

SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY

M. FAE GLASGOW

SOLILOQUY

THE RAINBOW LAY TRAPPED ON THE STREET, WHERE THE ICE-LOLLIES HAD MELTED, COLOURS RUNNING TOGETHER TO STAIN THE GRIMNESS OF CONCRETE INTO THE HOPE OF CHILDHOOD, ALL THE UNNATURAL GLORIES OF CHILDREN'S ICE-LOLLIES, ARCING INTO GLORY, THE RED THE BRIGHTEST OF ALL. It would be difficult, later, to explain why this stream had looked like a rainbow, very difficult, once it had all dried and the red had turned to brown, as blood must do. There was the bell-ring of children's laughter and a touch on his shoulder, making him jump as if the wing of an angel had dipped in to taste his soul. But it wasn't one of the children come back already, it was only Doyle, and the screaming joy of children in distant ignorance of what had happened on the Green.

"Not supposed to be like this," he heard the words as they came, lumpen and cold, from his lips. Like the children had been, when the ambulancemen had carried them away. Lumpen and cold, all limp and heavier than they had any cause to be. Red hair, streaming, like ribbons, or blood...a ribbon of blood, flowing forever, great streams of it, children's blood, the blood of innocents, the dark heart-blood that had pulsed out of Doyle to lie on the carpet, waiting for Bodie to find it after the ambulancemen had taken Doyle away, lumpen and cold and heavier than he had any cause to be...

His body was shaken as much as his mind, but the tangible reason for his body's tremors was still there. Doyle. Not lumpen or cold, but warm and alive and shaking him as much as Doyle's own hand was shaking with the horror of it all. The children, red hair streaming, shoelace undone, hanging from under the red ambulance blanket, the brown lace on the boy's black shoe, typical kid, couldn't be bothered to make sure his laces matched. Probably never even noticed, probably never bothered to make sure his underwear was clean. There were a thousand, a million, a thousand million mothers' voices in his head, all saying the same thing;

a thousand, a million, a thousand million fingers all being wagged: make sure your underwear's clean, you never know when you'll get in an accident.

Red blood, fading to brown, red hair, brown shoelace. Life, fading to death. The little girl hadn't known that he was the one who had been driving. She'd tried to smile at him. Sweet little girl, very politely brought up, apologising for getting her Mivvi all over him. Hadn't known it wasn't her ice-lolly that was making him all sticky. Hadn't known it was her blood, red of a different sort from her hair. And eyes grey and serene, the calm only the innocent can know. Those innocent of the knowledge of death. Those who don't see it coming. Those who ask him to tell Mummy it wasn't her fault she got her new Easter frock all torn.

He wasn't sure now if Doyle was still shaking him. Didn't much matter. The ambulances were leaving now, no need for lights or sirens, not for this one. Only the first one had needed lights, only that one. One with lights, two without, one ripping Sunday afternoon to shreds with its noise, two ripping his soul to shreds with their horrible silence.

It wasn't as if it was the first time he'd killed. No, the first time had made him laugh with the joy of still being alive, of surviving. This...

The rainbow was losing its nice clear arcs, wobbling and wiggling into a messy aurora, the red browning, congealing. Lumpen and cold. Like the children. All of them, even the ones still alive and screeching with fun in the playground, two streets over. They were dead, too, just that their bodies hadn't stopped yet, hadn't started to rot, red blood turning brown. Everyone died, and those children would stop their playing soon, to lie down and die in the street or in the bath or in a fire. They'd all die.

Pity he hadn't hurried up and jumped the queue.

It was Doyle shaking him, but it was hard to tell who was the more shaken. No life-red here, Doyle was grey of skin, and hair. Even his eyes

had died down to grey, like a cat's eyes after it's dead and the maggots start their living. Cowley too, all grey, from his suit to his lips, all the colour gone. In fact, now that he looked around, all the world was grey, even the smells of the grass and the sounds of the children. All grey. Everything, all of it, the entire Universe, a nice, comfortable, dead grey where he didn't have to feel anything at all. All grey...

Apart from the trapped rainbow, weeping at his feet. Colours blurring, fading, all turning to the brown of dead blood, melting, running...

Tears down his cheeks, running in runnels of grief. The rainbow wasn't running anywhere, it was only his tears. Useless, wasted tears. Like him.

He'd have to tell Mummy that it wasn't Her fault she had torn her new Easter frock. He'd say, "Mummy, it wasn't her fault. She was using her pocket-money to buy a Mivvi from the ice-cream van when this lunatic came round the corner too fast. He missed her, but the next lunatic didn't. So you see, it really wasn't her fault she tore her new Easter frock. She wasn't being naughty, just being a good little girl, her hair all red like ribbons..."

Her blood was all over him. He could smell it. Could feel it chilling his skin with the caress of Death. Could feel it seep into him, her blood coming in to his. Her blood, all brown and sepulchral, mixing with his which was redder and heavier than it had any cause to be, weighing him down, until he was as leaden as the sounds of children screaming in pain. Until he was a dead-weight, as the other children had been, the ones who had cried not at all, breathed not at all. He couldn't open his eyes, for if he opened his eyes he would see the empty spaces where the little bodies had lain, twisted and warped, as if he'd picked bundles of rags up and tossed them back down. He wasn't even sure how many there had been. One ambulance, screaming like the brown-haired boy, so that meant at least one, possibly two still...all right. But two ambulances, offensively silent, oh, god, that meant he could have killed four of them. He knew about the boy with the black shoes, brown laces dragging the ground as his hand had, when the ambulancemen had picked him up to take him away in the quiet of the ambulance. And the little girl, the little girl...

She hadn't felt any pain, he didn't think, but it was so hard to remember. Just her eyes, so clear, so bright, and her voice, filled with the smallness of the child's world, all her concerns on what would Mummy say. What would Mummy say, when he told her about her little girl's blood streaming as red as her hair, as red as her ribbons...

Would she scream? Or would the agony be too much and would she just sit there silent, as he had, when her daughter had died in his arms because he had...

Or would she moan and weep, crying for 'my baby, my baby, my baby' and then come at him, fingernails drawn like weapons to rake the eyes from his body. To rip out the eyes that had seen her little girl die. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.

He had seen a little girl die, because he had killed her.

If thine hand offend thee, cut it off.

It had been his hand on the wheel of the car, his hands steering, his hands that had swerved to miss the lamp-post and made the car skid and turn and tyres squealing and shrieking, just like the children, just like the children, Christ, the kids he hadn't even seen until it was too late and the car was hitting them, thud, thud, thud, thud, and all the screaming and shrieking and the ice-cream van had crunched when he'd hit it, setting the music off again.

And then there wasn't enough noise. There had been too many children in the queue to make so little noise. They should have been loud enough to drown out the van's obscenely cheerful tune. The ice-cream woman had shut it off, and then it was even quieter, until the sirens had started. He'd heard them coming, whilst he sat there, holding that little girl, knowing, knowing, knowing that she wasn't going to live long enough for them to get her to hospital. Knowing that he'd...

He'd kill the bastards he'd been chasing. Wasn't his fault he'd been taking that bloody blind corner too fast. The Council should be shot, building cul-de-sacs and roundabouts and blind corners like that, where there were going to be kids waiting to buy cones and wafers and Mivvis. Where there'd be children standing on the kerb, looking both ways, 'better a moment on the kerb than a month in hospital' oh christ,

why couldn't she have ended up in hospital for a month? He could've visited her then, bought her a new Easter frock so that her mum wouldn't be cross with her. He could have bought her the prettiest dress any little girl ever had, and he could have found one just like the one she'd been wearing, all bright poppies on a white dress, pink and red, red ribbons, red blood, streaming, streaming...

He was still kneeling on the pavement, looking at where the rainbow was bleeding off, running down into the gutter, ice-lolly sticks lying there like bones. And the orange of the rainbow was bright and sunny, and the indigo of the rainbow was rich and strong.

And the red was turning brown...

The church bells were ringing and peeling Easter Evensong when the discreet white car arrived to take Bodie away.

An inch from his face, the scarlet blossom sent out its pungent aroma. He was so close, each grain of bright yellow pollen stood out on the stamens, and the veins of black had individual cells, all interlocking, bleeding into the red of the petal. Behind it, the leaves were glossy, dark, the same hue that back in England, the town and county set called hunter's green.

He was a hunter, or was supposed to be. Had been, and had done it very well. He'd found the guerrillas, run them to ground, had brought Krivas to the lair. And with the mindlessness of the hunter, he had given no thought to what would happen once the hunted were found. It didn't bother him that the guerrillas would be killed—he was a mercenary, he was here to kill. But it had never crossed his mind that vengeance would be taken, nor that the decision would be made to burn the pestilence out. Or cut it down, or shoot it...

He shifted his gaze, turning, moving farther into the grove. He didn't give a shit what the others would say to him, after. And if they wanted to fight him over it, christ, he'd give them a fight. The anger banked in his belly, making his stomach churn, but not even the storm directed at the rest of his unit could lessen the loathing fury directed at himself. He should be in that village, he should be stopping them... Cold rationality asked the question: how? If he went back to that village, weapon drawn, shouting about humanity

and right and wrong, they'd laugh at him. And then they'd kill him, one more body to add to the pile, one white face amongst the black. It wouldn't change a thing, apart from cutting his own life abruptly short. There was nothing for it but to stand here, amidst the Eden of flowers and listen to the flat cracks of guns being shot, the sharp crackle of huts being burnt—and the full, roaring screams of the men as they died; the thin, high shrieks of the women; the thready, reedy cries of the children. It was that which was getting to him. He was inured to the deaths of men, the need to survive reducing everything to a nice, simple 'us' and 'them' and he'd been hardened to the rape and abuse of the women, even coming to the point of having a woman of his own. But this frightened, uncomprehending crying of the children, god, that was really getting to him, running up and down his spine, claws unsheathed to scrape on the bones beneath. He stared and stared and stared at the plants around him, his haven from the killing. He didn't care what Krivas said, he wasn't going to go in there and do anything so dirty as killing women and children and old men. Wouldn't do it, couldn't do it. The heat was sitting on his shoulders, swinging its heels to thump into his chest with every rank breath he dragged in, and a new certainty was born in him.

He was getting out. He was going to take his woman and go, get away from that mad bastard and hook up with some unit where at least the men were half-sane and the leaders not sadistic child killers. Nothing worse than a man who could kill children, and he wouldn't be part of what Krivas' band was doing. He shouldered his weapon and started back to camp, to gather his woman and his belongings and head for the Coast. And each methodical step took him a little farther into the red and green glory and farther out of range of the whimpering of children. Even after his ears couldn't hear them, his mind could. Oh, yes, he was getting out, and god help Krivas if he came after them...

He was clammy and rancid with sweat when the overgrown tangle of trees cleared from before his eyes and he found himself in the plastic comfort of the hospital. A woman was sitting in front of him, but it wasn't his woman. She was dead, clutching the spill of purple-grey intestines, while Krivas laughed and the others held

him in place, making him watch, watch, watch as the life seeped out of her along with her screams... Doyle hadn't been like that when he was dying, though, had he? No, that bastard had gone quiet and pale, drifting off into the ticking and clicking of machines, where Bodie couldn't get to him, couldn't bring him back. He'd had to watch as Doyle died, too. Spent too much time watching people die...

"Bodie?" she was saying. "Bodie?" Stupid cow, did she think he didn't know his own name or something?

"You have to bring this out in the open, you must talk about it, face it and put it in perspective."

He stared at her, incredulous, blue eyes holding very little of the reason most men had. "Perspective?" and his voice was as rusty as an old knife left in the ground. "Perspective? I killed four kids and I let them kill the whole village and I couldn't save her and then the bastard just lay in that bed dying on me and not loving me and you tell me to get it into perspective?"

The shriek died down, Bodie sinking with it onto the chair again.

"You didn't mean to kill the children, Bodie. No-one could have avoided hitting them..."

A sudden burst of rationality scythed through him. "Is that what the Inquest said?"

He'd caught her on that one, barbed wire of his voice snagging at her skin. "You paused too long, Kate—" so that was her name, that's right, CI5, one of Cowley's finest, and Doyle who hadn't died, only wanted to and didn't want Bodie loving him—"gave yourself away. I could've missed them, couldn't I, 'cept I made a mistake, a stupid fuckin' mistake an' she died, and got blood all over her ribbons..."

He knew he was crying, but the luxury of self-respect was long gone and he couldn't bring himself to care that he was snivelling, face wet, nose running. She handed him the box of hankies, silent, letting him get some of the agony out.

"Yes, you could have avoided hitting them..."

"Dead fucking right I could. Those soddin' bastards managed to miss the kids when they went round that fuckin' corner too fast, so why couldn't I, eh? Could have missed them, could have missed them, but then I'd've killed Ray, and I couldn't, could I? Couldn't watch him in a

hospital bed dyin' again, could I? Couldn't kill Ray, so I killed the kids instead. An' too much of a coward to face Krivas, so I'm as guilty as the rest of them for that village..."

A patina of professional quiet covered Kate Ross, not one atom of her own feelings showing on her face. For all she constantly put them in their places, she had a soft spot for both Bodie and Doyle, waiting until they were gone before she allowed herself a wry chuckle at their antics. This afternoon she was finding herself hard-put to keep her smooth armour in place, a spiralling urge to help growing stronger. It was, she knew from her own analysis, her almost compulsive mothering instinct, the thing that had driven her into a career of giving psychiatric care. Obvious, also, to anyone who understood the human mind, why she went in for care of the likes of Bodie, for they drew her, addictively, these men who seemed never to have known any kind of home. She sat there, tapping a newly-sharpened pencil on the pad of her thumb, reminding herself of her own humanities so that she wouldn't allow them to spill all over Bodie. It would never do for her own personal affections to influence the treatment of a patient, so she simply waited.

The silence had soothed him, giving him a small retreat. There was a bird fluttering outside the window, singing and singing, telling the story of all the centuries of all the other little chaffinches that had lived before it. Bodie could almost make out the words, and that disturbed him not at all: preferable, in fact, to some of the weird and not-so-wonderful things that meandered through his mind, taking an occasional bite, chewing him up and spitting him out again. Yes, the lack of human speech was soothing, and if he listened for just another second or two, he'd be able to make out what the chaffinch was chattering on about. Then the stupid bitch spoiled it all: she spoke.

"Why have you refused to see Doyle?"

"Because I'm a raving fucking loony, that's why, and Ray's a bit funny about nutcases. Hates loonybins, hates loonies. So even if I wanted to see him, he wouldn't want to see me, would he? I mean, stands to reason, dunnit? What a bloody stupid question, that. An' if you're the best Britain has to offer, small wonder half the security forces are barmy."

She didn't display a quiver of reaction, simply going on, voice ever so reasonable—reasonable enough to provoke a man like Bodie into shouting out the truth. "How do you feel about Doyle after the accident?"

"Fan-fucking-tastic, how d'you expect me to feel? Look, Ross, he's me partner. I watch his back, he watches mine. This time, some brats got in the way, that's all. An' I don't see why you lot are making such a song and dance out of all this anyway."

"You had a complete nervous breakdown, Bodie, including a catatonic fit. So running the 'brats' over affected you a bit more than that last statement would have me believe. Are you angry with Doyle because of what you had to do to—watch his back?"

"I've got nothing to be angry at Doyle for, have I? He didn't ask me to swerve the way I did, so what's it got to do with him?"

They were going backwards, some of Bodie's old protective shell coming back to hide him from the things he had to face. A different tack, then. "You and Doyle are very close, aren't you?"

"Used to be at any rate."

"Used to be? Why do you say that?"

A great, gusting sigh, the expression of a man speaking to a retarded two-year-old, tattered forbearance held up like a badge of courage. "Told you already, didn't I? Ray hates loonies. You say I've gone bananas, so that means Ray won't want to come within a hundred miles of me."

"And if I tell you he's been asking permission to see you?"

No answer to that.

"And if I also tell you that's he's rung up every single day?"

Still no answer, but there was a response, a faint, shielded light in bruised blue eyes.

"And if I tell you that he defied Mr. Cowley's orders and came out here when he was supposed to be on stand-by?"

He looked at her, sharp as a knife.

"It took me telling him that it wouldn't be good for you to see him to get him to leave." She didn't realise that there was a glimmer of amusement on her face as she spoke. "When I got there, he had half a dozen orderlies and three doctors held at bay, demanding to see you. I think he actually made old Dr. Cameron wet himself..."

She got what she wanted: a sparkle of humour from Bodie.

"Sounds like our Raymond Doyle, whom we all know and love so well."

"Do you?"

The slam of his barriers was almost audible and definitely visible. "Do I what?"

"Love him."

He burst to his feet, whipping over to the window, standing still a second, pacing over to the French doors, rushing back to the window where the chaffinch had poured out its song. Tension bunched along his back, the tendons of his neck standing out in stark relief, light, shadow, light. The shallow panting of panic barely lifted his chest, but made it flutter, like the bird he had almost understood. He rubbed his hand over his face, wiping away only he knew what, then turned to face her, anger and defiance and misery holding equal sway over his expression.

"Yes."

As flat and as clipped as if it were only a response to a question in court. Which perhaps it was. Doyle may have been infamous for his guilt-trips, but only because Bodie gathered all his guilts far inside and hoarded them, a miser with his bitter treasure, Midas poisoning everything he touched.

"Does he know?"

"You really are a stupid bint, aren't you? Oh, yeh, I can just see it now. 'Hello, Ray, how you doin', mate? By the way, I'm in love with you. Hope you love me..." and the dam broke as the last word splintered from him "...too."

She sat on the urge to shelter him from the pain: he needed to suffer this, else all that would happen in the future would be another funeral, this time with Bodie buried alive. "And does he?"

He struggled with his emotions, wrestling them, eventually, under control, face blotched and flushed, the fine whiteness corrupted by redness. "No." Flatter than when he had said 'yes', far deader, far softer.

"You seem very sure of that. Why, Bodie? What's Doyle done that you're so positive?"

"Tried..." he gulped in some air, a screwed-up hankie rubbed roughly across his nose, until he looked for all the world like a schoolboy trapped in the body of a man. "Tried, one night. Made a pass at him..."

The bird was back on the window-sill, war-

bling louder than their heartbeats, the silence between the humans vast.

“What did he do, Bodie, when you made the pass at him?”

An abrupt straightening of his spine, shoulders squaring off as if for a fight. “What’s me and Doyle got to do with me fallin’ apart after killing them kids then?”

“Are you going to pretend that you didn’t swerve that car to protect Doyle? Are you going to pretend that you weren’t so concentrated on Doyle that you didn’t even see the children until it was too late?”

It was less painful to answer the earlier question than deal with whys and wherefores of the accident: the loss of hope was so much more manageable than infanticide. He was, after all, very used to it. “He...he looked at me as if I’d grown an extra head, laughed himself silly then got worried sick when he realised I was serious.”

“So he rejected you out of hand?”

“Oh, yeh, no chance of changing his mind, neither.”

“Was he cruel about it?”

“Not by his standards, no.”

There was finality in that answer, and a warning. She was pushing, getting close to losing him again. She backed off, just a little. “Would you call yourself bisexual or gay, Bodie?”

“You’re the fucking psychiatrist, why don’t you earn your keep and you tell me.”

Her reaction was mild, voice very soothing. “I’d have to say bisexual, although you form more emotional ties with men than you do with women—just look at the groups where you’ve chosen to spend your adult life. Tell me, what do you think upset Doyle more—the fact that it was a man making a pass at him, or that it was you doing it?”

She saw the murder knotting in his hands, knuckles standing out white. Surreptitiously, she moved her hand until the panic button was within easy reach.

“You should know that an’ all, shouldn’t you, you’ve spent enough time harpin’ on at him, askin’ him questions his girlfriends would be embarrassed to ask. But seein’ as how you’re so fucking curious, I’ll tell you, shall I? Be worth it, if I can you out of my sight quicker. All he was worried about was that it was going to ruin our fuckin’ partnership. Rich, innit? I come a

poor second behind a fuckin’ job that he’s always moanin’ about, threatenin’ to drop...”

“But he wasn’t hostile, was he?”

“Look, what is this? D’you get bored when it’s not all talk about sex and perversion, is that it?”

“And would you consider it a perversion, having sex with Doyle?”

He gave her a very straight, painfully sane look. “You’re not going to let me out of this bloody office till I give you what you want to hear, are you? All right, all right, I’ll give you your jollies an’ I’m not going to do anything you’ll regret, so you keep your trigger finger to yourself, you won’t be needin’ that bloody button of yours. You know damn-well I wouldn’t think there was anything perverse, but poor little innocent Doyle would. I think it scared him, having to see me like that. So I pretended it was only ‘cause I was plastered and all it was was me fancying the nearest body. Didn’t tell him the rest, wasn’t any point, was there? If he didn’t want to have to think about me fancyin’ him, he wasn’t going to want me being in love with him, was he? So I laughed it off, camped it up and ran off home to wank in private. Happy?”

“Were you?”

She thought he might hit her after all.

But all he did was lower his eyes, seemingly addicted to the endless movements of his fingers shredding white tissue into damp, heavy snow. “Don’t be so fucking stupid. Never been so miserable in my life. And yeh, I know you know all sorts of interesting bits and pieces about that.”

“So he knew you wanted him, but he turned you down? Did you forgive him for that?”

“I ran those kids over for him, didn’t I?” The words came out of him in full spate, sent him in to full retreat, until he could completely deny the terror he had just spoken.

“I thought you said you didn’t see them until it was too late?”

“Didn’t see them... Heard Ray shouting and yelling at me first, I was too busy trying to avoid the fucking telephone pole to see where we were goin’...”

She gave him a minute, then a second, and a third, waiting until his face was calm, waiting until he had won the battle with his guilt and horror, turning the questioning back around to what needed to be faced.

“Did you forgive him for turning you down?”
 “Not much else to do, was there? Most he’s ever done is a bit of fiddling behind the bicycle shed with the other boys or having a quick look when they were seeing who could pee highest up the wall. Shouldn’t’ve hoped he’d do anything but turn me down flat.”

“And tell me, Bodie,” she said, finally asking the question that this particular session was all about, “can you forgive him for making you kill those children? Four children dead, Bodie, and another maimed for life. Have you forgiven him for that?”

He did hit her then, a single vicious backhand that sent her flying, blood spraying from her nose, splashing across the whiteness of wall like a Japanese print, chair crashing to the floor, her body thudding into the ground.

It took four orderlies to restrain him long enough for the sedative to reach his brain and donate him four hours of blessed oblivion...

Hankie still clutched to her nose, breathing through her mouth against the bloody stuffiness of her nose, Kate Ross sat at her desk, the light from the angle-poise reflecting in the night-mirror of the window. Her pen made not the slightest noise as she wrote, only the faint shuffling of her hand across the paper disturbing the silence. Her notes were even more disturbing, full of dire truths of a dreary future, if they couldn’t find some way to give Bodie Doyle back, lest he lose the one relationship he had left and was lost to the same madness that had buried Shotgun Tommy. Cowley wouldn’t like either the weeks she would need for Bodie’s therapy, nor the gamble they’d have to take at the end of that time. To lose Bodie would be a disaster for CI5, but she had few doubts about how Cowley would feel when she told him what it might cost to save him.

COLLOQUY

DOYLE STOOD ON THE BROAD STAIRS OF THE HOSPITAL, KICKING IDLY AT THE FIRST LEAVES OF THE EARLY AUTUMN, CAR KEYS IN HAND, AN EXPRESSION OF PROFOUND TRUCULENCE ON HIS FACE. Not a word had he spoken, and Bodie couldn’t find any words to say. He hadn’t let Doyle in to see him, not once, demanding that Murphy or Lucas or McCabe or Sue or Betty or the janitor, anyone but Doyle, be the one to talk to him about the inquiry into the

‘incident’. Not Doyle. Not Doyle who’d been in the car with him. Not Doyle who’d seen him kill children. Not Doyle, with his bleeding heart who would look at him with either pity or loathing.

Not Doyle, whom he was learning not to hate for having made him love enough to kill children, albeit by accident.

But Doyle it was who was standing there when the fledgling again faced the world, sanity grasped too tightly by hands that were afraid of losing their grip once more. And Doyle, bless him, had looked with neither pity nor hate, just relief, ushering Bodie into his car, a different colour, make, nationality from ‘the’ car. Not a word, which was balm itself. Just that quietness back at his side, a silence he hadn’t even noticed he’d missed. It brought it home to him just how unsure he was of re-entering the world, with all its pressures and stresses and tests for his sanity.

London was beginning to rear around them, drowning out the greens and freshness of Sussex, filling in the sky, roaring with life before Doyle spoke the first word between them.

“Curry or something from the chippy?”

Bodie glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, noting the loose grip on the steering wheel, the same casually untidy pose that Doyle never seemed quite able to get rid of. “Supermarket, I think. Have to get milk and stuff in, anything left from,” the pause was barely perceptible and Bodie was quite proud of himself for that, “then, it’ll walk out the fridge on its own legs.”

“Nah, cleaned your fridge out ages ago. Thought it was about time I put that bloody hazardous waste training to some use.” He slowed, made a great to-do about turning the corner, ostentatiously concentrating on something else, as if to declare that anything his mouth might say was nothing to do with him. His mouth opened and let his belly rumble. “You don’t have to stay on your own if you don’t fancy it, you know. Could always come and kip with me, for a bit. Until you got used to having to shift for yourself again after the room service at that country club they called a hospital.”

The recoil was almost physical, the figurative sign-of-the-cross hovering in the air between them, warding off something that was both temptation and the path to ruination. “I’d get under your feet. Cowley’s not letting me back

on the job until Ross sounds the all-clear. And with the way I..." he grabbed the reins again, jettisoned what had been on the tip of his tongue to say, "got her knickers in a twist, that'll be the day after doomsday."

"Look, if I'd been bothered about you getting under my feet, I wouldn't've bloody asked you, would I? Come on, Bodie, it's been two months since anyone stood still long enough to listen to me—none of the other blokes are as stupid as you are. And I've got shelves wanting put up and a bike needing parts. What with us being so short-handed and Cowley after my blood, I haven't had much time for that sort of thing. You can make yourself useful, then even if you do get under me feet, I won't mind. Go on, it'll be fine."

"No."

"What d'you mean, 'no'?"

"Just what I said. No."

"What the fuck for?"

Silence, intense, uncomfortable and shamed.

Doyle listened to what Bodie wasn't saying, thought over what was in the reports he'd pinched a look at—conveniently careless of Cowley to leave them lying on his desk and then be fifteen minutes late for Doyle's latest dressing-down. Kate Ross' words had been startling in their bluntness, less than unexpected in their content. And Doyle listened, too, to what his own conscience had been saying to him, all those questions that his own better nature had demanded he answer, all the things he'd had a tumult of time to think about. "You worried about making another pass at me, next time you're one over the eight?"

Bodie squirmed, not enjoying it actually being out in the open. "Leave it out, mate," he muttered, attention enthralled with the boring blank warehouse walls they were passing. "I've had my weekly session of psycho-torture."

"Wasn't going to analyse you. Just wanted to know if that's what's the matter."

Another silence, a quick breath, then the words rushing out helter-skelter. "An' what if it is? Look, Ray, after what...happened, I can do without bollocksing up our partnership, okay?" But the anger that had begun its autumnal fading in the weeks in hospital seemed ever farther away, now that he was sitting beside him. With the familiar smell of Doyle enveloping him, it

was hard to remember the resentment, harder to feel the hate. The ugliness was receding, driven back in a slow minuet by the simplicity of loving, but the caution and the shame were still flourishing greedily. "So why don't you let it go, drop me off at the shops and I'll give you a ring in the week."

"Nah. If that's all it is, then you're staying with me, sunshine. They've given you those little pink tablets to take, right, which means you can't have any booze, so you can't get drunk. Problem solved. Which takes us back to, curry or chippy?"

"I'm not fucking staying with you, Doyle, so stop the car. If you won't listen to me, I'll get out and walk!"

After a minute, Doyle stopped the car, but not to let him go. He parked in front of the Chinese restaurant round the corner from his house, opening Bodie's door for him, bowing him out. "Since you didn't want the other, we'll have a chinkie. I'll even," he wagged his eyebrows, "let you have pineapple fritter for afters." The humour died a death between them, Bodie's expression an all too well-remembered stubborn insubordination. "Okay, okay, if you won't listen to sense..." He stared at him for a moment, obviously weighing what needed to be said with what ought to be said. Leaning forward, giving them some semblance of privacy despite the bustle of the street, he spoke very quietly. "Truth of the matter is, mate, the doctors only let you out on the condition that you'd be staying with me. An' that means if you don't stay with me, you'll be back in hospital so quick you'll think you're on the Magic bloody Roundabout. Got a choice, Bodie. Me or the doctors. An' at least I'm not going to come after you with the fucking rubber enema hose, so come on, off your arse, I want you in there," a tug towards the Chinese take-away, "with me."

That took the wind out of Bodie's sails, left him drifting in an emotional Sargasso. He bowed his head, the shame of being too dangerous to be let out on his own eroding him. Bodie was, quite frankly, not up to a scene, so he got up off his arse and followed where Doyle led: it was easier than fighting and sometimes, still, he was so terribly tired. It seemed longer since last he'd been here, but that was only the distortion of the past couple of months telescoping the rest

of his life far, far away from him. When he was succumbing to it all, it was as if there was only present, future and Accident, and all his reality centred on every horror he'd ever seen or done. Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome, the doctors had called it when they thought him too far gone to hear them, nodding wisely and comparing his experiences to Vietnam. The voices faded and it was Doyle talking to him again, gabbing on as if there hadn't been so much as a day since they'd been together. Somewhere, deep inside him, a slow anger began to burn, so much squirrelled away down there to fuel it, all sorts of lovely hot-burning resentments and fears and angers, every single thing Doyle had ever done to him, the roller-coaster instability of mood the doctors had so sagely predicted. And his churning anger was beginning with Doyle pretending that the Accident had never happened and was ending with the prick-tease wearing those bloody jeans that made Bodie want to weep with the need to hold him and touch him. *Christ, Doyle can be a proper idiot*, Bodie thought quietly behind his blank eyes as they collected food and drove back to Doyle's flat, going through all the little daily routines he thought forgotten, but his body remembered perfectly well. *Anyone'd think I'd just had one quick passing fancy for him and copped one feel too many. Just goes to show what a cretin he is, don't it? And look at him, dishing food up as if nothing had happened, as if he hadn't thrown temptation in my face like bloody Eve setting poor Adam up. Wiggling his bum when he walks, bending over, looking at me all the time. The prat's got no idea that it's more than a quick shag I'm after.*

"Bodie? You all right, mate?"

"As well as can be expected. But if you're looking for scintillating conversation, you've got the wrong bloke. I don't feel over much like entertaining you, so after supper, I'm off home."

"No you're bloody not, Bodie, not after what Cowley threatened me with if I didn't make you listen to those wallys at the hospital. You're staying with me until you're back on your feet." A mouthful of curried prawn was chewed with viciousness, Doyle's flinty eyes never once leaving Bodie's face. And none of it disguising the pity and the sympathy, all of it making Bodie's blood hotter than the food. "And don't you get shirty with me, mate. I'll put up with a helluva lot from

you, but I'm nobody's whipping boy, you got that? You want to take it out on someone, you go batter Lady Fate. Was her fault, not mine."

And Doyle could feel the barrier rise between them, could almost see it in the abrupt stiffness of Bodie's face, the tension in his movements.

"Don't," Doyle said, more gently this time, remembering what the doctors had been thumping into him for the past two weeks. "Shouldn't have been so sharp with you, but the meaning's the same. Wallowing in guilt or taking it out on other people is just a cop-out, Bodie, and yeh, I am speaking from experience. You whack me when I get out of line, I'll do the same for you, emotional breakdown or not. Don't think I'm going to mollycoddle you, which means I'm not going to let you run to ground on your own, where you can pull the wool over your eyes and end up not dealing with any of it, just the way you 'coped' with Africa and Northern Ireland. You're going to have to start living, Bodie, whether you bloodywell like it or not. So shut up and eat your supper before it gets cold."

A pause, the future hanging in the balance, the fulcrum nothing more than the mood of the moment. There was a smell tickling at the back of Bodie's mind and he took the time to give it name: blood, all tangled up with the sickly sweet ices and Doyle's after-shave and the salt smell of his own tears blending into the stench of the blood, an endless circle of salt and sweet, the smell of bittersweet comfort. If he let himself drift, let the misery come out, he'd be able to feel what it was like, all over again, to have Doyle holding him so tight like that. But if he did that, he'd slip again, the way he had that week in the hospital, when it had all gone wrong and he'd started going away again... And if he bottled it all up, went it alone like a man...it would only be a matter of time before he ended up as mad as Shotgun Tommy or just plain cuckoo. But he would end up breaking, if he didn't learn to bend. And he'd be damned if he'd let himself be that weak again. So the long haul it was...

"Thought you weren't going to mollycoddle me?"

Doyle grinned at him, inordinately pleased with the once-typical Bodie response. "I should've known you'd be stupid enough to believe me."

"It'd be better to have someone around part of the time, I suppose."

"You suppose? Course it'd be better. It's all settled, so shut up, you stupid sod. You're staying and that's that. Now will you bloodywell finish that? I spent good money for that and I don't want it wasted."

"Yes, molly."

"You're a prat, Bodie, you *do* know that, don't you?"

Quicksilver change and the brightness of the instant was gone again, miring back into the sludge of depression, the miasma of emotion bubbling up. "That's one way of describing me, at any rate, isn't it? And don't start, Ray, I'm not wallowing in it," he bit out, the anger showing. "But I did it and pretending I didn't isn't going to change a blind thing. And you sitting there prattling on like Mary Fucking Poppins isn't going to help, neither!" A burst of movement and he was on his feet, coiled spring exploding into motion, heading for the door and outside and somewhere where there wasn't someone who knew what he'd done.

"Bodie! Hang on a minute, hold your horses." Doyle leaned on the door, slamming it shut in front of Bodie's face, stopping the escape with scant seconds to spare. His weight held the door shut, just as the weight of weariness on Bodie's shoulders stopped that one from even trying to fight him. All the arguments died on Doyle's tongue, all the words useless in the face of Bodie's depressed deafness, the endless pendulum swing of his moods marking their toll on his face. "C'mon, you look done in. Get yourself into bed." Not a muscle moved. "Go on with you. Face it, mate, if you're going to argue with me, you'll need all the sleep you can get."

Bodie could taste the longing to rest on Doyle, to simply ignore the past, to let him take the strain, just for a minute, let him rest the way sleep never did. But if he did that, he'd need more, then more and before he knew it, Doyle'd be skittering away from him like a newborn foal. Like the last time...

"Bodie? C'mon, mate, get your head down before you fall down and I do my back in lifting you back up."

Half-listening to the words, Bodie trundled back along the hall, hesitating at the bedroom door, waiting for a prod. "Yeh, you can have me

bed. Hope you appreciate all this, for I'll be expecting a tip at the end of the week."

And then Bodie was alone, in Doyle's bedroom, touching his bed, picking up his dressing-gown and breathing in the scent of clean Doyle. For the first time in his life, it wasn't even just lust, far more than it had ever been, even for Marikka. For once, he needed the affection to paper over the cracks the Accident had left, to fill in all the spaces, just as he craved the feel of Doyle under him, or over him, beside him, wherever. He dug his tablets out of his pocket, swallowing the prescribed combination with a grimace of self-hate. Slowly, he stripped, crawling under the bedclothes with the terry-cloth held close, caught between his legs, where it could rub with almost subconscious comfort. *Next best thing*, he thought, drifting off on the pink-pill cloud into Morpheus, *next best thing...*

And then he was so lovely and warm, Ray wrapped all around him, murmuring to him, stroking his hair, telling him it'd be all right, all right, and Ray felt so lovely, all soft crinkly hair and snub nipples, the whisper of skin rubbing against Bodie and he could feel himself getting hard against Ray and the dream wasn't ending, he wasn't waking up...

"Shit, Ray!" he croaked, pulling away, fuzzy round the edges but aware enough to know that Ray would kill him for coming on to him.

"Shh, 's all right, Bodie, I don't mind."

The drugs were enough to slow him for a few minutes, but he was used to fighting his way through them to escape the nightmares that were always lying in wait with their smells of Africa and Ireland and melting ice-lollies and blood like ribbons. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"It's all right, you can do it. You need that, Bodie, needed it for a long time now, haven't you, mate? Well, won't stop you this time. Go on, Bodie, come back here and do what you were doing. Take what you need, I can give it, don't mind..."

The sudden glare of light cast a pall on brittle reality. "Don't mind? Oh, thanks a lot, mate. I don't believe it. I don't fucking believe it! Pity?" the word was spat out, venom to sting as he had been stung. "Pity? Is that it? Oh, don't worry, Bodie, it's all right, Bodie. Take what you need, Bodie." The mimicry was vicious, an ugly cari-

capture of a fairy. “You been reading Barbara Cartland or something? You’re going to lie there and think about England and I’m supposed to be grateful, is that it? Is that your pathetic little plan? Oh, pity the poor poof, the silly little thing’s lost some of his marbles, let’s kiss it better? And you get to play martyr. You bastard, Doyle. This is real life, you know, and I don’t want pity from you.”

This was not how it was supposed to be and Doyle’s wary confusion showed on his face. “What the fuck is *this* all about? Look, Bodie, I’m willing to let you have sex with me. I’m even willing to let you fuck me, so don’t you go getting on your high horse with me. We both know you’ve been after me since the word go. Well now I’m offering.”

“Because you feel sorry for me? Sacrificing yourself to my unnatural desires out of friendship? Or is it,” he leaned down, all the pent-up fury at his helplessness pouring out to scald Doyle, “that you fancy a walk on the wild side, and what better way than with poor old Bodie. He’d never hurt you, he’d never blab, he’d let you have a go and then let you drop him like a ton of bricks. If you think that, then you’re more of a fuckin’ prat than I thought you were and you’re wrong, Ray, dead bloody wrong. I don’t want your pity and if you want to experiment, then go out and buy a plastic doll or a fucking dildo, but leave me out of it. I can’t take it, Ray, not from you, not now.”

He launched himself from the bed, trying to run, kicking off the bedclothes that clung to him like the arms of the drowned at sea, stumbling into the hallway, bashing against the wall in the dark, hot tears burning, his voice cracking and hoarse as he cursed Doyle and cursed his own weakness. He was at the door, freedom only a pane of glass away, but Doyle was there before him, refusing to let go, hands digging into Bodie’s arms, his chest, anywhere he could get a grip on the struggling man.

“Bodie! Bodie! Stop it, you stupid sod, pack it in before I have to hurt you!”

“You and whose army?” Childhood defiance, childhood’s tears, man’s strength pinning another man against the wall, arm across his throat, a breath away from the temptingly crushable larynx.

“All right,” Doyle’s distorted voice wheezed, “give it a by before you hurt me.”

“Give me one good reason why I should.”

“Cowley’d murder you for leaving him even more short-handed than he already is. And you owe me, mate, at least enough to hear me out.”

“No I don’t. I’m going, Ray, and nothing you’ve got to say is going to stop me.”

“Not even if I tell you it wasn’t all pity?”

“What, overcome by lust, were you? Or did you realise you loved me so much, you were willing to let me screw you, is that it?”

“Something like that, yeh.”

“So,” and now the voice was the rumbling, purring threat of a hungry panther, the eyes fixated upon the pulse beating wild and heady in Doyle’s throat, “you’re willing to let me screw you. Kiss it all better, would you?”

And as the catalyst of venting his anger and resentment at Doyle worked its way through him, coherency tiptoed in, holding realisation by the hand: realisation that long-fingered hands were touching him, down there, not tentative at all, determined, forceful, taking the fire out of him, drawing all the heat down to his balls, everything text-book correct like a well-drilled lesson and Bodie was too scarred to dare risk the loving, not while the wounds were still so bitterly fresh. The cold water rationality doused his ardour even as it inflamed his temper. “What is this, old home week? Your country needs you—fuck a psychopath?”

He didn’t wait for an answer, hands snapping forward to grab Doyle’s hair, forcing him down, lower, forcing Doyle’s face into his groin, rubbing his cock against the faint rasp of unshaven cheek. “Well, kiss it better then, Ray,” he whispered, voice an abominable distortion of love, “kiss it all better...” He pressed his hips forward, so that the instant Doyle opened his mouth to speak, Bodie had shoved his cock into virgin mouth, holding Doyle’s head hard against his belly, using the hot wetness of mouth to make himself hard, growing until he filled Doyle and began to thrust into the back of his throat. “Oh, yeh, Ray,” he crooned, “kiss it all better, make poor little Bodie feel all right.”

He could feel the gag reflex bump against his cock, could hear Doyle straining to breathe. Could feel the tears, the horrible, weak tears, covering his own face with rills of misery. Doyle had cried for him once, when he’d been stabbed. *Oh, fuck, Ray, why couldn’t you fall in love with*

me? Why'd it have to go and be like this? He pulled free, grabbing Doyle, hauling him up, crushing him close, stifling his own few tears, refusing to give in to them any more. "Sorry, Ray," he said, stroking curls over and over and over again, taking the spring out of them, "don't want it like that. Don't want to rape you, not going to do that. Go away, Ray, before I hurt you. Get away from me..." He shoved Doyle back, knocking him to the floor, only then registering that both of them were naked. He stumbled past Doyle, avoiding the lunging arm by luck more than skill, making it to the sanctuary of the bedroom. Chair hugging the door handle, he bought himself enough time to cover himself with clothing and cover his turmoil with his chosen mask, the one he'd brought home with him from school one day and never lost since. He'd learned young to keep the hurt inside, to not let it show—better, not let it touch you—when someone you loved deceived you or abandoned you. Each girl who became his 'aunty' for a week or a month or a year became simply one more lesson to be learned, all of them teaching him something new, some of it quite useful—such as shutting someone out when the loving started hurting too much. His face was utterly calm as he walked out into the corridor, completely impassive as he passed Doyle. Hand on the front-door handle, Doyle's words halted him.

"I'm serious, Bodie. You walk out of here, and they'll have you back in that hospital so quick your feet won't touch the ground. An' it'll be that bit longer before they take the chance of lettin' you out again next time."

"Always supposin' they catch me."

A decidedly threatening tone of voice, that, warning Doyle that what little of their friendship hadn't been sullied by this whole mess was at risk, that the whole thing was about to blow up in their faces.

Which it would have done, were it not for Doyle knowing him well enough; were it not for Doyle caring enough. "D'you think I'm goin' to let you go through this on your own, mate? Guard each other's back, that's what we do, an' last time you did that, look what happened to you. It's my turn to guard *your* back, Bodie. An' I need to do it, only way I c'n face my share of what happened Easter Sunday. C'mon, Bodie, why's it different this time? After the things

Cowley's put us through, after everything this soddin' job's thrown at us... Yeh, you're going to be leanin' on me for a bit, but who was it who held me head when I was sick, that first time I killed someone, eh? An' who was it who put up with me being a right bastard over the whole crap with Anne? Or what about all the times I can't face what we have to do to keep this fucking country 'smelling ever so faintly of roses'? Fair and fair about, Bodie. 'Bout time I had my turn, in't it?"

Oh, were it only so simple, but Bodie could see no farther than the lack of real passion that left him feeling betrayed.

"Your turn? For what, the big sacrifice? No one told you that lyin' back and thinkin' of England went out with Victoria, have they?"

Doyle shuffled a bit, stuffing his hands into his pockets; Bodie suddenly realised that Doyle was clad and he had a fleeting thought of how Doyle had looked naked, of how he must have looked, rifling through the cupboards to find his motorcycle overalls, of how he would have looked pouring himself into the fabric.

"Yeh, well, sorry 'bout that. Didn't mean it to come across as a mercy fuck, did I? But I don't know why you're making such a to-do about it, Bodie. I've killed for you, and you for me—" he could have bitten his tongue out at that, seeing Bodie's wince at what could be seen as a nasty reminder of the accident—"so what's the fuss about me sleeping with you? I mean, it's not as if we hate each other, is it?"

Bodie turned away from him then, facing Doyle with his back, but even that far more expressive than either one of them really wanted it to be. Callous though he was capable of being, not even Doyle would ever want to bring this much agony to someone.

"That's the problem, innit?" he finally said to the blankness of Bodie's shirt. "If you hated me, or even just liked me, it'd be all right, wouldn't it? Look, Bodie..."

"I don't want your fuckin' pity!"

"Not offering it, am I? Jesus, Bodie, you're making this difficult. Look, I admit it, I'm not in love with you, but that's never stopped either one of us from fucking someone, has it?"

"Yeh, but you're forgetting something, aren't you, sunshine? You're not interested in men, never have been, according to you."

“First time for everything, in’t there? An’ you know what they say: given the right circumstances, almost anyone’s capable of having a homosexual fling. So if just sufferin’ from terminal randiness can do it, why shouldn’t lovin’ someone?”

That got Bodie to turn round, to face him straight on. “You sayin’ you love me?”

“Sounded like it to me.”

“But?”

Doyle grimaced, giving him a glance of wry humour. “Thought you’d hear the ‘but’ even if I didn’t say it. It’s not the same for me as it is for you, Bodie. No point in beatin’ around the bush: I’m not so blind I can’t see that you’re in love with me. But I can’t say the same thing back to you. Won’t lie to you, Bodie.” He couldn’t leave it like that, not with that dreadfully painful blankness on Bodie’s face. “But who knows, maybe one day it’ll come to me being in love with you.”

“And in the mean time?”

Doyle shrugged and Bodie felt some of the chill leave him, felt some of the colour creep back into the world. There hadn’t been a trace of pity on that face, nor in the gesture, just typical Doyle awkward-grace, when all the words have been said and he didn’t know how to say them better. Doyle was handing it to him, offering himself out of the closeness that had kept them together even after Bodie’d confessed his less than platonic wantings. Doyle was giving him control, on a silver platter, tacitly saying how much he trusted Bodie, proving how much he loved, even if the passion weren’t there, even if the physical were only hedonism wrapped with friendship.

“In the mean time?” Doyle was muttering, shrugging again, scuffing his bare toes on the carpet. “Whatever you want, as long as you don’t try to take me for a mug. If you want us to take the next step, go on to sleeping together, well, to be honest, I’ve been doin’ a lot of thinking since you dropped that bombshell on me, mate. Not half as uninterested as I said I was. Was going to say something, but didn’t know how...”

It was one thing too many. Perhaps it was true, all of it, but it was just too neat, too pat, to ring true, not when you considered that this was the walking maze, Ray Doyle, talking. And Doyle had said ‘fling’, just a pathetic ‘fling’, when he

needed... Some of the anger was crawling back in through the soles of his feet, writhing up into him, taking a stranglehold on him, making him want to get Ray Doyle back for everything he’d ever done and some of the things he hadn’t. The hurt of it all, all the tangled elements were meshing to form enough rope for him to hang himself. Or Doyle. When he started feeling like this, all hell tended to break out, as Kate Ross could testify. The palms of his hands were beginning to itch, as suspicion began its pirouetting across his shoulders, tension not far behind. Too pat, too neat and tidy, too, too easy. Not like Doyle at all—not like *them* at all. And too soon, far too soon, everything still laid bare, like bloodless corpses at the mortuary waiting to rise and haunt him. It wasn’t romance they were courting, it was disaster. And the desire to hurt where he had been hurt was rising with his blood... “No,” he said, and was surprised by the scratchy 78 sound of his voice. “No, never work, not right now. Can’t trust myself, Ray an’ I can’t trust you. Not yet. Not till I know you mean it for yourself and not just because Ross says that’s what I need. ’S in me files, in’t it, needing you to be here. Cowley show them to you, did he? Cowley *order* you to do this as well?”

“Don’t be any more fucking stupid than you have to be, Bodie. Wouldn’t do this for just pity and I bloodywell wouldn’t do it because Cowley told me. Christ, can’t you see? I’ve risked my neck for you, haven’t I? Been in some horrible situations for you. Been hurt for you, even copped a bullet for you once. So why shouldn’t I share a bit of pleasure, with you, eh? What’s so fucking strange about that?”

“All that crap over supper, for one. I can’t drink, so I can stay because if I’m not drunk, I’d never dare make a pass at you? Come off it, Ray, you had no intentions of letting me screw you.”

Doyle leaned away from him, propping himself up against the wall, hands belatedly, embarrassedly, coming to cover his rampant erection while it slowly faded. “I honestly didn’t know, Bodie. I’d thought about it, been thinking about it since you’d tried it on with me, but I wasn’t sure. Wasn’t sure how far I could go, was I? I mean, all cats are grey in the dark, and I’ve had my share of blow jobs from fellas, but you’d want more than that. You’d need more

than that and I wasn't sure I could do it. Then I sat in the sitting room with you asleep in my bed and thought, really thought, what it'd be like without you. Didn't much like what I came up with, did I?"

"So you decided to give me a mercy fuck, is that it? Charmed, I'm sure."

"It's not that, not really. You need me, Bodie, and I feel a right wally admitting it, but I need you, too, even if it is in a different way. Don't you get it, you great berk? If you were a woman, there'd be no question, I'd've married you ages ago. Only thing stopping me was you being a bloke. Never had a proper relationship with a bloke..."

"Just furtive blow jobs in the cottages. Tell me, Ray, did you arrest the blokes before or after they sucked you off?"

A blur of motion and Bodie had Doyle's fist captured in both of his capable hands. "Already told you, Bodie, I'll take a lot from you, but I'm not going to be your whipping boy."

"Take a lot from me, would you? You mean things like a blow job, or a hand job. Or perhaps you'd like me to switch the outside light out and just get down on my knees so you can fuck me. As you said, *mate*, all cats are grey in the dark, so it really wouldn't matter if it was me or not, so you don't need to see me. Oh, sorry, I do apologise. I forgot. You *need* the light off so you can bring yourself to have sex with me."

"For Christ's sake, Bodie, what's wrong with you? I'm trying to give you what you've been wanting and..."

"Why?" The single cold word cut through all the heat with the ease of a garrote.

Doyle shrugged, the filtered glow from outside dancing on his muscles. "You're me mate."

"I'm a child killer, *mate*. You were with me, you saw what happened. It was exactly as the Inquiry said, wasn't it? I took the corner too fast, didn't see the kids, cos I was too busy trying to save your fucking neck. Too busy swerving so your side of the car wouldn't end up wrapped round the lamp-post. So," he swallowed, hard, the pain and resentment forming a massive, suffocating lump in his throat, "so I hit them. Ran them over, looked like dozens of them, all in their Easter best and I hit them. Hit them. I KILLED those kids, Ray!" he

screamed, lights in other houses blossoming as the sound faded.

"I know, I know. Knew why you'd swerved like that an' all. But we neither one of us can bring them back, can we? Can't do a fucking thing, Bodie, no matter how badly we want to. D'you think I'm happy, knowing I'm alive at the expense of those kids? How d'you think I felt when I went and told their mums and dads what had happened? How d'you think I felt standing there, holding the drawer open for them to identify the bodies of their kids, eh, Bodie? You're not the only one hurt in this, mate, we all got it. CI5's up the creek, Cowley running off to meetings with every Minister in the government, all the agents going through retraining after hours. You've had it worst, but we've all been through the mill with this one as well. And all I'm trying to do is give you what you need. After what you did for me, it's the least I can do. Bodie, don't look at me like that. I started all that stuff in bed because I hated seeing you hurting like that. An' because I'm a selfish bastard and don't want to have to give you up."

"Even if it means turning queer? You expect me to..."

"Shut up, Bodie! Anyone'd think I was offering to rip your toe-nails out with hot pliers, not sleep with you. Come on, I'm not *that* bad. Look, we've both had more'n our share of luck, haven't we? Cept yours ran out, but could have been me behind the wheel. Could've been me that ended up off on holiday with the men in the white coats. Could've been you standing here trying to persuade me to fuck you... Nah, I'm not stupid enough to argue 'bout something like that."

"Plus, I'm bi, so I wouldn't have to convince you I'd suddenly started singing soprano, would I?"

"You can't just turn gay overnight, Bodie, and any rate, that's not what I'm talking about, is it? I've told you already, I've let blokes do me before, and if you stop to think about it, that means I must've fancied a few, right? So what's so strange 'bout taking it one step farther and having it off with someone that's a bit more important to me than some bloke in a pub?"

"Just exactly what are you offering me, Ray?"

Doyle's expression was very clear and glinting with the honed edge of honesty. "Sex to go

with the friendship. Someone you can come to when your bird's dumped you for standing her up again. Someone who'll come to you..."

"When his bird stands him up. Not exactly wedding bells, is it?"

"Be lying to you if I promised you that. Listen, Bodie, can't change everything all at once. Who knows what'll happen a few years down the line? For all we know, we could be living together, or you could've found someone else and tossed me out the window. But I've always preferred birds and I don't think I can give all that up, not just right off the bat."

"But you're willing to let us sort of slide up on to the next step, is that it? No ties, no chain-you to me apron strings? Just a bit of sex, now and then, when one of us needs it?"

Doyle's eyes were still brutally honest, but there was pain in there to soften the sting, enough pain to balance out the bitter coating on the sugar pill. "It might not be all you want, but as I said to you already, I'd be lying to you if I said it was somethin' else on offer."

It was like the shock of the sea after the heat of the sand, the way that broke over him. The bracing chill brought him back to clarity, a respite from the chaos he had been since the Accident. There was too little of him left to withstand even the hint of pity or the hint of Doyle's sacrifice. If he let it, if he yielded to this siren of sympathy, if he took what was on offer, it would corrode him—and them. It was too soon, with all the excess of helpless anger still clogging him.

"Well, pardon me for not falling at your feet, Doyle." He caught Doyle's expression just before the shutters slammed shut. "Ray..." he said in an agony of gentleness, tossed by the earthquake of emotions. "Ray... We can't fix this all in a day. It's not as if this is something I can just stick a plaster on, you said that yourself."

It was Doyle's turn to retreat, to learn the lesson of the willow. "So you want me to back off, then?"

Nothing, just a mod, and an abyss of exhaustion swallowing Bodie whole, worn out by the dizzying spin of his emotions.

"Still have to stay here, you know. Cowley really would have my guts for garters if I let you loose on an unsuspecting world. And I'd be really pissed off if you expected me to let you go through this without me at your back, mate."

Bodie simply nodded again, leaving it at that, desperate for sleep, for rest, for time...

Despite all that needed yet to be said, there was nothing they could say, not right now. And it was awkward between them, more than it had ever been, even in the very beginning.

It was, not surprisingly, Doyle who finally broke the silence, broke the unspeaking stare of their eyes as they searched each other for the right way to handle this. "Well. Be off to bed now. 'Night, Bodie."

No answer followed him down the hall, but at least there was no spite to spike his spine. Only a hollow ache waiting to be filled, when the murk of tangled feelings had cleared a little.

It was a beginning, of sorts...

In the end, it took the slow ticking of the clock and the reweaving of old bonds and a few more truths coming out. Such as the night they went to the pub with some of the lads and Bodie, turning round, grinning from scoring double top on the darts board, had caught Doyle. He knew that priapic look from old and it was with a pang of severely contained jealousy that he turned to see who the lucky girl was. And saw Murphy instead. He flicked a glance at the unknowing Doyle, then back again, following the line of vision as he would a bullet's trajectory. The only thing in Doyle's field of fire was a very masculine body, one that was of the same overall type as his own. So all the talk and all the uncovered awareness had wormed into Doyle, making him genuinely aware of that part of himself, the part that would make a new future unfold between them. And if Doyle could look at *Murph* that way... He looked back at Doyle, to encounter greeny-grey eyes staring back at him, the beginnings of desire in their depth.

He believed it, then. It might not be in love, but, christ, he'd settle for a bit of genuine lust and a hefty dollop of friendship.

He lost the next three games, not to mention an absolute packet, his mind filled with thoughts of Doyle, of all the good and bad that came with that particular package. Thought of what he'd turned down, and why. Thought of what he'd done, and why. And amidst the beer and the camaraderie and the bawdy songs, he faced—truly faced, not merely paid lip-service to—the one thing he'd held against Doyle, for the one

thing which he'd spent seven months paving a path of forgiveness—for both of them.

He'd do it all again.

For Doyle, to keep Doyle alive and at his side, he'd swerve that car again, even knowing what the price would be. He'd be willing to do that, just for the selfish need to have Doyle beside him and to not be left alone. He stared into his beer, absently watching the head go flat, all the bubbles and fizz fading. Just like his resentment, and his anger, the very last threads of it finally unravelling. Useless to lay that all at Doyle's doorstep, when it wasn't his fault. No-one had made Bodie love him that much, no-one had asked him to. It had just happened, and no doubt Fate was somewhere, laughing like a drain, mocking the poor, feeble mortals and all their agonising over her little tricks.

When he looked up at the world again, it was Doyle, not the world, who was looking back. But then, now that he faced it, Doyle *was* the world to him, with all the dependence and need that meant. And all the culpability...

"You all right?"

A very small question, but, oh, how large an answer. The worst of himself finally faced, the path flagged by the months of slow healing, he looked at what he'd done in his life, with his life. It took seconds, rather like drowning. Not drowning, but waving, the old adage came to mind. Not drowning but waving... Bodie grinned at him, a true hell-for-leather Bodie grin. "Yeh. Yeh, Ray, I think I am at that."

He got a funny look for that one, but Doyle let it pass, as he had let so much pass, with the perceptible flexing of his patience. Nothing more was said, someone stood another round, another joke turned the air blue. But they were aware of each other, they two were, even amidst the blind amity and the clamour around them of good-fellow-well-met desperation to have a good time. Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die...

"Had a saying for everything, didn't he?"

"You what?"

Bodie realised that it had been a long time since he and Doyle hadn't needed speech. "Shakespeare. He's got a quote for everything, hasn't he? I mean, eat drink and be merry. Much ado about nothing. To be or not to be... Been

thinking, Ray. Remember that thing you told me was up to me when we did it?"

Not even a moment's hesitation, Bodie was pleased to note, finding Doyle's instant comprehension reassuring where he knew he still needed a mountain of reassurances. "What about it?"

"No time like the present, is there?"

The shock of it exploded in Doyle's eyes, the pupils dilating widely, the mouth slackening open for a moment. Bodie liked that, too, liked the way there was honest desire there for him. He could allow himself to see it, could dare to take the chance now that he knew what he'd been punishing them both for. Now that he could finally get rid of the guilt that had been nagging him for recognition, before he could lay the children and all his disinterred past to rest.

They weren't even all the way through the door before Bodie gave in, let the half-suffocated love rip through him. Doyle was hot against him, all gasping breath and rippling muscle. He felt the resistance, the same reaction he'd feared, the reaction he'd expected the night Doyle had made his offer. Doyle was pushing against him, but he didn't loosen his grip, kept on holding, tugging at him, struggling to bring him closer, to bridge the gulf.

"Jesus, Bodie, let me breathe!"

Bodie moved back, giving him scant space to breathe, holding back, trying not to let the newly buried problems resurrect themselves. It still wasn't everything he needed or wanted, but there was, at least, the promise of a future yet unborn. And it was better than nothing, and god, how he had hurt inside, for so long, as if someone had peeled him inside out. All of that was still somewhere in him, so he brought Doyle closer again, heat to warm the remembered chill. He touched Ray, one fingertip to a small brown nipple nested in warm hair, and then he was lost again, grabbing Ray desperately, holding him tightly to keep all the guilt and horror forever at bay. His hands were exploring Ray's back, carefully, oh so carefully as he tried to keep this as nothing more than him rutting against a friend who understood. But then realisation snaked its way in amidst the surfeit of sensation: realisation that Ray was reacting to him with the same fire, that the reasons behind it didn't matter at all. Pity, if it were that,

felt the same as passion and there was still the love of friendship spilling over them. And for the moment, that was enough.

It was enough that he finally had Ray, finally had him plastered all down his front, close enough that he could feel the catapult beat of their hearts, the passing rush of their breathing. He had Ray... It sang through him, soaring, masking the ache of what he'd done, the course of time winding through him. But none of that was even worth noticing, not when he could hear Ray gasping at the pleasure of Bodie's hand on his cock. He needed to give, needed to pour out all the bound-up feelings, so he slowly went to his knees, kissing Ray's chest all the way down, tongue rapturous in all the luxuriant hair, eyes closed as he laved his way down to where the hair became thicker and coarser and curly. The musk filled him, the intoxicating aroma exciting him as he moulded his hands to the rich curve of Doyle's rump, firm flesh warm to his touch, muscle fluttering, briefly, involuntarily, in perfect synchronicity with the lambent lick of his tongue the length of Doyle's cock. He flicked at the foreskin, slitting his eyes so that he could watch, could actually measure Ray's response to him, could see as the heavy skin was stretched thinner over the sensitivity of nerves, the cock growing, lengthening, peeping out from its warm cowl to seek Bodie's tongue. When it was there, bumping at his chin, blindly seeking his mouth, Bodie kissed it, not passionately, for a second allowing himself the sheer luxury of openly loving Ray Doyle.

So he knelt there, kissing him the only way he would be allowed to, for he'd had enough straight trade—in Africa, off-base in the Services, even on the docks as a kid—to know the limits. Oh, he could suck, he could use his hands, might even have those compliments returned. Would be fucked, too, although he very much doubted that Ray would follow through on the offer to let Bodie fuck him. Wasn't the way of straight trade, not when it was more than just two basically straight blokes making do with what was available. Everything changed when one of them was gay, or bi like Bodie, and it changed even more when one of them was in love. So there'd be no kisses, there'd be no open declaration of their relationship, but at least he had this, had Ray in his mouth, so

frantic for sex that the hedonistic Doyle didn't even care that they were in the hallway, draught under the door, the mat rough under Bodie's knees, making enough noise that the neighbours were probably wondering what the hell they were up to.

He sat back on his haunches, to catch his breath but lost it instead. He'd never been able to see Ray in all his glory before, and by christ, the man was beautiful, all lean planes and arcing lines, the shadow of hair and the lustrous gleam of sweat-sleeked skin. Groaning deep in his throat, he swooped forward, swallowing Ray whole, taking all of him in. Hands tangled in his hair, hands that were trembling in their arousal, hands that were begging him to swallow deeper. Bodie filled his hands to overflowing with the lushness of Doyle's arse, the muscles hollowing as Bodie's cheeks hollowed as he sucked Ray hard and harder, tongue playing with the pattern of veins and the slickness of skin sliding over rigid flesh.

He could finish Ray like this, his mate shoved up against the wall, but this might be the only time he'd have this, and he'd be damned if he was going to let an opportunity like this slip through his fingers. And there was still a dripping icicle of doubt in him, that made him fear what would never happen if they were to stop now. He knew that if they did everything tonight, then there'd be nothing to hold Ray back, nothing to make him say 'I don't know if I want to go that far' and if there was nothing like that to keep Ray from letting him do this again...

But overriding all his rationalisations, crushing them like so many eggshells, was the gnawing emptiness he felt, the desire to be filled, to take Ray in, to master and be mastered. The cock in his mouth was tensile with oncoming orgasm, so he withdrew his mouth, teeth catching with a fine delicacy on the underside of Doyle's cock, bringing him back from the brink. He didn't dare give either one of them time to catch hold of far-flung senses, so he manoeuvred and twisted them until Doyle landed on top of him with a whoof of breathlessness, pinning Bodie to the floor, his legs spread wide and limber, arse open under the fumbling head of Doyle's cock. Bodie spat on his hand, stretching down between them for wetted fingers to loosen his arse for fucking.

Over him, Doyle was staring at him, eyes wide and wild, mouth agape, face and chest flushed. He was speaking, not that he was making much sense, words dripping from him like sweat. And Bodie drank it up, drank it all up, swam and dived and gambolled in the unexpected largesse of Doyle's sexuality, gorging himself on this feast before the feared famine. He was ready now and arched up, Doyle's cock slicking its path between his cheeks. He reached down again, holding Doyle, guiding him, centring him until there was a radiance of pain and a heavy hotness piercing him. There was more and more filling him, until he was sure he'd burst with pleasure, overflow with this feeling of Ray inside him.

Doyle began thrusting, awkwardly at first, then suddenly finding the differences, making the adjustments for fucking a man, moving his hips slightly differently, slowing his strokes at first until he could feel the supple shift of Bodie's response, both of them moving in perfect counterpoint, Doyle never once taking his eyes from Bodie. Doyle was fucking him hard now, plunging into him, balls slapping against Bodie's arse, his belly rubbing against Bodie's balls, his cock thrusting against Bodie's prostate. Doyle could see it in Bodie's face, could feel it in the tightening of Bodie's body, that he was about to come. Doyle fucked him harder, moving faster, racing along with Bodie, every thrust of his body echoed by a yielding of Bodie's, the two sensations so closely intertwined he couldn't tell them apart. He felt the spasm begin deep inside Bodie, felt his body echo him, felt the cum burst from him, felt the cum hurtle from Bodie to splatter his belly.

And Bodie could think not at all, could only feel, feel Doyle inside him, his body hugging Ray, holding him tighter than a fist, milking him, drawing him deeper, cum splash in him, wet slickness for the last few strokes until Ray collapsed on top of him.

There was a canopy of light coming in from outside, lying sleepily against the ceiling and the far wall, all the world grey... The caustic depression began to bubble, sluggishly, like volcanic mud, sucking him down again. He pushed at it, but it would yield not a single cell of his being, fed by the guilt of the price he had paid for this happiness of his. He lay there, in Doyle's front hall, draught scratching his left flank, star-

ing up at the dead grey of the pre-dawn world, remembering a little girl and how bright her hair had been, with its flutter of ribbons. And how bright her blood had been...

He felt movement, the warm heaviness of Doyle shifting against him. "Bodie?"

He couldn't find the energy to answer, the greyness too hungry to spare any of him for speech.

"Bodie? You awake?"

Perhaps it was his breathing pattern that gave him away.

"Don't know about you, mate, but I'm fucking freezing here. C'mon, back into bed before we both catch double pneumonia."

He suffered himself to be cajoled along the darkened hall to the bedroom, flopped silently into bed, the desolation of Ray leaving adding itself mockingly to the grimness of the accident. Both inevitable, in their way, one his luck running out in the worst possible way, the other...well, Ray had made it plain. Just some friendly sex. The bedside lamp would be turned out and then Ray would leave him alone. All the words of love as dead as...that which he couldn't think about right now, not with Ray on the verge of leaving him, despite it all...

But then Ray was coming in beside him, cold feet chilling on Bodie's shin. He opened his eyes, and Ray stopped abruptly. "Glad you finally listened to sense, mate," he was saying to Bodie's astonished ears, making everything easy and right between, beginning the long work of building a life despite such acid foundations. "That was magic, that was." There was the faintest flutter of fingertips on his backside, then Doyle was talking to him again. "Did I do it right? Didn't hurt you did I?"

"No," he said, drinking in the reddish gleam of Ray's hair, the green glint of his eyes, shutting out the grey, the last burst of misery fading like sleet under the brightness that was Ray Doyle. "Didn't hurt me at all, sunshine. Sorry about being such a bastard to you, it's just..."

"It's just you try any of that crap with me again and I'll brain you, Bodie."

Doyle twisted and stretched, switching the light out, giving Bodie one last sight of the lean muscles of his body, then all was dark, and warm. *Half a loaf is better than none*, his dad had forever been saying, but for once Bodie

found himself agreeing. There were no promises of fidelity, not even of the right kind of *in* love, but they had friendship and love, of a sort. And now sex as well. He could bear that. Yeh, he could bear that. Especially since it offered him that most precious commodity...hope.

ELEGY

THE CLANGING AND BANGING AND BOINGING OF CHURCH BELLS KICKED HIM AWAKE, SO THAT HE FOUGHT AND WON A BATTLE WITH THE BEDCLOTHES, FINALLY EMERGING, VICTORIOUS, FLUSHED AND FOUL TEMPERED.

“Ought to be had up for disturbing the peace, that lot ought. Day of rest! I’ll day of fucking rest them. I mean, how’s a man supposed to rest with that bloody lot...”

The silence underlying the clamour deafened him. Church bells, ringing as if the world were going to end tomorrow. Or to tell the world that Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia... He could never think of the words of that old hymn without singing them, childhood memories rising bright as the foil on his chocolate Easter egg. He sat up, scrubbing at his eyes, waiting until the stiffness of his joints eased, staring out of the window at the sliver of sunlight that spilled through the curtains.

There’d be an Easter egg, he knew, waiting on the kitchen table for him, a huge one, in an ostentatious display box, covered with glittering foil, chocolates stuffed inside the egg and a big card tucked under the box. And the card, as it did each and every year, would read, “Still love you. Thanks for giving me hope. B.” He’d not open the egg, of course, not for a while. Not until late, once the sun had died on this day of the Son’s rising, not until the moon had leached the light and colour out of everything and all the world seemed dead.

He crawled out of bed, to wander, disconsolate, into the kitchen to stare at his lover’s token to him. But he didn’t look for Bodie. Not today, not on Easter Sunday. His Bodie wouldn’t be in their house now, wouldn’t have been for hours. By now, he’d be at the second of the little graves, placing a beautiful Easter egg there, as he did every single year on every single one of those guilty, pain-filled secrets, until he reached the last.

Ray knew he should be used to it, after all these years, but the day always ambushed him,

unforgettable as a mere date never could be. Numbers can be mislaid, holidays can be arranged to distract the mind, but Easter Sunday peeled from every church steeple, haunting them both. Guilt stirred in his belly, melancholy with it, and he turned from the gaudy Easter egg, turning away from the memories that never seemed to die. Doyle filled the kettle, plugged it in, picked the paper up from the mat, brought the milk in, started the day. He’d be able to fill it up with all the usual Sunday things, all the things he and Bodie had grown into the habit of doing since they’d got out of the rat race. But it would be different. It was always different on Easter Sunday. The kettle clicked off unnoticed, as Ray Doyle stood staring out his kitchen window at daffodils nodding and dancing in the breeze, a tumbled garden full of flowers, but not one of them red. Bodie hated red flowers. Doyle gave up all attempts to shut the past out and watched next door’s cat find a patch of sunlight and begin to wash itself with placid contentment, while the memory of children dying turned the day of Resurrection to ashes that stoppered his mouth. And then he started remembering the hollow ache of Bodie crying...

Bodie always started with the graves of the children he’d never even seen, either before or after he’d run them down, crouching down on the lush greenness of grass, crocuses erupting with colour, freesia inundating the air with the heady sweetness of their scent. With steady hands, he put the Easter basket on the faintly mounded earth, nestling it in the too-long grass, the brightly wrapped eggs a rainbow of colour. He would sit, for a time, amidst the graves of the old and the sick, contemplating the graves of the young, until it was time to move on, to the next one.

Derek’s grave had been neglected, since last he’d been here, and as always, it made him wonder. The brown laces in the black shoes—now it seemed less the typical child and more the uncaring parents. Perhaps Derek’s mum loved him as little as Bodie’s had loved him, and that made it all the worse, somehow, touching an echo inside him, as if it were the grave of his own childhood, himself lying in there, unmourned. Far, far away, on the other side of the church grounds, the tinny tinkle weaved its way through the air, calling the children to come

running with their pocket money and celebrate Easter with an ice or a cornet. He closed his eyes at that, hearing the screams he'd caused mingled with the high-pitched laughter of today's children. His head was still bowed as the sun passed the zenith and as an old woman hobbled past, a small bouquet of spring flowers clutched in withered hand, he placed the gift on the grass, purples and blues and orange rioting against the green. He got to his feet then, watching her as she had watched him, both of them leaving tokens on the graves no one else remembered. He left her there, to the solitary quiet, and began the last, and hardest, duty of his Easter Sunday.

The last place. It was there that he'd linger longest, kneeling, aware of every single one of the ravages time had wrought on him, glad of them, paying the penance for cutting such little lives so short. His back was beginning to give, his knees aching, the old wound in his shoulder gnawing away at the bone. He liked that, enjoyed the pain, for it gave him a focus other than the guilt inside. He could still remember her, as if time had not passed a single day. So worried about what Mummy would say about her dress, so worried that she was getting him all sticky from her ice-lolly; so trusting in the arms of the man she didn't know had killed her. His fingers fidgeted with the basket they held, this one full of every colour of the world. And this one included the colour of blood, before it spills away into brown... He couldn't keep his hands still, stroking the wicker as he had stroked the far smoother ripples of her long hair,

with its ribbons all tangled. He sat there, letting the age of his body stiffen, letting the old, old grief and guilt have its day. As he did, every year; as he would do, every year. Very, very steady, he brushed the tiny limb of lichen that was trying to steal onto his little girl's headstone, his fingertips dipping into the gores that made her name, and her dates, the years so horribly close together. He shifted, sitting cross-legged now, one palm buried in the grass of her grave, the other still clenched on the glittering pile of the basket. All around him, there was a banquet of colour, spring flowers turning the world into a rainbow of life, like the basket he always, always brought her: reds and blues and yellows, a splash of orange, a spray of pink, the scents of roses and honeysuckle, grass and the faint acrid smell of the city that lay just over the wall. Very still, he sat there, amidst the lively colours of spring and the granite slabs of the dead, until the day began to fade.

Then, when the sky turned red with sunset, he very gently placed the egg-filled basket with its bouquet of red ribbons that bled, streaming, streaming, and he sat there yet, watching, waiting until the moon stole all the colour and turned the red to grey.

When all the life had been leached, when the grave was nothing more than a place for the dead, a place for those who were well beyond the pains of life, he rose stiffly to his feet, and began the slow journey home, where life and colour and kisses were waiting for him, all bought and paid for.