

**D**ecember 24

Christmas was a dangerous time of the year, no doubt about it. He was always tempted to drink entirely too much, and Cowley was, despite clear Scrooge-like leanings, far freer with the whiskey than might be imagined. But there was a reason to celebrate this year. Raymond Doyle had moved in with him.

And it hadn't even taken much of a campaign to make it all fall into place. A suggestion on the first of the month to Cowley that it would be safer if unmarried partners lived together—less of a chance of a security slip-up like the one that had almost cost Ray his life a year before. Cowley had grunted, which Bodie took to mean he agreed, in theory. Then a few pointed remarks to Ray about how much cheaper two could live than one. And it had been Ray, finally, who “came up with the idea” whilst they were at Bodie's two-bedroom flat—the result of a paperwork foul-up at HQ.

Cowley'd let him keep it only until a one-bedroom flat opened up and had warned him not to get settled in. So there were still boxes of his own to unpack when Ray hauled in his own things, grumbling all the way about the walk up the three flights of stairs.

There were still boxes everywhere, and he was surprised to find that he didn't really mind the mess. Much.

And tonight, after the party, they would get a cab together and go home to the same flat to sleep it off. And if he was lucky, Ray'd feel like unpacking some more. He looked over at Ray, who was well in his cups at this point in the night, and smiled. Ray caught his eye and smiled back, raising his glass.

Yeah, all was right with the world, at least for a few moments. And the whiskey, bless Cowley, was flowing as fast as the champagne.

∞ **15** ∞

“C'mon. Home.”

“Yeah. Let's.”

“No, you big—we're home. Get out.” Ray pulled on his arm and he levered himself off the seat and out of the black cab, making a move for his wallet which Ray cut off. “I've got it, mate.”

Bodie stood up in front of the building and announced, happily, “We're here.”

“Tha's what I said. You are smashed.”

“Into a thousand pieces,” he agreed, feeling warm, despite the cold night. He suddenly remembered the chocolate rum balls that Susan had made. He'd planned on half-inching a few before they'd left, but had forgotten in the sudden rush to get coats

**FANCY THAT**  
**BY MIRIAM HEDDY**

and scarves.

“Which will all hurt tomorrow when we sweep you up and put you together again.”

“Glass’s half-full, s’shine.”

“Not after you’ve done with it. C’mon. Up the stairs.”

Before he knew it, they were unwrapped and on the couch, and Ray was handing him something in a green napkin. He stared at it for a second before popping it into his mouth.

It tasted as good as he remembered. “Ta, mate.”

Ray shrugged. “Nicked ’em for the road. Not that you left many on the plate for the rest of the mob.”

“’ey’re good. ’ave one yourself,” Bodie offered, feeling generous.

Ray shook his head. “Got ’em for you. Too sweet by half.”

“Perfect.” He nodded, licked his sticky fingers and stared at Ray, suddenly filled with a great warmth for his partner, who had been so thoughtful and brought him chocolates that he didn’t even care for himself. Not many mates would do that for you. Strong and bittersweet and perfect.

Ray blinked at him and Bodie sat up straighter on the couch, suddenly aware that he’d said it aloud. “The chocolates,” he clarified.

Ray was looking at him like he was speaking another language, so he stopped, not sure of what he’d just said. He’d been thinking of how much the rum balls were like Ray himself—strong and sweet and you could get drunk off the taste of Ray, or so he thought, having never tasted... Had he said *that* aloud? No. He hadn’t. He wasn’t *that* drunk. Bodie relaxed, confident that he would have to be a good deal drunker than he was to say something that idiotic to Ray. Drunk enough that it wouldn’t hurt at all if Ray thumped him one in response. Come to think of it, he would probably pass out before he’d say something like that to a bloke, any bloke, much less Raymond bloody Doyle.

Bodie was still contemplating how much alcohol it would take to attain just that balance of drunk—to be drunk enough to let that slip, but not so drunk so’s to pass out on the floor—when he fell asleep.

∞ C15 ∞

### December 25, morning

“Aw, bloody hell.” He opened one eye and saw Ray standing in the doorway to his bedroom, something white in his hand. Ray moved closer to the bed and put the thing across his forehead. It was a damp flannel, cool and pleasant across his eyes. “Ta, mate.”

“You alive, then?”

“Appear to be. Why?” He opened one eye and moved the flannel just a bit. “You have evidence otherwise?” He actually didn’t feel all that bad, considering his overindulgence the night before. He’d even managed to get up once at about four AM to clean his teeth, a necessity after all that chocolate, and to piss for what felt like a half hour, before heading back to bed. He’d found himself already undressed but didn’t remember removing his clothes. But then he didn’t really remember getting from the couch to the bed. Ray’d probably helped with that.

He pushed the cloth up on his forehead and stared at Ray. “You what?” It had sounded like Ray had said—

“So you fancy me, then?” Ray said it again, and this time there was no mistaking the words.

Again, Bodie asked, “You what?”

Ray smiled down at him, looking unnaturally tall leaning over him and the bed. Looking up at him was making him a bit nauseated, so he was glad when Ray sat down at the edge of the bed. “You said it last night, mate.”

“I did?” Now *that* he didn’t remember. He gave Ray careful scrutiny, trying to determine through the haze of his hangover whether Ray was having him on. But Ray was smiling in a

good-natured way.

“Yeah. You did.” Ray’s voice was soft, a mercy on his ears.

“Oh. Well then.” Bodie felt himself recovering rather quickly with the effort of trying to find a proper reply to that. “Well then. I suppose I do, then.”

“Fancy me.”

“Yeah. Fancy you. I said it, so it must be true.” With that, he pushed the cloth over his eyes again and settled into the pillow. That wasn’t so hard, after all. Ray hadn’t thumped him one, and his headache was already fading with the promise of a few more hours’ kip.

∞ **CI5** ∞

**December 25, afternoon**

“So how long have you felt this way?”

“How’s that?”

“How long.”

“How long what?” Bodie looked up from his book and tried to recall what Doyle had asked him.

“I said, how long’ve you fancied me, then?”

“Known you for six years, haven’t I?” Bodie shook his head and went back to his book. What he *fancied* was finishing the book before it was due back at the library.

“Six years!? You’ve fancied me for six years?”

“Not the *whole* six.”

“Why not the whole?”

Bodie looked up and frowned at him, wondering if Raymond Doyle had even the slightest idea how irritating he was to live with. He wasn’t yet fully recovered from his hangover and he was on the defensive against a rousing new headache brought on by the tension of anticipating talking about it since he’d woken up again. Doyle’d given him a good three hours’ break before bringing it up, and he was not up to having a conversation about this, now, or anytime in the foreseeable future. But especially now, when he was

midway through a good book and forgetting there was ever such a thing as scotch, rum balls, Christmas parties, or Raymond-can’t-let-a-conversation-die-a-natural-death-Doyle.

It wasn’t really a hard question. He was pretty well certain that it was impossible to fancy anyone for six years straight. Even someone who remembered you’d needed a new cricket jumper to replace the one he’d bled all over during the last op.

“Didn’t even like you at first. Thought you were a bit odd-looking, come to think...” He shrugged, unable now to remember exactly what he’d thought that long ago. “Got used to you, then. Like an ugly painting you inherit that won’t hang straight.” He smirked, continuing. “Bleeding ugly, but it keeps drawing the eye, doesn’t it?”

Satisfied with Doyle’s silence, he didn’t bother to mention the fact that it was damned hard to find someone attractive when they were calling you a berk every few minutes, taking out their bloody bad temper on you....

Or interrupting your reading every five minutes, for that matter. He’d about lost the plot of the mystery and it was just getting to the important part. Sighing, he flipped back a few pages to read over what he’d missed whilst keeping one eye on Doyle’s mood, waiting for the next strike.

∞ **CI5** ∞

**January 15**

“Seems I should do something.”

“Make supper, if you’re restless.”

Bodie was midway through a mediocre film and a glass of whiskey, and there was nothing moving him off the couch short of Cowley on the line with an assignment. And with the way it was pouring outside, the Queen herself’d have to be in danger to justify his getting wet.

“Not restless,” Ray said, continuing to pace around the flat as he had been for the past half-hour. “I mean to say, I feel I should

do something about you. Us.”

“Hmm.” Bodie heard him all right, but he wasn’t about to encourage Ray.

“Doesn’t seem right, does it?”

Bodie peered around the narrow hips filling his vision as Ray stopped in front of the couch, still trying to watch the film. “What’s that?”

“You and me. Seems... I dunno.”

Bodie sighed and shifted over to the other end, hoping Ray would take the hint. “What’re you on about now? You saying you want to move out?”

Ray looked up sharply. “No... D’you?”

“What?”

“Do you want to move out?”

“’s my flat, Ray. Why would I want to move out of me own flat?” Ray just blinked at him, so he quickly added, “I don’t want you moving out either. What’s this all about, anyway?”

“I was just...thinking aloud. ’bout you fancying me and all.”

“I’d fancy you more if you made supper.”

“Sod off. If you’re that hungry, you can make your own.” But still, Ray headed for he kitchen, and Bodie smiled.

It had been a bit awkward at first. Not just the living together, but the fancying bit. But once you knew what was going on in his golli head, Ray was easy enough. “If it’s important, Bodie won’t talk about it.” So he’d talked about it. Made a big show of breaking down and answering every one of Ray’s questions. Even the stupid ones. How long he’d been bisexual. When his first sexual experience was. With what bloke. What they’d done. A highly selective history, but he’d talked about it till he’d almost convinced himself that he *didn’t* fancy Ray. He was a bit sick of him *and* the subject, in fact. Then Ray’d walk past him straight from the shower, warm and damp in his dressing gown, dripping water on the lino, and it was all for nothing.

So he’d talk about it some more if it made Ray happy. Talking wasn’t doing, now was it?

Perfectly safe, talking was.

“When did you eat the cheddar?” Ray was speaking into the open fridge, offering a helluva lovely view of his arse in very, very tight jeans.

“Thursday.”

“When Thursday?”

“You were out with that Melissa.”

“Melanie.”

“’m sure you said it was Melissa,” who’d had that bum and all Bodie’d got was a bit of ham and cheddar. He sighed and closed his eyes, reminding himself again that after six years with him, Ray should be boring by now. Especially his arse. Bog-standard, it was. A bit too skinny, really, if you were objective about it. Still, he couldn’t stop himself from savouring another glimpse as Ray headed for the door, whinging all the way about something or other.

“Should just mark off a shelf, shouldn’t I. Leave you notes like Alice, ‘Eat to grow large.’ Bloody human disposal unit. I’m going out an’ picking up rations. Don’t touch the gorgonzola.”

He put up his hands in surrender and grinned. “Neutral, they are. Out of my jurisdiction.”

“Yeah, well. The last beer is as well, mind, so keep off,” Ray said, slamming the door behind him harder than was strictly necessary.

∞ **CI5** ∞

Arms full of groceries, Ray didn’t even wait till he was unpacked to start up again. Bodie sighed, realising suddenly that he’d been mistaken. Ray had yet more to say on the subject of his own attractiveness.

“Never would’ve taken me for your type.”

“Not my type, Ray. My *partner*.”

“Still,” Ray went on as if he hadn’t heard him, which he may well have not as he tended to carry on onanistic conversations when he was troubled. Usually, Bodie didn’t bother to intervene. “Seeing as you’re always going on about your beauty...would’ve thought you’d

be taken by a bloke that looked more... Dunno. Like yourself.”

“Narcissistic, am I?”

“Hmm. Always tellin’ me you’ve got good taste.” Ray turned then, winking at him and tossing him an orange, which he very nearly dropped in surprise.

“So I’m your type, then, petal?” he recovered, adding a touch of camp. The word hung between them for a second and then Ray laughed, the deep and dirty laugh that he was so used to being on the other end of.

“Couldn’t properly say. Never had a bloke before.”

“Don’t have one now.”

Ray blinked at him. “Don’t I?”

Bodie didn’t answer, paying close attention to finding the right place to start peeling the orange.

“Been thinking on that one, Bodie.”

“Dangerous that,” he warned, worrying now that he’d made a fatal strategic error at some point.

Ray shook his head and there was that laugh again. “’s ironic. In love with me. Couldn’t even get Ann there, could I? Esther was, though, I think. There some law I don’t know about?”

“Who said I was in love with anybody?”

“You did.”

“Must’ve misheard. You’d been drinking, and all. What I *said* was I fancied you.”

“You can’t even remember saying anything. And it’s the same thing, isn’t it?”

Bodie watched Ray carefully, catching the tenseness in his stance, and decided that a bit of lechery was in order. He made a show of looking Ray up and down, lingering over his tight jeans and bulging crotch. “Want your luscious body, *mate*, not your hand in matrimony.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t love me at all, then?”

“Ray—” He’d meant it all as camp and was a bit horrified to hear the slight roughness in

his voice. He did his best to rein it in.

“As a mate?”

“’course I do.”

“What’s the difference, then?”

“The difference is—the difference is that I’m not in love. Do I seem in love to you?”

“Dunno. I’ve never seen you in love before.”

‘Before’—Ray was a sly one. “People in love lose their appetite. And I’m famished.”

“Better eat your orange, then.”

Bodie looked down and saw his orange sat there untouched.

Ray looked at the telly and then down at the half-made cheese sandwiches. “Maybe I’m in love, then. Not sure I can eat any of this.”

“I’ll finish them up.” But he stayed where he was, resisting the urge to get up and go into the kitchen, not sure it was safe to get any closer now.

“Wouldn’t know, would I? Never was in love with a bloke.”

Bodie swallowed, hard, noticing that there was no ‘before’ at the end of that. Not that he’d expected one. He hadn’t expected anything, really. “Ray—”

“Don’t feel much like sandwiches now. I need a drink, I think.” Ray’s voice sounded funny and Bodie had the sudden strong desire to get away—go home—and realised one of the central problems of living with Ray, one he’d never anticipated. He was home now. They both were. It was enough to cause a bloke to lose his appetite and take to drinking.

Ray walked out to the sitting room and poured two drinks, handing one off to Bodie. Their hands brushed as he took the drink but Bodie hardly noticed, now desperately trying to remind himself that this was just Ray. As if Ray had ever been *just* anything before.

“I made ’em doubles. Need fortification, don’t I?”

“Do you?”

“Yeah. I think I do.”

Bodie had a sudden flash of fear that maybe Doyle was planning to get drunk and

try it on with him. He set his glass down and glared at Ray, trying to convey just what a bad idea that might be. “Sunshine, you *do* realise that I’m bisexual.”

Ray blinked those damned cat-eyes at him. “Yeah.” He cocked his curly head to the side and Bodie could tell he was thinking that he’d missed something. Bodie waited, and finally Ray repeated, “Yeah?”

“It means I sleep with blokes, y’know.”

“Yeah...so you said.”

“Find ’em attractive, I do.”

“Yeah...and?”

“Men, in principle. In general. As a collective. Male bodies. Naked men with muscles and hair and beards and arseholes and cocks—”

“Yeah,” Ray interrupted his list, colouring a little and clearing his throat. “Got that part.”

“Yeah. I knew you’d understand. There’s something about the male form... Isn’t there? Not that you don’t stand out, of course. Stand out in our crowd. Next to some of our CI5 toads, you’re a bloody sight for sore eyes. Not that they’re all unworthy. For instance, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but Murph’s not half bad.” Bodie felt a bit sorry for Ray, but he was going to plough ahead with his strategy of mincing no words. If Ray was suddenly thinking of soft music, roses, and chocolates, he needed to be dissuaded as quickly as possible. And if blatant crudeness didn’t do it, humour might.

“Murphy? Our Murph?” Ray chuckled.

“Anson, as well, if he gave up the smokes.”

“Ah, and McCabe and Lewis as well, I suppose. Like them too, do you?”

“Well, I dunno. McCabe and Lewis? Are they a matched set, then? Hmm. A menage, eh?” He raised his eyebrow and wiggled it for effect.

“In each other’s pockets, aren’t they?” Ray grinned. “Just like us. We’ll have to make it a CI5 foursome. Wonder if there’s a French word for that.”

Bodie ignored the obvious pass as if it had gone right over his head. Ray was persistent when he got hold of something. “Macklin’s worth a second look, too, come to think of it.”

“Macklin?” Ray sputtered and Bodie grinned.

“For an older bloke, yeah. He’s fit enough, isn’t he?”

“He’d kill you for thinking it.”

Bodie grinned wider, knowing Ray wasn’t yet sure if he was having him on. “Oh, I dunno. I always thought Macklin was a bit *too* butch, if you know what I mean.” He winked and Ray laughed.

“Who else, then?” Ray sounded like he was getting into the game.

“Pour me another and I’ll tell you.”

Ray took his empty glass and refilled it. “All right. So who else do you fancy?”

“Of our lot?”

Ray nodded, taking a sip from his own drink. “Yeah. Who else do you fancy? You’re not going to say Towser, are you?”

“Towser?” He pretended to think about it and manufactured a violent shudder that wasn’t all a show. “Towser if he was the last human on Earth. And I’d have to be good and drunk first.”

“Okay. Who were you going to say, then?”

“If you *must* know...” he paused for dramatic effect, “Cowley.”

“The Cow? That’s—that’s sick, that is! He’s—”

“Experienced?”

“Pull the other one, mate. He’s old enough to be our father!”

“Keeps it in the family, then, doesn’t it?”

“I take back what I said about your taste. Bloody perv.” Ray turned on the television, shaking his head and snickering.

Bodie sighed to himself, feeling himself very lucky to have diverted Ray before things could get out of hand.

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**Sometime in early February.**

“‘ave you taken the laundry in?”

“Your turn.”

“It was my turn last.”

Bodie stopped to think about it. Was it last week that Ray’d put too much starch in? He sighed. “Right. My turn. Did you separate it?”

“Yeah.”

“We’re out of pickle.”

“There’s half a jar left.”

“They’re blue.”

“Blue?”

“Blue. Not supposed to be blue, are they?”

“Nah. Put ‘em on the list. The eggs and milk have turned as well.”

∞            **CI5**            ∞

**Late February**

“Double?”

“I don’t—”

“A bloke?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh. Right, then.”

“Ray, I—”

“What’s he do?”

“Do?”

“For a living.”

“School teacher, if you’ll believe it.”

Ray snorted. “Handsome, is he?”

“Very.” Then, not knowing quite why, he added, “He thinks I work for the libraries.” He looked around the flat and added, “Need some more books laid round here, don’t I?”

Ray nodded, continuing to unpack the groceries.

∞            **CI5**            ∞

**March**

Sue and Laurie giggled when they stepped into the flat and Bodie had a moment of unease, which passed when Ray made a quick turn and pinned Laurie against the wall

beside the door, kissing her soundly. Bodie wasn’t surprised, really.

Ray’d been charming at dinner, making both the birds laugh at his jokes, which were, more often than not, at Bodie’s expense. He’d been more than a little swept into Ray’s good humour, only kicking him once under the table and forgiving all when Ray picked up the cheque. Then on the dance-floor, Ray’d been hot and confident, spinning both Laurie and Sue in turn round the floor, much to Sue’s delight. But Bodie’d sat back, not minding, knowing that Ray wasn’t poaching—but was merely spreading around the good cheer. When the right song came on, even Bodie’d danced a bit, knowing that his style was different from Ray’s but complementary—knowing too that the four of them looked good on the floor together, Ray laughing at his showy moves, showing off his own, and for once, they were in tune without forgetting the birds, letting them in on as much as they were able.

Bodie himself tended toward a bit more conversational lead-in, a bit slower seduction. What good was charm if you didn’t get a chance to be charming? But he and Sue exchanged a glance at Ray and Laurie and then at each other, and he could tell that Sue was into it, was flushed and pretty and sparkled in that way that birds did had when they were ready but still a little coy about it.

So he moved in, putting his hands around her waist, pulling her close against the closed door, leaning back against the door so that she seemed to be pinning him there, so that she had to lean against him putting her arms around his neck and tiptoeing to kiss him. If he opened his eyes and looked to the left a bit, he knew he could’ve seen Ray’s face, seen him with his eyes closed, kissing Laurie with enthusiasm. He could almost make out Ray’s mumbled encouragements between kisses, the little groan that meant that Ray was getting very turned on.

Sue’s mouth was soft, her lips tasting of

candyfloss. She smelled like flowery perfume and, under that, the faint sweat of the dance-floor and cigarette smoke. Bodie was turning on now, forgetting about letting her lead, wanting to assert himself now, wanting her hips pressed in closer. She was thin, a bit too thin, and when he brought her hips in to press against his own, he ground his cock into her pelvis and imagined, for a moment, that the hardness he felt there was something else. But the soft swell of her hips was more compelling than that illusion, and he let his hands roam over her body, glancing just once over at Ray, who was moving in a slow dance toward the couch, bringing Laurie along with him.

Bodie knew that he had to decide whether to manoeuvre Sue to the couch or whether to take her on the floor. Or move to his bed. But Ray had not headed to his own yet and Bodie didn't need to kid himself—that he was hard in part because of Ray, because Ray was in the room, because it was possible that Ray might look over at him and see him start to undress Sue, see him put his hands down her blouse, releasing the catch of her bra, freeing her small breasts into his hands.

He moaned at the image, at the power of it. And he didn't look back again to see if Ray was watching him, feeling Sue no longer coy against him as he led her into his bedroom.

∞                    **C15**                    ∞

Bodie didn't wake up till nearly eight-fifteen, except once, at half past seven when Sue woke him to say goodbye. She had to go to work; he couldn't remember where she'd said she worked and, unusually for him, he didn't much care. She was a one-night, not a girlfriend, really. One of those sexually liberated types, but a nice girl and someone he might call again because it had been good with her.

In the kitchen, he ran into Ray as he put on the coffee. Ray was wearing just his grey pajama bottoms low on his hips and Bodie spared a glance at the soft line of hair

disappearing at the drawstring. It was safe again, wasn't it? The way it used to be, camping it up because nothing would come of it. He felt no real need to hide his looking, now that Ray knew he looked, but neither did he make it obvious.

Ray was caught up in cleaning up spilled coffee grounds and didn't notice him until Bodie stepped next to him to get a mug from the dish drainer and Ray looked at him in that sleepy way of his and smiled slightly, the smile turning into a grin for no reason that Bodie could see.

"Morning." Ray took a sip from his mug, grinning still.

"That it is." Bodie was noncommittal, a bit gruff, though he had woken earlier in a good mood, feeling sated and rested in those first few minutes, watching Sue pull on her clothes, gather her shoulder bag, run her brush through her hair self-consciously. He'd definitely lost his good mood, now, but he wasn't sure what had turned the day against him. Maybe Ray's chip-toothed smile did it. Sometimes seeing Ray stupidly happy was enough to put a man off breakfast. There was simply no need for that smile before nine AM on a Saturday.

"Good night, wasn't it?"

Ray's none too subtle check-in irritated him still more. Laurie was probably still asleep in his bed, and Doyle was all ready to compare notes. Part of him was sickened, even as part of him was curious, wanting to know, to hear, wanting details.

"Yeah. Sue's got a lot of...enthusiasm," Bodie offered, not ready to share more yet.

"Could see that, yeah. Laurie as well. Knows her way around, doesn't she?" Ray was whispering, confirming that Laurie was still in his room.

"Does she?"

Ray nodded. "A right screamer."

Bodie tried not to smile at that and failed, knowing Ray meant Laurie, but unable to resist. "I thought I heard something. That wailing was you, then? I thought maybe



someone had killed an old tom.”

“Ah, listening at the door, were you?”

“‘course. Hoping to catch some tips, wasn’t I?”

“Should’ve just knocked.”

“And taken a seat at the foot of the bed?”

It slipped out and he was a bit surprised to see how far he was willing to push this, knowing he was pushing to prove he could, to prove that nothing had changed because they both knew this didn’t mean anything.

Neither of them noticed her until Ray’d already responded, “Better view, innit?”

Laurie didn’t say anything at all, didn’t make a sound, surely a bad sign, as she headed back to Ray’s room and didn’t come out again until she was dressed. Bodie stood there, unable to think or move, watching as Ray followed her back and out again, listening to Ray’s protests until he heard the roar of a car taking off just outside.

Ray came back in and shrugged, picking up his coffee and carrying it back to his room without saying anything more. Not that there was anything more to say. They’d both, clearly, said too much.

∞ **CI5** ∞

### Late March

Ray was at it again, looking at him speculatively. They were on an op, and Ray *should* have had his eyes on the monitors.

“Upstairs window.”

Ray sat up straight, taking his eyes to where they belonged. “Where? I don’t see anything. Damn.”

“I lied.”

“You what?”

“Keep your eyes on the job, sunshine, or go home.” He didn’t mean to sound hard. But Ray’s patience for this kind of op seemed to have decreased over time, as his own had increased. He wondered, amused at the thought, if that meant he was getting old. Cowley’d been getting up his nose less this

year, anyway.

“Sorry.” Ray shifted in his seat and leaned forward, turning his back to Bodie, who was listening to the house and noting down anything that sounded worthy of noting down. So far, it had been a conversation notable for its resounding dullness. He had never encountered such an outstandingly witless mob of gunmen. They had spent all day discussing cricket, somehow managing to make the doings of the team on tour bloody boring.

“’s okay.”

“You want to switch off?”

“Yep.”

They quickly changed places in the small van, and Bodie grabbed the thermos as he passed it, refreshing his lukewarm tea and offering some to Ray. Without his asking, Ray reached over and pulled out a new package of biscuits, offering him two and taking one for himself. He noticed that Ray only nibbled absently on his.

“You all right?”

“Yeah. The sound’s a bit low. Or my hearing is going.”

“I meant are you all right, generally. I turned the volume down a bit back.” He couldn’t say anything specific because Thompkins, one of the new batch of agents, was driving the van and within hearing range.

Ray shook his head no and then ran a hand through his curls, dislodging the headphones and then fixing them back on his head. Bodie smiled at the way he’d disrupted the smooth spread of curls, forcing two of them on top to stick out at angles so that he looked like he had curled horns.

“No, you’re not okay?”

“I—” Ray shook his head again, taking a sip of tea and then starting over, “Fancy a drink at the local after?”

Bodie didn’t fail to hear the catch in Ray’s voice on the word “fancy.” He sighed and stared at the monitors, trying to concentrate on the blank face of the house and the

curtained windows, looking for any signs of movement. Two more hours of this and they were off for another round with Ray, and he knew that he was wearing down, slowly, inevitably. And he knew it was only his own self-control that was keeping Ray from making a very big mistake.

∞                    **CI5**                    ∞

Ray brought the drinks back to the booth in the front. It was by the window, facing outward, with a curtain-framed view of the street. Bodie had picked the table, intentionally making it as public as possible, which he knew was a rather futile gesture as they were headed for their own very private shared flat directly after this.

For a few blessed minutes they drank in silence, and then it was Bodie who felt compelled to break it. “What’s on your mind, Ray?”

“I keep thinking about it. How come I didn’t know until you told me?”

“Didn’t know what?”

“That you were—what you are.”

“Blindly handsome and admirably modest? Should get your eyes checked.” The joke fell flat, and he sighed at Ray’s worried face. With the silver at his temples and the worry lines between his eyes, he looked older than usual, and fragile, somehow. “Sorry. I know what you meant. And you didn’t know because it’s not...knowable...” He searched for a way to make sense, finding the words were difficult and awkward. “That’s not the problem, is it? You don’t really care about me and which way the wind blows.”

“Guess I don’t at that. I always knew you were a bag of hot air going nowhere fast.”

“Ha bloody ha.”

Ray grinned and the tension seemed to ease up some. “’s not a joke, though.”

“Isn’t it?”

Ray shook his head, emphatically. “Maybe the joke’s on me, then, and I just don’t know it.”

“Nobody’s laughing at you, Ray.”

“No? Then how come you haven’t tried it on with me?”

“Tried it on with you?”

“Yeah. I’m just trying to understand. Not making heads or tails of it on me own.”

“Why should I?”

“What?”

“’m asking. Why should I?” He could see both of them staring back at him in the glass and he looked strange and pale in reflection. They were sitting very close to each other, the darkness blotting out the physical distance between them.

“Dunno.” Ray ran his hand through his curls again, irritably, staring into the mirrored glass. “Going to cut this all off, I think.”

Bodie gasped in mock horror. “Never heard the story of Samson?”

Doyle smiled and jabbed an elbow into his ribs gently. “Makes you Delilah, then.”

“Ah, but I like your curly top. Should keep it so long as you’ve got it, for tomorrow—”

“—we may be bald,” he laughed. “Won’t happen, though. Men in my family keep their hair.”

“The sound you hear is birds the world over sighing with relief.” Bodie did a bad imitation of a BBC announcer.

“Screw the birds.”

Bodie nodded, raising his glass up and clinking it against Ray’s. “To screwing the birds.”

Ray set his glass down without taking a sip. “Why do you do that?”

“What?”

“Try to make me forget what I’m saying?”

“Maybe ’cos I don’t want to hear what you have to say?”

“Coward.”

Bodie shrugged.

“You don’t fancy me anymore. That it? It was just a passing phase in the Bodie libido?”

Bodie wanted to lie then and there. Just say, “Yeah, a passing phase.” But he couldn’t bring himself to lie, not when it was this

important. “Still fancy you, sunshine. Can’t help myself, can I?”

“So why don’t you want me?” Ray hissed out the question, and Bodie was a little shocked at the urgency in his voice.

“Told you I want you, Ray. Told you that already,” he whispered back, wishing they were anywhere but in a too-picturesque pub with a bunch of old men who had come to watch the match on the telly.

“So why don’t you try it on?”

Bodie laughed at that, suddenly seeing the humour in it, hoping he could bring Doyle to see it too. “You want me to chat you up, is that it? Try it on with you, spread the Bodie-charm out like a bloody red carpet leadin’ up to my bed? Oh, but you know where my bedroom is, don’t you. Right next door to yours, isn’t it?”

Ray didn’t say anything to that.

“C’mon, Ray. What’re you asking me? Are you trying to tell me that you’ve suddenly discovered your latent homosexual self? Or is it not so sudden? Had three months to think it over and no birds caught your eye lately, so what the hell—why not try out your best mate? Won’t turn you down, that what you figure? A safe experiment? Find out how the other half lives? Ah, yeah, I get it all right. You’re just one of those blokes who doesn’t really fancy *men*, per se, but there’s this one *special* man in your life who you’d be willing to fuck, or is that be fucked by—” Ray winced at that, but Bodie didn’t stop, feeling like it all had to be said, and it didn’t matter that he was whispering rather loudly in a pub crowded mostly with men just off from their jobs, men going home to their wives and screaming children. “You love me so much you’d make the sacrifice, eh? Well it’s not necessary, but ta for the kind thoughts. Buy me a box of chocolates and a dozen roses and I might give you a kiss, but don’t push your luck, Ray.”

Bodie hadn’t looked at Ray directly as he spoke, preferring to watch the reflection in the glass, watching as Ray opened his mouth as if

to say something and then closed it again. He stopped and took a breath, waiting for Ray to say something. When he didn’t, Bodie added, “I’m not that hard up.”

“I noticed that.” Ray’s voice was mild, thoughtful. He was dangerous when he got thoughtful. Moreso when he was mild. Waiting for something. Setting up a trap.

“Just don’t, Ray. I just couldn’t take it. Not any of it.”

He finally turned to look at Ray’s face, no longer satisfied with the blurry reflection. Ray’s eyes were wet and he felt the ache in his own chest grow stronger, heavier, the weight of responsibility for them both making him angry. Cowley had known, had said to him that he didn’t expect marriage would ever be an issue. Marriage—a wife, kids, a dog—was responsibility that he didn’t need, want, or care to experience. But he hadn’t known—hell, Cowley hadn’t known something, at last, and Bodie couldn’t even present that to him, could he?—that Ray Doyle was Bodie’s own whether he wanted him or not, whether he fancied him or not. His to fuck up.

He sighed, all the anger worn down from talking about it, thinking about it, leaving only a sort of emptiness inside. He reached up to brush the tears from Ray’s cheek hoping Ray wouldn’t take it the wrong way. “Sorry. Sorry, so fucking sorry, sunshine. I didn’t mean—”

Ray shook his head, cutting off what would’ve been a fairly incoherent apology.

He was sorry for too many things, none of which included the small infraction of finding Doyle attractive.

“Bodie, let’s go home.”

They didn’t say another word until they were in the flat, walking home in a surprisingly comfortable silence. As Bodie shut the door and set the locks, he recognized the determined look on Ray’s face and knew it meant neither of them was going to sleep easily that night.

He took his coat off and hung it up neatly and felt Ray brush past him to hang up his

own coat. He didn't turn around until Ray had walked past him and was standing at the doorway to his own room. "I'm knackered. Night, Bodie."

"I—night, Ray. You—you all right, then?"

Ray smiled weakly at him, his eyes red around the edges, lines of stress on his face. "Yeah. I'm...got a lot to think about, haven't I?"

Bodie nodded and headed to his room, hoping he might find a way to sleep and not think about it.

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It was not the sound of the door that woke him, but the sense of a presence just inside the closed room. It was too dark to see anything, and Ray was quiet, but they'd worked together too long—long enough for Ray's presence not to startle him, just wake him on the edges, peripheral vision or something. Ray hadn't yet found his blind spot.

"Ray?"

"s me."

"Something wrong?"

"Nothing." The bed dipped as Ray sat down on the edge of it. He could feel the radiant warmth of Ray's body close by and could imagine what he looked like even without seeing him, sleepy and tousled.

He said nothing more for a few minutes, just listening to Ray breathe, waiting to see if Ray would say something more. When he didn't, Bodie sighed deeply, worried and confused and still half-asleep. He glanced at the bedside clock and saw it was three in the morning.

Looking again in Ray's direction, he found his eyes had adjusted slightly, so that he could see the faint outline of Ray's body, could make out that he was naked.

"C'mere, Ray." He held out his arm and patted the mattress at his side, moving over to make room for him.

Ray slid under the sheet with him, pulling the duvet up to his hips, and Bodie reached

out to pull him closer, not caring at that moment that he was naked as well, just wanting Ray close to him, wanting to do something, thinking about how much he'd hurt Ray for his own good, for both of their sakes. And overwhelming all of that was how good Ray felt beside him, in his bed, Ray's slighter body pressed up against him.

"Trust me, Bodie."

"I do," he answered, belying his words by tensing up.

"Trust me." And then he felt the softest, gentlest, most uncertain brush of Ray's mouth on his own, barely even a proper kiss. Then again, this time for a half-second longer. Then again, harder, a kiss, definitely, now, and he struggled to remind himself of how many different reasons he had for why this was a very, very bad idea, but they faltered under the weight of Raymond Doyle suddenly on top of him, braced up on his forearms and pressing down against him from belly to groin, legs wrapped against the outside of Bodie's own. He was instantly hard, aching with it, wondering if another kiss would bring him off, then finding that it wasn't enough as Ray kissed him again, this time with an open mouth, then again, still not enough, as Ray's tongue darted out and met his own, then again, the kiss getting hotter, longer, stealing his breath and his will before breaking off too soon.

The sound of them both breathing harshly, raggedly, filled the room before Ray spoke, still sounding winded, but gaining strength as he went on. "William Andrew Phillip Bodie." Bodie nearly laughed at how angry Ray sounded, rattling off the list of names as if they were a series of curses. "You couldn't find your way home on a sunny day with a map and a compass—"

"What?"

But Ray continued, hardly taking a breath, "—and a pair of binoculars. Bisexual bloody Bodie. What is it *about* fucking anything that moves makes you so special? Gives you the

fucking right to tell me not to push, does it?"

"I—"

"How naive do you think I am? I'm three years older than you, you great bloody fool! I was dealing with real, live gay people when you were hacking away at plants and playing merc in the big bad jungle. And don't go giving me any shite fairy tales about tough-arsed mercs and their bloody macho Games, as I've heard 'em before told by better men than you."

Bodie didn't know what to say to that, so he stayed quiet, finding himself oddly turned on by this display of aggro, all the while feeling Ray's cock, hard against his own.

"And in case you were wondering, Bodie-mate, I did not fancy you when we met. You were a berk then and you've been one, off an' on for six years. Mostly on. But, if you bothered to ask Cowley, and I think he'd tell you, my psych. profile suggests an extreme talent for dealing with berks—flexibility—physical and mental—"

Bodie could see, now, Doyle's feral grin, teeth showing and lip curled back and he responded to it by thrusting his hips up against Ray's, interrupting Ray's train of thought for long enough to elicit a moan from both of them.

"Bastard, I'm not done yet, so don't fucking move another muscle or I'll go back to me room." The words were issued as a threat, not backed up by any physical force, but the intensity of Ray's voice stilled him instantly, making his cock harder. "Good. Where was I?"

"Flexible. You're flexible." Bodie chanced it, part of him hoping Ray would respond.

Ray sighed, relaxing slightly, letting more of his weight fall to rest on Bodie. Bodie let him settle comfortably on top of him, holding himself still, waiting for Ray to make a move whilst frantically trying to figure out what to do. The intelligent thing to do would be to stop this before it went too far to stop.

"Oi, Bodie?" Ray's voice was a whisper directly in his ear.

"Yeah?" he whispered back, still

panicking.

"You like blokes, right?"

"Yeah. I do."

"Birds, too."

"Hmm."

"All the same to you, are they?"

"Same, yeah. Lovely in their own way, aren't they?"

"So it won't matter if we do this, then. Just another body."

Bodie paused before answering, struggling to decide the right answer to that question. "Am I just another body, then? This an experiment?"

"Could be that. Could be something else."

Ray was holding back, had been ever since Ann Holly. But Bodie wanted to point out that it was a bit late for all that. He'd already rejected him, hadn't he? Before Ray'd even gotten around to making an offer, he'd pulled back the bridge before he could come across willingly.

But he realised, now, that that had been his mistake. If it didn't matter, you had to *act* like it didn't matter. Let the bloke come across, if that's what he wanted. Should've told him from the start. Should've just said it sober, said he fancied Ray's body, liked him well enough, maybe even loved him in a matey way, because he knew Ray'd would accept that. Could've laid him quick and let that be the last of it. But no, oh no, he'd let on that this mattered, hadn't he? Let it become some sort of game after all, led Ray on by not leading Ray on. His brain hurt to working itself around that bit of illogic, double-think—no, triple-think, at least, and Ray'd beat him at it.

The question was, did Ray know how much trouble they were in? He put his arms around Ray, forcing him to lie down wholly against him, so that Ray's head rested on his shoulder. He held Ray close with more force than he needed to, as if Ray was struggling, which he was not, or might struggle, which again, Bodie thought, he would not. "This could hurt."

“I know that. Read up on it, didn’t I?” Ray mumbled into his shoulder.

Bodie shook his head. “No. This could hurt me. And if I hurt, love, then you hurt.”

“Partners, mate. That’s how it is.”

“No.” Bodie reached down and cupped Ray’s chin, forcing him to look up at him, making sure that Ray got this, because it was important. “No. I’m not talking about sympathy or empathy, here. Not talking about partners. I’m talking about revenge. You hurt me, I’ll hurt you back. I’ll make you suffer. I might even kill you.”

“Bodie—”

“Just so you know. Even Cowley won’t be able to stop me. It’ll be the last thing I do.”

Ray nodded, expression all shadows and softened angles in the dark room. “Big, tough Bodie.”

“Don’t fuck with me, is all I’m saying, Doyle. Tough? Maybe not, but I’m big enough to hurt you and you’re not fast enough any longer to get away.” Doyle was slowing down. They both were, finally, in a lot of ways. The last annuals had proved that, but Doyle was still quick and strong enough to be a threat.

“Oh, but I want to fuck with you, don’t I?” Ray wiggled against him, thrusting his pelvis forward so that Bodie was pressed into the mattress, all the air rushing out of him as the pleasure rushed up his body, spreading outward from his groin to his fingertips, which flexed against Ray’s back, nails digging into soft skin.

“You don’t. You—”

“I like pain, don’t I? Beautiful when I’m hurting, aren’t I? It makes you go all soft inside, doesn’t it? I saw you watching me after Ann—the way you turn on when I get dropped by a bird.”

“Bloody hell! That’s sick, that is.” But Bodie felt his fear receding, being replaced by a dark amusement that made him smile.

“Sick? We’re a matched set, then. Big, tough merc with sadistic tendencies that you

are—”

“I’m a narcissist, not a sadist,” he interrupted. “Ask Ross. I couldn’t love you enough, Doyle. I’ll always come first.” But as he said it, he knew it was a lie, knew that Doyle knew it too.

Ray shrugged and laughed softly. “Ah, but suffering’s what martyrs do best.”

“You’re not a martyr, Raymond.”

“I’m not?”

“Nah. You’re a satyr.”

“Mmm. That’s nice.” But Ray wasn’t responding to his compliments or insults anymore. And Bodie had run out of words, too wrapped up in the heat spreading through him. He gave up on talking, giving up on fighting, too, and began to arch his back, forcing Ray to respond by pressing down to keep his balance. They were always better at this kind of negotiation anyway.

Ray moaned softly, and Bodie lifted his legs up, letting Ray settle between them, surrendering even whilst he was absolutely sure that neither of them had really won.

He grabbed for the lube under the bed, feeling around with his free hand, glad Ray wasn’t heavy enough to pin him down easily. He placed it in Ray’s hand and Ray’s eyes widened with his smile, looking for all the world like a cat caught in the headlights, right before you ran it down. Then he closed his eyes, concentrating only on the feel of Ray’s fingers inside him, preparing him gently and efficiently.

They set about their task quietly, as with any dangerous op, signalling to each other silently, trusting in that awareness of each other that was sometimes too keen and sharp for comfort. But now it served them, and Bodie relished not talking, not thinking, not arguing. There would be time enough for that later.

Even as he came, with Ray’s cock buried deep inside him, he knew that Ray would find a way to have the last word. ∞