the clawing wariness for that five minutes when they'd bumped into each other at HQ before Bodie's report to Cowley. Normally, he would have waited for Bodie, gone for a bite to eat and a drink together, going over the day with each other, almost like a married couple, this compulsion to share their experiences. Apart from one, that was. Apart from one... He was as depressed as the weather, so he shut his curtains, turned all the lights off, put Sibelius on the tape deck and wandered upstairs. The bathroom was a cave of darkness, the tub a subterranean pool, redolent with the odours of mineral salts, soothing his mind as well as his body. Still, he turned the problem over and over in his mind, pressing the bruise to see if it still hurt.

It did. Funny, how until last night he honestly hadn't realised just what Bodie had become to him. He was everything, excluding lover, and that absence was Bodie's choice, not Doyle's. That desire had been recognised and accepted a long, long time before, then put aside to be brought out only when the temptation of daily living alongside Bodie became too much to ignore. Then, he would lock his doors, set the lights and the music, and make love to his body, pretending that it was Bodie loving him, or that it was Bodie watching him, not merely his own reflection. Only when he couldn't deny the loneliness any more, or when he had come perilously close to responding to Bodie's naïf teasing. The bathwater was cooling now, his skin beginning the prickle of goose-pimples, the uneasy restlessness sinking into his marrow. He scrubbed himself viciously with the soft towel, understanding the urge that drove some people towards scourging themselves, wishing he had one of the stiff, scratchy towels his gran had had when he was a child. Those had left the skin glowing red and stinging and he wanted something that would abate this melancholy. £3£3£3 There was an underlying uneasiness, one that **79** he recognised as his body responding to his £3£3£3 moroseness, the physical need rising to subliminate the emotional pain. His cock was beginning to quicken, slow flow of blood, sombre rise of his flesh, the reaffirmation of life over the brooding depression inside. Absently, he stroked himself, feeling no real pleasure, going then to pumping his cock. The restless desire remained, but he was still limp as a dish-cloth. A dollop of lotion, slicking his cock, fist pumping, turgid response, flesh reluctant, needing

God, but he missed Bodie. Losing him was going to be harder than anything he'd dreaded, far harder. He went into his bedroom, stopping in front of his wardrobe, opening the door, staring at the pale nudity that was reflected back at him. He looked like a wraith, a banshee come to wail his own death-or the death of his relationship with Bodie, incomplete as it had been. For him, he reminded himself. Bodie had everything from it that he'd needed. Until last night.

more from the mind than this loneliness.

Anger flashed through him: what the hell did he think he was doing, standing here like some Barbara Cartland heroine? What the fuck did it

matter what Bodie thought? What did it matter whether or not Bodie could handle Doyle's foibles? They were grown men both, and if Bodie didn't like what he'd seen yesterday evening, that was Bodie's problem, not his. After all, it wasn't as if they were lovers... Oh, how that phrase haunted him, shrieking and laughing at him, mocking cruelly. Narrow minded Bodie, not someone to approach with a proposal for a homosexual liaison. Bodie, who tended to see black and white, not bothering with the subtleties of grey, not in his own life. Spades were spades, all of them bastards, until he met one he fancied, then suddenly blacks were wonderful people. Poling on the river was for toffee-nosed pansies, until he'd met a girl who went in for that kind of thing, then the river and the countryside were the only places to spend days off. And queers were weak, undependable and flighty. That was it, final. Too risky to chance their partnership—and their friendship—on him being the right one at the right time to change Bodie's mind. Anyway, he didn't want being labelled as queer, didn't want being stuck into a tiny pigeonhole that only half-fitted him.

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He was still standing in front of the mirror, £3£3£3 a pale shape in the darkening dusk. He switched on the lamp, watching himself, the way his muscles moved as he walked back into the small world contained in the mirror. There wasn't much to look at, he thought. An average body, bit on the skinny side, hairy, knees he'd always hated, legs that he saw as ugly, the shin muscle prominent and stringy, the thighs heavy from running. Not much, he thought, not much at all.

> His body was still itching with the gloom of his spirit, depression yawning at him with bored patience, just waiting, like a big cat. He could feel himself going towards it, his mouth turning downwards, his eyes sombre, no spark of life to them. He stroked his cock again, to see if that would help. It just hung there, limp, foreskin covering the head and even that suddenly struck him as unattractive. Disgusted with his body and his attitude, he turned aside, carefully nurtured anger coming to his rescue. He damned well would not let Bodie get to him like this. He wasn't going to hang around, miserable and guilty, for something that wasn't wrong, no matter what Bodie thought. And what did Bodie

know anyway? All he knew was how to pull birds, no imagination, missionary position all the way.

Well, all right, so he was being unfair, but he absolved himself, knowing he had to burn this out of his system before the guilt and depression started the vicious cycle all over again. It had taken him too many years to come to terms with who and what he was to simply throw it all away because someone else didn't like it. Even if that someone else was someone he seemed to have fallen in love with... Perhaps that was why they called it falling in love: it happened when you weren't looking.

"Pack it in, Doyle," he said to his reflection. "Get a grip. It's not the end of the world. Bodie'll calm down, he'll get himself in order. And it's nothing to be ashamed of. It doesn't hurt anyone, it doesn't do any harm. It's not as if it's pædophilia or anything like that, is it? Get on with it, don't let Bodie get to you..." But his face, when he looked at himself, was still miserable, his body still as ugly. Slowly, he went over to the tallboy, to the bottom drawer, where he kept his special things. He had to do it, the compulsion overwhelming, the intellectual need to prove that it was all right pushing him on. First, the silver bracelet, heavy on his wrist. Then the neck chain, resettling it as it caught on the hair of his chest. An earring, next, the one he always wore when he did the clubs. Then the silk, the fabric whispering onto his skin, black glistening in the lamp-lit glow. He seated himself on the bed, slowly rolled the stockings up his legs, covering his legs, making them look long and perfect. Finally, high heels, shiny and stiletto, altering his centre of gravity, changing the cant of his walk. Facing himself in the mirror, feminine contrasting masculine, the balance in his soul settled. This time, when his hand cradled his cock through the caressing hold of the silk, he felt a throb of response, pride surging through him. He wasn't ashamed, he would never be ashamed again. He had promised himself that, when he finally faced up to the lingering afterburn of the day his dad had caught him sniffing around his big sister's underwear, a pair of her pink ones on, his prick stiff under the softness of the cotton. He'd carried that shame with him for years,

far too many years, until he'd been able to shed it, piece by piece. And he wasn't going to shoulder any more guilt or shame over this, not even for Bodie.

This time, he wasn't about to just barge in. He stood at the front door, patient for Doyle's permission to come in. It came, finally, and he couldn't blame Doyle for giving him wariness instead of welcome. Doyle was in his old dressing gown, the one Bodie had tried to get him to wear the night before, to cover a shame that should not exist. They were as silent and as strained as they had been in the car that morning, eyeing each other, each speculating as to what the other was up to. Bodie couldn't help wondering what Doyle was wearing under the dressing gown. He had his suspicions, for it was almost unheard of for Doyle to wear pyjamas and slippers and then top it all off with the dressing gown, so probably, under all the masculine trappings, lurked the feminine.

Bodie took a deep breath and spoke into the awkwardness that chasmed between them. "I've been thinking, Ray," he began, looking at his hands, not Doyle. "Been thinking a lot. And I think I owe you an apology. What you do in the privacy of your own home is up to you. And now that I'm over the shock, I've realised that just because you wear women's clothes, it doesn't mean you're queer. I mean, lots of men do it, don't they? Judges, generals, parsons... It's called cross-dressing, isn't it? I've been reading up about it, about how it's non-sexual, just a way of showing the feminine side of your nature, like. Not that there's anything wrong with having a feminine side, mind," he hastened to reassure his silent audience, "they say we've all got that to us. And it's just that some of us need to dress the part, cos we don't let it out properly the rest of the time. So..." he paused, still not looking at Doyle, part of his mind still in foment over what Doyle had on under that bloody dressing gown. As if hearing his thoughts, Doyle leaned forward and as he did, Bodie looked up, seeing the explanation of the long delay before Doyle had let him in, catching sight of Doyle's chest—his naked chest. And feet that were bare in the slippers, no stockings, no women's things as far as Bodie could see. He refused to name the pang in him disappointment. "Well, I just

wanted to come over and tell you that it was all right by me, if you, well, you know, wanted to dress like that."

"All right by you?" The anger in Doyle's voice cracked through the room, bouncing off the walls, ricocheting through Bodie. "Big of you, mate, fucking big of you. You're giving me your permission, are you? Well, I've got news for you, Bodie. I don't need permission from you or anybody else to do what I fucking please. You understand, do you?" he scoffed, the contempt drawing blood as Bodie's revulsion had drawn Doyle's the night before. "Let me tell you something, you great stupid prat, you don't understand shit! Cross-dressing? Read about it in a book, did you? Well, I fucking live it, mate. And it's not cross-dressing, not for me. I don't do it to express my feminine side, I do it because it turns me on. That's right, look shocked. You must've known that, Bodie, from what you saw. What d'you think I was doing last night, eh? You walked in on me when I was actually coming, for christ's sake. You call that being feminine, do you? And what about my toys, what about them, Bodie? That a non-sexual thing as £3£3£3 well? I've known you to blind yourself to the 81 truth before, but this is bloody pathetic."

The chair he was sitting in was turning to quicksand, sucking him in, suffocating him. He had to get up, to move, to get away, to not hear what Doyle was saying. It couldn't be true, it couldn't be true, it couldn't...

"Face the facts, Bodie. Your partner's bisexual and he gets some of his kicks from what's known in the trade as gender-fuck. I don't expect you to understand this, you ignorant bastard, but I'll tell you anyway, then you can get out of my sight and take your fucking platitudes with you. Non-sexual."

The scorn was like acid in Bodie's eyes, blinding him so that he could hear every minute sound—the tick of the clock, the hiss of the hifi where the tape had ended, the heave of his own breath, the furious hiss of Doyle's-but see nothing. He got to his feet, went over to the window, unable to stay still, powerless to leave the force of that inexorable voice.

"It's very sexual for me, Bodie. It turns me on something fierce to stand there like that. All the women's stuff, it just contrasts with me, makes me look even more masculine. Don't you see,

Bodie? I don't do it to be feminine, I do it to be more masculine. And it's exciting, feeling that silk on me, it's so delicate and fine, and I'm so hard and muscular." The averted face was getting to him, this display of outrage and horrified disbelief. "Shock you, does it? D'you want to be really shocked, Bodie? Well, I'll tell you something to scare you shitless. I think about you sometimes, when I'm standing there in my things. I think about you and I fuck my hand, and I pretend it's your arse I'm fucking."

He came right up behind Bodie, until Bodie could smell his after-shave and the underlying musk that told him what Doyle must have been doing prior to Bodie's arrival.

"I do it for a special treat, Bodie, when I want to feel really sexy, when I want to do something extra good for myself. Look at me, Bodie, you bastard!" He grabbed Bodie's arm, forcing him round, shaking him. "Look at me, Bodie. Don't you hide from me. Don't you do this to us, you stupid prick. Why does it make a difference, eh, tell me that. D'you think last night was the first time I've ever done it? D'you think I'm a differ-£3£3£3 ent man from the one you've known all this time? 82 Bodie, I don't even remember when I started £3£3£3 doing this, I just know that I've always done it. I've always liked it. Used to steal my big sister's knickers and wear them to school under my uniform, and it was best of all when we did sports, running around being all tough and playing football or rugby, with my panties rubbing me all the time. Oh, Bodie," and the anger was like him, utterly spent. "Can't you try to understand? It doesn't change who I am, it shouldn't change what we've got."

Bodie wouldn't look at him, white around the mouth, body rigid.

"Bodie, don't you dare do this to us."

Bodie wrenched himself free, finally looking at Doyle. "What the fuck do you expect from me, Ray? What can you expect?"

Then he was gone again, whirlwind leaving, hollowness setting up home in Doyle's belly. Going upstairs, he fingered his lovely things, but even they were unwelcome, a symbol of all the trouble gone before, of all the trouble yet to come. He thought of all the things he could do with what was left of the night, then tried to think of a single thing he actually wanted to do. Alone and lonely, all he did was turn the lights out and go to bed, pulling the blankets up over his head, the way he had when he was only a boy, caught in the middle of his parents' divorce.

He had intended to go straight home, but he couldn't, everything Doyle had said to him revolving around his head like a deviant carousel. For hours he drove, returning to the solitude of his flat only when he was so tired that he began to make mistakes in his driving. In his own home, he undressed, resolutely refusing to think about what Doyle had said. Not another second would he devote to it, brushing his teeth, washing, going to the bathroom, climbing into his bed with jaw clenched and muscles jumping with tension. He wasn't going to think about it any more. Not at all. Not for a second.

But Ray had said he thought about him sometimes, when he was doing that. Ray, thinking about him, wanking. His mate, a poof. No, he thought, be fair. Bisexual. Someone who could screw anything that moved.

He'd been like that, once. He rolled over, pulling the blankets up over his ears, screwing his eyes tightly shut as if that would blot out what his imagination was showing him. He wasn't going to think about that. He'd given all that up when he'd got back to civilisation and women, didn't do it any more, didn't need it any more, didn't want it any more.

But Ray did. A lot, if the pain in those green eyes had been anything to go by. Christ, how long had Ray wanted him? And why had he never said anything?

But he had, his memory supplied with inconvenient honesty. The night Bodie's girlfriend had stood him up and Doyle had suggested that as his girl had hinted more than once that she'd like a three-way with him and Bodie, then why didn't they go ahead and do it? He remembered his own reaction: rebuttal, vicious and beyond arguing, the instinctive reaction to something that scared him. He had wanted men before, when he was at school and first at sea. And when he was in Africa, of course. But it was one thing to want men when there were no women around; it was something else entirely to be afraid of a threesome because you just might be more interested in the other bloke than the girl.

He rolled over again, onto his back this time, then onto his front, punching his pillow in lieu

of his willful memory that wouldn't shut up or let him go. Doyle, saying that he thought of Bodie when he was masturbating. Bodie knew what it was like, to stand and watch a man beat his own rhythm stick. Knew how exciting that could be, knew how it could build anticipation until the sex itself became a desperation that had to be filled.

And that compulsion for sex, was it any different from what Ray did? He tossed again, the sheet entangling him in a sticky sweatiness, adding to his annoyance, fraying his nerves even more. He wasn't going to think about it, wasn't, wasn't, wasn't...

Ray, turning towards him, seed spurting from him, arching towards Bodie even as Bodie had stamped out the fire that was threatening to ignite his groin. And from what Ray had said, he would have been thinking about Bodie, at the very moment Bodie had stumbled upon him. He rolled over on to his back, trying to ignore the hope-filled stirring of his cock. He wasn't like that, not any more.

But Ray was. And without any kind of guilt, nor shame, nor any real difficulty. So why shouldn't Bodie? Why should he deny himself something he had once enjoyed? It wasn't smoking, which he loved, but had given up for the sake of his health and surviving Macklin. The old man must know about Doyle, even if he hadn't seen fit to tell his partner. A new thought occurred to him then, a realisation fed by months upon months of minuscule clues that had added up to absolutely nothing until this moment: what if Cowley hadn't said anything to him because he thought Bodie knew? Not, perhaps about the cross-dressing-or gender fuck, to use Doyle's terms—but about the bisexuality? They were the butt of many a joke round the Firm, cat-calls and comments, most of which they replied to in kind, camping it up like a row of tents. What if people already thought...

And it didn't bother him at all, much to his surprise. It was, rather, as if the worst had already been survived, for if everyone already thought it, then he wouldn't have to face the knowing sniggers. If everyone already knew...then there were only a couple of the mob who didn't enter into the spirit of the jokes, a couple of the staff who looked askance at them.

If it were already common knowledge...then Cowley didn't care, knew them well enough to trust them not to be security risks.

Yet he had thrown things at Doyle that accused him of being lower than low. And for what? For doing something that the poor sod obviously couldn't resist, something that was as much a part of him as sexual desire was of Bodie? He twisted back onto his stomach, pillowing his arms under the pillow, resting his cheek on the softness, feeling the hardness underneath. Was this what Doyle felt when he dressed like that, the intriguing differences, the congruity of pleasurable sensation, but delivered in such contrasting textures? He pressed his cock into the bed, into the softness of sheet and the hardness of mattress and felt the goodness of it surge through him. How many times had he done the same kind of thing, similar, but different?

And unbidden, the image came to him again, of Ray, standing there so tall and with his masculinity spearing out from the femininity of his...'things' as he had called them. Such contrast, such a richness of textures... And a confluence of those things convention had al- £3£3£3 ways told him meant sex. How many men could 83 remember the first time they'd seen the image £3£3£3 of ultimate sexual attraction: the woman in black lace, fish-net stockings and high heels? Bodie tried to remember, but it had come as no surprise to him when he had seen them in the magazines his dad had kept hidden under the mattress. Already familiar, already recognised as something that spelled the ultimate in desirability. Long legs sheathed in stockings, arching over pointed-toed shoes, enticing silk displaying rather than hiding the lure of genitalia...

And the other symbol of sex that he had seen. It all came down to the other thing, it was always the central focus of fuck-scenes in videos, or in porno mags, or in graffiti scratched on the walls of public lavatories. The erect phallus. Penis, prick, dick, cock, John Thomas, willie... There were so many words, but the image was always the same, hardness rising demandingly from the curve of balls and the thatch of pubic hair.

He bolted upright, shoving the covers off, all hot and bothered. For a moment, he rested on the side of the bed, mind and pulse racing, pic-

tures tumbling through his mind, acrobats of perversity, filling him with erotic images old and new, all of them bringing his blood to a boil. And at the centre of it, the hub of all this hungry revelation, was Ray.

Christ, how could he ever have been stupid enough not to see what was happening to them? Just because he had told himself it was inconceivable was no reason for him not to have seen it. As Ray had said, he could be willfully, destructively blind sometimes. He was on his feet now, throwing clothes on, cramming his bare feet into shoes, not bothering to tie the laces, tearing out of his flat and into his car. At this point, their flats were no more than ten minutes away and that was in traffic. At a quarter past two in the morning, there was only a lone panda car disappearing down a side street, freeing him to speed. He had no idea what he was going to say to Ray when he got there—always assuming he'd be allowed in after the stupidities he'd come out with earlier.

The door buzzing didn't wake him: the end-£3£3£3 less hammering echo of his confrontation with **84** Bodie had been doing that. Without having to £3£3£3 ask, he knew who it was and he dragged himself, wearied into numbness, down to answer the door. At least they weren't working tomorrow-today-which was just as well. The way things were between them, probably the only thing they'd be good for would be getting themselves killed. Always providing, of course, that Bodie didn't kill him for what he'd said. God, he couldn't believe he'd actually told Bodie he wanted him. And if he'd had to say it, why the hell couldn't he have been a modicum less stupid about it? The quintessential lesson in how not to make a confession to your friend and to someone you loved.

> He'd never seen Doyle look like this before, so worn and defeated. Not even after Ann Holly had he been close to this faded raggedness of spirit. He took a leaf out of Doyle's book and felt guilt lade his shoulders. Even acknowledging that there had been hastily-spoken cruelties on both sides, the original sin had been with him, for breaching Doyle's privacy, for setting himself on the Bench over him, for casting the first stone. "Ray..."

"You coming in or is what you've got to say quick enough to be said on the doorstep?"

"I'll come in."

Silence again, twisting to add to this rope that could hang them if they weren't careful.

Doyle, still well-wrapped, as if the cold had whistled through the walls of his house and Bodie the big bad wolf come to devour him, propped himself on the arm of the sofa, one leg swinging like a pendulum, marking the time as it passed.

"I've come to give you an apology."

"No, thanks, Bodie, I've already had one of your apologies tonight, I'm not up to another one."

"Yeh, well, this one's different. Just a flat out 'sorry'. Shouldn't've said and done the half of it, so I've come to say I'm sorry."

Doyle stared at him for a minute, as if weighing his sincerity. "Yeh, well, I should be apologising to you an' all, I suppose."

A silence notable for its awkwardness, neither one of them able to do more than fritter glances away on each other. Then Doyle sighed. "Are you going to be able to work with me still?" "Yeh."

"That's it? It won't be that easy, Bodie. You know that."

"Of course I know that, just how stupid d'you think I am? Oh, all right, so I'm going to be looking at you wondering, but not about the job, Ray. I know I behaved like a complete prat, but I was a bit taken aback. Can't think why, mind." He grinned, inviting Doyle to share the mild humour, start getting them back on an even keel.

A long, thoughtful look, then the faintest of chuckles. "Okay, okay, so you'll be fine on the job. All we have to worry about now is the rest of it."

Bodie couldn't meet his eyes, turning instead to his watch, taking it off, putting it back on. When he looked up, his gaze was steady and clear as a summer's day. "When you said you thought about me when you..."

"Put my things on?"

"Yeh, when you put your things on. When you said that, Ray, were you just saying it to wind me up or do you really think about me like that?"

It was Doyle's turn to look away, to take a breath, a moment out of time before returning

the bright wariness of his eyes back on Bodie. "That depends on you, mate." The sadness bled from him like clouds at dusk, barely visible, completely beyond reach, but so terribly melancholy. "Whichever answer makes it all right between us, that's the answer I'll give you. If you want me to think about you like my old grannie, then I'll tell you that's how I see you."

The very atoms in the air held still, frozen, waiting for the words that clung, fear-filled, on Bodie's lips before they spilled, tumbling helplessly from him, tumbling them both helplessly into an immutable future. "And if I don't want you to do that, Ray? If I want you to tell me the truth, no matter what, then what would you say?"

In years to come, Bodie would always say that this was the greatest moment of courage he'd seen in his life, sitting there watching Doyle hand his heart and soul over on a silver platter to a man he feared held a scalpel.

"If you wanted the truth? Then I'd tell you I think about you all the time, every day and every time I look at you, I want you. And sometimes, when I'm having sex with someone else, I'll pretend it's you. Or when I'm in bed on my own, I'll close my eyes and make it you touching me." He got to his feet, going over to the hifi, picking up a tape and discarding it when he saw that it was the same music that had been playing before, when Bodie had run from him. "And sometimes, when I've put my things on, I make love to myself because you're not there to do it for me."

"What do you want, Ray? If your fairy godmother came through the wall at you right now, what would you ask her for?" It seemed so easy to ask these questions, in the balm of darkness, the only light a single halo beside the window. "Go on, Ray, tell me."

"Same as anyone else, Bodie. Love, happiness, health, wealth."

The room was a womb, sussurating silence guarding them as they felt their way, blind, along this new path, a ribbon of light that was thin enough to cut like a blade if a single step went awry. "Who d'you want the love from? Tell me, Ray."

"Thought it'd be obvious after these shenani-

"Tell me, Ray."

"You really want to hear me say it, don't you? All right, I'll put it in so many words. I want you to love me. That clear enough? I've put my head on the block like a good little boy, now it's your turn, Bodie. Why'd you come back here tonight?"

Bodie came to his feet, walking slowly across the room until he was directly in front of Doyle. "I couldn't stop thinking about it-seeing you like that and all the stuff you'd said. Ray...hear me out, will you? Listen, I've been round the merry-go-round a few times, when it comes to blokes." He kept on talking, right over the sudden shocked jerk of Doyle's head and ignored the hungry fierceness in the green eyes. "Not for years, mind you, a hell of a lot of years, but I used to. I had a million excuses and to be honest, I'd always choose a woman over a fella any day of the week. But seeing you like that, thinking of you thinking about me... I just couldn't get it out of my head." He grabbed Doyle's hand, holding it between his own, aware as always of how physically warm Ray was. "I know how you feel about me-couldn't really miss it after all this, could I? And I think I could feel the same way about you." He brought the hand to his lips, £3£3£3 turning it, licking lightly where the pulse leapt 85 in Doyle's wrist. "But the real question is £3£3£3 whether we want to do anything about all this."

"I can tell you here and now what I want, Bodie."

"Even if I don't know if I can handle a longterm relationship?"

"Who said anything about long-term?" Hearty—as hearty as the traditional breakfast brought the condemned man.

"Stop pretending, Ray, there's only me here and since when have you been able to get anything past me? Come on, you've never done anything by halves, why'd you start it now? Look, I'm not saying that this'd just be a quick fling, I'm not saying that at all—"

"Then what are you saying?"

"I'm saying I'm pretty useless at staying with someone. If they don't get killed, then something's always happened and I've been able to get out before I get too involved. I can't promise you anything, not a thing."

Anger so hot it had burned cold flashed through him, words spitting from him. "What do you think I am, Bodie? Some poor shrinking violet? Some poor little thing you have to talk

sweetly to to get her to open her legs for you? Don't you try this with me, mate, don't you even begin to start on that. All right, so I like to wear women's underwear but that's only once in a while, when I need it. But even if I did it every fucking night and every fucking day it still wouldn't make me into some Victorian virgin. I've told you, Bodie, I don't do it to make me into Little Miss Muffet, I do it cos it makes me feel as butch as hell. So you get your stupid notions out of your thick skull and-"

"Give over, Ray, I never said anything anywhere near that! All I was saying was that you're better at belonging than I am. That's all, just trying to lay all the cards on the table. So don't bite my head off."

Doyle turned away from him, wrestling his temper under control, forcing himself to listen to words and not his own insecurities and fears. "Okay." Fingers tangling through hair, wiping his face, trying vainly to knead out some of the tension in his neck. "Okay. What're these cards of yours then?"

Bodie shrugged, even though Ray couldn't see £3£3£3 him, then reached out, watching as the shock 86 of his touch rippled down Ray's spine. He felt £3£3£3 the repercussions in his own flesh, the prescient knowledge of what was to come commingling with the sudden bolt of desire, that moment when he realised that he honestly did want Ray, wanted him with a fierce need that verged on the frightening. "That we start this and go into it with our eyes open. We want each other, there's no gainsaying that. We neither one of us wants to split up, but I can't make you promises I don't know I can keep. But I will promise to try, Ray. God knows, I'll try."

> Doyle leaned back into Bodie's strength, resting against the broadness of Bodie's chest. Oh would that it were all so simple. To go from horrified disgust to desire to commitment. Would that it were... "It's a bit sudden, isn't it? Tuesday last, you were as straight as a die and now here you are proposing shacking up with another bloke, and one who dresses up in women's things at that."

> "How the hell d'you think I feel? Christ, Ray, I thought I'd left all that kind of stuff behind, given it up for civilisation, but when I saw you like that, actually coming... Can't get it out of my head, Ray. It won't go away."

Doyle faced him again, incredulity dominating his face. "Are you trying to tell me what I think you're trying to tell me? You honestly expect me to believe that you're this—" a contemptuous snap of his fingers "-far away from being in love with me? You'll be selling me forests in the Hebrides next."

"Straight up, Ray—although I don't suppose that's the best way to put it, given the circumstances."

"Yeh, exactly. Look, how can you just do a Uturn like this, eh, Bodie?"

"I could say the same to you about the fucking corset!"

"But that's different, I've been doing that for years—"

"And that's what I'm saying to you, Ray. I've done it with blokes before, right? You just didn't know about it, the same as me and your undies. You're really important to me, it just hadn't dawned on me how much until all this made me stop and look at it properly. Anyway, what does it matter when it started or whether or not you can believe what I say? You can believe what I do, can't you?"

And standing looking at him, handsome in the light of the single lamp, Doyle suddenly couldn't care less what had brought Bodie to him like this. What difference did it make if it were for curiosity or kinkiness or pity? He'd have Bodie, at least for a while. Quite a long while, if he played his cards right, if he kept Bodie happy.

"Come upstairs," he said, not realising how desolate his invitation sounded, nor how defeated.

This isn't how it's supposed to be, Bodie wanted to shout even as he followed Doyle upstairs. In the bedroom, Doyle began methodically removing his dressing gown and pyjamas, as if this were no more important nor sexual than a doctor's examination. Automatically taking his own clothes off, Bodie couldn't forbear to comment. "I've just handed you my heart on a fucking silver platter and you make it sound like I've offered to pay you! What's wrong with you, Ray? That chip on your shoulder affecting your brain?"

"Don't let's start arguing, Bodie. Get into bed and I'll get the stuff." With that prosaic banality, he disappeared off into the bathroom and Bodie couldn't help but compare this joyless

lump with the feral beauty of the man he'd walked in on with such unexpected result. It wasn't right, it just wasn't right...

Doyle barely glanced at Bode when he came back through, setting towel and cream down on the bed-stand, pulling the covers back to get in beside Bodie. Words, seductive and low and dripping meaning, halted him.

"Get your things on, Ray."

His gaze snapped upwards, pinning Bodie like a butterfly for display. "What?"

"You heard me. Get your things on, Ray. I'd like to see you like that."

Eyes narrowed, voice narrower still. "Why?"

"Because I didn't get a chance to look properly before, that's why. And because it makes you feel sexy and gorgeous. And because it's something you want. Let me see you, Ray."

A very long pause, lingering stares and lingering thought and then, in silence, Ray got to his feet and went to the chest of drawers, pulling open the bottom drawer, the familiar creak squealing at him. Item by item, he drew his things out, and then, item by item, never for one moment looking away from Bodie, he drew his things on, the lusciousness of fabric and the taboo of his indulgence stirring his desire. Item by item, transforming himself until he was clad, head to toe, in his special things, his cock hardening with every hint of arousal from the man in his bed.

Bodie couldn't believe his eyes: this was not how he'd expected it to be. Oh, there was an ambivalence there, corkscrewing around his emotions, but it was all overshadowed by the scene unfolding before him. With every article that Doyle put on, he layered femininity over his masculinity, layer upon layer, male sandwiched with female, building and building until it was a composite picture of neither male nor female, but one thing only: Raymond Doyle. It was the perfect juxtaposition of all the things he'd always been expected to find sexy, but it was Ray who was turning his bones into liquid lust. Ray was sex personified, desire beating from him in flammatory waves, pummelling Bodie, turning him on something fierce. He was finding it hard to breathe as Doyle came over to him, hips swaying with the cant of his high heels, cock swaying in equal measure. He was transfixed by Doyle's gaze, as he reached for him,

pulling him down on the bed, turning him onto his back so that he could straddle the blackclad body, but Doyle had other ideas.

Doyle twisted, transposing them until it was Bodie on the bottom, Doyle kneeling astride him, dominant, in control, showing them both that he was still as much a man as Bodie. Then the issue was not one of who was on top, or who had the more machismo, for a look passed between them and there was no room left for anything else but the emotions of being together. In that look lay a truth, as small as the pea in the princess' bed, so small a thing to offer proof. Doyle saw it in Bodie's eyes, saw the love that lurked there, too shy and insecure to show its face in the brightness of day. But here, in the secrecy of the dark, it peeped out, making sudden, glorious sense of everything Bodie had been doing. Even the outrage in the beginning was quite reasonable now: seeing Ray like that had pulled the carpet out from under Bodie and look what had been hiding there. Small wonder the poor man had lashed out and then run, only to bury the facts even deeper so that he could cling, by his fingernails if need be, to a world that was £3£3£3 so much less complicated. Doyle leaned down 87 to kiss him, saw Bodie's mouth opening to him, £3£3£3 but instead, there was a gossamer kiss on translucent eyelid and a sweetness so intense it made heads and hearts spin.

Then Bodie moved under Doyle and sent a snarl of pleasure through them both, and Doyle kissed him again, but fiercely, possessively, grinding the hardness of his cock against Bodie, caressing him with the softness of silk. Hands raged over body, Doyle frantic to touch every inch he had imagined so often, Bodie filing himself up with the endless contrast of wispy fabric and the strength of maleness underneath. A whisper of sound, and the panties ripped, the head of Doyle's cock pushing through, tapping against Bodie's, pushing at him. In unison, mouths forged together, tongues sucking on each other, the two men hauled Doyle's things off him, careless of anything but the feel of each other. Then, a moment of profound stillness as they lay together, skin on skin, flesh on flesh, their hearts beating together. Bodie hadn't turned on this quickly since he'd been a teen, overflowing with that frenetic need to come, to be part of someone.

Doyle felt the upswelling of desire, felt it and matched it, his own body weeping its pleasure, sweat pouring from him, precum seeping from him. He was slick all over, and hot, and hungry and all he was was the drive to bury himself in Bodie's depths. Fingernails scrabbling, his mouth sucking on the fragile pulse in Bodie's neck, he found the tube of lotion, squirting it onto trembling fingers, slithering it onto shivering cock. Bodie was already spreading himself under Doyle, wrapping long legs around strong hips, arms pulling Doyle in tight and close.

Two fingers, slick with lotion, going into him but too much, too quick, Bodie's flinch of pain forcing him to slow, to breathe and to think, holding back a little, so that this was an act of love and not of rape. He knelt, so that Bodie's legs were splayed comfortably around his waist and then he slid his pinkie into Bodie, slowly, so slowly, watching Bodie every inch of the way. No distress there, only the brief closing of the eyes, to re-open and stare with utter trust at Doyle. So. The index finger this time, gently, £3£3£3 carefully, easing the puckered muscle, stretch-88 ing, stretching, taking his time, letting Bodie

£3£3£3 adjust. No longer an island, Bodie luxuriated in a feeling he had almost forgotten, this having someone else a part of you. And this sweetness was only the very beginning. He could feel his

kisses making him soar.

Another finger, two of them, side by side, deep inside Bodie, spreading his arse to let him in. He rotated his fingers, pulling back so that he could watch Bodie's face the moment his fingers found the buried prostate. Bodie's cock jerked as Doyle's fingers found him inside and ecstasy flooded him. Bodie felt, suddenly, on the verge of coming and felt, even more keenly, that he was empty inside. The fingers weren't enough, not even close. He wanted Doyle's cock up him, wanted to feel that plundering masculinity possess him. Wanted Ray...

arse relaxed and wished Doyle would get on with

it, but his mouth was stoppered by Doyle's,

The pretty pink hole was gaping wide for him now, a maw waiting to be filled. Carefully, he positioned himself, Bodie's hand coming round to guide him, leading him. There was a moment of snugness, then his cock was tamping Bodie's arse, filling him up, filling Doyle with sensation. He heard, as from a distance, the keening cry that erupted from Bodie, the intensity of his pleasure driving the sound from him even as Doyle drove himself deep inside. So tight, so incredibly tight, hardness in softness, perfect balance, as he needed it to be. He thrust, hard and fast, Bodie pumping with him, Bodie's cock slick as a mouth on his belly. He looked at Bodie looking at him and knew that they neither of them could wait. There'd be time enough later for them to be all slow and sweet and loving, but for tonight, for this moment, their loving would be fire and hurtling ecstasy. He couldn't maintain control, fucking Bodie with all his heart, pounding into him, the channel of flesh fucking him back with the tightness of its grip. The cum was gathered in his belly, hot and transcendent with pleasure. He thrust again, feeling Bodie shove up to meet him. Again, and Bodie's mouth fastened to his, breath mingling, sweat blending. Again, and the cum shot from him in a hot stream to splash on the hotter yet flesh of Bodie's insides. There was a moment of massive stillness, and then Bodie shouted, back arching and mouth falling open, his cum exploding from him.

Foolish, really, to be so disappointed that it was over so soon, but Doyle wished it had lasted forever. His whole body was still tingling with the feel of Bodie clutching him, ensnaring him in a trap he had no desire to leave. He held Bodie close, cradling him in his strength, hands stroking soft skin until his cock was ready to love Bodie again. He dropped small kisses on every available inch of Bodie, caressing him, keeping him close, keeping him safe.

For others, it would, no doubt, have been a small pleasure, but for Bodie it was a gift beyond measure. There had never been anyone to hold him quite like this before, giving him this utter certainty that he would be protected and cared for, sheltered and succoured. He nestled all the more comfortably into Doyle's arms, letting himself drift on a sea of tranquillity, his nerves still singing their pæan of pleasure. Something was scratching him. He ignored it. It bothered him a little more. He still ignored it,

preferring instead to concentrate on the softly coarse hair that covered Ray's chest. It was so wonderfully masculine, redolent with their combined musk, dappled with their combined sweat. The itch would not go away, so he finally yielded and moved, getting a muttered complaint from Ray for his troubles. The culprit that had irritated his skin dangled from his fingers and it took him a second to recognise what it was: a ragged piece of silk torn loose in their desperate hurry to get Ray naked. Bodie yawned, dropping the tattered remnant onto the floor, snuggling in closer so that he could sleep. Eyes almost closed, his languid mind recognised the expression he had seen in Doyle's eyes: wariness, reluctance, an edge of fear.

There was a solution for that, he knew, a very simple one, if he could get it out before he fell asleep. "Need to buy you a new one of these, Ray."

The words sunburst inside him, filling him with light. It seemed to him, in that brightness of hope, that perhaps Bodie had meant what he'd said. Perhaps it really was going to be the way they wanted it to be. He hugged Bodie to him fiercely, muscles bulging with the effort. He'd make it happen, he would. He absolutely would. If his world could turn itself upside down over night, then nothing was impossible.

Especially not him and Bodie, especially not with Bodie's acceptance and desire to fuel him.

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