

# SEEING IS BELIEVING *or* ALL OVER TWIST



*Take one Bodie, one Doyle, put them together in a van on an overnight obbo, and stir in persistent questioning and a pinch of philosophizing on life, the universe, and everything. Result? A savory stew of unexpected revelations. Please M. Fae, may we have some more?*

“So go on, tell me,” Doyle started up again, settling his bum a bit more comfortably on the plastic seat, elbow narrowly missing a stack of electronic equipment, “do you believe in anything you can’t actually see?”

“Ooh, yes,” Bodie piped in a little-boy voice, “I believe that big fat Father Christmas is going to squeeze his enormous fat arse down a tiny little chimney—and do it in modern blocks of flats as well, while he’s at it.” He shifted in his seat, stretching muscles to prevent the nagging backache that was the usual aftermath of an overnight obbo in the buggy-boo, especially when not only did he have to put up with the incipient claustrophobia of the cell-like van, but he also was incarcerated with the most pernicious of friends. “Hand us the flask, will you?”

Doyle passed the dark red flask over, handing Bodie the packet of Penguins before he could

ask for them as well. “You’ll get fat,” he said, watching in ostentatious disgust as three chocolate biscuits disappeared with alarming alacrity.

“Fat? I’ll have you know this is solid muscle!” Such declaration somewhat spoiled by the spray of chocolate-coated crumbs that landed everywhere.

Doyle wouldn’t have minded the chance to find out if it really were all solid muscle, and if a certain muscle were more solid than the rest. But instead of leaping upon his coy partner, he made a point of being fastidious, brushing himself off, drawing Bodie a dirty look.

“You’re just put out because I remembered to bring a tuck box with me and you didn’t,” Bodie muttered indistinctly due to both a mouthful of biscuits and his head being bent under the table while he rummaged around in one of his carrier bags.

“Rubbish,” Doyle lied, thinking longingly of

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both the stuffed condition of his fridge and the mounded condition of the bottom of his Christmas tree and how long it was going to be before Bodie came over to share it all with him, food disappearing faster than Bodie's patter of jokes appeared.

Bodie, knowing Doyle better than Doyle knew Bodie, kept on fumbling round in the dark. "Ah-ha!" he announced, goal in hand, which was more than could be said of Doyle, whose hands were decorously away from his groin. "Ta-ta-ta-ra!" With as courtly a flourish as possible when trapped between the wall and the table edge, Bodie presented Doyle with an enormous selection box, the sort that came complete with Desperate Dan's maze and assorted puzzles on the back and a dentist's nightmare within. "There you go, wouldn't forget you, would I?"

Doyle grinned delightedly, then frowned in keeping with the never-ending back-biting they both enjoyed with such verve. He produced a masterful combination of seriously aggrieved and wounded to the core with just a dash of righteous indignation. "You managed when it was my birthday!"

"Yeh, but we *were* undercover at the time, and I wasn't supposed to know you, was I?"

Doyle conceded the point grudgingly, grinning to himself as he scored one over his mate when Bodie fell for his woebegone act, hook, line, and sinker. Then movement sounded in the house they were bugging, all fun and games forgotten so that Bodie went back to listening in and Doyle leaned back in the chair until only faint smudges of lower body were visible in the scant light of the observation equipment. Face completely in shadow, he sat there munching on a Flake, and wondering. He knew so many snippets about Bodie, which was hardly surprising, living in each others' pockets as they sometimes had to. He could list Bodie's favourite books—a very long list—and the foods Bodie hated—a very, very short list indeed. Same thing when it came to music and films and television programmes. He knew the names of the men Bodie played cricket with, knew about Aunt Maggie who had moved into the house when Bodie was six and used to tell him outrageous fabrications about her past. He even, as of seven months ago, knew that Bodie was bisexual, although distinctly more inclined to-

wards the male of the species, to the point that Doyle often found himself wondering if Bodie's girlfriends were a form of self-deception rather than real desire.

He stretched a bit, wishing that either they could open a window or that the heating worked on a setting between absolutely-stifling and freeze-your-balls-off. Still, he mused, staring at Bodie's abstracted profile, it could be worse: they could be trapped in their car, and compared to that, the van was a veritable Taj Mahal.

Automatically making sure that he didn't disturb Bodie's view of the monitors, Doyle reached round and snaffled the plastic lid of the flask and then made a face as he tasted Bodie's version of tea. Disgusting as always, but it was warm and wet and something to do. He wasn't even close to being tired, the day having been spent in nothing more strenuous than putting up his Christmas tree and that last bit of shopping for perishables. Bodie was supposed to be coming over for Christmas dinner tomorrow before they went back on shift, and in over-indulgent preparation, he had a pile of food in. Be nice, he thought, spending Christmas with Bodie. In fact, it had been years since he'd bothered over much with Christmas—never seemed to be much point, not once he'd left home, it not being the same without someone to share it with. Anyway, as an unmarried, he usually landed Christmas duty, which he didn't mind, not really. Not when he was going to spend it with Bodie. Funny, he'd always loved Christmas and hadn't even noticed how much he missed making a big fuss over it until he had Bodie to cater to.

"What're you doing for Christmas then?" Bodie asked him, keeping his gaze on the array of monitors and tape devices.

"What d'you mean, what'm I doing for Christmas?" That brought Doyle up short, all his visions of domestic bliss thrown to the wind. He refused to accept Bodie's blasé attitude: he remembered too well his partner's almost-shy smile when he'd been invited over. "You'd better not've bloody forgotten that you're coming round tomorrow. You haven't, have you?"

"Course not," Bodie said offhandedly, the whole shenanigan apparently meaning less to him than to Doyle, but the expression on his

face and the timbre of his voice betrayed his super-cool façade. “But that’s not till later, and I was just wondering what you were doing up to then, you know, who you were going to spend the day with, if there was someone special you had lined up. Christ, Doyle, all I did was ask a civil question, no need for you to jump down my throat like that.”

“Yeh, well, I spent most of today running round like a chicken with my head cut off, buying grub for you,” he lied cheerfully, pleased by Bodie’s slip-ups and marking himself another point against Bodie. He sneaked a peak at his partner, calculating how far he could push Bodie this time. “Anyway, with you coming over, I’ll be slaving over the cooker all day tomorrow, won’t I?”

Bodie cast him a quick sideways glance. “You don’t have to, honest. The Chinese place round from you’ll be open, if the cooking bothers you, I could grab a take-away?”

Ending on a question, it made Doyle smile. He was the only one—apart from Cowley himself—that Bodie was ever willing to really go out of his way for, or more impressively, give up food for and it was quite a compliment to have Bodie turn down a traditional feast in favour of soggy spring rolls and limp pineapple fritters. He smiled then at Bodie, leaning forward to tap his friend affectionately on the arm, quite content now that he’d pushed Bodie into that small gesture of friendship. “Nah, you know I like cooking, an’ it’s always worth it, the way you clear your plate. Don’t you worry yourself over it, mate, you just turn up hungry.”

Bodie looked at him for a time that stretched itself out until even Doyle was a bit on edge. More for want of something to say than any real thirst, Doyle nodded at the over-sweet tea. “Can I have some more?”

Bodie nodded, ready to start in on the usual backchat, when they heard someone’s footsteps coming up the street, heels clicking wetly on the pavement. Tea and banter forgotten, heads close-pressed together, they watched as the real focus of this observation job showed up at the innocuous little house.

“So, go on, tell me,” Doyle started again, feet propped precariously on the table amidst the gadgets and the flasks and the wrappers from

the three bars of chocolate Doyle had quietly scoffed whilst slagging his partner off about Bodie’s infamous eating habits, “is there anything you believe in that you can’t actually see?”

“Oh, Christ, not that again!”

“Interesting you said ‘Christ’ though, innit?”

“That, Raymond my old son,” Bodie said patiently, swapping seats and shifts with Doyle, automatically signing the log book, “is called blasphemy, and that’s not something anyone can believe in.” He picked up the rest of his sandwich, taking a hefty bite before he added: “It’s just something you do to something you don’t believe in.”

That wasn’t quite Doyle’s definition of blasphemy, but he was willing to let it pass in the interest of getting Bodie to actually open up to him. “So you definitely don’t believe in God then?”

“I didn’t say that. I said I don’t believe in Christ.”

“But you celebrate Christmas,” sharp, pinning Bodie, hoping that he’d caught him out on something.

“And since when has Christmas been anything but an expensive over-indulgence? For your information, mate, Christmas as we know and love it was something the Victorians invented, and we all know how fucking moral that bunch of hypocrites was.”

“But,” Doyle went on, ignoring Bodie’s customary pose of cynical misanthropy, “you said you didn’t believe in Jesus, not that you didn’t believe in God. So does that mean—”

“It means,” Bodie answered him, brooking no argument and the lash of his voice warning Doyle off, “that I don’t believe in any fucking God sitting on his fucking cloud watching over his fucking flock.” He paused, eyeing Doyle with would-be contempt. “Don’t tell me you do?”

But Doyle had long since got beyond falling for Bodie’s deflectional questionings. “Not me we’re talking about, is it?”

“It’s not me either. You’re the one talking about God. Which is bloody stupid if you ask me.”

Interesting that Bodie had come over so defensive. “When it’s Christmas? It’s perfect!”

“And most important of all,” Bodie, com-

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pletely changing the atmosphere, pushing back any slight approach to real intimacy, bending one of his rare, warm smiles on Doyle, “you’re bored and getting on my wick is more entertaining than picking your nose.” Bodie was turned fully towards Doyle now, his gaze remarkably soft and gentle for a hard-nosed CI5 agent who was supposedly keeping his partner at arm’s length. “Here,” he added, thumping Doyle on the nearest knee and handing him another cling-filmed sandwich, “have some more of these. You need to put some meat on your bones, else you’ll end up puncturing Susy the Inflatable Doll and I wouldn’t want you to be lonely.”

Doyle grinned back at him, cosily aware of how fond he was of Bodie, for all the other man’s faults and even more smugly aware of how fond Bodie was of him. But then Bodie looked down and away, and Doyle looked away, the thin edge of the wedge of discomfort beginning to split between them. Not easy admitting how fond you were of someone, not when it wasn’t hidden behind jokes or affectionate insults, nor when there was nowhere to run and the only distractions were the clicks and hisses of electronics and the idle chatter of a politician old enough to know better than to believe that a woman young enough to be his daughter would be so enamoured of him.

Unwilling to face his own emotionalism when it came to Bodie, Doyle let the moment pass. “Can I have some more of the ginger beer?” he said, paving the way for desultory conversation to fill the quietness that had fallen between the elder statesman and his flight of fancy, filling the empty space that had fallen between himself and Bodie and which threatened to fill with yet more of Doyle’s honesty and even less of Bodie’s. And that wasn’t what Doyle was after, not this time.

“So anyway,” Doyle said as if an hour and a half hadn’t passed and as if the idle chatter hadn’t given way to the grunting and groaning of other people having sex, “is there anything you believe in that you can’t actually see?”

“You still going on about that? Christ, are you off your rocker or something? We’ve just been sitting here listening to that bloke getting his end away, and you’re asking me philo-

sophical questions?” Bodie pulled back, looking at Doyle in mock horror. “Here, you didn’t go and have the operation without telling me, did you, flower?”

Doyle fluttered his eyelashes shamelessly and blew a couple of kisses just for good measure, although his eyes were sharp with the miasma of desire that had grown with the sounds leaching through the speakers. “Oh, petal, I’d never do *anything* without asking you first!” But that was too uncomfortably close to the truth, so he dropped it, preferring to slide into conversation that put Bodie, not himself, under the microscope. “No, but seriously, *is* there anything you believe in?”

“My Browning.”

The comment landed on them like the wet blanket it was. “I’m not asking about that sort of thing,” Doyle said very quietly, pushing to get Bodie to open up to him, to reveal some of the depths that Doyle had thus far only been allowed to glimpse. “I know what you believe in when it comes to the job—”

“Do you? Do you really?” Very sharp, cutting almost, a brightness of cynicism in Bodie’s eyes. “I seriously doubt that, Ray.” Dismissively, he went back to watching the monitors of the darkened building, an almost visible shell around him.

“So you don’t think I know that much, eh?” Doyle moved closer, the legs of his chair screeching as he dragged himself to mere inches from Bodie. “You want me to tell you what you believe in?”

Bodie laughed, but it was hollowed with wariness and echoing with his own doubt. “You can try.”

“You believe in Cowley,” Doyle said with utter certainty. “You believe in that gun of yours.” Then, not sure at all, but hoping, pushing, prodding to have something—something he hadn’t yet named to himself—put on display for them both to see. “You even believe in me, don’t you?”

“What—you planning on offering to guard the Pearly Gates or something?” Bodie was squirming now, fiddling with anything that could keep him from revealing himself to Doyle’s perceptive eyes. “I’ve got news for you, pal, they don’t take our sort up there.”

Doyle didn’t move back, but simply watched

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all the more closely, this the first time Bodie had ever mentioned their shared sexuality in anything but the most jocular of tones. “That why you gave up on the Church?”

“Was never in the fucking church! My family’s not religious, never has been.” He made a couple of purely unnecessary adjustments to the surveillance gear, as if saying nothing would out-wait Doyle. Under that unblinking stare, he yielded, peeling back a single layer of his outer defences, showing more than he probably ought. “And when you get to know some of the things people are capable of, it’s hard to believe in some fat old geezer sitting on a fucking cloud twitching his harp.”

“Might not be someone like that. Might be—”

“An incredibly boring fucking conversation to go over again. You know something, Ray,” he went on, thinking about philosophers and debaters and dramatists, “you should’ve been Greek.”

“Didn’t you know?” Doyle asked him with fatuous wonder, thinking about Greeks and sex and the indulging therein. “I already am!”

And had the pleasure of seeing Bodie blush, and fumble, and suddenly become engrossed with the routine notes they were supposed to make when the target so much as farted.

Contrary to popular belief, Doyle really wasn’t a cruel and insensitive bastard: he let the subject drop, although he didn’t return his chair to the wall, sitting close enough instead that every time he swung his foot in idle boredom, his shin brushed against Bodie’s calf. Watching Bodie watching the sleeping house, Doyle indulged himself in remembering a particular evening over half a year ago. It had been one of their best nights, nothing spectacular to the casual observer: a couple of pints, home to watch the match on television, sitting up together talking until they heard the milk float clattering down the street. A lot of secrets had come out that night, but as usual there were more of Doyle’s than Bodie’s. In fact, now that he came to think about it, Bodie had refused to admit his sexual proclivities until Doyle had admitted that he enjoyed the occasional bout with a bloke. Then Bodie had spoken up, and Doyle remembered the lessons Bodie had obviously learned from the adored Aunt Maggie, because Bodie had regaled him with story upon

story of scandalous interludes, some of which may or may not have been true, but most of which had been doctored to make them funny.

Typical, that. Hide something in plain sight, make a joke of it, tell some terrible secret (I got out of Africa because the men I was working with enjoyed killing too much, Ray and I was starting to understand why...), and send everyone home happy with the notion that they’d been allowed in under Bodie’s defences to see the real man behind the bland and butch façade. Until they went over it again and realised that they’d found out more details, they’d found out more action, yet what made Bodie tick was still as obscured as ever. Like the whole thing with blokes. If he believed Bodie’s comments implicitly—and he wasn’t that stupid—then Bodie only went for fellas when there was nothing better available. But that wasn’t borne out by seven months of very careful observation. Given a stream of people walking past, it was the men’s bums Bodie looked at. Given a group of people in a pub, and Bodie would either be looking at the blokes, or he’d find some man to share a knowing wink and a smile with. Oh, yeh, given his druthers, Doyle was convinced that Bodie would rather have a man any day of the week.

Which left the question of why Bodie hadn’t so much as pinched his bum since that night. Not a pleasant situation, finding all Bodie’s casual touching stopped as if it had never started. Obvious reasons for it, of course, such as Bodie not wanting Doyle to think his virtue was at risk. But it had left Doyle with a growing loneliness, an emptiness that was very hard to fill. And, of course, he speculated as he watched Bodie stretch and rub his eyes tiredly, there was the fact that maybe Bodie thought he couldn’t get away with it any more. Maybe Bodie thought that he’d get caught at something worse than feeling his partner up. Maybe touching him up like that revealed a hell of a lot more than Bodie thought safe.

And that, that was what Doyle was interested in.

“Anyway,” Doyle said as soon as Bodie stirred from his uncomfortable doze in an even more uncomfortable chair, not bothering to acknowledge that they’d swapped turns and

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chairs and Bodie'd had two hours sleep since last Doyle had uttered a mutter, "you were going to tell me what you couldn't see that you actually believed in."

Bodie yawned, fingers scrabbling through short hair, redshot eyes focussing blearily on the flask with its reviving, if cooling, tea. "That," he finally mumbled round the edge of the plastic cup, "is a barefaced lie."

"No, it's not," Doyle responded with absolute mendacity. "You were just about to tell me when you dropped off and started snoring instead. You must be getting senile in your old age, mate, if you can't remember—"

"Doyle," and there was an edge to his voice, "I couldn't've been about to confess my all to you, because there isn't a single solitary fucking thing I believe in that I can't either see, hear, smell, touch or taste. All right? That finally sunk through your thick skull then?"

Doyle gave him a long steady look, until Bodie shuffled around guiltily and began their usual banter, distracting Ray with offers of sandwiches from the bag and soup from the other flask and a bag of Doyle's favourite violet chocolates from Harrods.

Not letting up the pressure of his gaze, Doyle refused the offers, eyes narrowing in interest as Bodie took on a hunted cast. His partner was obviously looking frantically for something to close this conversation, and so Doyle gave it to him, respite for Bodie, time enough for himself to think about what he was going to do. "Can I have some more of the crisps?" he asked. "Nah, the roast chicken ones," when Bodie went for the only flavour of crisps that Doyle hated. He noticed the tension bunching the tendons of Bodie's neck and took pity on his partner, deliberately setting out to be amusing, harking back to a conversation that had been off-and-on for days now. "Oi, d'you reckon Cowley gets himself all done up in his Highland best and stands to attention for the Queen's Speech tomorrow? Can just picture it, our George—" and he rabbitied on, lulling Bodie into a sense of ease, whilst Doyle's mind raced around nineteen to the dozen, adding together all of Bodie's reactions and comments and silences.

"So anyway," Doyle finally began again, close to the end of their shift, well into Christ-

mas Day, but still a long time before the sun would show its pallid face, always supposing it could brave the clouds and the cold, "what is there that you believe in—"

"Fucking hell, Doyle!" Bodie positively exploded, yelling loud enough to wake the dead or startle any poor passing stranger. "Will you just shut the fuck up and give me peace?"

Not even Ray Doyle would ignore Bodie in that tone of voice. Silent, Doyle shrugged as if his partner were being unreasonable, then settled back to finish putting two and two together.

"So what do you believe in that you can't see?"

Not Doyle asking this time, but Bodie, and a Bodie not looking at him, a Bodie concentrating on fiddling with a vivisected biro.

"Me?" Not often, not often at all that they either indulged in conversations like this at Bodie's instigation—too dangerous in some ways, for they could lead to confessions better left unsaid or consequences neither one of them wanted. Doyle shrugged, giving himself another second before he committed himself to an answer. Interesting that Bodie was asking him that, interesting that Bodie was the one initiating a deeper level of intimacy. And something that had to be a good sign. "I believe in a lot of things."

"Such as?" Not quite belligerent, not quite challenging, but very defensive, and Doyle wasn't entirely sure why. Oh, it could be nothing more than Bodie being awkward about trying to show Doyle that he wasn't bearing a grudge about Doyle's nagging, but it might, if they were both lucky, be because Bodie was finally willing to take their relationship another step forward.

Doyle looked at him for a long minute, long enough to make Bodie look at him, long enough for Bodie to become uncomfortable with the silence—long enough, in other words, to make Bodie vulnerable to the answer.

"You," Doyle said, unblinking in his honesty. "You."

And watched, as Bodie heard him, and took the answer in, absorbed the unspoken that lay underneath that single word.

"Me?" A fumble with a notebook, a dropping

of a pen, and then Bodie was looking at him again. "Not God, not Cowley, not yourself? Just me?"

Doyle's turn now to back off, thoughts of confession a lot cosier than the real thing. "Now who's got delusions of grandeur? Of course not just you. But you more than anyone else."

"Why me?"

Doyle watched Bodie's expression change, was convinced he saw the burden of responsibility settling upon Bodie, the weight of someone else's needs, someone else's life... Things Bodie had avoided since he was old enough to know what that all entailed.

"Who else?" Doyle shrugged as he spoke, as if it weren't important. "And anyway, I thought it was me meant to be asking what you believe in. *You* already know all the important about *me*." He leaned back in his seat, giving Bodie what little space was available, and waited for Bodie to take the plunge, or insist on leaving them circling round each other in this endless game of self-protection.

A deep sigh, a hand run through hair, a coiling of energy needing to explode, to *move*, to get out of here... And then Bodie was simply looking at him, and Doyle knew that this was the moment that would decide if he were going to truly know this man, if he were going to be granted the gift of seeing whatever Bodie believed in—the things that made Bodie the man he was. To find out if they were going to just continue being mates, or progress to something more.

"Our relief's going to be knocking on that door any minute now," Bodie said by way of a *non sequitur* that made perfect sense to Doyle, who had a slow upwelling of what would soon be joy. Bodie hadn't said that what he believed was none of Doyle's business, he hadn't said he wasn't going to talk about it. What he was saying was that there wasn't time and this wasn't the place. Which meant...

"I've got a fridgeful of food," Doyle delivered his own *non sequitur*, knowing Bodie would understand him the same way he did when they were on the job and there wasn't the time for mere words. He put on a voice that would have done a music hall announcer proud. "A Full English Breakfast," he declaimed, "complete with eggs, sausage, bacon, tomatoes, beans,

bread and butter—"

"Kippers?" Bodie added when Doyle began to wind down.

"And kippers! But they're the frozen ones, mind." He frowned theatrically, although his face was alight with this unspoken agreement they had, that Bodie would come home with him, that Bodie would let him in close to him, that—

Bodie, prosaic, breaking into Doyle's fantasy. "Have you got kidneys?"

"Course I've got fucking kidneys! But if you think I'm going to let you dig them out and fry them up just so you can have a complete breakfast, then you're mad. I'll cook for you, sweetheart," and he proved that Bodie's Bogart was bad only in the absence of Doyle's competition, "but I won't die—"

Doyle bit the words off: neither one of them was quite ready for declarations the likes of that. They both knew that they'd each one of them risked their lives for the other, and in this oddly intimate atmosphere, jokes about not being willing to die for the other were a minefield leading to denials and the trivialisation of what Doyle wanted.

And that, he finally admitted to himself in so many words after having danced round the topic for half a year, was to have Bodie. Physically, sexually, emotionally, even spiritually. With a chilling of shock and a thrilling of excitement, he finally confessed to himself that he wanted Bodie bound to him forever, with no time off for good behaviour, Bodie at his side always. He looked up then, amazement written all over his face, to catch Bodie watching him.

"Just dawned on you, has it?" Bodie asked almost casually, smiling quite indulgently at Doyle.

What was that Doyle had been thinking about—Bodie's girlfriends being a form of self-deception? How about deception of an excessively immature partner who was too stupid to know what he really wanted? And what was that about never really knowing what was going on inside Bodie's thick skull? A deeper understanding of what they were all about than Doyle himself had, obviously. That's what all the not-touching and the girlfriends dangled in front of his nose had been about: getting Doyle

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to the point where he missed Bodie and admitted to himself that he wanted the other man for his own. “You’re a rotten bugger,” he said without heat, too caught up with all this newness to be angry.

“Complaining to the management before you’ve sampled the goods? Tut, tut, Raymond, shame on you.” Then a happy and for Bodie, an uncomplicated grin, this one thing that Bodie was absolutely sure about. “You won’t be calling me a rotten bugger after we’ve shagged a few times, though, I can promise you that.”

A tantalising comment, but there were other things Doyle wanted to dig into first before he got started thinking about sex and lost all brain power. “How long have you known?” he asked, really rather put out that his own great revelation should be old hat and so embarrassingly blatant to his partner.

“Since about two weeks after you confessed you liked ‘an occasional bout with a bloke’ was how you put it. Charming, Doyle, absolutely fucking charming.”

To think that all Bodie’s hesitations and doubts and holding back must have been a ploy to get Doyle to recognise what Bodie had already worked out for himself—and without the decency of informing Doyle himself. Doyle didn’t know whether to murder the smug bastard or throw him to the floor and fuck him into oblivion. “You know something, I wish that once, just fucking once, you’d let me know what was going on inside that thick skull of yours.”

Bodie grinned at him, the same grin that usually had his commanders putting him on report or relegating him to the file room. “All you had to do was ask. All right, all right!” This, as Doyle not-so-playfully went for him. Arms full of a vaguely struggling Raymond Doyle, Bodie told him. “I’ve wanted you for a long time, Ray my old china, but you—” He shook his head, and manfully resisted the temptation to kiss a Doyle who was half in his arms, ripe rump hot and luscious on his lap. “You had this idea about having a ‘bout’ with a bloke, as if it was the flu or something. Did you honestly think I was going to get involved with you when being with a man was something you described like an illness?” For all his tone was jestful, Bodie was obviously deadly serious, for all that one hand was stroking the peak of Doyle’s

nipple through the limpness of cotton. “I’m not stupid and I’m not a masochist either. Being a ‘bout’ for you would’ve ripped me apart, Ray, and I’m not about to let anyone hurt me.”

Understanding was easy now that he at least had the basic rules of the game at his disposal. “Not even me. That’s what you were going to put on the end there, wasn’t it, Bodie?”

“Fishing for compliments, Doyle?”

There was an edge to that voice, a warning that for all his outward confidence and insouciant sang-froid, Bodie was dangerously insecure about this. Doyle, for one, couldn’t blame him. He stared at Bodie, taken aback as both Bodie’s knowledge of him and his own less than flattering attitudes were pointed out to him, and quietly decided that Bodie was right—he really could be a proper bastard at times, and if he’d been in Bodie’s shoes, he wouldn’t have chanced it either. He pushed himself up and away, resettling in his own seat, Bodie immediately using the pause to annotate the log, behaving as if there wasn’t a single thing going on. Which just went to prove how nervous the poor bugger was. And how easy to misinterpret Doyle’s pulling away from him had been. There was a lot he could say, but Bodie’s too-accurate assessment of him still stung, and he doubted that the facile phrases that he’d used so frequently to so many others would work with Bodie. In fact, for all that there was so much of his partner that he didn’t know, he was well aware that the wrong words now would set them back another half-year. No heavy declarations of affection then, no comments about how he wanted to be with Bodie forever and a day, nothing that would sound pretentious and therefore, meaningless. Best to keep it light, then, to fall back on their own tried and true methods of communication. Best, if only because it protected Doyle from Bodie not needing him as much as he wanted his partner. “So are you coming over for breakfast then?”

A wary look for that, a question in Bodie’s eyes, and then Bodie, braver by far in this moment, actually put it into words. “It’s the first time I’ve ever been offered breakfast without the sex coming first. Does that mean I get to say ‘can I have some more please’ and have anything I fancy?”

Their usual rivalry rose again, and Doyle

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decided that if Bodie could do it, then he bloody well could as well. "You can say anything you want to, it's not going to bother me," a tacit invitation to more than just sex and far more than mere food. Anything Bodie fancied, in fact, not that either of them was sappy enough to wax lyrical over it. "Anyway, I suppose," Doyle said, balancing his chair on two legs, deliberately spreading his legs to entice Bodie with the view thus revealed, "we could always say that we were just going about the sex bit so that it would match your brain, mate."

Bodie was smiling at him now, that fatuous grin Doyle had caught on him in unexpected moments, more promise in that than all the

fancy poetry Oxford had ever published. "You mean salacious, lecherous and fucking brilliant?" "Nah," Doyle said lazily, utterly straight-faced. "I mean backwards."

It was rather fortunate for Doyle's continued existence that their relief chose that very instant to tap quietly on the door.

"Or in your case," Bodie muttered under cover of Murphy and Jax complaining about cold and wet and ruined Christmas Days, Doyle jumping as a very proficient hand cupped his backside, "very arsy-versy."

And the closest Doyle got to complaining about that comment, was to ask for more...

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