## M. FAE GLASGOW

## WISH I WASN'T HERE

Silent and grey, water and sky surrounded him. Even the pier was grey in this light, the cloudy skies leaching the colour from painted wood, the shuttered cafés and amusement arcades staring blindly out at the deserted seashore, summer's colourful profusion of sun-burned holiday-makers nowhere to be seen. Bodie stuck his hands more deeply in his pockets and wandered a little farther out, to where a grizzled old man was sitting, solitary, fishing. They exchanged the brief nod that passed for greeting, then Bodie was walking on, looking for something to do, or see, or best of all, someone to talk to.

Christ, but he missed Doyle. The tea shop, used year round by locals, was still open, so he went in there, but only old Mrs. Henderson was there, dozing behind the till. Familiar now, Bodie helped himself to tar-like tea from the urn, and a cake from the old-fashioned cake stand that Teresa simply couldn't persuade her gran to get rid of. Quiet enough to not wake Mrs. Henderson up, he slipped a pound note under the tip saucer; he'd get his change later, if Mrs. H. woke up before he left, or tomorrow when he came in as usual.

Depressing thought, that. Sunk into a routine that would bore an octogenarian, and it was still a bit much for him sometimes. Not surprising, really. The injury was well healed now, but he was still a bit weak from the infection. Mind you, he was willing to admit, if he were alone with no-one within five miles of him and had a written guarantee that Cowley would never hear of it, that the tiredness was caused more by depression than any lingering after-effects of the stabbing.

Christ, but he missed Doyle! And how many times had he thought that today? Steadfastly, he refused to think about Doyle any more. Well, he wouldn't think about Doyle for an hour. Wouldn't think about the job, or his mates, or going out to a decent pub, or a film that was less than three years old, or a good Indian restaurant or any of the other million things he missed. Such as Doyle. But he wasn't supposed to be thinking about Doyle, was he? Not for another fifty nine minutes anyroad. He picked up the paper, supped his tea, took a bite of his cake, engrossed himself in the fervid discussion on whether the Council should erect a new wind shelter on the Promenade, or use the money for extra bins round the shopping precinct. By the second paragraph, he had reneged on his promise to himself and was missing Doyle all the more. If Ray were here, he'd be able to toss sarky comments across the table, and have Doyle answer him right back. But all he had was the grey sky, the grey sea, and Mrs. H. snoring at the till.

Small wonder he was depressed.

Go to the seaside, Cowley had said, recover your strength, get your edge back. He closed his eyes for a minute, indulging himself in one of the few amusements available him. Reliving the past. Correction: reliving the bits of his past that were about Ray but safe, oh, yes, only think safe thoughts about Ray...

The sun had been streaming in Cowley's window when the old man had ushered them both in, Doyle looking at Bodie, Bodie looking at Doyle,

both of them on tenterhooks. Not many people got invited to Cowley's flat, and those that did were usually of considerably higher standing than two CI5 agents.

"Sit yoursel's down," Cowley was saying, limping slightly as he crossed to the old-fashioned sideboard and got the whisky out. Another glance between the other two men: not only the Laphroaig, which was unusual enough, but the crystal glasses as well. "Here," Cowley was handing them both a glass, and suddenly the rich, peaty smell of the whisky was drowning out the smell of the sea and the tea-shop, and Bodie really was back there that sunny afternoon, in the final days of an unforecast Indian summer that had lasted a few precious days before autumn had closed the skies and started killing the trees. He could feel it again, the ache in his back, in the side of his neck, in his arm where the worst of the bruising had been, and hovering over it all, the odd lightheadedness that came from fever and too much weight lost too quickly. He should still, according to the doctors, have been in the hospital, but he'd signed himself out, and gone gratefully home to Doyle, Ray taking care of him, lazing around together in those few days of sunshine—until the phone call. And then there they had been, in Cowley's living room, his boss slightly rumpled in brown trousers and tan cardigan, shirt open at the neck, old brown leather slippers on his feet and his faded ginger hair dishevelled as if Cowley, of all people, had been worrying enough to run his hands through it.

"No doubt you'll be wondering what's behind all this."

Not a question, and only Cowley had any answers anyway.

Their boss was staring down into his glass, swirling the whisky, watching the way the light glinted in there. Silently, Bodie and Doyle waited. Then, abruptly: "You were very attentive of Bodie here when he was in hospital, weren't you, Doyle?"

Now how the hell was he supposed to answer that? Doyle shrugged, taking a casual sip of his drink, nothing showing how fast his heart was pounding, nor the fear that was racing through his veins. "Same's any mate would do."

Cowley, sharp-eyed, nailing him. "McCabe wouldn't do it for Lucas."

Quicksand, treacherous underfoot, ready to devour him. Another shrug. "Then maybe Lucas and McCabe need to be re-partnered, if they're

that callous about each other."

Nice one, Doyle! Bodie thought. That should put the old sod off the trail. Don't let anyone else see how close we're growing, don't let anyone spoil it for us...

"Oh aye? And what about after you were shot, Doyle, when Bodie went to stay with you, took care of your shopping and cleaning and heaven knows what else?"

Neither one of them gave in to the temptation to look at each other, not the slightest flicker of reaction giving them away, the united front presented as always, as if their world weren't being torn apart, all the ragged, unspoken secrets held up for public comment. "Told you, we're good mates, and we take proper care of each other."

"And is it?" Unblinking, no mistaking the implication in his words.

"Is it what?" Doyle, an edge of hostility now, tension showing round his mouth and in the way he uncrossed his legs, sitting up very straight, that very formality a silent banner of defiance.

"Proper."

"Couldn't be improper, could it?" Doyle demanded, willing his partner to keep quiet, to let him deal with this, let him bear the brunt.

"Couldn't it? Tell me, Doyle, what's the difference between proper and improper?"

Doyle smiled, not sweetly. "Oh, well, I wouldn't know, would I?" He dug out an old quote, a snide insult delivered by the former Minister. "Illiterate, ill-favoured gutter brat like me, what would I know? I'll just leave the moral judgements to you, I think.'

"Oh, you think, there's no doubting that," Cowley said with something akin to approval. Then it was Bodie's turn to face the Inquisition. "And you, Bodie, will you leave the moral judgements to me as well?"

"Depends, sir."

"Oh, it depends, does it? And what is it it depends on?"

Bodie swallowed, Adam's apple bobbing, gambling more than he had any right to do, not without discussing it with Ray first. "Depends on whether you're going to use the rules of peace or the rules of war.'

And felt Doyle's momentary puzzlement, saw Cowley's instant comprehension. Cowley's voice was very soft, his accent very strong, as if thirty years abroad had been wiped out and he were the man he'd been before he'd moved down South. "An' would it make that much of a difference?"

Bodie, almost in a whisper, sensing Doyle's comprehension and stunned disbelief. Oh, god, he thought, even if we get away with this, there'll be hell to pay when he gets me outside. "Yes, sir, it would make that much difference."

Cowley pressed his lips tightly closed and got to his feet, going over to that same sideboard, and the silver framed photos on it. Parents, obviously, in the poker stiff poses of days gone past. Immediately behind that: standing with an old woman who was obviously his grandmother, there was Cowley himself, all shining face and ruthlessly combed hair, in his brand new school uniform. Then Cowley again, this time with another boy, not a penny to choose between them, in their Boys' Brigade uniforms, honour badges bright as their sashes. Next, four young people, the two boys become men, laughing, flushed faces, standing there in their kilts and lace-up dancing shoes, the two girls in white dresses and tartan sashes, smiling brightly at the camera, more life than one photograph could hold. So many other pictures: a stern regiment standing stiffly at attention, soldiers caught exhausted in their bivouac, faces begrimed and muddy, the sort of photo that had signatures and dates on the back, too many of them belonging to dead men; a sepia-tinged old man, hair and collar of a fashion long since discarded, but with Cowley's sharp eyes and that same proud expression, and those same laugh-lines round so similar a mouth.

Cowley stood there for some time, face revealing nothing, remembering what Doyle and Bodie could never know, what Doyle and Bodie could never be told. The man's loneliness was palpable, and Bodie was guiltily glad of it, for it could weigh the scales in their direction. If Cowley could see his way to understanding that they were stumbling along, taking their first steps on a path that would free themselves from the loneliness that was the everyday curse of this line of work, then perhaps he would let them be. Perhaps, for it was obvious Cowley thought they had travelled that road many a time and were all too familiar with it.

With his back to Bodie and Doyle, paying more attention to the photographs of his own past than to them, or so it seemed to his agents, Cowley said: "For all we're fighting a war to keep the scum off the streets, we are, technically at least, at peace."

Cowley turned to look at Bodie, an expressionsomething, almost recognised—fleeting across his eyes before Bodie could decipher it. "You're asking too much of me, laddie," Cowley said, and there was sadness there, and regret, and things hinted at that their boss would never speak of. "You're asking me to mind things best forgotten, and to break rules that shouldn't be broken." A slight shake of his head, and then he was looking at those photographs of his memories again, speaking scarcely above a whisper. "The one rule I'm feart of breaking."

And Bodie was left to wonder what had been left unsaid: 'especially for me', or 'especially for you'?

But then Cowley was looking them again, brisk and dour as always, but this time, not even Bodie could imagine a smile on this face, nor that this man could have possibly hinted at forbidden feelings. "No, it's the rules of peace we'll go by. I trust you both know what that means?"

Doyle's silent shock echoed through the room, smacking Bodie, making him curl up inside with guilt. He glanced at his partner, saw the expression on his face, and Bodie felt the blunt wedge of that shame edging them apart. Christ, he shrieked, but silently, all the sound bottled up inside behind a militarily impassive face, why couldn't this have waited until we'd talked about this? Until after Ray at least knew where we were heading. Or what I wanted with him...

"Would you care to spell that out, sir," Doyle was asking carefully, very, very politely, an absolutely stunned expression lurking just behind his eyes. "So that we all know we're all talking about the same thing here."

"I thought I'd trained you better than that, Doyle," Cowley said, busying himself with pouring more malt, topping up three glasses far more than mere hospitality, even of the Scottish sort, demanded. "Think, man! If I were to spell it out, then that would mean I knew all about you and ... " a pause, a mouthful of whisky swallowed, then Cowley continued, "your partner there. And if I know about it..."

"You would have to ask us to resign."

"Aye, Bodie, I'd be leaning on the pair of you to resign, to get out before the scandal broke and damaged my department."

"And if you don't know?" Doyle, asking, Bodie looking at him with shock, and perhaps, a touch of hope.

"If I don't know?" A longish pause, more than a mouthful of good Laphroaig disappearing. "If I have cause to suspect-cause that can be put down in black and white and used against me, ye understand—" a sharp glower at them both, a warning and an anger, "then I'd have no choice but to order a full security check run on the pair of you."

And that slight emphasis on 'full' was the most chilling threat Bodie for one had ever had levelled at him.

"So basically what you're saying is that if we'd done anything—and we haven't, so you're in the clear-" Bodie said, unable to look away from Ray, watching the disillusion grow, "but if we had, then we'd be out, and if we hadn't-which we haven't-" and he wondered why Doyle was looking at him like that, as if he were some sort of slimy creature crawled out from under a rock-"but then decided that we were going to—which we're not, wouldn't ever even consider such a thing," and now he wasn't looking at Doyle, didn't dare face his partner, "but if we did, then you'd run a check and we'd be asked to resign?"

"Oh, for fuck's sake, have you turned into a parrot as well as a fucking eunuch?"

"If I was a eunuch, I wouldn't do much—"

"That's quite enough of that language, you two."

"Yes, sir." Bodie, looking downwards, closing in on himself.

"Oh, that's great, that's really great! I've got you threatening us with the chop and I've got him dancing like a puppet on a fucking string!"

"What d'you expect, Ray?" Shouting, jumping to his feet, not even noticing the way Cowley was watching him. "Me down on one knee with the diamond ring in its little box?" Subsiding then, folding in on himself, unnaturally small in his chair, all the power and bravado gone out of him. "We could never have anything like that. Why d'you think we've been going round and round in circles the way we have? If anything was going to happen..."

"That's enough," Cowley again, but not his usual bark. This was very gentle, and the bite it carried was all the more painful for it. "You two know better than to have this conversation in front of me."

Two voices, in tattered unison. "Yes, sir."

"Just see you remember to watch your language in front of me-and everyone else on the squad."

"Is that it?" Doyle asked, but looking at Bodie, asking a question that Bodie didn't know how to answer.

"Aye, laddie, it is." Cowley, saying it for them both. "If you either one of you intend to stay in security-and you've both got fine careers ahead of you, so don't go doing anything any stupider than you already have."

"So that's it then. Over and done with." Still looking at Bodie, but not asking any more, not really.

Bodie didn't quite shrug, a gesture Doyle had always found attractive. "Suppose so."

Doyle looked away, out the window, watching the light glint off a window opposite. "Best be off then, I suppose." Something too close to a sigh for comfort, then a watery smile, one that had no heart to it. "Need a lift, mate?"

As Doyle had driven them both here, and as Bodie was in no fit state to drive, the comment was nothing more than a signal that everything was back to being just friends, all other possibilities dead and decomposing before their eyes.

"Before you leave, Doyle, take this with you."

"What is it?" As cool as if this were a routine day, he picked the typed page up from Cowley's desk.

"A special course in weaponry at Sandhurst. I've made arrangements for you to spend this weekend and the next fortnight there."

Doyle just looked at him. "Is that a hint or an order? Sir?"

"The latter, if you're too stupid to take the former."

"It's all right, I've got the message. No need to send me off to the boondocks."

Cowley ignored him, turning his attention now to Bodie. "And you're looking too peaky for anyone's good. A wee sojourn at the seaside should see you straight."

And no-one was going to actually comment on that, although Doyle opened his mouth, only to close it again when he looked at Bodie's unrevealing face.

"The seaside at this time of year? Guaranteed pneumonia-"

"Not at this time of year, Bodie, not if you wrap up well." Implacable, making his point, giving them both the opportunity that they were still to be

trusted, that there was no need for that threatened full security check.

"I'll take my woolly undies then, shall I?" Vicious smile, so much anger suppressed behind it. "That should give the local ladies a thrill."

"Aye, it should," more heavy-handed than usual, labouring a point that had already been made, but harping on at it, as if he couldn't quite let it go. "So should you, Doyle."

"Pimping, sir?" Doyle asked sweetly, already half-way out the door. "Or am I supposed to pay them?"

And then he was gone, and Bodie with him, so that only Cowley was left behind in the untouched tidiness of his bachelor flat.

Unspeaking, Bodie and Doyle got into the car together, neither one of them willing to wonder aloud how long it would be before they could afford this luxury again. Several minutes, no words spoken and precious little of London travelled, cars congesting the roads like flu, crowds overflowing the pavements, tempers made short by the heat. Longer, and more distance travelled, far enough to take them beyond the press of humanity into almost deserted streets, old age pensioners moving with the slow care of the easily broken, and children hurling themselves around with the abandon of immortality.

In the car, it was Doyle who finally spoke. "So are you going down the coast or what?" Or what: follow the rules, or give it all up and stay together, do something about this intimacy that had been growing so unavoidably between them.

"Might go down to a place I know near Plymouth," Bodie said, being carefully casual, not wanting to push Doyle into what neither one of them had been ready for this morning, so the mere mentioning of it by Cowley shouldn't have changed that. "You?"

"You're the one he's sent off to get a suntan, not me."

"That's not what I meant and you know it. You going to Sandhurst then?"

Doyle was looking across at him, at the way the sun had made Bodie's normally pale skin slightly pink, at the single drop of sweat that was rolling down Bodie's temple. Doyle, from the expression on his face, wanted, deeply, to lick that droplet up, to taste Bodie, to know the man. But they hadn't brought this out in the open until Cowley had trawled it up in his prim little parlour, so Doyle didn't reach across, didn't press his lips to Bodie's warm skin. And Bodie knew why. After all, he had said he was going to the coast, doing the sensible thing, getting away from him-running away from temptation. Bodie knew he had made the right choice, no two ways about it. Still, to give up all the promise, all the possibilities between them without ever having given it a chance...

"Don't suppose I've got much choice, have I?" Doyle said heavily. "Anyway, not much point in staying behind if you've gone off to play in the sand, is there?"

Tension prickling his skin, Bodie hastened a glance at his partner, then looked away, preferring the banality of lace-curtained windows to the almost hopeful expression on Doyle's face. There had been an offer in that last comment: if Bodie stayed, then so would Doyle, and damn the consequences. But to give up everything he'd worked for, everything he'd done to redeem himself in his own eyes, for what? For a handful of promises that hadn't even been made yet? For a love that hadn't been mentioned apart from the most elliptical of Cowley's comments? For lust? Too much to lose, and perhaps all he would gain is a relationship that wouldn't work, a hope that would pan out into nothing more than a curiosity that faded when satisfied, the unnatural outcome of a tooclose partnership brought to premature fruition.

Half a street away from Bodie's flat, Doyle tried again. "Since we're getting hung anyway, I just wish it was for a sheep instead of a lamb."

That cut Bodie to the quick. He knew what Doyle was talking about, had been thinking of a similar metaphor himself. But from his point of view, it seemed that they'd been let off lightly with a warning to protect them from their own indiscretions. And perhaps, if they'd never even got to the point of discussing these feelings, protection from throwing their careers away on something as solid and dependable as air.

"Fair enough," Doyle said, when he pulled up outside Bodie's flat. "Silence speaks louder than words, eh? Anyway," and his sunglasses were left in place as he said goodbye, "you've got a key to my place, you can pick the rest of your stuff up tomorrow."

"You going to be there?"

"Nah." Off-hand, as if it didn't really matter anyway: they were only workmates, after all, weren't they? "Think I'll go hit the road tonight,

drive around a bit, have a bit of a break before I have to face the chinless wonders at Sandhurst. So." An oddity: an awkward pause between them. A casual goodbye seemed too little, a handshake too formal, and a hug-too much by far. "Well. See you back at work once you've got yourself back in shape."

"Right." He stared at Doyle, wishing there were something he could say, or better yet, something that he had said, before Cowley had dragged it out like so much dirty laundry. Again that fraction of a shrug, and he was turning away, going up to his own flat, leaving Doyle sitting in the car on the street in the sun, watching him. He could feel Doyle's eyes on him every step he took up the half flight to the main door, knew he was being watched as he dug out his keys, turned them in the lock, and pushed open the door. He didn't want to go through that door: didn't want to finish this before it had even started. Started to turn, to say something, but the car was screeching away, only the stench of its exhaust lingering in the summer air.

Back in the here and now, he could smell the seaweed and the sand, the clinging underscent of too many holiday makers packed too hotly into the tea room. He even fancied he could smell the Daddies sweat and the Mummies' stale, cheap perfume, and the grime of their sand-crusted kiddies. There had probably been a squabbling tribe of overtired tourists sitting at this table when he'd been in Cowley's parlour listening to the old man dispose of his life for him. And for Doyle as well. Christ, poor Ray. He'd been so taken aback when it dawned on him what he, Bodie, and Cowley were talking about that afternoon. Poor bastard, to have Cowley, of all people, bring it all out in the open like that, when all Doyle and he had done so far was let the camping go a bit too far, copping more of a feel than was strictly typical, being a bit too fond of slinging their arms round one another, a bit too free in their discussions of sexual dalliances... Of being a bit too conscientious in giving aid and succour to their companion-atarms. He could still remember, that first night Doyle was out of hospital, lying in Doyle's big bed, his partner still and silent and awake beside him. How long had they lain like that? Felt like forever at the time. And then Doyle had grunted with pain, and misery, and reached out until they were lying side by side, their hands and arms touching,

their legs so close he could feel Doyle's heat. They might have done it that night, if Doyle hadn't been so exhausted by the shooting.

Typical, Bodie thought to himself, abandoning the dregs of his tea and the crumbs of his cake, every single time either one of them had been vulnerable and miserable enough to let it happen, there had been an injury in the way, new stitches, fragile joints sprained into agony, bones broken and grating with pain. So they would touch each other, and perhaps think about saying something, but the moment would always somehow pass with neither one of them having the balls to speak. Then it was back to business as usual, all banter and bitching. But the touching would be easier next time, and a little bit more than before, and the friendship between them would be that bit more comfortable, that fraction more intimate.

Walking along the Promenade, most of the tourist traps boarded up already, shutters going up the day after the last Bank Holiday, he could have been in some science fiction film: after the nuclear rain. All the people departed, only the haunting music in the background. He looked around, trying to work out where the sound was coming from, finally spotted an open window, where bright flowers were drooping. Perfect, really, for the way he was feeling.

One shop was still open, the newsagents the locals used year round. The plastic mesh bags of spades and pails were gone now, the stacks of rock bought and consumed by sticky-faced children, barely enough choc-ices and ice-lollies left to cover the bottom of the big freezer, and the gaudy souvenirs stuck to the back of shelves to gather dust until the next invasion of the tourist hordes.

"Oh, hello, didn't expect to see you in here again today."

Bodie smiled at her, glad of the chance to actually talk to someone, and Mrs. Humphries was nice enough, if a bit boring and inclined to be oblivious to his many charms and overly fond of chatting about her children. "Yeh, well, not a lot else to do round here, is there?"

"No, there's not, unless you're willing to drive to one of the towns. Of course, you should see this place in summer, when the amusements are set up and the theatre's open. We have some really good plays—"

"In the summer," Bodie dutifully supplied. "Only problem is, summer's been and gone and I'm still here."

Jessie Humphries busied herself tidying the plethora of newspapers and magazines that were piled atop the counter. "If you don't mind me asking...

It was nice to have someone actually be interested enough to ask, and listen, even if it were only to pass on a new tidbit to the local gossips. "No deep, dark secret," he lied, smiling friendlily. "I've been ill and my boss sent me down here to rest till I'm back up to par."

"Have an active job then, do you?" The newspapers were actually dusted, and the magazines smoothed. "Something exciting?"

"Active, yeh, suppose so. Exciting, nah," he shrugged, eyes twinkling. Here was a game Doyle would enjoy, their old play of pretending to be something they were wildly unsuited for, and doing it all with such outrageous innocence that people actually believed them. "Not unless you get excited being a private nurse for an old—and very rich—invalid.'

"You! Never! Oh, come on, you're pulling my leg."

"No, straight up! I landed myself this cushy number looking after an old man, and when I got sick, his son sent me down here until I was well enough to go back to work."

All pretence of being politely interested was gone, replaced by voracious, bare-faced nosiness. Mrs. Humphries was leaning one elbow on the counter, chin propped on her hand as she stared at Bodie. "No," she finally pronounced after serious examination. "I can't believe you're a nurse. You look," she said with more perception than Bodie cared for and with an accuracy that actually stung him, "more as if your job would be to hurt people than to help them."

"That's only 'cause I'm such a fine figure of a man," he joked, the smile gone tight on his face. He'd hurt Doyle, he was sure of that now, but he would only have done more harm if they'd gone on with the relationship. Nothing was worth buggering the rest of their lives up, was it? Nothing, especially since it was probably only curiosity and the ties that saving someone's life bound round them.

"You're certainly a good looking young man," Mrs. Humphries was laughing, "but you're no nurse."

"Yes. I am!"

"Prove it!"

"Oh," he said, eyebrows waggling suggestively, telling himself he had to get on with his life and stop this pathetic moping, "you want to play doctors and nurses, do you?'

She had both arms folded across the counter now, and was watching him with bright-eyed interest, this unusual man who had half the town atwitter with speculation. "I've a daughter who's a nurse," she said, "and I did a bit of training myself, before I met my husband and was expecting. Where did you do your training then?"

Oh, Christ, he thought, trust me. Doyle would be laughing like a drain by now... "You've got me there," he said with his most utterly charming smile.

"That's what I thought! Go on, dearie, tell me what you really do."

For a minute, he actually considered telling her the truth, but then the story would be over the town as quickly as the phone could spread it, and hot on its heels would come the uneasiness or the requests for help. "Just been demobbed," he said, stretching the truth by a few years.

"You weren't injured, were you? Is that why you're down here?"

He hadn't been expecting such genuine concern and absurdly, foolishly, he felt tears of self-pity prick his eyes.

"Oh, you poor lamb!"

God, it had been years since he'd been called that, absolutely years, and it took him back to his Gram, who always had a sweetie and a cuddle for him. "No, no, I'm fine, honest. Just, you know, got sick..."

"Was it really bad?" she was asking him, and if she didn't stop being so fucking nice to him, he was going to bawl like a baby and embarrass himself to death. "I can tell just by looking at you, you saw active service, didn't you?"

"Yes," he answered, meaning CI5, meaning the Paras and the SAS and Africa, all the hurt and anger and denial a lump in his throat.

"Oh, I am sorry," she was saying, and now she looked all misty-eyed, and Bodie knew he had to get out of there, soon, now, should never have come in.

"Here," he said, grabbing the first postcard he saw, setting the revolving rack squealing and groaning in a slow circle, "I'll take this, need to get it off to a mate of mine..."

"Still in the Service, is he?" she was asking him kindly.

"Yeh, yeh he is. And I'll take a packet of Revels and a Crunchie as well." Anything, just get her doing that and stop talking to him with all that sympathy before he ended up telling her about Ray and Cowley and what they'd given up without so much as a murmur.

She took the money he was all but throwing at her, glanced at the postcard. And raised her eyebrows and tightened her lips in a moue of pity. "Like that then, is it?" she asked, even more kindly. "Was he injured the same time you were?"

"No, he wasn't hurt, not this time round..." For God's sake, hurry up, I need to get out of here, away from you... He snatched the postcard from her, and the chocolate, trying desperately to maintain his composure, to not make him any more a topic of gossip than he already was.

Her hand wrapped round his wrist, and he was looking at eyes that reminded him too much of Cowley. "Your friend," she was saying, with that terribly telling emphasis that made 'friend' so much more, "is he why you were kicked out?"

"I don't think I care for your implications," he said with icy dignity, proud of himself for not betraying his panic. "Now, if you don't mind?" He eased himself politely free, and turned on his heel, walking out of her shop, trying not to let her see his fear.

Back on the promenade, fighting down the urge to run and run and keep on running, he walked smartly along, cramming chocolate into his mouth, stuffing himself the way he always did when he was this stressed, this tense. This scared.

The postcard was burning a hole in his pocket, and he went into an empty shelter, turning his back to the road so that no-one could see him. He almost laughed when he finally noticed what he'd bought: a stretch of pebbled sand and an empty deck chair sitting all by itself and under it, as if handwritten, the familiar legend 'Wish you were here.' But it was true. He'd give his right arm to have Doyle here right now, making him laugh, or giving him a good argument, or having a fight with him. Even, he admitted, just to be able to see Doyle, make sure that he was all right, make sure that he was eating-stupid idiot thought he could live on yoghurt and nuts and vitamins if you didn't watch him-make sure that he hadn't been hurt on the job, because he'd be back from

Sandhurst by now. Not that they'd so much as phoned each other, mind. Didn't dare. Didn't want anyone to know what they'd only just been getting to grips with themselves.

He turned the postcard over and over in his hands, and then sat for a very long time, staring out at the endless, restless surge of the sea, the water always teasing the shore, running up it a little, then racing away, only to come back, and run away again... There were people walking along the beach, in lightweight kagoules and thin trousers, the sea breeze rustling past them. Bodie moved, until they couldn't see him, in case they decided to be friendly and chat to him. He didn't want to talk to them or anyone else. Didn't want to put up with mindless small-talk and endless platitudes about the weather and what a lovely summer they'd had and how mild it was for this time of the year...

He had the postcard addressed and a crumpled stamp dug from the depths of his wallet stuck on before he had even stopped to think. Looking out at the rocky outcrops dotting the seashore and the unending sea, he wrote, pen pressed so hard it cut into the card: Wish I wasn't here.

The so-nice family was coming his way after all, and so he was on his feet again, walking away before they could get to him, stopping only to drop the postcard into the pillar box on the corner. Then he was moving again, along the intersecting streets, farther and farther from the shore, in and out of streets, past houses he knew were filled with people who weren't like him, people who were happy and had families and other people they were allowed to love if they wanted to.

It wasn't until he got back to his shorefront B&B that it really hit him what he'd done. Wish I was not here. He sat down, heavily, on the bed, leaning his face into his hands, as it washed over him. He'd done something he should never have done, something he wouldn't have done if he weren't so miserable away from Doyle: he'd written and just about begged Doyle to come here, and that meant trying to be what Cowley had said they were. Lovers. Committed to each other. Willing to lose their jobs for each other. And god help them, what the hell would Ray's family do? They'd all had a fit because his sister wanted to marry a Catholic; what the fuck would they do when they found out their pride and joy was queer?

And what would he do if Ray didn't come? If

M. FAE GLASGOW

Ray didn't forgive him for walking out in the first place? If Ray, with some space between them, had discovered that all those sweet, unspoken feelings were nothing more than infatuation? On Doyle's side, at any rate, Bodie added unhappily, unlike him, who was finally ready to admit to love. Even if he'd left it too late.... He couldn't stay indoors, in this stale room with its anonymous furniture and empty bed. He went out, wishing he could leave his thoughts behind. Wishing he could run away from this fearful hope that was hammering in his chest that Ray might come to him, that it could actually happen between them at last...

The days were milder than he had any cause to expect them to be, the air positively balmy when he was out of the wind, but not so much that he could lie here on the rocky beach in anything other than normal everyday clothes. Especially not since the only time he had tried going in for a dip, some bastard had stolen his clothes from the bench. Still, that was over a fortnight ago, the weekend he'd sent his postcard. That was a thought he shied away from, forcing himself to keep it in perspective, to not let himself slide down into misery over it.

Physically, he was recovering, his body wellmended, and the misery was now simply something he lived with, something he accepted the way he accepted that he'd heard nothing from Ray. As Doyle had said, silence spoke louder than words, and if that was the way it was going to be, then fine, he could cope with that. Monday would see him back on the job, and he would go in to see Cowley, very blasé, very mature, and ask to go solo. Failing that, a new partner. And failing that... Well, there were always options for a man with his talents and experience. But one thing he was not going to do was hang around gazing at Doyle, pining away from unrequited love, wanting to die of unhappiness every time his partner had a new girlfriend. No, he'd walk before he let himself sink so low.

But then a voice would whisper: easy to say now, when you can't even see him...

He used the meditation techniques he had learned to finally master his temper, and cleared his mind of debilitating thoughts, until he was drifting, slipping into the sleep he never seemed to grasp in his bed at night, lying there alone... The sun was still quite warm, and bright in an almost cloud-free sky. Coloured dots danced on his inner

eyelids, and he lay and watched them for a while, preferring not to think, because when he thought, then all the colours faded and he was back to staring at grey sky over grey sea from his harbour of grey rocks.

It didn't feel like sand at first, more a strange dust, so light, feathery, drifting down like snow on his hands and on his face. Raising his hands to shield his eyes from the glare of the sky, he opened his eyes. And saw a grim faced, hard eyed Raymond Doyle staring down at him.

"H'lo, Ray," he said, inanely, because he wanted to leap up and babble and hold Doyle tightly and kiss him for a month.

"Bodie." Very formal, very distant, and then the sun-glasses were lowered again.

"How'd you find me?"

A shrug. "Postmark."

Of course, he never had told Ray where he was going, had he? And how must that have looked? "No, I meant, here, on the sand. Can't see me from the Promenade because of the rocks..."

"Asked."

Christ, he didn't know what to say to this uncommunicative Doyle. "Oh. Well, it's nice to see you..." And strong hands were grabbing him by the wrist and hauling him to his feet, so quickly he couldn't catch his balance, and he rested, for the barest second, against Ray Doyle's body. Not long, but long enough to feel the tension, and the arousal stringing him taut as a bow.

"Back to your room. Now, Bodie!"

"What's wrong with here?" he asked, trying to pull Doyle down below the level of the screening rocks and onto the blanket he had brought. "It's not all rock round here, nice bit of sand, feel that? Then we wouldn't have to go anywhere—"

"Apart from the local cop shop if someone decides to walk his dog along the beach!" This, hissed, as Doyle recoiled away, beginning to walk as quickly as soft sand would allow. A few steps away he stopped, wind blowing his hair straight back off his forehead, jacket gusting open to reveal the cling of his shirt and the fullness of his crotch. "Move!"

Bodie was gathering up his belongings, scrambling to catch up, blanket trailing along behind. Side by side with Doyle now, heart racing with both unrepentant happiness and burgeoning arousal, he steered his partner towards the house he was staying in. He wanted to ask, to talk about this before they got in any deeper, but this stern Doyle was not a man to be questioned. Bodie had seen Ray like this before, or almost like this before, and he wasn't going to risk triggering anything but the most carnal of explosions. So, not speaking, as all this had begun in the first place, Bodie led the way up to his room, dumping his stuff on the plump chair, shivering with anticipation when he heard Doyle lock the door behind them. He made out the sound of jacket buttons clicking against wood, realised Doyle had hung his jacket on the door handle. Then the unmistakable sound of boots being pulled off, and then Bodie was hauling his own clothes off, discarding them where they fell. He pulled the covers back, jammed the pillows into a pile at the head of the bed, and climbed in, rolling over and sprawling on his back, expecting Ray to be right behind him.

But Doyle was standing in the middle of the room, fully clothed, only his feet revealed.

And then something dawned on Bodie. Jacket removed, hung on the door knob-but no holster. Either left behind because he was on leave—and leave was unlikely, with the Squad understrength with himself off sick and McCabe still in hospitaland if he weren't on leave... Had he? Resigned? Gone tearing off to see Cowley, going off halfcocked, throwing his warrant card and gun at the old man?

## For him?

Ray's face was giving nothing away, only the tension of banked desire. The shirt was undone. one button at a time, Doyle's stare never wavering, then the shirt was shrugged off, dropped carelessly to the floor. With a snick, the waistband was opened, and Bodie held his breath so he could hear the rasp of the zip being undone, heavy fabric parting, and now he'd be able to see, to know Ray. But Doyle was wearing underwear, his cock still hidden from view, only his beautiful legs coming into sight, the muscles firm and well defined, inviting Bodie to trace their shape with his tongue.

Bodie was stroking himself, cock already hard. The jeans were kicked off, and Ray was standing there, hands on hips, only a scrap of cloth covering him. The sworls of hair on his chest narrowed into his groin, down to where the elastic was being stretched away from Doyle's belly, his erection pushing outwards, and Bodie licked his lips as he strained to see what was hidden in that shadow, what was under those curls coming into view.

"Let me see you," he begged, needing Ray.

Doyle came over, knelt astride Bodie's chest. "You want to see me? Then go ahead," he whispered, arching his groin forward, leaning back with one hand to take hold of Bodie's cock, eyes slitting half shut at the first sweet touch of Bodie's flesh on his.

Bodie reached up, propping himself up on pillows, his mouth open and wet on Doyle's underwear. He could feel the shape of the hard cock, learned it as if he were blind, taking in the contours and the smell and the taste. Then, and only then, did he allow himself the luxury of easing Ray's underwear down and down, the heavy cock springing free, so hard, already moist, the foreskin pushed half back already. Bodie had intended to take his time about this, be sophisticated and clever and imaginative, the best lover Ray had ever had-but he moaned helplessly and sucked the hard flesh into his mouth, the tight fabric pushing Ray's balls up against his chin, Ray's arse full and ripe in his clutching hands.

Doyle curled over him, pulling Bodie's head in tight against himself, his arms wrapped around Bodie's head, cradling him closely as exquisite pleasure enraptured them. It had been so long since Doyle'd had a man, and so much longer that he'd wanted Bodie, that now Doyle was on the verge of coming, his hips juddering into Bodie's mouth, his balls ready to explode. But Bodie pushed Ray away, dragging them apart, turning them over until Bodie was on top of him, Doyle's arms gripped by Bodie's strong hands and held over his head, Bodie using his weight to pin Doyle in place.

"I want to fuck you," Bodie said, breath coming ingusts, his mouth circled by wetness from sucking Doyle's cock. His mouth drew Ray's left nipple inside, the tongue flickering him with pleasure. "I'm going to fuck you."

Ray smiled, lifted his legs, his knees coming up on either side of Bodie. "Then what're you waiting for, eh? Go on, put it inside me. Fuck me, Bodie. Fuck me hard.'

There was a bottle of lotion on the bedstand, a lotion usually used for a very solitary and very lonely pleasure. But not today. Today, he would put it on his cock the way he always did, but first, he would put it inside Ray. One hand caressing Doyle's balls as he held them out of the way, knelt between Ray's wide-spread legs, and slowly pushed one finger into the tight hole. Bodie's

breath caught in his throat as he watched his finger disappear inside his partner, and again, as two fingers went inside, flesh stretching around him, widening to welcome him, Ray twisting round on his fingers. Then Bodie felt it, the nub of gland, and he scissored his fingers round it, Doyle's cock pulsing with every touch of his fingers deep inside him.

Bodie pulled back, letting Doyle calm down a little, then he put three fingers into him, stabbing him, fucking him like that, until the hole was loose and ready, sucking at him, Doyle clutching at him as he pulled free.

"Ready?" he asked, Doyle's legs over his shoulders, his own cock poised at Ray's arsehole, the slickness irresistible.

Doyle pushed up, and the first inch of Bodie's cock went into him, then all of him, as Bodie thrust hard, going straight in, hands braced on either side of Doyle's head, Bodie's belly hard against Doyle's cock and balls, Bodie's cock hard inside Doyle's body. Bodie pounded into him, Doyle meeting every thrust, the two of them finding the right rhythm, pleasure spiralling. Doyle's hands were urging Bodie down, his cock finding a deeper angle as Doyle's open mouth met his, as Doyle's tongue claimed his mouth, and they kissed for the first time, their chest and bellies pressed together, Doyle's hot seed splashing, making them slick, Bodie's cock sliding in and out of his arse with ferocious passion, until his whole body stiffened, and he spilled himself inside Doyle.

Then there was silence, only the sounds of their breathing, and flesh slipping from flesh, and two people becoming separate once more.

Bodie lay beside Ray on the bed, as he had done when Ray had come home from hospital, as he had done when he himself had come home from his sojourn with the bedpans. They weren't touching now, as they hadn't touched then, and the doubts began, chilling him. Maybe the gun didn't mean anything. Perhaps Ray had simply left it behind because he was off duty for the day. Perhaps he was going to put it back on the minute he got back to London and the old life, and this was going to be a one-off, a temporary giving-way to temptation.

Or maybe it was pity. That fucking postcard! Christ, what if Ray were here out of pity? He wouldn't put up with that, would sooner watch him walk away than have it be that.

"Ray?" he asked, softly, almost fearful of bringing speech in to disturb this fragile silence between them.

But Doyle said nothing, and Bodie lay beside him alone, waiting for the moment when he would hear Ray get up and dress and leave.

The bed dipped, and he thought to himself, this is it. He's getting up, he's leaving.

Then he felt Ray close beside him, sensed Doyle leaning over him. Felt the kiss pressed to his mouth.

And knew that this was never going to end.