

SNOWBOUND

OR

A TALE OF TWO SITUATIONS



Snowbound is one of those pieces that grew unpredictably and in a controversial direction. Originally it was meant to be a moderate tale of sado-masochism, one of the Glaswegian's 'particular perversions'. However, after the first draft was done, M. Fae decided to discard it as a lie. She felt it was too politically correct and not the way the characters wanted to go. So back to the keyboard to begin again. There are now two separate versions and the reader will have to make a choice of what and how much of each to read. This is a warning: the story M. Fae wanted to write consists of Nobody's Fault, It Was..., ...the Worst of Times, and Little Doyle. Read these four pieces if you do not mind rape presented without apology. If you do not wish to read a strong rape story, then read the alternate series which has no rape: Nobody's Fault, It Was..., ...the Best of Times. And stop. If you intend to read both versions, then please do so in the correct order and at different times. Everything all at once would be too overwhelming and would make little sense.

NOBODY'S FAULT

I've always wanted to be a soldier, for as long as I can remember. I think it was because when I was really small, I used to think King Arthur's Knights were soldiers, and every family back then had someone who went to war and never came back. Those were the blokes everyone had a good word for, you know, the

old 'never speak ill of the dead' bit, but I didn't know about that then: I just thought that soldiers—all the men who went away to fight were soldiers to me, whether they flew 'planes or sailed around in huge great big ships—all soldiers, were these wonderful people everyone loved and respected. So I suppose it's not sur-

prising that I wanted to be a soldier when I grew up. Better than being a riveter like my da, that was bloody certain. I can still remember him coming in at night, and you could smell the shipyards and the sweat off him. He was a big man, my da, and you know how when you go back as an adult, most people and things aren't half the size you thought they were when you were a kid? Well, my da were just as big. When I was small, I remember how it hurt the back of my neck to look up at him, and one of the first things I remember really clearly is him picking me up and swinging me as high as the ceiling. It made me dizzy and turned the world into something strange and bizarre and frightening: I shivered, absolutely terrified, when I looked down and could see the dust lying on the curve of the ceiling lightbulb. Funny how something like that can scare a kid, but it made me feel as if everything was all topsy-turvy and nothing made sense, like Alice through the looking-glass (which I moaned about when my mam tried to read it to me: my big brother always called it a sissy book and even if I didn't know what 'sissy' was, I knew it was something bad, like Fenian.). But Da had this great laugh, bigger than him, and when I was sitting on his lap, if he laughed at something on the wireless, I'd shake and shake with him laughing so hard, and I loved it. It was grand when he laughed, and I used to think about it after, when I was in bed at night, after I'd said my prayers and Mam had given me my kiss.

Then I'd think about what Da looked like, those round scars pockmarking his skin, little spots where the hair didn't grow any more, white dots that were so smooth when I moved the black hair on his forearm out of the way. I was fascinated by them, loved them and how soft they felt, until I realised that the ugly purple and black burns were what those pretty white spots started out like, part and parcel of being a riveter. Not that you ever heard him complain about it my da, not once.

I can still love my da when I think of him like that, and I can even understand him, now that I'm older myself, those nights he came in like a bear with a sore head, so bad-tempered he'd shout if anyone one of us tried to climb into his lap or get him to help with the homework. He had a hard job, and money was always on the

scarce side, and these days I know how hard it is to be responsible for other peoples' lives. So I can understand the nights when he came in tired and fed up. Friday nights are different, though. That's something I can't get past, and Friday nights were probably the reason I decided to actually do something about becoming a soldier instead of dreaming about it the way my mates dreamed about being football stars or pop singers. I was never sure if it was spite or genuine Faith that made my mum do it—and she wasn't the type you could ask, believe me—but every Friday night without fail, she'd make fish for tea. Every single Friday, like the good Catholic she was, and every single Friday, my da would come in late, and there it'd be in the oven between two plates—this is in the days before tin foil, of course, and we never had enough spare brass for take-away—dried up fish, boiled potatoes gone grey or yellowish or brown round the edges, peas that had started to dry out and harden. And that's when he'd start. First thing, he'd yank the plate out of the oven, slam it onto the kitchen table, and then he'd be f'ing and blinding all over the place. My mam'd hush all of us children, shooing us upstairs, but he'd be shouting at us as well, words and names that we didn't understand, but we knew it was all to do with the only thing they ever fought about. Funny isn't it? All my mates had families who had fights and aggro, and I always just lumped my family in the with them. It never even dawned on me till I was about ten that not everyone had an Irish Catholic mum and a Glaswegian Protestant dad (or Fenian and Proddy dog, which is what we'd hear when the fight'd start on Friday night) and that was what they argued about instead of money or him drinking or all the other crap that went on in my pal's houses. But anyway, we never went to Church, Mam'd leave us with the woman next door and go to the Church for early morning Mass just after Dad'd left for the yard during the week, but she was always going and complaining that she couldn't take us, and he'd always be complaining that she was still going to that 'Papist cludgie' and doing it behind his back. Later on, I'd understand a bit more about the strifes and strains of inter-religious marriage, but when I was a kid, all I knew was that Mam made fish on a Friday when all the other

neighbours were having liver or stew or sausages and that Da always went berserk when he saw it.

The drinking didn't help either, I suppose. He'd always go 'just for a few' or 'a wee bevvy' before he'd come home on Fridays. Never a whole pay-packet, mind, but enough to make him unsteady on his feet—there used to be a big dirty mark on the door lintel of the kitchen where he always stumbled into when he half-fell over the old-fashioned doorsill—and spoiling for a fight. He'd start off shouting, and she'd shout back, then he'd shout louder, and she'd get quieter, and we'd all be crowded together at the top of the stairs, listening. My big brother, and I remember this as far back as when I was too young to say his name properly and used to call him 'Bimmy' instead of Jimmy, he'd gather us three younger ones all together and put his arms around us and hold us together. My sister, Peggy, she'd always start crying, but Fiona never did. Not once, no matter what anyone ever did, our Fiona never shed a tear. She'd stroke my hair, petting me like a cat, when the arguing downstairs started getting scary, which was when Dad would be shouting at the top of his lungs and Mam would be so quiet it was as if she didn't exist any more.

That was the scariest, because we all knew what was coming next, and when the hitting actually started, it was almost a relief for us, because then it had happened, which meant that it would end, which was better than waiting for him to start and wondering if he'd come upstairs with his belt and take it out on us. But I suppose that's what helped me turn into such a loner as well: Jimmy'd be holding us together, and we'd all be hanging on tightly to each other, but as soon as we heard that first hit, we'd start to slowly unravel. It wouldn't even be physical at first, but I could feel it, even when I was really small. Most of all when I was little, I suppose. After a while, I learned how not to feel anything at all when it started, so that in a few years, all I'd think when the shouting started was a sort of boredom, a wish that they'd get it over and done with and shut up so that I could read or listen to the wireless. When I was really young—couldn't have been more than three, because I had my very first pair of big-boy flannel pyjamas on and the piping hadn't been picked off from the top of the pocket yet—I remember being the last one

left at the top of the stairs, watching the twisting shadows on the hall wall with a sickened, petrified fascination. I'd still be there, sometimes, when Dad would come stumbling up the stairs, and pick me up and hug me and tell me how much he loved me. He'd always start crying then, great big fat tears rolling down his face. And I'd feel sorry for him, and I'd love him, and I'd hate him at the same time for what he did to my mum.

Don't suppose it's really surprising that I grew up without the faintest idea how to have a good relationship with a woman. But on the other hand, Jim's happily married, so's Peggy. It's just me and Fiona who don't get close to people, not even each other. We're very alike, me and her. We even look similar, two peas in a pod Mam used to say. I was really shocked when she showed up at Dad's 60th birthday party—until I heard some of the barbed little poison remarks she kept on making to Dad. Fiona has a way with words: you ought to hear her when she gets started. Poor Da didn't know what'd hit him. I wasn't surprised though, especially not when I asked her why she'd shown up and it was for the same reason I did: she hated the old bastard, loved him a bit too, and she never wanted to have it on her conscience that she'd abandoned him. Hell's bells, I went to see him twice in the past six months, how's that for filial guilt?

I suppose it's not really true, though. As I get older, the memories lose a bit of their sting and I understand him a bit more. I'm not sure I like that: sometimes I hear myself saying something that could've come right from his mouth. But I wouldn't hit someone the way he did. I'm a lot of things, but I'm not a bully. I'm not saying I'm a Lord Longford either, mind—I've been known to enjoy a fight or two in my day. I won't hesitate if some bloke looks like he's out for trouble. I put the boot in and that's him taken care of, isn't it? But it's when I get so fucking impatient with people being stupid, that's when I hear my da's voice coming out my mouth. And as I said, every year I get older, I see more of my da in me. Normal that, though, isn't it? We all do that, don't we? You grow up ashamed of your parents or hating them, and then one day, you look in the mirror and guess who's looking back at you.

I was a bit upset when my da died, but I still

don't think there's any need for me to be stuck in here writing all this down on pieces of paper. I'm only going to tear them up after, aren't I? No chance I'm going to let anyone else see this—especially not that Doctor Ross woman. Sharp as a tack and twice as cold, that woman. I think she's frigid. Well, she'd have to be, wouldn't she? Not a flicker from her when either me or Doyle walks in, and women always go for at least one of us. But not our Ross. All she does is sit there, cool as a cucumber, making notes. She won't be making any notes from any of this stuff, that's dead bloody certain.

Funny, isn't it, how much I miss my da? If you'd asked me before he died, I'd've said I mainly hated the rotten old sod, but now... I don't know. He had a few good ideas, I admit that. And he did love us, I never doubted that. Even when he'd been hitting Mam, he'd always come in to me and kiss me and cuddle me till I fell asleep. Sometimes he'd tickle me, and there I'd be, laughing my head off, knowing that no-one else got that from him. Course, the other side of that was that I was the one who bore the brunt of it when Mam didn't. I was about eight, I suppose, or perhaps seven, when he started taking his belt to me on a Friday night instead of hitting Mam. I can remember lying in bed, waiting for him to come home—his drinking got worse, and he'd started not coming home on a Friday till closing time—and lying there terrified, my heart pounding, waiting and waiting for him to come upstairs. It was the same as when I was really small: the anticipation was the worst bit. Once the hitting started, it got better. You see, after a while, you get to the stage where you don't even feel it any more. But I wasn't

stupid enough to let my da know that, was I? Didn't want him to start taking the belt to my legs instead of my bum. And the hitting never lasted that long, but afterwards, he'd cuddle me, and he'd bring my present out of his pocket. As long as I realised that I'd done something wrong—and I was a right rotten brat, no two ways about it—then after he'd punished me, he always made sure I knew how much he loved me.

Not much else I can say, is there? My da was a bastard, I know that, but he was also the only father I had and that man loved me. So it makes sense to me that I got a bit tangled there over whether I should cry my eyes out or dance on his grave. And it's not as if it's anybody's fault that he was the way he was, is it? I mean, he'd had a hard life—if you thought my da was a hard-nut, you should've met my Granda! Da had four kids to feed and clothe and house and a wife who never forgave him for not converting. It wasn't as if he ever did us any real damage either, is it? A bit of a belting never did anyone any harm—like my mam said, spare the rod and spoil the child. It's just that my dad applied that rule to his wife as well as his children. But you have to give credit where credit's due as well, he kicked us all hard enough that we've all done something with our lives.

Right. I've had it. Pubs open in half an hour and Doyle owes me grub. So you can consider this 'verbalisation exercise' over and done with. And I'm going to burn every last page before I leave this room. Nobody's business but mine, and nobody's fault that my family wasn't perfect. And Ross can stick that in her pipe and smoke it.

IT WAS...

A surreality of snow and sky ensconced them, nuances of white and grey and silver numbing into an endless shadow of light, coruscating endlessly, until the road grew steeper and the rimpling fields became hills and finally, exultantly, mountains. Chester was far behind them, and in the car, they were warm, safe, protected by the illusion of steel strength

rushing them on towards cosy destination. The road was far from endless, disappearing around corners only to reappear again, briefly, to hide its biting blackness behind the softness of wintering hills. Despite the heater curling warmth around his toes, Bodie had a red tartan travelling rug wrapped tightly around him, only his pale forehead and dark hair showing in rumpled

sleep. Whistling, almost softly, imbrued by the greetings card fairy-tale world he was driving through, Doyle sat behind the wheel, eyes bright and alert, hands and feet quick and deft as he drove them along the unintentional viciousness of the mountain roads.

Festive song whistled almost under his breath, precisely the perfect tune for a man bent on convincing himself that all was well in his world and that he mustn't grumble and had lots to be happy about. He was, he thought to himself, sparing a glance at the snoring lump beside him, quite happy. Content, almost, or as much so as he could ever be. All his worries and woes had been deliberately and painstakingly sloughed, snake-like, for this holiday: he was determined that nothing, but most especially not himself, was going to spoil it this time. As if waiting to be discovered by Hollywood, a prettily snow-festooned sign glimmered at him: not far to Llanfairvechan and cosy cottage now. A slight skidding of the wheels stopped both his musing and his whistling, then yet another bend in the road was past them, and he could see the village at the bottom of the hill, and there, a vague sliver of dark amidst the dotting blackness of fallow trees, the road that sidewound its way up to the holiday cottage they had rented.

They'd reached the crossroads, with its never-quite bustle of bus stop, garage, pub and shop. The pub looked appealing, but only for the convenience of the booze, and he was more anxious to settle into a nice warm house than wet his whistle amidst the dotting of hostile natives they'd find in there. The village was of the sort usually labelled picturesque, but the locals never thought of it that way, seeing it only as a collection of homes, of the spot where old Thomas the butcher had his heart attack in the street Easter Sunday, or where young Glynnis was caught lifting her skirt just to annoy that foreign Vicar here on holiday from Cheltenham. But to Doyle, it was a place out of myth or Dickens, and as he stretched from the confinement of the car, he half-expected to see waifs pressing their noses up against the bakery window.

He laughed to himself: if he wanted to see that, all he'd have to do is waken Bodie up. He glanced into the car, to meet one blue eye peering at him enquiringly over the woollen blanket.

"D'you want to come with me or stay in the car?" Doyle asked, knowing the answer, but asking just on the off-chance that Bodie might choose to stir himself.

The blue eye simply closed again, and the lump slid a little lower in the seat.

"Lazy bugger," Doyle muttered, meaning it. Usually it was Bodie who did all this donkey work, but Doyle had been the one to draw the short straw this time round, by dint of Bodie having had a slightly nastier time on their last case than Doyle himself had had. Sourly, he pulled his collar up to meet his curls, tucked his scarf in a bit more tightly, and went off to brave the natives.

The leaded glass of the door glowed romantically at him, heat hit him, and then all the bright conversation died and all the faces turned towards him were uniformly blank and unfriendly. He smiled politely, nodded a hello, and then the conversations started up again. In Welsh, pointedly and rudely, definitively shutting him out, ostracising him for the unwelcome foreigner he was. Shrugging, too accustomed to holidays in Wales to bother about the traditional local reaction to the current English invasion, he wandered over to the shelves, beginning to gather the mountain of food he'd need to keep Bodie fed and happy.

Eventually, it was his turn, if only because the last customer had left, calling out what Doyle assumed were goodbyes to Ruth the shopowner. The woman who sneered at him from behind the counter even unbent enough to speak to him in English when communication was truly unavoidable. Perhaps it was the amount of money he spent, but the brazen leer he got made him think it might have been his tight denims which made her go so far as to give him a genuinely sturdy box to pack all the purchases in. Laden, acutely aware of hostility mixing with lust at his rear, Doyle made it out to the car, dumping the box in the boot, carrying the clanking plastic bag of booze in to be placed carefully behind his own drivers seat. Bodie mumbled at him and Doyle dunted him one on the shoulder. "Oi, mate, you'd better stir yourself. Is that the right road for the house?"

"How would I know?" Bodie muttered, pulling the cosy blanket up over his head, muffling his voice even more. "Never been here before."

“Thought you said—”

“I said I’d stayed round here a couple of times before, but that doesn’t mean I know every fucking house in Gwynneth, does it? Christ, Doyle, why don’t you go and ask for directions for once in your life?”

“Thanks a lot, mate. Much appreciated. However would I manage without you?”

Bodie, eloquently, snored.

Doyle slammed the door shut, rocking the car, and stormed off back into the shop. “‘Scuse me,” he said, glad that it was just him and the owner in amongst the tins and the packets and the rolls of toilet paper. “Em, I feel a bit stupid about this—”

Not bothering to even pretend to see him as anything more than a nicely packed pair of jeans and a pretty pair of green eyes, she said: “Yes, well, you would do, wouldn’t you, boyo?”

Ruefully, Doyle conceded the point, deciding not to notice the way she was undressing him with a lascivious stare. “My mate—he’s in the motor—forgot to bring the map and the directions with him, so I was wondering if you could, you know, tell me how to get to the rental cottage.”

“And which rental cottage would that be that you’re talking about? There’s all rental cottages round here, what with all the English coming in and buying everything in sight. Forcing the prices up until none of the people who belong here can afford to even have their own home any more.”

Doyle, resolute in his wish to reach his destination, was not about to get into an argument over the impact of modern life on the wilds of Wales and he certainly wasn’t going to make any comments on the stupidity of bigotry against someone just because they’d been born English. “The owners are a Welsh couple, name of Dai and Anne Thomas. He’s a civil servant, works in London these days.”

“Oh, you mean the bloke in MI6, the one with the *English* wife. So it’s his cottage you’re after, is it then?” Actually being married to ‘an English’ was obviously worse than being one, in this woman’s books, and what little respect Doyle’s attractiveness had won him disappeared under the burden of being friends with a Welshman who’d not only gone to England, but married English as well. “In that case, you can take the

road outside right here at the crossroads, and then you can drive straight through, and don’t be turning off or you’ll be in Bangor before you know it.” She gave him another very disparaging glower, and Doyle kept his fingers crossed that she wasn’t giving him duff directions just to make his English life miserable. “You’ll be going up the hill, and you can’t miss the Thomas cottage, unless you can’t tell up a hill from down. It’s the last house up there, and if you go past it, you’ll be falling over the top of the hill before you find another human soul. Now, sir,” she said with a sincerely unfriendly smile as one of her regulars came in, a blast of cold air and snow following close behind, “is that it, or is there anything else you need for me to do for you?”

“No, no, that’s fine.” He couldn’t resist adding sarcastically, “And I’ll try not to fall off the side of the mountain.”

“Oh, that’s kind of you, sir. Save the Rescue from having to turn out.”

Not, Doyle suspected, that they would turn out if two Englishmen were stupid enough to fall off the side of a local hill. Bloody Welsh, he muttered to himself, a withering squall of wind and snow hitting him between the protection of his thick hair and even thicker jacket, cheek stinging red in the cold. Typical bloody unfriendly Welsh. Anyone’d think they had a grievance against the entire English race. Coming to the car and finding the door locked, Doyle seriously considered having a grievance against one particular representative of the English race. Fingers numb, he thumped the window, shivering until Bodie stirred himself to unlock the motor and let him in. “What was that in aid of, you dozy bastard? Scared someone was going to nick the car with you still in it?”

“Nah. Didn’t want anyone thinking they could lift the booze while I was asleep, that’s all.”

“You always this trusting, or d’you save this ‘specially for Wales?”

“You ought to see me in Scotland, mate.”

“I must remember to tell Cowley that one. Sure he’d be fair chuffed.”

But Bodie didn’t answer, gone back to cocooning himself in woollen warmth and solitude. Doyle sighed, muttered something very unflattering under his breath, and concentrated

on getting their heavily burdened car up the steep hill and finding their cottage.

Snow fell in exquisite patterns of beauty, making driving a hazard to anyone's health and positively lethal to Doyle's good temper. In between fuming over the sheer stupidity of deciding to Christmas in Wales—in this weather? Christ, they must've been drunk when they came up with this bright idea—he managed to navigate his way through billowing, blinding snow, past cars parked in tiny lay-bys outside smaller cottages, until he realised the road had petered out and that the slate-roofed chocolate-box house on his right had to be where they were going.

"Right, we're here. Off your arse, Bodie, we've got tons of stuff to get in there, so shift." Bodie shifted, stretching, blinking slowly and tiredly, his face pallid and fragile in the snowlight. Frowning to cover himself, Doyle felt the familiar melting inside as Bodie unwound himself from blanket and car seat, startlingly gorgeous in his sleepiness.

Voice gruff from sleep, words slightly slurred. "This it?"

"No, it's fucking Disneyland, what d'you think? Here, you can start with the food and I'll get the suitcase." Not looking at his partner, but diamond-sharp aware of him, Doyle hurried out of the car, actually glad of the bitter cold and the tearing wind: welcome distraction, even more welcome force to battle with in lieu of Bodie. It was a bit of a struggle, but he had the boot open, the box of food in Bodie's arms, the suitcase and bag in his own without any of it dropping into thick snow or blown off by gusting wind. Through the gate, a plodding trudge through the drift of new snow, then the key fumbled into the lock and they were inside, the wind banished outside, light switched on bright and shining and imparting an illusion of comfort and heat.

"Strewth, it's freezing in here!" Bodie snapped, slapping his arms for a bit of warmth. "I'll find the boiler and—"

"Dai said the new heating wasn't going in until April, so it's the coal fires, mate. There should be a bunker somewhere, so—"

"So I've stayed in cottages like this before, which is more than you can say, so I've got a better idea of where the fucking coal is than you

have. All right?"

So much for his fond self-delusion of everything being just hunky-dory. "Pardon me for breathing! If you're going to be such a fucking bastard about it, I'll do the kitchen then, while you do your Cinderella."

"Fine," Bodie snarled, stomping off in high dudgeon, cold, tiredness and the simmering violence of the past few months keeping his mood foul, fuelling yet another baseless blow-up. Nothing Doyle could say would be right, and nothing Bodie could say would be the right thing for Doyle either. So much for Christmas, Bodie brooded, shovelling coal into a scuttle, twisting newspaper to lay the fire, placing the coal with skill learned as a boy. So much for the idea that seemed so brilliant in October. But that was before the hostage mess, and before the gun running cock-up, and a lifetime before the undercover nightmare. He shuddered then, not from the cold, remembering being undercover, remembering what he had had to do to keep up the slimy persona he had had to play.

Across the room, arms filled with the food he'd hauled from London—a luxurious Fortnum & Mason Christmas pudding, a bottle of hard sauce, chocolates from Harrods, the Christmas cake from Bodie's favourite little bakery—Doyle was standing watching his partner, wincing in sympathy when Bodie shuddered, too clear a memory of his own making him understand Bodie's tension. He wanted to go over to Bodie, put his arms around him in support, give him a bit of a cuddle, tell him it was going to be all right. But it hadn't been all right, and platitudes like that were worse than nothing. But perhaps a bit later, once they'd had a few drinks... Yeh, Bodie always felt better with a few good drinks under his belt, so he'd open the gin early, for himself, and either the brandy or the Haig for Bodie. Anything that would help them get past the last job, and the one before it. And the one before that. A black cloud of his own hanging over him, Doyle said nothing, passing quietly behind Bodie, going into the kitchen, his clattering around lending an air of normalcy and vitality to the cottage.

The fire was lit downstairs, and now the one in the bedroom upstairs was roaring away merrily to itself. Bodie stared into the writhing flame, feeling the heat on his face, enjoying it

absently, crouching beside the hearth, brooding about nothing in particular. The room was beginning to warm already, with its windows tightly closed and curtains drawn. He checked the bed for damp, found it bone dry, quilt and blankets and clean linen folded neatly across the bottom. The electric blanket was the first thing on, heat turned low, and it took him only a few moments to get the bed made with neatly mitred corners and pristine smooth quilt. Inviting, it was, all mounds of feather quilt and big pillows and the hidden cache of heat from the electric blanket.

He wanted to have Doyle in that bed. Wanted to fuck him rigid. Not something he hadn't done before, but never when they were both *compos mentis* and never, absolutely never, to be discussed after. The one big, unwritten but inviolate rule: between encounters, the sex didn't exist. But not tonight. Not again, not ever again, for he had had more than his fill of all the lying and deception and pretending. And he knew that Doyle planned on doing it all the same way they always did: he'd seen the amount of booze the normally stingy bastard had brought with him. So it was going to be the same old story. A few drinks, then a few more, still more, until Doyle was drunk enough to let his inhibitions go and condescend to go to bed with Bodie. Abruptly, the thought of that made Bodie want to weep, or kill something instead. To sit there beside Doyle on the sofa, drinking his beer or his whisky or his brandy like a good little boy until Doyle got plastered, then the touching, and the cocksucking, then finally the fucking. And if he was lucky, then Doyle wouldn't hate him in the morning, would perhaps do nothing worse than cut him off dead instead of making him suffer all the seven hells for daring to give Doyle what Doyle literally begged for the night before. There was no-one, not even Cowley at his peak, as vicious-tongued as Doyle when he got started. Bodie could attest to that.

Collapsing onto the bed, Bodie knew he couldn't take it, not this time. Not this time, not here, not after what he'd been through. The box of matches was hurled against the wall before he even realised he was going to throw it, yellow box splintering, reddish-blue tipped guts spilling down the pale pink cabbage rose wallpaper. A little unlit pyre grew at the skirting board and

methodically, without a single outward sign of his outburst, Bodie began putting the matches in the bedside ashtray. So domesticated he looked, but there was a fierce resentment burning in him, and all that showed it was the slightest narrowing of his eyes and the tightness of his lips. He dusted his hands clean, standing in the middle of the room, hands on hips, heat of the fire tanning his backside, surveying what would be the scene of yet another of their furtive, drunken encounters. Normally, he would have gone into the next-door bedroom, making up the bed in there to maintain the illusion of them not planning on having sex with each other, but not tonight. Not after what he'd been through, and not after what Doyle had put him through. There'd be no booze tonight, no ticket to deliberate amnesia, no excuses given. Doyle was going to have his fucking tonight, just the way the unfeeling bastard wanted it, but this time, Bodie was damned if he was going to let either one of them lie about it. They'd do it, but they'd do it stone cold sober, or not at all.

"And if Doyle doesn't want to sleep with me, he can make his own fucking bed, can't he?" he announced to the room in general, needing suddenly to hear the sound of a human voice.

"What'd you say?" came up, distantly, from downstairs. Doyle, of course, hearing him, probably wondering what the hell was going on now.

"I've done the bed and the fire," Bodie shouted down, tossing towels into the bathroom, sticking a spare one in the bedroom beside the bed where they could reach it when it was needed, as they would, inevitably, if he and Doyle didn't end up killing each other first. He took a deep breath, deciding that unless Doyle got difficult about the sex thing, then getting into a major fight with Doyle wasn't worth the aggro. The stairs he took two at a time, hurrying downstairs to where smells of cooking were already drifting.

"What're you making?" Light, casual, and oh, so friendly, no warning there that Bodie was about to turn their relationship and Doyle's world on its head.

"Tinned soup, sandwiches, tea and some of those cream cakes you brought, fatso."

Bodie shrugged, and dipped his finger into a Marks & Sparks cream sponge. "Want some of

my cream?" he asked, filthily, one cream-coated finger held suggestively erect an inch from Doyle's lips.

"Don't be disgusting, Bodie," Doyle snapped, shoving Bodie aside, making a great show of going over to the cooker to avoid unwelcome attentions. But his hips swung, and he stood with bum canted invitingly.

Yet they both knew what would happen if Bodie tried to take him up on the offer that wasn't truly on offer until later, much later, when they both had a skinful and it could be put down to drunken randiness.

Bodie, dark blue eyes brooding, crossed the tiny kitchen, large hands cupping the slenderness of Doyle's arse.

"Gerroff!" Doyle shouted, twisting free. "What the fuck's got into you, Bodie?"

"Isn't it more what the fuck's going to get into you, Ray?" He loomed in the kitchen, towering over Doyle for all that they were almost the same height. "Bring enough booze, did you?" Roughly, he shoved Doyle's aran sweater up out of the way, exposing hairy chest and pink nipples, palming the flatness of Doyle's chest, then twisting, hard, Doyle's nipples. "And I presume you remembered to bring the cream we use when we fuck." He stepped forward, aborting the nascent rise of Doyle's knee into his crotch. "You know the stuff I mean, don't you, Ray?" he asked silkily, rubbing his hardening cock against Doyle, pressing his partner back dangerously close to the pot of bubbling oxtail soup until he could feel the heat on his own face and knew that it must be blisteringly hot on Doyle. "I'm talking about your favourite lubricant. The nice, slick stuff so I don't hurt either one of us when I ram my cock up your arse."

Doyle, eyes dark, face like thunder, denying that this was happening, that any of this had any basis other than Bodie's unfortunate education as a pretty boy amidst sailors and then mercenaries. Voice rising, he gave vent to all the unfocussed rage of the past few jobs and gave no recognition at all to the sweetly taboo nights when he'd spread his legs for Bodie, felt his partner deep inside. No recognition for that at all, for to recognise the sex was to recognise the need, and that, as far as Doyle was concerned, simply did not exist. "Get your paws off me, Bodie, or so help me, I'll break your sodding

neck."

"You and whose army?" Bodie asked him, voice a seductive whisper. "Anyway, this is how you like it, isn't it? You're always on at me to do it harder, aren't you?"

A long, assessing look, then a sigh, of the sort mothers give teenage daughters and Cowley gives seasoned agents. "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, but if you're going to have a nervous breakdown and turn into a complete loony, would you mind going into the sitting room to do it? I'm trying to make lunch here." Calm words, calmer voice, the tone of the sane dealing with the unbalanced, but there was a wildness in his eyes, a glitter of fear, and of something else. Desire. Lust. Hunger.

Bodie saw all of that, and smiled. "Humouring the bamstick, is that it, Ray? And all the time, you're the one who's gone off the deep end, mate. Pretending we never fuck each other, Christ, what a sodding joke." The contempt was stinging, the thrust of his hips hard, punishing, the twist of his fingers painful. "But if that's how you want to play it, then fine. I'll go into the sitting room like a good little boy and wait for you to bring me my lunch." For a second, a terrifying second, he crowded over Doyle as if to kiss him, but then he pulled back to the harshness of his hand on Doyle's cock and the nip of his fingers on Doyle's nipples. "But don't think I'm going to stop, Ray, don't you think that for a second."

Then he was gone, the heavy door slamming shut behind him, and the kitchen was serene again. Apart, that is, from Doyle, who was still standing as Bodie had left him, jumper up under his armpits, nipples standing out swollen and thick. He licked his lips where Bodie hadn't kissed him, and conjured up the image of his partner leaning into him with the threat of rape.

And his cock throbbed.

Hard, erect, trapped by jeans that were far too tight, his cock remembered the thrill of Bodie's threat and power and intractable strength. The nearing loom of the kiss. The thrust of cock. The sharp pressure of hip. The heat of skin. The twisting fingers. The squeezing hand. All of it, all of him, all of them together, with the cooker digging into his back and the heat from the food scalding him. But all of it just puzzle pieces, to be put together into a knee-weakening memory of

Bodie, with the promise of sex in his hips and domination in his eyes. Trembling, Doyle undid his zip, hauling his cock out, fucking his fist fast and furious, replaying again and again the moment when Bodie leaned into him like that, with his cock so hot against him, his hands so hard and strong on his nipples, his eyes so darkly blue. His fingers clenched so tightly his knuckles were bone white, he leant against the kitchen table, bringing himself to a quick, painful climax. Searingly lonely, but better than giving in to Bodie. If Bodie only knew the way Ray reacted to him, then Doyle would never be up off his knees, and would never be free from Bodie's leash. As the last lonely spurt erupted from his cock, he fell forward, leaning on the back of the kitchen chair, letting it take his weight while he got his breath back and reined himself in under at least marginal control. He looked down at his hand, at the beaded whiteness slowly spreading, between his knuckles, onto his fingertips. And hated himself.

How are the mighty fallen, he thought to himself, so acutely aware of the legions of people who had wanted him, who had needed him. Yet here he was, standing in a kitchen with tinned soup on the cooker and cheese melting under the grill, so unromantic, so déclassé, alone with his cum sticky on his fingers, the man of his desires gone, uncaring, away. But then again, perhaps that was what he wanted most of all: to have Bodie labouring under the misconception that his, Doyle's, reluctance stemmed from an inability to deal with latent homosexual impulses—and what a joke that! If only, as the saying went, if only Bodie knew about the times up in the attic with his best friend, playing doctors at five, or earning a few extra quid when he'd been one step into disaster, running wild on the streets and half-way to Borstal. Useful, though, to have Bodie think that he was just being a complete moron about sex, bated once too often for his pretty-boy looks to be comfortable admitting that maybe, just maybe, the jibes might be true. As Doyle knew they were. As Doyle had always, silent confession in the dark to faceless priest, known they were.

Oh, no, it wasn't the queer aspect that worried him: it was the quicksand-slurping of need as it consumed him that scared him shitless. Needing so much, so all-devouringly, and needing

someone like Bodie. Bodie, who could be respected and deferred to. Bodie, who was strong enough to be leaned on. Bodie, who could always be needled into roughness, and violence, and the ominous pleasure of being dominated. His legs had stopped trembling, and his mind was capable of thinking beyond the confines of his own body and emotions, finally reminding him that the cheese would blacken soon and the soup boil over, and that Bodie, wonderfully dangerous Bodie, was waiting for him through that white-painted kitchen door. He should make his own lunch and demand that Bodie come through and fend for himself: assert his independence, display to himself that he wasn't really in danger of turning submissive to Bodie. He ought to. He really ought to.

But—a torn square of kitchen roll cleaned away the evidence of his weakness and his erotic addiction to Bodie's power, and then he was tucked away tidily, hands washed again, back to finishing making their lunch, setting the tray ready for two, heaping the pickle on more than half the toasted cheese, just the way Bodie liked it, doing the little things that pandered to Bodie so well. Only because they were partners, of course, he told himself. By the time he hauled the tray into the sitting room and faced Bodie again, he was his usual insouciantly pugnacious self, the lust and fear and self-knowledge tucked away as neatly as his spent cock.

"The least you could do is clear a bit of space, Bodie," he carped, using his own leg to shove Bodie's down from the coffee table, giving him somewhere to put the tray. Moving the scattered pages of the London paper out of the way, he felt it again: Bodie's hands on his arse, knowing fingers, confidant hands, utter certainty of welcome. Doyle whirled around fast, open hand slapping viciously into Bodie's cheek, violence restrained down to nothing more than that when he could so easily kill with that same hand, or with the knife on the tray, or with a sharply jagged broken china mug. Messier, to be sure, but effective, and they both knew it. But Bodie smiled at him, a long, slow smile and wilfully pressed Doyle on a sore point, one they both knew would set him off as quick as a firework.

"Slapping me off to protect your virtue? What a good little girl you are, petal, the Sisters would be proud of you." Then he moved forward,

trapping Doyle between his thighs, one hand pulling Doyle by the nape down, down, until they were face to face and Doyle's back was painfully contorted by the confining space and Bodie's inexorable hand. "Pity I know you're nothing but a fucking slag, isn't it? Just a cunt who'll spread for anyone who can get him drunk enough. That's you, isn't it, petal?" He ruffled Doyle's curls, a mockery of his usual affectionate gesture. "Gorgeous, aren't you, darling?" Rough fingers traced the shape of Doyle's eyes, tipping along his eyelashes, then following the line of his nose down to outline his lips. "Prettiest thing on the squad, that's my Raymond. Randroid too, but only if I get you legless first. Tell me, sweetheart, d'you let anyone with a bottle of whisky fuck you, or am I special?"

"You're a fucking maniac, that's what you are. Let go of me, Bodie, before I make you sing soprano." He pushed his knee forward, until the smooth roundness of his kneecap was up hard against Bodie's groin, and he could feel the rising cock there.

"Oh, yeh," Bodie breathed, rotating his hips a little, just enough to move himself against Doyle's knee, turning Doyle's aggressive dominance into caress, "do it like that. Harder, Ray, do it harder. But I forgot, didn't I? 'Do it harder' is your line, isn't it, petal?" He shoved Doyle backwards, so that Doyle barely missed the table and landed, heavily, on his backside. "That hard enough for you? Or am I being too rough for daddy's little boy?"

"I can take anything you dish out, so don't you come the bully with me, Bodie," Doyle snarled, getting to his feet in the proper stance for battle, lust curling hotly in his belly, the sensible part of his brain telling him he should turn on his heel and run like hell. From himself, not Bodie. "I'm sick fed up with your bully-boy shite, so you can just pack it in right now."

"Pack it in? Why, when it's what you want? Because it is, isn't it?" Bodie was on his feet, and they were poised, two tomcats fighting over territory, but they both knew the territory in question was Doyle's body. "You're so fucking insecure, you're petrified cos you fancy a bloke. What's the matter, Ray, that never happen to you before?" Then he catapulted forward, instantly past Doyle's defences, and there he was, kissing Doyle, tongue shoved deeply into

Doyle's mouth, hands clutching in Doyle's hair, holding him immobile. A ragged breath, and they were staring at each other, unblinking, one of them at least being honest, thinking the other was guilty of nothing more than a simple, obvious lie. "Or is it that it's happened too often?"

"I'm not a fairy, Bodie, and don't you go thinking you can make me feel like I am. Just because I—" he broke off in the nick of time, biting his tongue to stop himself from saying the dreaded words. Just because I let you fuck me, that's what he had been on the very precipice of saying, but he didn't dare say that. Didn't dare admit that some of what Bodie was saying was true. Not that it was, he told himself, swiping Bodie's hands away, marching over to sit on the sofa as if nothing had happened beyond one of their usual, far more innocent spats. Just because he'd done a couple of things when he was absolutely legless didn't mean anything anyway. After all, he'd stolen the odd thing when he'd been out drinking with his mates—and look at the night he'd cut that other kid up. Drunk as a pug he'd been that night, so all this was nothing more than another one of Bodie's exercises in excessive control, an attempt to turn a minor drunken weakness, a willingness to crawl at Bodie's feet, into an issue bigger than the Third World War.

"You know your problem, don't you," Doyle said, mouth full of toasted cheese and tomato, a speck of Branston pickle landing on his shirt. "You're too macho by half. In fact, Bodie, if either one of us has a problem with his masculine image, then it's you, mate. Stomping around like a bull on heat all the time..."

Bodie stood in front of Doyle, legs astride, arms folded, in black from the neck of his good wool poloneck to the toes of his snow-stained shoes. "Me? At least I don't walk around half hard all the time, showing it off to all and sundry and then screaming 'rape' every time some poor fella tries to get a taste."

"That's stupid! I don't—"

A slicing gesture with his hand, and Bodie had cut Doyle off. "I'm not going to argue with you, Doyle. You and I both know what you're like, and we both know I could talk until I'm blue in the face and you'd still deny it." He grabbed a plate, piling it high with the toasted cheese, taking his mug of soup, going over to the

solitary armchair and throwing himself into its cushions as if it were a newly honed Iron Maiden. "But I know the truth, Doyle, and I'm not going to keep on lying, not any more. I've had it with all your shite, and it's going to stop."

"Ooh, you're beautiful when you're angry, Bodie." Sliding steel between Bodie's ribs, the words glided out soft and vicious, turning the tables.

"That meant to be a dig at me, Doyle?" Bodie actually laughed, the tables turned not at all. "Supposed to get me all het up, all insecure about being a real man?" He took an enormous bite of toasted cheese, chewed it, had a swig of soup, picked the newspaper up again, burying his nose in the deathless prose about the upcoming home internationals. "Well, I've got news for you, mate," he muttered, all the more threatening because, so secure in his own self-image, he didn't even need to look at Doyle, "you can call me everything under the sun, you can waste your last breath on some pathetic innuendo that's supposed to put the wind up me, but all I have to do is remember you with my cock up your arse and you begging me to fuck you harder." Bodie looked up then, a quick, sweeping glance that stripped Doyle bare and made him see himself through Bodie's eyes, naked and impaled and pleading. "Oh, yeh, Ray, you'll have to do a bit better than cheap shots to get me on the run. Because I'm not backing down this time. Not a snowball's of that, sweetheart."

Doyle could feel the coldness of sweat trickling down his spine. He was over-familiar with that tone of Bodie's voice, having heard it in too many interrogations or too many sticky situations where only Bodie's lurking threat could get them out unbruised or unbattered. But this was the first time that he'd been spoken to as if he were the enemy, as if he were the thing that all Bodie's strength was arrayed against. It scared him. In fact, it terrified him.

But not nearly so much as it aroused him. Blood thundered through his veins, straining his cock hard again, soon, too soon after the bleak moment in the kitchen—don't think about it, it didn't matter, it didn't count, he told himself, face reflecting only the disinterest he didn't feel and hiding the maelstrom of emotions within—but he was hard again, and his balls

wanted to be touched and squeezed, and his arse ached to be filled with Bodie, Bodie's cum seeping from him, still body-warm against his skin. He yearned, flammably, to take Bodie inside himself once more, or to have Bodie bent double under him, cock to the hilt, Bodie's eyes closed to hold the ecstasy inside, Bodie's arse clenched around him. He shuddered, desire and dread colliding on his spine. He didn't want to think about what they did in the dark, didn't want to remember the dark and the illicit pleasure and the sinful delight. Didn't want to remember the sound of his own voice, so husky, so raw with need, demanding Bodie for more, for harder, for deeper.

Smiling behind his newspaper, Bodie chewed contentedly on his lunch whilst pricklingly aware of Doyle chewing on his words. He was winning, he could sense it, knew that Doyle's resolve to lie about this was slowly dissolving, snow into slush and turning just as murky. But it was for the best, no two ways about that, and not only from his own point of view. Doyle had to get over this stupid hang-up about swinging both ways: a waste, that, of energy and too unsettling in a job that gave them all the uncertainty that anyone could ever want. But it was the guilt, he thought, peeking over the top of the page at a pondering Doyle who had forgotten the mug in his hand, steam weaving round his face like the greying curls at his temples. Always too much guilt—just have a gander at Doyle's performance over this last undercover crap. Not that the guilt was undeserved, not this time, considering it was Doyle's stupid fucking fault the whole thing had gone so messily wrong. But to wallow in it that much—Christ, he'd almost expected Doyle to come before Cowley, cap in hand, and ask for six of the best for being such a cock-up. Instead, what had happened was Doyle getting plastered three nights in a row, turning up on Bodie's doorstep, bottle in hand and unwilling lust in his eyes. Last thing the poor bugger needs, isn't it? Bodie thought to himself, forgetting to keep his eyes hidden behind the sports stories, all this mess about being bisexual, getting himself all tied up about it. Be much happier if he just accepted it and let me—

He garrotted the next word before he could even think it, abruptly drowning all thought in

an article about the skills and weaknesses of Kenny Dalglish as opposed to Kevin Keegan, slipping away from that dangerous word with consummate skill. He did not need to remind himself that he did not, absolutely did not, love Raymond Doyle. In fact, he didn't even dare think it, just in case he admitted that he was hopelessly wrong. Because if he confessed to the truth of loving Doyle, then it wouldn't take long before that truth turned to lie as love turned to hate. For if he loved Doyle, if he was going to go through all this and have it turn to pain, and all because Doyle was too fucking immature to accept himself... If he loved, and there was no love given back to him, no warmth to hold him as he wanted to hold Ray. No-one to tell him it would be all right, and make it so with the complicated security of love and being loved...

"You going to sit there like Alf bloody Garnett or are you going to shift your fat arse and do the washing up?"

Doyle, of course, making a point to himself, sounding to Bodie like a man trying hard to be macho to cover the simmering desires within. "Why don't you put your floral pinny on and do it yourself?"

"Because one, I don't have an apron and two, I cooked the lunch, so you can do the cleaning up after."

"Christ, Doyle, did you have your sense of humour surgically removed at birth? Oh, excuse me, doctors," he said in a giggly, breathy female voice, "could you do, you know, the operation. Not because we're Jewish, of course, but because we wouldn't want our son to be fun with his friends, now would we?"

Doyle, freezingly, glanced at Bodie out of the corner of his eye and then rose to his feet, the simple grace and subtle sensuality of it making Bodie suddenly hot under the collar. Doyle, oblivious, plugged the television in, waiting impatiently for the set to warm up, long fingers tapping an agitated samba on the tarnished wood veneer, then flicking, quick economy, until he'd found *Grandstand*. He was aware, unexpectedly, of Bodie staring at him, and self-conscious with the same itchy unease of spotty adolescence, amorphous desire writhing between them, swithering between being a lust that should not speak its name unless drunk, or a darkly dangerous desire for more than mere

sex, and more than simple emotion. "What you looking at, mate?" he snapped, rhetorical question turned into sharp reprimand.

"Dunno," Bodie answered him slowly, folding the paper neatly and putting it onto the table amidst the clutter of lunch. "On the one hand, I could say I'm looking at the best partner I've ever had—and that includes my team in the SAS."

Wide-eyed, all green gaze and out-thrust aggressive chin, Doyle looked back at him, *Grandstand* chuntering away in the background, as forgotten as the rest of the world that existed beyond him and Bodie. The compliment had him on the razor's edge, waiting to hear what was coming next, what poison would be slipped in through the chink made in his armour.

"Oh, yeh, definitely the best in the business, when it comes to the job," Bodie went on, almost idly, the same voice he would normally use to discuss the relative merits of left backs and forwards and goalies leaping around on the television screen. "Then there's the other." Bodie leaned forward, stubborn-faced, lips and jaw hard and determined, while his eyes smouldered with the images his words were creating. "In the dark, because you always have to have the light off. But I can still see you, Ray, did you know that? Like that time in the car. Or the time down the back alley, remember that? We came out of the pub and you said you thought you were going to be sick, so we went round the back. And then d'you remember what you did to me, Ray?"

The voice, so low, so seductive, had him shivering with excitement, as the hardness in the eyes and the angry clench of jaw had his stomach knotting with darkest lust and purest fear. God, how he loved Bodie like this! All chained power, held barely in check, as sure and as certain as hell. Nervous of his own reactions, Doyle licked his upper lip and felt a leap of desire as Bodie saw the gesture and smiled, blackly, at him.

"I can see that you do remember. Not as drunk as all that after all then, eh? Not so pickled that you can't remember plastering yourself all down my front, then whisking us round so that you had your back to the wall and me to your front. You were hard then already, couldn't wait to get those fucking jeans opened and your

prick out, could you? Almost came out my arse, you stuck your tongue so far down my throat. But you like that kind of thing, don't you, Ray? Being as far inside the other person as you can get."

Every step measured, approaching Doyle a heartbeat at a time, Bodie crossed the small room, his monologue interrupted only by the catch of Doyle's breath. "Then you turned round, didn't you, spreading your legs for me like the cheapest tart, pulling your bum open so I could see where you wanted me to plant myself." He was less than a foot from Doyle now, close enough to see the quiver of silver chain on heaving chest, close enough to imagine that he could hear the thunder of Doyle's heart. "And I gave you what you wanted, didn't I, Ray? Fucked you where you stood, in a filthy alley not ten feet from the back door of the pub where Murph and all the rest were still drinking themselves stupid."

Bodie took the last step, until his trousers brushed Doyle's, until he could, quite casually it seemed, nudge Doyle's legs shut, standing astride the tight-clenched denim, his crotch a scant few inches from Doyle's wide eyes and determinedly shut mouth. "Oh, I always give you what you want, don't I? But what do you ever give me, eh? Sweet fuck all, that's what. Never so much as a smile when we're sober, but then when you're drunk, it's different then, isn't it? Then all you want is a good fuck and anyone'd do, wouldn't they?"

He was so close that Doyle could smell him, the sultry musk of his genitals, the descant scent of the Pears soap, a faint spiciness from aftershave. Smells good enough to eat, the common daily expression flitted through his mind, punctuated by the thought of himself with Bodie's cock in his mouth, Bodie's semen splattering against the back of his throat, Bodie— He took a deep, deep breath, intoxicating himself on the mingled scents, and almost, so very nearly, yielded then and there to the allure that was Bodie. But he didn't. Not quite, held back by fear, scared into immobility by his own illicit desires. Sucking cock didn't bother him, did nothing to shake his image of himself, but it was more than that desire that was flooding him: it was more than the rising curve of genitalia blanketed by woollen trousers. It was the coiled power in Bodie, the man's strength, the immu-

tability of his spirit, his aggressively dominant attitude. All of it combined to make Doyle want nothing more than to crawl at Bodie's feet. Prostrate himself naked, on his belly, arse in the air for Bodie's delight, licking Bodie's feet, giving himself over completely to Bodie's whim.

"Wouldn't they, you little cunt?" Bodie, in a conversation Doyle had long since lost. But he hadn't lost Bodie's inimical presence, and heard himself moan as Bodie leaned forward, arching his groin into Doyle's face, promising and threatening at the same time.

"Anyone'd do, wouldn't they, cunt?" Bodie snarled again, so hurt he was infuriated by the simple truth. "You're so desperate for the feel of a prick up your arse, you wouldn't care if it was attached to the fucking Pope, it wouldn't matter. Not as long as you got what you wanted. You've been using me, cunt, like a fucking walking vibrator, just turn me on and then shove me up your arse. And you don't even have to buy new batteries, do you, you little bastard you?"

But Doyle wasn't listening, not to specific words. All he could hear were the obscenities and the thrilling strength of Bodie's voice. And his own inner voice, the one telling him that he oughtn't to give in, that he didn't dare, not if he wanted to keep on being separate and strong in his own right. But that inner voice was too weak, and the other voice was too strong, the siren song of submission, reeling him in slowly, so very slowly, but closer and closer and closer.

"Always wanting more, and never giving me a fucking thing, apart from your arse, and I wonder how many other blokes've had that, you smiling coyly at them every single fucking time, making them think they're special..." Voice cracking, Bodie broke off before he betrayed himself, fighting tears back, refusing to cry over something like this. Doyle didn't deserve his tears, wasn't worthy of them, but Bodie was aching inside. He'd never hurt so much before, not ever, but then, he'd never been in love like this either, had he? Never known the stabbing agony of watching love walk away, uncaring, nor of waiting for someone to be blind drunk before they could endure his touch by pretending it was someone else. Furious to cover the pain, he grabbed Doyle by the upper arms, hauling him to his feet, pushing and shoving and hitting,

getting Doyle out of the room and up the stairs so quickly neither one of them had time to get over the shock of his explosion of violence.

In the bedroom, with the bed he'd thought so inviting, with the man he needed beyond reason, and all Bodie could think about was how much Ray Doyle had hurt him, and would keep on hurting him. Callously, in the worst possible way, with the indifference of someone who didn't care at all. "Who d'you pretend I am, eh?" he whispered, bleakly threatening, hand clutching Doyle's shirt collar, one of the buttons flying off as cotton was strained and pulled. "Because you don't think about me when we do it, do you? Oh, no, because that would mean treating me like a real person instead of a convenient cock, wouldn't it? And you're not interested in people, not you. Not my sweet Raymond. Care for the masses, have your heart bleed for the poor downtrodden millions, but when it's your own partner, your own fucking partner—" He swallowed, hard, stifling the pain again, stuffing it down low behind the protection of anger, using his fury as a bandage, covering up the seeping wound that Doyle had inflicted with his blind disinterest.

"What d'you expect me to do?" Doyle asked, quietly dangerous in his own way, fighting off not Bodie but his own burgeoning desire for this dangerous version of his friend. "Buy you chocolates? But I already do that, don't I? Bring you them into work with the paper, or have a few bars of Bournville in when you're coming over for a drink. So what else d'you want? Flowers? Oh, but flowers get right up you hooter, at least that's what you say." He stalked two steps closer to Bodie, his nostrils flaring, his temper rising in carefully controlled increments. "What, is my poor little petal's feelings all hurt? Well, tell you what, I'll—"

"You'll shut your fucking mouth, you fucking cunt, before I ram my fist down your throat!" Bodie, heated now, nostrils flaring, temper boiling, all the confusion and loneliness and the aftermaths of sex crushing in on him. "You've got a cheek on you, I'll give you that. But you're not going to put one on me, and you're not going to get away with pretending that it's all me and chance that gets you drunk with your arse spread. You'd better face it, petal. You're a fucking nancy boy, a—"

"A what? An idiot for not going to Cowley the first time you got me plastered and fucked me?"

Bodie stared at him, dumbfounded, shaking his head in disbelief. "You're amazing, you know that? To stand there, bold as brass and say that to me—*me*, Doyle, or have you forgotten that I was there and saw the whole thing?" He grabbed at Doyle, pinning his arms, pulling his body in close to press them hard together. "Feel that? You've got me going again, but you expected that, didn't you?" He freed one hand long enough to mould the shape of Doyle's rising excitement, the cock fitting his cupped hand to perfection. "And d'you feel that? You want it just as much as I do. Which makes you bent, Doyle." He grinned at that, a mere baring of teeth and glinting of eye. "Makes you the original bent copper, dunnit? You going to admit it, Ray?" he asked, needing Doyle to actually say it, to give credence to all those shared nights and shared sexuality, to make all the pent-up emotion he sensed true and real and something he could depend on. "You going to admit you're queer?"

"What d'you think, Bodie, or have you given thinking up for Lent? Just because I've been taken advantage of when I was too drunk to know any different, by a bloke who was supposed to be my friend," Doyle was almost spitting the words out, the venom hiding the secret truth that scared him spineless. "Someone I didn't expect to betray me like a—"

It was then that Bodie hit him. Stinging, resounding slap, ricocheting sound through the room, ricocheting sensation through Bodie and Doyle. Bodie looked at his hand in something akin to horror, that he should enjoy it so much, and Doyle—eyes dropping shut, mouth dropping open, a gaping chasm of lust opening in his belly as the fire fled through his nerves from face to brain.

"Don't you dare call me names, you fucking prick. Betray you? And how the fucking hell could I betray you when you don't trust me in the first place, not off the job at any rate?" His hands were itching, aching to hit Doyle again, to spread the pain inside himself to Doyle, to bring Doyle to heel. "You cunt, you lying cunt. All you ever wanted was to be fucked rigid and be too drunk to have to admit that you get off on

having a cock up your arse.” Silken steel, his hands were hard and harsh on Doyle, twisting one arm up behind the slender back, the half-Nelson to lead Doyle to the bed. With a surge of effort and the subterranean wish that Doyle would collapse in dislocated agony, he tossed his so-called partner onto the bed.

Winded, Doyle lay where he was, saying nothing, feeling the insidious lassitude of passivity slithering into his belly. He half closed his eyes again, until his field of vision was Bodie, entirely, nothing else to distract him, nothing else to focus on. His breath seeped from him slowly, and he wanted nothing more in the world than to say, yes, yes, whatever you want, Bodie, whatever you feel like, Bodie, whatever takes your fancy, Bodie. His legs wanted to splay themselves, to display what was held between, to offer the deepest intimacies, because he knew that was what Bodie wanted. But more than that, he knew the words Bodie wanted to hear, and they burned on his tongue and battled to get past his firmly shut lips. It would be so easy, so comfortable to say that yes, he was a fairy, if that’s what Bodie wanted him to be—and did Bodie want him to wear frocks? Or a bit of make-up? Scent? Because he already wore jewellery—his copper bracelet was warm around

his wrist, and his silver chain was clinging to his throat like a collar—because Bodie liked him bedecked, Doyle could tell from the way Bodie would play with the jewellery when they camped it up, or when he was getting ready to go out on a foursome with Bodie and some birds, or when Bodie was fucking him mindless. He had even changed the way he dressed, getting rid of the tatty clothes and bovver-boy shirts in favour of thin t-shirts that drew Bodie’s attention, and wearing his hair that little bit longer. Slowly, inexorably, he was changing himself to suit Bodie. He could imagine himself kneeling in front of Bodie, letting Bodie choose dinner for him, listening to the music Bodie liked, himself fading away into a shadow devoted to Bodie, a life-time’s hard-won independence eroded into nothing.

“Where are you, Ray?” Bodie asked, one knee on the edge of the bed, other foot planted firmly on the floor, all his commitment to action muddled into indecision. “What’re you thinking?” Staring, rapt, at Doyle’s blissfully distracted face, as thoughts scudded across uneven features making Doyle more seductively mysterious and making Bodie suddenly ache, fiercely, to kiss him, gently.

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...THE WORST OF TIMES

Doyle looked up at him, deliberately wiping all betraying expression from his face. The temptation was so strong he almost gave it voice, and wondered what Bodie would say if he told him the truth: I'm thinking about how easy it would be for me to just give up and let you make all my decisions for me. What would Bodie say to that, then? What would Bodie say if he confessed that malesex fazed him not at all, but that he was terrified a little more every single day when he watched another fragment of his independence disappear down the drain? Independence he had fought all the harder for, because it was not natural to him, a learned skill like knowing how to cope despite misfortunes or argue without degenerating into name-calling incitement. What would Bodie do if he admitted he was tired of struggling all the time and wanted nothing more than to yield, and cook for Bodie when Bodie wanted him to, fuck when Bodie wanted him to, go where Bodie wanted him to go. But of course, it was the imagining of what Bodie would do that stung him into speech. "What's it to you, butch?" he asked, the very picture of aggrieved belligerence.

All the sympathy fled Bodie's face, and it was the last of his sympathy, nothing left behind but the void where his willingness to understand and forgive had once been. "What's it to me? My fucking partner is giving me nothing but grief, getting himself tied up in knots over what he likes to do in bed and taking that out on me." He glowered, hands quick and blurring, stripping his own clothes off, flashing out to start on Doyle. "And don't you fucking deny that that's what went wrong this last undercover. And the obbo before that. So busy resenting me for giving you what you fucking well beg for, you can't even watch my back for me."

There. It was said. And then Bodie looked at Doyle, at the pale skin that was golden against his own winter pallor where Doyle's hands had locked over his own, stopping him from undressing Doyle, leaving Doyle protected by clothes compared to Bodie's uneasy nudity. "In fact, if we're going to be honest about this—and I am, oh Christ, I'm going to be honest even if you don't know the meaning of the word—it

wasn't even that you weren't watching my back, was it, Ray? Oh, no, not you. You were too busy sharpening the barbs and dipping the knives in poison, weren't you?"

"You watch your mouth—"

"Why—gone off the truth, Zarathustra? Well, here's something else you won't want to hear. I know about you landing me in it with Cowley. Pretty fucking low for a partner, eh, *partner*, stabbing me in the back like that because I'd fucked you the night before."

But it wasn't because you fucked me, Doyle thought but didn't say. It was because I cancelled going to that concert because you said you were tired and fancied a night in and did I want to come over to your place and watch the match on the telly. It was because I didn't even stop to think about it, I just did exactly what you wanted me to, like a fucking doormat—

"And don't think I don't know about that minute it took you to decide to come into the warehouse after me," Bodie said, low and cruel, shrugging Doyle's grip off, fingers going now to strip cotton from warm body. "The R/T was on, so I know how long it took you from getting the go-ahead from Cowley to coming in after me. And that was a morning after a night before as well."

But that wasn't because of the fucking, either. That was barely an hour after he'd caught himself changing his mind about where to have lunch because Bodie announced he wanted cod and chips instead of a vindaloo. Such a small thing, but it had been there again: the urge to hand himself, lock, stock, and barrel over to Bodie. To let the roles they played in sex carry over into the world outside the bedroom. To let Bodie command and control there too, the way he had wanted someone to make the decisions for him for as long as he could remember. The knight in shining armour come to sweep him off his feet and make him live happily ever after...

"You've bollocksed up the last two—no, it's the last three jobs. How'd you expect me to forget what you did to me on this undercover disaster? So kind of you to make a mistake like that, letting yourself be seen by a bloke you'd arrested and sent to the Scrubs. Clever, that, but

I suppose you'll tell me it was all purely accidental? And nothing to do with the fucking I'd given you not ten minutes before in the back of the car? 'Oh, no, Bodie,' he sneered, doing a creditable impersonation of Doyle's wandering accent, "'it was all just a weird coincidence, honest'."

But it wasn't, Doyle knew that. It was because he'd been terrified and thrown completely off-balance, recognising a growing need in himself and a faster-growing weakness. He'd always been a bit of a masochist—emotionally, with his guilt; sexually, with his love of rough sex—but that never worried him. It was this creeping desire to turn into Bodie's slave, to say nothing but 'yes' to him, to give up thinking and responsibility, and leave it all up to Bodie: his happiness, his well-being, his life. The temptation was there again, in the biting sharpness at his nipples as Bodie nipped at him.

"Oh, yeh, you like that, don't you, you little bint. Like what I'm doing? Well," Bodie drew back until only his fingers, his knowing, wonderful fingers, were still touching Doyle, keeping him at the perimeter of pleasure, "you want more of that, you're going to have to ask for it. Stone cold sober, no booze, no excuses. You're going to have to admit it. Tell me you like it. Tell me you want to be fucked." His eyes were very blue, made almost navy by the wideness of his pupil, and his cheeks were very flushed, rose amidst the alabaster. "Tell me it has to be me who fucks you."

Too close, too tempting, too much like admitting his own emasculating truth. So he did the only thing he knew to hold the temptation at bay: he attacked the one person he wanted and needed above all else. "You? Thought you said I was such a fucking fairy I didn't care who the prick was, as long as it did the trick? Doesn't say much for you then, does it?"

And the cruel streak worked, the words striking home so hard that Bodie's face lost all colour, a white mask of banked fury. "So that's how it's going to be, is it?" he asked with a quiet calm that bespoke his fury with clarion clarity. "Fair enough, if that's how it's going to have to be. Want me to force you into it? I can do that. Want me to rape you? Oh, no problem, sunshine," and his fist was clenched too hard in Doyle's hair, and his voice was harsh and grating in Doyle's

ear, and his other hand was too, too tight on his balls. "I can rape you. In fact, I fancy the idea no end. Serves you fucking right, walking around the way you do, flashing your stuff about, cutting me off at the elbow if I touch you—unless you're drunk, 'course. And I'll tell you something else for nothing, Doyle. If you don't get your head wrapped round the idea of being ac/dc or queer, then with your libido, you're going end up a fucking alkier."

"Better than ending up your bumboy."

Bodie's smile adsorbed on the surface of his fury, a thin film of humanity over the raging pain and fury. "Bit late for that, isn't it? Seeing as how that's what you already are. Bumboy." His hand grabbed a fistful of Doyle's buttocks, reddening them, a bruise leaving the mark of his hand upon the flawless flesh. "My bumboy, and this," both hands now, under Doyle, grabbing him, hands full, holding him so tight his whole body shuddered when Bodie shook him, "is mine. My bum, my arse to fuck whenever I want it."

"Like fuck it is! You get your hands off me—" and now Bodie's power didn't seem quite so alluring and the intrinsic violence of the man no longer appealed. Quite serious now, Doyle tried to push Bodie off, something in his partner's eyes warning him that he was in over his head, way, way over his head, and if he didn't break free, then he was going to be either hurt—or worse, lost. If Bodie did this to him and it was what he needed, down deep where it was so dark and murky in his own mind that he was afraid to look there for fear of what he might find... Panic rushing through him, he shoved up with all his strength, and discovered that what had fuelled so many lonely fantasies was true: Bodie was so much stronger than he, the heavy muscle and stolid frame unmoved by Doyle's own determined efforts.

In an abomination of sex, they lay tangled together, Doyle's hands flat-palmed on Bodie's chest, cock to cock, eyes staring into eyes. But there was neither love nor even passion there. Gathering himself, Doyle heaved upwards, twisting and turning like an eel, freeing himself from Bodie's grasp, sliding from the bed—only to be grabbed, and turned, and hauled in, Bodie's catch of the day, and he wasn't strong enough, Christ, his mind gibbered at him even while he

kicked and clawed and yelled and punched, pulling every dirty trick in every book, Christ, but he wasn't strong enough. Bodie was bigger, heavier, more experienced at this kind of fighting. Absurdly, the thought swam quite clearly into Doyle's mind—must remember to tell Bodie that he was right: CI5 training's shit compared to SAS—then he was breathing deeply, struggling for calm, struggling to master the dawning horror of complete loss of control and the sickening knowledge that holymarymotherofgod, Bodie was going to do it, Bodie was going to rape him—

“Oh, yeh, you do that, cunt, you fight me. Like it like that, so go on, fight me. Ah-ah, no knees in the bollocks, that's not nice, sweetheart—”

There was something in the way Bodie said that, something in the tangible excitement of the man that made Doyle realise that Bodie was getting off on the violence and the power and the complete emasculation of his so-called partner. And that Bodie had probably done this before, somewhere, with some other poor bastard, maybe in Africa—

“Yeh, that's it, spread your legs for me. Oh no you don't sunshine, you don't bite me, not unless I ask you to.” Bodie was wild, high on the power and the seeing Doyle like that, the fear in his eyes, the whiteness around his lips, the frantic kicking of his legs. Half their training had gone out the window, he must remember that next time he needed Doyle to watch his back, not that he was going to let Doyle do much more than watch out for him. A vicious swipe of Doyle's leg almost got him, whacking against him hard enough to sting. “I've had enough of this, sweetheart,” he said, kneeling in the small of Doyle's back, holding him down, the gasping pain rasping from Doyle singing sweetly along his cock. One-handed, he fiddled the belt from Doyle's discarded trousers, binding Doyle's wrists together, tying the entire parcel to the central post of the ancient brass bed. Doyle was tossing and turning under him, a gale-tossed sea, but it didn't take much for Bodie to subdue him long enough to grab a shirt and use that to tie one thrashing leg to the bottom of the bed. Three-parts bound, Doyle could do nothing more than glare up at him and shout, invective hurled with deadly accuracy, making Bodie bleed inside

where no-one, absolutely no-one would ever see it. He laughed out loud, the sound startlingly bitter, mocking himself for his own stupid desires, his fond imaginings that it could be different with Ray, that he could trust Ray, that Ray could be the one person in the world he would let inside to honestly know him. Stupid. Nothing but stupid romantic crap, and served him right for falling for it, he told himself, taking his time now, taking a tie out of the bottom of his suitcase, picking up his good leather belt.

He held them both aloft, standing there, Colossus astride a sea of strife, until Doyle shut up and looked at him. “See these?” Bodie asked. “I'm going to use one to finish tying you up and I'm going to use the other one to teach you a lesson.” He smiled then, a very ugly sight to see such a malicious expression on a face that had been growing so close to love. “Can you guess which is which, eh, cunt?” The brown, gold and navy striped tie was dragged caressingly across Bodie's flat belly, the tip tickling at his heavy cock. “D'you think it's this one? Course it is,” he was still smiling, “because this is going to keep that nasty little knee of yours away from the crown jewels, isn't it? And this,” he cracked the belt like a whip, the metallic clunk of the buckle making Doyle flinch away as far as his bindings would let him, “this is going to teach you a few home truths, cunt.”

Pace measured, Bodie approached the bed, capturing Doyle's flailing leg, securing it out of his way. Hands on hips, belt dangling loosely from his right fist, he surveyed his handiwork. “Oh, my, my,” he smirked. “This shall never do!” Delicately, he snaked the belt from his own trousers, knelt astride Doyle to prevent any attempts at rebellion, carefully adding the black belt to the tan one already around Doyle's wrists, lengthening the leash but not loosening it. “There, that's better. Now I've got room enough for what I want to do.”

“What are you going to tell Cowley, eh? Because you're going to have to kill me, Bodie, because if you don't, when you let me go, I'll come after you and kill you, inch by fucking inch. I'll skin you, Bodie. I'll start at your toes and—”

“And the only thing I'm interested in your mouth for is sucking.” One hand on Doyle's throat in tacit threat, Bodie turned around until

his back was to the top of the bed and he could stare down the length of Doyle's beauty. Pillow dipping under his weight, he knelt astride Doyle's head, lowering himself until his balls covered Doyle's mouth the way his hand covered Doyle's windpipe. "Remember that trick Macklin taught you?" he mentioned, quite conversationally. "The one you were so chuffed about? Well, guess what, Ray, I already knew it and if you so much as graze me with your teeth, I'll cut your breath off. Not a pleasant thing to go through, believe me." He wriggled a little, until his balls were separated deliciously by the hard thrust of Doyle's chin, and his arsehole was over Doyle's mouth. "Rim me," he said, rocking back and forth a little. "Stick your tongue up my arse, cunt, and if you do it right, I might not hit you."

Doyle, muted by the pressure of flesh pressing onto him, kept his mouth stubbornly shut, fighting Bodie, fighting his own unenviable self-sabotage, that loathsome part of himself that was telling him that he deserved this, that he was no better than this, that he was only getting his just desserts, vile, disgusting brat that he was. And there was another part of him attacking from the rear, coming up on him in a flanking move, ready to pincer him into defeat: a small part of him wanted this. It craved the abuse, longed for the defeat, was desperate to be owned. It wanted nothing more than to let Bodie do this to him, to lie back and let someone else make all the choices. But it was a small voice, a tiny part that he would not let win. He wouldn't give in, he wouldn't yield, he would stay his own man. So he opened his mouth, and instead of lapping the puckered opening above him, he bit, sinking his teeth into tender flesh.

Bodie roared, rising up from Doyle, turning around and grabbing his jaw in one frighteningly smooth motion. "You stupid little cunt. I was going to let you off without the lesson, but I can see I was too soft-hearted with you. All right, if you can't be worth anything without being taught a lesson, then I'll give you a fucking lesson."

Left-handed, he reached out, retrieved his brown leather belt, brought it up to caress a path over his own hand where it held Doyle, and thence to dally over tightly-clenched lips.

Bodie got to his feet then, and Doyle opened his mouth as if to speak. The whistling crack of

the belt turned the words into breathless gasping as pain whittled through bone and muscle to touch his soul. Doyle writhed helplessly, a red welt thickening the skin across his belly. Bodie's hand raised again, and Doyle tensed, knowing what was coming, dreading it, hating the pain, fearing his own submission to it. Again, the leather came hurtling down, again it cracked against skin, again Doyle managed to hold the scream inside.

"Being brave, are we? We'll soon see about that. I'll have you begging by the time I've finished with you."

Again, and again, the belt rose and fell, and as Bodie raised his arm a fifth time, Doyle yelled. "No, oh, Christ, no, Bodie. Don't hit me again."

Bodie knelt astride him, the tip of the belt tracing the welts it had left. "Are you begging?"

Doyle dragged air into his lungs, his breath catching on the sob in his throat, and he whispered. "Yes. Yeh, I'm begging. Please, Bodie, don't hit me again. I can't take it. Please don't hit me. I'm sorry for biting you, honest, I really am. I won't do it again. Just please don't hit me..."

Triumphant, Bodie stared down at his captive, drinking in the power of his position over Doyle, stroking one wet finger along the red lines left by the force of his belt. "Some things never change, do they, cunt? It's like my da always said. There's two sorts of people in this world: victims and winners. And if you're not a winner, then you're a victim."

Eyes narrowed with pain, Doyle looked up at him, focussing his mind on the conversation as antidote to his body's hurt. "Big man, was he, your dad?"

"Right hard-nut. Everyone was scared of old Andy Bodie, even the local bobbies crossed the street when they saw my dad coming. No-one ever messed Da around the way you messed me about."

"This how your da solved his problems, is that it?"

"Oh, yeh, never failed. Put the boot in, put the head in, if it was one of the blokes wanting to take him down."

"And women? What about the women, eh, Bodie?"

Bodie laughed at him, a grim and unnerving sound. "What's this? Police Manual, Page 96, how to keep psychos talking? Won't wash,

Doyle, not with me it won't. But as you're curious, and as I'm in no hurry..." That last came out as a threat, and made Doyle shy away, trying to twist his body out of Bodie's reach. But all Bodie did was to pin him more tightly, and tap the end of the belt the length of Doyle's cock, the implicit warning making Doyle lie very still and very, very obediently. "Who's a good boy, then? My da never lifted a finger to a woman in his life—apart from my mam, course, but that's different. A man's got a right to keep order in his own house, hasn't he?"

Bodie wrapped his fist around Doyle's cock, a gentle touch that was more frightening than the outright violence, for Doyle had to wait to see what would be coming next, and all the while Bodie was being nice to him, caressing him, turning him on against his will, rewarding him for behaving himself, for giving the power all to Bodie. His heart was pounding, fighting to be free of his chest.

"Oh, yeh," Bodie was speaking again, "it's either victim or winner, isn't it? I'm never going to be a victim again and you'd better get that through your thick skull, Ray." Bodie shook his head, hand tightening, not unpleasantly, around Doyle's cock. "You shouldn't've tried to hurt me with the way you won't let me love you. As if I'm not good enough for you, as if all I'm good for is a fuck in the dark when no-one else would know what you let me do to you." His hand became a fist, and Doyle squirmed, pleasure on the very rim of turning into pain. "You really hurt me, cunt, and I don't like that. I don't like that at all, and I'm not going to let you do that to me any more. D'you hear me? I'm not taking it any more and you're going to have to learn that the hard way."

"Bodie—"

"I've already told you, cunt," Bodie said, voice tender as vicious hand clenched round fragile flesh. "The only thing your mouth is good for is sucking my prick. Open up, baby, oh, that's my boy, open wide..."

He was kneeling over Doyle's face again, leaning down over his body, right hand still locked around Doyle's purpling cock. With a single long, hard thrust, Bodie buried himself in Doyle's mouth, ramming into him with complete disregard to Doyle's comfort. Doyle gagged, choking on the bigness of cock down his throat,

and Bodie laughed, thrusting harder, pushing in deeper, letting the gag reflex massage his cock. "Oh, yeh, I like that," he murmured, closing his eyes, hips pistoning his cock up and down in Doyle's throat. Doyle was thrashing around under him, and Bodie eased up, permitting the other man to breathe.

"Too much for you, am I?" Bodie asked smugly, stroking his wet cock across Doyle's face, sliding it back in between straining lips. He pulled himself all the way out, pushed himself in completely, pubic hair grinding into Doyle's chin, giving himself one more push, fucking Doyle hard. Bodie lifted out a little then, settling into a smooth rhythm, using Doyle's throat for his pleasure, fucking Doyle's face while his right hand pressed between the delicacy of Doyle's balls. He dug his knuckles in, separating the ovals, rubbing hard against the flesh underneath, flattening his palm to roll Doyle's balls, then folding his hand once again, knuckles threatening Doyle's manhood.

"Think I should do this harder?" he asked, fist pressing deep between the fragile testes, the skin pulled so tight it shone. "Or have you learned this lesson, hmm?"

Doyle, with Bodie down his throat and Bodie between his legs, was helpless, unable to answer with more than a mumbling groan. He wanted to pull away, but Bodie wouldn't let him, fist and cock taking command of him. He tilted his pelvis, Bodie's hand sliding down to the rimple of flesh that led from balls to arse, and the sensation of Bodie's hand on him there was incredible. He moaned, and started putting effort into sucking Bodie's cock, no longer a passive throat, now an active partner, feverishly pleasuring Bodie so that the pain could stop and Bodie would keep on doing this wonderfully pleasurable thing to him.

Bodie allowed Doyle his pleasure, content to fuck Doyle's face while the expert throat took him. He could come like this, might, since Doyle was being so sensible, and wonderful, not fighting his own inner nature, and actually accepting both himself and Bodie for what they were. Oh, yes, Bodie thought, he just might come like this, with Doyle's tacit admittance of his own bisexuality. He arched his back, thrusting a bit more deeply into the hot throat, his fingers penetrating Doyle's arse the way

Bodie had penetrated Doyle on many a drunken night. The moan of purest pleasure bled from him, the incredible skill of that sucking mouth sending him soaring.

Only to land, with a thud. He pulled out, hunching himself away from Doyle's wet face, not looking at the shiny smear of saliva and his own pre-cum that surrounded Doyle's swollen lips. "You bastard," he said, when he could speak. "You unmitigated fucking sodding bastard!" he yelled, slapping Doyle, hard, once on the wet face, once there, between his legs, Doyle's hard cock bouncing under the blow and shrinking, shrivelling with the pain. "All this time," Bodie was saying, voice chilled with his inner horror, "all this time, you were leading me a merry dance, weren't you? Down the fucking garden path. Making me wait till you got drunk, playing the straight with me, pretending you had to be plastered until you could overcome your disgust and let me have what you said I needed. But the way you use your mouth—you never learned that when you were lying flat out drunk, did you? Oh, no, that's the mouth of experience, that's the mouth of practice. Who's had you, cunt?" Another slap, and another, rocking Doyle's head back and forth, tied hands and bound feet powerless to defend him.

"Who's had you?"

Doyle was helpless, but he could still be defiant, he could still guard his own truths. He said nothing, refusing to speak, rolling with the blows, tears stinging his eyes every time Bodie hit him. Yet he wouldn't speak. He wouldn't let Bodie win, not on this. But his lip was bleeding from where he'd bit himself to keep the words unspoken.

"Cat got your tongue?" Bodie was asking, stopping the hitting, kneeling beside Doyle. "Funny that, you've usually got something to say. And what's this? No more questions about my past? I'm surprised, cunt, I never thought you'd give in this easily." A swift movement, and his hand was pressed over Doyle's mouth, keeping him silent. "I'll tell you a story, shall I? When I was in Africa, we had a little game we'd play. Sometimes," he paused for a second, lengthening the bindings round Doyle's ankles until Doyle's legs could be bent up higher.

That was when Doyle began to shiver. Being fucked was one thing: what Bodie had in mind

was something else entirely. He considered biting the hand over his mouth, but that would just lead to more pain, more hitting, and then Bodie would fuck him anyway. Fuck? This wasn't fucking, he reminded himself, this was rape. Even if he'd provoked Bodie into it, it was still rape. Struggling, he tried to press his knees together, but two big hands came down on him, shoving them apart, laying him wide open.

"Sometimes we'd play the game with new fellas to the unit," Bodie whispered, running his gun-calloused hands up and down the soft hair of Doyle's inner thighs. "But then there were the times we'd play the game with blokes who were like you—prickteasers, liars, cheats. Anyone who did anything to hurt the unit, we played the game with him. And I," he brought his face down very close to Ray's, so close that his breath soughed against reddened skin, "was the best of all of us. I never lost, cunt, not once. Winners and victims, always the same. And I told you, I'm not going to be your victim any more."

Doyle wanted to scream. He wanted to kill Bodie, or kick him, or hurt him, anything it would take to stop Bodie. "Don't! Oh, dear God, Bodie, don't!"

"Why not? Why the fuck not, you fucking cunt? I'm not doing anything you haven't asked for, am I? And if you don't like it, you've only got yourself to blame, haven't you? So don't you come crying to me, not when it's not my fault." And then Bodie's strong arms were lifting Doyle's legs up out of the way, and he smiled in anticipation.

Bodie was lying on him, hard cock digging into his belly, sliding down, stabbing the tenderness of his balls and then there, threatening arse, and Doyle could feel the scream rise in his throat. "No, oh, no, no, no, no," he said, again and again and again, a litany of denial that moved Bodie not at all. Unless it incited him to even greater powerplays.

"No?" Bodie whispered, grazing Doyle's puckered, tight arsehole with the engorged head of his cock. "No? *You* dare say no to *me*? You haven't learned anything at all then, have you? Well, you can learn from this."

One sundering thrust, and Bodie was in him, hard and burning and huge, fucking him viciously, handsome face contorted into an ugliness of violence inches above Doyle's face.

“Feel that? Feel that, you fucking cunt? Feel how big a man I am? Yeh, you like that, don’t you? Saying no all the time, but all you want is to be on your back with your legs in the air and a real man fucking you solid.” He jolted his hips forward, grunting with the effort, almost lifting Doyle off the bed. “You’re learning, cunt, you’re learning it at last. You belong to me, d’you hear me? You’re mine, and no-one else gets to have you. Just me, and that’s it.” He was sweating, hips forcing his cock farther into Doyle, orgasm clustering sweetly round his cock and nipples and balls. “You’re mine, mine, mine, mine.” The sweat was streaming down his spine now, pooling in the hollows in the small of his back, dripping down onto Doyle.

Burning pain screaming through him, the cutting rod ripping his guts apart, Doyle had a shriek rising in his chest, heart stuttering, all the emotion and sensation twisting together. And then Doyle felt the gathering pleasure in his belly, body’s automatic reactions betraying him again. He didn’t want Bodie inside him, not like this, not in hate and anger and violence. But his cock was ruled by the pressure on his prostate, and Doyle could have wept with humiliation and self-loathing. To be like this, with as little control as a cat on heat, prey to every tom in the area, oh, God, he wanted to die.

Bodie grabbed Doyle by the chin, forcing the averted face around until he could see it, until Doyle had to open his eyes, and Bodie stared into them as he fucked himself deeply into Doyle’s body, cramming himself inside, leaving no room for any awareness but of him. He plucked Doyle’s nipples, pulling them hard, grinning feral pleasure as Doyle trembled under him, and groaning with devout satisfaction as he felt Doyle’s erection stabbing into his belly.

One hand came down to manhandle Doyle’s cock, rubbing his balls hard, thumb pressing into the slitted head, fist tight around the hard heat. “Come, you cunt, go on, I want to see you shoot. Give it to me, let me have it, Ray. You belong to me, and I want it. Let me see you come.”

The voice sundered Doyle’s resistance, Bodie’s consuming desire defeating him, his will lost in the onslaught of terror and abuse and need. Every muscle in body went taut, his spine an arc of pleasure, his eyes filled with the

overwhelming sight of Bodie curled above him, face stripped bare by his need for Doyle. Staring into those blue eyes, Doyle let himself be fucked, let Bodie own him, possess him. Wished his arms free, that he could hug Bodie close. He pushed down on the cock impaling his guts, and the pleasure sang through him, as Bodie’s face twisted with the ecstasy of being inside him, and Doyle knew that same sweet delight, orgasm sweeping through him.

Snow-white cum exploded onto his blurring hand, and Bodie gave a shout of triumph. He wrapped himself the more tightly around Doyle, semen slick and slippery on their bellies, and gave himself over to sensation, shuddering into exquisite climax, his semen spurting from him, emptying his balls, emptying his aching soul into Doyle.

Cold. He was cold, shivering, the draught from the open door catching him full on the back. Drowsily, he shifted, only then remembering Doyle. “You must be bloody stiff, poor lamb,” he said, planting tiny kisses all over Doyle’s wet face. “Let me undo you, get you under the covers, hmm, love? Be nice, that, won’t it?”

Capable hands undid bindings gone tight in the throes of struggle and passion, those same hands growing gentle as they soothed circulation back into wrists marked red by the gnaw of leather. “Oh, look at you!” Bodie murmured, licking at the marks, caressing Doyle’s tenderised skin with his tongue. “You really shouldn’t do this to yourself, should you, Ray? Oughtn’t to make me so angry like that. It’s not healthy, Ray, it really isn’t.”

Bodie was undoing Doyle’s feet now, pulling covers down out of the way, until Doyle was lying, limp, exhausted, green eyes staring emptily at Bodie, awaiting his cue. It was an odd sensation, as if he were the eye of a tornado, such calm in the midst of such destructive, chaotic nightmare. He supposed he should fight Bodie, argue with him, kick him in the balls for what he’d done. But then again, he had asked for it, he was sure of that. Bodie could be a headstrong bastard, but he was basically a decent bloke: not someone who’d go around hurting other people if they hadn’t asked for it, was he? The electric blanket had made the bed all toasty and cosy, and he let himself relax into it, pillow soft under

his head, Bodie's strong arms moving him here, and here. He was sleepy, sleepier than he'd ever been before in his life, and all he wanted to do was curl up in this cocooned warmth that Bodie was creating for him, and sleep.

"Wore you out, did I, love?" Bodie whispered to him, draping the heavy blankets over their tangled limbs. "Not surprised, little tiger that you are. You really love it, don't you, Ray? Yeh, that's it, get yourself comfy, that's my boy." He enveloped the smaller body, stroking its hurts, smoothing its bruises, kissing away its tears. "But don't make me do it to you again, Ray, there's a good boy. I don't like hurting you, but sometimes, you leave me so that there's nothing else I can do. Cept leave you—"

"No!" Doyle was struggling up through the cotton clouds of sleep, fighting that obscene thought: a life without Bodie, unbearable, unendurable. He'd do anything to avoid that, anything to make Bodie happy... "Don't leave me. Just tell me what to do, tell me what you want—"

"Shh, shh," Bodie pressed tiny kisses to Doyle's forehead, soft caresses closing Doyle's eyes, tender kiss sealing his mouth. "It's all right, I'm not leaving you. As long as you don't pull any more crap, it'll be all right. Shh, I've forgiven you, you've got nothing to worry about. Just go to sleep, go to sleep..."

"Don't leave me..."

"I won't. I won't ever leave you, Ray. Sleep..."

With the loving gentleness of that voice and those hands cradling him in security, Doyle gave in to the surcease of sleep, so relieved to have Bodie still with him, so glad that Bodie hadn't left, so proud that Bodie loved him enough to force him to see how wrong he'd been.

As Doyle grew heavy in his arms, Bodie slowed his kisses, slowed his stroking hands, gave himself over to watching his Ray, examining every feature in a new light, memorising every inch of his lover. He'd been telling the truth, when he'd said it would be all right. As long as Ray did as he ought and didn't try to reck their relationship with any of his denial shit, everything would be all right. His hand found the rippled welt left by his belt, and as Bodie fell asleep, he was smiling.

He wasn't sure what had woken him up.

City-bred as he was, perhaps it was the utter silence outside, so that the heart beating behind him was deafeningly loud. Eyes wide in the dark, Doyle lay looking out the bedroom door, at the hall window that was close enough for him to see the night outside, but distant enough for all the details to be indistinct, all of the world blurred into snowy fuzziness. The snow seemed to be falling so quickly, such a thick, meandering cascade, piling up in the corners of the window panes, that Doyle was sure they would end up snowbound. They'd be stuck here for God knew how long, just the two of them, nowhere for him to go, no-one for him to see. Just Bodie.

The arm draped across his waist tightened, Bodie gathering him close even in sleep, and for a moment, Doyle resisted. But then Bodie muttered something irritable under his breath, shifting sharply, and Doyle felt himself go still and passive despite the rebellion his conscious mind was crying. He should get up and go, he knew he should. Even if all he did was go to the toilet or to the kitchen for a bite to eat, he should get up and move, and snap at Bodie if Bodie woke and complained.

That's what he should do. He knew, intellectually, morally, that he should face Bodie for what Bodie had done. He knew, again, in his mind and by his code of ethics, that he'd done not a damn thing to deserve what Bodie had done to him. But there was a voice inside him telling him that he did deserve it. After all, hadn't he been having fantasies about Bodie taking care of him and making all his decisions for him? About Bodie taking his independence away and keeping it safe for him? Only the benefits, none of the penalties, that's what he'd been after. Greedy. Selfish. Liar. So he shouldn't cry because he got his lumps as well as all Bodie's goodness, should he? Bodie had only been trying to make him see light. All right, so it wasn't exactly a good way to make anyone see the light—but what other means had he left Bodie, he asked himself. Plus, he ought to be ashamed of himself for driving a man like Bodie to violence...

And knew it all for the rationalisation it was. Driving a man like Bodie to violence? he sneered to himself. Bodie was a man who had lived his entire life by violence, and most of it by choice.

No-one had forced Bodie to be a gun-runner, or a merc, nor even a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces. No, it was always Bodie's choice. He'd even joined CI5, the most violent of the non-military security forces Doyle knew all the studies, had read all the reports, knew all the statistics. But still, he swept the truth under the metaphoric carpet, going back to look at what he'd done that had provoked Bodie so.

The sky was beginning to lighten in the distant window when Doyle felt Bodie stirring awake behind him. The right thing to do would be to get up from this bed and never let Bodie victimise him again. The right thing to do would be to walk out and retrieve his hard-won independence. The right thing was to run from this hellward twisting gyre as quickly as his feet could take him. Anything, but lie here and listen to Bodie's sweet words, letting the love and affection erase the violence and the violation.

He should get up and walk away. He knew

he should. But instead, he turned around in the circle of Bodie's arm, and smiled to please Bodie. Blue eyes glinted desire at him and his own shaky happiness was buttressed by that measure of approval. He'd do anything to keep Bodie happy and loving him. And it wasn't as if Bodie was going to make a habit of hurting him, was it? he tried to convince himself. Bodie was a good bloke, last night had just got out of hand, and who's fault had that been? No, he was better prepared now, he could keep Bodie happy. Words of love and praise were being whispered to him, and he did as he was bid. He'd talk to Bodie about last night—but later. When Bodie wouldn't be upset by him getting out of line. Anything to keep Bodie happy. Anything to keep Bodie with him. Anything. He opened his mouth to Bodie's tongue and his legs for Bodie's cock, drifting off on this morning's love.

And knew himself to be lost.

LITTLE DOYLE

23rd December

Been a while since last I got down to doing this, hasn't it? Still, it's not surprising, what with one thing another. It's been a bit busy on the job, even busier off it—haven't even seen Bodie since yesterday, although he's coming round at lunchtime with the Christmas tree and booze he says. But between Cowley and Bodie, I haven't had a minute to myself—and that's probably why the year's flown past. Christ, it's incredible. A whole, entire year for me and Bodie now. I wouldn't have given us a month, not with my record with people, but Bodie's got the patience of a saint, the way he puts up with my rotten temper. As Mum always said, I'm a moody bastard and a right pain—especially first thing in the morning. Or like yesterday, when I hadn't had any lunch, not a drop since half a cup of tar the cheeky git in the café was passing off for tea—which reminds me, Murphy and McCabe owe me for for the curry night before last—I was a proper bastard yesterday. And what did Bodie do? Smiled at me and tried to make me laugh. Course, he got

a bit broody as the day wore on, but that was my fault, really. But there's not a snowball's that I'm going to let him feel me up in public like that, pinching my bum in front of half the squad. Just not on, not a bit of it. Still, he looked as if his pet parrot had died when I gave him a look for it. I really felt like a cad of the old school when he did that, but what else was I supposed to do? Mind, I know he can't resist my arse when I'm wearing those trousers and no pants under them.

I suppose I should stop and think about that, shouldn't I? It's what this diary's always been about, thinking things through, getting things down on paper. Everything always seems a lot clearer after I've got it all organised on paper. So, why do I wear clothes like that to work when I know how Bodie's going to react to them? That's an easy one to answer, dead easy. It's what proves to me that he still loves me. Oh, he's always saying it, very affectionate is my Bodie, even if I nearly fell over in shock the first time he brought me flowers. But it's not the same when it's something for Valentine's Day or my birthday. Those're always pre-set, you expect some

something then—leastways, I always do, and Bodie always takes care of me. But if he can't keep his mind off me even when we're working—Christ, I've seen Bodie step over a dead body and not notice it because we're in the middle of a situation, but even then—maybe *especially* then, still waters run deep—he can't keep from feeling me up. It's as if it reassures him, same way he *needs* a good cuddle if a job's gone wrong, or if I've been an absolute bastard to him and we're making up after. Now *that's* something that happens often enough, but I must admit, I'm getting better. I'm finally learning what sets Bodie off, what really gets right up his nose, and what scares the shite out of him. Making him think I'm going to leave him is top of the list for all of *that*. I could've killed Cowley for sending me after that girl. You should've seen poor Bodie's face. Worst was the night I came tearing back to his flat—job was just finished, I'd reported in to Cowley and the old sod had given me the rest of the day off at *seven* at night, mark you—anyway, I wasn't thinking. All I wanted to do was get home to Bodie, try to explain it all away to him. I was desperate for him to tell me that it was all still all right between us. So like the stupid fucking idiot I am when it comes to people—I'm a fucking genius when it comes to crowds and strangers, I mean, Gandhi's got nothing on *me* when I get started, but I've got about as much finesse and tact as Hitler with the people I really care about—I come haring over to Bodie's without even ringing him up first. Do I stop to have a wash first? Oh, no, not me. Do I even run a flannel over my face to get rid of her bloody pink lipstick? Oh, no, not me, that's too clever by half for me when I'm in a hurry to have Bodie fall at my feet. I thought he was going to *kill* me that night—came perilously fucking close, I can tell you. He's a big lad, is my Bodie, especially when he's in a temper. I couldn't even hit him back, and not just because Bodie hates it when I do that. He was so—Christ, the poor bastard was almost in tears. *Bodie*, this far from bawling his eyes out like a baby, and he kept on saying it over and over again, about how I had her smell on me, and how he could see where I'd been kissing her, and how much I must've enjoyed it. Knew better than to lie to him, because although he went spare when he got me to admit it, he'd've blown his stack completely if

I'd lied to him. But that was the last big fight we've had, thank God, I honestly thought I'd fucked things up permanently after that, but then he calmed down, and he came over and he took me to bed and made love to me as if his heart was breaking for belting me. That's Bodie for you, isn't it? I'm the one who fucks up, I'm the one who makes him angry, and what does he do? Forgives me, that's what. I'd never forgive *him* for doing half the things I've done. I bear grudges, *long* grudges, but Bodie blows up and then that's it, over and done and forgotten. Christ, I'm fucking lucky to have him. There aren't many who would put up with me, I can tell you. In fact, before Bodie, there wasn't one. I know a lot of brothers and sisters don't get on very well, but me and my brother—Mum used to threaten throwing both of us out of the house, the way we used to fight. It was him who gave me my beautiful new cheekbone, and all I'd done to *him* was pinch his girlfriend from him. Didn't even fancy her, just wanted to prove to Steven that I could take anything of his that I wanted to. Charming, right? Still, breaking my cheekbone was a bit much, even if it was an accident and he'd never meant me to hit my face on the fireplace. I remember him punching me, and I can still remember seeing that fucking mantle getting closer and closer and me not being able to stop myself. Next thing I remember is waking up in hospital, my face feeling as if my head had exploded, and enough bandages wrapped round me I looked like a fucking mummy. When they took the bandages off, mind, I wished I was the invisible man. Course, it looks better since they put the plastic in and cleaned the scar up, but it's still as ugly as sin. Fits in with the rest of me, really, not that I'd ever let Bodie hear me say that. He caught me in front of the mirror one night, loved me half to death after. I thought he'd gone in for his bath, so there I am, standing there stark bollocks naked, looking at myself in the mirror, trying to work out what the fuck a handsome big bastard like Bodie would want someone like me for. I mean to say, I've got skinny hairy little legs—for that matter, I'm hairy all over, can still remember my first serious love affair nearly screaming when I finally got her into bed and she got her hands on all that 'peach fuzz' as Bodie calls it—and I've got hips that are too narrow, a barrel chest from

all that smoking when I was a kid, scars all over the place from the job, a head of hair that looks like something the cat wouldn't want to drag in if I don't have it permed, crooked teeth, funny-looking eyes and of course, my lovely cheekbone. D'you know what they put on my file at the hospital? *Permanent facial disfigurement*, that's what, and they were right. It's the first thing you see when you look at me—but Bodie swears blind that I'm just being a complete pillock when I say that. Anyway, that night I thought he was soaking the attentions of our dearly beloved Herr Wenderheim away, turns out he'd forgotten a towel or something. And then when he sees me standing there looking miserable—Christ, I don't know how I managed to land someone like Bodie. He made love to me—he even kissed my fucking *toes*! Claimed they were beautiful. Now how's that for besotted? It's things like that that make me put up with his temper and his jealousy. I mean, it's a bit unreasonable for me to expect him to adore me and put up with my faults and then do a fainting *fräulein* because the only thing he ever does wrong is lose his temper. And even then, I usually have to push him really hard to get him to *that* stage.

But I am learning, which isn't surprising after a year with him. If I didn't know who was boss behind closed doors, I'd probably agree with a certain someone who thinks Bodie's a fool to put up with the way I treat him. I still maintain that Murphy's just jealous—I know for a fact that he's offered Bodie sex on any terms Bodie fancies. Waste of breath, that. Bodie's not going to leave me, not for someone who's all sweetness and light like Murphy. But Murphy and half the people I know go weak at the knees if Bodie so much as *smiles* at them. But he's mine, and he's always going to be mine. Doesn't take much to get his attention back if he looks like his eyes are straying. All I have to do is go out without any underwear on, or wear one of those t-shirts he likes me in instead of one of my old checked shirts. And if I *really* want to bring Bodie back in close to me, I can put on that necklace he bought me to replace the one that got broken that night, or the bracelet I lost. It's not just the jewellery of course, not even when those're as close to a ring we can come. It's the *memories* that come with them. That bracelet was after we came as near as

spit to splitting up, and the necklace was his way of saying sorry after he'd gone a bit over the top for something I hadn't done. That's one of the things I like best about Bodie—he's never backwards about coming forwards if he's fucked up. Even if it's not his fault, he usually takes the blame—after he's calmed down, of course. Gets a bit hot under the collar if he thinks I've had an attack of the wandering hands.

Christ, look at the time! He'll be home soon, and if he keeps his threat, he'll be bringing home the biggest Christmas tree in London, and I wouldn't put it past him to nick the big one in Trafalgar Square either. I was supposed to be doing my diary to work out if I should stay with him or not, but I've already answered that, haven't I? I know if Ross knew about him doing me over once in a while, she'd say it's me reliving what I learned as a child, but that's just so much crap. What does she know? I put up with Bodie's temper not because of what she calls my 'damaged self-esteem' that she claims was caused by a childhood of everyone knowing I was my mother's bastard because I looked like my dad's best mate instead of him. I got used to that a long time ago—had to, didn't I? Bodie understands about that, a bloody sight fucking better than Ross does, the unfeeling frigid bitch. In fact, me and him understand each other better than anyone else ever could. See, it could be *me* flying off the handle all the time, only it'd be worse then, because I'd be going for him if he so much as showed a twitch of interest round someone else. Bodie and me're two sides of the same coin, and I know why he does it, and I'd rather it was him than me. I don't have his self-control, and I don't forgive and forget. Him being this strong with me, him being so—I don't know, it's almost as if he's the one who gives me limits sometimes and actually lets me *know* when I'm getting out of line. No-one else's ever cared that much before, they've always just let me away with everything and then walked out when they couldn't put up with it any more. But not my Bodie. He pulls me up short when I start, and I think that's what's kept us together for *twelve fucking months*. I never thought we could last that long, but Bodie's the one who's glued us together, although I've done my share too, a bit. I've learned how to keep him happy, I've stopped winding him up just for the sake of proving how

big a man I am—Christ, I must’ve been fucking impossible to put up with at first. How he did it, I’ll never know. Well, that’s not true, it’s just that I still find it a bit hard to believe sometimes, which is why I still push him sometimes until he loses his rag. He’s always so incredibly loving after that I can actually believe that someone—that *he*—honestly does love me as much as he says he does. And it’s getting better all the time. He *never* gets angry any more unless I ask for it, so I’ve got nothing to complain about, have I?

Bloody hell, I forgot the time! He’ll be home in half an hour, and I still haven’t got the lunch on or the bathroom cleaned—tidy bastard, is my Bodie, worst thing about him—and after the way I was yesterday, he’s going to be really pissed off with me for giving him a showing up in public like that. I’ll put on that green t-shirt he gave me, and the tight trousers he loves, and the necklace—

After yesterday, that’s not going to do the trick, is it? Think I’d better greet him with nothing but the necklace and a smile. Get him straight into bed. He always likes it when I do that, says it makes him feel that I love him as much as he loves me—and best of all, of course, is that he’d forgive me bugging the entire England squad if I take him to bed and beg him to fuck me. It’s funny, how important I am to him—never thought I’d ever be the centre of the Universe for anyone, especially not Bodie. Christ, I used to think he was so self-contained and smug, didn’t I? That first holiday we had in Wales together opened my eyes for me though, that’s dead bloody sure. I was so fucking scared of him and me as well, but now—it’s hard to even remember what we used to be like before that Christmas. I

know I’ve changed, I’m a lot more comfortable with who I am now. Needing Bodie doesn’t worry me the way it used to, not when he’s proved how much I can trust him and how safe I am with him. In fact, it’s a fucking relief to have someone I can actually let make the decisions once in a while, and I can do that with Bodie, because he never makes me feel like a sissy when I do. In fact, it’s when I let him lead and take the decisions for both of us that he lets me fuck him. Lovely that, makes me feel—I don’t know, sounds stupid, but I feel like a fucking superhero, as if I could take on the world and win. Christ, but I’ve got it bad, haven’t I? Should count myself lucky that it was someone as decent as Bodie that I fell for. Even if he *does* lose his temper—and after yesterday, there’s not much else he can do, is there? But even if he does go round the bend, I know it’s only because he loves me as much as he does, poor bugger. But I think I will meet him at the door bollocks-naked—always makes him happy, that. Then it’ll be up to him what comes next, but at least I’ll’ve shown willing, won’t I? And we’ve actually got time off from now until Boxing Day, so it’s not as if we have to hurry to get the house all decked out for Christmas—we can always do the tree and all the decorating after. And if I’m right, and unless I fucked everything up yesterday, I have a sneaking suspicion that he’s planning to ask me to move in with him. And on that happy note, I better get the lunch on before he gets home, else he’ll be too busy shouting for anything else, and I want him today. Thank Christ he wants me just as much, even if I don’t understand what he sees in me.

