



*Well, you're not going to believe the title are you? 'Sweetness and Light'? Hah! this is an M. Fae Glasgow story, a story where the Glaswegian lets rip enough venom to change creamy milk chocolate to bittersweet dark. Oh, our boys get together all right, but I guess the old saw is true: be careful what you wish for...*

It wasn't often anyone caught Ray Doyle on the hop, and Bodie savoured it with all the joy, glee and exhilaration at his disposal. And when he ran out of that, he roped in Murphy, McCabe, Lucas, Stewart and half the rest of the squad to fill the shortfall. A red-letter day, definitely, one to be relished, and all it took to renew the triumph was seeing Doyle the next morning, standing sulkily in the train station, the destinations board clicking through its endless list of places of escape.

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# SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

## M. FAE GLASGOW

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"Well, well, well, what have we here, what have we here?" Bodie said, eyebrow raised and hands rubbing, going for Monty Python and coming closer to Fagin.

Doyle, however, was no Oliver Twist, and the Artful Dodger would've steered clear of so thunderous a 'mark', even if those pockets hadn't been too tight to be pickable. Having obviously given the entire situation some thought overnight, Doyle didn't deign to respond to Bodie's great good cheer, although he did give Bodie a look that would have killed a lesser man stone dead.

"Not talking, eh?" Bodie went on, clapping Doyle on the shoulder, grinning at his friend, making the most of Doyle's uncommon discomfort. "Course, you probably did enough talking yesterday to last you a month."

Doyle sniffed disdainfully, spoiling the entire effect by sounding as if he were coming down with

a cold and suffering from a complete lack of handkerchiefs.

Someone bumped into Bodie, distracting him for a second, so that when he turned back to the oh-so-tempting target of Doyle, said temptation had removed himself to the nearest kiosk, having discovered a hitherto unhinted at passion for perusing the Beano, the Dandy and the Fab 208. It was a sight to warm the cockles of Bodie's heart: Doyle, so embarrassed he was reduced to running away and hiding his nose in the children's comics and teen magazines.

A mangled announcement came over the Tannoy, and only years of practice and a quick look at the board told Bodie that their train was getting ready to depart. Grinning widely enough to make people give him the wide berth usually reserved for lunatics and French tourists, Bodie came up behind Doyle, rested his chin on the soft white fabric of

Doyle's good jacket, and unashamedly read over his partner's shoulder. Doyle ignored him utterly, flicking the magazine pages with a controlled, telling fury.

Subduing his grin to better the effect of his little joke, Bodie sneaked his arm round Doyle, sticking his hand between the pages of the magazine, a glossy two-page spread on hair and make-up tips now displayed. Knowing his partner well, Bodie marked the exact second Doyle would finally register what he'd been looking at. Waited, just long enough, then said: "Nah, think you're perfect the way you are, petal. Anyway, glitter eyeshadow is just *so* déclassé."

Lesser men might quail before the infamous Ray Doyle temper, but Bodie just dissolved into another grin, his blue eyes alight with devilment. "You—" Doyle said, then reconsidered the rest of his tirade in the face of an eavesdropping blue-rinsed OAP with a moustache Kitchener would have envied.

"I what?" Bodie enquired sweetly, stepping round Doyle to make a quick but substantial raid on the display of chocolate and crisps. "You were saying, Ray?"

"Nothing much," Doyle replied politely enough, turning his back to his partner, muttering under his breath: "Nothing that won't improve for the wait, anyway."

Bodie, never one to let well enough alone, pinched Doyle on the bum, moving forward quickly enough to evade any possible retaliation. "By the way," he called to the thundercloud still standing there like the second Flood waiting to happen, "that was our train they announced back then."

With Bodie still grinning and Doyle cursing under his breath, they each grabbed their hold-alls and took off for the right platform. Pelting through the station with scant regard for pedestrians, luggage and the infuriated whistle-blowing of assorted BR flunkeys, they made it with a whole three seconds to spare.

Doyle threw himself into the nearest empty seat, glaring as Bodie seated himself opposite with considerably more aplomb and certainly less haste. Bodie smiled. Doyle frowned. Bodie grinned. Doyle looked out the window, no doubt captivated by the passing glory of run-down smoke-begrimed buildings and broken-windowed factories. Bodie nudged Doyle with his foot. Doyle, without acknowledging that Bodie was even still on the face

of the planet, crossed his legs, folded his arms and turned sideways in his seat.

Well, it might not be often anyone caught Ray Doyle on the hop, but finding him out of sorts was a common enough thing, and encountering his black mood was a given—if Doyle were the butt of a joke. It just wasn't often Bodie found himself on the receiving end, not like this. Oh, yes, there was the usual minor Vesuvius, but then it was over and done with, and Doyle would grin at him, or make a sly dig at him, or even apologise. This, however, *this* was the sort of treatment usually reserved for the despised Cochrane in Files.

"Oi," Bodie said quietly, leaning forward to make sure that no-one else in the carriage could overhear, "you're as much fun as a wet weekend in Barnsley! What the hell's wrong with you?"

Well, anticipating an answer from a sulking Doyle had been a trifle optimistic, but going on past form, Bodie had every right to expect a pithy reply followed by reconciliation. This time, all he got was the cold shoulder and an even colder glower.

"Oh, get off it, you're never pissed off because I'm having a bit of a laugh, are you?"

"A bit of a laugh?" Doyle said, keeping his voice down to a civilised level only because he was all but hissing with fury. "A bit of a fucking laugh? You've been rubbing my nose right in it—and inviting every bastard we know to join in!"

"It's only a bit of a giggle—"

"Easy for you to say, you're the one doing the laughing. Well, mate, you'll be laughing out the other side of your face when I'm finished with you."

The joke, needless to say, had gone decidedly flat at this point, Doyle's pointed animosity enough to prick anyone's balloon. "C'mon, Ray," Bodie wheedled, giving Doyle a friendly tap on the knee, "it was only a joke that got a bit out of hand."

"That's a real talent for understatement you've got there."

"Yeh, but look at it from my point of view. I mean, Mr. Drug Squad-art-school-been-to-Paris-twice-seen-it-all Doyle—taken in by a pretty face and—"

"Shut up, Bodie."

Considering that Bodie was known to not listen even to George Cowley when the mood took him, God knows why Doyle thought telling Bodie to shut up would have the slightest effect.

“But you’ve got to admit—”

“Admit what? That I was fooled? Right, fine, I admit it. I would’ve admitted it to you, but did you have to broadcast it to everyone in a hundred-mile radius?”

“But it was funny!”

“Who for?”

Bodie started to laugh, remembering the day before, and some of the comments the other blokes had come up with—and who would ever have thought that Miss Pettifer had a mouth like a trooper and a sense of humour like a sewer?

Doyle went back to looking out the window, and if he hadn’t have been sitting down, he would have been standing on his dignity.

One look at that clenched expression wiped the last of Bodie’s smile from his face. Fair enough, Doyle was furious with him, but going by that expression—the poor bastard looked genuinely upset. Which could, of course, be just an act, reeling Bodie in to make a fool of him to even the score after yesterday. But if it weren’t...

“This’s really got to you, hasn’t it?” Bodie asked softly.

Doyle gave him a dirty look. “Oh, yeh,” he sneered far more nastily than a simple bad joke warranted, “you’re definitely the second Einstein. Does this mean I won’t have to do your expenses for you now?”

“Give it a rest, Ray. Come on, what the fuck is bothering you so much? It was only a joke, for Christ’s sake!”

“And it was such a good joke, wasn’t it?” Doyle snapped angrily. “A lot of fun, was it? A real barrel of laughs, eh, mate?”

The Einstein crack had hit harder than Bodie would ever let on. “Quite the Dame Margot, Doyle. Going to hit me with your handbag?”

Doyle erupted from his seat like a bullet from a muzzle, storming past Bodie in a rush of white jacket and whiter-lipped fury. Behind him, Bodie smiled deprecatingly at the few rude souls who had looked up at the sudden burst of movement, and then sat there, his expression closed, thinking about what the hell could be wrong with his partner—and what the hell they were going to do about it if Doyle didn’t get his brain in gear by the time they made it to Brighton.

If there had been any stops, Bodie would have been worried, but he knew Doyle was on the train

somewhere, probably fuming. Probably working himself up into a right tizz, or tying himself in knots trying to calm down: it unnerved Bodie that he couldn’t be sure which way Doyle would jump. Doyle, he had decided within an hour of meeting him, was a difficult, contrary little bastard. By the next day, he hadn’t changed that opinion, but had started adding the first of the more positive layers, so that seven months into the partnership, he had not only come to like Ray Doyle, he had actually convinced himself that he understood his bamstick of a partner.

And today just went to prove how wrong a man can be, he told himself without much comfort. Outside, the countryside was its usual lulling image of serene Southern English greenery, the sort of landscape that had been written about by everyone from Shakespeare to Christie, and Bodie watched it as he passed through it, the colours muted and gentle, the land rising and falling softly, harmonising with the rhythmic click and clack of the train, nostalgic as a lullaby.

Something landed in his lap, and he jolted awake, the words out of his mouth before his eyes were fully open. “I’m awake!”

“You’ll be telling me you’re a virgin next,” Doyle said, but without the audible acrimony of—Bodie checked his watch—half an hour before. “Wrap yourself around that—British Rail’s haute cuisine at its finest.”

“Been ages since breakfast, and all I had time for was a bit of toast. Thanks, mate.” He looked cautiously at Doyle, at the set of his mouth, at his eyes, at the backs of his hands, and there it all was, the tension apparent to anyone who knew what to look for. “How much do I owe you?”

Doyle shrugged it off. “You can cough up for dinner,” he said, taking another bite of his sandwich, chewing methodically, eyes staring out the window, although Bodie would bet a pound to a penny Doyle wasn’t paying any attention to the bucolic bliss they were passing.

“Listen, Ray,” he began, waiting until Doyle finally turned and looked at him. “Let’s just forget all about yesterday, all right? Just forget about it, get on with today...”

For a long moment, Doyle simply looked at him, and then his features became a mask. Fully hidden, he smiled brightly at Bodie, his voice so perky he could have found work as a children’s TV presenter. “Yeh, why not? Stupid to get worked up

over a stupid joke, in't it? Consider it forgotten."

Bodie didn't believe it for a second, and the last thing any sane person wanted was Ray Doyle holding a grudge against them. But now wasn't the time to ingratiate himself again, not considering Doyle's innate distrust of those currying favour. "That's great. So—" And what the hell could he talk about that wasn't either brown-nosing or tiptoeing through a mine-field? "Straightforward routine, d'you think, this Brighton job?"

"Boring, if you ask me," said Doyle, only the faintest shadow of an off-note marring his mundane tone. "Just the standard threat against the standard bunch of politicians—get them every year, and nothing ever comes of it."

"Suppose so. Still, some of the nasties were very specific, not just the usual run of the mill promise to blow up the Tory Party Conference."

"You think so?"

"Yeh, bound to be, isn't it? I mean, apart from dirty weekends, name one exciting thing ever to happen in Brighton?"

"See your point," Doyle replied, neatly wadding his sandwich wrappers. Still pleasant, he pulled a can of lager out of his jacket pocket, offered it to Bodie. "Fancy one?"

Christ, but this felt weird. Perfectly normal conversation with Doyle, near idle chat about a perfectly routine job, one they could do in their sleep, and it was about as natural as *The Archers*. It was so predictable, Doyle's every comment sounding scripted, himself answering like a stage prompter. It was so...polite. That was what was wrong with all this. Too polite, too sedate, all the personality and fire taken out of it. More carefully, Bodie took a good look at Doyle and finally noticed some of the signs of strain, small tell-tales that must have been there for weeks, creeping up slowly, otherwise Bodie would have noticed them right off.

Drinking the beer Doyle had not only paid for but actually fetched as well, Bodie sat back, to watch and to think. And unnervingly, Doyle didn't seem to even notice.

The B&B Betty had booked them into wasn't half bad, with a view of the sea—as long as they opened the window, used grappling hooks, got up to the eaves and then leaned round the corner. Still, at least the windows didn't all look into blank walls or dustbins.

"Christ, these beds are fucking pathetic!" Bodie announced, still bouncing on the single bed he'd thrown himself onto.

"Hmm?" Doyle asked absently, drawing aside the net curtain to look into next door's garden. "What'd you say?"

"The beds. They're pathetic. Too soft."

"Oh. Well, you've slept in worse, haven't you?"

That wasn't the point: moaning about the accommodations was an ingrained habit and a source of some good laughs. And anyway, everyone in CI5 knew that complaining about the facilities was in the small print. But there was Doyle, staring out the window like bloody Ophelia, and if he kept that up, then this was going to be the most boring assignment ever.

"Right," Bodie announced briskly, "Time to let the Cow know his favourite calves are here."

He was halfway out the door before it registered that Doyle hadn't budged an inch. "Doyle! Come on, it's time to report in."

"Oh, yeh. Coming."

Bodie looked at him askance, not liking the way all the life seemed to have gone out of his partner. If it came to shooting... Bodie shook that thought off: they'd sort that out later, after they'd seen Cowley. And as soon as that was out of the way, Doyle had better either buck up or come up with some bloody good excuses.

Three hours later, and more windows, doors, access chutes and security checks than anyone would ever want to count, Cowley was finally satisfied—for the time being, anyway. With a grumbled 'on your way', he set them loose for the evening.

"So where d'you fancy going now then?" Bodie asked as they walked down the narrow street.

Doyle shrugged, and for a second, Bodie's concerns of the afternoon came crowding back in, but then Doyle was grinning like his usual self, nudging Bodie, his expression worthy of the dirty old raincoat brigade. "There's this disco Murphy was telling me about this afternoon," Doyle was saying, "and he swears every single bird that goes there is a nympho."

"Now *that*, my old son," Bodie said, "sounds like my idea of heaven. Did Murph say where this Eden was?"

"Down at the shorefront. You know, the other side of the road from the Promenade, a couple of streets up from the Pier, just down from that

caterer Cowley sent us to check.”

“Which means that we turn—” Bodie stopped for a minute, checking his bearings, “right, down here.”

“I suppose you want something to eat before we go in there, don’t you?”

“I’m a growing lad,” Bodie replied with some pathos, steering Doyle towards a pub that had a decent menu board outside. Decent, that is, if a man’s idea of superb food is steak and kidney pie, chips and mushy peas. Doyle, of course, turned his nose up at the culinary delights on display on the chalk board. Of course, such lofty ideals soon paled to insignificance when confronted with a plate piled high with steaming hot food. A stomach that thinks its throat has been cut will defeat the whimpering worries of clogging arteries any day of the week.

Replete, they finally set off for the disco of such instant CI5 legend, and though neither of them would admit it of course, with such pleasant weather, it was actually nice to walk for once.

“Wish we had the car,” Bodie said, taking a deep breath of sea air, stopping for a minute to admire the sea view.

“Yeh,” Doyle agreed without a second’s hesitation, half his mind preoccupied with the amount of skill it would take to paint something like this. “Bloody stupid making us take the train down here.”

“Bet that bunch of layabouts down the garage won’t even look at the motors, never mind give them a complete overhaul.”

“Yeh,” Doyle agreed absently, his attention drifting, and some of Bodie’s unease came back again. But then Doyle shivered, and turned to face Bodie, giving him a blinding grin. “Let’s go pull a pair of birds.”

“Raymond, I’m shocked, absolutely shocked by such coarseness coming from you.”

“So what’d you expect then? Me suggestin’ we visit the nearest philately club?”

“All right, so maybe I wouldn’t go that far...”

The disco was right in front of them now, and Doyle’s expression was positively sardonic as he turned towards Bodie. “Then we’ll leave it at pulling a couple of birds in the hope of a good shag. Okay?”

Now that was the old Ray Doyle of infamous and libidinous reputation, and with the prospect of several days and nights guarding a tribe of Tories,

Bodie was only too eager to put aside any and all worries this last night of freedom. All but shoving Doyle through the swing door, he gave him a swift grope that raised more than eyebrows. “Oooh, Raymond,” he fluted, trying out his impersonation of the poofter on that new comedy programme he liked, “you *are* a naughty boy, aren’t you?”

Their big night on the town turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. Far from pulling a couple of birds, the only thing Raymond Doyle seemed interested in pulling was yet another pint. Or another g&t, or vodka and orange—he’d even agreed to Bodie’s joking offer of a Babycham! Enough to make anyone worry about another bloke, but for Doyle, with his pretensions to a palate that could discern good wine and better champagne—well, the only thing that could possibly be more worrisome than that would be George Cowley himself adding lemonade to a dram.

“When did you get plastered, eh?” Bodie asked ruefully, not really expecting an answer. He’d never seen Doyle quite like this before, Doyle one for getting drunk slowly, measurably, usually stopping long before he was seriously impaired. But tonight—tonight, Ray had gone from pleasantly tipsy to absolutely blotto, apparently in the ten minutes it had taken Bodie to find the loo and escape the aspirations of a dirty old man.

So much for his chances of sex tonight, Bodie thought to himself, not so much resigned as outflanked by Doyle’s bizarre behaviour. Oh, not the getting drunk, although that was ill-considered to say the least, given their duties of the next day, and considering precisely who would be issuing their orders. It was just that Doyle was back to that strange frame of mind from earlier, distanced almost, leaving Bodie feeling as if Doyle really weren’t there.

“C’mon, Ray,” Bodie said, trying to finagle his partner out of his chair. “Time to get you home.”

“Be a long drive,” Doyle announced. “’Cept you’ve forgotten we don’t have a car—not a single sausage. That’s bad, Bodie, very bad,” he went on, still not quite so loudly that any of the club-goers would hear him, but that was thanks only to the blaring music. “Cowley wouldn’t be pleased at you forgetting about leaving your car.” A pause, while Doyle stared up owlishly at Bodie. “Where *did* you leave your car?”

"It's in London, Ray, just like yours, and we meant to leave them there. Now come on, mate, up you get..." Easier to stand water on end than to get Doyle to his feet. "Come on, Doyle, get up!"

"Don't want to. 'S nice here." He frowned, thinking. "Bit noisy, mind you, but it's nice."

"Yes, but it's time for all good boys to be in bed," Bodie replied, managing this time to get Doyle out of the chair and propped, after a fashion and after several attempts, against the wall while Bodie fished around looking for the jacket that Doyle had managed to lose.

"Then I'm going to stay up forever and ever," Doyle declared.

"Yeh, yeh, Peter Pan, you, me and the rest of the Lost Boys," Bodie told him, humouring him, which was the only way for Bodie to keep a head on his own shoulders when Doyle was one over the eight: stropo didn't even begin to describe a drunk Doyle in full flight.

"I am goin' to stay up f'rever an' ever," Doyle repeated, leaning heavily against Bodie, one leg braced, the other made, apparently, of rubber, the combination making it exceedingly difficult for Bodie to get himself, Ray and those two conflicting legs out the door.

"Whatever you say, Ray," Bodie agreed, not really listening, concentrating on getting Doyle out that door and headed up the street.

"Never never never never going to go to bed."

"Right, fine, yeh," Bodie muttered, steering Doyle round a corner and wishing he could trim Doyle's sails, or at least minimise the listing to one side. Or contain the listing to *just* one side.

"Said it yourself, Bodie, my old pal." Doyle came to an abrupt and swaying halt, almost over-balancing, Bodie struggling to keep the too-fluid man from tipping them both over into the gutter. "Only good boys go to bed, and I'm not good." A moment of deep thought, the words beginning now to really slur, such helpful warning signs coming too late to be any use at all. "Not a boy either. Not a man." He paused then, his body doing a slow circle, his mind obviously engaging in the same, slow drunkenness. "So if I'm not a boy an' I'm not good..." Eyes almost shut, barely able to focus, words more and more disorganised. "Does that make me a bad woman?"

"It makes you fucking Peter Pan," Bodie said, aggrievedly shoving Doyle back up the street towards their B&B.

"Oh, no," Doyle said with as much firmness as his liquid brain could muster. "Oh, not me, I'm not fucking Peter Pan. He's too young." Doyle stopped again, Bodie only just managing to catch him. "But if what's-'is-face made 'im up years an' years ago, then he's too old. But he's still a boy cos he never grows up. So he *is* too young. I think..."

Well occupied with just keeping Doyle steered in the right direction, Bodie was only just beginning to filter through the drunken nonsense enough to wonder what the hell Doyle was going on about.

Doyle was nearly cross-eyed with the effort. "I think..."

"Yeh, yeh, the poor man's Socrates," Bodie said, tempted to throw Doyle over his shoulder and carry him back.

"I'm going to be sick," Doyle announced loudly.

"Oh, no, you're not," Bodie replied, one hand on Doyle's scruff, the other in the small of his back, hurrying him along the street.

"I am," Doyle said ponderously. "I'm going to be sick..."

"Oh, no, you're not," Bodie repeated, sounding as fervent as a monk at prayer. "No, Ray, you're not. Oh, god, you are..."

Not a pretty sight, and not a pleasant experience, but Bodie consoled himself that it could be worse. He'd come that close to tossing Doyle over his shoulder to carry him up the road: it didn't even bear thinking about.

It was easier to shove him where they needed to go, now that Doyle was just a groaning mass of misery. Desperately trying to be quiet, Bodie found the 'hidden' outdoor key and let them both into the B&B, edging Doyle slowly upwards, one stair at a time. A few stumbles, and that unfortunate moment when Doyle decided this whole thing was incredibly funny, his filthy laughter erupting all like a music-hall joke and Bodie gave up all hope of getting Doyle into their room undetected. He could hear a door opening downstairs, the sound from a television set filtering up the stairs.

"Hurry up, Ray," he hissed, egging Doyle on, all but pushing him up the stairs, trying to get them out of sight before the owners could catch up with them.

Not far enough away for Bodie's peace of mind, a floorboard creaked, and a question sallied forth.

"Who is it?"

"Oh, terrific," Bodie whispered, clamping a hand over Doyle's mouth in case Ray should

decide to answer the man of the house.

"I said, who's there?"

"No he didn't," Doyle hissed, prising Bodie's fingers away from his mouth. "He said who is it, not who's there, why—"

Bodie covered Doyle's mouth again, which didn't exactly help him in his attempts to get the door open without dropping either Doyle or Doyle's jacket, push Doyle inside, stop Doyle from landing on his face and taking Bodie with him—and what's more, accomplish all this without the owner catching them. Funny lot, these B&B people—for some reason, not too many of them took kindly to drunken young men careening up their newly re-carpeted stairs. Might have something to do with what Doyle had the decency to do in the street, he conceded, dumping Doyle on one of the beds, watching in alarm as Doyle turned a rather delicate shade and went a bit green around the gills.

"You're not going to be sick again," Bodie said, more a command than a question.

"Oh, god, don't say things like that," Doyle mumbled, rolling over to bury his face in the bedspread, rolling right back over as the faint hint of disinfectant assaulted him. "God, I'm drunk..."

"You noticed! Congratulations, mate."

It took a few moments, but the question finally came.

"What are you doing, Bodie?"

"What does it look like?"

"Dunno. Can't see that far, and I don't think I want to lift my head."

"You just lie there then, mate, and let me put you to bed. Should just leave you to sleep it off in your own muck though, shouldn't I?" Bodie muttered, peeling Doyle's shoes and socks off him. Normally, that's exactly what he'd do, but Doyle... If anyone had asked him, he'd've said it was because he owed Doyle. At least, that's what he would have said for the record. The truth, though? Definitely owed Doyle a lot, but it was more than just watching each other's backs on the job, wasn't it?

"C'mon, Ray," Bodie said, wry amusement putting paid to what would have been justifiable annoyance. "Don't just lie there doing your Sleeping Beauty, give us a hand."

Slowly, as regal as the Royal Wave, Doyle raised his right hand. With the first two fingers stiffly extended.

"And up yours an' all, mate," Bodie replied, finally getting Doyle's zip undone.

"But you haven't been, have you?"

Typical bloody Doyle, Bodie thought, anger an abrupt sunburst through him. Take a perfectly simple situation, a nice friendly mutual wank, and what does Doyle do? Analyse it to fucking death, make it Sodom, Gomorrah and Babylon all rolled into one. Being rougher than he ought, he pulled Doyle's jeans off him, left the shirt in place, and shoved him out of the way enough to pull the bedspread up over him. "Right," he said, dumping the wastepaper basket by Doyle's bedside, "you're on your own now. If you have to spew your guts up, do it in that. And don't forget the loo's down the corridor, so don't you go peeing in the wardrobe."

"Bodie?"

Even angry, Bodie couldn't ignore that tone of voice. "What?"

"What're you doing?"

"I am going out. To do what we were going to do in the first place before you got plastered. Any objections?"

Doyle closed his eyes, brought his arm up to cover them, and Bodie almost reconsidered. Almost.

"Course not," Doyle said quietly. "Thanks for seeing me back in one piece."

"Don't mention it," Bodie said, switching the light out and opening the door.

"No fear of that," Doyle replied wearily, his form no more than a blur in the dark.

"Right, well, then," Bodie said, fumbling for words, uncomfortably aware that this was about more than Doyle being drunk and Bodie helping him. "I'll be off. I'll see you later. If I get lucky..."

"Then if we're *both* lucky, I won't see you till the morning."

And that was one minefield Bodie didn't want to touch.

Late morning, coming across each other in the room set aside for the plebs to have their meals and snacks, it was as if nothing had ever happened, as if nothing had ever been said—as if nothing had ever been left unsaid.

Doyle lowered his sunglasses for a second, surveyed the pallid Bodie and grinned at him. "See you had a good night last night then."

"Good? God, let me tell you about good. You

should've seen her, Doyle—"

"Why should he be the only one to see her? Go on, Bodie," Murphy parked himself on the arm of the sofa, took a hefty drink from McCabe's coffee that he'd snagged on the way past. "Tell us all about her."

"Gorgeous," Bodie said, hands doing the traditional hourglass in the air. "Blonde—"

"Natural or from a bottle?"

"Definitely a natural. Fair skin, long hair, the biggest tits I've seen in months and her legs—heaven."

"Spread 'em for you, did she?" Doyle asked, the steam from his tea misting his dark glasses.

"Only when she was on her back. The rest of the time..." he trailed off in an artistry of glorious memory.

"The rest of the time," Murphy put in, "she was too busy collecting her money."

"I'll have you know she was a nice girl!"

"Lots of tarts are nice girls, aren't they?"

McCabe said, reclaiming his mug from Murphy. "I mean, look at Murphy's mum!"

Of course, there had to be a good-natured scuffle over that, Murphy's sainted mother notorious for her reaction to her good Catholic son going into CI5.

And through it all, Bodie was acutely aware that Doyle had retreated to lean against the wall, just standing there drinking his tea, watching the shenanigans. Standing there as if he were at a bus-stop, watching life pass him by.

Trying to be discreet about it—everyone knew Cowley had eyes in the back of his head—Bodie gave in to an enormous yawn. Bad enough that this was just a routine baby-sitting job, albeit for an entire crèche of pampered politicians, but this having to hang around listening to the after-dinner speeches was positively criminal. What was worse, he couldn't even catch Doyle's eye. He looked over at his partner again, hoping Doyle would look back, the pair of them indulging in one of those schoolboyesque games of theirs. Chance would be a fine thing. Doyle was standing there with all the personality of an American Secret Service man, just as grim and twice as boring. But at least if his attention wasn't on Bodie, it was on his job, if the other man's tension was anything to go by. Between keeping his eyes peeled for the job, Bodie spent a long time watching his partner, looking at

him anew, appreciating him in a way he didn't normally allow himself. Approved of Doyle's contained, understated power, of the way he moved, easy grace always ready to turn into deadly force. Admired the skill that gave Doyle's close observations and readiness the illusion of being nothing more than a slightly bored man looking for something interesting. Of course, Doyle looked better in his tatty old jeans and that godawful T-shirt of his than he did tonight, all done up like a dog's dinner, but even so, he did look good—would look a lot better if he'd stop fidgeting with his collar. And his tie. And not to mention the cummerbund. Guttersnipe through and through, Bodie decided rather fondly, for all the polish he'd acquired over the years. What they used to be called the salt of the earth, not that Doyle could ever be as bland as salt. Doyle was more exotic spices and pepper.

It was time for another full circuit of the grand dining room, and Bodie paced round the room, attention on all the myriad details of security, common sense wishing for better lighting, a small part of him approving of the flattering glow of lamps.

Returning to his original post, one last survey marking all of his colleagues positioned perfectly, and then there was nothing much to do but stand there, the perfect shop dummy, and watch other people eat. Boring. Dead boring. Still, it was amusing to wonder which one of them was the next Profumo waiting to happen—or, hearing Ted Heath's inimitable laughter rising over the polite chink of crystal, wonder who the next Jeremy Thorpe would be. He made a face at his own thought: Ted Heath, in bed with a bloke—Ted Heath, in bed with anyone. Revolting.

He couldn't have stopped himself if he'd tried: he looked over at Doyle, who sometimes was ugly but who was never revolting. At least, Bodie couldn't think of anything Doyle could do that would disgust him. Case in point: just think about that night after the Smithfield op.

Surrounded by politicians, policemen, CI5 and Cowley, thinking about Doyle that night was undoubtedly the stupidest of ideas, but once the image was there, Bodie couldn't get it out of his head. That had been some night, high on the adrenalin of almost getting their heads blown off, Bodie's arm still painful, burning, a poisoned feeling where the bullet had grazed him, the

bandage feeling too tight, constricting his bicep every time he moved. And Doyle, staring at him like that, eyes big as saucers, genuinely shaken, so close that night, each of them so close to dying, but worse yet, each of them so close to being the one left alive without the other.

When the hell had it become that?

Uncomfortable with his thoughts, Bodie shifted, getting a warning glare from Cowley, and finally, Doyle's attention. For a moment, Doyle stared at him, eyes full of an intensity Bodie couldn't name, and then that was gone, tucked neatly behind the bland indifference that was slowly driving Bodie right round the twist. Especially since he was pretty sure what was getting at Doyle. As soon as this was over, Bodie decided, as soon as they got home, that's when they'd sort it out.

And in the meantime, he had a job to get done.

This time, they made the train with fifteen minutes to spare, settling themselves into good seats—pointing out the window and cackling wickedly as McCabe, Lucas, Murphy and Anson all came tearing up, out of breath and cursing wildly.

"Tut, tut," Bodie said affably as the sweating, swearing crew collapsed into the same carriage and tried to stuff sundry hold-alls and clanking carrier bags overhead, "what would Father say?"

"If you mean about nearly missing the train, he'd just tell us to be quicker in our debriefings. Or get in there before you pair did."

"And if he was asking about the strange and uncanny noises coming from a certain carrier bag," McCabe took over from where Lucas left off, "he'd just grab a tumbler and say his is a big one."

"A big one? Him?" Murphy started, the conversation degenerating into a discussion of tumblers and other acrobats, and the sizes of various people's members.

Doyle laughed in all the right places, of course, but let pass some really golden opportunities—especially considering he was the only man who'd ever seen up Cowley's kilt. Beside him, Bodie listened to what Doyle didn't say, and noticed how much Doyle didn't drink, adding it all up and getting an answer he didn't like one bit. Definitely would have to sort the little sod out as soon as they got themselves home.

With much verbosity and hilarity, it was eventually decided that they should all pour themselves

into the one taxi and go to HQ together, which would save getting up that half hour earlier in the morning to pick up the various cars. Of course, the mechanics, on the premise that while the cat's away the mice will play (according to the agents) or on the grounds that a bunch of maniacs were driving these cars into the ground (according to the mechanics amidst a litter of ruined gear boxes and dented exhaust pipes), hadn't quite finished with some of the cars. A good excuse, Bodie decided, climbing the stairs to Doyle's flat, catching Ray's blue launderette bag before it slipped out of his hand and took the Chinese take-away with it, because this way, it was easy enough to get Doyle to invite Bodie to come home with him, and then they'd have to get this stupid attitude of Doyle's sorted out.

"D'you want the last pineapple fritter?" Bodie asked solicitously, secure in the knowledge that Doyle thought such delicacies to be utterly vile.

"Oh, no, Bodie, you have it, do," Doyle replied, leaning back with his eyes closed, feet propped comfortably on the coffee table.

"You can finish the prawns if you want."

Doyle smiled slightly, his hand going to the belt of his jeans. "If I have one more mouthful, I'll burst."

"Messy little bugger, aren't you?"

Suddenly defensive, arms crossing across his belly, legs crossed at the ankle, a frown darkening his expression. "Yeh, well you don't think I meant to be sick in the street, did you."

No time like the present, or so they said. Bodie leaned back himself until he was shoulder to shoulder with Ray. "Oh, no, Doyle, I thought it was a life-long ambition of yours. Anyway, it's a bit of an overreaction, isn't it?"

"Just don't like making a fool of myself, that's all."

"You mean like dear old Josephine?"

Well, Bodie had never made any claims to tact, which is just as well, otherwise he'd be sued under the Trades' Description Act. Doyle glowered at him, not an auspicious sight.

"Come on, Ray, it was funny."

"Was it?"

"You could freeze the river over with that tone of voice. Look, so it was a bit embarrassing, but you just stop and think about what you'd've said if it'd been Murphy in your shoes. And if it'd been Cochrane, you'd've drawn blood!"

"And what's that got to do with it?"

“Oh, be fair, Ray!”

For a few moments, the only response was one white-trained foot tapping against the other, Doyle’s tension palpable. “Right, fine, okay. I overreacted, you’re right, I’d’ve done the same to Murph or Cochrane, end of subject and can we forget it now please?”

Suspicious as hell, Bodie turned himself sideways, face on now to Doyle’s mutinous profile. It would be easier, he supposed, to let it lie, but still... For all that he was sure Doyle’s current problem was puritanical pratings about that one innocent mutual wank, there was something else going on here: obnoxious though Doyle often was, he was as fair as a summer’s day in Greece, and that sense of humour of his was so twisted, Bodie had every right to expect Doyle to still be laughing over the whole stupid situation. Which reminded him, now that he stopped to think about it: Doyle *had* laughed, like a half-stopped drain, first off. It was only later on he’d gone peculiar over the whole thing. Interesting, definitely interesting, and deciphering Doyle was rapidly turning into Bodie’s biggest hobby. After darts, of course, he told himself reassuringly—and behind pulling birds, and moto-cross.

Comfortable silences had quickly become the norm for them, but this harked back to their earliest days, to the prickliness that had no friendship to buffer it. Any second now, and Doyle was going to bolt from the sofa and tell Bodie to bugger off home, which would put paid to getting to the bottom of this.

“You never shared a wank with a bloke before then?” Bodie said, seemingly unconcerned, fingers crossed that Doyle would be so taken aback he’d forget to storm out of here on his high horse.

“You what?”

“Not deaf, blind.”

“Bodie, what the *fuck* are you going on about?”

“Wanking, it’s supposed to knock you blind, not deaf. And you weren’t hearing what I’d said—”

“No, I wasn’t understanding what you’d said, and this is no time for any of your stupid fucking jokes, Bodie.”

Bodie leaned over, his face only an inch or two away from Doyle’s, so close he could count individual eyelashes, could see every fleck of colour in the moody eyes. “If you don’t want to keep this light, then we won’t. It’s about that wank you and me shared, three weeks ago, isn’t it?”

Doyle withdrew completely, although physi-

cally, he didn’t back down an inch. “I thought you said nothing happened.”

“I said it didn’t matter. I’m not the one pretending it never happened.”

“And you think I am?”

The sudden humour in Doyle’s eyes was unnerving, pulling the rug out from under Bodie’s feet. “Isn’t it?”

“You really think you know me, don’t you—really think you’ve got this all worked out, bet you even think you’ve dotted all the i’s and crossed all the t’s.”

“Two minutes ago, and I’d’ve agreed with you. If it’s *not* the wank—”

“Isn’t it?”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, don’t start tying us up in knots. Is it or isn’t it all about that time we lent each other a hand?”

“You tell me, you’re the one who’s got it all worked out.”

“And I’ve just admitted that no I haven’t, so is or isn’t it all about that night?”

“Nothing’s ever *all* about anything, is it? Not really.”

“Fucking hell, I need a drink!” In the end, it was Bodie bolting from the sofa, pouring himself, and on reflection, Doyle as well, a stiff measure. He stood across from Doyle, the coffee table and its Chinese débris between them. He stood there for a while, just drinking, staring at Doyle, trying to pin together all the bits and pieces Doyle had been saying. And the things Doyle hadn’t been saying, Ray’s silences and evasions often more revealing than his so-called true confessions.

“Okay, let’s give it another go. Were you upset about what we did that night?”

“Depends on what you mean by upset, doesn’t it?” Doyle replied coolly, terribly self-contained, so controlled Bodie couldn’t read him at all.

“Don’t make this any harder than it already is.”

Doyle grinned at that, an unpleasant, unhappy grin. “That’s not what you said that night, is it?”

“So you *are* bothered—”

“Did I say that?”

“I’m not fucking sure! Christ, Doyle,” Bodie complained, throwing himself down on the sofa beside his partner, “worse than blood out of a bloody stone.”

“What the hell do you expect?”

“How about a bit of co-operation here, eh? It’s you we’re trying to help.”

“Help? Me? And here was me thinking it was all just prurient curiosity on your part.”

“Get off it, Ray, you’ve got problems and it’s fucking obvious. And before you start, if we don’t get them sorted out between us, it’ll be in to Ross for you, and then where will we be? And don’t say ‘in Dr. Ross’ office’, you know perfectly well what I mean.”

Doyle took a contemplative sip of his whisky, savouring it, perhaps needing its warmth. “D’you think the Cow would fire us if he found out?”

“Dunno. Compared to some of the things blokes in the squad’ve done, I don’t know if shagging your mate is something he’d give a toss over.”

“Yeh, but we didn’t actually fuck—”

Doyle should watch it, Bodie thought almost dispassionately, breaking off like that gives too much away, be a real problem in interrogations. Calmly taking another drink, he ticked off examples in his mind: Doyle’s reaction to his own simple ‘up yours’, the off-comments about not mentioning it, the times he’d completely changed the subject. Obvious, really, he told himself, absently wishing for the cigarettes he’d had to give up when he joined CI5, fingers slowly tearing a carton lid into neat strips instead.

“So we didn’t fuck,” he finally said, very quietly, not sounding half as off-hand as he’d wanted to. “Is that what you wanted?”

“What—us fucking or us not fucking?”

Bodie shrugged, the words getting lost inside the maze of his own inchoate confusion.

“I don’t know.”

Bodie glanced at him, went back to fiddling with the soggy white cardboard. “How about an educated guess then?”

There was no explosion of movement from beside him, just the soft sound of emotion imploding. “Yes,” Doyle said, simply, the answer an unbelievable complexity in their lives. “Yeh, I think I wanted us to actually go the whole road and fuck.”

“So what do you want to do about?” Still very quiet, impossible to tell if this was passive acceptance of friendship’s needs, or patient hunger of a stoat waiting for its next kill.

“What’m I supposed to say to that, eh, Bodie? Take me, I’m yours?”

“But you are, aren’t you?”

There was movement then, Doyle stuttering to his feet, all his grace fled. Pacing the room, one hand on the back of his neck, rubbing, massaging

defiant tension. To the wall, to the other wall, then to the window, each footstep a measure of his freedom, a mark of his captivity.

“That joke you lot were all having such a rare time with,” he finally said, fingers drawing aimlessly interweaving circles in the dustiness of the windows, “gave you a good laugh, didn’t it?”

Bodie wasn’t fool enough to think the joke was the issue. All his own feelings on hold, he sat there and waited, watchful.

“Oh, yeh, big joke, Ray Doyle, taken in by a bloke in drag. I heard all the jokes, you know, every last one of them. Even laughed at one or two. But not one of them was close to the mark.”

Bodie knew what was coming, waited for it, watched it settle down between them.

“Thing is, I knew that wasn’t a bird I was chatting up. I sussed him right from the start.”

“So you knew what you were getting into.”

“Hadn’t the faintest idea,” going on, hurriedly, at Bodie’s half-suppressed disbelief, “well, at least I knew it was a bloke. And I would’ve done it, Bodie, I’d’ve fucked him—might even’ve let him fuck me. That was some of it.” A stare, bright and cutting. “But some of it was just to see what you’d do.”

“Yeh, I realised that. A bit late, but you know what they say.”

For a moment, they just looked at each other, then looked away, neither too sure of what needed to be said next.

“So you really did want to have sex with him?”

Bodie asked, and only hearing himself speak the question made him realise just how much he needed to know the answer to that.

A shrug, eloquent, dismissive, depressed. “If I take away your reaction, knowing you were probably going to show up in the pub before he could take me home with him, and it boils down just to the sex—fuck it, Bodie, I don’t even know that, not for dead certain. I thought I wanted to fuck him—thought I *should*.”

“Eh? How the hell could you think you *should* have sex with a bloody fairy queen?” Another pixel of the picture, the answer absurdly simple. “Because you and me’d just had that wank, you wanted more—maybe, none too sure—and if you wanted to have sex with blokes, then who more obvious than a bloke who looks sort of like a woman, that bloody drag queen, right?”

“Yeh. Except I wasn’t too sure I wanted sex with blokes.” Another of those pauses, and then Doyle

continued, voice very deceptive in its casualness. "The only thing I was really sure of was that I wanted to do it with you again."

If he had an ounce of common sense, Bodie knew he'd get up and walk out now, put this daft conversation down to too much drink and leave it at that. Instead, he levered himself off the couch and went over to stand behind Doyle. He was close enough to see the stitching on Doyle's T-shirt, the slight bump of the label under thin cotton, the way the hair on his nape swept upwards to disappear into the tumble of curls. That night, the one he'd tried to think about in only the vaguest of terms, he'd wanted to kiss Doyle, just there, in the very slight hollow that cradled his spine between the muscles of his shoulders, the one vulnerability amidst all that toughness.

"It was only a wank," he said, sounding as if he were keeping things in proportion, feeling like a salmon swimming against the tide. "You know, the sort of thing tons of blokes do with their mates. It's not as if it meant anything, is it?"

Doyle turned then, to look at him, his expression harsh. "You tell me," Doyle said, voice tight, "you're the expert."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

Doyle shrugged again, and the incipient argument was tossed aside. "Not much. I suppose you're right, really. I mean, look at men in prison. Half of them end up doing a lot more than we did. Then there's the Navy."

"Merchant and Royal," Bodie supplied helpfully, more comfortable with the direction this was going now. "And the Army."

"But not the Air Force."

"Don't you believe it, Raymond my old son," Bodie sounded more like his usual irreverent self. "Right bunch of fly boys."

"And I suppose the SAS, too, what with all their talk about partners an' all."

Bodie winced, eyes shutting for a second. "Oh, I walked right into that, didn't I?"

"With your eyes wide open."

"Not half as wide open as my big mouth. All right, all right, you're not the first fella I've shared a wank with—does that keep your face straight?"

A faint echo of the customary filthy chuckle. "If it does, it'll be the only thing straight round here."

"Oh, get off it, Doyle, lending a mate a hand doesn't make you queer."

"So it doesn't, does it?"

Those green eyes were disconcerting, digging holes through all Bodie's defences. "No it does not." There, firm, to the point, succinctly masculine. That should put an end to it.

"Well, if feeling another bloke's prick doesn't make us queer, and if giving another man a hand job doesn't make us queer, and if lying there all but cuddling afterwards doesn't make us queer—"

Bodie did not want to hear this. Did not, did not—

"Then does it make *me* queer because I want to do it again—with you? And if all that doesn't make me queer, Bodie, what does wanting to kiss you make me, eh?"

"It makes you naturally affectionate?" Bodie said lightly, playing for time, trying desperately to escape—something he'd rather not even risk naming.

"It makes me—" Doyle turned away again, to the pattern he'd drawn on the mucky windowpane. "It makes me fucking confused as hell, Bodie."

"Ray—"

"It's all right, mate," fingers enlarging the interlocking device of circles and crosses. "If I can't sort it out in my own head, why should you sort it out for me?"

"It's just it being new to you, that's all."

"Yeh, you're probably right. First time for everything and all that." Self-deprecating laugh, scraping uneasily along Bodie's spine. "Trust me to turn it into the fall of Western Civilisation As We Know It."

"Don't worry about it, Ray, seriously. It's just..."

"Nothing much," Doyle supplied, shrugging again. "Well, thanks for dinner. I'll see you in the morning then."

So all appearances to the contrary, Doyle actually had been paying attention to all of Cowley's briefings. And for once in his life, Doyle was letting someone off the hook. Bodie gathered himself, hoping to hell the fact that he was running away didn't actually show. "Dismissing me, are you then, angelfish?"

"I should be so lucky," was all Ray Doyle said, none-too-subtly herding the routed Bodie out the door.

Bodie was half-way home before it hit him what Doyle meant.

And it scared the hell out of him.

Life trundling along as usual, routine work,

routine shoot-outs, routine work-outs, routine reports, nothing at all out of the ordinary. Cowley hauled them over the hot coals the usual number of times for the usual sorts of things, Macklin pounded them in the usual way with the usual help from Towser, and everything went swimmingly. Anyone else would lull themselves into a pleasant sense of security, of massive change averted, of disaster headed off at the pass.

Bodie, on the other hand, was no fool, and what's more, he knew Ray Doyle, knew him very well indeed. Bodie was walking around waiting for the other shoe to drop—or for a swift kick in the goolies when he least expected it.

When it finally came, the wash of sheer relief was the only real surprise for Bodie.

They were in Bodie's flat, at Doyle's suggestion, a well-earned evening off adjourned here instead of off to the nearest pub with the most buxom of barmaids.

Bodie sprawled on the sofa, the waiting game finally over, his brief respite of relief fading fast, his laziness masking the way his skin was crawling with tension again.

Doyle was sitting opposite him, perched, uneasily as a devil in a church, on the edge of Bodie's armchair. Doyle looked down at his hands, looked up at the collection of guns on the wall, finally glanced briefly at Bodie, then his gaze skittered away, alighting on something far less unnerving than the impalement of Bodie's steady stare.

"I thought I should tell you."

"So tell me."

A false start, Doyle leaning back in the chair as if he were completely at his ease, neither he nor Bodie fooled for a second. "I'm going to ask to see Dr. Ross for a bit of help."

Bodie blinked, face carefully impassive as he tried to swallow that one. "You what?"

"I said, I'm going to go to Ross—"

"For fuck's sake, Ray, why d'you always have to go and surprise me, eh? I thought I knew what was coming, had it all worked out, I mean, I was ready to cope with everything from you threatening to resign, or tell Cowley what we'd done or anything. Christ, I was even ready to cope with you going down on one knee and confessing your undying love. But this—" the tide of words broke, Bodie having to stop for breath, to catch his scattered thoughts. "Ross?" he asked, unbelieving. "Our Dr.

Ross, the one who pokes around inside you more than Frankenstein?"

"None other," voice light, shoulders drooping.

"But Ross, for Christ's sake! She'll peel you like an onion and then take the leftovers to show Cowley. You can't go to *her*."

"Yeh, well, if I don't go to her, it'll be some mad bastard out there with a gun turning me into mincemeat. So I'll take Ross, thanks all the same."

"It's not that bad, is it?" Bodie asked, mind busy trying to catalogue the differences that should have warned him that Doyle was slipping that badly, panic beginning as not even hindsight could give him 20/20 vision.

"No, Bodie," Doyle said softly, "it's not that bad. Leastways, not just yet. But—"

"Then what the fuck did you go and have to say that for you mad bastard—"

"*But* it was the only way I was going to get you to sit still and pay attention to me, wasn't it?"

Bodie shifted, uncomfortable, convinced he should be furious with Ray, guilty-as-charged enough that he had to stifle the apology dancing on the tip of his tongue.

"Come on, Bodie, every time I've so much as tried to mention it—"

Defensive now, wishing this were already over and done with. "It was only a quick wank between mates stuck for anything else."

"Hark at you! Listen, Bodie, you might be able to go round wanking other blokes, feeling them up, holding their cock in your hand until you've got their cum all over you and then sit around not even bothering, but when I do that, when *I* do that—it gives me pause, you know? I start to wonder why I've suddenly taking to wanking a man, I start to wonder what it all means, why it happened—where it's going to end up."

"Or what's going to end up where, eh, is that the big worry, Ray?" Consoling now, cajoling, the metaphoric whites of his eyes showing as Doyle slowly herded him into the dark corner where truth waited. "Worried that now you've lent me a hand, I'll be after your arse next? Come on, for fuck's sake! It was only a wank."

"No it fucking-well wasn't and you know it! We both know it." A pause, weighted perfectly. "Don't we, Bodie?"

"Look, Ray, it was only a quick handjob, didn't mean anything, we'd both had a bit too much to drink..." Under Doyle's impassive disbelief, Bodie

trailed off, the lies limned too clearly to be ignored. It was coming, Bodie knew, his own words echoing with the desperation of a man trying not to take that final step.

“Why won’t you admit it was more than that?” Doyle asked him.

“Why?” Oh, there were a million reasons why, and all of them would mean the end of life as he knew it. “Which reason d’you want me to give you, eh? There’s the one that’s because I don’t want you making a mountain out of a molehill and fucking everything up. Or how about the one where I don’t want you running out buying us matching hand-bags?”

“Oh, thanks ever so, butch. How about the one that’s the truth?”

“Oh, they’re all the *truth*, Ray.”

“You know what I mean, don’t come the cretin with me.”

“You really want to hear it, don’t you?” Bodie demanded, morbidly curious, watching himself sinking into the quicksand of emotion. “I mean, you’re not kidding, you really do want to hear me say it?”

Doyle gave him a look then, uncertainty colouring his pugnacity. “‘Cept I can’t know that until you say it, can I?”

Bodie just looked at him for that. Got up then, poured them both a drink, sat himself back down. “All right,” he said, picking up the threads, holding them like reins. “All right. You want to hear it, and when have I ever not given you what you wanted?” No answer given, none expected, that another side of their partnership never discussed till now. “I don’t want to talk about it, I don’t want to think about it, I don’t want to admit a fucking thing about it, because if I do, if I do...”

“Come on, Bodie,” the soft seduction of confession offered, “what is it you’re so scared of?”

The truth was a long time coming, bitter and painful and too full of hope for Bodie to want it. “You. It’s you I’m fucking petrified of.”

“Me? Don’t be stupid—” Bitten off then, this not the thing to say, no reason to cause hurt, no reason to chase Bodie right back into his foxhole. “Sorry. So—” trying to make it sound just casual enough, trying desperately not to make it sound meaningless, “—how come you’re petrified of me?”

“Use your head, Doyle. It’s so obvious it’s pathetic.”

“It’s a lot of things,” Doyle snapped back, “but

pathetic’s not one of them.”

“Oh yeh? And what is it then?”

And it was, finally, written all over Bodie’s face, right there, clear as day for Doyle to see. The smile lit up Doyle’s face, brought beauty to his eyes. “It’s wonderful. It’s exciting, and it makes me feel like—” Words failed him, but the warmth in his eyes was clear enough. “If it’s what I think it is.”

Bodie looked away from that. Gathered some more courage, looked back. “Still want to hear me say it then?”

“What d’you think?”

“I think...” He took a healthy swig of his whisky, rolled the smooth glass between the palms of his hands. “I think we’re mad even to consider it.”

“Why? You said yourself, we’ve already done it—”

“We’ve already had a quick wank,” Bodie corrected, “and what you’ve got in mind...”

“What *I*’ve got in mind?” Doyle eventually finished for him.

Facing a cohort of rabid mercenaries would be easier than this. Very precise, very clipped, clutching too frantically at control. “Yes. What *you*’ve got in mind.”

“Oh, yeh, and you’re not thinking anything of the sort, right?”

“Dead right. Pure as the driven snow, that’s me.”

“Yeh, after a few lorries have been through it. You’re as pure as slush so c’mon, Bodie, admit I’m not the only one thinking this.”

Bodie tried, he really did try, but that faint, almost hidden hint of insecurity and desperation finally got him. “Christ, Doyle, what the fuck do you want?”

“Now there’s a question.”

And all Bodie had been asking for was an answer. “Yeh, it *is* a question. So how about answering it?”

“I asked you first.”

“No you did not!”

“Yeh I did.”

“You didn’t—”

“Did—”

Dissolving into grins, an odd edge of shyness tiptoeing between them. “Sound like a pair of kids, don’t we?”

Doyle snorted, inelegant as ever. “You must’ve known some right riff-raff before me. How many

kids d'you know sit around discussing making love with their best mate?"

The words just sort of blurted out, embarrassing both of them, Doyle looking almost apologetic for having actually come right out and said it. "Well," he said, defiant to the end, "it is what we're talking about."

Bodie just took another good mouthful of even better whisky.

"Well it is—isn't it?"

"I don't know what the fuck's wrong with me," Bodie sighed. "I've never had any bother lying before."

Doyle's grin was contagious enough to get him quarantined. "

"So you do love me, then?"

"Oh, come on, Doyle! That's not the sort of thing you just blurt out, is it? I mean, not in the living room, in broad daylight."

"It's pitch black outside."

"But the lights are on in here, you know what I mean."

"You mean," Doyle said slowly, "that you're the strong, silent type."

Bodie beamed. "Got it in one."

"A real relief, is it, me understanding all that? What—does it save you from having to worry about me going out and buying us matching handbags?"

There was a definite edge to that comment. "I was only kidding when I said that, Ray."

"So you wouldn't mind if I let people know?"

That brought Bodie up short. "Of course I'd fucking mind! Are you off your rocker? Oh—I get it. Winding me up, " he tut-tutted like his Great-Aunt Amelia, but with far more goodwill and wagged his finger for good measure, "naughty Raymond."

"And what if I wasn't pulling your leg? What would you do if I let slip to one or two of the lads?"

"Tell that lot? Christ, by the time they'd started on the queer jokes, Cowley'd know about it and he'd have us at Ross' before the lads could present us with his and his towels."

"Bother you, that, would it?"

"Being kicked on my arse off the squad? Oh, and you're saying it wouldn't bother you, is that it?"

"Might be."

"Get off it, Ray. You don't want to be chipped out any more than I do."

And it was Doyle's silence that made him look

twice, and then a third time.

He swallowed hard before he spoke. "When did all this start?"

"About six weeks ago."

"What, you woke up one morning and decided instead of shooting baddies at my side, you'd rather be pruning the roses round the cottage door?"

"You know, it's when you're a fucking prat like this I wonder what I see in you. If you must know, I was getting fed up with the job a bit to begin with, and that's what started me looking at you. You know, what would I do if we weren't mates any more."

"And you realised you'd just wither and pine away without my manly presence."

"Shut it, Bodie, if that's all you're going to say. What happened to the man who couldn't lie any more, eh?" Doyle jeered. "Lost his bottle, has he?"

"Better than losing his mind the way you have."

"The trick cyclists used to call it a mental disorder."

"And is that what you are?"

"A trick cyclist?"

"A queer."

All the fight went out of Doyle again, mood changing more abruptly than the weather in spring. "I told you, I dunno. I've started looking funny at other blokes, ever since you and me... Yeh, well, I s'pose 'love-making's a bit on the Barbara Cartland side of things."

"Prefer good old Anglo-Saxon myself."

"I shall have to bleach my hair blond then, shan't I?"

Bodie nearly smiled at that, his fingers crossed that Doyle's mood had shifted again. "Ooh, petal, you don't have to do that for me."

"And what do I have to do for you, Bodie? Apart from keeping my mouth shut?"

Bodie didn't think this was quite the moment to mention that he was sort of hoping that Doyle would open his mouth, and open it wide, wide enough to swallow a cock Bodie had cause to be proud of.

"C'mon, Bodie, I asked you a simple question. What's it going to take here?"

A dollop of vaseline? Keeping the teeth out of the way? Something, probably his survival instinct, told him these weren't the sort of suggestions Doyle was looking for. "Depends. On what we want."

"I know what I want. Question is, what do you want? You're the unknown quantity here, mate."

Not something Bodie was about to agree with, that was for sure. "What do I want?"

"Yeh. It's not that hard a question, is it?"

"It's the hardest fucking question of the lot!"

How the fuck am I supposed to know what I want, eh? With the way we live, who's got time to want or plan?"

"We'd have time if we were moved down to the B squad."

"This isn't about what I want, is it?" Bodie demanded, everything he'd thought he could depend on slipping away from him like greased lightning. "This is all about what you want, and what it's going to take to get me to give it to you. You want us to leave CI5, don't you, go in for something nice and safe and boring."

"Something non-lethal, that's all I'm asking for."

"Crossing the street can be lethal, for fuck's sake!"

"Yeh? But you don't nip across in front of lorries, do you? And that's what we're doing, Bodie, playing Russian fucking Roulette every time we go out on a job, or come back to our own flat from doing the shopping. Have you any idea how many nutters there are? And how many of them are after us?"

"And have you the faintest idea what it's like to live a boring, normal life, suburbia, net curtains and mowing the grass on Sundays? Course, a pair of pansies like us set up amongst all the wives and kiddies would have to put up with the looks and the gossip, but you wouldn't mind that, would you, save you a bob or two instead of announcing the banns in the paper."

"Christ, when did it turn into this?" Doyle asked, weary and worried in equal measure.

"D'you want to hear the funny thing? I came here tonight to seduce you. Yep, get you into bed, fuck like bunnies, and leave it like that."

"But your mouth got the better of you. As always."

"Oh, sorry, I do beg your pardon, for a minute there I forgot that real men don't say a word about anything, just roll up their sleeves and get on with it."

"I didn't mean it that way—"

"Then how did you mean it?"

"To shut you up. For God's sake, Doyle, do we have to analyse everything to death? So we fancy

fucking each other. You've even said you came here to get into my bed, so why don't we do that, eh?"

"And all the rest? Giving up the squad, this being more than just a casual shag, we're just to ignore that, are we?"

"Why not? We can talk about it tomorrow," Bodie said in his best wheedle, getting up to go over to Doyle, knowing that if he could just touch his partner, it would be all right. He repeated it to himself, a talisman against the tangled mess this had become. It'd all been so straightforward at first, nice and easy, and look where they'd got themselves to. It wasn't supposed to be like this, he told himself. It'd all started out so well, and look at it now—slipping through his fingers, sand at the seashore. "C'mon, Ray," he whispered, his breath stirring the fine hairs on Doyle's nape. "Come to bed with me."

"Why? Because you know if I don't do it now, I never will?"

"Because I need you."

And he was scared that Doyle would realise just how brutally honest that comment was.

"Need me? You? Thought all you needed was a compass and a Swiss knife."

Now wasn't the time to tell him that the survival kit for the Ray Doyle minefield hadn't been invented. He reached around and touched Doyle where the jeans were most faded, where his cock always made its presence known. "Like that?" he asked, as the cock under his palm stirred and stretched.

"D'you like it when I do this to you?" Bodie said again, rubbing his own cock against Ray's lush arse.

His answer was Doyle turning in his arms, moving quickly, pinning Bodie up against the wall, his hands in Bodie's hair, trying to grab the short strands, his mouth a gaping wound against Bodie's, tongue pressing, demanding, forcing its way in, invading Bodie's mouth like lust. Again and again Doyle kissed him, hard, angrily, the bitterness like a bad taste in Bodie's mouth, until he was willing to accept the truth.

Doyle loved him. Had loved him for ages, enough to give up the squad. Had loved him enough that the prospect of sharing a room with him down in Brighton on that job had driven him to drink.

The poor bastard.

And then Bodie found himself kissing back, and the anger abating, Doyle melting against him, a puddle of limp warmth, a rigid heat digging into Bodie's thigh. It had been a long time for Bodie, since last he'd allowed himself this with a man. A long time, really, since he'd allowed himself the dangerous pleasure of Doyle's cock heavy in his hand, Doyle so vulnerable in orgasm, all his strength suspended, bursting out of his cock in white streams into Bodie's hand. Bodie wrapped his arms around Doyle, held him tight, his hands going down to press that firm arse, fingers instinctively seeking out the hole.

To think that one day, Doyle would let him in there, would let him fuck him up there—Bodie almost came just thinking about it. Fingers were plucking at his nipples, hips were grinding into his, Doyle's cock suddenly freed from the confines of its jeans, Bodie's own cock struggling free of the clinging cotton of his underwear, Doyle's hands so sure, so steady, touching him just right. Almost without thought, he brought his hands to clasp the back of Ray's neck and pushed him, every so gently, utterly implacably, down, and down, until Doyle's chin and nose bumped against his cock.

Bodie looked down, to find Doyle looking up at him, an encyclopædia of meaning in those eyes. But all Bodie could see was that beautiful mouth not two inches from his cock. The mouth opened, and Bodie sighed as his cock was swallowed, his body disappearing inside Doyle for the first time. This was no polished performance, no gifted display, but the hunger made up for that, and the fact that it was Doyle made it sublime. Doyle licked him all around, and up and down the shaft, taking the head of his cock back into his mouth, sucking on him again. The hands pumping him were no match for the pleasure of the mouth sucking him, and Bodie pushed farther forward, trying to get in deeper, pausing patiently when Doyle gagged, pushing forward again more slowly to let Ray get used to this newness.

Bodie's hands were in Doyle's hair, or caressing his face, his fingertips addicted to the transition between cock and mouth, that line where he and Doyle blurred together.

He had to have more.

"C'mon, Ray," he whispered, "get up. Let's go to bed, do this proper."

Doyle stumbled to his feet, knees numb from their unaccustomed use, one hand rubbing the

aching muscles of his jaw. "Do this proper, eh? Going to bring out the fine china then are you?"

At the threshold of the bedroom, Bodie stopped Doyle, looked him straight in the eye. "I was thinking about bringing out the vaseline."

There was an odd smile in reaction to that. "Who's it for?"

"I don't want to hurt you. You're my mate, for fuck's sake."

"I'm your mate, am I? Oh, and we mustn't hurt our mates, must we? Right, lead on, MacDuff, and fetch the vaseline while you're at it."

Bodie hugged him for that, darting past him to get into the hall cupboard where he knew there was a jar of vaseline somewhere. It took him longer than he'd expected, long enough for the first burst of passion to wear off—normally. But there was nothing normal about this time. It was Doyle waiting for him in that bedroom, Doyle with those green eyes and those legs, and that arse, oh, that gorgeous arse.

In the bedroom, the bedside lamp was on, and that was about it. Doyle had stripped the covers right off, everything lying in a heap at the bottom of the bed, tumbling onto the floor. Doyle himself was lying flat on his back, cock at half mast, legs splayed, and if Bodie twisted just right, he could see it, there, past the soft hair of Doyle's muscular thighs, the darkness that was the entrance to Doyle's body.

"Oh, god," Bodie groaned, "you are a sight for sore eyes. Pretty as a picture and a fuck's sight more fun."

Deliberately, unsmilingly, Doyle stroked his own cock, peeling the foreskin back, the head glimmering slightly in the light. "Come here and suck me," he said.

Bodie clambered onto the bed, plastering himself the length of Doyle's body, his cock rubbing against Doyle's, Bodie's hands overflowing with the delight of palming Doyle's naked arse. His fingertips ploughed their way to the furrow that cradled Doyle's anus, Bodie lifting Doyle up, arching his body, until his finger pressed home, sinking in just a fraction, but enough to make Bodie bite down on Doyle's shoulder to stopper the embarrassing sounds inside.

"Oh, fuck," he breathed, again and again and again, his vocabulary cut to the bone, the only word necessary for what he was doing. He rolled Doyle over on to his side, memories of his own past

guiding him, of how the penetration and discomfort were less and the pleasure more if a man was taken on his side the first time.

“C’mon, Ray, over you go.”

“I’m not going on my hands and knees like a girl or a fucking dog, Bodie.”

“Not asking you to. Here, just lie on your side, like that, shove that leg up out of the way there, that’s it, oh, yeh, that’s it, Ray, open it up for me.”

Finger well coated with vaseline, he slipped it all the way inside, knuckles tense bumps as they forged a path inside. Two fingers now, Doyle relaxing, hips starting to move as Bodie’s fingers found his prostate and massaged him there, every pressure of Bodie’s fingers rewarded with a groan from Doyle’s mouth and a thrust from his hips. Three fingers now, and Bodie couldn’t wait another second, just could not bear not to be part of Doyle. He was generous with the vaseline, his cock slippery, and he pushed it up against Doyle’s body, pushed, harder, until the head slid in, pushed again, another inch, and another, slow and steady, sweat erupting all over his back as his muscles trembled under the toll of not just ramming his cock in as far as it would go. Slowly, and it was getting easier as Doyle’s body adjusted itself, Doyle’s breath shallow pants, the occasional indrawn hiss of breath, and then Bodie was all the way in, pubic hair against the soft skin of Doyle’s backside, balls pressed against the sweet, sweat-dampened undercurve of Doyle’s buttocks.

Bodie withdrew an inch, eased back in, again and again, until Doyle’s body was moving with him, and the two of them had found a rhythm that was eons older than either of them. Bodie heard the sounds coming from his own mouth, couldn’t spare the attention to stop them, stifled them against Doyle’s shoulder, as he clutched Doyle to him.

Perhaps because it was the first time like this for them, it was over far too quickly, leaving Bodie still needy even as his body was satiated, streaming deep within Doyle, the sudden wetness a real erotic thrill.

I just came inside him, he thought, half-dazed, astonished that so simple a thing should mean so much. I just came inside him! He fell back on the bed, one hand going up to cover his eyes against the lamp light, post-coital sleepiness staking its claims on him already.

Movement beside him, registering amidst his sleepiness. He hugged Doyle then, pulling him

close, not complaining when Doyle wrapped Bodie’s fist around his still-hard cock, smiling quite sweetly when Doyle kissed him, a ferocious kiss full of hunger.

“Still need it, do you, angelfish? Must remember to shag you harder next time.”

And complained not at all when Doyle climbed on top of him, sitting astride his belly, cock aimed at Bodie’s face, hand blurring, as white streamers of cum bedecked Bodie’s chest, chin and cheek.

Loved it when Doyle leaned forward, and with pointed tongue and lascivious delight, licked his own cum from Bodie’s skin, the two salts mixed to one sweetness.

“Wonderful,” Bodie sighed, clumsily gathering Doyle to him, “that was abs’lutely wond’rful.”

And he wondered not at all why Doyle, Ray Doyle, of all people, had said not a single word.

Morning. Mouth like a sewer, bladder complaining, back aching.

Bodie smiled the smile of the blessed. It was lovely and warm under the covers: Doyle must have tucked him in during the night. Nice thought, that. He stretched, lay there for another minute, finally opened his eyes.

No Doyle.

He shrugged: Doyle never was one for lying in bed when he could be up and at ’em. Probably in the sitting room with a mug of tea in one hand, the morning paper in the other, feet up on the coffee table, and that slurp of his punctuating every page turn.

Bathroom first, he decided, and then go through to Doyle, when he was worth looking at.

Washed, shaved, dressed even, Bodie went into the sitting room. The morning paper was there, but still folded from being shoved through the letterbox. No sign of tea, not even a bit of heat clinging to the kettle. No sign of Doyle either, unless you counted that lone sock he’d found inside his own shoe from last night. Must’ve landed there when Doyle tossed it off.

Must’ve been in too much of a hurry to get out of there to bother looking for it. Unpleasant, that, wearing trainers without socks, something Doyle hated.

Bodie sat heavily on the sofa, and put his head in his hands. It had gone wrong. Somehow, it had gone terribly, terribly, wrong.

What the fuck was he going to do?

Work, for starters. Not much going on today, so no need for him to be in at the crack of dawn. Maybe that was why Doyle let him sleep.

Or maybe Doyle let him sleep just to see the expression on Cowley's face when Bodie sallied in an hour late. One smooth motion had his keys in his hand and his jacket slung over his shoulder. One thing that had gone well this morning: despite his thumbing his nose at speed limits and the occasional corner, there were no men in blue waiting with flashing lights and sirens.

Still, Bodie felt as if he were driving hell for leather straight to a disaster.

One of those nondescript mornings, not really raining, just a bit of drizzle, overcast, dull. HQ was bright with lights, full of people, but there was no sense of rush, no mad dive to get information gathered or bombers stopped. A quiet day, one the squad relished, a chance to take things a bit easy.

Bodie returned greetings, cracked jokes, and looked over his shoulder, trying to see the axe before it fell.

Where the hell was Doyle?

It just wasn't the done thing for one half of a team to wander around like a lost sheep looking for Bo Peep, so Bodie didn't actually ask anyone if they'd seen Doyle, but Cowley would have been proud of the job he did of directing conversations just so. Not that it helped; no one so much as mentioned Doyle passing.

Tea break, the rest room bursting at the seams with too many young men with too little to do, random acts of minor vandalism breaking out like a rash, bad jokes flying. In the thick of it, Bodie rescued his tea from one of McCabe's overenthusiastic retellings of a tale that grew with every telling, and it was as he was nabbing the last of the chocolate covered swiss rolls he felt it. Wondering when this awareness had happened was a nice distraction from facing the fact that for better or worse, he knew that Ray Doyle had just walked into the room.

"'Allo, 'allo, 'allo," Doyle said, doing the *Dixon of Dock Green* impersonation that usually got Bodie well and truly thumped, "what 'ave we 'ere, then?"

For an awful moment, Bodie thought Doyle was actually going to tell the squad exactly what they had there, right in their macho midst. But after a moment, the harsh edges of Doyle's smile softened, and he was preternaturally cheerful. "Where've

you been all morning?" he asked pleasantly. "I've been looking all over for you."

Which was a lie, but not one Bodie was going to call Doyle on. Treading carefully, eggshell bombs underfoot, Bodie smiled back, panic threatening. "I've been in."

Not, perhaps, the most tactful thing to say, given the circumstances. Doyle winced, theatrically, and shifted, ever so meaningfully. "In where?" he asked, all innocence.

And that was one question Bodie wasn't going to delve into too deeply. "Here, HQ. Down in Files. Where've you been?"

Doyle's smile would've done Dracula proud. "With Cowley."

Bodie nearly choked on his mouthful of tea.

"Yeh. Seems he wanted to update everyone's personnel files, and there aren't many on the squad with the security clearance to go through some of it."

"Rubbish," Murphy said, coming late to the conversation, tossing in his tuppenceworth as he passed by on his way to pour himself another mugful of sludge disguised as tea. "Only reason Cowley picked you was that it was either that or let Anson loose, and he's the biggest gossip known to mankind."

"Unlike me, eh, Bodie?" Doyle asked softly. "It's all right," he went on, "I'm not going to go broadcasting the news all over the place. Won't be ringing the *News of the World* or the Minister or anyone else. You're safe as houses."

Which was probably exactly what the Roman soldiers said in exactly the same tone of voice as they tossed Daniel into the lions' den.

"Right," Doyle was saying, "Cowley's finished with me, so d'you want me get started on getting our reports up to date?"

"Ehm, yeh. Fine. That'd be great."

And Doyle acted as if it were quite normal to have Bodie spluttering and confused and agape. "I'll see if I can make a dent in that report on the drug trail we were trying to follow, then. See you later."

Doyle was half turned away, and Bodie was wondering if he should heave a sigh of relief or heave the largest rock he could find at that thick head, when Doyle turned back, and smiled, not kindly.

"Yeh. Don't you worry about a thing. I'll run off quietly and do the reports. Mate."

And then Bodie knew that relief was the last thing he should be feeling.

Later, the afternoon wearing on, lunch a thing of the past, eaten with a bunch of the lads, Doyle just another one in the crowd, Bodie tracked his partner down in the cupboard known as their office.

Walked in. Sat down. Had no idea what the hell to say. It wasn't as if he could just ask flat out if Doyle's arse was sore after last night, or what the fuck it was he'd done wrong, to deserve this sort of treatment.

"Need to borrow my jacket?" he asked.

"You what?"

"Need to borrow my jacket. To heat up that cold shoulder you've been giving me."

"Cold shoulder? Get off it, mate. You're the one who didn't want me buying us matching handbags. You don't want the rest of the lads guessing you've got yourself a new bumboy, do you?"

"It's not like that! You're no bumboy—"

"No? Yeh, well, actions speak louder than words, isn't that what they say?"

"Look, what the fuck are you getting at?"

Doyle slammed the folder down on the desk. "What d'you think I'm getting at? Oh, yeh, by all means, Ray, let's fuck, but shh, don't tell anyone, mustn't let it show. And oh, yeh, Ray, you're not my bumboy, just roll over and let me shove it in you."

"It wasn't like that, and don't you try to make it sound like that. You didn't exactly argue, did you? I mean, I didn't hear you complaining, did I?"

"No," Doyle finally said, sounding infinitely weary, "no, I didn't, and that's the real problem, isn't it?"

It was slipping through his fingers again, the ground under him as dependable as quicksand. "Listen, Ray, I'll do better," he heard himself say, knew he meant it. Tried to take some of the deadening weight off the moment. "Honest. Cross my heart. C'mon, mate, I'm dead serious. All right, so I don't know what I did wrong, but I can work that out, can't I? Get it right next time."

"Course you will, *petal*," Doyle said, sounding like every mother with every childish dream, "course you will."

The sight of Doyle going through that door scared the hell out of Bodie; he wasn't sure now that there was anything that would stop Doyle from just keeping on walking.

"Ray!"

Doyle poked his head round the door, expression impassive.

"Will I see you tonight?"

"Nah. Promised a couple of the lads that I'd play in their darts team tonight. You can come and watch, if you feel like it."

"So, that's it? I mean, last night, a one off thing, was it?"

"I should be so lucky. No, it's just that with us working with a bunch of blokes trained to suss out a person's every secret, you and me suddenly being in each other's flats every night doesn't sound too bright, does it?"

"True enough. So..."

"We'll be round the Black Swan at eightish, if you want to show face. Might even want to bring that girl you've been shagging."

He'd rather rip his toenails out with rusty pliers.

"See you tonight then," Doyle said breezily as Lucas and McCabe came down the corridor towards them. "Give Sally one from me."

Then he was gone, disappearing along the corridor with the two other agents, being the picture perfect, perfectly straight mate making perfectly innocent plans with his perfectly platonic mate.

The clock on the wall ticked dolefully, but Bodie stayed in the tiny office, doing more paperwork than he normally did in months. Cowley would be pleased. Cowley would be the only one pleased round here.

He didn't need to look at his watch to know that a whole two minutes had passed since last he'd looked: almost eight. He should be shifting soon, if he was going to go down the pub and watch the lads from the squad play darts.

Bodie picked up the thickest file of all, and started in on it. The lads, he thought sneeringly, since when has Doyle been one of the lads?

Since you fucked him, he admitted. Since you told him you'd go to bed with him, as long as he swept it under the carpet like a dirty secret.

He read the minutiae of someone else's life, wondered just what an obbo on him would read like. Considered, carefully, that he had been given everything he'd ever wanted: Doyle in his bed, Doyle keeping his mouth shut, Doyle in love with him, Doyle willing to promise to stay with him. Everything, definitely, and handed to him on a silver platter.

But as the loneliness began eating at his soul as he thought of Doyle as 'one of the lads', his 'mate', dark counterpoint to the heaven of Doyle loving him, Bodie wondered how such a feast managed to feel like famine.