

A Kiss From a Rose

by Christy

Almost before Bodie had tossed the rose into the grave, Doyle was walking away, his shoulders hunched against the wind and sleet. Bodie paused and took one last look as an elderly woman threw a handful of earth onto the coffin. Then he strode off after his partner. Murphy caught them up outside the cemetery. "Some of us are going for a drink. You two coming?" Bodie went to say yes, then glanced at Doyle who shrugged. Silently they piled into Murph's car, waited for Lake, then headed back into the city. Bodie had never felt less like drinking in his life. But then he didn't know what he wanted to do any more.

"You didn't really like him, did you?" Bodie had lost any trace of subtlety after the fourth pint.

"No I didn't," said Doyle frankly. "I respected him, but that's not the same thing at all."

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't trust him. Look at all the times he stitched us up. Oh, he had a good reason for it each time, but it was like we were expendable. I mean, I'm sorry he's dead and all that, but I never felt close to him. I never felt he cared about me. You a bit, maybe. But not me. Not Murph, or any of the others."

"Hang on, mate ..."

"You asked, Bodie. So if you want the truth, I just feel angry. Yeah, he did loads of good. But bloody Cowley fucked up too many lives. Starting with yours and mine."

Bodie rubbed his hand across his face. He was exhausted, and his eyes felt clogged and gritty. It should have been obvious to him that he and Doyle would have this conversation sooner rather than later — he just didn't think it would be barely an hour after Cowley's funeral. He lowered his voice after glancing up to check that Murph and the others weren't listening in.

"Ray, it needn't be the end for us. Maybe we could ... You know, if you wanted to ..."
Taking a deep breath, he laid himself open as he'd never done in his life. "You know I said I'd wait for you. So if you want ..."

Doyle's smile was unexpected, sweet and sad. "Mate, I know. Listen, it's been a crap day. Let's leave it for the moment, eh?"

"OK. Fancy going to a match tomorrow?"

"Nah. Got a backlog of jobs as long as the M1."

"Pick you up Monday morning, then?"

"Yeah. See what's life's gonna be like under Macklin."

But when Bodie drew up outside Doyle's flat at 8.30am sharp, all the curtains were still drawn. A relentless tattoo on the front door only brought a mouthful of abuse from the guy next door on nights. A spot of breaking and entering revealed a flat stripped bare.

"So where's your boyfriend?" Macklin's cold eyes raked Bodie up and down.

"Fuck you, Macklin."

"I think you'll find that's fuck you, sir."

Bodie slammed his gun, ID and car keys on the desk. "No, it's fuck off." All the way home on the tube he was planning with relentless tunnel vision, repeating the hurriedly cobbled-together agenda as if it were a mantra. Three hours to clear the flat. Two hours to hire a van and shift his belongings to the garage he'd rented for just such an occasion. Then he could start scouring the bars, looking for some old contacts. With a bit of luck he'd be out of the country by the end of the month. Not Africa, though, he was getting too old for that caper. Maybe some bodyguarding ... Anywhere but England. He almost fell over the shoebox on the step. Instinctively he felt for his RT to phone in a suspicious package, then realised that part of his life was now gone. Using a pen, he tipped the lid off the box and found it filled to the brim with letters, photos and cuttings.

Bodie made himself a cup of coffee and started to pack. But his mind kept returning to the box and after barely ten minutes he tipped the contents out onto the table. The paper trail that was Doyle's life cascaded over the polished wood. With the skill of a poker player, Bodie began to sift through, discarding and retaining as he went. One photo jumped out at him, still in a frame, unlike the rest. It showed Doyle, beer tankard in hand, sitting on a longboat on the Thames, near Oxford. They'd hired the boat for a week and done a bit of fishing and a lot of pottering about. A touch too much sun and beer and they'd ended up snogging, then jerking each other off. Unlike the old cliché, they still respected each other in the morning. Until that old bastard Cowley issued them with an ultimatum when he guessed - either their jobs or their relationship. It was a decision Bodie had rued ever since.

He glanced down to see the frame clenched so tight in his hand his knuckles were white. Rapidly he began to sweep the pile of paper back into the shoebox. Then, with single-minded focus, he began to pack. By mid afternoon the flat was empty. He slammed the front door, shoving the keys back through the letterbox, the shoebox tucked under his arm. One last journey to the lock-up would do it. Then he could begin his search.

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