

Transmetropolitan

by **Christy**

"So we going out on the piss tonight, goldilocks?" Bodie stretched luxuriously, glancing at the clock above his desk.

"Nah, can't, got a hot date."

"Don't tell me, the delectable Chris."

"Yep."

"Must be serious. What's this, the second date?"

"Waddya mean, second? This is the third!"

"How come?"

"I reckon a cup of coffee after an art exhibition counts."

"So she's gonna put some lead in your pencil, then?"

"Ho bleeding ho ..."

Bodie wolf-whistled, causing a passing female agent to glare at them. Bodie blew her a kiss and continued blithely: "So what is it tonight? Staying in to see her etchings?"

"A film, thanks for asking."

"Don't tell me, French with subtitles."

"Spanish, actually."

"You seeing her tomorrow as well?"

"Maybe. What is this? Twenty questions?"

"Just thought the two of you might like to join me and the delicious Karen for a meal."

"Thought she was in the West Indies."

"Flight got cancelled. Captain had problems with his throttle or something. So when do I get to meet this sexy creature?"

"When I'm sure you won't embarrass me, sunshine."

"When have I ever ...?"

"Thought you wanted to be out of here in ten minutes."

Bodie rolled his eyes and grimaced. Doyle flicked an elastic band at him, stood up suddenly and grabbed his jacket. "Thanks for the offer, but I think Chris has something else planned for tomorrow. If the Cow comes looking for me, I've gone to buy a birthday pressie for me maiden auntie. See you Monday."

Bodie shuffled some papers, counted backwards from 120, then set off for the car park himself. Once Doyle was out of sight, he jumped into a non-descript Ford Escort, borrowed on the pretext that the Capri kept stalling. Then he shot out of the car park after his partner, careful to keep a safe distance back. Doyle would go apeshit if he spotted him and Bodie could live without the inevitable impersonation of Vesuvius.

Bodie was intrigued by his partner's sudden secretiveness over the latest bird. If he was honest, he was hurt. Doyle always introduced his girls to him. Generally they double-dated, but this time Ray had trotted out a succession of excuses why this couldn't happen. All he knew about Chris was that she was an artist and was tall with dark wavy hair and blue eyes. Something was definitely fishy.

Bodie parked at the bottom of Doyle's road and was just in time to see him disappear into his flat. He turned the radio on for some background music, opened a packet of biscuits and settled down to wait. He would sit on his partner's tail for as long as it took.

It was after 7pm when Doyle came out of his flat and set off down the road on foot. Bodie slid out of the car and closed the door silently. He was glad of a walk, having sat there for over an hour and a half. He'd drunk so much Coke that he felt wired, the radio phone-ins had made him want to bomb Essex, and he'd had to flash his identification to ward off a nosy old bag who was clearly in charge of the neighbourhood watch.

Doyle bounced along, never once looking back. After about 15 minutes, he veered suddenly into a pub. It was called the King George, and Bodie vaguely remembered having been in there several years previously when they were tracking down an informant. Then it was the sort of place where the rats ran around in pairs, and Bodie could only assume it had changed hands since. He grinned at the image of Doyle and his arty-farty girl making deep and meaningful conversation in a spit and sawdust dive.

He considered briefly going in and lurking in a corner, but discounted that idea rapidly on the grounds Doyle had eyes in his back. So he settled for a window seat in the greasy spoon cafe across the road where he ordered a bacon sandwich and pot of tea. It was nearly 7.30pm, and Bodie assumed they'd have one drink, then head off for the film. Perhaps he should go into the pub after all and pretend it was a coincidence and that he just happened to be passing. He grinned as he realised Doyle was hardly likely to fall for that one, given he could spot one of Bodie's fibs at 20 paces.

The door of the pub billowed open suddenly and he picked out his partner's curls and tight jeans. Ray was laughing at something as he looked back at his companion. Bodie frowned in confusion. Maybe Chris had changed her mind and Ray was meeting a mate. Bodie didn't recognise him, but then he didn't know all Ray's police colleagues. He was just about to go across to join them, when Doyle's companion smiled at him and gave his waist a quick squeeze. Ray grinned back and briefly returned the gesture. Then they set off down the road, talking animatedly. Every so often their hands would touch. Bodie's legs went from under him and he sat down heavily, not seeing the hovering girl who wanted to give him his bill. Tall, dark wavy hair and, had he been close enough to see, blue eyes, no doubt. Chris was a bloke and his partner was a fucking queer!

Bodie stood up, slammed a handful of coins on the grimy table, and set off after the two men. An unconvincing little voice in his head was telling him that of course this wasn't Chris, it was some mate of Ray's and of course he'd always been the touchy-feely type. Bodie's jaw was clenched so tight, his face started to ache. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. Doyle, a shirt-lifter ... He spooled through hundreds of incidents and conversations in his head, searching for the slightest clue he might have missed. Nothing came to mind.

At the bottom of the road he saw the two men disappearing into the tube station. His last image was of Chris's hand resting lightly on Doyle's arse as they jumped onto the escalator. Bodie turned on his heel and headed back for his car. He'd seen quite enough.

He nearly cancelled his date with Karen for the next night. His first instinct had been to storm round to Doyle's on Saturday morning and find out just what the fuck was going on. Then he had a more subtle idea - go over in the evening on the pretext of borrowing something, then hang around until Doyle's hot date showed up. But he prided himself on keeping his cool under the severest provocation, and knew he couldn't trust himself in his present state. So he met Karen and they spent a so-so evening having a meal then watching a film. He shrugged and grunted when she asked him why he was so quiet. On Sunday, as he lay on his sofa with an old Cagney film playing in the background, he knew what he had to do.

He was outside Ray's flat by 7am on Monday morning and was rewarded rapidly for his vigilance. Ten minutes or so later, the courtyard door opened and Chris and Ray appeared. They glanced round hurriedly, then shared a quick kiss on the lips before Chris hopped into a car, waved and disappeared round the corner. Ray waited until he was out of sight, then went back inside. Bodie gave him three quarters of an hour, then leaned on the doorbell. The intercom crackled.

"Yeah?"

"'s me."

"Push."

Doyle met him in the doorway, dressed in jeans and a terracotta tee shirt, but barefoot and with his hair damp from the shower.

"You're bright and early, sunshine."

"Yeah." Bodie paced round, picking things up, then putting them back down.

"Good weekend with Karen?"

"OK."

"What did you do?"

"Film."

"Good job I wasn't relying on witty conversation this morning." Bodie humphed.

"Help yourself to coffee if you want it. I won't be a sec."

"Enjoy yourself with Chris?"

"Yeah, it was great. Saw a good film on Friday, then ..."

"D'you fuck him up the arse or d'you bend over and let him give you one?"

Doyle went white. "What d'you mean?"

"Don't lie to me any more, Doyle. I saw you and the mysterious Chris. No wonder you didn't want me to meet this girl, because she never existed."

"I never said it was a she, you just jumped to conclusions."

"Not unreasonable in the circumstances, mate."

"So?"

"So? You're a fucking queer!"

"It's not against the law."

"Yeah, but it makes me puke! Jesus, a shirt-lifter, I can't believe it."

"Shut up, Bodie." Doyle's voice was low, but his eyes flashed dangerously.

"I'm entitled to have my say when I discover my partner's a raving poofter."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, considering we have to work together every day. Gives a whole new dimension to watching my back, doesn't it? Does Cowley know about your sordid private life?"

"It's none of his business, like it's none of yours."

"You lied to me, Doyle. We're supposed to be partners, be able to rely on each other ..."

"I never lied to you and it makes no fucking difference what I do outside of CI5."

"Until you get picked up in some cottage sucking the dick of a pretty policeman ..."

Doyle spun away and started pacing the room like a caged tiger. "That's a filthy thing to say. You can fucking take that back ..."

Bodie simply sneered.

"What you so worried about, Bodie? Reckon everyone'll think you're a poof as well? Or is it a case of the lady protesting too much?"

He didn't see the swinging backhand which caught him across the nose and mouth, drawing blood. Bodie instinctively took up a defensive position, expecting his hot-tempered partner to retaliate. Instead, Ray said quietly:

"Get out."

"You ..."

"Get ... out!"

Bodie was across the room in one huge step, slamming the door so hard that all the windows rattled. He sat in the car, clenching the steering wheel until his knuckles were white. When Doyle didn't appear by quarter to nine, Bodie headed in to work.

He was sitting at his desk, staring blindly at a pile of paper, when Doyle appeared. It was almost ten, and Bodie watched his partner talk to Betty, Cowley's secretary, then look at his watch. A few minutes later, he disappeared into the boss's room. He was in there for nearly half an hour. When he reappeared, he strode past Bodie, blanking him completely.

"Bodie!"

"Sir?"

Cowley was beside him. "My office. Now."

He wasn't offered a seat, which was a bad sign. Cowley stared at him, as if he could see into Bodie's soul. The silence lasted for maybe a minute and a half before Cowley said tersely: "I'm separating you and Doyle."

"What?" Bodie was gob-smacked.

"His view was that the two of you are unable to work together any more."

"Don't I get a say in this?" He'd recovered his voice, but it sounded strained.

"I'd be interested to hear your side of the story."

"Well ..."

"Well what?"

"Well, I suppose Doyle and I had words this morning ..."

"Words that included some obnoxious behaviour on your part?"

"But he's ... For God's sake sir, he's screwing another man."

"Blasphemy, Bodie."

"But ..."

"Shut up, Bodie. I will not allow any prejudice in CI5, especially when it involves one agent striking another. Your behaviour was unforgivable. I could throw you out of the squad for this."

"Sir."

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't."

"Because Doyle and I are a good team, sir."

"Were a good team. How do you expect him to trust his life to you when you behave so disgracefully? Minor spats are one thing. This I will not overlook. As of now you're on office duties until further notice. When I am satisfied you can control yourself and your prejudices, I shall review the situation. Do you understand me, Bodie?"

"Yes sir."

"Get out of here and make a start on that backlog of paperwork on your desk."

Bodie lurched back to his desk as if in a dream. He was just in time to see Doyle disappearing out of the door, a cardboard box in his arms. The desk next to his was now empty.

He spent the next fortnight shuffling paper and doing mind-numbing routine checks over the phone. Occasionally he would glimpse Doyle in the distance, laughing and joking with someone. Cowley had paired him with Jax and they seemed to be getting the pick of the assignments. Only once did Bodie try to talk to his former partner when they ended up at the coffee machine at the same time. He had rehearsed a speech countless times in his head, but when he saw the contempt in Doyle's green eyes, the words stuck in his throat. Doyle's voice was cold and hard as he said: "Don't worry, Cowley's paired the spade and the queer together. I'm sure he'll find you some nice respectable WASP with a wife and two kids."

"Ray, can't we ..."

"Get out of my life, Bodie."

"But we ..."

He was left addressing thin air. Leaning back against the cold wall, he closed his eyes, trying to subdue the pounding in his head. Then he went back to his desk, wrote out his resignation and handed it to Betty. Before Cowley could read it, he walked out and went home.

The phone rang on and off for the next couple of hours, but he ignored it. He'd hurled his RT against the wall at some point, which had stopped it beeping. When someone then started ringing the doorbell, he disabled it and went to bed, despite the fact it was only mid afternoon.

He snoozed fitfully, waking up finally at about 10pm. His head ached and there was a vile, sour taste in his mouth. He drank three glassfuls of water, followed by two hefty slugs of scotch. He laid his gun on the table and stared at it for a long time. When the nearby church clock struck midnight, he tucked the gun into his holster, pulled on his jacket and jumped into the car.

The downstairs of Ray's apartment was in darkness, so he clambered over the wall into the courtyard. When he pressed his face to the cool glass, he could see a sliver of light from upstairs. Producing his picklocks, he had the door open within a minute. As usual, Doyle hadn't set the alarm.

It was like he knew every inch of the apartment, that there was a loose floorboard by the sofa and that the third and sixth stairs squeaked. He stood on the landing, wondering what the distant hammering sound was. Then he realised it was his heart. There was a chink of light from under Ray's bedroom door and a faint murmuring from the radio. He pressed himself against the wall, listening for the tell-tale sound of another person in the bedroom. In one movement, he crossed the landing and threw the bedroom door back. Ray was curled up in bed reading. He shot upright, going for his gun from the pile of clothes on the floor. But Bodie was quicker, kicking it away.

"Oh yeah, very macho, Bodie. What you gonna do? Blow my head off then go out in style yourself?"

"Shut up." He didn't want to acknowledge that the same crazy thought had flitted through his brain at that exact moment.

"So what then? Gonna slap me around 'til I tell you where Chris lives so you can go round and deal with him as well? You can tell yourself you've done the world a favour, two fewer queers and all that ..."

Bodie just stared at him, taking in the tangled curls, boyish face and thin, bare chest. It struck him suddenly how pale and tired Doyle looked. His skin seemed almost translucent, the green eyes were cloudy with exhaustion and his broken cheekbone stood out even more starkly.

"So what's with the caveman routine?"

"I've resigned." His voice sounded rough and far away.

"Yeah, I know. But what's that got to do with me?" Doyle's face was expressionless.

"I wanted to talk to you ... Things needed to be said ..."

"Yeah well, there's the phone or the post, or even face to face at a civilised hour."

"Needed to say it now, I might never see you again ... owe you an explanation."

"What makes you think I want to listen to anything you've got to say?"

"Please, Ray ..."

Doyle sighed loudly and gestured to a chair in the corner. "Chuck the clothes off and take a seat. You're making the place look untidy."

Bodie looked around vaguely and complied. His legs suddenly felt weak and wobbly. He realised that Doyle was staring at him.

"So you gonna work that jaw of yours and tell me what's so urgent it needed a midnight house call?"

Bodie rubbed his fingers through his cropped hair and tried to marshal his jumbled thoughts. The room suddenly seemed very hot.

"Earth to Bodie, come in please ..."

"I wanted you ..." There, he'd said it.

"What?" Doyle looked bemused.

"It's because I wanted you, couldn't tell you, didn't know how to. I was afraid, Ray. Still am."

"Mate, you're not making any sense. Have you been drinking?"

"A bit, but that's not it. Ray, I was jealous, couldn't stand not being with you ..."

"But we'd have seen each other at work, we'd still have socialised together. I still wanted you to be my best mate. I wanted to introduce you to Chris, didn't know how to ..."

"No, Ray, listen to me! It was more than that ... I wanted you for myself, just you and me."

It was like a light had suddenly snapped on in Doyle's brain. "Oh Jesus, Bodie, are you saying what I think you are?"

Bodie nodded, his mouth too dry to speak. Doyle ran his fingers through his curls so they stuck out in all directions. Bodie longed to reach out and smooth them down.

"So what was with all the insults?"

"I dunno ... It was like everything happened too fast ..."

"How long have you felt like this?" The voice was gentle now.

"Ages. Years. What could I do? Couldn't tell you, didn't know how too. I was frightened, thought I was a freak, that you'd never feel the same."

"I did." Doyle's voice was low but clear.

"You did?"

"Yeah. I could look at you, but couldn't touch. Why d'you reckon I went looking away from home? I wanted someone who'd mean as much to me as you did. No way I could tell a macho thug like you the truth, though, was there? Jesus Bodie, if I'd had a fiver on you thumping me, it'd have been the safest bet in the universe ..."

"Yeah, I'm sorry, Ray. Shouldn't have hit you."

There was a silence, then they both started to speak at once. "Go on, then," said Doyle shortly.

"Chris, was he the first, you know ..."

"The first time I've been with a man?" Doyle's voice was expressionless.

"Yeah ..."

"No."

"Oh."

"You want a list, marks out of ten for each one?"

"Ray ..."

"If you really want to know, Chris is the first one for nearly a year. I started when I was at art college. But then you know what they say about artists ... I'd say Chris was easily the best. Great body, nice big dick, knows how to use it ..."

"Ray!"

"Don't ask personal questions if you can't take the answers, Bodie."

"Sorry, mate ..."

Doyle exhaled loudly, chucking his book across the room. "Yeah, so am I ..."

"Ray, I'm sorry I said all those things, sorry I behaved like a pig. Look, I hope you and Chris'll be happy. You deserve someone who'll look after you properly. You and me, we had some good times, yeah?" He stood up suddenly, praying his legs would support him.

"Where are you going?"

"Abroad, visit this mate of mine in America, travel a bit. See what turns up." He didn't want to think what came next. More dirty little wars where death was always around the corner. He couldn't believe he'd thrown away the only job he'd ever liked, lost the only friendship he'd ever valued. He'd go back to being alone again, try to forget the fact he'd once found someone who filled that gaping void in his life.

"Fucking typical!"

"What d'you mean?"

"Just like you to run away when things get hairy."

Bodie shrugged, moving towards the door. He couldn't disagree.

"Don't go."

"What?"

"You heard. Come here." Doyle patted the side of the bed.

"But ..." His brain was telling him one thing and his legs were doing something completely different. As he perched on the side of the bed, Doyle traced a long, slim finger across his cheekbones, down his jaw and round his lips.

"What do you really want, Bodie?" he whispered.

The temperature in the room seemed to have gone off the top of the scale. "Ray, I dunno ..."

"Not very helpful, mate." The fingers were now stroking through his hair. His whole body felt like jelly.

"What about Chris?" His voice was a rough croak.

"Gone."

"Gone where?"

"Got a job in Ireland. Went on Monday. He wanted me to go with him. I damn nearly did as well. Nothing to stay here for, was there?"

"Shit, I'm sorry ..."

"Don't be. It was good while it lasted, but things were getting heavy. He wanted loads of commitment, and I could hardly tell him he was second best, could I?"

"Does that mean ... You know, will you, you know, us ..."

"Try it in English this time, sunshine."

"Ray, I want you. Can you forgive me enough to give it a go?"

Doyle traced his knuckles down Bodie's cheek, making him shiver.

"You're cold, mate. Get in bed, let me cuddle you, warm you up a bit."

As if in a dream, he stripped off his clothes and burrowed under the duvet and into the waiting pair of arms. They lay there for a long time, just holding each other close. Eventually Bodie pulled away, staring intently at Doyle.

"You OK, sunshine?"

"Yeah ... I just want to look at you. Just need to touch you." He reached out and stroked his fingers through thick curls, across forehead and tired eyes, as if to smooth away all exhaustion, down the asymmetric cheekbones and around the full lips.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered.

"Don't be daft, you're the one with the looks ..." But Doyle had coloured, his huge green eyes never leaving Bodie's face.

Bodie leaned over and kissed him once, chastely, on the lips. "As far as I'm concerned, you're perfect," he said simply. In response Doyle melted into him, the gorgeous slender body entwining around his own heavier frame. His shaking fingers burrowed into the soft curls and he felt long fingers massaging his own scalp. Every nerve in his body was on fire.

He kissed Ray's tantalising throat, picking up the hum of pleasure as he moved down to the creamy skin covering his collarbone. He ran his fingers through silky chest hair, then traced his knuckles up and down the line of thin ribs. Doyle murmured happily, snuggling closer so that his curls tickled Bodie's chin and shoulder.

"Ray, we ..."

"Ssh. Sleep now, we can talk all we need to tomorrow. Everything's gonna be OK."

Bodie wanted to argue, to point out that his life was a shambles, but he could feel warmth, comfort and security pulling him under. His last thought before he slept was how right it felt to be lying in Ray's strong arms.

When he woke up, light was streaming through a gap in the curtains and there was just a slight dip in the bed next to him to remind him that he hadn't slept alone. He sat up, rubbing his hair and groping around for his watch. When he eventually found it, tucked inside his left shoe, he discovered it was nearly 10am.

"Shit!" He shot out of bed, the covers going straight up in the air.

"That's what I like in the mornings, a spot of witty conversation." Doyle bounced in, looking nauseatingly cheerful. Bodie was about to make a sarky comment, but communication was made impossible by a sweet-tasting pair of lips feasting on his own and by the smell of a freshly-showered body. When they eventually parted, Bodie's head was spinning like he'd drunk a bottle of wine, and he felt like a swooning Victorian maiden.

"Ray, shit, have you seen the time. The Cow'll kill us ... you. Oh shit!"

"Not a very extensive vocabulary this morning, is it, sunshine? And forget the Cow, I've spoken to him."

"When? Today?"

"'bout an hour ago. I told him you were here, that you needed time to get your head together."

"What'd he say?"

"Firstly, that he's not accepting your resignation. Secondly, we've got to see him tomorrow at 9.30am. Thirdly, he wants to know what you've done to your RT."

"Sh ..." Bodie looked up, caught Doyle's eye and grinned sheepishly. Ray responded by taking hold of his hand and squeezing it. Bodie pressed the long, slender hand to his lips, kissing Ray's palm.

"Ray, look, I'm really sorry about last night ..."

"Oh well, s'pose I should be glad you didn't do an SAS and come through the bloody window!"

"You've been watching too many Milk Tray adverts."

"I always did like the ones with nuts."

Bodie snorted and Doyle added hastily: "D'you want some breakfast?"

"Only you." Bodie cupped Doyle's face in his hands, studying it as if for the first time. Leaning forward, he instigated a kiss that seemed to go on for ever.

When they could breathe again, he said quietly: "Ray, you never answered my question last night ..."

Doyle put on his most martyred expression. "Bodie, sometimes you're incredibly dim. D'you really think I'd be letting you snog me if I wanted you out of my life?"

"So that means ...?"

"It means yes, sunshine. You're a bad-tempered, stroppy thug, but I love you for it ..."

"Even though I hit you, called you all those names?"

"Yeah, well, thumped you in the past, haven't I?"

Bodie's smile was sudden, sweet and devastating. Equally rapidly Doyle found himself splayed on the edge of the bed with his jeans peeled down to his ankles and an inquisitive mouth exploring between his thighs. Long fingers scrabbled for cropped hair, a lean body arched and a scream loud enough to panic the neighbours rang out.

Doyle sat up, looking sheepish. "Sorry, mate."

Bodie sat back on his heels, testing the unfamiliar taste and texture on his lips. "For what?"

"Didn't last long. I was gonna warn you so you didn't have to ..."

"Doesn't matter. It was great."

"Was that your first time?"

Bodie looked worried: "Yeah. Wasn't it ...?"

"It was fantastic. Now you're very much the man in form, so ..." He rooted in the bedside drawer and tossed a small tube to Bodie, who caught it and turned it over and over in his large hands.

"Ray, I've never ..."

"Yeah, well, that's why, running a benign dictatorship, I came to this decision. Reckoned you need the practice. You gonna get on with it or sit and look gormless? I mean, I know you've got a headstart there, but ..."

Bodie pushed him backwards and kissed him into silence. Then he turned Doyle over onto all-fours. He knelt back, admiring the way the position showed off Ray's strong, slender body and gorgeous arse. Tentatively he reached out and stroked the tantalising bum. Doyle moaned, pushing himself back onto the exploring hand. Swiftly Bodie spread the cool gel over his cock, then pressed the tip of it to the tight hole.

"Fingers first..." Doyle's voice was shaky.

"Wha'?" His own wasn't much stronger.

"Makes it easier ..."

"Oh, right ..." Cautiously he inched his forefinger through the tight ring of muscle. Ray squirmed and moaned as he added a second finger, wiggling it around and feeling the pressure ease a fraction. As he inserted a third, the slim body writhed uncontrollably in front of his unbelieving eyes.

"Bodie ... I need you inside me ... now." The husky voice was so sexy that it seemed to make him even harder. Withdrawing his fingers, he watched as Ray reached back and parted his buttocks. Bodie took hold of his aching cock and gently pushed at the opening. He slid it in maybe an inch and heard Doyle give a low, throaty moan. He pushed again and began to slide in.

"Yeah, and again ..."

He was sheathed in this incredible hot, tight arse which clasped around him like a vise, threatening to rob him of the last semblance of sense.

"God, you're filling me ..."

He grabbed Doyle's waist and began to move cautiously, feeling the velvety channel clutch at his cock.

"That's good, mate, you're so big ..."

Bodie groaned as Doyle clenched once, twice, three times around him.

"I want you, deep as you can go ... oh yeah, magic, it's like you're in my mouth as well ..."

He thrust so he was buried to the balls, then paused. Doyle wriggled again, setting up the most incredible sensations.

"Go on, give it to me ..."

Bodie withdrew slightly, then set up a swift pumping motion. Doyle's dirty talk had turned to inarticulate groans and cries and Bodie was unable to take his eyes off that out-of-control arse pierced by his cock, writhing beneath him. He was suddenly aware of the spiralling moans spilling out of his own mouth.

All at once Ray bucked back, impaling himself completely on Bodie's cock.

"Bodie ... touch me ..."

Bodie reached round and grabbed Ray's prick. Two firm squeezes and Doyle screamed and shook, collapsing face down on the bed. The spasms in his arse brought Bodie off with an equally loud shout.

Bodie rolled to one side, his eyes closed and his breathing harsh. When he could prise his eyes open again, he saw that Ray was still lying on his stomach, his whole body trembling.

"You OK, goldilocks? I mean, I wasn't too ...?"

Ray shifted onto his side and grinned. "Pretty damn good for a beginner. And did the earth move for you too, sunshine?"

"Move? Went into bloody orbit! Mind you, made an interesting discovery."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. You're as mouthy in bed as you are at work."

Doyle pouted unconvincingly. "Oh thanks very much! Whatya gonna do about it?"

"This," said Bodie, pulling his partner towards him and kissing him into silence.

They showered together, letting the warm water cascade over their entwined bodies, then tucked into tea and piles of toast for a belated breakfast. Sensing Bodie was getting edgy, Doyle suggested a walk and a pub lunch. The journey out of London was conducted in almost total silence. They parked in a pub car park beside the Thames and set off along the river. It was a pleasant spring day, with just enough sun to make jackets unnecessary. After about 20 minutes of walking, Bodie stopped, flopped down onto bench and said:

"Ray, let's talk."

Doyle sat down beside him, keeping six inches between them. The sunlight picked out bronze streaks in his hair. "What's come over you, mate, wanting to talk?"

Bodie rolled his eyes. "In this case I can't avoid it, can I?"

"S'pose not."

"Look, is Cowley really gonna ignore my resignation letter?"

"He said so."

Bodie humphed and stared out over the river. Ray leaned back, closed his eyes and said: "Is that what you want?"

"Is what what I want?"

"Keep up with the plot, Bodie. Do you wanna stay in CI5?"

"Course I do!"

"What's the problem, then?"

Bodie shrugged and looked away. Doyle sighed loudly and said: "Let me guess. You're wondering whether we can work together again, given you've just screwed the arse off me."

Bodie flinched. "Ray ..."

"You are a delicate little flower all of a sudden, aren't you? How would you describe it, then? How about fucked me 'til I saw stars?"

Bodie looked up and the pain in his midnight blue eyes seared through Doyle. "I thought you wanted to, you know, give it a go together ..."

"Until you get a guilt complex about what we're doing? Or until you get bored of me and drop me for some bird with big tits?"

"Ray, please believe me, I'd never do that. Don't you want ...?"

Not caring if anyone saw them, Doyle scooted nearer and wrapped his arms around the powerful shoulders. "I do," he whispered. "Just had to be sure you really wanted to."

"Of course I do." Bodie searched and found a pair of alluring lips. The kiss was only broken by jeers from the river as a rowing crew shot past. Doyle flicked a nonchalant V-sign, gave his partner a last kiss and dragged him to his feet.

"Food," he said decisively.

Bodie grinned, slipped his arm around Doyle's waist and hugged him. "Best idea you've had all day, goldilocks."

"What, even better than this morning?"

"Well, maybe second-best ..."

After they'd eaten, they retreated to a corner of the bar with their drinks. Bodie gulped half of his down. then said: "So what do we tell Cowley tomorrow?"

"Just that you've changed your mind and don't want to resign."

"Yes, but what about us?"

"D'you mean do we tell him we're shagging or do we ask him to work together again?"

"Both, I suppose."

Doyle dipped his finger into his pint then rubbed it round the rim of the glass, producing a high-pitched whine. Bodie sighed ostentatiously. In response he was treated to that urchin grin which made his heart do a back flip.

After a moment or two, Doyle said thoughtfully: "I can't see that he's going to have a problem with two guys shackled up, given all his good liberal principles. Only thing he might start getting funny about is us being paired together again. I assume you do want to be paired with me?"

"Course I do. That's if you do." That sudden vulnerability again.

"Yeah, I might just survive!"

They finished their pints and Bodie stood up to go for refills. Doyle's hand on his arm stilled him. "Forget those. Think we should get on home."

Bodie fluttered his eyelashes. "Ooh, I've always wanted to see your etchings ..."

"No time for that sort of thing. We've got a lot of research to do before tomorrow so we can convince the Cow we've explored every angle of this."

"As the actress said to the bishop ..."

By the time they stood in front of Cowley the next morning, they could scarcely keep their eyes open. Bodie ached from head to toe in places even Macklin had never managed to find, while Doyle looked even more dishevelled than usual.

Cowley looked them up and down as if they'd crawled out from under a stone.

"Perhaps you'd like to tell me what's going on?"

Doyle glanced warningly at Bodie, then said: "Bodie wasn't himself, sir. He needed some time to think, get his head back together. We did a lot of talking yesterday, resolved a few things."

"Why did you resign, Bodie?"

"Dunno sir. Seemed like the right move at the time."

"And now?"

"No sir. I mean, I don't want to resign, if that's OK with you."

"That depends."

"On what, sir?" Bodie looked worried.

"Whether you'll go through this charade again at some stage."

"No sir, I can promise you that."

Cowley humphed and reached for a piece of paper which he handed to Bodie.

"Destroy that, then."

Bodie glanced at it, recognised his own scrawl, then ripped it to shreds.

Cowley put his specs back on, then said sharply: "Now gentlemen, I'm sure you've got plenty of work to be getting on with."

"But sir ..."

"Yes, Doyle?"

"Me and Bodie, I mean, Bodie and I, we'd like to be paired together again. Please."

"That's not what you wanted a few weeks back."

"I know that sir. But it's different now, we've talked a lot of things over, resolved things. I mean, Jax is a great guy, but Bodie and me ..." He trailed off.

Cowley took an age to reply, making them sweat. Then he said: "Two conditions. One, you spend next week with Macklin on a refresher course. Two, you're damn careful."

Doyle's brow furrowed. "Of what?"

"Just what I've said, Doyle."

Bodie's lips twitched. "I understand, sir."

"Good. Now get out of my sight before I make it two weeks with Macklin!"

As they disappeared, he could hear Doyle saying plaintively: "What the hell did the old man mean, be careful?"

Bodie's voice was long-suffering. "I'll tell you later, goldilocks!"

-- THE END --

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