



Jane Mailander's story is certainly the most unusual of our Pros pieces, a stirring mix of Bodie and Doyle, Jody and Dil, life and death, modern grief and ancient lament. For those who must know, this is a death story, but for those open to affecting storytelling, this is a celebration of life...

Author's Note: For the purpose of the story, I have telescoped the time a little bit.

he Metro was crowded, but the crowd was silent. The only sound came from the singer on the platform; she had the crowd captivated and she knew it. But she sang only for herself, her heart pouring out of her voice.

Bodie couldn't help but smile as he made his way to the bar; he couldn't have asked for better timing. He ordered a double Glenlivet, keeping his voice low; yet even that small noise seemed to intrude upon

ONE WHO HAS MADE A LONG JOURNEY

JANE MAILANDER

the solitary singer. Bodie turned his back on the bar to give the singer his full visual as well as aural attention, sipping at the neat single-malt and admiring her sleek and beautiful legs. Short tight dress clinging to every line of her, and a body to merit it. She'd hardly changed from the way he remembered her—except for the grief in her face and in her voice, making her private pain a work of art... Bodie's smile faded as he listened to the lyrics she sang: words about loss, the cruelty of love, fate that played games with people's hearts. And in a heartbeat he was back in the ambulance beside the limp, still-breathing remains of his partner—green eyes gone opaque, the pressure bandage unable to stop the red oozing from his temple, oxygen mask obscuring the rest of Doyle's face in as productive an act as sowing seed on the ocean waves—silently begging Ray to die before they reached the hospital.

Ray had been gone the moment the bullet was fired. Would have been worse if they'd managed to keep that thing alive; Doyle could have survived for years, curled in bed like a gangly fetus, fed and oxygenated and cleansed by tubes while Bodie would have fought every court in the land for the right to switch off the cruel machines.

And what would have been the clout of a man's friend and working partner, anyway? After all, wasn't as if he and Ray'd been family—

Again awash in cold grey waves, Bodie downed the rest of his double in a gulp and clenched his teeth as the gold fire blazed a path down his gullet; for a moment the heat drove back the cold. To quickly bank the fires higher, to drown the pain and the singer's words, he let another memory sweep him back to a sunny day and a grassy field...

He had wanted to disappear for a while, to stay away from that bastard Cowley and his traitorous partner for

their roles in his being under suspicion of treason, and in Marikka's murder. He'd especially wanted to get away from Ray; that stupid sod actually thought that some deeper level of understanding would have arisen between them just because they'd started fucking each other. No, better to use this opportunity to wipe the slate, get rid of the baggage, find something new, somewhere new to go.

He hadn't gone far, physically. But it wasn't the sort of hidey-hole they'd suspect, either.

And one hot Saturday afternoon he'd discovered his cricket mob playing in the fields adjoining his flat. He'd thought a match might sweat some of his anger from him, and had inveigled a place for himself in the line-up. Some of the old-schoolers had harrumphed at Bodie's sweatshirt and jeans (when he'd gone to ground, for some reason Bodie had neglected to bring along his white gear), but they knew that Bodie might make the difference between defeat and victory.

Instead, Bodie's team had been soundly trounced by the opposition; none of them had been the equal of Tottenham's bowler. To add insult to injury, the bloke was black as the ace of spades and looked like he weighed a ton—well, blacks were good cricketers, but how the fuck could anyone that size run that fast and throw that hard?

Bodie had been toweling off in a foul mood when he'd heard a soft cheery voice behind him. "You got some good moves there, mate. With a little help you could be brilliant." And he had turned around to face the big black Tottenham bowler.

Bodie wondered if a fight might make him feel better—he needed to do something. "Now why would I want a spade's help?" he'd said coolly.

The rage and retaliation he'd expected never came. There had only been a deep pain in the man's face, the kind of wounded expression Bodie had never seen on a man before and that suddenly, if briefly, had given Bodie the ludicrous urge to apologise.

"Because I'm a hot-shit bowler, that's why you might want it," the man had said softly. "Come on, mate, give us a chance. You're too good a bowler not to want my help."

Bodie'd had to smile at that one; the man's lack of false modesty about his talent was very familiar.

"And I've got to pass it on to someone before they ship me out on Monday." The man's face tightened in reaction to that thought.

Service man. Bodie had thawed a bit at that, mentally elevating the man from arrogant-black-bastard to fellow-soldier. "Branch?"

"Army. I enlisted. Was a job, wasn't it?" The man

had laughed with no humour.

"Where?"

The man's face had stilled. He'd whispered two syllables like a shroud flapping in the wind. "Belfast."

Bodie had felt his own face lose expression. The last of his resentment evaporated before this word that had suddenly bound them together. His mouth had opened and his belly rumbled. "I did a tour in Belfast. With the Paras."

"You've been there?" The man had stared at Bodie, amazed; his "and you're still alive?" had trailed after, not needing to be spoken. "You're a soldier, too?"

Funny how these things worked out. "Tell you what, mate," Bodie had said as if he'd been contemplating this idea all afternoon. "Teach me that spin of yours, and I'll give you a few tips for surviving *The Sow that Devours Its Young*."

The man had smiled at that, as cheerful and friendly as before, and had stuck out a hand. "I'm Jody."

Bodie had taken Jody's hand. "Bodie."

They'd stayed out on Spitalfields until the dark had fallen; then Jody had invited Bodie to "this hot little bar" for a few beers...

Applause intruded, and Bodie blinked; he started clapping also as the singer gracefully descended the small platform and the canned disco music kicked in again. Once again the Metro was a place of laughter and loud talking and clinking glasses.

The singer took her place at the bar next to Bodie and nodded at the bartender, who began to concoct something—no doubt a margarita, Bodie thought fondly, and took the opportunity to see what the handful of years had changed.

Not much change. Her hair was different; a higher, shorter bob than the dramatic black locks he remembered, as if she had shorn herself in mourning. But now there was a pain in her beautiful face that Bodie would feel himself—if only it could get past the indifferent grey lead wrapping him inside.

It had been nearly three years since he'd read the account of Jody's kidnapping by the IRA, and the fucking stupid way he'd been killed—squashed under the treads of the Saracen that had roared to his rescue. John Wayne escaping the Indians only to get trampled by the cavalry. Well, that's war—most of the deaths are stupid ones. Stupid as your best mate getting shot in the head and not knowing when to die, so you ride with him to hospital trying to figure out what to unplug to make him stop breathing—

Fucking stupid way to die. Maybe that's why

I'm here, now.

He opened his mouth and spoke.

"Hallo, Dil. Remember me?"

Dil's eyes seemed intent on the bartender's gestures as he prepared her order. But, "Col," she said in the soft-rough voice that curled warmly in Bodie's gut-level physical memory, "tell Bodie I remember him."

"She remembers you, Bodie," the cheery-faced bartender repeated, still blending the concoction.

Bodie nodded, playing along with the bizarre chaperone. "Col, why don't you be a good lad and ask Dil if she'd allow me to buy her that drink you're making?"

"Be all right if Bodie bought you this drink?" Col asked Dil, who rested her chin on her fist and cast a sloe-eyed glance Bodie's way.

"Tell him I'd like that, Col."

"She'd like that, Bodie," Col said, his face as impassive as a good bartender's face should be.

As Bodie pulled a tenner out of his wallet, the battered card beside it was jostled partway out. Bodie rolled with the pain as he pushed the card back in and paid for both Dil's drink and a refill on his Scotch.

"Col, ask Bodie whatever happened to that bitch he was with that night," Dil said after a tentative sip at the margarita.

"Tell her I don't know and don't care," Bodie replied without the benefit of Col's intervention. He mentally chalked one up to Dil. Deedee—Deirdre?—had been ill-favoured in everything *but* the looks department. Bodie had picked her up here, that night, to make a double-date with Jody and his bird, and in defiance of that bastard Doyle's hold on him. But then he had seen Dil in the spotlight, singing, and the allure of the shrill blonde on his arm had faded before Dil's radiant beauty and sexuality, and before that husky voice that had been the sound of sex. Dil had joined Jody at their table afterward; all that evening Bodie had been acutely aware each time Dil and Jody had kissed and/or felt each other up—and he had sensed an absence within him like an aching tooth every time they'd looked at each other.

That absence was back full-force now, a cold wind aching all the more because he had known life without it.

"She said," Col emphasized, and Bodie blinked, realizing he'd missed the line, "why are you here now?"

Sloe eyes held Bodie's as transfixed as they had been that night, years ago; dark sorrowful eyes that glowed with an inner pain, that had been nothing but sparkling and wild when she'd been with Jody. But for their colour and warmth, Bodie might have been looking into a mirror.

Mirrors. She was the Knight of Mirrors, demanding truth. And it was truth that came out.

"Col," Bodie said without breaking contact with that magnificent misery of eyes, "tell Dil that my soldier is dead, too."

He wished he could take back his words the second he saw their impact in that face. It would have been kinder for him to gut her.

"Tell 'im I'm not a fuckin' charity station, Col!" Dil snapped in a high harsh voice and jerked her head away from Bodie to glare into her margarita.

"She's not a fuckin' charity station, Bodie!" Col snapped, still cleaning a glass; his face was still blank, but his eyes bored into Bodie with an unreadable expression.

Bodie blinked. That backlash of anger had acted on him like a slap in the face or a drench of cold water, lifting him away from his grey thoughts. He stared at Dil, who did not look back.

This was not the Dil whom he had seen that night with Jody. Not the Dil who'd said such gut-splittingly funny, vicious and true things about DeeDee's intelligence and probable hair colour that she'd stomped out in a high screech while Bodie had sat helpless at the table, rupturing in silent hysterics at Dil's witticisms. Not the Dil who'd agreed with Jody that the bereft Bodie might like to come back to their place for the evening.

Not the Dil who, with Jody, had spent that night teaching Bodie the difference between better-than-your-right-hand, wanking-with-a-good-mate, and sex.

Even now the recollection of that night licked at Bodie's insides, warming him with a memory unadulterated by the cold: sucking at those tiny tits of Dil's as she had bared herself; the chuckle he'd given out as his suspicion about Dil had been verified; Jody's big hand in the small of Bodie's back as he'd embraced them both together; the world turning white behind his closed eyes as Dil's incredible mouth sucked him dry while Jody buried himself in her arse, groaning in bliss.

It had been sweet and wild and fierce and tender, and it had frightened Bodie in a way he had never felt before in any bout between a pickup's

legs, male or female. Dil and Jody had been making their goodbyes to each other; it should have been private. They were both men, scarcely monogamous; their sexual arrangement should have been devoid of romantic bliss. And yet their feelings for each other, their sexuality, their innermost selves—their natures—had been generous to overflowing, cheerfully accepting and admitting an acquaintance to share their bond and their sexuality for a night.

Their refusal to leave their powerful emotional rapport out of the bedroom and their ability to read how Bodie was feeling all night long had inspired him. Jody and Dil had left Bodie a lot more than pleasant memories and a cricket pitch.

Bodie had wanted to find something new, somewhere new to go; and that night he had found it. That strange path he had set foot upon with his two guides had led him back to Ray, but via a different route than the one he had always trodden. What he had learned that night had, for the first time in Bodie's life, given him the courage to return and change a bad situation rather than run from it.

He had gone back to CI5 and Cowley within the week. Back to Doyle that first night back. They had spent that night in short talks and long silences, the air reverberating between them in the comfortable wordlessness of their working partnership, no longer rattling emptily from an inability to traverse emotional territory. And when they had parted, they had kissed at the door—the first kiss they had ever shared out of tenderness instead of passion. And, for a moment, Bodie had seen in Ray's eyes and had felt in himself the look that Jody and Dil had shared.

Things had been better between him and Doyle from that time on, stronger; he had felt their rapport reverberate within him every time he and Ray had looked at each other or held each other. He had not known what emotional intimacy could do to sexual compatibility. For the first time he had begun to imagine a future for himself, a life with Doyle after CI5, a permanent place for both of them to live, work they could do together after they'd been demobbed—

Folly. *Vanitas vanitatis*. Nothing like a good swift dose of death to kick you in the teeth with reality, was there?

The look in Dil's eyes told a similar story; one that Time had aged and ripened. But Dil's sorrow was not the dead flat grey that filled Bodie's insides; in her eyes was something that had tem-

pered the pain—something living and green in the middle of a dead garden.

From across the memories, the two survivors warily eyed each other now. There was a taut pride on Dil's face, a tight-lipped glare that dared anyone to think that she needed anyone looking out for her.

"Don't want a fucking charity station, Dil," Bodie said mildly, hiding the fact that just maybe he had come to see her for precisely that reason. "I want..."

What Bodie wanted was presently rotting under six feet of soil. But better that, oh so much better that, than rotting under a white sheet and tubes and needles and machines—and *then* rotting under the ground, while Bodie rotted in prison for performing one last act of kindness for a friend...

Bodie lowered his head to stare into his refill. "I want a friend," he said simply, and took a long swallow of the friend he had left, letting the liquor firefall its way down and once again burn out the grey, for a moment.

But his days with a friend were over, weren't they? He was back to pubcrawls with working mates where everything they said to each other not job-related was shouted in a drunken haze of sentiment, forgotten the next day in the blaze of hangover and the tonic of violent action. Back to sex as a scratched itch; birds and prostitutes and the occasional blowjob in the cottages.

Back to wondering if anyone besides Cowley would pause long enough to throw a handful of dirt on his grave when he finally died. Or if anyone would care enough about him to spit on it...

"All right," Dil said, exasperated.

Bodie looked up, pulled away from his self-absorption, to see Dil descend her stool.

"Well, come on," Dil said without looking behind her.

Bodie watched her leave the Metro. Then he downed the rest of his malt and got off the stool to follow her.

A big hand closed on his upper arm; Bodie turned, ready to blister the hand's owner, and found himself the object of piercing eyes in an expressionless face.

"You do right by 'er, mate," was all Col said in a neutral rumble before he let Bodie go. But the look in his eyes promised what he would do if the other thing happened.

Bodie did not spare Col a second glance as he

left the Metro and saw the briskly stepping figure halfway down the street.

“Dil—”

“Just leave it, Bodie,” she said fiercely, not looking beside her as she strode along, Bodie’s gait easily keeping up with her. “Just don’t say another fucking word.”

So he didn’t. Not one word while they ascended the stairs to Dil’s flat. Not one word while she turned on the lights and made her way to the marigold-gauze curtains surrounding the bed. He followed her after making sure of the locked door.

Dil flicked on the rosy bedside lamps and gave Bodie a look that indicated that he should stay there, and vanished into the prosaically white bathroom abutting the curtained and gold-coloured seraglio atmosphere of the bed-chamber.

Bodie looked around at the flat he had been in once before, three years earlier. The hangings were the same, the bits of bric-a-brac that loaned an exotic flavour to the place.

But now he was being watched by a dead man. He was surrounded by snapshots; shots of Jody, of Dil, of Jody and Dil. One framed shot of a beaming Jody in his cricket whites, perched over the dresser, overlooked the bed itself. And there, at the room divider, hung Jody’s cricket whites.

Dil had turned the place into a fucking shrine. All that was missing were the votive candles—

And what did Bodie have? A card in a wallet, memories of blood and blank eyes.

Here were all these smiling faces. He remembered those smiles. Remembered those mouths on him, those hands...

His cock was starting to stand at the memories. Sweet memories, from a time completely before the leaden wall had crashed down upon him, memories he could treasure for their own sake.

Bodie began to undress. The suit coat first. Then the holster, and the heavy grey metal weight it cradled under his left arm, quickly rolled up in the coat and deposited on the chair seat. If Cowley knew that Bodie had brought the piece along on his leave...But his partner was gone, now he had to watch his own back, take care of himself...but not here. The need was not the same here.

Bodie had just removed his shoes, seated on the edge of the bed, when Dil re-emerged, clad in a filmy robe of some kind; she was beautiful, exotic, and unreachable behind those dark eyes. Sexuality twined round her limbs and hung like Spanish

moss, like the clinging folds of her shift.

Bodie stood up and went to her; he took her in his arms and kissed her. She responded with equal passion, and Bodie could do nothing but respond.

Together the two of them divested Bodie of the rest of his clothing; he stood, feeling every shift and catch of the silken material of Dil’s shift on his bare skin, his lifting cock getting caught in a trailing edge of material. Dil smiled and took hold of the shift in both hands to stroke its silkiness along the silken heat of Bodie’s cock, drawing it across its breadth, pulling it gently to press against the silken smoothness of Dil’s thigh, the cloth going round as if to bind Bodie’s cock to Dil’s leg. At Bodie’s moan of passion, Dil laughed in her throat, and knelt, stroking Bodie at the hips, down the smooth white flanks, digging her nails into the tops of his thighs.

Dil’s eyes met Bodie’s then, dark and shining and flat of anything save passion; his eyes meeting hers were the same. Bodie saw only Dil, felt only Dil against him as his knees buckled and he fell across the bed with Dil following him down, sucking, sucking the marrow from his bones. Sucking out his reason, his mind. The world whirled and tilted around him as one hand stroked Bodie’s chest, his throat, his jaw, where his tongue captured Dil’s fingers and drew them in, sucking wetly on them even as her mouth worked on him, calling up the wild memories, bringing on the white burst of a supernova.

Bodie became vaguely aware that Dil was hovering over him; he blinked his eyes open to find her mouth millimetres from his own; her breath warmed his with the smell of lime and tequila, the essence of his own cum. “Like starting that way don’t you?” he mumbled blearily.

“I always say, Bodie,” and her eyes gleamed, “if you’ve got a good head you should give it.”

“Mmm,” he agreed muzzily, eyes closing again. “Shouldn’t do that, you know. Not polite. Ladies first.”

Dil curled against him, stroking the silken shift material against his smooth bare skin. “There’s time, Bodie. We have all evening.”

Bodie nodded and closed his eyes; his breathing slowed. Dil stroked his chest and cheek, ruffled his hair. She stroked lower, curled her hand round the swollen damp cock where it lolled on a sticky thigh, dozing as peacefully as its master. She bent down to engulf the swollen organ again and suck out the last few little spurts of cum.

It was like an eagle striking. Big broad hands, wide-spread, clapped down on her ribs from behind and hoisted her away from the suddenly-moving body she had been molesting. Dil shrieked in pure startlement as Bodie's weight bore her into the covers. "Gotcha," he hissed, digging his fingers in a little as his body lay down on top of her. "Forgot that, didn't we?"

"You bastard," she wheezed, "can't possibly be that alert after—"

"You can if you learned where I learned." But he had learned in a climate where to be un-alert meant death; it was a survival reflex. Survival—

Bodie flung the shift over Dil's head and pinned it down, baring her back from neck to ankles, blanking his mind of anything save physical sensations. His big hands held her firmly at the waist, gripped...Oh, and how she shivered and gasped at his warm wet open mouth in the small of her back, his tongue delineating each vertebra and rib, himself as slow as she'd been quick to suck him off. He smiled a little before continuing; he'd remembered this particular like of hers correctly. His hands moved to her buttocks, lean, spare little things...he shuddered once as the grey lead wall clanged down, shook his head hard, once, and his hands quickly moved down to her upper thighs.

Beautiful silken thighs, spread open from behind, parting the dark cleft, the hint of the dark pouch beneath. Bodie lowered his head toward the beginning of the inverted V beneath Dil's small skinny arse, burrowing between her legs, under the slight plumpness of the buttocks' cleft. Her body was hot to the touch, soft-skinned, wiry and strong; her own unique musk billowed in the dark place as Bodie reached with his tongue to lick Dil's small velvet sac up into his mouth and engulf it. He felt her moan rather than heard it; gripped her as she writhed beneath him as he supped on her again, sucking her testicles from behind, his head splaying her thighs wide open. She clutched and cursed and twisted, unable to move while Bodie's mouth held her paralyzed.

Finally Bodie let her balls slip free as he raised his head, just enough to seize her arse open with both hands and then to lay waste to it with his mouth. Dil kicked and hissed "oh *shit*, oh *shit*" and arched against the firm hands clamped at her buttocks, but nothing stopped the inexorable push of the wet tongue sliding into that moist, musky cavern redolent with spices...Dil had scented

herself there, in preparation for him.

His cock was interested again, still wet from her mouth and his cum, lifting eagerly to the arse that had made Jody moan so hard, the arse that was nothing like the one he would not think about now. He was with Dil, only with Dil; it was Dil he was mounting now, chewing at her shoulders and neck, hoisting her arse into position...exhaling in long exquisite judders of breath as he slid into her moaning body.

He quivered a little in her, gathering himself; she squirmed deliciously, gasping as he thrust himself to the sinews in her hindquarters. "Oh fuck, Bodie you bastard, you fuck like...like, oh fuck..." She sucked in a long breath and splayed her legs wider.

Bodie's hands were busy on Dil even as his cock kept filling her arse; they stroked silken shift and silken flesh indiscriminately, gripping and pulling taut nipples; fingers wriggled into the tight space between flesh and bedclothes to seize hold of the thick protruding cock and pull firmly.

Dil humped and squealed beneath Bodie, who laughed in lust and fucked her into the bed again. "Bitch," he crooned in her ear, fucking. "My sweet cunt." He pulled her cock hard, again. "So good to fuck, you're so wet, so big for me..."

Dil's response was a wordless wail as her body gathered beneath Bodie's in a rising mound.

Alive. She was warm and supple and alive; her blood pulsed through beautiful flesh, her cock thickened in his hand, her body clutched at his. She was Dil. She was his. She was—

He arched back as Dil bucked and howled beneath him, spraying his gripping hand, as his own lifeblood exploded from him.

He and Ray were in the safehouse at the trainyards, firing out the windows at the faceless army surrounding them. Cowley had turned their location in, had deserted them. This was an Operation Susie; there would be no help for them from any quarter. Unbidden, he remembered the last frame of the film—Butch and Sundance running straight out into the gunsights of an entire army—

Now Ray was the one who was shouting, panicking at being cornered, screaming that they'd best just run out and get it over with quickly, get out now, now!

And Ray was outside, running through the trains, between the bullets being fired at him, and he was after Ray, running, shouting at him to get down, to lie low, his mates were coming to save them.

There, rumbling through the trainyard, toward the men firing at them, a phalanx of his SAS squad, guns out, missiles firing, tanks charging.

Charging straight at Ray, running straight toward them, heedless.

He screamed Doyle's name just as Ray vanished beneath the treads of a Saracen. The tank rumbled on, leaving Ray motionless in a spreading puddle of blood.

He reached Ray's side and turned him over. There was no mark on him but a bleeding mess at his temple, the white of bone and the yellow of brain showing through. Ray's eyes blinked up at him, stared. Begging.

He nodded to those eyes to show that he understood. He drew his gun and slid the barrel into Ray's mouth. His finger squeezed once.

His own head flew apart.

His eyes snapped open and took in the unfamiliar location instantly. He sat up with a silent curse, shaking his head once, and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

The rosy bed light was still on; Dil still slumbered beside him. His body reverberated with the memory of the sex and the unraveling of physical tension.

It didn't matter. He shouldn't have come here. All he'd done in coming here was to get his rocks off—and all he'd succeeded in doing was to add another gruesome twist to his dreams; Jody's death, now, that turned Doyle into a mess of blood and brains and begging eyes...

There was nothing for him here, it was a mistake to have come. He'd better leave, now.

He dragged at his pants where they were carelessly draped over a chair, ready to get dressed and leave before Dil awoke. The weight of his wallet tumbled from the back pocket into his lap.

Blood, brains, begging eyes...

He fumbled the wallet open like a parched man fumbling off the cap of a canteen. He pulled out the card and stared at the living Doyle.

Ray's I.D. photo wasn't much of a picture; Doyle had hated getting photographed. Staring straight ahead, a grim 'let's get this over with' expression, the curls Met-short, the black-and-white photo giving no indication of hair or eye colour—it didn't look like any of Bodie's memories of Ray's face. It was all he had, and it was already acquiring a battered, frayed look. Dil's flat, plastered from one end to the other with snaps, only emphasized the poverty Bodie held in the palm of his hand.

"Your soldier," Dil's voice came from over

Bodie's bare shoulder.

Bodie nodded, not turning around to acknowledge her. Not caring that his hasty escape plans had been thwarted, and not wondering why he didn't care. "Just a regular dangerous day. Just another villain's bullet finding its mark, just another man down. Nothing special about it. The job got finished with just the one fatality on our side and the one who did it's in custody now." He carefully replaced the worn I.D. card in his wallet and tucked the wallet back into his crumpled pants. "The op was successfully concluded. The goal we sought was achieved. It's over."

Dil rested her chin on Bodie's shoulder and turned to look him in the face; she made no other body contact with him. "You're sorry the gunman didn't kill you too."

Bodie waited a moment for that truth's impact in his leaden center to die down before shrugging. "Doesn't matter." Nothing mattered; nothing could touch him inside now. He couldn't even warm himself with the rage of revenge; Cowley had immediately had Bodie put on 24-hour observation, keeping him from the accused until the man was transferred out of the basement. The old bastard had had a point, Bodie had been forced to concede; it *would* have been a black mark on the organization if they'd tried to explain that the prisoner had hanged himself in CI5 custody after cleverly sewing his own genitals into his mouth.

Dil eyed him very closely. "I wanted to die," she said softly, eyes turning to fall on the immaculate cricket outfit hanging by the room divider. "It was all over. I couldn't even bring myself to hate the man who did it. I wanted to kill myself."

"What stopped you?" Bodie was genuinely curious. He'd spent a night or two himself sitting on the edge of his bed in this fashion, staring at his drawn gun in his hand, feeling none of his involuntary revulsion at the thought of suicide, feeling nothing at all...

"Fergus." Her voice was low, remembering clearly. "The man who'd killed my Jody. He saved my life."

Bodie blinked; turned to stare into her eyes.

He knew the name. Fergus, Fergus...Hennessey, that was it. Yeah, Hennessey had gotten seven years for tweeping one of his old cell-mates. Bodie remembered some of that two-year-old case; he remembered discussing it with Ray, saying that he wished that Hennessey's behaviour would become

a trend. That had turned into a big verbal fight between them over Bodie's cold-bloodedness; as a result, he had wound up telling Ray more about his stint in Belfast that night than he had ever told him before. But he had never told Ray about Jody or Dil; Ray had never learned that one of the people responsible for the change between him and Bodie had been kidnapped and killed by Hennessey and the rest of his bastard friends.

"I love him," Dil said quietly.

"You can't." It was not a question or an accusation Bodie made; it was a statement of fact.

"He came looking for me. Jody had told him about me. Hadn't told him everything about me." Dil's face went blank for a moment, shutting out her pain at what that phrase revealed. "But Fergus took care of me. He tried to keep me safe from his old friends. And when I learned the truth, all of it..." Her eyes blazed, briefly, then were dark and shining; full of tears. "I couldn't bring myself to kill him. I had his gun on him, and he just stood there and waited. But I couldn't pull the trigger." She nodded to the dresser, to the large framed photo of Jody in his cricket whites beaming at her. "He wouldn't let me do it."

Bodie stared into the dark happy eyes of the dead man. No, Jody wouldn't want any death dealt in his name.

"So I decided I would join him," Dil whispered, tears spilling. "I put the gun in my mouth. But Fergus pulled it away and told me to leave. He saved my life.

"He went to gaol for killing that bitch who tried to kill us, the one who used her tits and her cute little arse to get my Jody. He's there now. I visit him. And when he walks out I'll be at the gate waiting for him. He knows that."

Bodie turned and deliberately took hold of Dil's upper arm with one hand, making her look at him.

"Bodie, you're hurting me—"

"You listen to me, Dil," Bodie said softly, something cold bubbling up inside him. "I tried to warn Jody. Now I'm warning you. A lot of those IRA bastards are baby-faces who pour on the charm—and they're the ones who blow up most of the old people and kids, because no one suspects 'em. Dil, don't go near that *fucker* again, ever." He shook her, once, glaring into her wide wounded eyes. "And don't let him sweet-talk you into thinking he's mended his ways. The only way you can reform Ulstermen is the way they 'reformed'

your Jody. Of course Hennessey wanted to take care of you. Pass up a chance to fuck his prisoner's bird? Another victory for the Glorious Cause—"

"That was *after* he saw what I looked like naked!" Dil shouted, yanking her arm free.

Bodie stared, stunned into silence.

"I blew him, before, when he thought I was a woman—but he wouldn't touch me after he'd undressed me, not then or after. But *that* was when he saved me, Bodie—after he'd learned the truth!" Her dark eyes, still tearful, were blazing into Bodie's. "That was when he told me he loved me. That he'd do anything for me."

Couldn't be. Good Irish lads were raised to think mother-killing was less sinful than sex—and that was if the sex was church-sanctified baby-making. Well, all right, so Fergus got a quick lesson in what a walk on the wild side looked like—

"Dil, please. Don't trust him. Don't trust anything he says to you. Ireland is a sow that eats its young. They're scorpions, every man Pat of them, it's in their nature to kill—"

"Scorpions," Dil's face froze, eyes wide, and Bodie stared at her suddenly wild look. "Why did you say that, Bodie, *why did you say that?*" The savage look on her face held Bodie immobile.

He blinked, bewildered. "Just, just a story I told Jody out on the cricket field that afternoon. Heard it when I was in Africa, comes from there. There's a scorpion and a frog. The scorpion wants to cross the river—"

He was stopped by a sight and a sound that should not have been made. But Dil was, indeed, shaking with laughter.

"Dil?"

She only shook her head and laughed harder, louder. She fell back onto the bed, her arms clasped about her flat chest, head rolling back and forth, tears of mirth pouring from the corners of her eyes, laughing louder and louder.

Bodie raised a hand to slap her out of her hysteria, only to have his hand caught and held in both of hers, gripped hard. "Wait, wait," Dil gasped, still shaking. Bodie stared at her; what the hell did this mean?

Finally she stopped shaking and was able to speak. "Now...now I know where Fergus heard it," Dil gasped, weary from her laughing jag. "You told it to Jody. Jody must have told it to Fergus. Fergus told it to me. And now you've returned to close the circle."

Bodie stared, incredulous. Now he understood her laughter. The irony of it all turned up the corners of his own mouth. "Small world," he said wryly.

Dil raised one languid hand and stroked Bodie's side from the bottom of the ribcage to the hip. "All of you, that same story. It must be in your natures to tell it."

He smiled at that too.

"Fergus told me that story, Bodie. I've seen him every visiting day. My Jody died in his custody. But I truly believe, now, that it is not in his nature to kill."

"You believe that." Again, it was not question or accusation.

"I believe it. As surely as it is in *our* natures to survive."

Bodie's smile faded. He looked away. She'd pegged him just that way, when they'd first met. "It was my nature to survive," he said. "It was never a problem before. But now I don't trust myself back on the streets. I just—don't care enough to worry about my life."

And he wondered why he had just said that out loud. There was no one he could have told that to. Ross suspected, of course; Cowley too. But he could not tell them what he had just told Dil. Why her?

He wasn't going to fool himself. He knew he'd never again let himself get as close to someone as he'd gotten with Ray Doyle, knew he'd never again try to reach beyond the matey camaraderie of those who faced death together. All he wanted was to find a reason strong enough to make him want to survive, that was all. All he wanted was something that would drive out the leaden indifference and keep him from that split-second slowdown that would make the difference in his next shootout. That was all he wanted or needed, any more.

"Why me, Bodie?" Dil's voice, level and husky, carved through the layers of cotton wrapping his mind to echo his own thoughts back to him. "Why did you bring the story back to me? Why did you come here?"

The weariness brought on by the sex and the dream and the candor caught up with Bodie. Words fell from his mouth again. "I think...I came here to see...how *you* can live with it." He paused, gathering words together as if they were berries on a picked-over bush, few and far between. No sound intruded on his gathering; Dil did not need to have "it" explained.

Bodie did not look at Dil; instead, he kept his eyes on the large framed photo of Jody overlooking the bed, his beaming expression one that could only be described as complete and utter love—for life, for Dil, for sex, even for his bloody cricket. It was a wise look and a forgiving one, a benevolent guardian that seemed to understand the turmoil in human hearts. Jody's presence in this room had been strong enough to keep his lover from shooting his murderer—

Bodie looked away and glared at the floor, his heart congealing like an alcoholic's liver. Jody was dead, gone forever, rotted into a mess of bones and corruption in a worm-eaten wooden box, and a mountain of photographs wasn't going to change that. In a few years, Ray would look just like Jody, Ray was gone, there was nothing left of Ray, not even such a photo that seemed to hold a fragment of the dead man's personality intact, it was time Bodie stopped this useless sentiment and faced that and got on with his life—

If he could only remember how.

From such thorns and flowers and brambles, Bodie found the words he needed. "I've lost mates before," he said matter-of-factly, turning to look at Dil, "in every mob I've been in. Good mates. I've seen two people I loved shot point-blank right in front of me, before this happened. One of them was the reason I was in Spitalfields that day." There was some small noise that might have been the sheets shifting on the bed. "I got over them both. I survived." He shook his head. "I dunno. Just, can't make myself care about what happens next. Used to be good at that. Can't bounce back this time.

"Tried," he whispered after a long silence. "Tried everything. Worked till I dropped. Fucked myself blind. Made myself not think about it. Everything that used to work before." A short sharp breath escaped him in what would have been a laugh, once. "Now it's Cow's-milk. Maybe that'll help." Single-malt fire in his belly. Golden oblivion. Death in a bottle, just like his old man. If he was lucky...

"Dil, what do *you* do?" he said, unaware of how pleading his voice was at that moment. How had *she* scaled the grey wall and escaped?

"I just live with it, Bodie," Dil said fiercely. "Day by day, by day. By day. That's how I do it. A day at a time.

"I don't do it alone. There is someone else who loved Jody, as I did. Someone who is *not* a scor-

pion,” she said defiantly, glaring into Bodie’s eyes. “Someone who loved me enough to save my life, and to—to save me from something I did. Someone who thought my life was worth preserving. Someone I’m waiting for. I visit the prison and count the days to his freedom.

“In the meantime, I work. I sing at the Metro. I have a margarita.

“And when the pain is too much, I cry. You can’t cry, can you?”

Bodie looked away, lips pinched tightly together. He was sick of every fucking bastard telling him that watery eyes would magically restore his equilibrium and make him feel better about what had happened.

The voice behind his averted head was only a sorrowful understanding. “No. It’s not in your nature to cry, Bodie. You’re the soldier my Jody never was.”

“He was a fucking idiot,” Bodie snapped. “Thinkin’ soldiering’s a job like anything else that pulls a paycheck. You don’t deal with gun-toting zealots in a factory!” He turned and glared at Dil who was now sitting up in bed, brown and naked and beautiful, slim legs drawn up to her chin, sloe eyes on his. His eyes shifted to the beaming gentle face in the big framed photo. Again, unbidden, the memories of those big hands embracing his and Dil’s bodies together, that incredible mouth on him, the soft husky voice that had been a perfect mate to Dil’s timbre and that had been created to voice the raw sounds of human sex... Bodie’s cock twitched and filled, lifting as if to gaze at the photo that had caused its reaction. At all the photos.

All those photos, and not one of Jody in his uniform. Dil was right; Bodie had been right in his assessment that night, so long ago. Jody had never been meant to be a soldier. All that sex, all that life and love and generous carnality—wasted, all rotted away to worm-food in useless, wasteful death—

“He should have stayed home, the stupid shit! He should have stayed down when I told him to!” Bodie’s eyes squeezed shut as the deepest, blackest pit inside him was breached. “He shouldn’t have made me want him dead,” he whispered.

No more. No more death.

He had made love to Nbeli. And to Marikka. And to Jody and to Dil. And when he’d come back from his exile to Spitalfields, he’d stopped fucking Ray and had started making love to him.

All of them were dead now, except for Dil. How

had someone he’d made love to survived? What spark of life did Dil have that would keep death from stealing any more of Bodie?

Sex was to make life, and all Bodie could do was to make death. His cock, his gun, they were all the same, bringers of death. It was all he’d ever been good at, making death.

And Bodie found, very simply, that he didn’t want to make death any more. No more death.

No more death. No more death...

Gradually Bodie became aware that he was huddled on Dil’s bed in a fetal position, his face buried in his knees, and that a strange high voice was coming from him, repeating the same three words over and over. And that Dil’s arms were around him.

Even after the words melted into a wordless high keening sound, Dil did not let go of Bodie. She said nothing. She only held him as a long, tearless, wordless cry unrolled from him; it was the first sound of grief Bodie had made since that day. The first sound of grief he had made since long before that.

The grey lead wall unreeled from around him in a long ribbon of sound, as if it had been loosened by the warmth of Dil’s arms to peel away in a sound of pain.

There, where he’d come from, he could say nothing; what he had loved had been forbidden. But here—

Here, in this shrine that honoured the life and love of a dead man and in which his memory lived yet green, and in the arms of a lover who had let him share her love long ago and who had absolved the man who’d caused her greatest grief—here, he was safe. Here was a place for emotional pain. Here was a place to mourn the death of love.

This was why he’d come here.

Tears, warm and wet, spilled down Bodie’s shoulder and side. Dil had laid her head against Bodie’s bowed head, kissing his ear and temple and shoulder; the tears were hers. Perhaps the anguished sound had triggered them; perhaps they were caused by memories of her own lost soldier; perhaps she was even sorry for Bodie.

Like blood returning to a frozen limb, the leaden numbness inside Bodie began to vanish before the blossoming pain of grief. His voice caught on the pain mid-keen, and continued its wordless lament.

Ray—partner, best mate and best-loved at one and the same time. Three people lost at once. Two

deaths, one after the other: one on the street and one in the ambulance.

And at the end, he'd wanted Ray to die. He'd wanted death.

No more death. Let Ray be the last death he made.

No more death.

"I can't go back," he said quietly, staring into the steam wafting into his face from the teacup wrapped in both hands. Dil, clothed in a light shift and curled in a chair opposite the bed, busy peeling an orange, said nothing. His voice was hoarse from its long cry of anguish. "I can't go back and do what I did. That part of my life is over." He drew in a long hot mouthful of fragrant tea, flavoured by the scents in the air of oranges and buttered toast, and let it warm him to his very core.

The morning light poured onto the bed, golden through the gauze curtains. Bodie felt the warmth against his bare skin, almost as strong as a human touch.

The pain was fresh as a new-minted penny, and as bright and clear-cut; the greyness that had enwrapped him ever since Ray's death had been altered by the alchemy of this place, changed from lead's silent cold indifference into the warm bright resounding copper of grief. He was as grateful for that pain as Cowley must be for his; every twinge of his bad leg reminding him that it hadn't been amputated after all.

It had been the nature of his work that people died. It was in his nature to be a soldier. But it was no longer in his nature to stop feeling when people he loved died.

Perhaps a scorpion could change its nature. Perhaps one who lived with scorpions was not necessarily scorpion by nature, after all. Perhaps he and Fergus were alike.

Dil finished eating all of the orange before speaking. "What will you do now, Bodie?"

He had been thinking of nothing else since before the sun had come up. He'd already rejected the idea of accepting the post as Cowley's aide—that would only mean that he would order people to their deaths. He wanted more; he wanted to repudiate death rather than simply stop dealing it.

And yet it was his nature to be a soldier...

His eyes roved the room, as if looking for an answer. They fell on the chair that still held his clothes. The outline of his wallet was clearly visible

in the pocket of his crumpled trousers.

His wallet, and what lay within. Lifeless gray picture with that glare—

That angry *green* glare.

Bodie started, stared at nothing, his heart thumping wildly once.

He had just *seen* him, wild rust-coloured curls, angry eyes and all. He'd *heard* him—

Bodie, you stupid shit, think!

And there it was. There it was.

Dazed, he stared into his teacup as if reading his own fortune. Then he laughed weakly, weary from the unfamiliar emotional territory he had traversed that whole long night with his guide.

One branch of the service he hadn't tried yet...

Two syllables, a tattered flag raised to flap in a light breeze.

"Oxfam."

And once he said it, it became clear before him.

Get an engineering degree under his belt and he could be abroad again, building dams and bridges instead of bombing them. Helping people feed themselves better; that would lessen the number of starving peasants who turned to terrorism and sniping to fill their children's bellies.

A soldier, who brought life.

Cowley would be upset at his resignation—but not nearly as upset as he would be at Bodie's death on the job caused by apathy for his work and carelessness for his own life.

The studying would give him something to think about, something to focus on, something to work for; something that would occupy him and give his grief sense and meaning.

Oxfam.

That was the sort of solution Ray would have come up with.

Bodie was used to acting once he'd made a decision.

He put his teacup down and stood, stretching, sunlight bathing his naked body from top to toe, feeling cleansed from the inside as well. A quick shower, find his clothes...

Dil stood and approached him. Bodie reached for her, smiling; he caressed her upper arms and kissed her, tasting orange and honey, feeling love for what she and Jody had done for him long ago—and what she and Jody had done for him the night before.

Three years ago they had shown Bodie how to love Ray. Now they had shown him how he could

live without Ray, in a way that would remember and honour him.

The dark sloe eyes that met his were dark and quiet, accepting. He realized that he could see the reflection of his own eyes as well, and that his own eyes were the same way at last.

"Think you were right last night after all, Dil," he murmured, kissing a strand of her hair and embracing her. "Was a fucking charity case, wasn't I?"

"I'm a sucker for fucking charity cases, Bodie," Dil said softly. "Wouldn't fight them otherwise."

"M grateful you believe in fucking charity cases."

"If the charity case is worth fucking," she said with her best Mona Lisa smile.

He smiled back. "I loved Ray," he said softly.

"I still love Jody," Dil replied serenely.

Bodie's urge to start back home right away faded before a stronger urgency.

As he pulled Dil against the length of his bare body, he saw Ray in his mind's eye; for the first time since Doyle's death, Bodie's vision of blood, brains and begging eyes vanished before stronger memories of Ray dynamic, alive, flashing the ugly chip-toothed grin that always flattened Bodie with its charm, light dancing with evil intent in sparkling green eyes.

And there was Jody on the dresser, smiling, full of love and life.

Something blossomed green inside Bodie, piercing his warmth inside with the pain of tender thorns.

There was nothing dead in this room. There was

no death here. He held love in his arms, and in his mind and his heart.

There was no need for him to hurry back to tell Cowley his plans for the future. No hurry. For now, there was only the present.

He pulled Dil back onto the bed with him and kissed her curly hair, hands busy stroking the sleek body beneath the light shift. She moved under his hands, covered his mouth with the taste of honey.

Jody beamed at his lovers as the morning light poured golden and warm through the gauze hangings to embrace them both.

Then Siduri, the goddess of the vine, said to him, "If you are that Gilgamesh who has done mighty deeds and whose strength is like no other man's, if you are he who passed through the land of the Scorpion-Men, why are your cheeks so starved and why is your face so drawn? Why is despair in your heart and your face like the face of one who has made a long journey? Why have you traveled here?"

Gilgamesh answered her, "And why should not my cheeks be starved and my face drawn? Despair is in my heart and my face is the face of one who has made a long journey. My friend, my brother who was very dear to me and who endured dangers beside me, my brave comrade who came to my aid in times of danger and who never deserted me, death has taken him from me. I raged like a madman; I wept for him seven days and nights, and would not give him up to burial until the worm fastened on him. Since he went, life is nothing; that is why I have traveled here.

—Written in cuneiform on clay tablets in Sumeria, approx. 3000 B.C.