

# PANTING FOR IT OR THE ARTFUL ROGER



*M. Fae swears that the circumstances for this story really did exist some years ago, but she cautions that in the interest of salacious fun, a certain career change has been moved back in time to fit into the Professionals Universe. Heavens! Does this mean that time has been ‘bent’, that we have ‘screwed’ with our setting, and ‘rogered’ our reality? Hmm, this begins to ‘prick’ our interest...*

“Funny sort of place, innit, Bodie?” Doyle murmured, leaning back in to the shadows, looking askance at the world promenading past him.

“Funny sort of people an’ all,” Bodie replied, neatly side-stepping a moustachioed giant of a man in a hooped frock and rather fetching hat.

“Funny sort of informer you’ve got as well. You sure he said this was where you were supposed to meet him?” He pressed himself a little harder against the wall, none too keen on the way the man in the blue dress, blonde Tammy Wynette wig and Havana cigar was looking at him, but on the principle that better safe than sorry, he was keeping his back to the wall. Mainly because that meant his bum was safely to the wall as well, which he deemed was a good preventative security measure.

“Listen, Dougie said to meet him here, and he’s never given me a bum tip before, has he?”

Judging by the more...esoteric elements of the horde, Doyle wasn’t too sure of that, not if the way that bloke was ogling Bodie was anything to go by. “Into all this, is he?” he asked, casually.

“Suppose so. Said he’d often thought he might be a bit this way inclined, and then when he got involved with one of those avant-garde actor types, that was when he was still at school, mind, a bit previous is our Dougie Paul, well, he said that that was it.” He trailed off, mouth agape like a guppy as two visions of profound loveliness wafted past—and closer inspection showed that the prettier one wasn’t wearing a fox stole after all. It was a hairy—an exceedingly hairy—chest. “Em, yeh, well,” he stammered,

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then recovered manfully, hell bent and bloody determined that he wasn't going to let his 'seen it all before' record be ruined in front of Doyle, of all people. So he chuckled, in a worldly sort of way, raised an eyebrow in a cosmopolitan kind of way, and smirked, so very Continental, Doyle half expected to hear him say 'ooh la la'.

"And?" Doyle asked, singularly unimpressed by Bodie's display of BBC2-ish sophistication. "You were rabbitting on about this Dougie Paul fella realising he was one of this lot, and—?"

It took Bodie a second to gather his thoughts, which was hardly surprising considering the vista parading in front of them. "Oh, yeh, it dawned on him one day and then he got involved in it himself. Well, the thing is, it's a slippery slope, all this alternative and esoteric lifestyle choice," Bodie said, doing quite a good Robin Day, "and once he'd got hooked on all of it, he says he just kept on getting more and more involved, in deeper, you know the kind of thing I mean—started out as something he did occasionally and before he knew it, he was obsessed and—well, that was it. Hooked, couldn't get back out."

"Tried, did he?" Doyle asked, sliding neatly in behind Bodie as the roving hand of Bodie's handsome passing man in tights, body glitter and satin slippers made contact with his unprotected front portion.

"More than once, or so he says. Although I think he likes all this, myself. Think he really gets off on it all—he claims it's glamorous. Can't see it myself," he added, as a wraith of a man in a footman's satin livery minced past, pausing long enough to bat his outrageously long false eyelashes at Bodie, who, being a polite and well-brought up young man, smiled pleasantly in return and nodded. Which is when the pallid, fey young thing came waltzing back, eyelashes going nineteen to the dozen and glossed lips pursing seductively. Bodie swallowed, audibly. Doyle sniggered, filthily. The young man simpered, delicately.

"Hello, sailor," he whispered, draping one long-fingered hand on Bodie's sober-suited shoulder. "Or is it 'hello there, soldier'?" He leaned in a bit closer to Bodie's frozen expression, fruity cologne drifting up into Bodie's nostrils. Eyelashes were batted once again, lips pouted to an absurd degree, and a very confident hand

was placed in a very intimate place. Bodie squawked, and the limpid young man whispered, meaningfully, "Or should that be, hi there, Guardsman?"

Bodie didn't know what the hell to do. If he brought his knee up and gelded this vision of loveliness, then Cowley would have his guts for garters. If he didn't bring his knee up and geld the aforementioned vision, then the amorous suitor was going to have Bodie wearing garters before the night was out. And if he said anything that caused a fuss, Cowley would kill him for making a spectacle out of himself—'And why did you enter into a slanging match, Bodie?' Because he was feeling me up, sir. What else was I supposed to do? 'Lie back and think of England—and keep your eyes peeled while you were at it.'—but if he didn't...

"Sorry, mate," and blessedly, Doyle was there, saving him like the proverbial bell. Bodie sighed in relief, and then choked, vulgarly. Doyle, eyes gleaming with wicked wait-till-I-tell-the-Squad humour, was draping one arm casually across Bodie's shoulder, his other hand coming round to pluck, delicately, Bodie's admirer away from that which was so very admirable. Doyle let both the long-lashed lovely and Bodie go, and Bodie heaved another sigh of relief. Then choked again, a strangled cry of utter shock sticking in his throat.

"You see," Doyle was positively lisping, "he's already taken." And Bodie was. Taken, in another slender, long-fingered grasp, while Doyle simpered sweetly at his side, left hand on Bodie's rump, right hand on his front. "Aren't you, darling?" Doyle murmured, gazing limpidly up into Bodie's blue eyes.

"Um, eh, uh..."

There was no other way to describe it: Doyle giggled, girlish and high. "Oh, he just gets so tongue-tied!" He pursed his lips, Clara Bow in tight jeans, and whispered, ever so conspiratorially, "Don't you simply *adore* the strong, silent type?"

"The best ones are always fucking taken," lovely-lash snapped, too annoyed to remember to play the primping nancy. "Don't tell me you're exclusive?" he added, eternally hopeful.

"Um, eh, er..." Well, what else could Bodie say, considering that his butch partner was lisping, feeling him up and blowing in his ear,

all at the same time, which is no mean feat, if you think about it.

“Shit,” the once ardent suitor muttered feelingly, turning on his heel and stomping off, a wind of invective trailing behind.

“Gerroff, Doyle!” Bodie hissed, squirming.

“Keep this up,” Doyle squeezed Bodie right where he was most sensitive, “and it’ll be *you* getting off, won’t it, mate?”

Bodie groaned inwardly: he knew he should never have confessed all. Ever since the infamous Confession Doyle had never missed a chance, not once, not ever, to get a dig in or set him up royally, and the toad would just get worse and worse if Bodie gave him an inch. (Although Doyle was in the process of taking about seven inches...) He could always throw a fit, come over all hurt and upset, but Doyle usually laughed like a stopped drain when he did that, so Bodie decided instead to stand on his dignity, a performance that was marred by the fact that there was a lull in the stream of bustle in front of him and that his audience consisted of Doyle alone, who had never thought Bodie had enough dignity to spit on, never mind stand on.

Bodie tried again to dislodge his tormentor, but without making it look in the process that he was holding Doyle’s hand in encouragement. A luscious idea, but he didn’t think Cowley would be best pleased if he got reports of Doyle wanking his partner in public—even in a den of sin like this one. “Ought to be ashamed of yourself, doing that to me in public—”

“Why? ’D you rather I did it in private then?” And the evil little sod flickered his tongue out to delve briefly, but efficiently, into Bodie’s ear.

“Stop it, Ray, before someone comes! And I didn’t mean it like that,” he added, with undignified haste, seeing exactly what Doyle could do with a malapropism like that.

Doyle shrugged, his attention wandering already, the joke gone stale, and went back to propping the wall up, the sole of one boot flat against the shiny painted surface. “Wish he’d hurry up, your pigeon.”

“Not half as much as I do.” Heartfelt, fed by that unnerving fluttering in his stomach, the one that was always put there by Doyle and his easy, meaningless flirtations. “Not half as fucking much as I do.”

Doyle was examining his nails, a tiny ragged

edge gnawed off by sharp white teeth, even so carnivorous a sight hitting poor Bodie somewhere decidedly below the belt. Doyle exuded sex, even smelled of it half the time. It wasn’t that he came to work unbathed or anything so clatty, but more that Doyle was always on the rise, his musk lingering round him, more erotic than any expensive shop-bought scent. Bodie would describe it as less shop-bought and more shop-worn, harmonising so well with Doyle’s debauched-angel hair and pop-star jeans. Trying hard not to pant with unbridled lust, Bodie looked away, thinking boring thoughts, imagining revolting sights, like Cowley in the bathtub or Maggie Thatcher posing for *Playboy*, anything but the sight of that mouth sucking on so phallic a finger, or those jeans, hugging so phallic a bulge, or that hair—

And he was getting ridiculous, and if he didn’t get his mind out of the groin, Doyle would kick him into the nearest gutter and leave him there for Cowley to find in the morning. So he turned his mind to lofty thoughts, reciting favoured poems, doing quite well until he noticed how delectably erotic some of the sonnets were, and weren’t they the ones Shakespeare had written to his ‘Dark Lady’, the handsome—now who was it? Essex? Sussex? Sex? Oh God, all right, so he wouldn’t think Shakespeare. He’d think... Doyle’s arse, rubbing up and down against the wall, wriggling away. “What the fuck are you doing?” he hissed, not quite willing to actually let Doyle see him looking.

“Got an itchy bum,” Doyle replied, very reasonably, he thought, especially when you compared it to Bodie’s half-hysterical squeak. “Why?” Then he added, glinting, unable to resist the temptation, “Getting you going, is it?”

“Who, me? A skinny little arse like yours? Told you, sweetie, you’re not my type.” And he had told him, bare weeks into their partnering, standing there like a sergeant-major at parade rest, barking the truth out, daring Doyle to comment on the magazine he’d found stuffed under the sofa cushion: so I like blokes as well. You going to make something of it? Doyle, faintly smiling, flicking through the gay porno mag, glancing up at him through untidy hair, saying, I might. One of these days, mate, I just might at that. And if I decide to, you’ll be the first to know. Then Bodie, stung, fearful of mockery,

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fearful of loving and being laughed at: Sorry, mate, you're not my type. Too scrawny by half. Doyle merely smiling at him, with an unnerving edge of utter disbelief, looking from Bodie back to the Dutch magazine overflowing with men sucking men, men fucking men, men kissing—

But Doyle wasn't in the past with him, he was firmly in the present, and half-smiling at him again, the way he had the night of The Confession. "And 'im?" he asked, nodding at a tattooed navvy in pink tutu. "Is 'e your type, eh, Bodie? Get your blood going, does he?"

Friendly, being quite nice about it, and Bodie could never resist Doyle when he was like that, which always led Bodie into making more confessions, telling Doyle another juicy little titbit about his sexuality. No, he could never resist Doyle when Doyle had that gentle Three Musketeer smile to him, all for one, one for all, you and me together, mate... And not only that: best not to ignore Bodie's secret, hoarded pleasure at being able to talk to Doyle about it, about his liking for men, as if by talking about it, he drew Doyle in almost close enough for Doyle to share his desires. Throwing caution and common sense to the winds, he jumped into the joke feet first. "Ohh, yes!" he piped, flapping at the wrist. "Such a nice big boy!"

Doyle grinned at him, pushing off from the wall, ready to saunter over towards the fairy on steroids. "Straight up? In that case, I'm sure he'll be thrilled to know."

Bodie thought he'd die then and there with embarrassment, or shortly thereafter if Doyle landed him in it with the navvy. "Ray!" he hissed, half-reaching out to halt his partner, who shrugged him off; Bodie's heart thumped nervously.

Then, predictably, Doyle stopped, glancing over his shoulder, face alight with mischief, and Bodie wasn't sure quite how far Doyle was going to play this game. "Ray, you wouldn't..."

Doyle's smile widened and he took another step forward, towards the navvy who seemed to have found a fairy wand and was doing a Zorro with it.

"Ray, you wouldn't, would you?"

Doyle winked at him, took another step.

Bodie was beginning to panic: Doyle had a wild streak, a sense of humour that sometimes went so far beyond the limits that it was haz-

ardous to the health. If Doyle set him up with that great bruiser over there, Bodie didn't much fancy his chances of getting out of it with both face and virtue intact. There was a vibration of genuine dismay in his voice. "Christ, Ray—"

Doyle looked at him again, still over the arch of his shoulder, eyes impish. "Changed your mind already? Oh, tut, tut, tut. You always this fickle, Bodie?" He was still teasing, but he was walking back to Bodie now, well-pleased with himself that he'd been able to get his boastfully cool partner visibly sweating. "And you've got the cheek to say I'm the one who ought to be ashamed of himself, you tart. Five minutes a fella, is that it?"

"I was only joking about him."

Doyle gave him a sharp look, the edge in Bodie's voice unusual, even when Bodie'd come off worse in one of their endless game of one-upmanship. "And I wasn't? Christ, you can be a right pillock sometimes, Bodie, did you know that?"

Still not mollified, heart still chundering with the close call with betrayal. "I'd have to be deaf not to. You tell me often enough."

"Yeh, well, my mum always said virtue should be rewarded." His pose against the wall looked bored, but his eyes were sharp and bright with every glance cast in Bodie's direction: each and every glance that was redolent with speculation and oozing reckless try-anything-once curiosity.

Bodie was doing everything in his power not to notice Doyle noticing him. He didn't want to get his hopes up, didn't want to start dreaming that his partner was willing this time, maybe, to try a walk on the wild side. Didn't do to think about it; all that happened then was disappointment and a raining misery that could last weeks until he could accept once again that Doyle was only flirting, just teasing, playing around with Bodie's attraction to him. It lasted an entire second, until all his good intentions went flying out the window as Doyle slid a hand—the very one that had grabbed Bodie earlier—in between his own shirt buttons, and Bodie could see the movement of fingers as Doyle scratched himself. In fact, he'd have sworn he could hear the fragile whisper of chest hair being rubbed. Dry-mouthed, Bodie made himself look away. Trying frantically to ignore the

erotic poem standing beside him, he opted to go back to reciting poetry to himself. But not Byron: too dangerous by half was that randy old sod. So... Sassoon, yes, he'd run through Siegfried. A good war poem, that would get his mind off Doyle... 'I listen for him through the rain...' Well, that put paid to pondering the beautiful horror of war. All right, so that was Sassoon out there with Byron. How about Donne? No, Donne always struck him as queer, and he was trying to forget all that. Tennyson? No, because then he'd start going through 'In memoriam', and all that did was make him want to hug Doyle close and never let him go, in case Death got him before Bodie had a chance to love him properly. Whitman was, naturally, completely out of the question. Mishima as well... Wilfred Owen—no, he did that poem about Hercules wrestling in the nude. Goethe, Genet, Ginsberg, no, all the 'G's were out. Same with Hopkins. And Lawrence, Come on, come on, he half-muttered to himself, there has to be *someone* who wasn't queer... But because he needed so much to think only macho, hetero thoughts, all he could remember were the poems he'd shivered with amorphous desire over, too young to understand why they made him feel so warm and restless inside. At his side, Doyle was fidgeting, a wriggling of his hips in jeans that could be seized by the Vice Squad any second now.

Wordsworth. Bodie latched on to images of daffodils and clouds and wandering and oh, Christ, now Doyle was watching him, bright-eyed and inquisitive, obviously on the verge of asking something risqué.

"So if you don't fancy our friend in the tutu," Doyle asked him, as if there hadn't been a break in their conversation, "what *do* you fancy?"

"A pint?" Bodie answered with faint hope of derailing Doyle's line of questioning. One thing to joke about sex, one thing to bandy about dodgy comments and subtle digs, but quite something else to talk about who and what he liked when everything he wanted was standing right beside him, a pitfall waiting to swallow him up.

"Can't, can we, not until your bloody pigeon turns up. Go on, Bodie, what d'you fancy?" Still that sparrow-bright gaze, nothing escaping the beady eyes.

For an instant of sweet insanity, Bodie con-

sidered saying, simply, 'you'. But then there would be the expression on Doyle's face, and his reaction, followed swiftly by disapproval and revulsion and rejection. Oh, Doyle was broad-minded enough to joke with him about it, wicked enough to tease him about trying it—'one of these days, I just might at that', God, he'd never forget Doyle saying that—but all that was sex in the abstract, and a far cry from being on the receiving end of a *grande passion* from his very large and very male partner. "D'you seriously want to know? Here?"

Doyle swept a hand round to display how alone they were for now, riotous noise and gales of hysterical laughter coming through from the main hall, a cluster of be-denimed men rustling back and forth across the far doorway, but their own backwater was solitary and still, deserted for whatever fun was going on up ahead. "No-one but me and the mice to hear, is there? Go on, I'm dead curious. What do you fancy?"

Doyle had never betrayed him, never so much as let him down. Even if the bugger's idea of rescue could make life a bit awkward—'he's already taken'—Doyle was always there like the RNLI, come hell or high water. So what if Doyle wanted to wade through his private wants and needs, browsing at a jumble sale of Bodie's secrets? It was all part and parcel of their friendship, every intimacy shared except sex. And if Doyle wanted to start *really* talking about sex... It might backfire and burn them both, but if it didn't, then Bodie would have some tantalising new memories to take to bed.

"Yoo-hoo, anyone home?" Doyle, of course, waving his hand in front of Bodie's face.

"Just thinking. Trying to think what I like."

"Christ, your age and you still don't know? I'd that all worked out by the time I was thirteen." A sly, slanting look and then: "Although I've come up with a few new ideas in the past four months."

Bodie could feel the slow blush crawling up his face. Doyle didn't need to say another word: Bodie was used to this teasing flirtatiousness by now, and usually handled it better than this stifled embarrassment. But staying cool was hard, when he wanted Ray so much that it had to be written all over his face—or pointing out from his trousers. Sure enough, that infamous near-telepathy of theirs worked again, and Doyle

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was looking down at him, one eyebrow rising to match the rise of Bodie's arousal.

"Like that, is it?" Doyle asked with sympathy rather than the more frequent amusement. "Sorry, mate. Don't suppose it's fair of me to be having a go at you when you've got all these blokes round you." A slight pause, Doyle surveying a forlorn cobweb clinging to the cornice, time enough for Bodie to get himself pulled together. "Does it really get you going, just looking at fellas like that?"

Bodie hesitated, again tempted by the lemming words on the tip of his tongue. It would be so easy to say that it was Doyle himself who'd got him going this time round, as per bloody usual. "What d'you think? It's not as if it's any different from watching birds waltz past, is it?"

That expression was back again, and with it, Doyle's question, softly, softly whispered. "What do fancy, Bodie?"

There wasn't a trace of condemnation in the green eyes, not a hint of sneer to the slightly parted lips. Just curiosity—copper's nose, Doyle always called it. Bodie shrugged, settling into this next level of closeness with Ray, smiling inwardly to himself at how uncommon this friendship of theirs was. He'd never had a friend like Doyle before, not a male friend anyway. Not that he was complaining, not by a long chalk. But for all the pluses of talking to Doyle like this, there was still the itchy discomfort of actually saying the words out loud, making himself that vulnerable to Doyle's curious stare. "Nothing kinky, if that's what you're after. Just..." he thought about it, taking the time to consciously list what it was that turned him on, what it was that attracted him in the first place. "I dunno. I like a good arse, but I suppose the first thing I notice is if he's quick. Can't stand stupidity, gets right up my nose."

"Never!" Doyle declaimed in mock astonishment. "What a surprise that is."

No different, then, talking about sex or football. Doyle was going to be his usual snotty self, and Bodie found himself grinning, and warming to the subject. "Yeh, must make you wonder how I've put up with you for five and three-quarters months solid, mustn't it?"

Doyle gave him a very old-fashioned look. "You're not getting out of it that easily, Bodie. You were baring your all, mate."

Bodie, never one to resist a bad joke, surveyed his neat navy suit with an astonished eye. "Baring my all? Nah. Too cold, innit? Ouch! Oi, you, that hurt. All right, all right," this, as Doyle started pummelling him, half-fun punches egging him on, "I'll confess. I like a bloke who can move well, you know, really fit and...not so much graceful, no fairy stuff or anything like that. But, athletic, economical the way he moves, light on his feet, supple... Good sense of humour, a good laugh, but not one of these Sloane Ranger twits. He has to know how to be quiet as well, and understand about the job."

Doyle had gone very quiet now, listening intently, and neither one of them was quite sure when this had gone from a frivolous list of things Bodie fancied to a description of someone Bodie could love.

Bodie was sombre now, made all the more so in contrast to the crescendoing laughter from the main hall. "Goes without saying, doesn't it, that he'd have to understand about the killing."

"That's the worst of it, isn't it, mate?" Doyle agreed, too many bitter memories matching Bodie's, drawing them closer together. "Finding someone who doesn't run a mile when they find out you kill people for a living. But it's worse when they get turned on thinking about it."

"Christ, yeh. That happened to you and all?"

Doyle nodded at him, absently fiddling with the sit of Bodie's collar, automatically smoothing the crisp whiteness to lie properly. "There've been a few. One girl was dead keen to have me fuck her with my shooter."

"And you're not talking about the one between your legs either." He couldn't help it: he looked down between Doyle's legs, at the luxuriant swell of sex there. And looked up, only to meet Doyle's very knowing eyes.

"I turn you on, don't I?" Doyle said, very flat, betraying no reaction.

At least he didn't punch me, Bodie thought, stepping back to show Doyle that there'd be no uninvited passes made between them, a tacit reminder that Doyle could always trust Bodie. He fully intended to be very matter of fact about it, but it came out as mournful whisper, the pain of not-having ambushing him. "Yes. Oh, God, yes, Ray, I'm sorry."

Doyle shrugged at him. "Not as if it's something I didn't already know. You've always

fancied me, haven't you?"

What could he say, but the truth? It was already far too late to lie, so he spread his hands in unconscious supplication, terribly near to begging Doyle to forgive him, stay with him, let them still be friends even though he was going to confess the unignorable to a straight friend. "From the second I laid eyes on you. I can't help wanting you."

"Gathered that, from the way you feel me up at every verse end." But still, there was no accusation, only that bright-eyed interest, Bodie's every breath noticed. "Funny thing is, it's never bothered me."

Bodie gulped in a breath, suddenly suffocating under the pressure of possibility, Doyle looking at him like that, not minding that Bodie wanted him. Coiled curiosity, Doyle was standing not a foot from him, and Bodie knew that he'd do it: no matter the cost, no matter the bleakness of morning. If Ray wanted to have a go at gay sex, then Bodie would do it, and never let his friend see the longing for love in him. "Glad to hear that, mate. You know, if you ever want to, you know, sort of, well..."

Doyle's eyes creased with amusement, and then his hand went out to soothe Bodie's reaction away, petting him as one would a frightened dog. "It's all right, Bodie, I'm not laughing at you. Can't be easy for you, can it? Fancying your partner, communal showers after the gym, workouts with me..."

And he was telling him, needing to let this sympathy hear it all. "Worse in the car sometimes, the way you sit, and you're always rubbing up against me. And when you let me touch you, Christ, Ray—" He broke off then, turning away, pressing his hot forehead to the cold wall, hiding away from Doyle, from the aching need that was too much, sometimes, to bear.

After a moment: Doyle's hands on Bodie's shoulder, Doyle's voice, roughly gentle, an odd crack of nervousness threading through it. "You never heard of the old saying, mate?"

Bodie, wordless, murmured a question into the blank wall.

"If you can't beat 'em..."

Slowly, very slowly, Bodie turned round, eyes searching out Doyle's, heartbeat tripping faster and faster at what he saw there. "Join 'em?" he whispered, beginning to hope, to be

sure that this time Doyle was going to let him, and maybe for more than one night's experiment. "D'you mean it?"

Doyle, his turn to be embarrassed, scratched the side of his nose, glance flickering away from Bodie, coming back to him, a rueful grin lifting his mouth. "No, I'm fucking lying. Course I mean it, Bodie. Took long enough to think about it, didn't I?"

Joy, champagne bubble bursting inside him. Half shy, a tiny wariness still that Doyle might be setting him up after all, he reached out, brushed his knuckles gently across Doyle's battered cheek in a clumsy gesture of sweet affection. "What's got into you, mate?"

Doyle, all limp wrist and hard cock was pressing up against Bodie, lispng, "Nothing yet. Thought you were going to do something about that, sailor?"

And plummeting, leaden, into the jocularity: "Don't mess me about, Ray."

"Oh, give me some credit, Bodie. I mean, I'm a bastard, but I'm not fucking Cowley!"

"No, but you'll be fucking me, won't you?" Dizzy now, getting high on the promise, knowing that Doyle meant it, wanted to make it with him, wanted to let him love him.

Doyle's eyes went dark, all black pupil and endless depths. "That's what got me thinking about getting into this with you in the first place," he admitted, tongue-tip moistening lips gone dry with arousal and the desire to kiss. "Once I knew you were into all that, I couldn't stop thinking about fucking you. Didn't worry me, least, not that bit." He was closer now, hands sliding warm and strong round Bodie's waist, pulling his friend in nearer to him until their bodies were pressed hard together, only fabric keeping them apart. "It was the being fucked that gave me a few dodgy moments. Wasn't sure if I fancied it, then I wasn't sure if I could let anyone that close to me, didn't know if I could trust anyone that much, not even you."

Hands trembling, Bodie cradled Doyle's face, finally free to run his fingers through Doyle's hair in something other than matey good fun. "What changed your mind?" he asked, as his sight was filled with the perfection of Doyle's mouth, waiting, just waiting, for Bodie's kiss.

"Wednesday, the 23rd of December, 9.15 A.M."

Delighted, Bodie couldn't help but laugh.

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“Christ, d’you think you could be a bit more specific?”

“Was when I was sticking my neck on the block for Cowley to chop off because of a hunch you had that you hadn’t even told me about yet. Thought that if I was stupid enough to trust you like that, then getting ploughed by you wasn’t a big deal.”

Bodie rubbed his groin against Doyle’s. “That a big enough deal for you?”

Doyle’s head dropped back, long neck exposed to Bodie’s sucking kisses, lithe back held tightly by Bodie’s strong arms. His eyes opened, focussing blurrily on the dark head bent so vampirically over him, and then he groaned, shoving Bodie off, heaving great breaths and running a shaking hand over his face. “Not here, Bodie,” he managed, struggling to control the unexpectedly devastating course of arousal through his body. “Can’t have it off in a public corridor.”

Bodie, cut off from him, standing desperately alone, fighting to keep his hands off Doyle, swallowing hard, expression mutinous.

“Don’t look at me like that, Bodie. We can’t go round fucking in public, you know that! Christ, blokes’re still getting arrested for kissing, so what d’you think Cowley’s going to do if we get nicked for having sex in public? Well?”

Then the harsh demanding was gone, replaced by concern in the dilated eyes, as what he was seeing percolated through the passion into Doyle’s mind. “Bodie? What the fuck’s the matter?”

Bodie, big, strong, brave Bodie, who always had prided himself on being so cool, so imperturbable, so invulnerable. On the verge of tears, or rape, hands clenched into fists, jaw jumping with fragilely leashed tension. “But if we stop, you won’t let me try again. If we don’t do it now, you’ll get cold feet or go off the idea, and that’ll be that, and I’ll never have you, I’m—”

“Bodie, Bodie,” and Doyle was touching him again, a safe, reassuring stroking of hand across hand, then a fleeting caress of finger to parted lips. “Why’d do think I took my time before I said anything to you, eh? The night I found that fuck-mag in your flat, I knew right then and there that you’d let me do anything I wanted to—and you wouldn’t expect me to let you do the same thing back. Fucking hell, Bodie, it was

written all over you that you’d let me use you as trade and then walk away once I’d satisfied my curiosity.” Abstractedly, his fingers were tracing the puckered bump of nipple through fine cotton, Bodie’s eyes closing, an inarticulate moan escaping him; Doyle recognised that if he didn’t step back now, if he didn’t stop touching Bodie this very instant, then the insistent demand of his cock would have them up against the wall, prey to any passing stranger. So he stopped touching, went back to talking, trying frantically to get himself back under control. “Problem with that was I already liked you. Not often I’ll put someone else before what I want, but you—” He sighed, shaking his head, not quite understanding his own reactions to Bodie himself. “Don’t ask me why, but I didn’t much fancy doing anything that’d end up hurting you, so I left it.”

“Shouldn’t’ve. We could’ve been fucking for months already, and you’re going to wind up leaving me anyway, so—”

“Am I?” Quick as a bullet, and striking just as hard, Bodie’s eyes flying open under the impact. Doyle took a step back, forcing his hands into his pockets where they couldn’t touch Bodie and land them both in hot water. “But that’s just it, Bodie. I don’t think I’m going to leave you at all. You don’t get it, do you?” Wry affection, and the almost uncontrollable desire to ruffle Bodie’s hair, to continue the intimacy now that it had finally started. “You’ve always liked fellas, Bodie,” a quickly incisive glance, and another of Bodie’s secrets was laid bare, “in fact, I think you like blokes a lot more than you like women. But I’ve never fancied a fella in my life before. But you, oh, you rotten bastard, you got to me. Made me curious, made me care about you...”

Bodie found his voice, albeit shakily. “Inevitable was it, then?” Heart stopping, waiting to hear if Doyle was going to say what he hoped, oh, God, how he hoped, Doyle was going to say.

“Suppose it was. Got very fond of you, and after that—”

There was, unexpectedly, a riot going on up ahead. Blistering roar, feet stamping and hundreds of hands clapping, and then a tsunami of men running or strolling down the corridor, every single one of them talking or laughing or shouting to someone else. Doyle stepped back, pushed into the wall by the rippling river of



sweating men in hooped dresses and plumed hats, with make-up running, wigs being hauled off, hairy chests being scratched.

“Here, isn’t that your informer?”

Unfortunately, Doyle was right. Bodie groaned in frustration, this being the last thing he needed. He’d forgotten why they were here, had forgotten everything but Doyle, and him, and the sliding sweetness of touching Doyle.

“Bodie!” Dougie Paul was striding up to them, bodice half-unbuttoned, one big hand picking his beauty spot off. “What are you doing back here, darling?” he boomed, coming up to Bodie, bold as brass, and enveloping Bodie in a bear hug and puce ball gown.

“Waiting for you, Dougie,” Bodie answered, not quite brave enough to look at Ray. He had a sneaking feeling that Doyle might not be quite ready for the sight of his partner—and soon-to-be lover?—being kissed and cuddled by a tall man in a dress and full make-up.

“Here in the bowels?” Archly delivered, with another smacking kiss on Bodie’s lips and a quick but all-encompassing grope of Bodie’s buttocks. “So to speak, darling. Now, who is *this* luscious beauty?”

If looks could kill, Dougie Paul would never have even been born. “My partner,” Bodie said, a strong warning in his voice.

Paul heard it, snapped a glance off at Bodie and asked, *sotto voce*: “Straight?”

“Yes, bloody straight—”

“Actually,” Doyle said, continuing the soft undertow of seduction between them, “only temporarily. Right, Bodie?”

And it was worth it, to see Bodie blush. Red-faced and gaping, then the glowing realisation. “Straight, for the time being,” he said to Dougie, positively beaming with pride.

“Talk about the luck of the fucking Irish?” Dougie muttered, looking from Bodie to Doyle and back again in comic disgust. “But enough of your sex life, Bodie, before I grow so jealous I fuck your friend just to annoy you. Why are you wasting away here in the nether regions?”

“Because, Dougie,” Bodie answered, neatly intercepting Paul’s investigating hand, “you told me to. Be here at 7 P.M., Christmas Eve, that was the message you left.”

Dougie Paul tut-tutted, but before he could make another comment, he was accosted by the

handsome young man in false eyelashes and tights. “Eddie, darling, I was looking for you! Just thought I’d ask these handsome young darlings—”

“Don’t bother,” the young man they now knew was ‘Eddie’ said, slipping an affectionate arm round Paul’s waist. “They’re both already taken.”

“Strictly speaking, that’s not quite true—yet, anyway, although judging by my dear friend here—” a very swift, but telling, squeeze of Bodie’s prick, mere trousers not nearly enough to keep Dougie Paul from his goal, “it won’t be for very much longer at all. But you,” he turned his full attention to his cohort, “were absolutely wonderful, darling, truly divine.”

“Do you really think so? I was so dreadfully nervous, the old ticker going—”

“No, no, darling, you really were quite superb.”

Somewhere in all of this, Doyle’s face had taken on a very interestingly peculiar expression, somewhat like that of a child catching Mummy and Daddy going at it in bed. Bodie surveyed him with sinking heart. If Doyle was turned off by all this, if Doyle thought that they were going to end up like this...

“Bodie, darling, I really must run. I’ve got to get this silly frock off and get my face cleaned. So I’ll give you a ring, shall I?”

“Give me a ring?” Bodie, outraged, suddenly furious that Dougie Paul should have dragged them all this way on Christmas Eve for God’s sake, and then put Doyle off by his drag queen impersonation and now was trying to palm him off without a word of info? Fat chance. “Not bloody likely, mate. You can tell me what you brought me here for or—”

Dougie Paul was looking at him strangely, but not half as oddly as Doyle was looking at the prematurely balding Eddie. “Bodie, what the blazes do you think I brought you here for, darling?”

“Information,” Bodie said succinctly, biting the word out, teeth snapping shut on it. “Fucking information, the same as you always do—”

“Information?” A shake of the head, a ostentatiously patient sigh. “You obviously didn’t get the entire message then, did you, darling? You were supposed to be here at seven, but not in this dingy corridor. Out front, darling, with

all the other revellers.”

Bodie was just staring at him as the flood of men slowed to a trickle and Dougie Paul and his friend made as if to join the departing.

“I left tickets at the booking office for you, lovey. I thought you’d rather enjoy seeing me do the Wicked Stepmother in ‘Cinderella’.”

“No info?” Bodie asked, beginning to feel a complete and total fool.

“No, darling. Just a pantomime for Christmas, because you’re such a child at heart.”

He was no longer beginning to feel a fool: he had reached that horrible state, and with bells on. “Oh. Right. Well.”

Dougie leaned over, kissed him lightly on the lips, patted him paternally on the cheeks, squeezed him suggestively on his nether cheeks. “Don’t be sad, darling. I’ll leave tickets for you, Boxing Day matinée all right? And bring your lovely friend, do.”

“Oh, yes,” added Eddie, smiling coyly. “We would so enjoy that.”

A flutter of goodbyes, and then they were gone, and Bodie and Doyle were left alone in the corridor again, the far doorway going dark as the last of the stage lights were turned off, the last of the stragglers disappearing through doors that shut firmly.

Bodie looked at Doyle, waiting for whatever reaction was heralded by that most peculiar expression; he was resigned to whatever Fate had in store for him. He’d been so sure, so absolutely fucking certain, that Doyle was going to make love to him tonight, but looking at that stunned and bemused face, he wasn’t so positive now.

“Bodie... Those blokes...”

Oh, God, here it came. The ‘I don’t want to be like that’... “They’re *actors*, Ray, what else do you fucking expect? All right, so they’re queers as well, but they’re in a fucking panto, that’s why they were in dresses and tights and make-up and all that crap. And all the lavender stuff? Christ, Doyle, everyone knows actors are fairies, but that’s not because they’re queer, I mean, even the straight ones ponce around like nancy boys, and Dougie’s just flamboyant, he kisses everyone, didn’t mean anything...” He trailed off, drying up under Doyle’s steady gaze.

“I do know all that, Bodie,” Doyle said with a cutting edge of sarcasm. “I did gather that, you

know. Nah, that’s not what’s getting me, is it?”

“Look, Ray, I’m not into the theatre crowd. It’s just that I’ve known Dougie since school, and don’t ask me how, but he comes up with some good info on all kinds of stuff—”

“I’m not fucking talking about your pigeon, Bodie! Christ, you’re a proper thickhead, aren’t you? Hasn’t it dawned on you yet?” Bodie looked at him, blankly defensive. “Eddie,” Doyle added, waiting for the penny to drop. “Your friend’s Eddie.”

“So he was a bit on the precious side—” He cut himself off, not wanting to get into all this, wishing only that they’d left without waiting for Dougie Paul to show up, long before the panto had ended, while Doyle was still willing to be loved.

“Bodie,” Doyle said, taking Bodie by the hand, leading him along the deserted corridor until he found an unlocked door that opened onto a prop room filled with chaises longues and Victorian tables, “think Eddie.”

Bodie, shutting the door firmly behind himself and blindly seeking Doyle’s warmth in the dark, wasn’t up to thinking about anything other than the fact that Doyle hadn’t changed his mind. God, his heart was soaring, Ray had been telling the truth when he said he’d thought this all through, that it was all about how much he trusted Bodie, and how he cared—

“I said, Bodie,” Doyle slid comfortably into the circle of Bodie’s arms, “think Eddie.”

“I’m thinking Eddie, I’m thinking Eddie,” Bodie lied, feverishly undoing Doyle’s shirt buttons, Ray’s more nimble fingers returning the favour.

“Now think corgis.”

“Don’t be disgusting, Ray!” Then, a breath before he could kiss Doyle, realisation hit him over the head with a mallet. “You mean—”

“Yep.”

“But you can’t mean—”

“Oh, yes, I can.”

“No, you can’t. That Eddie could never be—”

“He,” and the word was underlined by Doyle’s voice, “works in the theatre, doesn’t He?”

“Yeh, but—”

“And Dougie’s Eddie is young, and he’s going bald, and he’s about that height.”

“Yeh, but—”

“And with all that make-up on, it’s hardly surprising we didn’t recognise him.”

“But he made a pass at me!”

“Even Royals are allowed to have good taste once in a while, mate.”

“Fucking hell! Small wonder you had that funny look on your face. Thought it was because seeing Dougie in his costume was giving you some funny ideas about me, especially when he kissed me like that.”

“Only funny ideas it gave me was about how I hadn’t had a chance to kiss you properly yet. You going to do something about that?”

Bodie was, and did, his mouth opening against Ray’s soft lips, his tongue easing past hard teeth to find the limber tongue within. He wrapped his arms around Ray, felt the answering tightness of Doyle enveloping him, and decided that the world could end right now and he’d still be happy.

“Love you,” he murmured against Ray’s throat, “love you so fucking much.” And stopped, dead, cursing himself for saying it too soon, for having the moon on a silver platter and then asking for the stars as well like a greedy brat.

“Course you do,” Doyle said, sucking on Bodie’s earlobe, moving down to mark the side of Bodie’s throat and then lower still, to fasten on a peaked nipple. A swathing lick across Bodie’s chest, then he was back for a kiss, hands holding Bodie’s head tightly steady, while his tongue plundered wet warmth, taking possession of what had been so freely given. “That’s cos you’ve got good taste, mate,” he whispered, letting go only long enough to shove his own shirt out of the way, hugging him close, finally skin to naked skin.

Bodie was arching against him, fever-hot, hands fumbling at trouser buttons and zips, stumbling over elastic waistbands, hurting Doyle in his haste. “Slow down, slow down, come on, Bodie, let me do it. Like that, oh, yeh, that’s it...”

Dreamy voiced as he got his first feel of Bodie’s cock, the very first touch of his hand on another man, and Doyle loved it, all that hardness under silk skin sliding so delicately over the swollen head. He knew how that felt, knew every minute sensation Bodie was going through, knew precisely how to move, how hard to press, where to stroke his finger softly.

He was giddy with excitement, alight with Bodie’s shuddering passion and with the breathless words whispered in his ear. The last few faint reservations that had held him back for too long disappeared in the face of delectable reality: he loved the way Bodie felt against him, was thrilled by the rigid weight of another man’s cock in his hand, mouth watering at the thought of having Bodie, this precious part of Bodie, inside him, fucking him hard.

“I want you to fuck me,” he said, and Bodie went very still in his arms.

“You mean that?” Voice quivering, cock straining, arms hugging Ray very tight. “D’you really mean it, Ray?”

“Course I fucking do, you moron. And I want it now, Bodie, do me now...”

They stumbled together to a red plush chaise longue, neither one of them *compos mentis* enough to notice whether it was a prefab prop or the genuine article rescued from the fireplace to deck up the stage. For them, it was simply something soft enough to lie on, and large enough that Bodie could spread Doyle out on it, and then cover that hard heated length with his own body. Between them, they managed to get off the worst of their clothes, until Bodie tired of such practicalities and devoured Ray with kisses, from the tip of his nose to the hollow of his breastbone, to the dip of his navel, to the arrowing hair that led unerringly to Ray’s arching sex, pulsing so headily under Bodie’s tongue. Overflowing with love for this man, Bodie took Ray in his mouth, sucking on him, running his tongue under the tight slipperiness of foreskin, teasing and tasting, bringing Doyle close to the edge of his endurance.

“Gerrup here, Bodie. No, not like that. Turn round, want to suck you...”

Bodie shuddered, in danger of losing it just because of the husky passion in that dark voice. He twisted, half falling off the old furniture, a cloud of dust making him sneeze, so that he came worryingly close to biting Ray in a singularly deflating manner. Instead, he pulled back, and poised, a bridge over Ray’s body, holding himself still, save for the merest flicker of his tongue on the seeping head of Ray’s cock. He waited, not pushing it, glad of the time to bring himself back from the brink, letting Doyle set the pace. Then Doyle’s hands were on his

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rump, and only then did he lower himself, taking Doyle inside as Ray absorbed him.

Doyle wasn't sure that he'd be able to do this: Bodie loomed large and thick and long over him, so close that he could see the pulse in the vein. But he had been thinking about it for a long time, all his intellectual questions about life-change answered, and now all he had to conquer was his own fear of inadequacy. Tentatively, he licked at Bodie, grinning in simple delight as that made his partner shiver and sigh. He reached up, hands filling with the lush bounty of Bodie's arse, drawing Bodie down nearer and nearer until the snub head was pushing at him, wet as Bodie's tongue had been earlier, pressing past his lips like a kiss. He opened himself up to it, his own cock being sucked into Bodie's mouth as he sucked Bodie into himself. Bodie thrust, choking him, and he shoved upwards, controlling Bodie's movements, easing him back down when he was ready once more. Better prepared, familiar now with the feel and the smell of a man inside his mouth, he could take more of Bodie in. He was kneading Bodie's arse, sliding his hands over the ripe rump, adoring all this heat covering him with such taut passion.

And then he let back his head and screamed, Bodie slipping farther into his throat as Doyle was washed by waves upon waves of indescribable pleasure from that most intimate touch of Bodie's moistened finger. No-one had ever been inside him before, apart from the horrible violation of doctors removing bullets or appendix. Never had there been anyone inside him with this terrible, devastating tenderness, making him no longer alone, no longer separate. Bodie's finger was gentle in him, respectful of his virgin arse, finding and exulting his prostate. Unique sensation, commingling with the ecstasy of being inside Bodie and having Bodie inside him, equal partners in this, as in everything else, as it had to be for them. He was keening, deep in his throat, and could feel the vibration echo through Bodie. He was going to come, couldn't hold back, was coming and coming...

Bodie flexed his finger, his mind aswirl with the exquisite knowledge that this was Doyle he was inside, that this was Ray's first time with this, that no-one else had ever been trusted enough or loved enough to be allowed this. Ray was taut as a bow under him, swallowing him,

sucking on him hard, doing wonderful things with his mouth and throat. Bodie pressed his finger home again, and was rewarded with the splashing heat of Doyle's essence on the back of his throat, Ray thrusting up helplessly, clenching Bodie's finger inside him, spilling himself into the haven of Bodie's mouth. Bodie nuzzled him caressingly, gentling Doyle back down from orgasm, holding the softening cock safe in his mouth until Ray was back with him, hands scrabbling at him, trying to get him to turn.

"C'mere, you, come on. Want to taste myself on you. Get up here, let me kiss, come on, love, move!"

Then Doyle was kissing him, laving the inside of his mouth, sharing the taste, stealing every last droplet for himself. Ray's hands were busy on him too, pulling him down to lie flat on top, hands on his arse encouraging him to rub himself against the moist laxness and soft belly; Doyle pushed up against him and Bodie's hardness caught between them, stroked by the coarseness of Doyle's pubic hair, squeezed hard by their close-pressed bellies. With Doyle's tongue in his mouth, with Doyle's hands on his arse, with Doyle surrounding him with heat and demanding hunger, Bodie came, his seed erupting whitely on his belly and Doyle's; Ray's hand slid immediately between them, capturing some of the shimmering semen, bringing it up to lap with his tongue, then kissing Bodie deeply. And it was the most exciting, most tender thing Bodie had ever done, sharing the taste of himself with someone he loved as fiercely as he loved Ray.

They kissed for a long time, slowing down to small butterfly kisses pressed to damp foreheads, quiescent nipples explored in the leisure of the afterglow, occasional words whispering their pleasure at this, and this, and how much each pleased the other with his beauty.

But it was growing cold, and discomfort burst their bubble of happiness.

"Jesus, but I need a pee," Doyle announced, putting paid to the romance of the moment, neither one of them into golden showers. He clambered out from under Bodie, laughing gleefully as his partner tumbled in an undignified heap onto the liberally dusted floor.

Bodie lay there for a moment, unwilling to get up, for then he would have to chat normally,

beginning the slow withdrawal from ultimate intimacy back to the normal distance of daily life. He didn't want to admit reality yet, wanted to hold on for a few more minutes to his dream of Doyle loving him. So easy to convince himself of that in the magic of love making, but so hard to believe when Doyle was pulling underwear and jeans and socks on, for all the world as if they'd never been closer than workmates. If he opened his eyes, only the location would mark any difference between what was happening now and what had happened a thousand times after a workout or a training session. And he simply wasn't ready for that, not yet. Just another minute, that's all he was asking for, just another minute of pretending that Doyle loved him, that pillow talk was truth, that Ray would still love him once they walked out that door and back into the real world. Just another minute...

"You going to lie there all night, or are you coming home with me, mate?"

That snapped Bodie's eyes open, in time to see his trousers come flying at him.

"Get a move on, Bodie, we don't want to end up getting locked in this mausoleum, do we? Not when I've got a nice big bed at home, and a Christmas tree, *and* Christmas pud for tomorrow." Now fully dressed, he stood with hands on hips, watching as Bodie struggled into clothing, the attempt suffering from the way Bodie couldn't take his eyes off him. "Christ, mate, were you still prat enough to think I was only satisfying my curiosity? Trying on a bit of the queer? Don't be daft, Bodie. D'you think I'm going to risk my career for the sake of a quick tumble when I could borrow one of your video nasties if all I was was nosey?" He handed Bodie his jacket, watching while it was shrugged on,

never once letting his flow of comments slow. "Just goes to show how much I love you. Have to, to put up with—"

Bodie's face lit up with a delighted grin and he looked as if he felt ten feet tall. "Well," he said, vaulting neatly over the chaise longue to land at Doyle's feet, dropping a kiss on the curve of the broken cheekbone, "that's all right then, isn't it?" He was bursting with it, ecstatic and elated and suddenly conceited, for surely he had to be the second most wonderful person in the world if Ray Doyle loved him? With a flourish, he opened the door, bowing Ray through it, the palatial gesture popping a thought into his mind. "Here, if that Eddie bloke really was you-know-who, and he was chatting me up about being a Guardsman, d'you think that means all the rumours about that lot are true?"

Doyle, eyes gleaming, started singing 'Half a Sixpence', and then his filthy, overripe chuckle billowed down the corridor behind him. Bodie followed on, watching Doyle's back, eyes addicted to the clench and flex of buttock, a spring to his step as he went home with Ray. Sleepy night-watchman locking the door behind him, Bodie and Doyle walked past the gaudy posters advertising *Cinderella: a Pantomime for children of all ages!*, too enraptured in each other to even notice any good pseudonyms plastered there in fake gold. Freezing rain dotting the street in the first threat of yet another stormy night, Bodie didn't even feel it as he slung his arm around Ray's shoulder, looking for all the world to see like two young blokes who'd had one drink too many. Together, they wandered slowly off to the car, and then, at last, finally home.

