

PULLING THE OTHER ONE

Here is story number 6 in the ongoing Sports series—that is if you can consider the activity referred to a ‘sport.’ Doyle, very ‘sportingly’ lets Bodie in on Cowley’s plans in advance, and although Bodie comes close to being ejected for ‘unsportsmanlike’ behavior, he carries on only to return ‘sporting’ a most serious injury...

“**YOUR** reward, my son,” Ray Doyle intoned solemnly as Bodie came into the rumpiled rest room, himself and Bodie the last of the agents to finally be done with the aftermath of this latest sweeping the nation clean, “will be in Heaven.”

Bodie dumped the dimpled bags on the table, the unmistakable aroma of bacon sandwiches filling the air. “Yeh, well, as long as my reward covers the two quid you owe me—”

“I’ll give it you on payday,” Doyle said cheerfully and absolutely mendaciously, payday being three weeks away and Doyle’s memory for money he owed never able to stretch more than ten minutes. “Anyway, you won’t be needing money where you’re going.”

“Oh, yeh?” Bodie said as he helped himself to the tea Doyle had already mashed for them. “That because we can pinch bits off the pearly gates and all the harps are made of gold then?”

“There is always that,” Doyle said through a mouth overflowing with the joys of cholesterol, “but with any luck, all this muck,” he waved his third sandwich briefly before cramming another huge bite in, “won’t catch up with either one of us for a while. No, I was talking about something a bit more immediate.”

That gleeful expression on Doyle’s face was enough to make even Bodie pause in the middle of a hard-earned breakfast. “Oh, God,” he moaned, every muscle loudly remembering every minute of

this past week in hell, “what’s the old bastard come up with for us this time?”

Doyle chose this moment to slowly savour his bacon sarnie, such activity being also conducive to savouring Bodie’s dismay.

“Come on, Ray, what’d he say while I was out scouring half of London trying to get you breakfast?”

Once upon a time, that mournful, puppy-eyed, put-upon whingeing pout would have had Doyle eating out of Bodie’s hand, but Bodie wasn’t the only one who had learned to see right through his partner. Doyle took one look at Bodie doing his wounded hero routine, and took another bite of his sandwich, closing his eyes in an expression of ecstasy the likes of which hadn’t been seen since *Deep Throat*.

“Oh, come on, Ray,” Bodie tried again, even going so far as to pour, unasked, another cup of tea for the camel-thirsted Doyle.

Doyle simply impersonated said camel, slurping up enough tea to float the Titanic.

“Should’ve known,” Bodie muttered, attacking his own sandwich, his tongue chasing a drop of brown sauce as it escaped down his chin. “You’d do anything to wind me up after—”

Doyle would prefer not to think about Bodie’s last little trick, thanks all the same. The mere mention of it was enough to bring a blush to his cheek, although he always claimed that was just a flush of temper. Doyle spoke too quickly, his words

and bits of decimated sandwich interrupting Bodie's too, too humiliating reminiscing. "Betty was careless for once."

"Congratulations," Bodie said sweetly. "So when's the happy event? And if it's a boy, are you going to call him Dixon so he'll follow in your footsteps?"

"Christ, if you were any funnier, you could be a politician." Doyle burrowed through the pile of bags and debris on the table, smiling smugly as he simultaneously came up with both an apple and something to wipe the grin off Bodie's face. "Saw your file—and you'll never guess where *you're* being sent, as of first thing tomorrow morning."

Bodie swallowed, hard, at least partly because he had just stuffed half a Crunchie into his mouth. "Just me?"

"I," Doyle replied, quite unable to keep the smirk from his face, "get to babysit some fat Arab at the Savoy. You," he yielded to temptation and grinned from ear to ear, "don't."

Bodie didn't think he wanted to know the answer to this, but then, he reasoned, forewarned is forearmed. Always supposing Doyle was telling him the truth and not just winding him up to get back at him for that lovely little trick with the Nair, the scuba suit and the portable video camera. Still, on the off chance the cheeky bugger honestly was on to something, not that it would do to come over too anxious. "So what's he lumbered me with while you're living it up at the Savoy?"

Doyle shrugged, a flawless artifice of disinterest as he wallowed in the coming joys of getting Bodie back. Bodie, not to be outdone in the stakes of who could care less, made a point of crumpling all the grease-spotted bags and chocolate dotted foil together, making quite a satisfying racket just for good measure. Doyle, however, having had considerable exposure to this man's usual habits of untidiness, wasn't about to be put off such an untoward and unnatural display of domestication. "Ever heard of Thorne?" he said over the din of Bodie playing house.

"Course I have," Bodie said from under the table where he'd gone to pick up the crinkling wrapper from his Crunchie. "He's the leader of the Liberals—even bloody McCabe knows that."

"Not Thorpe, Bodie," Doyle said with the boundless patience of a man who knows that vengeance is about to be his, "Thorne."

"Thorn?" Bodie mumbled round the Kit-Kat

he'd found at the bottom of one of the bags. "As in Crown of?"

Finally full after what felt like weeks of snatched snacks, Doyle neatly dropped his apple core into one of Bodie's unsuspecting pockets and then draped himself the length of the settee. "Thorne, as in town of. Thorne, as in possible site of that drug-smuggling bunch Cowley's after." He stretched, enjoying that nowhere near as much as he did the look on Bodie's face as he continued Thorne's claim to infamy. "Thorne, as in right next door to the Isle of Axholme, home of child abuse and club feet."

"He's sending me up there?" Bodie winced: he hadn't wailed like that since big Jim MacKay next door had nicked his teddy when he was three. Manfully, he thrust thoughts of flat land and flatter brain-waves from his own rather more wildly oscillating thought patterns, and continued in what was intended to be a mature and calm tone but came out, alas, more like the three-year-old with the pinched teddy. "But I haven't even fucked up once in *months!*"

Oh, this was wonderful! Doyle kicked his shoes off, wriggled his toes happily, had himself another stretch. "That's what you think, mate. The Cow obviously doesn't agree with you, does he? Not if he's sending you off to Thorne."

"Christ," Bodie muttered, parking his bum on the arm of the settee nearest Doyle's unkempt curls, "it's the back side of fucking beyond."

"Thorne? Never!" Doyle exclaimed dramatically, positively dripping amazement. "*Your* backside now," he carolled sweetly, "now that's the back of fucking beyond—better watch those sweeties, petal, instead of eating everything in sight."

"It's all right for some," Bodie muttered, thinking of Doyle lapping up the luxury of the Savoy—and not gaining a bloody ounce—when Bodie would be stuck in some midget cottage in some miniature village not even the bloody Yanks would call quaint, and he'd manage to put on half a stone from all the fry-ups—or maybe he'd lose a few stone, thanks to the local fondness for tripe. Nah, he thought to himself, he'd gain half a ton on the fish and chips alone. "Thorne," he said in absolute disgust.

"Could be worse," Doyle said cheerfully, if not entirely truthfully from Bodie's point of view.

Bodie looked down at the smug little face that was so soon going to be luxuriating in the best hotel in London while some people were going to

have to earn their crust. "Oh, do tell."

Beating the Cheshire Cat at his own game, Doyle grinned. "He could've based you to Immingham. Or Crowle, or even—" he paused dramatically, "Fishlake!"

Bodie didn't even honour any of that with so much as a sneer. "Thorne," he repeated morosely, encompassing the entire region, thoughts of trawlers and trays of fish stinking up through the ice and women who would gut a fish as soon as look at it, never a very reassuring thought when you were wandering past all those sharp little knives.

"Course, with all things considered..." Doyle said as he sat up, all the better to see his comment strike home. Proving yet again what a good actor he was and why he was such an asset undercover, Doyle became very, very serious, his concern spilling over, his voice somber, oozing more nurturing caring than Mother Teresa could in a month, "it's not going to be easy, is it?"

Bodie looked at him warily, not liking this almost as much as he wasn't going to like bloody Thorne and the glories of tracking down yet another drug-smuggling ring.

"Yeh," Doyle said, trying desperately to maintain his doom-and-gloom-for-whom-the-bell-tolls delivery, "not with your target having a hobby the likes of his."

The Gothic tone was over the top, and Bodie kicked himself for ever believing the cheeky toad in the first place. "Go on then," he said, all breathless cadet-cop credulity, "tell us!"

Past master at pulling his partner's leg, Doyle wasn't going to let a minor detail like Bodie sussing him to stop a good joke. "You'll never believe it," he said ingenuously.

"Oh, I will, I will," Bodie gushed, laughter threatening.

"I'm telling you, you won't believe me. You'll just think I'm having you on—"

"Would you ever do a thing like that to me, after what I've done for you?" Stretching over to poke Doyle in the stomach, Bodie overbalanced, landing, satisfyingly heavily, on poor Doyle's unprotected abdomen, a gusting whoosh of air proving that Bodie had found himself a nice soft landing, his elbow barely missing one of Doyle's more tender spots.

"Gerroff! Christ, you weigh a ton, mate," Doyle muttered breathlessly aggrieved.

"Nah," Bodie told him, settling himself comfortably on the couch in the space left by his partner suddenly having to sit bolt-upright, "svelte and smooth, that's me. But you were going to tell me all about this bloke I'm supposed to investigate." He cast a kindly eye on Doyle who was still rubbing his belly and trying to catch his breath from where Bodie's misplaced elbow had scattered it. "Tut tut," he said, thumping Doyle on the back, "thought you said you'd given up smoking?"

If Tolstoy had been able to glower like Doyle, he'd never have had to write *War and Peace*. Doyle's expression was, to put it mildly, speaking. "Your mark," he finally said, voice just the teensiest bit on the fragile side, "makes Compo look as smooth as Noel Coward and *Last of the Summer Wine* deeper than bloody Ibsen.."

"That sophisticated, eh?" Bodie replied musingly, with every appearance of being impressed right out of his tree. "I shall have to pack my dinner jacket and pocket Shakespeare then, shan't I?"

"You can joke all you like, it won't stop it from being true." If Bodie hadn't been watching, Doyle would've patted himself on the back for doing such a good job of pretending to such perfect sincerity. "Anyway," he shrugged, every inch the maligned truth-teller, "told you you wouldn't believe it." He sniffed, his expression harking back to other times when he had actually been telling the truth. "Don't know why I bother sometimes. Risking Cowley catching me at it just so I could let you know what the old bastard had you in for this time..."

Inured though he had hoped himself to be to Doyle's little tricks, Bodie still found himself wondering if maybe, just maybe, this time Doyle wasn't having him on. "Oh, go on then," he said ungraciously. "We're all sitting comfortably, so go on, tell us."

Doyle turned absolutely honest, completely trustworthy eyes on Bodie and murmured: "Ferret-legging. His name is Job Goole, and he's the local champion ferret-legger."

Naturally enough, Bodie burst out laughing. "Ferret-legging? Oh, Christ, Doyle, pull the other one." The image that conjured made him laugh all the harder. "Bet that's not what he says though, does he? And what did you say his name was?"

"Knew you'd never believe me," Doyle muttered glumly, keeping up his act, experience having proved that Bodie was susceptible to his wounded routine, despite what Bodie would have the

world—and Bodie himself—believe. “Goole. Job Goole.”

“Oh, god, that’s brilliant, that is! Goole? As in goolies? Surprised he can call himself that after he’s had a few ferrets down the front of his trousers. Ferret-legging?” He shoved Doyle, inviting him to join in the joke, himself weak with laughter.

“Christ, I’m going to wet myself—”

“Dead bloody right you well,” Doyle said darkly, “if you have to get in on the ferret-legging up there.”

“Ooh, I can hardly wait. Can I borrow some string to tie my trouser bottoms with? And a pair of cast-iron knickers?”

“You’ll be laughing on the other side of your face when Cowley hands you the bloody ferrets you’ve to take up there with you.”

“And is that my cover? A fellow ferret-legger, so I can *weasel* my way into old Goolie’s confidence and *ferret* out the drug ring?”

Doyle shrugged with elaborate disinterest, all the better to prove that he really was telling the truth and quite hurt by the way his best friend and partner was reacting. “Suit yourself,” he said with just the right touch of wounded friendship, “but don’t come crying to me after.”

“Oh, you mean you won’t kiss it all better if a ferret has a bit of a nibble? Cruel, Ray, too, too cruel.”

“It’s no skin off my nose—”

“But quite a bit off my prick, eh?” Bodie wiped his eyes, his hilarity gradually easing. “Ferret-legging,” he muttered, almost impressed. “That’s a good one, that.” He glanced over at his partner, told himself that he really wasn’t affected by that droop-mouthed, droop-curved posturing going on at his side. “All right, a joke’s a joke,” Bodie told Doyle, tugging on a handful of curls just to make his point. “Though I must admit,” he tossed a bone at Doyle’s dog-in-the-manger, “you really had me going a bit. But ferret-legging?” The whole thing tickled him again, and he started laughing. “Suppose that’s why Cowley’s not going himself. Be a bit hard ferret-legging in a kilt.” He laughed harder, thumping Doyle’s knee in his own glee at the endless jokes he was going to get out of this one: “But I don’t suppose it’d get hard at all, not with all those little ferret teeth down there—”

“Oh, there you are,” Betty said in her best Headmistress voice. “I should have known you’d be up to no good. Mr. Cowley wants to see both of

you in his office straight away. And for goodness’ sake, Bodie, do see if you can stop behaving like the first form fool.”

“Yes, miss,” Bodie called as they trailed along behind her. “Don’t give us any lines, will you, miss?”

A quick rap on the gleam of Cowley’s door and they were inside, Doyle’s eyes wickedly amused.

“Don’t bother sitting down,” Cowley said abstractedly, not even looking up from the paper on his desk, “you’re not on your holidays. Bodie,” he did look up then, pushing a manilla folder across the desk, “you’ll be taking the late train up, your destination and everything else you need to know is in here. Make sure you read it, this time—I don’t want you going off half-cocked again.”

“Sir.” Manfully, Bodie resisted the urge to comment that half-cocked was the only way he’d be able to get off after a spot of ferret-legging, although he couldn’t quite resist glancing at Doyle, sure that his partner would let the joke drop now that he had his assignment in his hand.

“And you, Doyle,” Cowley pushed another plain folder across the desk, “see to it that you get that mop of yours cut before the hotel staff use you to wash the floor. You’ll be starting on that tomorrow. In the meantime, the pair of you can finally finish the reports that should’ve been on my desk a fortnight ago. That’ll be all, so away with the pair of you.”

“Yes, sir,” Doyle said, smiling smugly as he perused his file with its endless pages of information and the single instruction sheet with its handwritten warning to not be running up a room-service bill equal to the National Debt. He smiled all the more smugly when he saw that Bodie, file open, mouth gaping even more openly, was staring in dawning horror at the words printed on all those pieces of paper.

“Sir...” Bodie began.

The phone rang, Cowley picking it up immediately. “Thanks, Betty, put him through.” Cowley looked up at his two best agents. “Well, what are you two doing standing there making the place look untidy? Get on with it.”

“Yes, but...” Bodie muttered even as Doyle grabbed him by the arm and began hauling him out of the office.

“And don’t you go forgetting to pick up your special equipment, Bodie!”

The door shut on Bodie's horrified face. "He didn't mean..."

"Told you," Doyle said smugly, well pleased with himself.

"Yeh, but it's not the sort of thing you'd expect anyone to believe, especially coming from you. Bloody hell!" he exploded, having just come to the paragraph about Job Goole's known habits, friends and the places he frequented. "Christ, you should see these names—like something out the flipping Ark!"

"Ferrets, you mean?" Doyle asked innocently.

"Not yet," Bodie replied glumly, running through the list of the Worker's Social Club, the old associates from the days when Goole's father had been down the pit, Communist Party membership duly noted. Then there was the model ship club, and the local darts team, and playing for the Church football team when he was a youth, which was when he'd first been associated with Michael Singer from Bolton, the man who'd gone back to Bolton and then on to Colombia and some of the biggest drug dealers in the world. Bodie turned the page, following the meandering path of Goole's contacts with Singer, reading on until he came to the last and most recent report, with its names and pursuits and lists of things Goole did for a living and for fun. "Here," Bodie said, finger pointing, hand thrusting the folder under Doyle's nose, "what d'you think this means?"

Cross-eyed, Doyle grabbed the page away, read the words, a slow smile of profound revenge growing with his satisfaction. "That," Doyle replied, not hiding his delight at all, "refers to his ferret-legging habits, I'll warrant. This when I get to say I told you so?"

"Doesn't actually say that, though, does it? Just something about dubious practices with animals..."

Doyle cackled merrily, not even the thought of catching up on reports damping his great good humour.

"I mean," Bodie went on, riffling through the pages looking for some reassurance, "this could just mean he shags sheep, couldn't it?"

"That's not what Betty was saying on the phone today, is it?"

Bodie knew better than to believe Doyle. But the rotten sod had been spot on about everything else today, hadn't he? "Even if it's not sheep-shagging," he said, not even aware of the irony that he'd be less worried about inveigling himself with a man of

carnal passion for sheep than he would about insinuating himself with a man who put ferrets down his trousers for fun, "it might only be putting the food money on the ponies."

"Or," Doyle replied cheerfully, seating himself in front of the much battered and more maligned typewriter, "it could be what Betty said it was: he could have a thing about ferrets down his trousers. After all, Cowley did say you had to pick up your special equipment..."

"CI5 doesn't run to ferrets—we're not a bloody zoo."

Anson, complete with cigar and scratching absently between his legs, chose that moment to walk in.

"Then again..." Bodie said, trailing off meaningfully.

As Anson was one of the few things that could get either Bodie or Doyle out of the restroom, they decided that discretion was the better part of valour and maybe now really would be a good time to get those reports done.

One way and another, it was an interesting afternoon. One way was Doyle endlessly making his little digs about ferrets and trousers. Another way was every other agent making their little digs about where Bodie was going and what he was going to be doing up there...

By the time they were actually supposed to have lunch, Bodie was positively twitchy.

By the time they were due their official tea-break, Doyle was hiding his smirks and Bodie was crossing his legs.

And by the time they both wandered down to supplies and Bodie was handed a huge pile of things, Doyle was almost choking on laughter and Bodie was going through the various bags, boxes and other oddities with something akin to real trepidation.

It wasn't the horrible clothes that did it, although the hat almost ruptured Doyle. It wasn't the fake I.D. and faker history, although that almost had Doyle on the floor. It wasn't even the psychiatrist's report that listed Bodie's new personality as what people used to call a bit 'simple'—all the better to wander round without anyone paying any attention to him, and who bothered with what they said around the village idiot, Doyle asked between gales of giggles.

What finally did it was the rock-hard protective groin cup.

Bodie took one look at it, face going pale.

Doyle took one look at Bodie looking at it, and his face went scarlet. "See?" he cackled as soon as he could stop laughing long enough. "What did I tell you?"

"That does it," Bodie announced, grabbing the old-fashioned, well-worn leather cup. "I'm going to have words with George bloody Cowley."

"Ah, Bodie," Doyle said, suddenly sober. "Bodie, I don't think—Bodie, come back here! Oh, Christ," he muttered to Heaven, until the memory of the Nair and the full-body scuba suit returned his sense of humour to him. "This I've got to see."

Doyle pelted along the corridor, reaching Mr. Cowley's office just in time to see his partner steam inside.

With superb dramatic flair, Bodie threw the groin guard down on Cowley's desk and announced, loudly, very loudly: "I'm not putting any fucking ferrets down my trousers."

Very deliberately, Mr. Cowley took his glasses off, looked at the groin cup, looked at Bodie. "I'm glad to hear that, Bodie. CI5 does not condone bestiality. Now, why don't you take your cricket gear and practice your bowling before you take your train?"

"Bowling?" Bodie said, very quietly, one might even say querulously. "Cricket bowling?"

"Well, you wouldn't wear that for lawn bowling, would you?" A pen was picked up, used to delicately slide the worn leather nearer Bode. "And stop off to see Betty on your way out—have her make you an appointment with Dr. Ross..."

"Yes, sir," Bodie said stoically, frantically thinking of all the ways he could kill Doyle, slowly and painfully and untraceably. "But I don't think that will be necessary, sir."

"I'm sure you don't, but I'll be the judge of that. Go on, get on with you."

"Yes, sir," Bodie said, all clipped accent and standing at full attention. "I'll just take this with me..." He picked the cup up, pivoted on his heel, left the office just as Doyle showed him a clean set of heels and Cowley muttered under his breath: "Ferrets?"

Fortunately for the safety of the Realm in general and Doyle in great particular, Bodie didn't manage to get his hands on his partner before his train left for points north. And even more fortunately, at least if you were to ask Bodie, his return

took his partner completely by surprise.

"Bodie!" Genuine pleasure there, real delight that Bodie was back, followed swiftly by a very sensible wariness that Bodie, vengeful, wickedly funny, totally daft Bodie was back. And they were alone, the rest room empty, all the active agents being briefed, Doyle the only one currently on stand-by in HQ itself. "Nice to see you, mate," Doyle said, rising to his feet just in case Bodie was simply going to jump him and knock lumps out of him for that last little joke.

"That's what Dr. Ross said to me as well."

Oh, shit, Doyle thought, wincing. Just as well they had to keep their affairs in order and their wills up to date. "It's that manly physique that does it."

"Nah, she's shaved her moustache off now."

Doyle laughed, more from nerves than anything else—not that he was going to let on that he found any joke of Bodie's less than absolutely hysterically funny. At least, not for a day or two, until Bodie had forgiven him for the ferret incident.

"How was the Savoy?"

"Oh, same as always," Doyle said languidly, as if he lived at the Savoy in the lap of luxury. "You know how these places are."

"The Sheik get up to the usual hanky-panky?"

"Yeh," Doyle salaciously, completely slandering a very religious man who'd spent all his free time either praying or having dinner with one of his many brothers, "and a few we'd never have thought of on our own. I hear you managed to crack that drug lot up there."

"Easy enough done," Bodie said, "they were all a bunch of bloody amateurs. Any tea in the pot?" he asked, coming into the room, limping slightly.

"What happened to you then?" Doyle demanded, always worried when his partner was injured.

"Nothing you didn't tell me about."

It took a second for that to sink in. "But I was only having you on—"

"Pity Goole wasn't." He poured himself a cup of sludge masquerading as tea, made his way to the chair, obviously trying to hide the limp, succeeding a bit better at that than concealing his wince and grimace of pain when he sat himself down in the armchair.

"You all right, mate?" Doyle asked, worried—if Bodie really had had to ingratiate himself like that...

“Doctor says I’ll be fine,” Bodie told him, quite convincingly.

Doyle, however, knew when his partner was lying. “Come on, you, out with it. What did Robinson say?”

Bodie shrugged, a small frown marring his smooth forehead. “Claims I’ll make a full recovery.” A short pause, Bodie hesitating before admitting the rest of it. “As long as the infection goes down, of course.”

“Infection? You’ve got an infection on your prick?” Incredulous, sure that Bodie was joking. “Pull the other one, mate.”

“Well, I won’t be pulling my own for a while, that’s for fucking sure. Won’t be fucking anything, either.”

“Are you serious?”

“Would I joke about a thing like that? Christ, Doyle, we’re not all as sick as you.”

Doyle circled round carefully, keeping a close watch on his partner, doing his damndest to work out if Bodie were having him on or not. “Give you a jab, did he?”

“Bite, more like.”

“Not the ferret, Bodie. Doctor Robinson.”

“Still up to date on the tetanus, so at least I don’t have a sore backside to go with the front.”

He really did look serious, didn’t he? Still... “Where did you get bitten?”

“You want the gory details? The nearest measurement?” Bodie demanded, outraged, a blush rising to embarrass him even more than the question. “You want to know how many inches down from the head?”

“Be serious, Bodie, this is you we’re talking about,” Doyle said as he perched his bum on the edge of the table, his legs close enough to touch Bodie’s. “Be more a question of how many millimetres.”

“Ha, bloody, ha. Actually, the way it feels right now, I wouldn’t mind if it were as small as yours.” Trying to be discreet, he shifted in his seat, crossing his legs, flinching, uncrossing them rapidly. Nonchalantly, fooling no-one, he casually spread his legs as widely as he could within the chair.

“You really aren’t kidding, are you?” Doyle asked him, still with that dubious edge.

“Wish to hell I was,” Bodie muttered fervently. “Look, Ray, we’ve been mates a long time, now, haven’t we?”

“Yes,” Doyle said slowly, not trusting a sentimental Bodie.

“And we’ve done all the things blokes usually do around each other, you know, piss, shower, get changed?”

“If you think I’m going to do the traditional to get the poison out—”

“Don’t be stupid! No, I only meant...” He broke off, looked away, discomfort finally forcing him to speak. “Look, I need to, you know, adjust myself. It’s hurting like hell, my underwear—”

“Got your knickers in a twist, eh?” Doyle said with some sympathy and more suspicion. “There’s a bog just down the hall.”

“You think I can walk with it like this? Christ, how did the Inquisition do without you?”

He did have a point: even Doyle had to admit that.

“Keep an eye on the door,” Bodie said, the pathos of the situation obviously getting to him.

“All right.” Draped in his usual ‘for hire’ pose, Doyle leaned himself against the door, watching in what became real sympathy as Bodie levered himself painfully out of his chair.

Holding the front of his trousers out as far as he could, Bodie unzipped himself, pushing his trousers down out of the way, gingerly trying to ease his underwear away from his poor, abused member.

“You all right there?” Doyle asked, wincing a bit just watching Bodie’s expression.

“Bloody bandage’s stuck,” Bodie gasped, clutching at himself. “Christ...”

“Come on, Bodie, just do it!”

“Hark at the man who couldn’t take a bloody elastoplast off his chest.”

“Yeh, but that’s cos it pulled the hair. Oh,” he said, a bulb going off.

“No, not oh,” Bodie said viciously, humiliated into anger. “You think they didn’t fucking shave me?”

Doyle never did have a problem finding something to be guilty about, even if it were an asked-for retaliation gone a bit too far. “Sorry, mate,” he said, really meaning it. Until, that is, curiosity bit him with teeth sharper than anything a mere ferret could muster. “They really shave you down there?”

“What d’you think?” Bodie muttered, still fiddling around with his underwear. He couldn’t, quite, bring himself to give that one tug it really needed.

"You mean they've left you bald?" Ray Doyle's chuckle was filthy at the best of times. On this particular occasion, it was a health hazard.

"Smooth as a baby's bottie?"

"Pack it in, Ray."

"Yeh, but you won't be packing it in anywhere, will you?"

"Not given the current set of circumstances," Bodie replied with as much dignity as he could, considering he was standing there with his trousers round his knees and his hand holding the front of his y-fronts.

"Here," Doyle said, keeping his face straight with extreme difficulty, "let me give you a hand with that."

"No thanks," Bodie said coldly. "You just want to have a look at me then laugh yourself sick."

"Who, me?" Doyle declaimed. "You've mistaken me for some other bastard, Bodie. Right, take a deep breath," he said, kneeling down so he could see what he was doing. "Ready?" He took the waistband of Bodie's underwear in both hands. "Steady?" He flexed his arms. "Go!" He pulled Bodie's underwear down in one fell swoop, revealing Bodie, not an inch from Doyle's nose, all his glory neatly bandaged, complete with bow, and something written in blue biro.

'Gotcha!', it said.

"Bodie..." Doyle said, threateningly.

"For fuck's sake," Stewart said from the door, "can't you two wait until you get home for once?"

"Yeh," McCabe said, shoving by Doyle on his way to the kettle, "just because you haven't seen each other in a week—"

"But it's not like that—" Bodie said.

"Nothing like that!" Doyle shouted.

"Yeh, yeh, right," Stewart muttered, stretching across a frantically redressing Bodie.

"No, honest," Doyle said quickly, getting up off his knees even more quickly, it having dawned on him that the others might be a bit more inclined to believe him if he weren't on his knees at his partner's feet. "It really wasn't what it looked like."

"Pull the other one," McCabe said, snickering at his own joke.

"What's so funny, Mac?" Lucas asked, wandering in for a cuppa to wash away the taste of another dull as ditchwater briefing.

"Bodie and bloody Doyle—worse than dogs on heat. Going at it right here—"

"Fucking hell," Lucas said, snitching McCabe's

tea, "isn't the honeymoon over yet?"

"But we're not—"

"But we haven't—"

Then the rest of the agents started coming in, the tale growing more in its retelling than Bodie's tail was likely to grow for quite a while. Catcalls and guffaws surrounding them, Doyle looked at Bodie.

"They're not going to believe us, you know," he said, and anyone would have been excused for thinking the mild tone was genuine.

Bodie had no such excuse. "It's not my fault..."

Doyle took one step forward, threateningly, then stepped back, hurriedly, as everyone hooted at him plastering himself to his hubby's front. "You know I'm going to kill you, don't you, Bodie."

"Now why would you want to do a thing like that, Ray?"

An exceedingly sweet smile, enough to scare the living daylights out of Cowley. "Because it's going to be a real pleasure, that's why."

"Yeh, but," Bodie muttered, subtly edging his way towards the door, "you did ask for it..."

"Oh, I did, did I? Don't care. I'm still going to kill you."

"I've got a better idea, Ray," Bodie said, grinning as he felt his way along the wall to find a way out.

"Torture you first?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of being hung for a sheep as for a lamb."

Enjoying himself by now, especially since he'd just thought of the perfect revenge for today's little débâcle, Doyle said: "Hanging's too good for the likes of you, mate."

"Couldn't agree more, so let's not, eh?" He had found the doorway now, was sidling through it, backing quickly up the corridor. "I just meant, if our reputations are already ruined, well," he shrugged quite artistically, "we might as well enjoy what we're supposed to have been up to in the first place..."

"Making me an offer I can't refuse, eh, Bodie?"

Doyle demanded, doing a great impersonation of Shotgun Tommy, complete with the caressing of his gun.

"Hope to fuck I am," Bodie replied through a rather fixed smile. All right, so Doyle wasn't going to shoot him, wasn't even going to hurt him—not seriously, anyway—but Doyle's sense of humour could be lethally humiliating. And having it off with each other wasn't exactly a fate worse than

death, was it? “Come on, Ray, it’d be fun!”

“That a promise?”

“Course it is. Just ask Murphy.”

“Already have,” Doyle said, landing himself right in it.

“Oh, yeh? That a fact, is it?” Bodie’s smile was a lot less fixed, widening into a cat got the cream grin.

“Never believe a word Murphy says.”

Bodie backed all the way into the supply room, Doyle shoving him in and locking the door behind them. “All right, to even the score,” he said, loftily

ignoring Bodie’s puerile chuckle, “you prove it’s worth being hung.”

“Oh,” Bodie said, as Doyle lowered his jeans and revealed himself in all his unbandaged glory, “being hung definitely has its plusses.”

Doyle, breath coming a hell of a lot faster than could be explained by a quick walk along the corridor, made a grab for the front of Bodie’s trousers. “It’s time to put up or shut up, Bodie...”

In the end, it was more a case of them both getting it up and Bodie opening Doyle up, boldly going where no ferret had ever gone before...