## BRASS FARTHING

These stories are both part of what we like to call Nanny's Teddy Tales and Other Bedtime Stories, and well, there are teddies and there certainly are times in bed—but frankly, these stories aren't meant for children. The Glaswegian and her editor share a not particularly favorable view on the topic of Bodie and Doyle and assorted stuffed animals. We would prefer to see either Bodie or Doyle-or both-stuffed, and that takes us back to the bedroom. Oh well, just remember that the Glaswegian's mind is a bit twisted and perverted...

## **NANNY'S TEDDY TALES** AND OTHER BEDTIME STORIES: **EXEUNT**

**EMMA SCOT** 

HE SHUT THE DOOR VERY QUIETLY BEHIND HIM, not disturbing so much as the staleness of the air £3£3£3 with its weight of Doyle's blood still hanging in **42** it. The stain on the carpet was untouched since £3£3£3 the forensic men had taken their scrapings and samplings and filled their little bags with the bits and pieces of Doyle's life. He took the long way round the living room, stepping over shredded brown paper and exploded milk, breathing through his mouth to try to keep the smell of soured milk and fetid blood out.

> And all that did was to make him taste it, as if he'd knelt down to where Doyle had fallen and placed his tongue there and let the loss seep into him. As it was seeping into his bones with the chill quiet of the flat. The coffee mug was still in the sink, the cupboard door still lying open the way the forensic team had left it, the Desiderata still lying where Cowley had left it. Unchanged, all of it, as if the past 32 hours had never happened. As if time had stopped when Doyle had been shot and then shipped off to hospital.

As if Ray hadn't died.

Bodie's knuckles whitened, his fingers gripping the lip of the sink, his teeth sinking into his own lower lip, drawing blood to bead, whereas the gun had drawn blood to pump, life beating out of Doyle too fast, too much lost, too much strength bled from him for him to survive the trip to the hospital and the first cut of the surgeon's knife. Four hours it had taken them, to tell him. Four hours when Cowley had started him on the search to see who had shot Doyle, the old bastard knowing all the while that Doyle hadn't made it, would never know or care who it was who had been behind the whole fucking mess. Ray. Gone, for good. Not just for a while because he'd flown off the handle and had walked out on Bodie again, not just for a while because he simply needed time to be by himself.

Gone.

Bodie stared at the *Desiderata*, hating it for its maudlin sentimentality which had no place in a world that could kill the way it had just killed Doyle. He straightened up, going over to the cupboard where he knew Doyle hid-had hidden—his best booze, away from the gourmand appetites of his partner. There was other stuff in the house that would do the trick just as well, but it was in the cabinet in the living room, beside the stacks of records, surrounded by the books, and in the bottom drawer was the old wooden case that still held Doyle's oil paints, with the dried out tube of white and crumpled cadmium, and he couldn't face such a tangible presence yet. He had once threatened to use the linseed oil as lubricant, one wild and happy

Tuesday afternoon, the day he had discovered just how much Doyle wanted him, bouncing on Bodie's stomach to the strains of Handel... First time they'd had sex, that afternoon, the first time of so very many... And most of them in Doyle's flat, wherever that had been at the time. So very rarely in Bodie's house, both of them so much more comfortable in the places that Ray made home.

He filled a tumbler with Laphroaig, Doyle's own favourite whisky, the special bottle Bodie had bought him that time they had to go up to Islay and had rounded the work off with a quick holiday touring the distilleries. There was no burn as the peaty malt slid down, only a growing glow filling his belly. He'd once told Ray he felt the heat all the way into his belly when Ray came inside him...

His fist clenched, threatening to break the glass the way his pain was threatening to break his control. With great deliberation, he put the glass in the sink, wincing, hating that single coffee mug that was sitting there. The 'if onlies' and 'what ifs' were starting, gnawing at his bones like rats. If only they hadn't had that last argument. If only he hadn't been pushing Doyle away, his own fear overruling his needs. He'd thought Ray understood, had been sure of it... But what if he hadn't? What if part of the reason he'd—died—had been that the stupid bugger hadn't known how much Bodie loved him and hadn't been fighting hard enough to live? What if he'd been too tired of the fighting and the struggling and the slogging to make their relationship work in spite of the scars Bodie carried?

What if it had been Bodie who had killed him, simply by not being here?

He took a deep breath, the life shuddering through him, and abandoned the kitchen. He'd told Cowley he'd clear Ray's things out, go through them, sort them all out, and he'd best start with the bedroom. If he was feeling like this just standing in the kitchen staring at a mate-less coffee cup, then Christ help him going through the stuff in the bedroom. But that was what needed going through without other hands being on it. He'd protected Doyle's privacy from the forensics mob; it'd be stupid now to let strangers go through it just because he couldn't face the memories. He had to get the

bedside cabinet cleared out, get rid of the tubes and the toys and the magazines. They weren't the kinds of things a straight CI5 man would keep within easy reach of his bed. And what if that was part of why Ray hadn't fought, part of why Ray had been so fucking careless as to leave the locks unset? Tired of hiding, tired of the constant pushing at Bodie to acknowledge them, tired of keeping up the façade of chasing women...

He shied away from the rest of his own thoughts and the nagging guilt they heralded. Even clearing out the bedroom would be better than facing himself on this. But to get there, he had to cross the living room again, with its blazon of death and stench of betrayal. Shoes shining reflections of the scattered shopping, he picked his way through the debris, avoiding touching anything that bore the contamination of death. He made sure that he was blind to the brown stain, with its outline drawn in black, the shape that Ray had left behind. A heavy sigh escaped him as he finally crossed the threshold into the bedroom.

Which was no better.

There was no smell of death here, just a faint 43 linger of after-shave and overalls, the odour of £3£3£3 life, a ringing blow to the pit of his stomach, winding him. Nothing here out of the ordinary, just the reminders of everything Doyle had been. And what Bodie had lost.

Dovle.

The grief began then, filling and emptying him in enervating waves of discord. To have had as much as they had, with all the tacit promises yet unfilled, and to have lost it all—a single stroke of the brush, a single blow and it was all gone, just as Doyle had always said it would be. Ray had always said Bodie would be the death of him, but always in the tone of a joke. Bodie collapsed onto the edge of the bed, fists clenching the covers, eyes clenching shut over the tears, holding them and the pain in. And wasn't that the problem, wasn't that why he was here, now, with Doyle already cold and dissolving into no more than memories? He'd held everything in, good bad and indifferent, shutting Ray out, making Ray shut him out in his turn. Keeping them apart, despite all the intimacies of sex and love. But a love he'd never let show, not really. A love he'd always run from, even when he'd

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made such a show of accepting it. He'd been full of the bonhomie and the teasing titillation of touching, but he'd still always been one for the girls. Even when Ray had, in a sense, called his bluff by becoming involved with that Holly woman, he'd still kept up the façade of camping, hiding the truth in plain sight, so that noone would ever think the elaborate charade to be anything other than light-hearted fun of dubious taste.

He wondered now if Ray had thought that was all there had been to it. Wondered if Ray had fallen prey to the games Bodie had made them play. Wondered if Ray had seen through all of it to the fear that undermined everything. Their last days together came to mind, and he stopped wondering.

Ray had seen the truth all right, in all its complexities and distorting convexities, and that would explain his almost melancholy understanding, his gentleness even as he began the slow untieing of the bonds that had held them together. Oh yeh, Ray had known...

Face bloodless, eyes sightless, his head full £3£3£3 of memories too heavy for him to carry, he faced 44 the ceiling, only to turn away from that, too, £3£3£3 when his eyes focussed and made him see the familiar cracked-ice pattern in the plaster. He'd memorised that, without even realising he was seeing, in many a night spent under Ray, Ray over him, Ray in him...

> Frantic for escape, his gaze darted round the room, wounded animal hunting succour. But all he found was a softness with the power to wound ever more deeply.

> That stupid fucking teddy bear, the bone of many an argument, the point of many a barb, the one chink in Doyle's armour that he had used with cruel accuracy. He got to his feet, slowly, terribly slowly, not knowing how leaden his limbs were, not knowing that he was moving like a man in the middle of Sartre's worst nightmare. The teddy was rough in his hands, all the plushness of fur worn away by a lifetime of comforting. Both eyes were in place, sewn on firmly, but they were different, one the amber of a real teddy, the other a navy-blue button stolen from school uniform for surreptitious surgery. Now that it was too late, he found the tolerance to smile at the image of toe-rag Doyle, too tough to be caught dead with a teddy bear,

sitting up at night, giving back the sight to his old teddy, torch propped up on the bedstand, tongue tipping out the corner of his mouth, eyes squinting in concentration. Oh, yeh, he could smile benevolently now, but that had been an effective weapon in one of their arguments, a great way to wound without exposing his own vulnerable flank.

Bloody bear. Knew as much about it as he did Doyle. It was still in his hand when he sat himself back down on the bed, unconscious of the fact that he had climbed under the covers, as if he were getting in beside Ray, careful not too steal all the blankets, leaving enough space on the right hand side of the bed, beside the alarm clock... Pillows behind him, he sat and stared at the bear where it rested in his hands. Small, compared to the largeness of his hands, small the way a child's bear should be, smaller than ever, the bear growing smaller in comparison to the years that a man had kept it and carried it with him. Doyle's one concession to sentimentality, his one enduring symbol of home, his one memento from the past that he would never yield, and Bodie held it in his hands, draped with the black ribbons of bitter argument. How he'd mocked Doyle for this bear, not that Doyle had ever let that defeat him. The bear had never been hidden, never put away, no matter how often Bodie had used it to laugh when that would keep an argument flaring and any possibility of exposing his own weakness far, far behind a solid wall of obfuscation. So that left him with a threadbare stuffed toy in his hands and a mate under the dirt.

Not much to show for all their years together. Not much to show for his own lifetime thus far.

His knuckles were white again, where he was crushing the teddy, the old, oft-mended seams bulging. Small white gaps began appearing, grinning teeth to mock as he himself had mocked. He loosened the grip of his right hand, reaching for his knife, bringing it out to where the light could shine on it bright as sun on water, and as beautifully. Face set and blank, he turned the bear around, slipping the tip of the knife into the back, up high, where the second bullet had taken Doyle. He was careful to get the positioning just right and satisfied, he turned the silent accuser around, measuring where the heart would be, if it had a heart.

Like me, the words whispered around the room, breathed by his lips, and he wasn't sure if he meant that the bear had a heart, like him, or if he were heartless, like it.

No matter. The curved point of his blade would take care of that little detail. He cut, precisely, the exact spot where the first bullet had bitten into Doyle, the wound that had eventually taken his life.

But no, it wasn't that that had killed him, was it? If Bodie had been there, or got there in time, the doctors would have had time to fix him, put him back together again, like Humpty Dumpty. He'd taunted Doyle with that, too, nasty joking that it was only natural that a man who still had a teddy bear would like fairy tales, especially in his position. There was a grimace twisting his face as he twisted the knife, making the blade go all the way through, turning the back of the bear into a collage of carnage, all the insides pushed out, to hang there, stuffing dripping like blood. Bodie leaned back into the pillows, holding the bear up so that it intruded between himself and his view of the ceiling. Natural to do that, really. He'd used the bear to get in all sorts of nasty digs at Doyle, and of course, the nastiest of all were after he'd let Ray fuck him, flat on his back, under this ceiling, under Doyle... Oh, yeh, he'd always made Ray pay the piper for making him need someone the way he needed Ray.

Made him pay, in blood, this time...

Muscles aching from lack of sleep and overwork, he stretched across to balance the bear on Doyle's bedstand, just behind the alarm clock, on top of the book that Ray had left, open and unfinished, facedown.

Facedown. Ray had been facedown when they'd found him, too much of his blood seeped into the carpet, that rotten, fucking thick-pile carpeting that would never come clean, not with all that blood in it...

There was a code, far older than Bodie, going back farther than he could trace his family, but it was the kind of thing that was bred into the bones, down where the mind has no control, for there is no thought involved, only the instinct. And he knew the one thing that honour demanded, the one thing he could do that would appease whatever mad force had forged the world he lived in. Bred into him, from the marrow out, layered year upon year of childhood with its tales of chivalry and Arthur, Robin Hood and the Battle of Britain, noble men atoning for ignoble deeds. The decent thing to do... The gentleman's way...

The way out.

Exeunt, he thought, with a smile all the smaller for its contained wildness. Not exit, but exeunt, the way Shakespeare always did it, clearing the stage, wiping the slate clean to start again with the next scene, the next act, the next play. A new cast of characters, a new plot, a new beginning and middle and end.

Yes.

The decent thing to do.

Yes.

Yes.

The only way, the only way out, the only light there could be at the end of the tunnel, now, after what had happened...

He took his gun out from his holster, where the muzzle had been digging into him, so common a feeling that it no longer registered any more than the flex of muscle against bone registered when he walked. He held the gun, cradled £3£3£3 it, turned it this way and that, appreciating the 45 glint and the gleam of it, this thing he'd carried £3£3£3 with him as long as he'd been side by side with Doyle. This gun had saved his life, and Ray's, more times than he could actually remember.

Perfect, then, that it should finally end that life. Those who live by the sword...

He put the muzzle into his mouth, tongue circling it the way he had Ray, those few times he'd sucked Ray. Eyes closed, he caressed the metal, slowly, with endless patience, until the metal was no longer chill against his lips, but as warm as he was, his body heat stolen away from him by the inanimate, unfeeling metal.

Unfeeling, unthinking.

That's what he wanted to be: as unfeeling and unthinking as the gun and the machismo he'd lived his life by.

He couldn't get it out of his mind, the feeling and thinking of Doyle, in a grave, eaten by worms and earwigs, his fingernails still growing even as his body rotted. Unfair that Doyle should end like that, clay back to clay, ashes to ashes...

He wanted to be ashes, had always wanted to be burned and then scattered, where the

creepy-crawlies couldn't get him. But he'd settle for burying. Only fair, since that was what he'd done to Doyle.

The gun was warm and round and phallic in his mouth, the trigger crooning to him, seductive voice of escape, enticing voice of oblivion.

The ultimate pain-killer.

His finger trembled, faintly, as it never had before, not on the trigger of a gun. But this time, there was a tremor there, as his eyelids flickered, as the tears he had never in his life spilled flickered and threatened to fall.

A deep breath, and with it, the serenity of knowing it would be his last.

His fingers tightened.

His body slumped.

HE SHUT THE DOOR VERY QUIETLY BEHIND HIM, disturbing not so much as the staleness of the air. The stain on the carpet was untouched, the chaos still scattered underfoot. Polished shoes shining, he picked his way through the miserable debris, heading instinctively for the bedroom. He knew, had perhaps known even before Bodie had walked out of his sight, that he would find him here.

And how he would find him.

His face falling older and more haggard as he saw no more than he expected, Cowley turned away to begin the processing of death all over again.

for Weed from Bill and Ben

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