

EAST

The exotic, erotic East. Eastern promise, Eastern delights. 1001 tales for long nights.

Here are three spicy tales. Sebastian's "Velvet Underground" was inspired by Lou Reed's "Venus in Furs," whose title derives from the novel of the same name. It was written by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch—the man who gave us the word masochism. That says it all...

The other two stories are by the Glaswegian and are the final two tales in our docklands series.

VELVET UNDERGROUND

SEBASTIAN

IN THE LOOKING-GLASS, HE EMBODIED FANTASY: A WARLOCK.

A stranger.

Even as something urged him to turn away—dangerous, the path this sort of self-love set you on—his eyes, greedy, devoured the image the mirror showed him.

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Burnished, polished curls were the only soft thing about him. White T-shirt, the more simple to contrast the rest of his attire; long black gauntlets, warrior style, to his elbows, where they flared into a cuff; his arms, thin and strong, bare above to the shoulder. Dark velvet jeans, skintight around his lean thighs and narrow belly, delving into shiny leather boots with sharp, sharp heels. He stamped once, suddenly, with the self-assured arrogance of a Cossack, his chin held high, haughty. And over it all, his own eyes, winter's grey, stared out at him, imperious, bold.

Prince of the night and of men's darkest, weirdest dreams.

He shivered: understanding all too well the chilling hint of something diabolical; perverse though it might be. He touched himself through warm velvet, then squeezed with vice-like fingers to cause pain; hating it, loving it—

Hating it.

It's just a job. Keep it that way.

The cloak he swung around his shoulders was edged with fur. Oddly, it had bells to adorn the hem; dull and mottled copper-bronze shapes, they could have been a long time buried in mud under flowing water. Not tinkly, fairy-tale bells, these: bells for adults who needed—certain things. They produced a weird, off-key sound to grate on the nerves: an eerie whine which slid through the senses, promoting the message of his eyes and what he wore and the things he would say—

A sexuality of ice. No mercy.

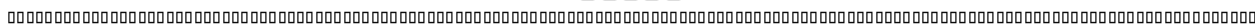
He did not want to see Bodie. But Bodie came anyway, that afternoon, curious; sharp blue eyes peered into every corner of Doyle's appearance, missing no detail, carefully assimilating it all.

"Hmm." Hands clasped behind his back, he stalked all around his partner, returned to face him. "You look—"

Doyle could not repress a wry smile. "Ridiculous?" he offered, knowing just how he must look to an outsider—for Bodie was very much an outsider, here in this secret underground where pain was pleasure and darkness ruled with a whip...

"Oh no," Bodie said, very quietly, and shivers coursed down Doyle's spine, "not that."

Vibrant with tension and jumpy, Doyle



said, "Good, is it?"

Bodie smiled, sudden and dangerous. "Good isn't quite the word."

A little silence between them stretched, drew taut.

Doyle turned away from Bodie. Parodying himself a little, he picked up the whip that lay on the dressing-table. It was a beautiful whip, a whip for connoisseurs, ivory-handled with a ring of pure silver and flighted with the finest, purest leather. Doyle ran his hand along the knotted thongs, studying himself in the mirror.

Bodie watched him too, taking in the arrogant spread-legged pose, the strong slender line of his body; the way the white T-shirt showed off Doyle's thin, firm-muscled upper arm, the skin brown outside, tender white within. Small nipples made little points and cast a dark aureole. And his face: tense, brooding—

Bodie frowned abruptly, disturbed.

"You okay, are you? I mean—not getting to you too much, is it, Ray?" When he had heard what Doyle had been assigned to do, he had felt first amused, then incredulous. He never thought Ray would agree to do it, nor that he would stick it having started, and it was worrying him that Doyle seemed so remote, an other-worldly look in his eyes.

Without warning, Doyle kicked the heels of his high boots together and whirled, flicking Bodie lightly across the thighs with the whip. A stylish and graceful move, it unnerved Bodie: the more so, since Doyle did not even seem to realise the oddness of what he had done.

Even through corduroy the whip had stung, pain dancing on his nerves like an itch.

Christ, Bodie thought, sweating, yeah, this job's getting to him all right, bloody daft question to ask... It was always the same. Whether coffee-morning circles in suburbia or killing parties raiding in the desert were the norm in your part of the world, sooner or later you conformed: unconsciously you soaked up the rules and sank into unity. Doyle was a part of something else now; living a new reality. One Bodie did not dare to imagine.

Doyle was answering him, looking far away with eyes that dreamed.

"Yeah. It...yeah." He fixed his eyes on Bodie's, gave a small shrug. "It—unsettles me."

"Not surprised," Bodie said, his chest so tight he could hardly draw in a deep breath, and Doyle nodded, briefly himself again.

"Yeah, gonna need a week on Ross's couch when I get out of here." Restless, he twirled the whip in his hand; already, Bodie noticed, he was an expert with it, and the strangest quiver ran through him, raising all the tiny hairs on his skin.

"You hate it?" he asked directly.

Doyle met his intense gaze head-on; then his lashes dropped over firekindled eyes as he said: "No, that's not my problem."

Bodie, voiceless, took that in. Also silent, Doyle shrugged again. There was a speck of dust on the calf of one boot; he bent to brush it off. Bodie attempted humour, eyes never leaving his partner.

"Probably better than rhino horn, watching you in action."

But Doyle seemed hardly to have heard him, the whip handle tapping carelessly on strong leather as he turned away. "You better go now, Bodie, I need some time on my own."

Before—

As he left, to leave things on a light note, Bodie said:

"You never know—I might come in myself, find out just what you get up to."

But it didn't come out as a joke.

Doyle's curly head turned, wintry eyes locking with his.

"You know where to find me," he said, expressionless; and a dark vista fell open between them, black magic, tainted, impure.

Challenging.

Time had passed, days and weeks, but what they had created was infinite.

Doyle had changed; or maybe it was Bodie who had changed, because, clad in denims and a lemon T-shirt, flipping open a can of

beer and wincing at the pop, Doyle seemed normal; or as normal as he ever was. Right from the start Bodie had suspected Doyle had depths of strangeness untapped by most: a changeling, a dæmon whose choice, for reasons all his own, was to fight for the angels, not the dark.

Straight as a die: honest to a fault: put with this a morality so extreme it was in itself almost a parody of corruption, and it all added up to the paradox of character which Cowley needed from his hand-picked army, hired to fight the worst things in the world.

Doyle had a rare temper, not the noisy vociferous tantrum which might explode over a lost sock or a missed parking space; those even Doyle did not expect to be taken too seriously, but occasionally something else showed itself. A cold and vengeful fury for those who had annoyed him, or made him look small: times when Doyle, under cover, had been forced to take humiliation from some carefree soul who thought he was an easy target, exactly what he seemed: but Doyle brooded and did not forget. Certain telling little events made Bodie uncomfortable to remember them: the former colleague, for instance, Doyle had never forgiven for making him look foolish in some prank years ago, languishing now in some forgotten hell-hole, never knowing whose word in whose ear had had his minor drugs charge made an example of. Nothing illegal, not even unfair: it was simply that extenuating circumstances did not enter into Ray Doyle's scale of justice, and mercy was not his style.

And Bodie. A mercenary with a twisted elegance of outlook, as casual about life as death, Bodie was a suave psychopath to Doyle's green-eyed paganism, fighting for the angels at his side, though god knew why.

They had been good as partners, one of Cowley's inspired teamings; fiercely loyal to one another even if they were not exactly friends; but now they were off-course and drifting. There was one way to go, or there was another: but to undo the dark, unmentionable sin of the past, to unclench its twisted fingers from

everything they said and did and felt now, was impossible: somehow, they had to live with it.

And so here Bodie was, lounging on Doyle's bed and drinking from a can of beer while Doyle put together a sandwich in the kitchen. One bored blue eye on the screen, Bodie flicked channels relentlessly: soap opera, sport, cartoons, black and white film—

Doyle appeared in the doorway wearing a white chef's apron and kissing his fingertips. "Le dîner, mon copain." He twirled the plate on his hand. "Ç'est magnifique. Though I do say so myself."

Bodie's stomach was tortuously tied. "I'm not that hungry."

"*Croque monsieur*," Doyle continued, advancing undeterred, confiding: "That's a cheese sandwich to you, mate."

"You have it," Bodie said, uninterested.

The sandwich landed on his chest.

"Christ, Ray!" Bodie sat up in a hurry, knocking over his beer; the toasted sandwich, hot and greasy, fell onto the bed. He ate it, to get rid of it. Doyle threw himself down beside his partner and lounged against the pillows. With one hand he stuffed the sandwich into his mouth, with the other he reached for the TV flipper and went through the channels: black and white film, snooker, cartoons...

"Pass me a hanky," he said, through a mouthful of sandwich, indicating: "wardrobe."

The handkerchiefs were in a drawer within. Bodie extracted one and noticed, as he turned to pass it to Doyle, something imperfectly hidden behind rows and rows of jeans and shirts. His heart jolted and his stomach turned, as a vista of memories he had buried fluttered darkly in his mind like moths, and from nowhere he heard the faint, eerie sound of bells.

The devil stepped into the room and stood looking, interested.

Anger Bodie had suppressed rose to torment him; the past surrounded him like incense, richly scented with emotions best left unstirred. To keep silence would be the best thing he could do; being Bodie, he defied dam-

nation and chose, instead, the worst.

“That little job well and truly over, isn’t that right, Ray?”

Doyle followed his gaze to the edge of fur along brown cloth. With one finger, he stirred a circle in the condensation on the top of his beer can, round and round; his gaze on Bodie was quite steady.

“You know how it is.”

“But I see you’ve still got the gear,” Bodie said, bending an amiable glance towards his partner. “Just in case, I suppose.”

Doyle’s grey-green eyes blazed sudden ice. “And what’s that supposed to mean?” Very carefully, very gently, he set his empty plate on the bedside unit, dusted his hands and the crumbs from his shirt, watching Bodie with a cat’s slanted concentration.

“Well, I’d have thought you’d want to rid yourself of all that filth as soon as possible. You know what they say: live in dirt long enough and it sticks.”

Doyle laughed coldly. “Oh, come off it, Bodie. Don’t be such a bloody hypocrite.”

“And what, my Raymond, is *that* supposed to mean?” Bodie smiled, a clever and terrifying smile. The flames rose around them; fire and brimstone faintly scented the air. Doyle chose to be perverse.

“Oho, a slight case of diplomatic amnesia. All right, mate, I understand.” He winked outrageously.

Bodie wanted to choke him. He grasped the bedclothes in tense fingers and stared from the foot of the bed at his curlyheaded partner, half his size but a dirty fighter. He had his back now to the offending robe, which roused in him the most disturbing and violent feelings, bonded as it was to the past, to the wicked thing they had done: bent on expiation he turned round, yanked the wardrobe door fully open, ready to tear the garment up with his bare hands.

A worse horror met his disbelieving eyes.

He stared, utterly silent, and heard the obscenity of Doyle’s laughter behind him.

It stopped when Bodie turned, six feet and 170 pounds of heavy muscle, his eyes sardonic and murderous.

“Don’t tell me. You got attached to them.”

Doyle didn’t say anything. He stayed where he was, prone, shockingly vulnerable, refusing the option of defence. Indeed, his eyes stared up in mocking provocation, defiant and bold.

Bodie kicked aside a tangle of fetishes, the sad trappings of sadism. He continued, with grim and sinister geniality, “Or, I know. Secretly you hoped for a Master?” From the hoard of peculiar toys, Bodie selected the whip, the very whip which in Doyle’s hands had lashed with a furious beauty, flying to draw blood from tender skin: he weighed it in his hands and considered Doyle with measuring eyes. “Sweetheart, you never know: I may oblige you.”

The endearment venomous, the offer dripped black poison. Doyle laughed up at him and kicked his foot against the duvet, casual and leisurely. “No chance, mate: I know you. You couldn’t do it.”

As an invitation, a provocation, it was hardly subtle. Doyle tossed his head with roguish coquetry: but something more flickered beneath, a terrible desperation, a mad dervish dancing wildly in his eyes.

Bodie hated him for that.

It was the sweetest, dirtiest temptation he had ever had, to lay into Ray Doyle with slashing strokes, punish him for lascivious acts with half the world, the whip singing in his hand: he felt the thing vibrant, eager to snap through the air and take the blood it hungered for.

Bodie threw the whip down, hard, so that Doyle caught it instinctively and winced.

“You sick bastard,” Bodie said, breathing hard. “You poor, sick bastard. Grew on you, did it? Now you can’t do without it?” His mouth twisted, savagely. “I know the story, Ray. It starts as a game, and then you find you can’t stop playing.”

“It isn’t like that,” Doyle said.

“*Then why hang on to it?*” Bodie hurled at him, all of his anger and his shame blazing like a torch, burning the last hope of salvation away. Abruptly, Doyle’s attitude changed, melting him into a pliant sprawl. His sudden smile was sweet, deepening the crease in his cheek so that it flashed like a dimple. “You said it yourself. To—play with.” And he drew the whip between his legs obscenely, like a lover, a deviant caress rich with subtle eroticism. Bodie was disgusted, and fiercely excited, and could not take his eyes from his wanton partner. It was already too late: already they were doomed.

“That’s a dirty game, Doyle,” he said from a tight, tight throat, astonished and ashamed by his intense and urgent responses to something his intellect was sickened by, even as his body yearned.

Doyle kissed the tip of the whip and threw it away. He held out his arms. “But you want to join in.” His eyes, insolent, travelled the length of Bodie to linger, appropriately.

“I don’t think you mean this, Doyle,” Bodie said through gritted teeth, undoing his belt buckle. “But you’ve done it anyway; and now you’ll have to take the consequences.” With a shocking thrill he saw the first apprehensive flicker from Doyle, the nervous sideways glance. Bodie advanced on him with deliberation. “You’re asking for this, aren’t you? Well, you can have it.”

Very carefully, with a lover’s tendresse, he unclasped Doyle’s belt, pulled down the jeans and the scrap of warm cotton he wore beneath, pushed up his T-shirt to his armpits. He opened his own trousers just as far as was necessary and no more.

Half naked, an appealing sprawl with his clothing disarranged, Doyle looked sweetly ripe for rape. His hard organ curved up erect; it looked huge over his narrow hips, straining halfway up to his heart, a vivid colour against the pale skin of his belly. A teardrop glistened at the slit. Bodie smiled tenderly, brutally. “I think you’re enjoying this even more than I am. Which—” he knelt over Doyle’s face— “only

goes to show—” he paused, with the tip of his cock an inch from Doyle’s perfect, quivering mouth— “just how beyond help you are. And sweetheart—” his hand closed, suddenly, on the fragile windpipe of the man beneath him— “if you bite me, you won’t find breathing very comfortable: just a friendly warning.”

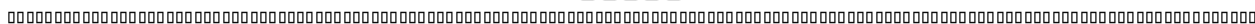
Doyle’s eyes looked up at him, shining, somehow sad. Bodie shut his mind to them. Madness, this was insanity; but he fucked the warm wet hole of Doyle’s tender mouth in a white-hot blaze of lust, giving vent to all the anger and the fear and the sheer sexual glory of passion unleashed and power gained. A gasp left him as orgasm surged; he grabbed at curls and ground Doyle’s face hard into the musk of his loins as his cock extended itself and spat sweet fire down Doyle’s throat, a wonderful physical joy spreading warmly through him, convulsing him with shudders of glorious sensation.

Looking at Doyle afterward, with his heart still pounding fiercely, Bodie didn’t regret a second of it, not one second; it had been far too marvellous for that. Doyle’s eyes, closed, were wet with tears; Bodie brushed them away with his thumb and tasted sweet salt. “Was that what you wanted?” he whispered to him tenderly. “Right up your street, eh mate?”

Unable to speak, Doyle turned his head away from him. Bodie caressed his chest gently and saw Doyle’s cock, a pale, sad little curl on his belly. “Too rough for you, sweetheart? Or— not rough enough?” He leaned over and picked up the whip from the floor. “There.” He brushed Doyle’s genitals with the leather thongs, trailing them over him kindly. “Is this what you like?” Slowly, Doyle’s body responded to this inhuman lover, the cool corrupt touch of an artefact. His eyes, wide open, watched Bodie all the time; even in the sharp-edged ecstasy of orgasm: the last and best bravado of all.

And now there was no hope.

Pride and perversity, the weird ritual dances of pleasure sharpened by pain; they had let these things out of the box and the conse-



quence was damnation. Perhaps, once, they had dreamed of something different, and never spoken: but it was out of reach forever now.

Perhaps it had been theirs for the taking, once.

Once upon a time.

Before...

Tired, Bodie lay down beside his partner; his hand groped for and found Ray's. They lay there hand in hand. Doyle was sleeping sweetly, his breathing a noisy rasp, his cheeks streaked with the silvery salt of tears; his fingers entwined tightly with Bodie's. Bodie shivered, and burned, as if with a fever: he could not sleep.

The present was no comfort at all: but when he shut his eyes it was to find the horror of the past waiting, unpurged, to unfold its little drama again before his cringing mind.

They were in hell, no doubt at all of that: the wheels were set in motion; all they could do was suffer to be swept along, and pay the price for eternity.

And so he had come, anonymous, into the stormsweet world of depravity where the Master now ruled; opened for a while the chink of dark fire that ran beneath the real world where people worked and laughed and played, the currents that ran deep beneath the rational mind, and he discovered forbidden enchantment; it engulfed him.

Briefly masked, two harlequin diamonds shielding his eyes, the man who was and yet was not known to him led him into velvet passages of desire, spiked with thorns that only sweetened the pleasure, the rough voice harshened now with command.

And he listened to it, shivering, and obeyed because damnably he wanted that, and only that; and the sound of weird bells celebrated his subjugation. The whip whispered silk, and struck home on bared skin, drawing nerve-shrieking pain, exotic pleasure equal in strength: he knelt for it without meekness, seduced into wanting by that voice of subtle magic, beg for me, kneel for me—

He tasted leather, and felt only rushed, dark excitement frightening in its intensity, a tidal wave, too fast, too much for him. The whip, enchanting, stung along skin and teased him. The Master spoke to him, harsh, imperious, and his own voice answered only in gasps, whispery. The high sexual tension gathered, and peaked—

A moment of stillness lasted too long. He waited, in an agony of wanting.

"BLEED FOR ME," said his master, and he laughed, a soft, chilling sound just as the whip struck home.

Kneeling bared on fur, he cried out, the warm sweet pleasure at his centre ripening, overflowing: and he was coming with unbearable glory even as the silver-tongued whip, expert, drew blood.

Awakening from the maelstrom to silence, tasting the warm mouth of the man who now knelt beside him, holding him, something he had not expected and yet it came to him as naturally as breathing; for an infinity they stayed that way, equals once more, very close.

Then the crack opened, and closed behind him with finality, and he was out in the world again, with the knowledge of a thousand years on his shoulders.

And that was the end of innocence.

For H.G., though she is too nice for it: but she knows why. 5/90