

PERMANENTLY ATTACHED AT THE HIP

'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men

Gang aft agley'

—but contrary to Burns' opinion, sometimes they 'gang' exactly as you'd like them to. Here, in the second of the DIY (do-it-yourself) series, what seems to be courting hilarious disaster turns into a courting of a different persuasion. And was it Cowley who referred to Bodie and Doyle as the Bisto Kids? Nahh! They're the Banter and Bicker Boys

WHISTLING under his breath, Bodie let himself into Doyle's latest flat, the tune changing to a low whistle of pure admiration. Well, perhaps not so pure admiration: compared with where Accommodations had stuck him this time, Doyle's place would put the Taj Mahal to shame, which brought out Bodie's impurest jealousy. In no hurry, he took the time to have a good look around as he started in on his partner's new home for the duration. Proper garden door, nice bit of patio—be great for tomatoes, Bodie thought to himself, not that he'd ever admit to a green thumb let alone the know-how of growing a vegetable garden. No need to ruin his reputation by confessing he had more than a passing knowledge of those things that grew and blossomed and ripened. Still, that corner there would be perfect for a tub with strawberries, and that wall would be just right for runner beans... Shaking his head at the domestication even his raucous life had never quite stamped out, Bodie crossed the small patio, picking up his tune again, enjoying the afternoon sunshine, made even happier by the simple fact that the bloody conference was finished, Nîmes was more than a Hovercraft away, Cowley was safely at home in his mews flat, and Bodie could scoop up his mate and go out for a pint of real beer, not that cat's piss they had in France.

Even through the glass door, Doyle's kitchen fairly screamed the personality of the occupant, making Bodie smile. Yeh, a nice drink or two, then

back here for something to eat, cup of Doyle's good coffee after, feet up, watch the telly or gab, and all of it done in perfectly reasonable, absolutely comprehensible English. God, but it was good to be home—and two days early at that. Brilliant. Be nice to give Ray a bit of a surprise—and if the gods were smiling, then Bodie might even give Doyle's bird of the moment an even bigger surprise. Always fun that, landing Ray right in it, enough to bring a grin to Bodie's face as he dumped his over-stuffed duffel bag on the doorstep and dug through his pockets.

Skeleton key jemmying the lock, Control already warned that Doyle's silent alarm was about to go off, Bodie let himself in. And stopped, dead in his tracks. The smell was awful, fetid and rank, the burning acidity of chemicals. Wishing he hadn't left his RT in the car, Bodie drew his gun and made a quick recce of the downstairs. Nothing untoward to be seen, but the putrefied smell was coming from upstairs, as were small, faint noises. Someone tied up, unable to move fully, perhaps? Doyle making the noise, maybe, or whoever was responsible for the chemical spill moving around looking for something—another bloody American 180? Too risky to call out for Ray then, and hang proper procedure—he wasn't going outside for his RT, not after the last time he'd come, unannounced, to Ray's flat.

Ugly, that had been, and uglier every time he thought about it. And that had been the result of a

clean shot—this hellish stench stank of acid, of Phantoms of the Opera and ancient bottles of vitriol. Careful to make not so much as a whisper of sound, Bodie crept slowly up the stairs, gun gripped reassuringly heavy in his hand. As he ascended, the noises were expanding, identifying themselves with their familiarity: water running, the squeak of a tap being turned off, the shuffle of footsteps, the rattle of the towel rack.

In the bathroom, then, either answering a call of nature, or washing off some splash of the corrosive. One or two other possibilities didn't even bear thinking about. The last step now, the narrow runner carpet giving way to the wall-to-wall type, Bodie observing all the details automatically, although none of it registered on a conscious level right now. Nothing but blank wall to his right, but to his left, two doors hung limply open. The smell was worse up here, far worse, until Bodie had to fight the urge to sneeze or clear his throat of the irritation. Must be much worse in there, he thought, nearing the first open door. Must be much worse for Doyle.

The open door was nothing more exciting than a hall cupboard, Hoover chucked in with a motley pile of other household necessities, a set of shelves serving as an airing cupboard of sorts. Mouth set in a grim line, Bodie carefully approached the open door from which spilled light and fumes in equal measure.

One last step, and then Bodie whirled into action, kicking the door all the way open, bursting in, immediately lunging into ready stance. "Hold it!" he shouted. Then stopped, looking. The looking took quite a while, which was hardly surprising. It can be just the teensiest bit odd to come racing upstairs to rescue your partner from this week's mad scientist only to discover said partner clad in nothing but his dignity and hair curlers. "You..." Bodie spluttered again, choking. "You—"

"Yeh?" Doyle demanded, all aggro and bluff, as if sheer bull-dogged viciousness would make up for the fact that the average drag queen had nothing on him. For that matter, Doyle himself didn't exactly have much on himself, a fact of which Doyle was uncomfortably aware. He didn't much mind Bodie seeing him in the buff; what bothered him was the way the sight had Bodie writhing around in complete hysterics. Although Doyle was willing to concede that might have less to do with his hairy legs and chilled-into-minutiæ genitals

than the awful fact that Bodie had caught him with his curlers in. Pulling himself together—and resisting the urge either to pull his hands over his poor shrivelled cock or to pull the rollers from his hair—Doyle stuck his hands on his hips, thrust his chin and his petted lower lip forward and snarled: "So what about me then?"

"You..." Bodie managed again, then collapsed, boneless, against the door jamb, sliding slowly down to the floor as he descended rapidly into absolute hysteria. "You..."

"What, is that the only tree you know?" Doyle muttered, and mere bravado proving seriously unequal to the task, he snatched the towel up from where he'd dropped it a couple of minutes before, and just happened to find a damp patch of skin that he could rub so that the towel draped down nicely—not that he was covering himself up or anything, of course. "Or were you planning on saying something meaningful?"

"It's just..." Bodie dissolved into another spasm of giggles, one hand coming up to point, helpless with hilarity, at Doyle's current state. What with the natural giddiness that comes part and parcel with relief, the state Doyle was in, the truth of the whole thing and best of all, the blackmail potential of the situation, Bodie was in seventh heaven. Or would be, if he could stop laughing long enough. "I never thought—"

"I'd never've guessed," Doyle told him sourly.

Bodie was too delighted to bother with such a routine slur to his intellect. "Well, what'd you expect? I mean, you..."

"You back on those bloody trees?" Doyle asked dismissively, the sanguine effect completely ruined by the expression on his face.

"But Ray, you..." Manfully, Bodie pulled himself together before Doyle decided to stitch him up. "Sorry," he said, sounding like he almost meant it. "It's just, well, I never realised you had a perm before..."

Discretion being the better part of valour, Doyle decided that he really did have to bend over the sink to wash something off his face—preferably the humiliating blush. Of course, he wouldn't half mind if he could hide his entire head—curlers, perm papers and all—while he was at it. Having already decided to dump him up to his armpits in all the rotten, lousy stinking luck a man could have in one day, Lady Luck decided to really get him back for all those bullets that had just missed him,

and all those times Bodie, Cowley and/or the entire active complement of CI5 had come over the ridge to rescue Ray: the timer went off.

Bodie, still hiccupping with suppressed giggles, agreed that the bloody buzzing noise was horrible, but he didn't think it warranted the very pained expression on Doyle's face. "What's that for?" he asked, all innocence and anticipatory glee, the blackmail book rapidly filling up.

"Nothing," Doyle muttered, slamming his hand down on the timer, knocking the defenceless little thing onto the linoleum floor where it lay, silenced forever. Which was pretty much what Ray would like to do to Bodie.

"Has to be something," Bodie said reasonably, although breathlessly, the hooting laughter barely restrained by Bodie's survival instinct.

Doyle gave Bodie a look that would have had a lesser mortal running, screaming for Mummy. Bodie, of course, just slouched there, grinning.

"Come on, Ray," he wheedled, "it had to be for something. A man doesn't put his timer on for just nothing, does he?"

Glacial stares had nothing on Doyle. Unfortunately, they also had no effect on Bodie, and although the clock had stopped ticking, time was still passing. Which meant if the didn't get on with it, he'd be giving poodles a run for their money. "Open your mouth once, just once," he snapped, throwing his towel (in lieu of a sharp, pointed object or bullet) at Bodie for emphasis, "and I'll ram your fucking tonsils out your arse."

Doyle turned his back on his partner, started fiddling with a bottle and rubber gloves he'd taken from the medicine chest. Bodie sat staring at him happily, counting the seconds off. Timing perfect, he announced, "But I don't have any tonsils, Ray."

"Then I'll cut your balls off," Ray replied, smiling sweetly, the threat of that maniac's nice smile completely undermined by the big yellow rubber gloves and curlers adorning his otherwise naked self. "Or are you going to admit you don't have any of those either, eh?" Triumphantly, he turned his back to Bodie again and set about saving himself from doing a Shirley Temple.

Given the circumstances, Bodie didn't think Ray really ought to be bent over the sink like that. The damp towel positively itched in his hand, but, being of a kind, gentle, and sweet disposition, Bodie refrained from slapping Doyle in the most painful of manners. Of course, it could also have

been because Bodie had a better idea. Scrambling to his feet, he edged round his stooped partner, crouched down on his knees and made a point of examining Doyle's genitals, much to Ray's very loud outrage, and much more intriguingly than Bodie was about to admit, especially to himself. "Not only do I have some, I've got more balls than you," he said, seraphically.

"Oh, you've got three marbles in your pocket then, not two? Poor lad."

Further such lofty repartee was prevented not only by the coarseness of the conversationalists, but also by Bodie's ever-delicate hooter. "Christ, Doyle!" he exclaimed, backing off as quickly as the smallness of the room would allow. "What the hell are you pouring on there?"

"What d'you think I'm putting on now?" Doyle demanded, peeved. "And why can't you just bugger off and leave me and my perm in peace?"

"Oh, that's nice, that is," Bodie said in his best Hamlet, "I come back from a week *sur le Continent*, and what do I get from my best mate? Do I get a 'hello'? Do I get a 'nice to see you, mate'? No, I get a 'bugger off—'"

"Yeh, well, you shouldn't just walk in on a person, should you? Coming in here like the poor man's James bloody Bond..."

"As opposed to skulking in here like the poor man's Barbara Cartland," Bodie told him, practising some of the new digs he'd be able to get in for the next decade and another idea springing, full-bloom, into his mind..

Doyle took the wicked grin to be pleasure at the Cartland crack, which was all for the best, or would be, in the end. "Skulking? In my own bloody bathroom? Listen, mate, in case you'd forgotten, you're back in England now, where a man's home is his castle, an' I can do whatever the fuck I want to in my own bloody bathroom, all right?"

"Upset are we, dear?" Bodie enquired with all the fruitiness of an orchard. "What is it, petal? That time of the month again?"

"The only time it is is for you to sling your hook and bugger off, Bodie." Of course, it would all have been far more effective if he hadn't had his head stuck in the sink while he dealt with the perm neutraliser, and it would have been even more effective if one of his curlers hadn't picked that moment to get itself stuck in the hot tap. Muttering crudely under his breath, Doyle set about disentangling himself, all fingers and thumbs and curlers.

"Having a bit of bother there, eh?" Bodie asked cheerfully, wishing this was Doyle's old flat, because then he'd know precisely where the camera was, thus enabling him to record this for posterity and the VIP Lounge notice board.

"Oh, no," Doyle sneered, tugging his thumb free from the cold tap, "I'm just having a bit of fun, that's all."

"Well, in that case, I won't lend you a hand then."

"I wish you'd lend me your brains, butch," Doyle camped, so unexpectedly pleasant that Bodie did a double-take.

"Need some help then?" he asked Doyle, naturally suspicious, given both the circumstances and Doyle's ever-challenging nature.

"Nah," Doyle replied, eyes watering and scalp smarting as he pulled himself free, a few hairs and a wisp of paper floating gently down into the sink, "I just need something for my silver platter."

"Silver? For me? Oh you shouldn't have!"

"Only the best for my Bodie," Doyle said as he carefully unscrolled one of the small curlers, peeled off the paper and squinted up to see if the curl were right. "And it's the only silver I'd buy you, ducks."

All right, so Ray was obviously setting him up: that didn't mean Bodie wouldn't want to hear the punch-line. "Not gonna buy me a silver spoon then, eh?"

His back to the room, Doyle gazed at Bodie via the mirror, deft hands unrolling the gathering mountain of used curlers and discarded paper. "It's a bit late for a silver spoon for you, mate. Thought about getting you a silver bullet, once or twice. Until," and he batted his eyelashes and blew the most outrageous kiss Bodie's direction, "I saw you with your shirt off. Not even a full moon could help you there, could it, mate?"

Bodie drew him a dirty look for that: he'd always been a bit on the sensitive side about his unmacho hairless chest, and Doyle bloody knew it, flaunting his own, suitably, butchly masculine upper torso every chance he got. "Yeh, I don't turn into a hairy, slobbering beast when the girls come out—unlike some urban gorillas I could name."

Doyle's lovely reply dropped right off the tip of his tongue even as tears sprang to his eyes: one of the curlers had mated with his hair, his scalp pulled unmercifully tight.

"Oh, here, let me," Bodie said, temporarily losing interest in today's game of get-Doyle, the

familiar, more-or-less affectionate backbiting giving way, as it always did, when Doyle actually needed a bit of a hand. Coming to stand immediately behind his partner, he shooed away Doyle's gingerly probing fingers, his own hands reaching confidently for the tangled mess. "Should've asked me five minutes ago," he grumbled, separating the painful knot a few strands at a time, tutting sympathetically. "Saved yourself no end of grief."

"What d'you think this is, the bloody BAFTA awards? No need to chew the scenery like that, Bodie, it's only a bit of hair."

"Oh, well, in that case..." Bodie murmured, shrugging before giving an almighty tug that freed the hair from both curler and scalp with ferocious equality, not to mention a satisfyingly blood-curdling scream. "Oh, I'm sorry, did that sting a little?" came the polite enquiry.

"Fucking hell!" Doyle erupted, tears erupting just as dramatically. "Should've mentioned you were half Apache."

"Are you implying I scalped you?" Bodie sniffed, managing to look and sound seriously insulted. "Even if I would—I couldn't."

This was one of Bodie's pointed little comments that were always best left dangling like a benighted particle. Still, it was politic to prove the boss right once in a while, and Cowley was fond of saying that Doyle had more hair than sense. "All right," Doyle asked, going willingly, "you would if you could, but you can't, so why can't you?"

Bodie tried ruffling the infamous curls but encountered a handful of prickly curlers instead. "These—bloody rug's too well nailed down!"

"Oh, ha, ha," Doyle muttered, that last remark pathetic even by Bodie's Billy Bunter standards. "In fact, you're just too witty for me, so why don't you pop downstairs and put the kettle on while I get this lot finished, eh?"

"And miss the caterpillar emerging as a butterfly?" Bodie declaimed, regretting the paucity of esses in the sentences: he had his limp wrist and lisp down pat. "Come on, you don't expect me to leave before the entire process is done, do you? I mean, it's bizarre enough finding out you perm your hair, but *look* at how you have to do it! It's amazing—"

"Hang about," Doyle interrupted before Bodie could stick his other foot in his mouth to join the first clodhopper. "Are you telling me," he asked carefully, "that you really didn't know I did this?"

Bodie was busy fingering one of the curlers, poking at it industriously. "Already told you that."

"Yeh, but I didn't believe you, did I? But you're serious?" he demanded, not sure whether to be pleased that his hair looked natural, or furious that his partner obviously needed a new pair of glasses and his head examined while they were at it. "You really weren't having me on when you were rabbiting on earlier on?"

"Oh, no, Ray, I think all my mates run around with their hair in curlers."

"Don't you start—"

"I'm not starting, so shut up, Ray. Anyway," he had discovered that under the hair and paper the plastic was shaped more like a bone instead of the curls they produced, "you're in good company, aren't you?"

"Oh yeh?" Doyle said sarcastically, expecting the litany of Queen, Queen Mum and a few other queens thrown in for good measure.

"Yeh, 'course you are." Bodie twitched the clean towel from the rack, used it to mop up the trails of water dripping down Doyle's face and cheeks.

"There's Kevin Keegan, Brian May, Marc Bolan, Leo Sayer..."

All right, so it wasn't the butchest of lists, but it wasn't the expected fairy tale either.

"Not to mention," Bodie said, smiling sweetly as he mopped one errant drip from the tip of Doyle's nose, "Kojak."

"Kojak?" Doyle said, not getting it. "But he's bald—"

"Exactly."

Doyle got it. "Only way I'll end up bald from this is if you 'help' me again. An' if you won't make me a cuppa, you can shift your carcass and let me get on."

"All right, all right," Bodie snickered, insufferably good humoured. "Keep your hair on."

Doyle ignored that as being not worth even hearing.

"Good, that, wasn't it?"

Doyle ignored that too, perhaps in the fond and foolish hope that if ignored long enough, even Bodie would take the hint and leave.

"You know," Bodie repeated, not because he had thought it that funny, but because getting a rise out of Doyle was always good for a laugh, "keep your hair on." Still no reaction, and a calm, unresponsive Doyle was no fun at all. "Course," Bodie added, taking a good long look at Doyle's nudity,

more overtly appreciative than he ought to have been as he was not in the Guards or working in Buck House itself, "it'd be nice if you had kept *anything* on. Be frightening the horses in that get up."

"Yeh, well," Doyle stood upright, giving Bodie an odd look, "I'd be worried, if there were any horses round here."

Bodie simply raised one eyebrow and glanced, meaningfully, down at his own groin. "But you've got a stallion in here."

Doyle took his own glance at Bodie's groin, making sure he didn't linger too long. "Stallion? Nah, not you, mate," Doyle said in the tone of one about to pay a rich compliment. "A gelding, that's you."

"A what?"

"Gelding," Doyle replied in all innocence. "That's the one they cut—"

"I know what they fucking cut," Bodie told him, crossing his legs involuntarily, appalled that Doyle could even joke about such things. But then again, Doyle probably didn't share his rather pathological reactions to such things, Doyle's father not having converted to Judaism late in life and bang smack in the middle of his sons' adolescence. Just thinking about it brought a wince to Bodie's face, not to mention a shudder to his spine. "Gives me the willies just to think about it..."

Doyle, needless to say, collapsed into hysterics at that. "Now that," he said into Bodie's aggrieved face, "really was good. Gives you the willies..." he sniggered to himself as he went back to unravelling his hair.

Bodie crossed his arms and stood on his dignity, although his bum insisted on reminding him that he was sitting on the bathtub, and with the way the rim was cutting into him, his nether regions were about to either fall off or go numb. Conveniently ignoring the minor detail that he could easily have moved without having to either lean on the small of Doyle's back or rub his hip against Doyle's rump as he went past, Bodie settled himself on the toilet seat itself, shoving Doyle's eldritch and unpleasant collection of bottles and fumes and steel tail comb on to the floor out of the way. "Oh," he thought to ask, "you don't need any of that lot, do you?"

Peering over the edge of the sink at the mess on the floor, Doyle just shook his head. It really wasn't worth the endless, deliberately convoluted and no doubt excruciatingly pun-filled discussion Bodie would indulge himself in to complain about it.

“Good,” Bodie said, then sat there, obviously trying to think of something to say, annoyed because Ray wasn’t saying anything, seemingly too uneasy to wonder why he should even be feeling the need to fill the small silences between them with chatter. “So, did you have the new barmaid you fancied over at the Swan?” he finally said, staring at the subtle play of muscles under the skin of Doyle’s back, at the curve of his buttocks and especially, at the shadows revealed by Doyle’s bent-over position: shadows, hints, dark lure, hiding the opening, the most private part of Doyle’s body, and there, framed by the strong, richly-haired thighs, the dark sway of genitals. Catching Doyle catching him twisting round to get a better look, Bodie veered his eyes immediately to the floor and the conversation immediately away from balls, pricks and the prick he worked with. “I had this great bird in Paris. Tits to here, legs to there—”

Doyle let the words wash over him, paying less attention to Bodie’s amoral amorous exploits than he usually did. Methodically, he took the last of the curlers out, dropping them messily into the basin propped so precariously on the vanity shelf. Bodie’s voice was hurried, harried, words tripping over themselves as he went on and on about how much and what types of sex he’d had. Oh, shit, Doyle thought, suspicions rising and heart sinking, it can’t be. He can’t do that to me...

“...even let me in through her back door, if you get my drift,” as if someone as filthy minded as Doyle wouldn’t, “so it’s hardly surprising I’m knackered—and even Cowley was jealous, although what an old prune like him would do with someone as ripe and luscious as Monique I’ll never know, unless he wants to be invalidated out after his heart-attack. Tits out to here—”

“Cowley?” Doyle enquired politely. “I’ve never noticed.”

“Not Cowley, Monique—” and it registered that there’d been half a dozen such openings already, and Doyle hadn’t taken him up on a single one of them. “And you haven’t been listening to me, have you?”

Not enough recently, Doyle thought morosely, and not half hard enough. Oh, Bodie, I hope to hell I’m wrong. “I hang onto your every word and engrave it in my heart.”

Bodie drew him a dirty look, annoyed because Doyle had missed his catalogue of Monique’s multiple charms, quietly pretending that his heart

was beating faster and his breath coming more shallowly because he was pissed off with Doyle, not because he was distracted by Doyle standing there naked in front of him, close enough to touch.

“Anyway—”

Doyle broke in before he could hear any more about ‘tits to here’ and a bird who kept both doors open, before Bodie could even think about sex again. “Give us the towel before I flood the place.”

“Parting of the water, eh?” Bodie teased, handing Doyle the clean towel from the top of the cistern. “You’ll be back in nappies again if you don’t apply yourself to your potty training, Christopher Robin.”

Doyle hid under the towel, slowly squeezing the dripping of water into the thick towel, quickly trying to strangle his nascent suspicions. “Oh, shit,” he muttered, at both where his thoughts were insisting on running, and on that last bloody curler he always seemed to miss.

Bodie, watching him emerge from the enveloping blue cloth, didn’t bother to wait for Doyle to get himself tied in a knot this time, reaching out immediately to tug the curler free. “Did that smart a little?” he asked, just as politely as the first time he’d nearly scalped his partner.

“Smart?” Doyle demanded, tears once more springing to his eyes, vying with the lethal glower therein. “You wouldn’t know smart if it jumped up and bit you on the arse.”

Perhaps he *had* been a bit excessive with the enthusiasm, Bodie conceded, as the loosened strands of hair drifted to the floor in a positive cloud of chestnut. “Sorry,” he muttered, not quite loudly enough to be heard over Doyle’s inventive invective. “Here,” he almost shouted in the hope that he would be heard over the dissection of his heritage, family background and the marital and familial status of his parents.

Doyle relinquished his towel and his wet hair to Bodie’s ministrations without pausing a beat in his run-down of Bodie’s entire personal history.

“...cousins—nah, it’d have to be twins, identical fucking twins, to produce offspring as stupid and twisted as you—”

Bodie decided that this was not the moment to mention that identical twins would have a matching set of genitals to go with their matching faces, thus making the production of any offspring a major miracle whether they were fucking twins or not. “Whatever you say, Ray,” he murmured,

plying the towel with as much enthusiasm as finesse, although Doyle, if asked, just might declare that the enthusiasm was winning hands down. Doyle, in fact, was inclined to say such a thing, asked or not.

"If this is a taste of how you handle your girls," Doyle muttered from under the now-soggy folds of rippling terry, "then small wonder you're always pinching mine." A flurry of memories of Bodie pinching his bum glutted his suspicions, and brain reacting quicker than his mouth, he bit off the rest of his comments, this novelty explaining why he bit his tongue as well.

"You all right down there?" Bodie enquired with a solicitousness that sounded feigned but was as honest as the day was long—and not at the North Pole in winter, either.

"Course I'm fucking all right," Doyle snapped back, sunny as that winter's day at the North Pole. "Why the fuck shouldn't I be?" Apart from the fact that I've just said something that reminded me of what I was trying not to think about, he thought, trying not to think about that either, and definitely trying not to think about Bodie 'helping' him up the stairs, or Bodie grabbing him, and as for the way Bodie had been looking at him a minute ago—Christ, Doyle thought, panicking, that really didn't bear thinking about at all. Defensiveness always made him nastier than anything other than facing the day without benefit of caffeine, so he demanded again, viciously. "Well? Why the fuck shouldn't I be all fucking right, eh, you stupid fucking moron?"

"No reason," Bodie told him mildly, more or less unruffled by yet another of Doyle's mood swings, the sort that made going through menopause seem such a placid, desirable state of being.

No reason, Doyle repeated to himself, and wished he could snort elegantly instead of sounding like a pig when he tried it. No reason at all—hah! We should be so bloody lucky... Not that they were going to be, he thought gloomily, noticing the way the rough towelling was no longer towelling roughly, but was smoothing over him like the finest Turkish terry—which could be taken in any number of ways, although Doyle could only think of two, both of which were rude, which was hardly surprising, given the combination of Doyle's filthy mind and the ever-more compromising condition he found himself in. In fact, if Bodie didn't pack this in, it would be Bodie who found him in a

compromising position. Which upon mature—oh, all right, then: upon salacious, libidinous, and lecherous—consideration, might not be such a bad thing.

But then again, Doyle reminded himself, wishing he was conveniently straight and not bi and wishing most of all that he had a nice pair of baggy trousers and a chastity belt on, this wasn't some anonymous encounter with some willing bloke or a discreet holiday abroad cruising—in every sense of the word—the Greek Islands or the beaches of Spain. This was England, and CI5, and Cowley. This was poor Bodie, who started rabbiting on about birds the second it dawned on the poor sod that he'd noticed that his partner was naked and bent over like a dog waiting to be mounted, and not by a taxidermist.

Cursed by hearing as good as his eyesight, Doyle couldn't help—no matter how prodigiously he tried—but make out what Bodie was saying to him. Oh, no, he thought, we really don't need this...

"...amazing hair. Should've known it came out a bottle, shouldn't I?"

"Yeh, you bloody should. Cowley'd have your guts for garters for not noticing..."

"Oh, so now he pays us to be fashion critics, eh?"

"It's all in the small print," Doyle sniped back, but his heart wasn't in it, and he couldn't be bothered coming up with anything flash to say. He couldn't even *think* anything flash, going round and round in circles over what Bodie, poor, macho Bodie, was going to do when it finally dawned on the thick bugger that he just might be a bugger in the literal sense of the word. All hell'll probably break loose, Doyle decided morosely, with him on the receiving end of all of it. He could just picture it too, Bodie shouting at him, posturing like an ape, and being Bodie, he'd do a King Kong, all the usual fuss and bother and aggro before Bodie would even half-cope with it. All those brooding silences and sarky little comments, all the female conquests to rub Doyle's nose in and to prove that Bodie really was still a man. No, Doyle didn't need any of it.

"Oi, you awake down there?"

"Eh? What?"

"Never thought you'd go in for maidenly modesty, mate," Bodie said heartily, "especially not knelt on the toilet floor starkers."

He was, wasn't he? On his knees at Bodie's feet,

while Bodie gently rubbed his hair dry, probably straightening out the perm instead of just loosening it a bit. “Emm, what was it you were asking?”

“D’you get the colour from a bottle as well?”

“Nah, get that from Mum—you’ve seen her, exact same colour.”

Which was why Bodie was suspicious in the first place, having seen Mrs. Doyle when her roots were growing out. Still, Ray’s vanity didn’t seem worth getting into a fight, not when it was so...peaceful to sit here like this. “It’s nice, this,” he murmured, not meaning to mention it at all, the comment slipping out.

Doyle groaned, and not because Bodie’s grip had tightened, although the flex of Bodie’s thigh muscles just might have had something to do with it. He was wearing some new pair of trousers, light gabardine of an even lighter grey, and they were even more revealing than those bloody bone coloured cords Bodie wore, much to Doyle’s distraction. And yes, there was definitely evidence there that Bodie was just about to start the King Kong act—and if shadows were anything to go by, it wasn’t just the ape-man posturings that were going to be gargantuan. Which was a bit of a problem, Doyle always having had a thing about bigger being better...

“Ray?” Bodie asked softly, confusion evident in his voice, and other parts of him growing more evident by the second.

Decision time, Doyle told himself. Time to make up his mind whether or not he was willing to take Bodie on that voyage of self-discovery, or if he was going to run like a craven coward and let Bodie cope all by himself. Or with some other bloke. Like Murphy. He bet Murphy would jump at the chance to show Bodie a thing or two.

“Ray?” Sounding worried now, the towel dropped to the floor, Bodie’s hands smoothing over the tangled, nearly dry mess he’d made of Doyle’s hair.

“It’s all right,” Doyle told him, busy trying to work out if he were lying through his teeth or if it really could be all right between them. In fact, he admitted to himself, it’d probably be more than all right or even a bit of all right between them. They liked each other—oh, all right, they were fond of each other. Okay, so they were really fond of each other.

Oh, all right, he told his conscience and inconvenient streak of honesty, I’m half-way to falling in

love with him—

Only half way?”

Half is all you’re getting, he snapped at that stupid part of his brain that actually thought honesty was the best policy in affairs of the heart, so shut up and make do like the rest of us...

Bodie, hands stilling uncertainly, made to withdraw, moving as if to stand up.

“Don’t—” Doyle said, strong hands gripping Bodie’s stronger thighs, the ripple of muscle delectable. “I told you, it’s all right,” and he looked up, smiled at the commingling of embarrassment, confusion, and hazy lust on Bodie’s face. “It’s gonna happen sooner or later,” he murmured, caressing Bodie’s thighs, not yet daring going higher, “so we might as well be honest and let it happen now, hadn’t we?”

“I—” Bodie swallowed, hard, and his cock pulsed, hard, because Ray chose that precise moment to touch him, precisely, there. “I—” he was stammering now, and there was even the hint of a blush rising up his neck like the flush of passion.

“Told you, it’ll be all right,” Doyle repeated, his hand doing some repeating of its own, rubbing back and forth across Bodie’s trapped cock. “Trust me, Bodie, just you relax and let it happen.” He undid the button on Bodie’s waistband, grasped the tongue of the zip, pulled down slowly, Bodie’s eyes scrunching shut and a moan escaping him. “Relax,” Doyle murmured, “just relax...”

“Lie back and think of England?”

“Something like that, but I’m not going to rape you—” at least not until he found out if Bodie liked to play games like that, “—and you’ll enjoy it.”

The zip was now pulled down, and with a bit of encouragement, Bodie squirmed around enough to let his trousers be pulled down and out of the way. Doyle licked a swathe through the black hair pointing down to the hidden treasure, Y marking the spot, Doyle’s nimble hands quickly uncovering his favourite candle-stick. Y-fronts suitably lowered, Bodie’s flag-pole stuck out in all its glory, and Doyle sat back on his heels and licked his lips. He could, as Wilde had said, resist everything but temptation, especially a temptation as big as this. Now he knew why Bodie called himself a stallion, and he certainly hadn’t been gelded. Leaning forward, Doyle took a mouthful of Bodie, swirling his tongue around him as if tasting a wine, deciding that he liked the bouquet, and judging by the moaning and groaning going on above and the

writhing and throbbing going on below, Bodie was going to be a positively fruity vintage.

“Ray,” Bodie was murmuring, “you don’t have to, honest, you don’t have to...”

“Shh,” Doyle mumbled, his diction ruined by the dick in his mouth, “like doing this...”

Head bobbing, cock throbbing, Doyle sucked hard, pulling back far enough to pay special attention to Bodie’s foreskin, teasing the sensitive skin, grinning when Bodie reacted with a suitably desperate thrust back into Doyle’s mouth. His own hand blurring on his own cock—thank Christ he hadn’t had to get himself out of his usual jeans or he’d’ve done himself a serious mischief—Doyle was having himself a lovely time, and for all Bodie was moaning his head off, Doyle didn’t think his partner was exactly complaining. One hand firmly wrapped around his own cock, the other having a good grip of Bodie’s balls, the situation equally in hand, Doyle stopped what he was doing. “Want me to stop?” he asked saucily, milking Bodie.

“Not quite yet, if it’s all the same to you,” Bodie gasped, voice quivering almost, but not quite, as much as his thighs, and certainly not as much as his hands which were positively a-tremble with the desire to grab Doyle by his brand-new curls and ram him back down where he belonged. “Come on, Ray,” he muttered, hoping that the verb used would give Doyle the right idea, “come on...”

It wasn’t just Doyle’s ears that pricked up at the sound of Bodie’s voice. Taking himself firmly in hand, metaphorically as well as physically, he once more applied himself to his task, sucking hard, taking Bodie so far inside him his Adam’s apple was in danger of being cored. Bodie was lifting his hips up, thrusting as best he could considering that he was sprawled awkwardly on the smooth toilet seat and had Doyle pressing him down, out of self-preservation if nothing else: he didn’t think Cowley would be too pleased to have Bodie’s cock listed as his cause of death. Course, next time Bodie threatened to strangle someone, Doyle would be the first in line. Coming up for air and to give his jaw a rest, Doyle whispered as seductively as he could: “Like this, do you?” once again proving that in this partnership, Bodie was the smooth talker.

Sweating, flushed, tie and shirt askew, trousers and y-fronts pooled round his knees, his cock red and hard and surrounded by the pale tan of Doyle’s hand, Bodie looked down at his friend. “Off and on,” he said pointedly.

Doyle, never thick unless you measured round his cock, took the hint, going back to the job in hand, making sure that Bodie would be too busy feeling wonderful to think about anything, let alone the fact that a man—his partner at that—was giving him head. They’d think about it later—over a good wank, if Bodie should ultimately prove yellow—and deal with any breast-beating and hand-wringing then. For now, the pleasure was all that mattered, and the feel and taste of Bodie inside him. He gave it his all, pouring himself into it in the sure and certain knowledge that Bodie would eventually return the compliment and pour himself into Doyle. Shifting to ease the pressure of the linoleum floor on his poor, abused knees, Doyle shifted to increase the pressure on his poor, abused cock. One more thrust into his throat, one more pulse of his hand, and Doyle was coming, semen shooting from him. Bodie, unfortunately, didn’t take Doyle up on that particular hint, his cock staying rock hard in Doyle’s mouth. Either Bodie had incredible control, Doyle thought somewhat fuzzily, or the poor bastard was having a bit of trouble because it was a bloke sucking him. Time, then, for a few refinements, enough to distract Bodie from the problematical awareness of having his first homosexual experience.

Doyle put his hands to work, fingering Bodie’s balls, making a tunnel for Bodie to fuck for the few seconds he wasn’t fucking Doyle’s mouth, but he was careful not to let his hand so much as hint at wandering in the general direction of Bodie’s arsehole: no need to shock Bodie into punching him into next week. If Doyle put as much effort into buttering up the right people as he put into getting at Bodie’s cream, then Ray Doyle would’ve had George Cowley’s job in a month. It paid off handsomely here, Bodie pumping frantically, Doyle swallowing even faster, taking Bodie in.

“See?” Doyle said, propping his elbows on Bodie’s knees, glad that Bodie had been sitting down else he’d probably have fallen down, which would be another difficult thing to explain to the boss. “Told you it would be all right, didn’t I?”

“It wasn’t all right,” Bodie told him with wonder in his voice and a quite unnerving spark of lust in his eyes already. “It was fantastic.” Tentatively, he stroked Ray’s hair, fingers toying with the curls, letting the hair coil around his fingers. “You’ve done that before, haven’t you?” he said, not really

asking a question, more offering an invite for Doyle to talk.

“You could say that I’ve done it once or twice.” Depending on whether we’re talking in the dozens or the hundreds, he added to himself, quite sure that his partner wasn’t ready for that sort of knowledge just yet.

Bodie looked away then, swallowing visibly, unable to look at Doyle as he sat up now and began to slowly tidy his clothing. “What do we do next, Ray?” he asked softly.

Here it comes, Doyle thought as he got up off his knees and managed to brush off a particularly clingy bit of perm tissue, this is where the King Kong routine starts, and I swear I’ll murder him if he calls me Fay Ray! “Next,” he said out loud, giving Bodie a hand up and then beginning to unbutton the shirt Bodie had just tidied up, “depends on what you want to do. We can go downstairs and have a cuppa—” Bodie’s stomach, ever alert especially after a trip on the Hovercraft and several hours since his last meal, piped up with a few gurgling suggestions of its own. “Or we can have something to eat. Or we can go to bed right now and I’ll show you a few more of the things I’m good at.”

As a seduction, it was just as well his partner was willing to meet him more than half-way. Almost shy, the expression enough to make Doyle not only melt but come over all queer, Bodie said, very quietly, “I think I need something to eat. And a bit of time to get used to all this...”

Gorillas in the Mist in the kitchen, Doyle thought resignedly. Oh, well, it could have been a lot worse: could have been caveman tactics in the bathroom. “Fair enough,” he replied, surreptitiously wiping his sticky hand and belly on that damp, abandoned towel, “we’ll have something to eat first.”

It was a measure of how far gone the pair of them were that neither one of them made a single crack about Doyle having already eaten. All the better for Bodie to get a good ogle at his bum and remind him of some of the more esoteric pleasures that were on offer, Monique fresher in Doyle’s mind than she was in Bodie’s, Doyle led the way downstairs, a smile lifting the corners of his mouth when he felt Bodie’s hand cup his nether cheek familiarly.

“Sausage and eggs do you?” he asked as if Bodie feeling his bum was a daily event, which it nearly

was, only the absence of jeans making a difference—and what a difference, Doyle thought, barely able to control his squirm of pleasure. “And there should be a couple of tomatoes in there as well.”

Bodie, greatly daring, briefly pressed his fingertip to the opening to Doyle’s body. “Tomatoes? Amazing what you can fit up there, is it?”

Doyle could have kissed him for that, but decided not to, on the grounds that kissing, the final bastion of queerdom between two men, just might bring on the macho stud from hell routine. Instead of kissing Bodie, he leaned back against him, just for a moment, then moved away, behaving as if this were absolutely normal for them. Apart, of course, from the fact that he was still completely starkers and was proposing to fry sausages. Dish-towels were too small to tie around his waist, and he didn’t possess a pinny, floral or otherwise. No two ways about it: he was going to have to put some clothes on, and just keep his fingers crossed that Bodie wouldn’t turn straight while he was off in the bedroom getting dressed. “Here,” he said, shoving the frying pan into Bodie’s hands, “stick that on the heat, and get the plates and everything out, and I’ll get some clothes on.”

Still, he hesitated before leaving: Bodie’d coped remarkably well for a man who’d always been straight before, but there was no guarantee that reaction wasn’t going to set in. “I’ll only be a minute,” he said.

Bodie smiled at him, although he was a bit diffident, the tiniest bit awkward. “My turn this time, eh?” he asked with a quirk of his eyebrow and a courage that made Doyle proud. “It’ll be all right, Ray,” he said, still smiling. “I’ll be all right.”

Not much Doyle could say to that. Well, there was, but it all involved inquiries into what Bodie was going to be *all right* doing, and would Doyle like it as much as Bodie had liked what Doyle had done to him. Thinking better of opening his mouth and letting his belly rumble—twice in one day, a new record, surely—Doyle simply nodded and went upstairs to get his tightest jeans, the ones that wanted a patch on the bum pocket.

Downstairs, wielding the frying pan with the practised skill of an ex-armed forces man, Bodie smiled to himself, until he started whistling quietly. Not the way he’d expected his day to end up, not even close. In fact, he’d thought it would have been a good three months before he’d manage to persuade Ray to throw caution to the winds and have

sex with him, and as for getting Ray to feel even half of the unspeakably robust emotions Bodie harboured for his partner—well, sufficeth to say, he had been expecting Doyle to do a perfect impersonation of rough trade for the first month at least. At this rate, he might even end up with a Ray Doyle who would end up loving him the way Bodie was too embarrassed to admit he loved Ray.

And to top it all off, just think, he thought, thinking about all those plans and plots, all that slow build-up, all those careful little comments, all those little touches that had been part of his well-planned campaign to seduce Ray Doyle, and all it had taken was batting his eyelashes shyly and lying back to let Doyle do all the work—for once. Who knew, perhaps batting his eyelashes might work the next time there was luggage to be carried. No, he thought, being realistic, Ray might have shocked him with his willingness and

his wonderful, welcome and exhilarating affection, not to mention his incredible mouth, but there were only so many miracles in heaven, and Ray Doyle fetching and carrying wasn't one of them.

But it really was amazing, he thought, what a show of innocence and a DIY perm could do for a man. Now he could hardly wait to see if that idea about Ray, the KY and a naive “the gay bloke in the chemist's sussed me and said we'd need this...” would do.

Making himself look suitably helpless in the kitchen as Doyle's less than elfin feet thundered down the stairs sounding more like an entire team of rugby players than a single fairy, and practising his expression of uneasy self-discovery, Bodie thought to himself that good old P.T. Barnum was right: there was definitely one born every minute.

And at that moment, grinning happily, Bodie's sucker walked in.