

If I Should Fall From Grace With God

by Luka

Part 1

Murphy sat on the wall, munching an apple and enjoying the late afternoon sun. It was nearly 4 pm and the kids were straggling home from school. One lad wolf-whistled as Murphy lobbed the apple core into a nearby wastebin. Murphy bowed ironically, then glanced at his watch again.

The university building was unprepossessing concrete. Inside, it had that sharp, indefinable institutional smell. Murphy loped up the stairs to the second floor, against a tide of students shambling off towards the pub. He stood on a landing where three corridors stretched into the distance. A student of indeterminable sex was leaning against a wall lighting a roll-up.

"'scuse me mate, any idea which way for room 846?"

"Down there, far end."

"Cheers."

Murphy started down the indicated corridor, checking his progress against the numbers on doors. Down here it smelled faintly of furniture polish. Every so often a dark wood door would swing open to reveal book-lined offices, or tutorials in progress in classrooms obviously painted by the same person who'd decorated CI5.

Room 846 was the last room on the right before the fire escape. Murphy tapped on the door and waited for the 'come in'.

"Mr Murphy, I'm sorry, but Dr Ross has been called away.... Fuck, Murph, what the hell are you doing here?"

"Hello Ray. Long time and all that."

Ray Doyle sat down abruptly. His long hair was tied back in a ponytail, revealing a gold stud in his left ear. The clothes were casual but neat—green cotton shirt and beige chinos.

"Bloody hell, Murph, what are you doing here?"

"Come to see Kate."

"She's not here. I'm standing in for her."

"How come?"

"I'm her research assistant. Why the hell do you want to see her?"

"For some help."

"How come?"

"That's an odd question coming from a media star. Saw the two of you with the cops on that Kent rape."

Doyle shrugged, fiddling with the silver bracelet on his right wrist.

"And I hear on the grapevine you two did a lot of the legwork on the call girl case in Leeds."

Doyle fixed Murphy with an unwavering glare. "Look Murph, have you just come here to parrot our CVs at me, or is there something else?"

"Like I said, we want the benefit of your advice."

"Cowley never wanted advice off anyone."

"Cowley's on sick leave. He had a heart attack six weeks ago. It's me and Bodie."

"Fuck off!" Doyle was out of his seat.

"Ray...."

"Fuck...off!"

Doyle set off for home in a daze, not hearing the farewell from Jackie the department administrator. He tried to focus on the evening ahead, a rare free one. A long, hot bath, followed by a good book and some music in the background. Maybe a takeaway pizza.

He slammed the front door and dumped his bag at the bottom of the stairs, ignoring it as it burst open, spilling papers everywhere. He headed straight upstairs and stood under a shower so hot it felt as if his skin were frying. Then, clad in a baggy T-shirt and tracksuit bottoms, he grabbed a bottle of vodka from the freezer and poured himself a generous shot. It went down without touching the sides. A second disappeared at a more leisurely pace as he went out into the garden, staring unseeingly at the roses at the height of their beauty. Suddenly he hurled the glass at the garden fence, watched it shatter into myriad pieces. He sat down on the grass, knees drawn up to his chin, forehead resting on his knees.

Damp and evening chill seeping into his limbs roused him. He had no idea how long he'd been sitting there, but hunger gnawed at his stomach. He prepared pasta for supper, with tomatoes and basil from the garden, but didn't taste the food. He washed up mechanically, then pulled out his tool kit and set about stripping down the pine door he'd salvaged from a skip a while ago. It would look perfect as the living room door. Maybe he could work out how to fit stained glass into it.

He hurled the sander aside. His beautiful house suddenly felt tainted. Fucking C15. Why couldn't the bastards leave him alone to get on with his life? People who betrayed him never got a second chance.

Doyle sat by the fire, a cup of tea clasped in his hands. He drank several mouthfuls, but they had little effect. He couldn't stop shivering. Bloody crazy feeling this cold at the end

of August. Must be going down with flu or something. Unsteadily he set the mug down, slopping tea over the coffee table. Grabbing the phone, he dialled a number, praying the phone would be answered.

"Hello." The voice sounded muted.

"Kate?"

"Ray. Are you OK? Do you realise what time it is?"

He glanced over at the clock. It was almost 1 am. "Hell, Kate, I'm sorry, I didn't realise. I'll..." His voice trailed off.

"Ray, what's wrong?"

"It's OK, I'll see you...."

"No, don't ring off."

"I'm fine, Kate, I'm sorry...."

"Ray, stay where you are. I'll be over as soon as I can."

"You don't have to...."

"I'll be with you soon."

When Kate Ross arrived 20 minutes later, she found Doyle curled up on the sofa, wrapped in a rug. The gas fire was on full, the heat almost suffocating. She turned the fire down and sat on the sofa beside him, taking his hand gently. His hair was wild and loose and she thought he'd been crying.

"Ray, what's happened?"

He sat up and sniffed loudly, raking his fingers through his curls, and for one brief moment she saw the ragamuffin he'd once been.

"Kate, I'm so sorry...."

"Stop apologising and tell me what's happened."

He sniffed again, tried the cheeky grin that she used to pretend she was immune to. The effort was a pale imitation of the real thing—something she hadn't seen for far too long.

"You must be thinking the end of the world's about to come."

"Ray, I don't think anything. I just worry when I receive semi-coherent phone calls in the early hours of the morning."

"Yeah, sorry. I didn't realise. Please apologise to Lucy for me."

"No apology needed. She was all for coming over as well."

"You're lucky, Kate. She's a sweetheart."

"I know. But you didn't ring me to compliment me on my love life, did you?"

He shook his head. "Some past history reared its ugly head today."

She sat up straight. "Who?"

"Murphy."

"Murphy as in CI5?"

"Yep."

"The one who'd got the appointment this afternoon?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

"Ah, now, I have only a fragment of the story. I slung him out before he could tell me the whole sordid tale."

"What did he say?"

"He and..." Suddenly he couldn't say the name. Kate squeezed his hand and he continued: "They're standing in. Apparently Cowley had a heart attack and is on sick leave. Suddenly CI5 want, and I quote, the benefit of our advice."

"Why?"

"Dunno. Like I said, I showed Murphy the door."

Kate sat back and frowned. Doyle said quietly: "I know I'm over-reacting. I thought I'd got all the crap out of my system."

She tutted quietly and he grinned again, this time with more spirit. "Yeah, I know all the right phrases as well. Anyway, never mind CI5. We really have to prepare for that conference. I was going to do some tonight."

Kate looked at him thoughtfully, then said: "We could finish it tomorrow. Come round for supper. Lucy's muttering about using you as a guinea pig for some recipe. Now, let me make us some hot chocolate, then you can go to bed."

"Ooh, will you tuck me in, doctor?" The humour was forced, but she was glad he'd made the effort.

"Yes, but no bedtime story tonight!"

It was 2.30 am by the time Doyle got into bed. He tried every relaxation technique he knew, but was still awake an hour later. Kate was a star, bless her. No one else he knew would have rushed round to see him at that hour. She was a real friend. Of course she'd been shat on by CI5 as well. Bloody Cowley, pretending to listen to her, then ignoring

every recommendation she made, despite the fact she was usually right. Being a woman and a lesbian were the main reasons. If she'd been black she could have had a full house.

Doyle shifted irritably, glancing at the clock. 3.45 am. Shit. He had to be at work by 9 am to see a student. Work. He owed that to Kate as well. She was the only person who'd helped him rebuild his shattered life. Oh, lots of people mouthed platitudes. Some didn't even bother to do that. But Kate had picked him up, dusted him down and stood him back on his feet.

It had been bloody hard, though. He now knew what it was like to hit rock bottom. It was still painful to think of the year after he'd left C15. He'd thought at one time that all the rest of his life held for him was a crummy bedsit and a dead-end job in a garage mending motorbikes.

Kate, though, had other ideas. He'd laughed in her face when she suggested he apply for university. After all, working-class people like him didn't go to university. But she'd been quietly persistent, sending him prospectuses and mentioning constantly this project she was planning that she knew would interest him. He'd told her she was mad, but she'd insisted his police and C15 skills would be invaluable.

A newly gained university degree in psychology behind him, he sometimes still couldn't believe what he'd achieved. He'd stuck out like a sore thumb among all the bright young things marking time before marriage or a job in daddy's firm. They hadn't known what to make of the mature student who was a good 15 years older than most of them and who conscientiously attended every lecture and tutorial and had always done the background reading.

Now Kate and Doyle were building a formidable reputation for offender profiling. But that sure as hell didn't include offering advice to C15.

Kate and Lucy lived in a top floor flat in Wimbledon. Downstairs was Lucy's brother Marcus, a violinist who spent most of his time on the road with various orchestras. He left the garden and his cat Cleopatra to his neighbours' tender mercies.

Doyle and Kate sat round the living room table, papers spread everywhere. A tantalising smell of tomatoes and garlic wafted from the kitchen. Every so often Lucy appeared, topped up wine glasses, offered a kiss or cuddle to the two workers, then sauntered off whistling. Cleopatra divided her attentions between Doyle's lap and the kitchen, where she could expect a choice morsel or two.

Eventually Kate closed her notepad with a snap. "Enough already. We'll read it through again on Monday morning, but I reckon that'll do."

"Yeah. But that ending's not quite right."

"Like I said, Monday."

Doyle leaned back in his chair and drained the last of his wine. Kate laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"You slurping wine."

"I don't slurp!"

"You sound like a drain!"

Doyle went to say something, then stopped. Kate raised her eyebrows, but he shook his head, trying to bury the memory of a voice from the past that had once made that same observation. She seemed about to say something, when the phone went.

"I'll take it, it's probably Marcus to say what time he'll be landing tomorrow," called Lucy. They heard her laugh, then call out: "Kate, it's Susan for you."

Doyle perched on the windowseat, fingers toying with the wine glass. Lucy wandered back in, tweaked a curl, then went to top up his glass.

"No more, thanks. Or are you trying to get me drunk so you can have your wicked way with me?"

"Ooh, master, and me a young virgin!" Lucy knelt at his feet, best west country accent to the fore.

"Submit to me, wench!"

"I'll rescue you, fair maiden!" Kate appeared and struck a pose. Doyle suddenly wondered what Cowley would have said if he had seen his former strait-laced shrink clowning around.

"Thwarted again!" he bemoaned. Lucy laughed, hugged them both, then rushed for the kitchen, shouting at Cleopatra to leave the bread alone.

"How's Susan?" asked Doyle.

"Fine. She sends her love. Looks like the Foreign Office secondment's going to be permanent. She's off to Paris in a month. I've invited her for supper next week."

"And?"

"And what?"

"Kate, don't play games. I know you asked her about the surprise visitor."

Kate had the grace to look slightly sheepish. "She doesn't know much. She thinks it may be to do with a series of sex attacks."

"Why isn't it police business?"

"Because the last two victims were MPs' offspring."

Doyle ran his fingers through his hair. "So they wanted you—or us—to draw up a profile of the attacker."

"I suppose so."

Doyle leaned over to pick up the cat, who was licking her lips smugly. "I still think it's a go to hell, don't you?"

"Is that what you really think?"

Doyle glared at her and stood up abruptly. He walked over to the large picture window with its view of the All England tennis club.

"Ray...."

"Leave it, Kate."

"Talking to him might do you some good."

"I wouldn't piss on that bastard if he was on fire!"

"Raymond, you have such a lovely turn of phrase." Lucy dumped a pile of cutlery into his hands. "After you've washed your mouth out, you can lay the table."

Doyle woke the next morning with the cat wrapped around his head like a Davy Crockett hat. Cleopatra meowed irately when she was disturbed, but eventually allowed herself to be enticed under the duvet, where she curled up behind his knees.

Lucy bounced in at 9 am with a mug of tea. As Doyle struggled upright and took a sip of the scalding drink, she sat cross-legged on the bottom of the bed.

"Ooh, you look all cute and rumpled!"

He stuck his tongue out and sat back against the wall, eliciting more annoyed sounds from his sleeping companion. Lucy snorted with laughter and reached under the duvet to rescue the cat.

"Thought my luck was in then," observed Doyle.

She smiled and said only: "You're coming with us to collect Marcus from Gatwick this afternoon?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Of course."

"Good. Every time he's phoned he's asked after you."

Doyle nodded, running his hands through his tangled hair. He'd had half a dozen phone calls of his own, plus a weekly postcard from a variety of towns and cities throughout Germany and France. Lucy continued: "You know he likes you a lot."

"And I like him."

"Yes, but in what sense?"

"Lucy...."

"Ray, you need someone who'll love you properly. And Marcus will give you all the space you need."

"But he doesn't deserve it."

"Doesn't deserve what?"

"All the personal baggage and shit I'd bring to a relationship."

"Shouldn't you let him judge that?"

"Yeah, maybe...."

"You don't have to tell him everything. He knows you've had a lot of crap to deal with. He's a patient guy, my brother."

"I know."

"Ray, talk to him. Please."

"OK."

"Promise?"

"Yeah, promise."

As Susan had once so famously remarked, Marcus could get a rise out of a corpse. He was six feet tall, slim, and had dark brown eyes and tousled black hair. You could guarantee that the queue for his attention at a party would stretch round the block. But he had eyes only for Ray Doyle. The relationship, such as it was, had started about three months ago, although they'd known each other for the three years since Lucy and Kate had become an item. Marcus had invited Doyle to one of his concerts, then had made a terribly polite pass in the bar afterwards. Since then they'd seen each other a couple of times a week while Marcus was in London, but it had all been chaste kisses, hugs and holding of hands. Doyle felt like an awkward teenager and several times had begun a halting explanation. Each time Marcus had kissed him gently and whispered: "No hurry. I'm happy as we are." But, as Doyle stood by the airport arrivals gate that afternoon, seeing Marcus's face light up when he saw him, he knew he owed him far more than that.

Marcus lit some candles, put a Mozart CD on, then poured them each a glass of red wine. Ray was curled on the sofa, the light picking out the copper streaks in his hair, his wide green eyes fixed unwaveringly on Marcus. Ray smiled at him and Marcus felt brave.

He kissed the tip of Ray's nose and said: "I've missed you, you know."

Ray chuckled and slipped his arm around Marcus's shoulders. "And I thought you arty types had a girl or boy in every town."

"I beat them all off with a stick. Told them I had this gorgeous man waiting for me at home."

"Do I know him?"

"Intimately, I believe."

Ray leaned forward and kissed Marcus on the lips. Marcus broke away for a moment, laughed with genuine happiness and set both their glasses on the coffee table.

"I like this kind of welcome home."

"I've missed you too."

"Will you stay tonight?"

"I'd love to. But Marcus, there are some things you need to know."

"Like what?"

"Things you need to know about me if this relationship is to go anywhere."

"Ah, guilty secrets time, is it? Like how you stole a packet of Rolos from the Co-op when you were nine?"

Ray smiled gently and stroked Marcus's hair back from his face. "It's a bit more than that, sweetheart."

"Surely not that you ran the boy scouts' extortion racket?"

Ray grabbed Marcus's hands. "I'm serious, Marcus. I need to tell you stuff you would probably prefer not to hear."

"Ray, you don't have to tell me anything you don't want to...."

"I've mucked you about for long enough. If this relationship's going anywhere, you have to understand a few things about me."

Marcus settled himself comfortably against Ray, free hand combing through the soft long curls. "OK, but anytime you want to stop...."

"I don't know how much you know about my background. Before I got my degree, I was in the police and then worked for an organisation called CI5."

"Christ!" Marcus could have kicked himself for the involuntary comment.

"What?"

"I thought they were like the secret police." He said it slightly embarrassed, wondering whether to make a joke of it.

Ray half-smiled. "That's what some people would say. More like a counter-terrorist group. CI5 aren't universally popular, I know that, but we did some good work, saved a lot of lives."

"So why did you leave?"

Ray took a deep breath. "An undercover job went wrong and I was badly hurt."

"Christ, Ray, what happened?"

"I was in hospital for a month and on sick leave for another. I went back, but I made a serious mistake and nearly got my partner killed."

"Your partner?"

"Not in that sense. Definitely not. Work partner. He got shot because I couldn't hack it any more. I left after that."

"It sounds awful. I'm glad you're out of it and safe." Marcus kissed him again. He knew the words sounded trite, but it was all he could think of.

"Marcus, that's not all. I'm telling you this because it's the main reason why I've been keeping you at arm's length these last few months. When it all went wrong undercover, I was gang-raped."

"Oh Jesus, no!" Marcus's arms were around Ray, holding him tight. When they separated, Marcus was trying not to cry, but Ray's gaze was steady. Only the pain buried deep in those eyes betrayed him.

Marcus tried to speak several times, but his voice refused to function. Eventually he managed: "I'm sorry, here's me behaving like a baby and you're so brave."

Gentle fingers played with his hair. "Sometimes I think I'm all cried out and then suddenly it's back with a vengeance." He laughed harshly. "It's partly why I had to leave CI5. Real men don't cry, do they? But then real men don't get raped either."

"The bastards! They said that?"

"Not to my face."

"Didn't they offer you counselling?"

"I had a brisk pep talk from one of the doctors. You know 'damn nasty, but worse things happen at sea, so pull yourself together.' My boss needed me back at work and seemed to take the view it was like falling off a bicycle—you had to get straight back on. So I did and nearly got someone killed. Then Kate came along."

"Is that how you met her?"

"Yes. She was working with CI5 and insisted on seeing me. She cottoned on at once how I was feeling and wanted me stood down, but no one would listen to her. She was proved right, of course. When I resigned she wanted me to go for counselling, but I wouldn't at first. Later, when I'd started to get my head together, she helped me apply to university. I owe her everything, Marcus, she was the only person who stood by me when my life was falling apart. Other people who I trusted didn't."

Marcus grabbed Ray's hands and kissed his fingers. "Let me look after you, Ray."

"You still want me after what I've just told you?"

"Of course I do. I love you. Will you come to bed with me? Let me hold you?"

Ray nodded wordlessly, gathering Marcus into his arms. He whispered: "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For wanting me."

Doyle turned the motorbike off and removed his helmet. It had been a good night with Marcus, gentle and loving. He was fumbling in his jacket pocket for his office keys when someone stopped alongside him.

"Hello, Ray." He would have known the voice anywhere.

Doyle suddenly felt cold and almost faint. "Go away."

"Please, Ray, we need to talk."

"We don't need to talk about anything." He turned his back and slipped his rucksack off, but not before he'd caught a glimpse of an expensive suit and Italian shoes.

"You know that's not true."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why isn't it true?"

"Well..."

"See, we have nothing to talk about. I don't have a fucking thing in common with a clothes horse with a put-on snooty accent."

"Ray, I know you hate me, you've good reason to and I'll never forgive myself for the way I treated you, but we need Kate's and your help to catch a sex attacker. You could stop someone suffering like you did."

"You bastard!"

"What do you mean?"

"How do you know what I went through? Four years ago you couldn't get far enough away from me. Men don't get raped unless they're queer, and queers deserve all they get, I seem to recall that was your view. If I have to listen to any more of your false concern, I'll puke!"

Doyle walked inside without looking back and ran straight upstairs to his office. To his dismay, he realised he was shaking and on the verge of a panic attack. He kicked into his relaxation routine and then, when his breathing was steady again, made himself a cup of herbal tea. As he was drinking it, Kate barged in.

"Do you know who's outside?"

"Yes."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Briefly."

"And?"

"And nothing. I just told him we had nothing to say to each other."

"But this case, Ray...." Kate looked troubled.

"What do you mean?"

"It's the kind of case we can help with. Let's face it, it's what we're trained to do and it's not like there's anyone else who's anywhere near up to speed on what's needed."

"So you want to do it? You're the boss."

"I think we should do it, which isn't quite the same thing."

Doyle spun around in his chair and stared out at the scrubby patch of grass which passed for a garden. Without turning round, he said: "It's up to you. You do it and I'll sit this one out."

"It's both of us or neither. We're a team now."

Doyle exhaled loudly. "OK. But I won't deal with him directly. Either you meet him or we both deal with Murphy. And I won't set foot in CI5 either."

"Ray, is that...?"

"Those are my conditions, Kate. It's that or we don't accept the case."

The building seemed colder and bleaker than he'd remembered it. Stupid really, as he'd only been away for two months. Doyle shivered and huddled into his cream jacket. He couldn't understand why he was so cold. It was the middle of August, for god's sake, and everyone else was wandering around in shirt sleeves. Maybe he'd got a chill. He'd be fine once he started working again.

Brian, the chief security guard, was at his desk. "Mornin' Mr Doyle, nice to see you again."

"Thanks Brian. You well?"

"Not so bad. Hear you bin a bit poorly."

"Yeah. I'm fine now."

"Good. Mr Bodie with you?"

"No. Haven't seen him yet."

"Thought he'd be with you your first day back. Don't want you changing your mind and nipping off to the park for a spot of sun."

"No chance of that."

"The Major's in."

"Better go on up before he starts yelling, then."

The stairs seemed steeper as Doyle trogged up them. Lewis passed him on the first landing, a pile of files under his arm.

"Hello Ray. Nice to see you back."

"Cheers, Geoff."

"See you later."

Kirsty was lifting the plastic cover off her typewriter when Doyle made it to the top floor. She smiled at him and nodded towards the kettle in the corner. "Hello Ray. Nice to see you back. Mr Cowley's on the phone to the minister, so make yourself a cup of coffee."

"Thanks love. And you wouldn't say no to one with milk, no sugar?"

"You remembered!"

"Never forget a pretty girl's vital statistics, do I?"

She laughed and stuck her tongue out at him. "You're as bad as Bodie!"

"Aw, that's a bit harsh. No one's as bad as Bodie!"

She glanced up at him, as if she'd detected the repartee was stilted and mechanical. He thought she was about to say something, but Cowley opened the door and peered out.

"Ah, Doyle. Nice to see you back, lad. Come in."

Doyle followed him in, still nursing the mug of coffee. Kirsty hovered behind him and passed one to Cowley. Once the door was closed, Cowley retrieved a bottle of whisky from his top drawer and poured a shot into both mugs.

"Now, sit you down and let's see..."

He flicked through the file on his desk, but Doyle was sure Cowley knew every word it contained.

"So...Dr MacKinley says you're physically fit. Dr Grove agrees, but both want you to talk to someone."

"No point," said Doyle abruptly.

Cowley removed his specs. "Why not?"

"I want to get back to work, not sit around whining to shrinks."

"Hmm. And you think you're fit for duty?"

"Yessir."

"Hmph. We could certainly do with you back on board. Bodie's been like a bear with a sore head while you've been away. He's outside, is he?"

"No sir. Haven't seen him yet today."

"He didn't pick you up?"

"No, sir."

"Hmph. Why...."

The phone rang and Cowley snatched it up impatiently. "Yes? Oh for heaven's sake, whose decision was that? Well, I'll not have it. Half an hour."

He slammed the phone down and put his glasses back on. "Very well, Doyle, get over to the gym. Brian Macklin will be there at 9 am and I want him to look you over. Once you've seen him, come back up here and we'll see."

"Sir."

Murphy came over the following morning, accompanied by a pile of bulky files, Jax, and Ruth Pettifer. Doyle realised he was pleased to see Jax, who had initially made an effort to keep in touch with him, and the feeling appeared to be mutual. He wasn't quite so sure about Ruth, who'd had a tendency to treat him as if he'd crawled out from under the nearest stone. But she shook hands with him and started chatting pleasantly about his change of career while Kate made some tea.

Before they started, Murphy drew Doyle to one side. "Sorry about your unexpected visitor the other day. I hear you sent him away with a flea in his ear."

Doyle humphed, but said nothing. Murphy added awkwardly: "For what it's worth, Bodie thought you might respond better to the direct approach."

Doyle's harsh bark of laughter made everyone look round. "Then he's a bigger fool than I thought he was."

Kate said quickly: "Shall we start? I've got another appointment at midday."

They spread the files out and Murphy gave a rundown on the background. The attacks had started three years previously, but it was only within the last year that police had linked them officially. All had been on men aged between 20 and 40. All of them were respectable professional men and about half were gay. Six months previously the son of an MP had been attacked. A fortnight previously, the latest attack had been on the son of another politician. The next day, the case was handed over to CI5.

"What the hell was the delay?" asked Doyle. In spite of himself, he was intrigued by the case.

Murphy leaned back in his chair and drained his mug of tea. "We reckon the plods didn't take it that seriously at first, simply because they assumed it was a load of gay boys falling out with their boyfriends. And it took them ages to find out that the lad attacked six months ago was the son of a Tory MP. Daddy had disowned him when he found out he was gay. We're wondering if the lad's been working as a rent boy, although he denies it. He frequents some dodgy clubs and has some less than desirable friends."

"Not all gays are rent boys," snapped Doyle.

Murphy regarded him steadily. "I didn't say they were, Ray."

Jax said hurriedly: "We've had problems getting information out of the latest lad to be attacked. He doesn't seem to want to talk to us."

"Are you surprised?" said Doyle.

Murphy sat up straighter in his chair. "Look Ray, I know you didn't want to take this case, for whatever reason. We insisted on it, simply because Kate and you are the best in your field. But you've got to believe us when we say we're not homophobic. Whatever happened to you was unacceptable, and some of us have made a point of stamping out crap like that."

"Only some of you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Don't play dumb, Murph, you know what I mean."

Murphy sighed. "Whatever Bodie said was nearly four years ago. He's genuinely sorry for it and really wants to talk to you and to put things right. He's not happy about being excluded from this meeting."

"Hard luck," said Doyle. "I have nothing to say to him and I don't believe he can usefully add anything to this case. If I find you've set me up, Murph, you'll be out of that door so fast your feet won't touch the ground. Now, if you want to leave us this stuff to look at, Kate and I will be in touch."

"Raymond Doyle, you are not going to that conference looking like a model for Oxfam!"

"Lucy..."

"If I've managed to persuade Kate to splash out on a smart jacket, you're not going in that apology for a suit."

Doyle had to admit sheepishly that his one good suit had seen better and happier days. So he allowed Lucy to take him on a whistle-stop tour of clothes shops, returning home with a frighteningly expensive Italian charcoal suit, two white cotton shirts and a couple of subtly patterned ties. Marcus arrived back from a rehearsal partway through the unpacking and wolf-whistled like a street urchin.

"Bloody hell!"

"What?" said Doyle irritably as Lucy fussed around, muttering about the length of the trousers.

"You look...wow!"

"What are you going on about?"

Marcus waved his hands around vaguely. "Sort of, I don't know, exotic."

"Sod off!"

"And I love you too!"

"You do look very striking, Ray," said Kate unexpectedly.

"Yeah, all the stuffy old Oxford farts won't know what hit them!"

"Those stuffy old farts, Lucy darling, are eminent psychologists from all over the world."

"Mr Doyle?"

"Yes?" Doyle welcomed the interruption as a chance to escape from an over-earnest German, who seemed determined to parrot the whole of the presentation back. Their paper had certainly caused a stir, given the controversy over whether offender profiling was a waste of time. His saviour was a 40-something woman wearing a dark suit, her hair cut in an immaculate bob.

"My name's Sally Grant. I write for *The Guardian*."

"Oh. Nice to meet you," said Doyle vaguely, glancing round to find Kate. She was chatting to an elderly American woman who had asked a couple of razor-sharp questions.

"I wondered if we could have a chat sometime. I'd really like to do a feature on your work."

"Um, I'm not really the person to ask...."

"Hello, Sally, how are you?"

"Kate, nice to see you. You had them eating out of your hand! I was just saying to Mr Doyle that I'd love to do a feature on you for the paper."

"Don't see why not. When did you have in mind?"

"Sometime next week, if you could manage that."

"Fine by me. How about Wednesday at 4 pm? That suit you, Ray?"

"Um, yes...."

"Good. Now let me give you some directions, as we're based at the University of London now."

As they headed off for tea, biscuits, and more polite chat, Doyle said: "I'm surprised you agreed."

Kate frowned at him: "Why shouldn't we? Sally's genuinely interested and won't stitch us up, if that's what you're worried about."

Doyle shrugged and drank down half a cup of tea that could accurately be described only as weak and helpless.

"Ray, what's bugging you?"

"Dunno. Nothing, I suppose."

"It's just that you're not yet used to good publicity, is that it?"

"Maybe...."

Kate set down her cup and gripped his shoulders. "Ray, I want everyone who tried to screw up yours and my lives to know just what we've achieved. OK?"

Ignoring the askance look from someone Lucy would have dubbed an old fart, Doyle hugged Kate. "OK!"

The interview took about an hour and a half and seemed to delve into every part of their lives. They'd agreed to keep quiet about C15 and had passed it off as a stint in the civil service. Just as Sally was packing her tape recorder and notebook away, she said: "Is it true you both used to be with C15?"

They looked at each other and Kate said carefully: "Why are you asking that now?"

"Just for interest. I assume you won't want it mentioned in the piece."

"Off the record, Sally, it's something we definitely don't want talked about."

"Fair enough. But is it true they've drafted you in to advise on the rent boy murders?"

"They weren't all rent boys," snapped Doyle.

"I stand corrected—and take it that's a yes?"

They glanced at each other and Kate said: "Mention it if you like, Sally, but please don't mention C15."

"OK. People will assume it's the police. Any progress?"

"It's early days yet and we've only just drawn up the profile," said Kate.

"But you'll let me know if anything comes of it?"

"Of course. Now, how's Jess?"

"Very well. You heard she got promoted?"

"Sarah said. Send her my love. And let's get together for supper sometime."

They both noticed Doyle looking faintly bemused and both laughed. "Meet the dyke mafia," said Kate.

The feature appeared in *The Guardian* under the headline 'Getting under the skin of the criminals.' Doyle had to admit Kate had been right—it was a sympathetic piece and Sally had been genuinely interested in their work. And it generated interest as well. Aside from three police forces phoning to ask for help, several other universities wanted them to do some visiting lecturing and a publisher had contacted them to discuss a book.

"Told you it'd be fine," said Kate.

"Humph. No one loves a smart arse," said Doyle.

Murphy arrived by himself to go through the profile Kate and Doyle had drawn up. He settled himself in the armchair, accepted a cup of tea with a characteristically lazy smile, then began to read. Doyle attempted to get on with his own paperwork, but found himself glancing up frequently.

Eventually Murphy set the paper aside and drained his tea. "Mmm, interesting."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Haven't lost your old subtlety, have you?"

"Murph, forget the small-talk and get on with it, OK?"

Murphy stared at him for a moment, before shrugging and saying: "I follow most of this, but there are a couple of points you or Kate will need to talk through with us."

"What d'you need clarifying?"

"I'd rather Bodie heard them as well."

"Fix a time with Kate, then."

"Ray, why won't you talk to him?"

Doyle exploded: "Jesus, Murph, are you fucking thick or something? I've made it perfectly clear that I don't want anything to do with him!"

"But why?"

"That's none of your fucking business!"

"It's my business when I have to put up with you being obnoxious and him mooching around like a bear with a sore head because you won't let him apologise."

"It's too fucking late for that."

"Limited vocabulary you've got.... Yeah, I know, fuck off!"

In spite of himself, Doyle smiled. "Look Murph, I've no gripe with you, but I wish you'd let the matter drop. Bodie said a lot of things that can never be unsaid. CI5's way behind me and I just want to get on with what I'm doing now."

"You know he was there when you were awarded your degree?"

"What?" They both glanced over to the photo on Ray's desk taken a couple of months back on graduation day. He was decked out in gown and mortarboard and flanked by Kate, Lucy, and Marcus.

"Bodie was. He somehow wangled a ticket. I saw the photo in his desk drawer. He doesn't know I saw it, mind."

"What photo?"

"I assume he took it."

Doyle said abruptly: "D'you want me to explain those points or not?"

Murph sighed. "Yeah, go on, then."

Doyle was sitting with his back to the door, staring out over the rooftops, when Kate appeared with her coat and briefcase.

"Ready to go, Ray? I promised Lucy we'd stop off for some wine on the way home."

"Yeah." But he didn't move.

"How did you get on with Murphy?"

"He wanted a couple of points clarified."

"Which ones?"

"Mainly to do with the sex life."

"Hmm. Thought they'd query that."

"Yeah, well, think yourself lucky. You nearly ended up having to do it because he wanted...." He looked away, teeth clenched.

"Say it, Ray," said Kate softly.

"For fuck's sake, Kate! OK, he wanted bloody Bodie to hear it! Satisfied?"

Kate scooted her chair nearer and took hold of Doyle's right hand. "Ray, you can't carry on like this. You need to work it through and you know you do."

"Yeah." He rubbed his eyes. Gently Kate began to stroke his hand.

"You know it's OK to cry if you want to."

"All I've done is fucking cry! I hate it! I just want him to fuck off out of my life and leave me alone!" Leaping up, he grabbed his jacket. "Come on, let's get out of here."

Kate had to walk fast to keep up with him, worried by the tension coursing through his whole body. Part way round the off licence, Doyle said suddenly: "Murph said he's got a photo of me on my graduation day."

"Murphy has? Why? He wasn't there, was he?"

"Not Murph."

"Bodie?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

"Dunno. Murph saw it in his desk drawer. He said he was there, wangled a ticket somehow."

Kate stopped abruptly, earning herself muttered curses from an old man with an armful of cans. "Ray, I really think you need to meet him."

"No fucking way!"

"Not necessarily make up, but he's still obsessed with you and you need to make a clean break from him."

"What d'you mean, he's obsessed with me?"

"Let's go home. This isn't the kind of conversation to have with half of London listening in." The glamorous young black woman behind them at the till smiled angelically and suddenly became busy looking for her purse.

Lucy was cooking and Marcus was hindering her when they got back to the flat. Doyle dumped the bottles of wine on the worktop and allowed Marcus to fold him into his arms.

"Ray, are you OK, sweetheart? You look really pale."

Doyle kissed him. "Just tired."

Marcus put on his best down-turned mouth expression. "Does that mean you'll be too tired for later?"

In spite of himself, Doyle laughed and kissed Marcus again. "I might just have woken up by then!"

Kate said, "Ray, let's go and sort out that stuff."

"What? Oh yeah, right."

They disappeared into Kate's study and closed the door. Doyle flopped down into the overstuffed armchair and Kate perched on the end of the desk.

"How d'you mean he's obsessed with me?"

"He always has been. It was obvious the way he used to look at you and touch you. He was always in your personal space."

Doyle's brow furrowed. "But that was just Bodie. He used to do that to everyone."

"What, grope their bums? Ruffle their hair? Drape himself over them?"

"Well, maybe not."

"Did you ever see him doing that with his girlfriends?"

Doyle thought for a minute. "Now you mention it, no. He was always dead embarrassed if they touched him in public."

"There you are, then. Bodie was and is obsessed with you. I'd go as far as saying he's homosexual as well."

"You have got to be kidding! Bodie hates poofs, it's common knowledge." When Kate didn't react, he said: "Then how d'you explain everything he said to me, both to my face and when he thought I wasn't there?"

"What do you think?"

"Kate, don't try bloody mind games on me!"

She watched him impassively as he ran his fingers through his tangled hair.

Eventually he said: "Yeah, yeah, I know, a classic case of protesting too much."

"Exactly. And everything happened too fast for him. What happened to you, the shooting, him finding out you were gay, you leaving CI5. He may never acknowledge his true feelings, but I'd bet anything you like that he's really gay. Under all that macho posturing, Bodie's terribly uncomfortable with women. In my opinion he really doesn't like them."

"Accounts for him going through women like a dose of salts."

They sat in silence for some time, Doyle hugging his knees and Kate watching him worriedly. Eventually he said: "You must think I'm really stupid."

"Why should I think that? You know very well how hard it is to deal with something this close and this painful."

"So you think I should see him?"

"I think you should give it serious thought."

"And what do I say to him? 'Hello Bodie, nice to see you again, mate. Hear you're a shirt-lifter too.'"

"I think should you take the lead from him and see what he wants to say to you."

"I dunno, Kate...."

"Think about it. You don't have to rush into anything."

"S'pose not."

"Let's go and eat before Lucy and Marcus scoff the lot."

"OK. And Kate?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks."

She hugged him. "You know I'll always be here for you."

"I know and that means everything to me. I don't deserve you. Or Marcus. Or Lucy."

"Crap! Just stop thinking you're not worth anything. You are!"

"I'm sorry...."

"And stop apologising."

He smiled weakly and kissed the top of her head. She watched him head off for the bathroom and wondered if the terrible damage done to him could ever be repaired.

Marcus bounced onto the middle of the bed and held his arms out. "You going to join me, sweetheart?"

Doyle nodded, draping his shirt and trousers over a chair. Marcus started to hum *The Stripper*. Doyle laughed and started to ham it up, shimmying his way across the room and bounced onto the bed.

Marcus kissed him. "God, you're gorgeous! Dunno why the hell you cover yourself up with all those baggy clothes. If I had a body like yours I'd wear tight T-shirts and jeans to show it off."

Doyle pulled away suddenly, drawing his knees up to his chest.

"Ray, what's wrong? What have I said?"

"Nothing...."

"Please don't shut me out. Talk to me."

"That's how I used to dress...."

"And you think it got you raped," said Marcus with a sudden flash of clarity. He didn't miss his lover flinching slightly. Carefully he moved closer, slipping one arm around Doyle's waist.

Doyle shrugged. "Rationally I know I should dress how I want. But I dunno, I just think of all the things they said to me and all the names they called me. They told me I was asking for it by wearing tight jeans with holes in and skimpy T-shirts."

"That's how men justify raping women wearing short skirts."

"I know. And like I say, I try to rationalise it. But it doesn't do much good. Maybe as well I'm trying to break away from my past, trying to create a new me. Mr Sophistication!" The laugh was nowhere near convincing.

Marcus kissed Ray's palm. "You know that I love you just how you are."

"And I love you...Marcus?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Please will you fuck me?"

"Are you sure? We don't have to do anything you're not ready for. I mean, you can do me, or we can just kiss and cuddle."

"Honestly, it's what I want."

Marcus kissed each of Ray's fingers in turn. "Any time you want me to stop, I will. And another thing—I won't fuck you. I'll make love to you."

Doyle lay back, watching Marcus reach for the lubricant. His heart seemed to be beating at twice its normal speed and all his limbs felt shaky. He took a deep breath, trying to focus on the handsome man kneeling above him, slowly and sensuously lubing his formidable erection. Rolling onto his stomach, he pillowed his head on his arms, face hidden by a curtain of hair. Warm lips began to kiss him, starting at the nape of his neck and trailing down to his arse.

"Ray, your bum, it's perfection. Jesus, you're so beautiful, I can't believe it. I want to be inside you, make it good for you..." Gel-laden fingers started to stroke around his hole, gently probing inside. Doyle couldn't help flinching. Marcus withdrew immediately.

"Did I hurt you?"

"No. Sorry...."

"Nothing to be sorry for, sweetheart. Gently now, think of how good you'll feel soon."

The fingers resumed their exploration, stroking the gel deeper. Doyle moaned and wriggled, spreading his thighs as wide as possible.

"How does that feel?"

"OK. Nice."

"Good." The fingers were withdrawn, leaving him feeling almost empty. Then a warm hand began to stroke his back and bum. "Here goes, sweetheart."

The first nudge was bearable, but the slow slide in felt as if he was being stretched unbearably. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth, willing himself not to tense up.

"OK?" The tension in Marcus's voice was clear.

"Yeah...go on...."

"Ray, you're so beautiful, I love you, sweetheart. God, your arse is so tight." A slightly harder nudge sent currents of pain through Doyle. He whimpered into the pillow. Marcus grabbed his waist and eased him back towards him, burying himself even deeper. Doyle wriggled in an effort to ease the tearing pain and suddenly it seemed easier.

"How does that feel?" Marcus's voice was congested and unsteady.

"OK. Yeah. You all in?"

A gentle shove and he felt crisp hair rubbing his buttocks. "I am now. OK?"

"Yeah. Oh Jesus, you're hard." Doyle reached back and fumbled for where they were joined. Marcus's balls seemed huge and heavy in his hand. He groped for the base of his lover's cock, measuring where it disappeared into his widespread arse, filling him completely.

"OK?" Marcus was breathing heavily, his fingers digging into Doyle's waist.

"You're so big... It's like you're touching me everywhere."

Marcus sat back on his heels, easing Doyle upright so he sat on his lap. Doyle moaned as the change of position seemed to impale him ever more. He'd forgotten how good it felt to have a man's cock inside him. Fingers began to play with his nipples, stroke the hair on his chest.

A voice breathed in his ear: "How's that feel? Good? Wish I could kiss your nipples, feel them getting hard. They're beautiful, Ray, like little brown pennies."

Doyle moaned louder, feeling the cock inside him shift position. Marcus's hands strayed lower, cupping his swollen balls and toying with his erection.

"You like this, don't you, sweetheart? Feels like you're about to explode, you're so hot and hard. Is that what I feel like inside you?"

"Can't believe how hard you are! Marcus go on, please, I can't stand this much more...."

A low throaty laugh. "You want me to give it to you, make you scream?"

"Yeah! Now!" He threw his head back, shivering as Marcus nibbled his neck and throat. Then, in one smooth movement, Doyle was positioned back onto hands and knees, arse upthrust and skewered.

"Wish you could see your bum, Ray. It's beautiful, just perfect. And I'm filling it, like we're made for each other...."

"Oh yeah...." Doyle's voice was low and unsteady and he thrust back, reclaiming the several inches of cock that had slipped out. Experimentally he moved from side to side, laughing aloud when Marcus moaned. Suddenly one large hand settled on his waist, the other grabbed his burning cock and squeezed. As he cried out, the thrusts started, in deep, then almost withdrawing, leaving him begging and gasping, crying out Marcus's name.

The cock buried impossibly deep inside him seemed to tense, then gushed, flooding him. "Ray...yes...now, sweetheart, come with me!"

One final raking thrust, strong arms around his waist, keeping him in place. Then his cock exploded, raining over his chest, pumping into Marcus's hands. Doyle pitched forward, dragging Marcus down on top of him.

For several minutes all they could do was breathe heavily, trying to regain their voices. Eventually Marcus croaked: "You OK, sweetheart? I wasn't too rough?"

"No—I'm fine. Better than fine. That was sensational, Marcus."

Gently Marcus withdrew, leaving Doyle feeling suddenly bereft and empty. He started to shift onto his side, but Marcus's hand on the small of his back stopped him.

"Let me clean you up, sweetheart, make sure you're OK."

Doyle snuggled into the bedclothes, wriggling at the phantom sensations of the absent cock. Pulling Marcus towards him, he muttered drowsily: "I'm fine...come here...shower later."

Marcus laughed. "Mucky pups!"

"Woof."

Doyle shifted position for the umpteenth time, glad that all his tutorials were in the afternoon. He grinned ruefully. It wouldn't do for him to fidget constantly in front of students because he'd been so well seen-to the night before. They'd over-slept, and then he'd had to dissuade Marcus from an action replay in the shower. He'd only escaped by promising to cook dinner that night and to return the bedtime favour. It had been good, though. No, more than good. Bloody amazing. He'd forgotten just how fantastic it felt to have a lover inside him.

Kate's appearance brought him back to planet earth. She handed him a cup of tea and settled herself in the armchair. "Good night?"

"You know it was."

"I'm glad. He's good for you."

"Not if I fall asleep at my desk the next morning because he's kept me up all night!"

"I don't think I want to know that!"

"Lucy will. That woman has an unhealthy interest in our love lives."

"She just wants to see her brother kept out of mischief."

"So that's what you call it?"

Kate wrinkled her nose at him, trying not to grin. "So what have you got on today?"

"Bloody paperwork this morning. Then tutorials this afternoon."

"Have you thought any more about what we talked about last night?"

"No."

"If you get the chance...."

"Maybe."

It was nearly 6.30 pm. The tutorials had been like pulling teeth and Doyle was rapidly coming to the conclusion he didn't have the patience for the teaching side of things. He needed to talk to Kate about it. The profiling projects reminded him just why he'd loved police work and....

Shit! Doyle rubbed his gritty eyes and looked at the phone. Once he'd even got as far as dialling half of the number. He raked his fingers through his hair, longing to go home and sink into a hot bath. Marcus was due at 8 pm and Doyle hadn't even thought about what he was cooking. But he knew if he didn't make that phone call then, he never would. He

grabbed the receiver and began dialling a number he could never forget. It was answered after just two rings.

"Could you put me through to Mr Bodie's office, please. It's Ray Doyle calling."

Part 2

Bodie sat facing the pub door, fingers toying constantly with a beer mat. He was on his second pint already and made a conscious decision to slow down his drinking. He glanced at his watch for the umpteenth time and noticed that it wasn't even 8 pm yet. He'd been paranoidly early.

A couple of minutes after eight, the pub door opened and a familiar figure walked in. Bodie was on his feet immediately, almost overturning his chair, in his haste to catch Doyle's attention.

"Ray." He held out his hand. For a moment he thought Doyle would refuse to shake it, but in the event the contact was brief.

"Hello."

Doyle was regarding him steadily out of those unwavering green eyes and Bodie could feel his stomach turning somersaults. "Can I get you a drink?"

"Orange juice, please."

Bodie raised his eyebrows, but didn't feel confident enough to make a comment. When he came back with the drinks, Doyle had taken off his linen jacket to reveal a green cotton shirt and beige chinos. He looked well; a touch too pale and thin perhaps, but he was attracting a good deal of attention from those around.

"Very smart. Pensioned off your old jeans and leather jackets, have you?" Bodie tried to sound relaxed as he set the glasses on the table.

Doyle shrugged and took a sip of the drink. "I'm vegetarian now."

"Oh, right."

They both began to speak at the same time, stopped, then Doyle gestured Bodie to continue.

"I don't know what to say to you, Ray, except I'm glad you agreed to come and that I'm so sorry for all the hurt I caused you."

Doyle raked his fingers through his hair with that old familiar gesture. "OK. But I have to know how you want to play this."

"How d'you mean?"

"If you were just expecting to buy me a drink, parrot an apology, then assume that cleared the air, you'd better say now and we'll shake hands and I'll go."

"And I'll never see you again," finished Bodie. When Doyle gave a fractional nod, Bodie continued: "But you being the Ray Doyle I remember fondly, you'd rather talk."

Doyle gave a faint smile and nodded.

"OK. I happen to think we do need to talk properly, but not in a pub. Have you eaten?"

"Not since lunchtime."

"Then may I buy you dinner?"

"I'm happy to eat, but we'll go halves."

"As you wish. What d'you fancy? Italian? Indian? Chinese?"

"Italian."

"How about Gino's? He's still going."

For once the popular restaurant was only about half full. Gino himself greeted Bodie with a handshake and showed them to a corner table, well away from prying ears. They ordered and sat in a somewhat stilted silence until the food came. Bodie noticed how Doyle picked at the lasagne.

"No wonder you're still as skinny as ever."

Doyle's searchlight eyes were on him like a shot. "You lost any right to make personal comments about my appearance four years ago."

"I'm sorry."

Doyle exhaled loudly and took a sip of wine. "OK."

"Ray, will you let me explain why I behaved like I did? Please."

"OK."

"Can I just say that I've missed you so much. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't turn round to say something to you, or store up something I know will make you laugh. I hate myself for the hurt I caused you."

Doyle shoved his plate away, all pretence at eating forgotten. "But why did you do it? You hurt me so fucking much!"

Doyle stood outside the rest room, trying to steady his breathing. From inside there came a blast of laughter as McCabe delivered the punchline of a joke: "So the fireman had the fairy sliding up and down his pole all night!"

"Tell 'em the one about the Rasta with the big willy next." It sounded like Lucas.

"Yeah, and you can scrape him off the floor if Jax hears him telling it!" Murphy, Doyle thought, always the voice of reason.

"And Doyle won't like it either. Doesn't go for jokes about wogs or queers." There was no mistaking Bodie's easy drawl.

"Does that mean he's a queer, then?" Bloody McCabe, thought Doyle.

"Yeah, look at all that bloody jewellery he wears." That little shit Pennington.

"I've always wondered about Benny. He looks at Doyle like he wants to give him one."

"Shut up McCabe." Bodie, a bit too sharp. "It's Ray's first day back today and if he hears you spouting all this shit, he'll go berserk."

Doyle shoved the door open a bit too vigorously. All eyes turned to look and he caught a flash of concern in McCabe's face that he'd been overheard.

"Ray mate, nice to see you back." Murph stuck his hand out. "How ya doing?"

"Not so bad, Murph. Survived the Cow and Macklin this morning, which can't be bad."

"The Cow allocated you a job already?"

"You bet he has. Me and his lordship—" he gestured towards Bodie, who waved a lazy hand—"are after that little shit Collins."

Murph looked confused. "The IRA job? I thought Lewis and Anson had that one sewn up."

"Yeah, well, we're scraping the dregs off the floor." Doyle flashed McCabe a smile and was satisfied when he flushed.

Outside the rest room, Doyle leaned against the wall for a split second and took a deep breath. Bodie was watching him worriedly.

"You OK, mate? Sure you're fit?"

"I'm fine." He started walking briskly towards the car park.

"Sorry about this morning. Breakdown in communications and all that. Thought it was tomorrow you were back."

"Yeah."

"Got anything planned for tonight? Thought we could have a pint, then search out some talent."

"I dunno, Bodie. See how I feel later, maybe."

"Jenny's got this gorgeous friend who'll be perfect for you. Hair down to her arse, tits..."

"No thanks."

"What d'you mean, no thanks?"

"Just what I say. I'm not interested, Bodie."

Bodie felt his forehead and Doyle tried to jerk away. "Yeah, definitely sickening for something."

"Not some tart with big tits." It sounded more vicious than he meant it to.

"Whoa, steady on, Raymondo."

"Listen Bodie, I'm sick of you trying to fix me up with girls."

"Maybe you'd prefer boys?"

They were at the entrance to the underground CI5 workshops and garages now. Doyle spun around sharply, nearly sending the irascible Malcolm flying. He muttered an apology, then grabbed Bodie's arm. "What did you say?"

Bodie shook himself free. "Maybe McCabe was right. After all, you let that poofy arty mate of yours kiss you in hospital."

At first he'd thought Bodie was joking, now he knew he wasn't.

"Were you spying on us?"

"Didn't need to spy, mate. You weren't being very discreet about it."

"It's none of your fucking business what I do in my private life, Bodie."

"Ah, so you're not denying anything!"

"Fuck off!"

"I worry about you, mate. Before all of this I had my doubts."

"All of what?" Doyle was suddenly very still.

Bodie hesitated, then ploughed on: "Before what happened to you."

"And how do you know? No one was supposed to know. Fucking Cowley and his slack mouth! Or did you sneak a look at my file?"

"It wasn't Cowley," was all Bodie would say.

"Then how the fuck did you find out?"

They were at the car now and Bodie climbed into the driver's seat of the silver Capri. Doyle grabbed his arm: "Bodie, how the..."

"Take your hand off me."

Doyle pulled away like he'd been burned. "Scared you'll catch something?"

"Maybe."

"You bastard!"

Bodie was gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles were white. "Doyle, I don't want any more lies. Are you or are you not queer?"

"Yes, I'm queer," snapped Doyle.

Bodie looked as if he'd swallowed a slice of lemon. "Are you balling that arty mate of yours?"

"It's none of your fucking business who I sleep with."

"Jesus, Doyle, get real! What d'you reckon Cowley would have said if he'd caught you and Chris with his tongue down your throat?"

"He didn't have his tongue down my throat."

"Yeah, but funny how you let him touch you when you wouldn't let anyone else near you."

"What are you saying?" Doyle's voice was low and dangerous.

Bodie hesitated.

"What-are-you-saying?"

"Ray, let's change the subject."

"No mate, you started this and I want you to explain that last comment."

Bodie took a deep breath. "For someone who'd just been fucked by four men, you seemed to be enjoying the attentions of a fifth. Well into your stride, were you?"

Doyle backhanded him across the mouth, but the blow lacked power because of the angle. Then he exploded out of the car, slamming the door with all his strength. Bodie remained where he was, staring straight ahead. Suddenly the RTs crackled into life.

"All units, this is a grade seven call-out. Repeat, all units, grade seven call-out. Morgan's Haulage warehouse, East India docks."

Doyle hesitated and seemed about to go back into the building. Then the door burst open and Cowley appeared at a run, with Ruth just behind him.

"Bodie, Doyle, you should be on the road. Get over there now. Susan and Turner are under fire."

Doyle got back into the car and Bodie gunned the engine. The Capri shot out of the carpark with a squeal of tyres, leaving the red Granada trailing in its wake.

Lewis and Anson were directing operations outside the warehouse, maintaining contact with Cowley while allocating agents to positions. Anson looked up as Bodie strode towards them, Doyle several paces behind.

"What kept you two? You were supposed to be picking Collins up."

"Shut it, Anson. What the fuck's happening?"

"Susan and Turner are holed up in there with Collins and his chums taking pot-shots at them. You two need to take the side entrance. Murphy and Jax will cover you with the rifles."

"Makes better sense for me and Murph to have the rifles," snapped Bodie.

Anson fixed Bodie with a steely stare. "What's your problem? You're usually the first to complain if you and Doyle get separated."

"Yeah, well, Murph and me are the best shots in the squad with rifles."

"For fuck's sake, the Queen Mum could hit the target with a rifle at the range we're talking about. Now, are you gonna get over there, or d'you want to discuss it with Cowley?"

Bodie threw Anson a poisonous glare and stalked off, not waiting to see if Doyle was following. Doyle hesitated a moment and looked around to see where Cowley was.

"Problem, Doyle?" Anson regarded him sharply.

"I dunno...."

"What's wrong with your other half?"

"Don't ask me," snapped Doyle.

"You'd better get after him, mate, before Cowley chews you both up and spits you out."

Doyle made his decision and headed off towards Bodie, who was hidden behind a row of large metal refuse bins. As he squatted down beside him, their sleeves brushed. Bodie shifted away.

"Bodie...."

"Shut up, Doyle."

"But...."

"Not now! We can see Cowley as soon as we get back."

"So this is the end?"

"Don't be such a fucking drama queen. And, in case it'd escaped your notice, we're in the middle of a job."

"Listen Bodie...."

There was a blast of gunfire, followed by shouting. Suddenly the side doors burst open and two men tumbled out. Bodie picked off one and the sound of a rifle from behind suggested one of the snipers had got the other. Bodie was already making his way towards the building when he realised Doyle wasn't following him. He turned for a second.

"Listen mate, if you've lost your nerve, fuck off away from here."

Doyle followed him into the warehouse, trying to ignore the pounding in his head and the trembling in his limbs. He could smell damp and dust. The movement in the shadows

caught his eye a moment too late. He tried to shout out, but no sound came. The bullet hit Bodie in the side and he crashed to the floor.

Doyle was vaguely aware of Jax kneeling beside him, checking him for injury.

"Ray, are you hit?"

He shook his head. Again, no words would come.

"Put your head between your knees, mate. You'll be OK in a minute. Murph, where's that bloody ambulance?"

"On its way." Murph was kneeling beside Bodie, trying to stanch the flow of blood.

"Where's the Cow?"

"Inside, I should think, knocking heads together. Jesus, what a fuck-up."

Anson appeared. "The ambulance is here. They'll take Turner in the next one because he was knocked out. How's Doyle?"

"He'll be fine," said Jax. "Just got a bump on the head or something."

Doyle struggled to his feet. "No." The word sounded contorted and rough. He yanked his holster off, dropping it and the gun to the floor. His ID and a spare clip of bullets landed on top of them. Then he began to walk.

White lights. Cold tiles. A constant hum. Doyle opened his eyes, then closed them immediately. But he had still caught the attention of someone at his bedside. A woman. Short dark hair. Trouser suit.

"Ray?"

He turned onto his side, curling up into a ball. He began to shake. A hand touched his shoulder, a woman's voice warning too late.

"Doyle? Are you awake, lad?"

He began to scream.

Bodie rubbed his face and signalled to the waiter for another bottle of wine. Doyle shook his head at a refill for his soft drink and Bodie could sense his disapproval as he drained half a glass at one gulp.

"You want the truth?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes."

"I couldn't cope with seeing another bloke kiss you."

"It wasn't your business."

"I know that. But it was like it was all too much to cope with—what happened to you undercover, me not being there to save you, finding out you were gay. But I was angry. Angry at them for what they'd done to you. And angry at you because I thought you were invincible."

Doyle laughed harshly. "Oh yeah, me who cracked up and who almost got you killed?"

Bodie shook his head. "That was as much my fault. I'd been goading you. And Cowley should never have let you back on active duty."

"Were you going to ask for re-teaming?"

Bodie hesitated. "Ray...."

"Answer the question, please."

"Yes."

"I could just about have understood you not being able to cope with me being gay. But when you said I enjoyed being raped. Jesus, Bodie, you could never in a million years imagine what it was like, being fucked again and again by four men until I passed out. It hurt worse than anything, worse than bullet wounds. Those bastards weren't gay, by the way, they were just on a power trip. How do you humiliate this tough undercover cop? You treat him like a woman, like a worthless piece of shit. Make him cry.... Make him beg...."

"Ray, don't."

"Don't what, Bodie? Don't tell you this so you can continue living in blissful ignorance? Don't tell you what I caught from being raped? Don't tell you about the nervous breakdown?"

"Don't relive it if it hurts so much."

"Of course it fucking hurts! I remember what happened every fucking day of my life! remember the career I lost, the people I thought were friends."

"Like me." It was almost a whisper.

"Like you. That hurt almost as much as the injuries. D'you know, the only person who made any effort to keep in touch was Jax. He picked me up from hospital. He didn't pretend he didn't know which day I was starting back. He came to visit me when I was shut up in the loony bin."

Bodie flinched and drank the rest of the wine, topping up the glass again. "I'm sorry. There are no excuses for why I lied about not knowing when you were starting back. I suppose I just didn't want to face you, didn't know what to say."

"How did you find out I'd been raped? No one apart from Cowley was supposed to know."

"I sneaked a look at your file one night when Cowley was with the minister and no one else was around. I wanted to know what all the fuss was about. I mean, no one has two months off for a few bumps and bruises."

"Who else did you tell? Did all the lads have a good laugh at the poof getting his comeuppance?"

"No one, Ray, I swear to god."

"Murph knows."

"Then he must have seen your file since we took over. But he won't tell anyone, you have my word on that."

"Oh yeah? What's that worth?"

Bodie looked at him for a moment. "Probably not very much."

"Sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"I don't blame you. You know I did try to visit you when I was out of hospital, but they wouldn't let me in. They said you were refusing to see me."

"You could hardly be surprised, after what you said."

"I know. I still can't believe I said it. I know you'll never be able to forgive me for that and I understand that."

"Is that what you want? Forgiveness? So you can walk away with your conscience clear and prejudices intact?"

"Ray, I've changed. You have to believe that."

Doyle shrugged indifferently and it was like a stake through Bodie's heart. "It hardly matters to me anymore what you think."

"I suppose not. Except I'd hoped we could work together on the present case."

"I don't know.... Leave things how they are at the moment."

Bodie shrugged. "Do you want coffee?" he asked abruptly.

"OK."

They sat in silence until the waiter brought the coffee over. Bodie shovelled two spoonfuls of sugar into his cup and stirred it vigorously. "Can I ask you something personal?"

Doyle shrugged. "Why not? You know my innermost secrets."

"How long have you been gay?"

"I swung both ways in my teens, was exclusively gay at art college, then dated girls in the police and C15. I always preferred men, but I told myself it wasn't an option when I joined the police. It shouldn't have been in C15 either until I met Chris again."

"This was the Chris you tried to pass off as a woman."

"I never lied. It was just your assumption."

"A reasonable assumption."

"Maybe."

"So are you with anyone now?"

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

Doyle seemed to hesitate a fraction. "Marcus. He's a musician."

"Does he make you happy?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad. You deserve all the happiness there is."

"What about you?"

"No one special. No time, for one thing. You remember what it's like."

"Bodie, are you gay?"

Bodie stood up, shoved his chair back and flung some notes onto the table. He walked out without looking back.

Kate was first to arrive at work in the morning. She'd stopped at the bakery to buy them sandwiches for lunch and had also been seduced by the freshly baked croissants. Ray would love them. His appetite seemed to have perked up recently; a mix, no doubt, of being in love and of Lucy's wonderful cooking. Maybe he would even put on a bit of weight.

"Good morning, *Dr Ross*." A shadow loomed over her shoulder as she juggled briefcase, bag of food and keys.

"*Mr Bodie*. What can I do for you?"

They stared each other down like two hostile dogs marking their territory. She noted the immaculate cut of his suit and caught a faint tang of expensive aftershave. But his eyes betrayed his tiredness.

"You can mind your own business, for one thing."

"If you have a problem with our work on the rape investigation...."

"That's not what I mean and you know it. You might have fucked up Ray's head, but you're not doing it to me."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Oh, I can just imagine you putting Ray up to asking about my private life. You might have talked him into believing he's queer, but you sure as fuck aren't doing it to me! I...."

"Don't be so stupid! For one thing, no one can talk another person into believing they're homosexual. And for seconds, I have no interest in your private life."

"Yeah, I suppose you're far too busy screwing up Ray's."

She advanced on him and took a cheap pleasure from him taking a step back. "At least I've been there for Ray whenever he's needed me and didn't reject him when he was at rock bottom." She stalked inside, not looking back, and slammed the office door.

A couple of minutes later Doyle found her sitting on the desk, staring into space.

"Kate, are you OK? What's happened?" He perched beside her and slipped an arm around her shoulder. She leaned her head against his.

"I've just had a run-in with Bodie. He accused me of putting you up to asking questions about his sexuality and of screwing up your mind."

"The bastard!" Doyle's arm tightened around her so that she winced.

"What the hell did you say to him last night? He looked awful, like he hadn't slept."

"I just asked him whether he was gay and he stormed out. But I never mentioned what you said, Kate, honestly."

Kate's tone was total disbelief. "You asked him outright?"

"Yeah, I know it wins no awards for subtlety. But I was sick of his self-pity and patronising bullshit. It's one sure-fire way of getting him out of my life, don't you think?"

Kate smiled thinly. "I'm not convinced it counts as textbook closure."

"Bollocks to that! Now what's that heavenly smell coming from that bag?"

"Ray, are you changing the subject?"

"No, doctor. There's no subject there to change any more."

They were poring over some files when the phone went. Kate reached for it absent-mindedly, then Doyle saw her stiffen. She put her hand over the mouthpiece and said: "It's Murphy. There's been another attack. He's on his way over. And you lead this meeting."

"Why me?"

"Because with the amount of work we've got coming in, you'll be working by yourself before long."

Murphy arrived with a young agent called Tim Burrows in tow, whom he introduced as a computer whiz. They accepted cups of coffee and Murphy said without preamble: "This one's lucky not to be dead."

"When?"

"Last night, sometime around midnight."

Doyle grabbed a notebook and pen. "Let's have the details."

"Mike Barnes, aged 29, an actor from Camden. He'd been performing at this fringe theatre in Islington. After the performance he went for a drink in the bar, then left about 11 pm. He was found unconscious in a square in Primrose Hill by a courting couple at about 1.30 pm. They'd shinned over the gates for a bit of nooky."

"What time is the square locked?"

"It's kept locked all the time and only residents are supposed to have keys. But that's a bloody joke. As far as I can see, half of London's got one."

"Gay?"

"Nope. His girlfriend reported him missing."

"Doesn't mean he's not gay. Had he been raped?"

"Yes. And mutilated."

"Ah! How and where?"

"Looked like a thin-bladed knife. Some initials had been carved on his chest. Looked like a D and an L."

"OK. That figures."

"How come?"

"Your lad's getting restless, trying to be a bit too clever. He wants to play with you a bit, to leave you some clues. And he's stepping up the pace."

"Um, can I ask you something, Mr Doyle?" Tim Burrows removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"Sure. And call me Ray."

"The rapist, why d'you say he's probably not gay?"

Doyle had been expecting this question. "Because most male rapists aren't."

"But..."

He sighed, pushing his fingers through his hair. "Rape's about power, control and humiliation. Sexual gratification is incidental. Why do you think there are so many rapes in prisons?"

"Oh. I'd never thought of it like that."

"It's a common misconception. Like we said in the report, this guy's bright. He plans the attacks. You're looking for someone of above average intelligence and good social skills. This isn't some sad loser stuck in a bedsit. I can almost guarantee you that this guy, when you find him, will have a good job and a circle of friends, all of whom will say they never suspected anything."

"So where the hell do we start looking for him?" asked Murphy.

"OK, let's think this through. You've interviewed all the victims and can't find a link?"

"They've all been interviewed at least twice. I've started correlating all the information we have in the computer," said Burrows.

"No obvious links?"

"Nothing. We thought the fact two of the victims were sons of politicians might lead somewhere, but it hasn't. None of them have ever met, their jobs are worlds apart, they don't even go to the same venues."

Doyle exhaled loudly. "OK, this is an outside chance, but worth a try. Let's get a map and start plotting venues on it and see if that throws up anything of interest."

Murphy went out to the car and returned with a street map. They spread it out on the conference table and Doyle reached for a marker pen. "Right, shout out where the attacks happened."

Burrows set his glasses firmly on his nose and opened the file. "Archway, two in Primrose Hill, Camden Lock, West Hampstead, Mornington Crescent, Camden."

Doyle marked the points in green, then stared at the map. "Interesting.... Might be a pattern there." He picked up a pink marker. "OK, now where do the victims live?"

"Two in Camden, one in Islington, one in Brixton, one in Ealing, one in Southgate, and one in Hertford."

"Mmm, less help there by the look of it. Where do they work?"

"All over—north and south of the river, Reading, Oxford...."

"Looks like we should be concentrating on where the attacks happened." Doyle took a red pen and plotted the boundaries to the districts. "I'd wager the guy you're looking for lives or works within that area."

Murphy grimaced. "Big area."

"Yes, but it narrows it down a bit. I assume you've got a list of people with previous convictions from the computer?"

"For what it's worth. Most of 'em are either dead, moved away or going straight, so to speak."

"Huh, believe that and you'll believe anything," said Doyle tersely.

Part 3

Bodie screwed the piece of paper up and hurled it in the direction of the bin. It missed, coming to rest among a selection of other rejects. For someone who could churn out official missives to keep the Minister happy, he was finding this letter impossible to write. Maybe

he should try a memo—'Sorry. I love you.' The irony of it struck him and he began to laugh hysterically. Judy, his secretary, appeared in the doorway.

"Are you OK, sir?"

He sat up straight, automatically smoothing his hair. "I'm fine. You might as well go now, love. There's nothing else to do."

"Thanks, sir. See you tomorrow. Oh, Mr Murphy wanted to see you if you had a minute."

Murphy was perched on the his office windowsill, watching the office staff straggling out.

"What did you want, Murph?"

"A little bird tells me you went out for dinner last night."

"Are you spying on me?"

"Why would I want to do that?"

"And why would you care who I have a meal with?"

"Because my little bird just happened to be having a nice quiet meal last night and was nearly mown down by you steaming out like an express train."

"Your little bird should keep its sticky beak out of my business."

"What the fuck are you playing at, Bodie?"

"What d'you mean?"

"If you're fucking around with Ray's mind, don't."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"That guy is trying to rebuild his life and he doesn't need you playing silly fuckers. He's been hurt badly, Bodie, you can see it in his eyes. He's a shadow of what he used to be."

"You fancy him, do you, Murph?"

Suddenly the usually placid Murphy was in Bodie's space, eyeballing him. "It's about time you did some hard thinking, mate. No one gives a flying fuck if you're queer, except you."

"Fuck off, Murph, my private life is nothing to do with you."

"Wrong. The way you're acting at the moment, neither of us is going to have a job in six months' time."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"People are starting to notice you mooning around. For fuck's sake, Bodie, you know that bastard lot of stuffed shirts in Whitehall are just dying for us to foul up so they can close CI5 down or put some gormless puppet in charge if the Cow doesn't come back."

"Yeah, and suppose they let us stay. What do you reckon is going to happen when it gets out that a poof's in charge of CI5?"

Murphy began to applaud. "Congratufuckinglations!"

"What?"

"At last you've finally admitted it. Come on, I'll buy you a celebratory coming out drink."

Three pubs and a visit to the chippie later, Murphy was doing his best to manoeuvre Bodie up the stairs to his flat. He eased the swaying figure into an armchair and went out into the kitchen to make coffee. Bodie followed him in, brandishing a whisky bottle.

"You wanna 'nother glass, Murph?"

"Go on then, one for the road."

Bodie sloshed two generous measures of scotch into two wine glasses he'd dredged out from the back of a cupboard.

"Hey steady on, mate, you've drunk enough to sink the QE2."

"He's so beautiful. He's even more gorgeous than the day he left me."

"He left you? For fuck's sake, you selfish maudlin prick, you rejected him."

"I know." Bodie downed the scotch in one and held out his glass for a refill. Murphy sighed, but topped it up. "Shit Murph, I want to make him happy, look after him...."

Murphy snorted. "Ray Doyle never needed anyone to look after him, independent, bloody-minded little shit that he is."

"D'you think I've got any chance of getting him back, Murph?"

Murphy removed the glass from Bodie's hand and hauled him to his feet.

"I dunno, mate. You don't deserve him, mind, he's far too good for you. Now get your arse into bed. We've got that meeting with the Minister at 9 am tomorrow."

"Fuck...."

"Not tonight, thanks, Josephine. Now, where's your spare duvet?"

Bodie woke the next morning with the mother of all hangovers and a vague remembrance of making a prat of himself. As he staggered into the kitchen, he found a nauseatingly cheerful Murphy concocting a huge fry-up and whistling his way through the Beatles' back catalogue. Bodie backed out gingerly and retreated to the bathroom until he had deposited some of the overload from both ends.

A shower made him feel about one-third human again, so he wandered back to where Murphy was demolishing a pile of toast.

"Yours is keeping warm in the oven."

"Thanks," said Bodie dubiously. But he eventually polished off two sausages, two rashers of bacon, some baked beans and a pile of mushrooms. He drew the line at the congealed fried egg.

"Come on superman, get your posh togs on and get your arse in gear. The Minister waits for no man."

"Murph, I'm going to go and see Ray."

Murph whistled. "Best of British, mate. And don't forget to leave me a note of what you want played at your funeral."

"What do you want?"

"To talk."

"What about?"

Bodie shrugged. "I dunno. Just chat, like we used to."

"So you reckon we've got things to say to each other still?"

Bodie's voice was quiet. "I know I have."

Doyle exhaled loudly. "Come in," he said shortly, stalking down the path without looking back. Once inside, he dumped his jacket and bag and started off upstairs. "Kitchen's at the end if you want to make tea. But keep your fucking nose out of my belongings, all right?"

When Doyle reappeared, hair damp from the shower, Bodie was sitting at the kitchen table, cradling a mug of tea and staring out at the garden.

"Nice garden."

"Yeah." Doyle poured himself some tea.

"Are those photos on the noticeboard the before pictures of the house?"

"Yes."

"You did all the work yourself?"

"More or less. Kate, Lucy and Marcus helped decorate."

"It's nice."

"Yeah."

"How long have you been here?"

"Six months."

"Where were you before that?"

"In a shitty bedsit with no heating and mould growing on the walls. Then flat-sitting for Kate's partner's brother when he was abroad."

"Oh. So you've gone up in the world."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Buying a house."

Doyle slammed his mug down, slopping tea over the table. "What are you saying?"

"Just wondered how you afforded it. I'm still stuck in a C15 rented flat."

"And as we all know, you're hob-nobbing with the movers and shakers now and I'm just a loser...."

"Ray, that's not what I'm saying."

"Sounds like it to me. For your information, and not that it's any of your business, Kate lent me the money for the deposit which I can now start paying back now I have a proper job, and I got the house at knock-down price because it needed so much work doing to it."

"You've done a brilliant job on it."

"Don't fucking patronise me!"

"Ray, I'm sorry, I don't mean to."

Doyle picked up the mug of tea and headed into the back room. "I've got some work to do. You can come and sit in here if you're so keen to continue this scintillating conversation."

"Ray, you're not making this very easy."

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm doing my best here."

Doyle ignored the comment and sat cross-legged on the floor, pulling the partially sanded door towards him.

"What are you doing?"

"Sanding this down so I can stain it and maybe fit some stained glass in it. Found it in a skip."

"Shall I start at the other end?"

"If you like. But you'll make a mess of that fancy suit."

Bodie shrugged and reached for a square of sandpaper.

"There are some clean clothes on the spare bed. There should be a T-shirt and tracksuit bottoms you can put on."

"OK. Thanks."

When Bodie returned several minutes later in the borrowed clothes, Doyle was seemingly engrossed in his task.

"These your clothes, Ray?"

"Who else's are they gonna be?"

"Well, I wasn't sure. Your partner's, maybe."

"They're mine," snapped Doyle.

"Bit big for you, aren't they? They fit me perfectly and I've put on half a stone since I've been standing in for Cowley."

Doyle shrugged.

"Come to think of it, all your clothes look baggy now. Have you lost weight?"

"A bit."

"What happened to the skin-tight jeans and T-shirt?"

Doyle shrugged again.

"Gone all respectable now, I suppose."

Doyle flung down the sandpaper. "If you must fucking know, I stopped wearing them because they made me look like a tart."

"Never bothered you before."

"I never got raped before."

Bodie's face was white. He said in a voice barely above a whisper: "Ray, I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"For having the subtlety of a flying sledgehammer, for one thing."

"Nothing new there, then."

"I know you won't believe me, and I've no right to expect you to, but I want to be here for you if you need me."

Doyle shoved the door aside and leapt to his feet. He stood at the patio windows, hands thrust in his pockets, shoulders hunched.

"Ray, I'm sorry."

"Stop apologising."

"Shall I leave?"

"Up to you."

"What do you want me to do?"

Doyle spun round suddenly. "Don't make promises you can't or won't keep."

"All I can promise is never to hurt you again."

"That's an impossible promise to try to keep. It wasn't just you anyway...."

"No, but mine was the worst. I was your friend and I let you down when you needed me the most. Do you know, I dreamed so often of running away from CI5 and from England when I realised just what I'd done."

"What stopped you?"

"You."

"Me?" Doyle looked bemused.

"Yes. I'd shattered your dream of trying to do some good. I had to stay, had to try to make a difference."

"And have you?" Doyle's voice was barely above a whisper.

"I don't know." Bodie suddenly felt old and tired.

Doyle turned away and started lighting the candles which dotted the room. Bodie watched as the light played off his face, making him look other-worldly.

"Ray, you were right."

"About what?"

"What you asked me in Gino's. I am gay. Well, bi. Always have been."

"Then why lie about it?"

"Because it's not the kind of thing you admit if you come from where I do, or if you've done the jobs I've done. And, well, I wish I wasn't."

"But that didn't give you the right to treat me like shit just because you couldn't sort your own life out."

"I know and I'm sorry."

"So have you ever done anything about it?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Have you slept with a man?"

Bodie looked away.

"Well?"

"A few times."

"Prostitutes?"

"What the hell do you take me for? No, guys I met in pubs."

"One-night stands?"

"Yes." Bodie laughed harshly. "And I bet you can guess what they all had in common?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Slim, green eyes, curly hair, gorgeous bodies...."

Doyle was staring at him, eyes huge in the dim light.

"So now you know what a fucking hypocrite I am. Ray, I love you. Always have done. Always will."

The silence was almost unbearable. "I loved you once."

The words were like a stake through Bodie's heart. "Can you ever love me again?"

A whisper. "Don't ask me to answer that. Please go, Bodie."

"I will, but don't forget what I've said, Ray. I can wait." Then he was gone.

Doyle woke up at 6 am, still fully clothed and curled up on the sofa. A couple of the candles were still burning and he realised he'd been bloody lucky that the house hadn't burned down. Staggering to the shower, he stood under it until he could prise his eyes open fully. He felt dreadful, muzzy-headed and with a horrible sour taste in his mouth. For a moment he considered phoning in ill, but then thought of how much time that would leave him to brood.

Christ, what the fuck had he said? He could have bitten his tongue after he'd told Bodie he'd once loved him. He'd locked those feelings up tight within himself and sworn they'd never see the light of day. Bloody Bodie! The bastard had swanned along, looking a million dollars in his designer suits, and promptly set about over-turning Doyle's carefully constructed new life.

He made it into work on autopilot and attempted to bury himself in some research he'd started. Kate had been on at him to do a PhD, but he'd been stalling. The academic work didn't interest him. What he loved—and was good at—was the intellectual puzzle set by profiling.

"You look like shit."

"Thank you doctor. Is that your considered professional opinion?" But the repartee sounded flat.

"Are you going down with something unpleasant?"

"Doubt it. I was treated to a surprise visitor last night."

"Bodie?"

"How did you guess?"

"What did he want?"

"To talk."

"And?"

"And nothing. We talked a bit, he helped me sand down a door, he left."

"And that was it?" Kate had fixed him with a suspicious stare.

"Yep."

"And are you seeing him again?"

"Not if I see him first."

"You ready to go, Ray?"

"You're not on the line tonight, are you? I thought it was me and Maxie."

"It is. But there's a management committee meeting as well next door."

Doyle rolled his eyes. "That'll be nice. Presumably it'll be an hour and a half of Martin spouting psychobabble, followed by Peter saying how nice it is to see the ladies joining, culminating in Jo ripping off his bollocks and feeding them to him on a plate."

Kate laughed. "Something like that. Now if you'd only join the committee, you could have the pleasure of all this at first hand."

"Sorry, I'm defluffing my navel that night and all nights after."

The Gay and Lesbian Line office was on the top floor of a community centre in South London. The place was always busy, with Brownie and Cub packs, evening classes, and judo groups jostling for space. Doyle's personal theory was that the steel drum workshops took place every time he was on the line.

When Doyle and Kate arrived, Maxie was brewing tea. She hugged Kate and nodded briskly to Doyle. She was a large, handsome black woman whose toleration of men and fools could be measured in inches. Doyle occasionally suspected she found the two categories mutually inclusive.

At 7.30 pm Kate disappeared into the annexe room for the meeting, and Maxie flicked the answerphone off. "I'll take the first call, shall I?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Fine," said Doyle, checking the previous night's logbook. "I see Rex phoned again."

"Hmph. 'bout time he got a life," said Maxie.

Doyle snorted with laughter, earning himself a beady-eyed stare. "I was just imagining you telling him that."

Maxie laughed, a deep, throaty bark. "Doubt it's the textbook response."

"True, though." Rex was the bane of the phonenumber. He phoned a couple of times a week to recount his latest—fictional—encounter with a man, coupled with 20 minutes of self-pity over how he could never leave his wife. When challenged, he would terminate the call. Opinions differed on how to deal with him. Some volunteers advocated telling him to go away and call back when he was willing to address his sexuality seriously. Others felt he needed time and space. Doyle, who knew he should be in the second category, firmly believed the first group were right.

"You're looking better," said Maxie suddenly.

"Oh...thanks."

"Don't look so skinny and pasty as you did last time I saw you. Got a new man, I hear."

Doyle laughed. "Lucy been gossiping again, has she?" Maxie and Lucy both worked in the same art college department, where Lucy taught jewellery and Maxie was department administrator. Apparently she terrified students and staff alike, and ran the place like clockwork.

"She might just have mentioned that you and her little brother were an item."

The phone rang. Maxie let it ring twice, then picked it up. Doyle reached for the new copy of the *Pink Paper*, half an ear on the phone conversation. As far as he could judge, it was a newcomer to London, who wanted to find out what was going on on the scene. Maxie lobbed in a few questions to check the caller really was out and comfortable, rather than someone who sounded confident but who needed to talk. Once she'd satisfied herself, she provided a few suggestions for pubs and social groups.

It was a quiet night. By 9.30 pm, they'd only had the one call and had both drunk enough tea to refloat the *Titanic*. Doyle stood up and stretched, trying to remove the kinks in his back. The phone rang. He sat down again, counted to three, then picked up the receiver. "Hello, London Gay and Lesbian Line."

"Ray? It's Danny. Sorry to bother you, mate, but can you check the diary to see when I'm on next? Some bastard nicked my rucksack on the tube today. All my fucking life was in there!"

Doyle reached for the office diary. "Hope you've reported it to the police."

"Yes, for what good that'll do."

"You never know. Hang on, Danny.... You're on this Friday with Jo and then a fortnight Thursday with me."

"OK, that's what I thought. I'll see you then, Ray. Gotta go, I'm in the bar."

"See you then, mate. Take care." Danny was a rugby-playing solicitor. From various hints made, Doyle suspected Danny fancied him. Doyle liked him a lot, but didn't fancy large blond Hooray Henry types.

The phone rang again almost immediately. Maxie answered it, then almost immediately replaced the receiver.

"A hang-up?"

"Yes."

"I'll take it if it goes again, just in case." Sometimes callers would hang up if the phone was answered by someone of the opposite sex. Hence phoneline policy was to have both a man and a woman on each shift. This wasn't always possible, due to a shortage of female volunteers. Kate's theory was that once two lesbians set up home together, nothing would entice them away from the sofa and the cat.

The phone rang. Doyle picked it up. Before he'd even finished the set introduction, there was a laugh from the other end of the line. Doyle finished the sentence and waited. There was another laugh. "Hello Ray Doyle."

"Hello," he said noncommittally. "Is there something you want to talk about?"

"Very conscientious, aren't you? I suppose at this point all these sad souls pour their hearts out about how they hate being gay."

"Is that what you want to talk about?"

The laugh again. Light and slightly tinny. "Heavens, no. I know just what I am and I'm happy that way. No, I just thought I should ring and introduce myself to you and your friend Kate."

Doyle grabbed his clipboard and scrawled on there "GET KATE. NOW!" and shoved it under Maxie's nose. She frowned, then made for the door to the meeting room.

"So why do you feel the need to introduce yourself?"

"Well seeing as you've turned me into a media star...."

"How come?"

"Oh, I read *The Guardian*. Very sympathetic piece it was as well. And that's a nice office you and Dr Ross have. Very civilised."

Kate appeared suddenly and Doyle gestured to the party line. She lifted it carefully, but couldn't disguise the slight click. Immediately the line went dead.

"Ray, what the hell's going on?"

Doyle glanced briefly at Maxie, who was standing in the doorway, arms folded across her formidable bosom. "I dunno. Bad vibes. Sorry to have dragged you out of the meeting for nothing."

Kate seemed about to question him further, but then nodded. "Ray, they want you in the meeting for a minute to tell them how the database project is going. Mick can replace you for the last half hour."

"So what the hell was all that about?" Kate stuck the car keys into the ignition, but didn't switch the engine on. Doyle leant back in the passenger seat and pushed his fingers through his hair.

"Contrary to what you might think, I'm not cracking up."

"Never said you were. What happened, Ray?"

He told her, eyes fixed unwaveringly on her face. Kate stared out of the window for a moment or two before replying.

"I don't like the sound of this."

"I'm not mad on it myself either," said Doyle ruefully.

"I suppose it couldn't have been one of the regulars who recognised your voice?"

"Why would they be that interested in the newspaper article? And they wouldn't know my surname."

"True."

"But how did whoever know we do the phoneline?"

"Oh shit."

"Yeah. Followed us, maybe. Christ, Kate!"

"So what do we do? Tell Murphy?"

"Can't see that we can do anything for the time being. We can't mention it to Murphy yet in case it breaches confidentiality if we're wrong. And the committee will think we're bonkers. When are you on next?"

"Thursday. What about you?"

"A fortnight Thursday. Who are you on with?"

"Jack Marshall."

"I'll give him a ring and see if he'll swap."

"A trap?"

"Not really. Just a non-scientific test. Come on, home James."

"I feel like a bloody penguin," said Doyle, running a forefinger around the inside of his collar.

"Wondered why you had such short legs," commented Lucy, fiddling with his bow-tie.

"And I'm hot."

"Before you even think of it, you may not take your jacket off."

"Why not? My shirt's clean!"

"Ho bloody ho," said Lucy. "And stop fidgeting, for god's sake."

Doyle was craning round to scan the audience. Their group seemed to be the youngest there by at least 20 years.

"Who are you looking for?"

"No one in particular. Just seeing who's around."

"Old habits die in hard."

"Maybe," he said shortly, flicking studiously through his programme.

"No picking your nose, Raymond, or wolf-whistling when Marcus walks on."

"Ha ha."

"Ssh, it's starting," whispered Kate.

Doyle generally enjoyed classical music, but for some reason he felt uncomfortable and restless. He applauded mechanically at all the right points and made all the appropriate noises at the interval when they made the obligatory rush for the bar. Someone knocked into him, spilling soda water on his sleeve.

"Sorry mate, let me buy you another one." The man was in his twenties, with short dark hair and a pleasant smile.

"No, it's OK, can't stand fizzy water really!"

The man laughed. "I'm on the wagon as well. Well, if you're sure."

"Yes, thanks for offering."

Back in his seat, Doyle leaned back, assumed the air of one pondering about the interpretation of Elgar and spent the second half fantasising about what he could do to Marcus across the kettle drum.

The after-concert party was jammed to the gunwales with family, friends, hacks and hangers-on. Doyle, Lucy and Kate snaffled a corner table and waited for Marcus to join them. Doyle yawned discreetly, disliking the false, gushy atmosphere of such occasions. He watched Kate and Lucy talking quietly to each other, their fingers touching now and then.

"So what did you think, darlings?" Marcus bounced over and twirled in front of them.

"Magnificent, maestro!" said Doyle.

"Another drink?"

"No thanks. If I have another glass of water, I'll be peeing 'til Christmas."

"We can go soon. I just need to buttonhole a few people."

"Networking?"

"You've got it. I'll see you in a sec."

"OK, I'll be outside. It's like a bloody sauna in here."

Doyle wandered over to where some French windows had been thrown open. There was a high-walled courtyard at the back with fragrant shrubs growing up and across. He stood enjoying the night air for a few minutes. As he turned to go back inside, a sound brought him up short. His first instinct was that it was a cat, but something made him go and investigate. Crumpled in a heap in a dark corner of the courtyard was the semi-naked body of a man. One look at the man's chest and Doyle went cold.

"Ray, we can go now."

"Marcus, keep back. Get someone to phone the police. And tell Kate to phone Murphy."

"Who?"

"She'll know."

"But..."

"Just do as I say. Now!"

The police and CI5 arrived at the same time, leading to the usual mutterings over procedure. Doyle sat on a chair in the corner watching the posturings. Marcus was beside him, white and silent.

Murphy saw them and wandered over. "You found him, Ray?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who he is?"

"No idea, but then I didn't get much of a look at his face."

"Looks like he's a member of the orchestra."

Marcus stiffened and gasped. Doyle touched his arm gently. Murphy caught the gesture and said: "Are you a member of the orchestra, Mr—?"

"This is Marcus Bryan, my partner. He's a violinist," said Doyle.

"Nice to meet you, Marcus. I'm Steve Murphy, CI5. I used to work with Ray. Maybe you could help us..."

"No fucking way. He told me all about what you bastards did to him." Marcus got up and walked off, not looking back.

Murphy raised his eyebrows. "And I had a shower this morning," he said mildly.

"Sorry about that, Murph."

"Actually I don't blame him. He is right, after all."

"Yeah."

Anson appeared, pointedly ignored Doyle, then whispered something to Murphy. Murphy nodded, then said to Doyle: "He's been identified. One of the cellists in the orchestra. Our lads and the plods are just about finished taking names and addresses so we can start on witness statements tomorrow. Once the place is cleared of civilians, forensics can finish off."

"If you like I can stay and...."

"The police want all the civilians out of here," snapped Anson. "They're all in the way."

"Well fuck you too, mate," said Doyle. As he walked off, he could hear Murphy laying into Anson without using the same obscenity twice.

Marcus drove most of the way home before saying abruptly: "Sorry I was such a drama queen."

"It's OK. Murphy's one of the good guys, mind."

"If you say so."

"I do." It came out sharper than he'd meant it to.

"Do they know who it was?"

"If they do, they don't tell civilians like me." He didn't know why the lie fell so easily from his lips.

Murphy was on the doorstep when Doyle and Kate arrived at 8.30 am the next morning. His first words were: "Ray, I'm sorry for what Anson said last night. The guy's a monumental arsehole and I tore a strip off him."

"Yeah, well, tell me news and not history. Anyway, since when did you let the police call the tune?"

"Ah, sore point."

"How come?"

"Let's just say that Bodie and I don't quite have the gravitas or clout that Cowley does. Anyway, can you take a look at what we've got so far from last night?"

"You go through it and brief me later, Ray. I've got a tutorial at nine," said Kate.

"OK. What have you got, Murph?"

"Quite a lot. And you ain't going to like some of it."

"Ray, are you OK?"

Doyle was staring blindly at the crumpled newspaper cutting that Murphy had laid in front of him. It was the piece from *The Guardian* about him and Kate. Knife marks and red pen marks had almost obliterated the photo.

He had to cough several times to clear his throat. "Where did you find it?"

"Tucked in the victim's top pocket. He died this morning, just after 5 am."

"Shit."

"Yeah."

"You realise this changes things considerably?"

"I'd just about worked that one out for myself," said Murphy ruefully.

"OK, who was the victim?"

"David Leonard, aged 48. He lived in Hammersmith and had been a cellist with the orchestra for 18 years. He was married with two children. Aside from being raped, he'd had the initials NT carved into his chest. And he'd been strangled."

"Anything to link him with any of the previous victims?"

"Not so far. Thing is, Ray..."

"What?"

"That newspaper cutting."

"He's trying to attract our attention."

"Bit more than that, I'd have said. He's totally obliterated you and left Kate untouched."

"I had noticed," snapped Doyle.

"Look, Bodie and I have been thinking..."

"Congratulations!"

"...and we're going to have one of the lads keep an eye on you."

"What d'you mean?"

"Nothing obvious. Just surveillance here and at home."

"No fucking way! I don't want CI5 snooping around my life again."

"Ray, for Christ's sake, this guy's focussed on you all of a sudden. He knows you do the phonenumber, he must have been following you. I notice you've kept damned quiet about what all that means."

"I said no, and that's final. Now piss off, Murph, I've got work to do."

Doyle wrinkled his nose, picked up two cups of dubious-smelling herbal tea and tipped them out of the window.

"That'll have given a passer-by a hairwash," observed Kate, making herself comfy in one of the easy chairs.

"Very sought-after, herbal shampoo. Now, shall I take first call?"

"Yes, just as long as you sit down and stop prowling."

He grinned at her, bared his teeth and perched on a swivel chair, spinning round and round.

"Ray!"

"Yeah, I know, keep still!"

"If you've got that much excess energy, there's a database waiting for your attentions."

"Oh lovely." But he scooted over to the computer and booted it up. Doyle sometimes wondered how he'd got lumbered with compiling a gay resources database for the phonenumber, given he hated using computers. He had the passing thought that at least CI5 had taught him where to look for information.

They had half a dozen calls in the first hour, two of them wank calls that Kate dealt with briskly and the other straightforward ones wanting information. Doyle tapped away at the computer, adding more information about gay organisations and resources. The idea was for all the phonenumber's material to be available to volunteers electronically by the end of the year. Kate read, yawning occasionally.

At five to ten, Kate started putting books and papers away, then reached for the clipboard to tally up that night's calls for the records. As she reached to flick on the answermachine, the phone rang. They looked at each other, both tempted to leave it, but integrity won and Kate reached for the phone.

"Hello, London Gay and Lesbian Line."

"Good evening, Dr Ross."

Doyle nodded as he recognised the voice. "Hello," said Kate evenly.

"I assume Mr Doyle's there listening with you?"

"If you want to talk to a male volunteer that can be arranged."

The light laugh again. "Oh no, you'll do perfectly well, doctor. In any case, it's just a courtesy call to make sure Mr Doyle found the little present I left for him."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I think you know. You were there, after all. Anyway, can't stand around chatting all night. I'll see you very soon, Ray."

The sound of Kate replacing her receiver sounded very loud in the silence. Gently she took Doyle's phone from his hand and put it down. Then she led him to the sofa in the corner, passing him a glass of water.

"Ray, we have to tell Murphy."

"But what about confidentiality?"

"Stuff that," she said. "Lives are at risk here and one of them might just be yours."

Murphy was not amused. "Jesus, you should have told me all this before!"

"How could we? First of all there was the confidentiality issue and secondly we didn't know that he wasn't a hoaxer," said Kate.

"Have you got a transcript of the conversations?"

"As far as we can remember them. And Murphy...."

"What?"

"We're putting our heads on the block with the phonenumber here. I don't want any of this to be made public in any form."

"It won't be. Now Ray, whether you like it or not, you're having that babysitter."

"I'm not going to some bloody safehouse."

"Let me check out your place first to see how safe it is."

"One front door, one side passage to a small back garden. High fence at the back topped with barbed wire with a storage depot for a removal firm behind. Fences both sides between the neighbours."

"Thank you for that briefing."

"My pleasure. Anyway, if I stay at home there's a chance of drawing this guy out if he's really got his eye on me."

"Just shut up, Ray, and take me over there so I can check it out."

"What are you doing here?"

"Babysitters Unlimited at your service."

Doyle started to close the front door, but Bodie's foot was quicker.

"Ray, let me in. Like I said, I'm your babysitter."

"Short of foot-soldiers all of a sudden, are you?"

"No. I wanted to do it."

The simple honesty disarmed Doyle and he opened the door fully to admit Bodie, adding only: "At least I'm getting full value for my taxes."

Bodie seemed to fill the narrow hallway, looking around him with uncharacteristic nervousness. "Anything to report?" he asked.

"Nope. All quiet. Look, I've got work to do. Make yourself tea or coffee, or whatever."

"Brought some beer with me. I thought you might like some."

"No thanks." With that, Doyle disappeared up the stairs to his study.

The next time he looked up an hour and a half had gone by and he could hear Bodie's heavy tread on the landing. There was a tap on the door and a dark head appeared round it.

"Tea?"

"No thanks." He fixed his gaze on the pile of paperwork.

"Something to eat?"

"No thanks."

"Ray, you look like you haven't eaten since...."

"I said no thanks!"

The door closed with a little too much force. Doyle stretched, then removed his glasses and rubbed his gritty eyes. He glanced at his watch—nearly 6.30 pm. Kate would be home soon. He could phone her and....

A steaming bowl of tomato soup was plonked down in front of him, accompanied by a doorstep of bread.

"Hey, mind my papers!"

"Get that down you."

"I said...."

"I know what you said. But if you don't clear that bowl in the next minute, I shall personally hold your nose and pour it down your throat."

Doyle sat up straight, whipping his specs off. Bodie laughed.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I think I'm supposed to say something along the lines of 'Oh Miss Jones, you're beautiful!'"

Doyle stared at him for a moment, then his face broke into an unwilling smile. His 'fuck off Bodie' lacked venom.

"Congratulations."

"On what?"

"Remembering my name. Yes, I know...."

"Fuck off ," they chorused together.

Doyle reached for the soup and sampled a mouthful. Heinz's bog-standard tomato had never tasted so good. He hoovered down the rest of the bowl.

"More?" asked Bodie, mopping up the dregs with his bread.

"I can get it myself."

Bodie picked up both bowls. "You stay here."

"Why?"

"Because you look like you're going to fall over."

"I'm fine."

"Ray, it's no weakness to admit you're tired. You've had a shitty time—"

"Nothing I can't handle."

"I know." Bodie disappeared downstairs, reappearing with refills of soup, plus two mugs of tea. Doyle raised an eyebrow.

"Just wanted to see if your tea-drinking manners had improved."

Doyle took the proffered mug and sipped it delicately, little finger outstretched.

"Very impressive. Training from Her Maj herself?"

"Of course." Doyle drained the mug, adding a final slurp for extra effect. Pushing the mug and soup bowl away, he reached for his paperwork.

"Leave that. Come and watch TV or have a kip."

"Can't. Too much to do."

"Ray, you don't have to keep driving yourself so hard."

Doyle looked at him for a moment, then said surprisingly mildly: "What do you know about it? You don't know what my life's like any more."

"Only that you haven't changed as much as you think you have. You've always been stubborn and driven."

"So?"

"Just that there's other things outside of work."

"Such as?"

"Well, you know, drinking with mates, going to the footie...."

"Is there a point to this little homily, Bodie?"

Bodie stared at him for a moment, then said: "I'll be watching the TV if you want me."

"Why should I want you for anything?"

His only reply was the door slamming. Doyle ran his fingers through his tangled hair. The final comment had been uncalled for, if true. Bodie was doing his best. Doyle just wished he wouldn't try so hard.

And he wished that so much that had happened could be undone. That he could return to a time when he'd been happy, really happy, doing a job he loved with a person he loved....

Fuck! Doyle swept the paperwork onto the floor. He had loved Bodie more than anyone else in his life. Snapshots of memories were imprinted on his brain—nights out at the pub, weekend fishing trips, evenings spent in front of the TV watching a match. And always at the back of his mind the thought that he might be picking up positive messages from Bodie. The casual arm draped around his shoulders. The hand ruffling his hair. The good-natured scuffling. But everything that promised so much had been swept away as his life had fallen apart. He couldn't, just couldn't, risk his hard-fought-for new life.

Doyle worked steadily through until just after 9 pm, when he got up to go to the toilet. As he returned to the study, he heard the opening bars of the BBC nine o'clock news. He went downstairs and stuck his head around the door to listen to the headlines. There'd been another bust-up in Parliament over the NHS, a bomb had gone off in Northern Ireland killing three soldiers and two civilians, and England had lost the second Test to the West Indies by an innings and plenty.

Bodie was stretched out on the sofa, a can of beer to hand. He gestured to it without looking up. "There's plenty more in the fridge."

"Don't drink much."

"Since when?"

"Since I drank myself into oblivion trying to forget what happened."

Bodie sat up straight. "You had a drink problem?"

"I was well on the way to one. Didn't want to end up like Cowley, did I?"

"Cowley doesn't have a drink problem."

"You really believe that?"

Bodie shrugged. Doyle stretched and said: "I'm off to bed."

"OK. I'm knocking off at midnight. Pennington'll see you through to tomorrow."

"Oh joy."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"He's a homophobic little shit."

"He's OK."

"He isn't and you know it. You might like to warn him that if he speaks out of line, he'll be shitting teeth for a month."

Bodie said quietly: "I'll have a word with him."

"Good. Now I'm off to bed."

"OK. Sleep well."

Bodie did another check of the house, and then radioed in to base. Ruth was holding the fort and confirmed it was all quiet. He then went back to the living room, but couldn't settle to anything. The sound of a light thud sent him hurrying to Doyle's bedroom.

Doyle was curled on his side, fast asleep. His glasses were still on and the bedside lamp was shining. A textbook lay where it had fallen on the floor beside the bed. Bodie stood in the doorway, unable to take his eyes off the half-naked figure with the burned and scarred back and shoulders. Suddenly it was as if all the strength in his legs had gone, and he slid down until he was sitting against the wall. Doyle shifted slightly, clenching his fingers tightly. Asleep his face was less harsh, less haunted.

The sound of a clock striking the half-hour roused Bodie and he got up, unable to stifle the gasp at the cramp that had set in. Doyle was immediately awake, sitting up in bed.

"Sorry, didn't mean to wake you." Bodie backed out of the room.

"What are you doing in here?"

"I heard a noise. It was the book falling on to the floor."

Doyle reached over and picked it up, meticulously finding his place again and marking it. He took his glasses off and set them by the bed. Then the bedside lamp was snapped off.

Pennington turned up at ten to midnight, whistling. Bodie grabbed him by the arm and hauled him into the living room.

"You bring the fucking pipe and drums along as well?"

"What do you mean?"

"The whistling postman impersonation. You want to take an ad in the local paper to let people know we're here?"

"No. Sorry."

"Right. Ray's asleep. Jax'll be over at eight to relieve you. And no playing silly fuckers, Micky, OK?"

"What d'you mean?"

"You say anything out of turn to Ray and you'll be spending the next six months filing. Clear?"

"Clear."

"Fair enough. Good night."

Bodie stood outside trying to catch his breath. His head was spinning and he felt slightly queasy. The thought of his cold, empty flat repulsed him. He thought again of Doyle's house with its candles and pictures and comfy sofas. As he walked towards his car, a slight movement from the adjoining garden caught his eye. Probably a cat. But he took a step towards it to check and was too late to react to the blow across the back of his head that laid him out.

Doyle woke up about 7 am and realised he was never going to get back to sleep, despite the fact it was Sunday. So he grabbed his dressing gown and went down to the kitchen. Pennington was there, feet up and reading a paperback thriller. He glanced at Doyle, grunted a greeting and carried on reading. Doyle pointedly made a single mug of coffee and took it through to the living room to drink. The pile of files from the previous night caught his eye, so he spread them out on the table. Something was nagging away at the back of his mind.

The doorbell rang. Instinctively Doyle got up to answer it, but Pennington was there first. He motioned Doyle back into the living room and peered through the spy hole.

"It's Jax."

Pennington opened the door a crack, gun at the ready. Jax slipped through, nodded to him and stuck his head round the living room door.

"How's tricks, Ray?"

"OK, mate."

"Is that coffee I smell?"

"Yeah. Help yourself."

"Great. I only got four hours' sleep last night. Murph and I didn't get back until the early hours of the morning."

"Where did you go?"

"Deepest bloody Berkshire to talk to David Leonard's family."

"Fuck! Berkshire!"

"It's not that bad there, mate. Could have been Essex..."

Doyle knocked some of the files flying in his urgency to go through them. Picking up a handful, he grabbed a notebook and pen and shoved it at Jax. "Write down the victims' names," he instructed.

"Why?"

"Just humour me for a moment, mate. I reckon I've found the link."

Twenty minutes later they examined the list. "Jeez, Ray, I reckon you've cracked it," said Jax, draining the dregs of his cold coffee.

"At some time in their lives they were all in the same area of Berkshire. Doesn't tell us much, given they weren't there at the same time and don't appear to have known each other."

"But it's something to go on. Tim Burrows can run a more detailed analysis. And we can get agents out interviewing people now we know where to focus. I'll tell Murph and Bodie."

Doyle wandered out into the kitchen and stuck some bread into the toaster. He was just spreading it with jam when Jax appeared.

"Help yourself to toast, mate."

"Thanks," said Jax vaguely. "Ray, do you remember what time Bodie left here last night?"

"About midnight, I assume. Why?"

"It's just no one can track him down. He's not answering his phone at home, or his RT."

"Sounds par for the course from what I remember."

"Not now. He's on call 24/7. And Murph's just been round to Bodie's place. Doesn't look like he slept there last night."

"Oh shit. Do you think...?"

"I dunno. But I don't like the sound of it."

Murphy turned up half an hour later clad in a scruffy tracksuit with an Ireland rugby shirt underneath. His opening gambit was: "Ray, is your phonenumber open on a Sunday evening?"

"Yep, 365 days a year, including Christmas Day. Why?"

"I know this could be jumping to conclusions, but I reckon Bodie's disappearance has to be related to this case. For one thing there's hardly anything else going on at the moment. And for seconds it was a bit of a coincidence it happened outside your house."

"How d'you know?"

"Because we found his car round the corner and spots of blood just in front of your fence."

"So you want me to go on the phoneline tonight just in case our man phones?"

"Is that possible?"

"Should be. Let me phone Kate. She'll know who's on."

He put down the phone five minutes later. "Kate's on her way round. And you're in luck. Lucy, Kate's partner, is on tonight, so I've swapped with her. Kate's going to square it with the other person."

"Will the other people you've swapped with recently start asking questions?"

"Shouldn't think so. The rota's like musical chairs at the best of times."

"Thing is, Ray, can you get one of us in?"

"Let's talk about that when Kate arrives."

Kate was surprisingly phlegmatic about the whole thing. "OK, but it's got to be you, Murph. And if it's a genuine caller, we want you out of the room. I also want your assurance that you won't tap the phone."

"Fair enough."

"I don't know how the heck we'll explain it away to the committee if they ever find out."

"Then we'd better make sure they don't."

"Dunno why we don't just move in here and have done with it," grumbled Doyle, unlocking the phoneline office door.

"Think how public-spirited we are," offered Kate.

"Bollocks. Ugh, that milk's off. Looks like herbal tonight. You want a cup, Murph?"

"No ta, mate. Never did like liquid joss sticks. Now, where d'you want me to sit?"

"Make yourself comfy on the sofa. Hope you've brought a book, as some nights it's like watching paint dry." The banter, to Doyle's ears, sounded horribly forced.

"Not tonight, I suspect."

"So you reckon he'll ring?"

"Don't you?"

"I suppose so." Doyle busied himself with clearing the desk and setting out the clipboards and associated paperwork.

"Ray...."

"What?"

"I know this isn't easy for you."

"You don't know shit, Murph. In fact, you're presuming a lot, aren't you?"

"How d'you mean?"

"That I give a flying fuck what happens to Bodie."

There was a tense silence, then Murphy said: "That's bollocks and you know it!"

"Fuck off, Murph!"

"Whatever Bodie did to you in the past, hasn't that been negated by all the things you shared?"

"Like what?"

"Like the times he saved your life?"

Doyle threw one of the clipboards across the room, scattering papers and missing Murphy's head by about an inch. "Save it, Murph. And so what if you're right?"

"If I weren't right, you wouldn't be here."

"Cut it out, you two, it's 7.30 pm and I'm turning the answerphone off," snapped Kate. The phone rang almost immediately.

Doyle reached for it, but Kate tapped his wrist gently. "Let me take it. You need to take some deep breaths."

"Yes, doctor." He closed his eyes and steadied his breathing, hearing Kate chatting to someone who was clearly another phoneline volunteer. When he opened his eyes again, Murphy was watching him worriedly.

"You OK, mate?"

"Fine. Who was that, Kate?"

"Sam. He couldn't remember when he was on next."

"Dozy fucker. He never turned up last time he was supposed to be on with me."

"He spoke very highly of you."

"Doubt it."

The phone stayed resolutely silent for the next hour. Murphy tried to make conversation a couple of times, but was rewarded with grunts from Doyle and abstracted answers from Kate.

Suddenly Doyle exploded out of his chair, kicking the coffee table aside and thumping the filing cabinet hard. "For fuck's sake, the bastard's playing with us."

"Of course he is," said Kate calmly. "He wants you to lose your rag. Come on, sit down and focus, Ray. It won't help Bodie if you blow up at the guy. Now, like it or not, you're having some tea. Peppermint or camomile?"

The phone ringing made them all jump. Doyle reached for it, nodding to Kate to pick up the party line.

"Hello Ray. You don't mind if I call you that? After all, I feel I know you intimately."

"How come?" asked Doyle, with a calmness he didn't feel. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Kate passing the party line to Murphy.

"Oh, I think you'll find we have a lot of shared history. And I really think it's about time we got together to discuss this and that. After all, I've invited a friend of yours along as well to share some memories."

"Please can I speak to Bodie?"

"Missing him already, are you? Just a very quick word with him, then."

"Ray...it's tur—"

"Bodie!"

"He's missing you as well."

"Is he hurt?"

"Oh, I don't think so. Just a little dented here and there. So are you coming to visit us, Ray Doyle?"

"If you tell me where you are and what you want."

"What I want? I don't think I want anything, thank you for asking."

"So why all of this?"

The briefest of silences, and then: "Let's just say memories."

"What sort of memories?"

"Ray, you ask too many questions. But then I suppose it's your job. Now, shall I tell you where to find us?"

Murphy pulled the car into a lay-by and switched off the engine. A small knot of C15 cars and personnel were already there. Doyle glanced out. Aside from Anson, who studiously

cut him dead when their eyes met, Doyle didn't recognise anyone. They all looked frighteningly young.

"You don't have to do this, you know," said Murphy quietly.

"That's not what you hinted earlier."

"For fuck's sake, Ray, I didn't mean you had to put your life at risk. Sitting at the other end of a phone is a vast difference from confronting some nutter."

"Murph, I'll do what I think's right. Now shut up and pass me the map."

"OK, the entrance to the estate is about half a mile down the road. The drive looks to be about another half a mile long. The house is at the end of it, but it's a ruin."

"Are there any other houses in the grounds?"

"The lodge is a ruin as well, but it looks from the map as if there are outbuildings of some sort."

"Who owns it?"

"I've got Burrows checking on that at HQ. The last registered owner is some company, but that's almost certainly a cover."

Doyle ran his fingers through his hair. "The place is vaguely familiar."

Murphy looked at him sharply. "How come?"

"I dunno, do I, or I'd have said. I just have this nagging suspicion I've been out here before."

"On a C15 job?"

"Maybe. But all those new houses and estates don't ring a bell."

"What d'you reckon Bodie was trying to tell us?"

"I dunno. Tur—was what it sounded like. Could mean anything."

"Ray, do you want a gun?"

"Tut tut, Murph, I'm a civilian now, as Anson was so quick to remind me."

"Bollocks to that. You're working for C15 at the moment. I'm not at all sure about sending an unarmed man to confront a murderer."

"Ah, but I thought your sharpshooters would be sitting on my shoulder."

"Yes, but they won't get as near as you will."

"Murph, guns are way into my past."

"I don't like it, Ray."

"I'm not mad about it myself either. Can we get on with it?"

"OK. I'm going to put the bug under your shirt collar, so don't fiddle around with it. You keep me informed as you walk up the drive. Once you've made contact with the guy, I'll start to move the lads in. Now, there's a bullet-proof vest on the back seat."

"No thanks. Waste of time. And I doubt very much if he has a gun. This lad's an exhibitionist, so a fancy knife will suit him very well."

"Is he likely to kill Bodie?"

"There's got to be a chance after the last guy. Things have escalated to such a pitch that he's trying to call the tune, but suspects it's getting out of control. So if he's going down for life, he might as well go out in style. Don't be deceived by all that posturing and camping on the phone—this one's an evil little shit."

"Ray, will he have, you know...."

"I don't know, Murph. Again, there's a strong possibility, given it's what he's done to all the others."

"Shit."

"Yeah. Now let's get this bloody show on the road."

"See those posts there, that's where the drive starts."

"OK." Doyle started to open the car door, but Murphy grabbed his arm. "I'm giving you precisely five minutes to start down that drive. Then the lads are moving in behind you."

"All right. But tell 'em to keep their heads down. And if they could avoid shooting me in the head, I'd be grateful."

"Are you casting aspersions on my crack troops?"

"I won't answer that."

Doyle started to trudge down the tree-lined drive. It was pitch-black, with only the moon providing the faintest spark of light. After the phone call, everything had happened at a blinding pace. Kate had stayed at the phonenumber office, while Murphy had mobilised the troops.

The drive was rutted and pitted, and Doyle stumbled frequently, falling once and grazing his arm. The trees overhead got thicker, shutting out virtually all of the moon. Something skittered in front of him and into the undergrowth. The smell of damp soil and decay got stronger.

The warehouse was dank and cold. Doyle could hear hooters from the river and the sound of squabbling gulls outside. Craven and Green were bent over one of the boxes, checking the contents. Bradley paced around, cracking his knuckles periodically. McLeish sat at a table, smoking a cigar and flicking through paperwork.

A car drew up outside, its engine rough and in need of tuning. McLeish was instantly alert. "Duncan, Bradley, see who that is."

Doyle slid his gun out and followed the big man across to the huge doors. Bradley drew back a grille which allowed him to see out.

"Boss, it's Noddy Hughes."

"OK, let him in."

Doyle slid back into the gloom. Shit a brick, not fucking Noddy Hughes! Of all the rotten lousy stinking motherfucking luck. Noddy was one of the most ingratiating and terminally useless of Met snouts. If he was in with McLeish, he was definitely playing way out of his league. And he'd seen Doyle plenty of times while he was in the police. Maybe, if he could keep well back, disguise his voice, if necessary....

"Duncan, search him."

"'ello Mr Doyle, you gone bad, then?"

"That's right, Noddy." Fuck, fuck.... Doyle had a cold, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"What do you mean, Doyle?" McLeish was onto it like a shot.

"Changed me name, didn't I?"

"Why?"

"He used to be a copper," supplied Noddy helpfully.

"Yeah, got kicked out," said Doyle. He could feel sweat forming on his brow.

"So what did you do?" McLeish's voice was deceptively casual.

"Was on the take, wasn't I?"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

McLeish nodded. Sitting back at the table, he scribbled something on a scrap of paper and handed it to Bradley. "Go and ring Mitch and ask him what he knows about an ex-copper called Doyle."

Doyle started to protest, but McLeish silenced him with a languid back-hander across the mouth. "You button it. If you've got nothing to worry about, nothing else'll be said."

It seemed like an age before Bradley lumbered back, a grin splitting his potato features. "Boss, he's a C15 man!"

McLeish nodded again, that same unruffled mannerism. "Well, well, and what does C15 want with us?"

"He's lying. I went for a CI5 interview years ago, before I got booted out of the force." Doyle's heart was beating double-time. He glanced at the door, and saw that Craven and Green had blocked his way.

McLeish followed his glance. "I don't have time for this. Bradley, you lads have a little chat to Mr Doyle, or Duncan, or whatever his name is, and make him see sense. Call me when you're done with him."

Doyle hurled himself at McLeish, but stumbled and fell over something. As he crashed to the ground, he heard a muffled squawk. Fucking Noddy in the fucking way.... A piledriver of a punch caught him on the side of the head. He tried to get up, but Bradley was looming over him, grinning that inane smile. And he was opening his flies.

Doyle stumbled again and suddenly he was in a clearing, with the ruins of the house in front of him. It had once been grand, but now was covered in ivy and graffiti. The nagging feeling in the back of his mind got stronger. He *had* been here before, but he couldn't remember when or why.

"Hello Ray Doyle, nice of you to join us."

The voice, from very close, made him jump. "Where's Bodie?"

"Waiting for the party to start. I like parties. Do you?"

"Depends on the party."

"Oh yes. I remember some dreadful ones. You might too."

"What do you mean?"

"Follow me. Your friend's waiting."

A torch picked out a path round the side of the house. It was difficult to make out anything about the person behind the torch, save that he was of average height.

"What is this place?" asked Doyle.

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Of course, you'd only have seen it in its heyday. The parties then were wonderful."

"Why are you so sure I've been here before?"

"Because, Ray Doyle, I saw you and your handsome friend here. Oh, you won't remember me, but I remember you both very well indeed."

"What...?"

"In here."

"What's this, the stables?"

"Very good. There used to be a fine collection of thoroughbreds here, once upon a time."

"When?"

"When this place and the people in it flourished."

A door opened and Doyle blinked at the sudden light. Lanterns and torches decorated the room, which looked as if the grooms and stablelads had once used it. The figure in front put the torch down on a table and spun round to look at Doyle. A knife glinted in his hand. "Welcome, Ray Doyle, to my humble abode."

"Hey, I saw you...."

"Yes, I regret I did spill your drink at the concert the other night."

"Where's Bodie?"

"Your concern for him is so touching. Come and see for yourself."

Bodie was crumpled in a corner, his arms and legs tied. In the half-light Doyle could see the blood coating his face.

"Is he...?"

"Oh no, not dead. Just a touch dented, like I told you on the phone."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, my manners are so remiss! My name's James Turvey. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Sir Neil Turvey's grandson...." Bodie's voice was scarcely audible.

"Jesus Christ! The man who...." Doyle's voice trailed off.

"Do finish," said Turvey, interestedly.

"The man behind the death of Susie Carter and a whole load of others."

"No!" Turvey was across the room in an instant, his face pressed close to Doyle's. His breath was sour and he was wheezing slightly. "No! My grandfather wasn't a murderer!"

"He may not have killed them himself, but he might as well have committed the crimes himself."

"You killed him! CI5 killed him. He was dying from the moment you dragged him out of my sister's birthday party in front of all those people."

"He deserved all he got," croaked Bodie. A kick to the ribs made him cry out. Doyle moved instinctively towards Turvey, but was halted by the knife.

"James, let's talk about this...."

"You're just like all the other shrinks, wanting me to talk!"

"I'm not a shrink, James."

"My parents sent me to them. They thought I'd been scarred by grandpa's death. You know my sister went off the rails? Drugs, drink.... And then grandpa died in prison."

"But all these men, what did they have to do with it?"

"And there was me thinking you'd work it all out! Shame on you, Ray Doyle." Some of Turvey's levity appeared to have returned. "Their stupid parents were all to blame in some way."

"How?"

"The judge who sentenced Grandpa to life. The bastard barrister who insisted he'd get Grandpa off, then charged us the earth. The MP who was Grandpa's best friend until it all happened. Grandpa's business partner who took all the money and ran.... Oh, and that stupid actor who was my best friend until it all happened."

"But how did you find them?"

"Oh, I'm a freelance journalist, I know how to track people. I found you, didn't I? And I can get close to anyone. People are vain, they think they're important when you tell them you want to do stories about them. And all sorts of people will answer questions when you tell them you're a journalist. You and your Dr Ross are the same. I couldn't believe it when I saw your pretty face plastered all over the newspapers. Meant I could organise this lovely reunion for us all."

"So what do you want with us?"

"Ray, you are most extraordinarily dense tonight. I want to party. I didn't want to start without you. I thought I'd save the best to last. Now, I've saved the front seat for you."

"James...."

The knife again. "Sit down."

Doyle sat down and Turvey clicked handcuffs round his right wrist, cuffing him to the chair. "I'm sure you'll enjoy the show."

"James, we can talk about this. This isn't the way to resolve anything. Put the knife down and we can talk." Doyle was battling to keep his voice calm. His biggest fear was that the CI5 squad would burst in and turn the whole thing into a bloodbath. In the dim light no one with any sense would risk shooting. But he wasn't sure he credited some of CI5's finest with any sense.

Turvey dropped to his ground beside Bodie, forcing him over onto his knees. He pressed the knife to Bodie's throat with one hand and fumbled with his own fly with the other. As Bodie began to struggle, the knife bit into his throat. He let out a guttural cry, and Turvey laughed triumphantly, tugging at the fastening of Bodie's trousers.

Doyle was vaguely aware of his own voice mouthing inane platitudes as Turvey's manic laughter ricocheted around the room.

"Ray!"

As Doyle suddenly lurched forward, dragging the chair with him, Bodie exploded backwards, sending Turvey sprawling. Doyle was on to him like a shot, trying to subdue the struggling man. The knife blade flashed and Doyle cried out as it cut deep into his shoulder. He struck out blindly with his free hand, feeling his punch connect with bone. Turvey fell away, unconscious.

"Doyle, are you OK?"

"Yeah.... Keep still, let me...." Doyle crawled across to Bodie, the chair dragging behind him.

"Ray?"

"What?" Doyle knelt down beside Bodie, his shaking fingers trying to unpick the knots one-handed.

"Thanks. Come here and keep still. Murph and the cavalry'll be here in a minute."

"Bodie, I thought you were dead, you dumb sod."

"Ssh. Stop wriggling, or you'll lose more blood."

"Don't leave me again."

"I won't...."

Doyle started to sink into the safety of a strong pair of arms, arms that had encircled him in the past, arms that made him feel as if he were the only person in the world.

He came round in the back of an ambulance, with Jax sat beside him.

"Welcome back to planet earth, mate."

"Jesus, feels like someone's had a chunk out of my shoulder."

"They did. That bloody nutter with the knife."

"Where is he?"

"In the ambulance behind. He'll be shipped off to HQ once he's recovered from that concussion you gave him."

"What about Bodie?"

"He's OK. Just lacking some of his usual sartorial elegance."

"Jax, had Turvey...?"

"No. You got there in time."

Doyle leaned back and closed his eyes. "Thank fuck!"

"Hang in there, mate, we'll be at the hospital in a minute."

"I'm not going to any bloody hospital. I want to go home."

"Ray, you need patching up. You've lost blood."

"I've had worse than this. I'll see my own quack if it'll keep you happy."

"Ray, for god's sake!"

"I mean it, Jax. Me and hospitals don't get on."

Jax exhaled loudly. "OK, compromise. You go home and I bring the CI5 quack over."

"Not if it's that wanker MacKinley."

"Nope, he's long gone to that great golf course in the sky. You'll like Dr O'Mahoney."

Dr O'Mahoney was 30-something, blonde and female. Her bedside manner was a vast improvement on her predecessor. She cleaned the wound, put in a couple of stitches and administered a tetanus shot. "Take it easy for the next few days and don't try any weight-training!" she advised.

Jax showed her out, then set about making tea. Doyle was amazed to discover it was still only 4 am. As he was starting to drowse in an armchair, Jax came through from the kitchen with a steaming mug of tea and some doorstep sandwiches.

"Get these down you. I bet your blood sugar's through the floor."

"Jax, I'll be fine. You get back to HQ and nail that bastard."

"You sure? I can stay, or get one of the others over."

"Nope, I'm going to bed after I've eaten this. I feel like I haven't been to bed for a month."

"OK, if you're sure, mate. You did well tonight. Murph'll be around later to get you to fill in the gaps."

"Tell him not to bother, Jax. I'll write it up and send it. No offence, mate, but if I never see CI5 again, that'll be too soon for me!"

"Ray, why didn't you phone me as soon as you got back?" Kate's voice was gentle.

"I was knackered, just wanted to go to bed. I was going to ring you in the morning. Didn't think you'd appreciate a 4 am alarm call!" The joke sounded lame and Doyle just wished Kate would go and leave him alone. There was too much going on in his head.

"Jax phoned me, said he didn't think you should be by yourself."

"I'm fine."

"Did you sleep at all?"

"A bit."

"Fibber."

"Too much to think about."

"Ray, you saved someone's life—Bodie's life. No one died." Kate pushed her hair back from her face impatiently.

"Oh? And what about that poor sod from the orchestra?"

"I meant no one died yesterday. You saved Bodie. And Turvey will stand trial, which is what he deserves."

"I've spent the last however many years trying to forget what I used to be. I might as well not have bothered. It's like I'll never be able to escape my past."

"Why are you so keen to forget what you used to be?"

"Too much blood and too much hatred.... I'm tired, I don't want to talk about it any more."

"Do you want me to stay?"

"No thanks, I'll be fine."

"Marcus wants to know if he can come round later."

"Tell him I'll ring him. I'm not good company at the moment."

"I don't think he's expecting wit and repartee."

"He wouldn't get any."

"It's over between you and him, isn't it?"

"Why d'you say that?"

"Ray, you can cut out the professional tricks right now!"

The doorbell sounded, very loud. "Whoever it is, tell 'em to piss off," snapped Doyle, grimacing as he shifted position on the sofa. Kate ignored this, and he could hear her inviting someone in. Bodie, sporting a swollen eye and clad all in black, which accentuated the pallor of his skin. Doyle couldn't take his eyes off him.

"Hello Ray."

"Hello."

"Can I sit down?"

"I suppose so."

"Ray, I'll pop round later."

"Kate, don't..." But the front door slammed.

"Don't want to be alone with me, then?"

Doyle shrugged and grimaced again. He didn't want to have to deal with all of this now.

"Still hurts, does it?"

"I'm OK. What about you?"

"Fine. Just a few bumps and bruises. Wanted to come and thank you."

"For what?"

"Saving me."

"Didn't do anything."

"Crap, and you know it. That nutter had a knife and was set on carving me and probably you up like the Sunday joint."

"Bodie, it's not funny!"

"But maybe it's the only way I can cope with what nearly happened."

"You and your bloody sick sense of humour."

"Once upon a time you'd have found it funny."

"Some things are too close to home to joke about."

"Sorry mate, you're right...."

There was a silence. Eventually Bodie said hesitantly: "Ray, can I ask you something?"

"What?"

"I want to see you again."

"You're seeing me now."

"No, as friends. And...."

"And what?"

"Could it ever be more? I mean, I heard what you said before you conked out."

"That was self-preservation, mate. Didn't fancy explaining to Murph that I'd let you out of my sight."

Bodie laughed, and Doyle joined in briefly. Abruptly he said: "There's a lot to talk about, a lot to resolve. Jesus, we can't wipe away all that shit between us as if it never happened."

"But do you want to try? I mean, you said before that you loved me once. And whatever you might try to convince yourself, we had some great times together."

"I know.... Bodie, I dunno, this is crazy...."

"What is?"

"What do we have in common any more? You can never come out in your job. Me, it's common knowledge I'm queer. All we can ever do is hurt each other."

"The job might not be an issue much longer."

"What d'you mean?"

"Doesn't look like the Cow's coming back. His quack's going to insist he retires."

"So?"

"I'm not staying in CI5 if Cowley's not in charge. And anyway, the word is it's going to be quietly shut down. And even if the Cow does come back, I'd leave if it meant we could be together."

Doyle stared into space for some minutes. Bodie reached out and gently laid his hand on top of Doyle's. "Ray, won't you give me a chance to prove I love you?"

"Why would you want to bother with an emotional cripple? I'm not sure I can love anyone any more." Doyle's head was spinning. He wanted to look down to where their hands touched, but he didn't dare.

"So you won't even try?"

"It might have escaped your notice, but I have a partner."

"Ah, Marcus. That's his name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Do you love him?"

"That's none of your bloody business! He's a good man. He's been patient, he's been there for me and he treats me like a prince."

"Are you happy with him?"

"I decided a long time ago that I'd probably never be happy again. Content, maybe...."

"But do you really love him?"

Doyle closed his eyes. Bodie picked up each of Doyle's hands in turn, kissing the palms briefly. "Ray, I love you." Then he was gone.

Marcus was sitting on a wall, swinging his legs to and fro. His usually animated face was tired and drawn, and he hadn't shaved that morning.

"It's over, isn't it?" he asked without preamble.

"Marcus, no, I don't know...."

"You know," said Marcus, almost to himself, "I was going to make this grand speech about how I couldn't stand in your way and how I had to let you go. But really I want to scream and shout and beg you to stay with me. Giving you up without a fight seems like a cop-out, somehow."

"Marcus, I...."

"Good-bye Ray. I love you."

"Wait. Please."

Marcus stopped and turned around. Gently he touched Doyle's damaged cheekbone. "Go with what your heart, not your head, tells you, sweetheart."

Doyle watched him disappear across the park. Then, jamming his hands into his pockets, he began to walk away.

-- THE END --

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