

Streets of Sorrow

by Christy

PART ONE

Murphy exhaled loudly, swore creatively, then quirked an eyebrow at Bodie.

"You gonna break it up, or shall I?"

"Me," said Bodie grimly.

"Then you can do us all a favour and get him out of here. "

"He's perfectly right, Murph...."

"I know that, mate. And he's entitled to tell us once. I just can't be doing with the 50th action replay. I dunno how the hell you put up with him...." Murph noted, amused, how Bodie bristled. He added hurriedly: "Yeah, I know he's right and I know he's a good guy. It's just, sometimes the little sod doesn't know when to shut up.

Bodie smiled thinly, a bare crack of his lips. "Yeah, well, on days like today I treat him like the test match on the box. Let him witter away in the background and only tune in for the juicy bits."

Murph laughed. "Think you'd better go and umpire before Anson gets strung up by his forward short leg.... "

"Fucking public school arsehole!"

"I know, mate...."

"Bodie, what the hell did he think he was playing at? That was on the street, we'd all have been goners."

"Yeah, I know.... "

"The guy's a waste of bloody space. And we got lumbered with him last time as well.... "

"Ray, give it a rest, will you. "

Doyle, cut off in full flow, stared, then shrugged. "Sorry mate, 's just, Anson really gets on my wick."

Bodie gazed at him, wide-eyed. "Really? I'd never have guessed...."

Doyle poked him in the ribs with a bony elbow. "Anyone ever tell you that sarcasm's the lowest form of wit?"

"And the highest form of intelligence...."

"Bollocks...."

"That's what I like about you, Doyle, your witty response for every occasion. "

The resultant scuffle was cut short by Cowley opening a window above their heads and pointing out that if they had that much energy to burn off they could always attempt to improve on their assault course times.

Bodie flopped onto the grass, feeling dampness and the smell of earth against his cheek. 'Wanna be an accountant,' he gasped when he could catch his breath.

"Or a train driver." Doyle sounded equally breathless. He'd tied a green bandanna around his head to keep his hair off his face. It exactly matched the colour of his eyes, but he hadn't appreciated Bodie's crack about colour co-ordinating your training kit.

"What you doing tonight?"

Doyle opened one eye. "Filling in my application to British Rail."

"Shall I come and help you with the joined-up writing?"

"It'd need a few more long words than you can manage. Gonna stay over, are you?"

"That OK?"

"Yeah. Just need to stop on the way home for some bread and milk. Ate me out of house and home this morning, you did."

"Growing lad like me needs a good breakfast."

"And I suppose that same growing lad'll be expecting some supper tonight?" "We can get a takeaway. Leave us more time for other things...."

Doyle sat upright abruptly: "Shit, it's half past! We going inside for these tests, then?"

Bodie levered himself up, groaning. "Yeah...."

"This new shrink sounds a bitch...."

"Did you hear what she said to Lucas?"

"What?"

"That if his test results were to be believed, he was educationally sub-normal!"

"Sounds a shrewd woman to me."

Bodie would have sworn on a bottle of the most expensive malt that nothing in the world could surprise him any more. Aside from the fact he'd ended up in bed with his

partner the previous night, that is. If pushed, Bodie would have described himself as bisexual. But he'd also have added the rider that if you were tall, dark and gorgeous, you never had to buy it.

He'd lusted over Doyle since day one, knowing he could never say or do anything that would jeopardise their working relationship. A steady stream of pretty girls meant he was never short of a bedmate. Bodie had resigned himself to being able to look all he wanted, but never to touch...until a seemingly innocuous present and the old story of one glass of wine too many had turned his regimented life on its head.

It had been Doyle's birthday, and Bodie had commandeered his kitchen to cook him a meal-something, according to Ray, that was rarer than rocking horse shit. In truth, the myth that Bodie couldn't boil an egg was just that, one put about mainly by himself to ensure there were always plenty of volunteers willing to prove that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach. Bodie was actually a perfectly competent cook, pointing out that a single man didn't get to 30-something without knowing his way around a kitchen. But unlike Doyle, he didn't enjoy cooking, preferring to leave it to those who did. Didn't mean he couldn't follow a recipe, though.

Even if Bodie said so himself--and he did, several times--the meal was a success, roast chicken and all the trimmings. And dessert was a huge bowl of trifle, laced liberally with sherry. Even Doyle, who didn't have a sweet tooth, demolished two helpings. Afterwards they adjourned to the sofa with a bottle of wine to watch a world title boxing fight. Not that Bodie could remember much of the action afterwards...instead, he was only too aware of the warm body curled up next to him.

After the fight had finished, Doyle wandered into the kitchen to make coffee and Bodie grabbed the chance to retrieve a small box from his jacket pocket.

"What's this?"

"Open it."

"It's not ticking. "

"Very quick. Can see why you joined C15."

"Bodie.... It's lovely. But it must have cost you the earth." They'd instigated an unwritten rule of not spending more than about a fiver on each other's birthday and Christmas presents.

Bodie shrugged. "Just thought you'd like it."

"You didn't have to.... But thanks, I love it. "

"Couldn't stand all the moaning after you lost the last one!" Doyle had been inordinately upset when he'd come round in hospital a couple of weeks back after a fight with some drug smugglers and found his silver chain missing.

Doyle nodded and his hand strayed to his throat where the chain should have been. He lifted its sleek, heavy replacement out of the box, letting it slide through his fingers. Bodie heard himself saying : "Shall I do it up for you?"

Doyle looked faintly surprised, but nodded. "OK. "

Bodie's clumsy fingers fumbled with the opening. Gently he draped it around Doyle's neck and fastened it. Doyle's hand briefly touched his arm. "Thanks...."

Bodie reached out to straighten the chain. But, as his knuckles brushed against warm skin and the arc of soft hair above the green tee shirt, he was lost. He trailed his fingers down Doyle's throat, his thumb lingering at the tantalising dip between the collarbones.

Suddenly he pulled away like he'd been burned, his heart hammering, just waiting for Doyle to hit him. Doyle was staring at him, his eyes huge, absent - mindedly touching the spot where Bodie's fingers had been.

"Ray.... Shit, I'm sorry, I dunno what came over me. Look, put it down to too much pop...."

"Is that really what it was?" Doyle's voice was low and rough.

Bodie shrugged.

"Well?"

He looked away.

"Come on Bodie, say something!"

He took a deep breath. "If you want the truth, no. I've wanted to do that for ages."

"Just that?"

Bodie shook his head.

"What then?"

Bodie knew he'd well and truly burned his boats. "Want to kiss you. And I.... I've fantasised about being in bed with you. If you're disgusted and want to ask Cowley for a new partner, go ahead. And if you want to laugh yourself stupid at the fact your best mate's in love with you.... "

"Who said I was disgusted?"

"Leave it, Ray...."

"Sit down and stop edging towards the door."

Bodie perched on the armchair, trying to pretend his hands weren't shaking.

"Not over there, here."

Cautiously Bodie joined his partner on the sofa. Doyle shifted until he was sitting cross-legged. Bodie wondered, irrelevantly, how he managed it in such tight jeans.

"What's brought this on, mate?"

"I dunno. Just drop it, Ray. I've said I'm sorry. Look, I'll call a cab, pick my car up tomorrow.... "

"You're going nowhere until we get this sorted out."

"Leave it, will you. Please."

"No. "

Despite himself, Bodie smiled.

"What's so funny?"

"Might have guessed you'd want to talk it to death."

"Yeah, well, it's not every day your best mate makes such a grand announcement. "

"You're being very calm about it." Bodie had expected an explosion followed by enough pyrotechnics to blow the National Grid.

Doyle ignored this and said : "This isn't a wind-up, is it? Not some stupid bet you and Murph hatched up?"

For a split second he was going to lie, but said : "No."

"I thought not. How long?"

"Since we met."

Doyle's eyebrows shot up into his ragged fringe. "Jesus.... And I never guessed. "

"Not exactly the kind of thing you drop into casual conversation, is it?"

"S'pose not. "

"Ray, look...."

"What exactly do you want from me, Bodie?"

"Whatever you feel you can give." It sounded glib, but it was the truth.

Doyle nodded thoughtfully, reached out and stroked Bodie's cheek. The feather-light touch sent electric waves down to his toes. The hand strayed down his chest and halted at the zip of his cords.

"Ray.... "

"Sshh.... "

Before Bodie could say anything, Doyle slid to the floor between his thighs, opened his zip and took him deep into his mouth. Bodie tried to tell him he didn't have to, but the sight of his cock going into that generous mouth and of his fingers tangled in wild hair realised his hottest fantasy and he came like a rocket.

When Bodie prised his eyes open again, Doyle was stretched out on his side, licking his lips and watching him out of huge, unblinking eyes. Bodie slid onto the floor beside him and went to unfasten Doyle's jeans. But his hands were gently but firmly pushed away.

"Come on sunshine, it's your birthday, let me...."

Doyle's smile was sudden. "Bodie, it's been a brilliant evening, you've cooked me a great meal, bought me a wonderful pressie. But those bloody tests tomorrow, mate. I'm shattered, need my bed...."

Bodie hesitated, wondering whether he was included. Doyle stood up and stretched, his tee shirt riding up to reveal his taut stomach. He glanced down at Bodie: "You coming, then? And you'd better not bloody well snore."

Doyle fell asleep first, but Bodie lay awake for a long time, just gazing at him in the half-light, transfixed by his gorgeous body. Doyle wasn't conventionally handsome--his individual features were too eccentric for that--but taken together, the tangled auburn curls, asymmetric cheekbones, full mouth and too-wide green eyes were devastating. Doyle shifted in his sleep and Bodie buried his face in his hair, simply needing to touch him, overwhelmed by his closeness and scent. As he fell asleep, their fingers entwined, his final thought was how he'd never felt so contented in his life.

When Bodie awoke, the sun was like a laser through a gap in the curtains and for a split second he couldn't remember where he was. Then he became aware of an unwavering green gaze on him. He reached over and gently touched an uneven cheekbone. Doyle sat up hurriedly, looping his arms around his drawn-up knees.

"Hi. "

"Hi yourself." Doyle's voice was low, husky and so sexy.

"Could get used to this."

"What?"

"Waking up with you beside me."

Bodie leaned over to kiss Doyle's throat, but was gently restrained.

"Not now, sunshine. Don't want to turn up for the tests looking like we've gone ten rounds with Henry Cooper."

Bodie contented himself with tweaking a curl. "Certainly not. Don't like the man's aftershave, anyway."

"You're in no position to criticise after that bottle of cat's piss you bought last week...."

All the reports they'd heard about the new shrink were true. Dr Kate Ross was gorgeous--and hard as nails. Bodie turned round to whisper a sarky comment to Doyle, and noticed his brow was furrowed.

"What is it, mate?"

"Nothing.... "

She hustled them into the little rooms so they could do the tests. When she let them out again, 20 minutes later, Bodie's head was spinning. Doyle was still frowning.

"Take a seat and we'll have a look through these. Now, Bodie, isn't it?"

"That's me. "

She glanced up briefly and Bodie suspected she'd marked his card already. "Results excellent, although I should point out I don't appreciate the facetious answers. My predecessor obviously let you boys get away with murder."

"He loved us for our wit, charm and good looks...." The previous shrink had been 65 if he was a day, a retired Home Office sort who'd hated the sight of both of them.

Her lips twitched. "Maybe I'll reconsider if and when I see evidence of all three. Now, Doyle...."

Bodie swung round to grin at Doyle, but was taken aback to see the look of horror on his face. Before Dr Ross could finish her sentence, he'd shoved his chair back so hard it went flying, and bolted from the room.

Bodie had adopted what Murphy called his medium psychotic face when Dr Ross found him trying to 'persuade' Lewis to relinquish his car keys. The dependable but slow-moving Lewis was well on his way to a desk job and equally well on the way to losing the use of his car.

"Bodie, come with me."

He ignored her, backing Lewis up towards a wall, hand outstretched for the keys.

"Bodie, we're wasting time. Come with me. I'll drive you."

She got his attention this time and Lewis grabbed the opportunity to saunter off down the corridor with as much dignity as he could muster.

Bodie glared at her out of narrowed eyes. 'What are you talking about?'

"I'm assuming Doyle has gone and you want to go after him."

"Nah, just fancied a nice tootle round the countryside."

"Where are the obvious places he'd go?"

He was about to be facetious again, but suddenly shrugged. "Home. Couple of pubs. Park, maybe."

"Then we'll try them first. Any friends he trusts?"

"Only me."

"Then we'd better try your flat. I assume he's got a key?" This was flung over her shoulder as she strode off towards the car park.

"Yes."

"OK. Park first, then the flats."

"How come?"

"Because in his position I'd want to be alone."

"What d'you mean?"

"Just what I said. Now are you going to direct me or do I locate this park by guesswork?"

"Look doc, are you going to tell me what the hell's going on?" Bodie flopped down on the sofa and regarded the neat figure opposite him with distaste. They'd spent an hour checking all Doyle's likely bolt-holes until Bodie, his temper rapidly reaching boiling point, had slammed his hand on the dashboard and demanded to be taken home. He needed space and time to think. When Dr Ross shoved an elegantly-booted foot in this door to stop it closing in her face, he knew he wouldn't get either. The bloody woman was second only to the Cow when it came to dodging questions.

"What do you know about Doyle's background?"

He leaned back and exhaled loudly. "Look, you want the family album, wait until another day, eh?"

"Just answer the question, Bodie."

"Born in Derby, went to art school for a couple of years, joined the police, the nCI5...." His voice tailed off when he realised that was virtually the sum total of what he knew about his partner. Not that Doyle knew much more about him, though.

"Has he ever mentioned Birmingham to you?"

"Only that it's a shithole halfway up the M1."

"Bodie, this is serious."

"I don't see anyone laughing."

"Please think, it's important."

"Not that I can remember."

"You've never been there on an assignment?"

"No."

"Can I use your phone? Not the one wired up to HQ."

"Can't your hairdressing appointment wait until tomorrow?"

She just stared at him before saying quietly : "Anyone would think you didn't want to track Doyle down."

"That's crap and you know it!"

"Then help me. Don't fight me."

"Then don't treat me like a moron. You owe me some explanation for why Ray legged it as soon as he saw you."

She hesitated, then said : "Ray recognised me from a long time ago, from a part of his life he'd rather forget."

"How come?"

"I think it's something he should tell you himself."

"And you think he's gone to Birmingham?"

"It's a possibility."

"Then what the fuck are we waiting for?"

They made it to Birmingham in just over two hours of highly aggressive driving. Doyle would no doubt have appreciated the irony of Bodie slapping the siren on the car roof to ease them through the city rush hour. Dr Ross had said little all journey, and Bodie had blocked her speculative questions about him and Ray with non-committal grunts. As they came off the Aston Expressway, Dr Ross directed him through a maze of back streets.

"Pull in over there, just past the lamp post."

It looked like a derelict industrial area with boarded-up buildings and smashed windows. Somewhere overhead, a train rattled by.

"Where the hell are we?"

"There's a homeless refuge just here."

"Yes, but what's that got to do with Ray?"

"Are you coming in or staying in the car?"

In response Bodie got out and slammed the door, staring suspiciously around. Dr Ross knocked on an incongruously brightly painted front door. After what seemed like an age, a panel slid back and a face peeped through a grille. It could have been male or female, and any age between 50 and 90. It reminded Bodie of an illustration he'd once seen of a character in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

"Is Jane there?"

"Yur." The face disappeared. Some minutes passed before a woman appeared, flanked by two strapping black lads.

"Katy! Lovely to see you, sweetie. 'scuse the heavy mob, we've had a bit of trouble from a husband who won't take no for an answer." She enfolded Dr Ross in a hug.

"You're looking well, Jane. This is Bodie, who I mentioned on the phone. Bodie, meet Jane. She runs the refuge."

Bodie shook hands obediently. Jane looked to be in her late 30s, but was strikingly pretty, even dressed in a pair of jeans and an oversized man's shirt.

"Nice to meet you, Bodie. You look as if you could murder a bacon sarnie and a mug of tea."

"Yeah, thanks." He also liked the fact she didn't quiz him about his name.

They followed Jane down a long, bare corridor into a huge kitchen. Four or five women were there, cooking or laying the table. As if by magic, steaming mugs of tea and gigantic bacon sandwiches oozing tomato ketchup appeared in front of them. After they'd demolished them, Jane said : "Come with me and we can talk where it's quiet. In ten minutes it'll be chaos in here."

Jane's office was little more than a store cupboard, jammed tight with a desk and a filing cabinet. She produced two fold-up chairs for the visitors, then perched on the corner of the desk.

"How can I help you, sweetie?"

"Jane, d'you remember when I first met you?"

"Of course I do. We were living in the den."

"And do you remember one of the lads? Ray?"

Jane nodded. "That gorgeous little boy with green eyes and auburn curls."

"Yes."

"What about him, Katy? He disappeared and we never saw him again. Always worried what happened to him."

"I met him out of the blue earlier today. Thing is, he recognised me and now he's gone missing."

"Why d'you think in Birmingham?"

"Because I think he's got some scores to settle."

"But the den's long gone. There's a garage there now...."

"I think he's gone looking for that man."

"Ah."

"What d'you mean?"

"I found out who he was."

"Who?"

"A priest."

"Never!"

"Yes."

"So where is he?"

"I'll take you. But are you sure Ray'll be there?"

"If he isn't, I don't know where he is."

Jane disappeared off, and Bodie grabbed his chance. "What the hell's going on?"

"Ray ran away from home and ended up living in a derelict workshop with Jane and several other kids. There was a man who...gave them some trouble. I think Ray's gone after him."

"A priest?"

"I didn't know that until Jane said."

Jane reappeared, pulling on a jacket. "Katy, shall I ring Mal?"

"No. Let's see if we can sort it all out without him."

"He won't be very happy, Katy. The police have got their eye on him."

"Leave it, Jane. I'll talk to him later."

Bodie felt as if he was in some second-rate spy movie with everyone except him talking in code. He'd accepted some time ago that Dr Ross could stall for England, so he was reluctantly getting used to the fact that he wasn't going to be the one calling the shots. He unlocked the car, let Dr Ross get into the back seat, then said: "OK, where the hell am I going?"

The rain started just as Bodie pulled up outside the church. The air was muggy and from some way away there was a clap of thunder. Doyle's car was parked carelessly across the driveway. Dr Ross started to say something, but Bodie cut in abruptly: "You two stay here and I'll go and see what's happening."

There were four or five buildings parallel to the road, all different heights like something from a child's toybox. The church itself was in the middle and Bodie sprinted for the porch just as the rain came. A notice pinned to the door told him the

church was kept locked outside of services and that worshippers should call at the presbytery next door.

The scream was sudden and so unexpected that Bodie jumped back. Trying the door, he found it was unlocked. It took him a moment or two for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. Then the smell hit him—dust, incense and polish. For one awful moment 20 years fell away and he could hear a priest's voice cracking on the upper notes as he promised eternal damnation.

"Get away from me!" This voice was elderly, wavering with fear and age.

"People like you are scum!" The second voice was distorted with anger.

Bodie was disorientated, staring frantically around, trying to work out where the voices were coming from. All he could see in the half-light were rows of empty pews and the eerie glow at the far end of Christ on the Cross.

"Keep back, I'll call the police."

"Oh yeah? Reckon they'd like to hear what I've got to tell them. And I assure you that they'd believe me now."

"Ray!" Bodie's own shout seemed to bounce off all the walls, coming back to him tenfold as a grotesque echo.

"Bodie, go away."

"Where are you, mate? What's going on?"

"I don't need you here. Go home."

"Call the police! This madman...." There was a gasp as the quavery voice was suddenly silenced.

Bodie looked up and saw two figures on a balcony, 50 feet or so above his head. Gazing around frantically, he spied the stairs up in one corner. "Ray, I'm coming, hold on...."

As he was halfway up the stairs, a door slammed and a key clicked in a lock. Doyle's disembodied voice could be heard cursing fluently.

"Ray, what's going on?"

"Get the fuck out of here, or I'll lose him. This is nothing to do with you...."

"Where's he gone?"

"Behind this fucking door. Didn't see it.... You distracted me." Two hefty kicks from a booted foot and the door flew open. Doyle pelted up the stairs behind it with Bodie just behind him. Another door opened out onto a flat roof.

The rain was pelting down and the wind had risen. Within moments Bodie was soaked to the skin, his hair plastered flat to his head and torrents of water stinging his eyes. The old man had retreated towards the far side of the roof. Doyle moved

towards him, stalking his prey. Bodie grabbed his arm. "Look mate, let's go inside, talk about this where it's dry...."

"Fuck off, Bodie."

"Ray, please...."

Doyle ignored him, circling the priest, saying nothing. The old man jabbed ineffectually in his direction with a walking stick. Doyle laughed, a harsh, humourless sound, and batted at the end of it.

"Get away from me!"

Doyle closed in and the old man stumbled away from him. His feet slipped on the treacherous surface and he cannoned into the fence at the edge of the roof. Bodie heard a sickening crack as the rotten wood fractured and the man began to slide.

Instinctively Bodie grabbed at the stick, trying to yank him back. The man was scrabbling blindly, trying to hang onto the edge of the roof, his legs bicycling over the edge. Suddenly it all seemed so quiet, the wind dropping and the rain slackening to almost nothing.

"Ray, grab my ankles!" Bodie knelt by the edge, grabbing the old man's arm.

But his words were whipped away by a sudden gust of wind as the old man's grip failed, dragging Bodie with him over the edge into darkness.

PART TWO

Bodie opened one eye a fraction, then snapped it shut almost immediately. It was like someone was shining a searchlight in his face.

"So you're back with us, sleeping beauty."

"Murph?"

"No, the Queen of Sheba."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly midnight. You've been out of it six hours or so."

"Shit...."

"Yeah."

"What the hell happened?"

"You decided to do a Batman impersonation and took a dive off a church roof. Lucky you landed in a flower bed. Must have been saying your prayers, mate."

"What's the damage?"

"Couple of broken ribs and concussion. Hope you believe in miracles now."

"What about the other bloke?"

"Dead."

"Where's Ray?"

"Dunno, mate. What the hell was he playing at?"

"Murph, I've got to know where he is. Cowley must know."

"I'm sure he does, mate. But he ain't gonna tell me, is he?"

"Please Murph...."

Murph had never heard Bodie beg before and he wasn't sure he liked it. "One day I'm gonna swing for you. I'll see what I can do."

"You going back to London?"

"Yep. Just got to see the Cow first."

"He's here?"

"Supervised the tidying up personally. He's just gone to sweet-talk a few plods into forgetting what they saw. Look mate, you get some rest and I'll give you a buzz first thing. Sounds like they'll kick you out mid morning after the quack's done his rounds. You want me to come back up and get you?"

"Thanks mate, but I'll manage. Where's the car?"

"Outside. The Ice Queen brought it over."

"Shit, where is she?"

"Waiting for me to take her back to London. Bodie mate, what the hell were you and she doing up....?"

Bodie turned over and closed his eyes, trying to ignore the pounding in his head.

"Don't ask, Murph."

Murph phoned first thing, just as Bodie was regarding a pile of yellow mush disguised as scrambled eggs with distaste.

"Memorise this address, mate. I'm gonna deny we've ever had this conversation. Cowley'll string me up by the short and curlies if he ever finds out how I got it."

"Murph, you're a bloody hero!"

"Wish you'd tell the divine Louise that. My unscheduled spot of B&E on your behalf brought a beautiful relationship to a premature end."

"Sorry mate."

Murph laughed. "Plenty more fish in the sea, so Anson assures me. You just take care of yourself mate, and stay away from roofs."

An hour after Bodie was discharged, he was heading up the MI towards Derbyshire, his foot flat to the floor. By early afternoon he was in a small village 20 miles or so from Derby. The house he stood outside was on the edge of the village and looked like an old rectory.

The woman who opened the front door was in her 60s, but tall and vigorous-looking. Before he could open his mouth, she said : "Mr Bodie?"

"Yes. But how d'you...?"

"Please come through. Ray's in the garden."

"Is he...?"

"I'm so glad you've come. He needs you."

The garden was huge and well-tended, with a greenhouse, shed, a pond, seats and a table. Bodie stood, overwhelmed, wondering where Doyle was. When his eyes had got used to the sunlight, he could see a figure sitting on a rug under a tree. Bodie edged forward, as if he were stalking a wild animal. As he got nearer he could see that Doyle was staring blindly into space.

"Ray?"

"Bodie, no...." He flinched away, the pain in his eyes obvious. "Go away, you shouldn't be here."

"Why not? I need to see you."

"No, you can't, not after.... I nearly killed you."

"Don't be daft, it'd take more than that to finish me off!" He knew immediately that the forced levity was inappropriate.

"Shut up, Bodie, it's not funny! Jesus Christ, you have to make a joke out of everything. I suppose everyone knows now, don't they, how I...."

"Ray, no one knows anything."

"Except that I'm cracking up. Now you've seen it for yourself, you can fuck off out of my life."

"Ray...." Bodie knelt down in front of him and reached for Doyle's hand. He snatched it back and ran it distractedly through his limp hair.

"She told you, didn't she? Knew she would!"

"Mate, you're not making any sense. Who told me what?" "Dr Ross." He almost spat out the name.

"All she would tell me was that you'd run away from home and were living on the streets with some other kids."

Doyle laughed harshly. "S'pose you could say that. So she never told you that I was a whore, sold my body to any man who'd pay?"

Bodie felt like a block of ice had embedded itself in the base of his stomach. "Christ, Ray...."

"It was the only way I could earn money to stay alive. All the dirty old men loved me, didn't they? They told me what a pretty little thing I was...."

Bodie said quietly : "Whatever happened then, it's all in the past. Whatever you did, you had to do to survive."

"Bodie, you don't understand, I let them fuck me, they paid me.... "

Bodie tried to put his arm around Doyle's shoulder, but he pulled away from him.

"Please go, Bodie."

"I'm not going anywhere. I love you, no matter what."

Doyle shoved him away hard and tried to scramble to his feet.

"Ray, please listen to me...."

"Get away from me, I'm not worth it...."

"You are to me."

"Jesus, are you thick or something? I'm second-hand goods.... Why d'you think no one can love me? Not gonna do your career any good, is it, when Cowley finds out."

"Not going, mate. You're stuck with me."

"You just want to fuck me, don't you?" He started to fumble with his zip. "Give special rates for friends...."

"Ray, please, don't...."

"So you don't fancy going where hundreds of others have gone? Don't reckon I'll be tight enough for you? You want me to give you another blow job?" Doyle tried to unfasten Bodie's trousers, but Bodie grabbed his hand, restraining it in his own.

"I get it, you like it rough? Go on, slap me around, then fuck me. I'm used to it...."

"Ray, no!"

Doyle was away down the garden before Bodie could scramble to his feet.

"Ray...."

"Leave me alone!" The voice was harsh and distorted, growing faint as the slim figure disappeared into the undergrowth. Bodie went to follow him, but a gentle hand closed on his arm and a quiet voice said : "Let him go. He needs some space."

"But...."

"You look exhausted. You were hurt, weren't you? Lie down for a minute. Ray'll come back."

Bodie obeyed, only too aware of an impending humdinger of a headache. Curling up on the rug, he slept.

When Bodie woke, the sun had gone in and the air was distinctly cool. He shifted gingerly, wincing as his ribs objected, aware that falling asleep on the ground probably hadn't been the wisest move. As he sat up, he discovered Doyle sitting cross-legged staring at him. His hair was a tangled mass of bronze and his eyes were heavy-lidded. In Bodie's biased opinion, he looked beautiful.

"Bodie, I'm sorry...."

"Nothing to be sorry for, goldilocks."

"You really love me?"

"Yep."

"There's a load more shit.... "

"I'm sure there is, mate, but you don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"But I'm...."

Bodie put his hands on Doyle's shoulders. "Listen mate, nothing will change the way I feel about you. Christ, there's stuff in my past I'm not proud of."

A long, slim hand briefly rested on Bodie's. "You'll stay, won't you?"

"What, here?"

"Yes. Come and meet Jack and Peggy."

"Who are they, Ray?"

"My parents. My adoptive ones, that is. They're looking forward to meeting you, I've told them so much about you."

"You never said you were adopted."

Doyle shrugged. "They mean so much to me, I never think they aren't my real parents. They rescued me from the gutter."

Jack and Peggy could never have been mistaken for Ray's biological parents. They were both tall and powerfully built, had black hair going grey and dark brown eyes. Peggy was in the kitchen, a large room dominated by an ancient pine table, presiding over something that smelled divine. Suddenly Bodie realised just how hungry he was. She turned round and favoured them with a smile.

"OK, boys?"

Ray nodded, kissing her on the cheek. She hugged him, her eyes never leaving Bodie. "I've made up the spare bed, Ray. Would you like to show Mr Bodie upstairs?"

"Please, just call me Bodie."

"Doesn't anyone call you by your first name?"

"Not really."

"What is it, for heaven's sake? Engelbert? Cedric?"

"They might just be preferable! It's William, actually."

"That's not so awful."

"No, but I've just got used to being called by my surname, so it's stuck."

"I'd prefer to call you William until I get to know you better."

Bodie nodded weakly. He felt about five and had the sudden urge to check that his hands were clean and that he didn't have mud on his shoes. Doyle was trying to stifle a grin. Halfway up the stairs, they both burst out laughing. Doyle said: "I should have warned you. She's a magistrate, used to be a primary school headteacher. Has a talent for making you feel like a kid again."

The spare room was at the top of the house, tucked under the eaves. It was painted white with cheerful blue curtains and a matching eiderdown. Bodie sat down on the bed, suddenly aware of how shattered he was.

"You OK, mate?" Doyle was watching him worriedly, leaning against the door frame in typical pose.

"Yeah, just a bit tired. Look Ray, I've no clean clothes or toothbrush or anything."

"Don't worry. Jump under the shower, then I've got some trackie bottoms and a tee shirt you can wear. Peggy'll bung the rest in the wash overnight."

"I can't go down for the meal dressed like that!"

"I do. What's the problem?" Doyle looked genuinely mystified.

Bodie had to smile. "That'll be great then, thanks very much."

When they went downstairs again, Jack was there, lounging on the sofa, flicking through the sports pages of the *Daily Telegraph*. Bodie, only too aware of the snug

fit of his borrowed clothes, was grateful to see that Jack was dressed casually. They shook hands and Bodie sank into an overstuffed armchair.

"Nice to meet you at last. Ray's mentioned you a lot. Now, what do I call you? Understand Peggy's insisted on being formal."

"Call me Bodie, everyone else does."

They sat and chatted, and it took Bodie a while to realise Jack was subtly cross-questioning him.

"Ray says you're ex-SAS."

"That's right. And I did a stint in the paras." Bodie decided to keep quiet about his less than salubrious life prior to the British army.

"Why did you join C15?"

"Liked the sound of it and felt I needed a new challenge."

"No regrets?"

"None at all."

"You don't sound like a Londoner."

"I'm not. I'm from Liverpool."

"Your folks still up there?"

"No. My parents died years ago."

"No brothers or sisters?"

"None."

"You and Ray were paired together from the start?"

"Yeah, from day one. The little sod dumped me on my backside after about a minute of self-defence!"

Jack laughed. "All our work in the gym paid off, then."

"You teach martial arts?"

"Mainly boxing, but I do a bit of self-defence as well. Useful stuff if you're Ray's size."

"So I've you to thank for all his dirty tricks, then! Funnily enough, he won't come sparring with me."

"Done a bit, have you?"

"Yeah, started in the army. Go down the gym now once, twice a week."

"Come down and have a look at ours before you go. Got some good kids there."

"Thanks, I'd like that."

The meal was delicious, a traditional roast followed by apple pie and custard. Bodie tucked in with enthusiasm, realising it was his first proper meal since he'd cooked for Doyle. That evening seemed light years away. He looked over to where Doyle, never a hearty eater at the best of times, was pushing his food around his plate. Bodie's eyes met Peggy's, and she managed a rather forced smile.

When they'd finished, Bodie, well-trained, got up to clear the table.

"I'll give you a hand," said Doyle, balancing a couple of plates precariously.

"You will not," said Peggy firmly. "Go and help Jack carry that shopping over to Miss Gibbs instead. William and I will clear up."

Doyle, stifling a grin, acquiesced. Bodie trailed obediently into the kitchen and started running a bowl of water for washing up.

"Mrs Doyle, I can manage...."

"Call me Peggy and I've been sat down too long in court today. I'll wipe." She saw Bodie's bemused expression and added : "I'm a magistrate and I do get time off for good behaviour!"

Bodie started passing her the glasses and she took her time drying them, as if planning her next move. But her question came like a meteorite out of a clear sky.

"You're in love with Ray, aren't you?"

Bodie discovered the accuracy of the expression 'jaw dropping.' "Um...."

"Oh come along William, I wasn't born yesterday."

"Yes," he said weakly. There really was no other answer.

"Thought so. And of course he worships you."

Bodie, who'd always prided himself on his iron self-control, then discovered that blushing really did make your face burn. Peggy, choosing to ignore this, continued briskly : "Have you told him?"

Bodie nodded.

"And?"

Bodie shrugged.

"And?" repeated Peggy.

"He told me he was damaged goods and not worthy of my love," said Bodie bleakly.

"Has he told you about himself?"

"A bit."

"In that case he must trust you completely."

"He trusts me with his life every day."

"Of course, although part of the problem at the moment is that he's blaming himself for almost getting you killed in Birmingham."

"I know he is, and no he didn't."

"That's as maybe, but he thinks he'll have to leave CI5. I know Mr Cowley has told him otherwise."

"When?"

"He brought Ray up here yesterday. A charming man, I thought. But not to be meddled with."

"No," agreed Bodie.

Peggy seemed about to add something, but then the front door burst open and they could hear Jack and Ray laughing. Urgently she grabbed Bodie's arm and whispered : "He needs you."

Bodie was in bed by 11 pm. They'd played Scrabble for an hour, then Peggy had produced cocoa and biscuits before hustling them off to bed. For a moment he expected his gran to appear, tuck him in and read him a bedtime story. Bodie closed his eyes, trying to blank out too many memories. An hour later, he was still restless.

"Bodie, you asleep?" The voice outside the door was soft but clear.

"Yeah...."

"And I suppose you've got Miss World in there?" Doyle opened the door and slipped into the room.

"You've just missed her." Bodie sat up and flicked on the bedside lamp.

Doyle bounced onto the bed. "Can't sleep," he said plaintively.

"So you thought you'd engage me in midnight wit and repartee?"

"Something like that. And I'm cold."

Bodie sighed and lifted the bedclothes. "Get under here before you catch your death."

Doyle hesitated fractionally, then slid under the blankets. He smelled of soap and herb shampoo.

"Your bloody feet are freezing," grumbled Bodie, trying to ignore the proximity of that much desired body.

"Bodie, need to talk, to tell you stuff...."

"Don't half pick your time, mate." But the sting was taken out of Bodie's words by the way he rearranged the pillows and tucked the covers around Doyle.

Ray snuggled close to him so that their thighs were touching. "You're at liberty to get out of my life when you've heard what I've got to say."

Bodie grabbed his hands. "Ray, listen to me, I'm going nowhere. You're stuck with me."

"Maybe...."

"No maybes."

"Just listen, then decide."

There was a brief silence, then Doyle began to talk. "I was brought up in the shittiest part of Derby, where even the rats ran around in pairs. By the time I was 13, I'd run away from home ten, 12 times. Hated it. Hated my real dad. He kept telling me I was 'a fooking mistake.' These days the social services would have had me out of there like a shot. Was permanently covered in bruises, the bastard used me as a punchbag when he was drunk, which was most of the time. One night he knocked me across the room, smashed my cheekbone on the fireplace. Ended up in hospital, but legged it when I heard them talking about sending me home. Hitched a lift with a lorry driver and ended up in Birmingham. Didn't have any money, only the clothes I stood up in. These kids found me nicking left-over food down in the market and whisked me away before this gorilla pasted me all over the Bull Ring.

"We slept in a disused workshop underneath some railway arches. To us, it was like a palace. We'd scavenged mattresses, crates, someone even found an old sofa. We pooled all our food, used to concoct these feasts on an old primus stove. We knew where to look for all the old fruit and veg when the markets shut. And there was even a moral code. You stole off the punters if you could, but you never stole off a mate. We all looked out for each other. It sounds crazy, but life on the streets seemed a better existence than home. I had a bit of money, somewhere to sleep, people to look out for me...."

Bodie kissed the top of his head and said quietly : "How many of you were there?"

"Six. I was the youngest, then there were twin sisters called Carrie and Jo, two lads, Danny and Mark, and an older girl called Jane. She was wonderful, I often wonder what happened to her."

"Ray, I've met her.... "

"When? Where is she? Is she OK?"

"She's fine. She runs a homeless shelter in Birmingham. Dr Ross, she's in touch with her. That's how we found you."

"Oh shit, Dr Ross...."

"What about her?"

"She was so kind to us.... I often thought about her, you know, who she was and what happened to her. And she saved my life after...." A shudder racked his whole body.

Gently Bodie began to stroke the tense back. "After?"

"After that priest raped me and left me for dead," said Doyle harshly.

Bodie enveloped him in a fierce hug, trying to ignore the pain in his ribs.

"Sunshine, don't tell me if you don't want to."

"I've got to.... I've got to break the hold he's had on me all these years. Jesus, Bodie, it's down to him that I couldn't tell you before that I loved you and why I wouldn't let you do anything to me the other night. Shit, it's the story of my life, trusting people and they let me down. You're the only one who hasn't.... I mean, he seemed so nice, bringing us food and that. Used to take me to the church and pay me to do odd jobs. Then he'd feed me and let me have a bath. 'course he soon started coming into the bathroom partway through. Letting him touch me up seemed a reasonable exchange. After all, it's what I did with all those other punters. Maybe nothing would have happened if I hadn't have jerked him off the first time.... "

"Ray, don't say that! You were the victim...."

"I dunno.... Maybe he would just have looked and not touched. But he sat on the side of the bath one night, said he'd help me wash my hair. His flies were open, just at my eye level. I graduated after that to sucking his cock. Got more money for it, and a nice meal afterwards. In a funny sort of way I reckoned it was worth it. But then...." A huge shudder racked his body. Bodie held him close, gently stroking his back.

"In the morning I was a real mess and it was like he suddenly came to his senses, realised what he'd done. He bathed me, called this doctor. It was obvious it wasn't the first time he'd been called there. He got me into hospital, told them the priest had found me dumped in his garden and that he'd tried to help me. No one was gonna believe me ahead of a holy man, were they?"

"No," agreed Bodie.

"I escaped from the hospital and made it back to the den, but was too weak to do anything. The others, they called the doc, and she patched me up, kept an eye on me until I was better. She wanted me to go back to hospital, but I wouldn't. Knew if I did I'd get sent home."

He laughed harshly: "Bloody ironic really. First or second day I went back out onto the streets, this mate of my dad's spotted me on New Street and dragged me back to Derby. Ended up in a worse mess than what the priest had done to me. My dad knocked me from top to bottom of the stairs. Eventually my mum persuaded him to take me to the hospital. He tried to explain away head to toe bruising, three broken ribs and a broken nose by telling them I'd done it falling downstairs. 'Course, they

examine me, find I'm no virgin and the next thing I know, the bloody social workers are there and I'm taken into care."

He looked up and said fiercely : "I didn't tell them anything! Proper little Houdini I was. Within the week, I'd legged it from the children's home. Some pervert tried to touch me up, so I smacked him one. Was gonna go back to Birmingham, but I'd missed the last train. So I broke into this boxing club I used to go to, kipped down on the mats, was gonna leave first thing in the morning. It was run by Jack, the games teacher at school. He'd always been good to me, got me involved with the club.

"Anyway, he found me asleep, made me tea, sat and talked to me and I told him I'd kill myself rather than go back to the children's home. He took me home with him, he and Peggy fed me, gave me a bath, put me to bed in this beautiful soft bed. Peggy tucked me in, then sat and held my hand.... I slept for nearly a day and when I woke up they told me I didn't have to go back to the home and that they wanted me to live with them. I cried my eyes out, it was like something good had happened to me at last. But I didn't believe it was true, I knew they'd change their minds when they found out the truth about me. I told them everything, that I'd sold myself on the streets. I was just waiting for them to throw me back into the gutter where I belonged."

He continued roughly: "I never thought it was possible to be so happy. Suddenly there were these two wonderful people who loved me for what I was, not what I'd been. D'you know what I remember the most? Just being clean and having my own bedroom. Peggy and Jack's kids were grown up, so I had them all to myself. I could barely read and write, so they spent hours helping me catch up. I did OK at school, did well enough to get a place at art college when I was 18. But it wasn't really what I wanted, so I joined the police when I was 21. Peggy and Jack were so proud of me...."

"Not surprised. Jesus Ray, most kids would have given up...."

Doyle scrubbed at his eyes and said : "Thought I'd put all the crap behind me. I mean, CI5 was the job I'd always wanted, I'd met you and everything seemed brilliant. Until Dr Ross. Didn't want to face her, knew everything would crumble. Didn't matter then if I settled a few old scores."

"Would you have killed him?"

"I wanted to at first, but then I realised he was just pathetic old man. Thought I'd scare him a bit. Was gonna call the cops, tell them everything. I was even gonna stand up in court if necessary and tell everyone what he'd done. "

Doyle rolled away, as if holding Bodie at arm's length. "So what you gonna do now? Like I said, I'll understand if you...."

"Nothing," said Bodie firmly. "You're stuck with me, mate. I only ride off into the sunset if you tell me to."

There was a small chuckle from beside him. "Always fancied a man with a good seat."

Bodie awoke the next morning to an empty bed and just the faintest scent of Doyle on the pillows. He had a shower, dressed, and went downstairs with the intention of wandering in the garden. But he found Peggy in the kitchen pottering round and preparing breakfast. She favoured him with a lovely smile.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And you and Ray have had the chance to talk a bit more?"

Bodie started, wondering if she'd heard footsteps or whispers in the night. But she was regarding him blandly, so he nodded and said : "Yes."

"And?"

"I think everything will be OK," he said, praying that his optimism wouldn't be misplaced.

"Good. Now, Jack and I are going to visit an old aunt today. And while you're welcome to come with us, I'm sure you'd prefer to spend the day together. So I thought I'd make you a picnic and you can either sit in the garden or go down to the river."

"That's wonderful. Thank you."

"It's no trouble. Anyway, it'll give you both the chance to be near to each other."

"You're very relaxed about it."

"Jack and I decided a long time ago that if our children were happy, so were we. And I know you'll make Ray happy. He's had a lot of hurt in his life and needs someone like you to care for him."

Bodie nodded, wondering if this was all a dream and whether he'd wake up in London any minute.

"And of course my oldest, Richard, lives with another man."

"Tell me about your other children," said Bodie, sensing a temporary respite.

"Richard's a PE teacher in Brighton, he's 39 and lives with his partner David. They've been together five years. David's a university lecturer. Sarah's 37, married with a six-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son and lives in Nottingham. Both she and her husband Graham are teachers."

"How did they react to you adopting Ray?"

"Richard was at university and Sarah had just started working, so I suppose it wasn't like they were at home all the time. They were very good with him, very gentle. I think they liked the idea of a little brother."

"Do they know everything?"

She looked at Bodie sharply, then said : "Not everything. They knew he'd been abused in some way, but we decided not to tell them the whole story. It wasn't always easy, he'd been badly damaged, but you just knew he was someone worth fighting for. It made me realise how lucky we'd been with Richard and Sarah, that they'd never given us any trouble and had had such an easy life. A few days after Ray arrived, we went shopping in Nottingham to buy him some clothes. All he had was what he stood up in. He disappeared at one stage and I thought he'd run away. But then he came back with this brooch for me. I was convinced he'd stolen it, and was subtly trying to find out where he'd got the money from. When we got back home he eventually told me he'd bought it with some of the money he'd earned from prostitution and he'd understand if I didn't like it because of that."

Peggy twisted the tea towel round and round, her knuckles white. "That did it, I started crying. He asked me why I was crying and I said it was because I appreciated the gift, but the thought of what he'd gone through to earn the money upset me so much. I managed to ask him casually how much money he'd got left. Turned out he'd got £20, which was a lot of money in those days. He'd hidden it in his shoe so that his father and the people at the children's home wouldn't find it. We went into town the next day and opened a savings account with it. I told him some good should come of it and that he'd be glad of the money when he went to college. He told me not so long ago that he remembers that moment really clearly and he thought I was mad because he could barely read and write and because people like him didn't go to college."

"What about his natural parents?"

"His mother tried to keep in touch for a while, but he didn't want anything to do with her. I think he probably blamed her for not protecting him from his father. But she was a pathetic thing.... She died a while back, drank herself to death."

"Does Ray know that?"

"No, and I shan't tell him unless he asks. I don't want anything else hurting him or stirring up the past."

"And the father?"

"In prison. Got 15 years after killing someone in a pub brawl about 18 months ago."

She looked up at Bodie and said : "The best day of my life was when the adoption papers finally came through. The second best was when he passed out of police college. Ray's a fighter, he's battled hard for everything he's achieved and it's made us so happy to see what a success he's made of his life."

Bodie had just picked up the picnic bag and a rug when the doorbell went.

"Hang on, I'll get it," said Doyle. When he didn't return after a few minutes, Bodie went after him.

He was sitting on the bottom stair, hugging his knees, staring wide-eyed at the woman on the doorstep. Bodie felt a sudden stab of cold in his stomach. "Dr Ross."

"May I come in?"

"I think that's up to Ray. It's not my house."

At the mention of his name Doyle looked up and said harshly. "Suppose you're just the messenger girl. Cowley's sent you to play mind games with me and then to hand me my notice."

"Ray, please, can we go somewhere more comfortable? Then I can set your mind at rest."

He shrugged again, but stood up and led the way into the living room. Dr Ross perched on the sofa and Bodie was about to flop into the armchair when he saw the look of pure need on Doyle's face. He joined him on the windowseat, allowing their knees to touch. Then, any caution long-since thrown to the four winds, he slung his arm around Ray's shoulder, hoping it would be interpreted as one of their usual matey gestures.

Doyle broke the uneasy silence, running his fingers through his tousled hair.

"Doc, who were you?"

"A first year medical student. I got involved with a homeless shelter. Then they mentioned these kids who lived rough."

"You could have told the police or the social services about us. Why didn't you?"

"I thought about it plenty of times, but I suppose it was because I couldn't ever convince myself it would make things OK for you all. In a bizarre way you all seemed much happier than if you'd been in some children's home. And I thought I could keep an eye on you." She half-smiled, softening her face. "I've spent years wondering what happened to the kid with curly hair, green eyes and damaged cheek."

"Yeah, well, never thought a mate of my dad's would see me hanging around New Street station and bundle me home."

There was an uncomfortable silence, then Dr Ross said : "Why did you decide to go back to Birmingham?"

"Reckoned you'd tell Cowley and I'd lose my job, so things couldn't get any worse. It's OK doc, I was never going to kill him, he was a pathetic old thing. Kept begging me not to hurt him...."

The revulsion on her face was sudden and unexpected. "He should have been in prison for what he did to you."

"Who'd have bothered about a cheap little rent boy?"

They could see from her face that she knew Doyle was right. Instead, she said : "How did you find out where he was? He might have been dead."

"I'm a bloody detective. Trogged round a couple of Catholic churches until I found the right one. And before you ask me, I'm glad he's dead."

There was a long silence before Doyle added : "And I suppose you're gonna tell me I've cracked up and won't be fit for work again."

"All I know is that Mr Cowley wants you to take a week's break, then come back to London to talk to him. I know he doesn't want to lose you, but after what's happened he has to be sure you want to be back on the squad."

"And what about Bodie?"

Dr Ross hesitated fractionally, then said : "Mr Cowley is hoping he'll come back to London with me today."

Bodie stood up suddenly. "I think Cowley should carry his own messages. As he isn't, maybe you could tell him from me that I'll be staying with Ray until he's better. I'm owed a stack of holiday."

She nodded and stood up, looking around for her shoulder bag. Doyle said quietly : "Doc, thanks." She favoured him with a slight smile before allowing Bodie to escort her to her car. As they stood outside, she said : "How long have you two been lovers?"

Bodie's first instinct was to lie, but then he said shortly : "Just before all of this. S'pose you'll tell Cowley it's another reason why the pair of us don't have a future in CI5."

"I won't tell him anything of the sort. It's up to you to tell him."

Bodie humphed, closed the car door with rather more violence than was needed, then stalked back into the house without looking back.

They took the picnic down to the river and lay side by side on the rug. Doyle had barely spoken since Dr Ross had left, so Bodie was taken aback when he said : "You realise you've probably blown it with Cowley? He won't like his blueeyed boy not running back to him as soon as he clicks his fingers."

Bodie shrugged. "His problem, not mine."

"You'll talk him round. You always do."

There was a long silence and Bodie rolled onto his back, fascinated by the patterns the sun made through the trees.

Doyle said suddenly: "What would you do if I left CI5?"

"Go with you," said Bodie promptly.

"Really?"

"Yep."

"What would you do?"

"Dunno. What would you do?"

"Dunno either."

"Might not come to it, goldilocks."

"Can't see the old man being overjoyed by my escapades and by the fact we've got it together. And that you sent his lackey back with a flea in her ear "

"You know Cowley, he'll bollock us from here 'til next week, then send us out on some impossible mission."

"Maybe.... But Bodie, would you really jack it all in for me?"

"Said I would. Would you do the same for me?"

"Of course I would."

"Now we've established that, let's just wait and see what happens."

"OK. And I'm sorry about all this."

"Nothing to apologise for."

"I dunno.... It's just I haven't really handled any of this very well...."

"Come on mate, it's a lot of shit for anyone to deal with."

"Yeah, which means the doc gets to play her mind games with me...."

"Just forget her, Ray. You're a fighter, you can cope."

"Bodie, wish I could have told you before what I felt for you. Thought I was probably bisexual, but didn't want to confront it. Brought back too many memories. I'm glad you still want me. Don't understand why, mind you...."

"For a start off because you're so beautiful," Bodie whispered, gently easing him into his arms.

Doyle's response was electric, shoving him away with unexpected violence.

"No.... Don't say that, ever...."

"But it's true...."

"Bodie, shut up!"

"Hey, come on goldilocks, what's wrong with telling the truth?"

"I'm not.... Please don't say it...."

"Why not?"

"He used to tell me I was beautiful...."

Bodie said quietly : "I want you to know that you are beautiful and you shouldn't be ashamed of that."

"I'm not handsome, though."

"Why d'you say that?"

"You remember Jenny?"

"What about her?" Bodie remembered her all too clearly, nasty little bitch. Most of Ray's women he'd tolerated, but Jenny was pure poison.

"I overheard her telling that mate of hers she was trying to fix you up with that I was funny-looking."

"Bitch!"

"True, though." Doyle was watching him closely and Bodie felt like he was treading on broken glass.

"No. I think you're stunning."

"So you don't think I'm handsome?" Doyle was like a dog with a bone.

Bodie sighed. "Like I said, you're stunning. Exotic, even."

"Don't be daft."

"You asked."

"Why?"

"Why did you ask?"

"Why am I exotic?"

"You've got gorgeous hair, amazing big green eyes and perfect lips...."

"But I'm skinny, too short and my face is a mess," finished Doyle flatly.

Bodie leaned over and gently kissed the wrecked cheekbone. "I don't think that's true."

"You don't have to lie, Bodie."

"I would never lie to you."

Doyle entwined their fingers. "I know.... Sorry...."

"Nothing to be sorry for. Does your face bother you that much?"

Doyle shrugged. "Not most of the time. I mean, I'm used to it and all that, but some days I hate looking at myself in a mirror. It makes me feel like it's another reason why people don't love me. I know it's daft and I try to tell myself I'm being stupid, and if people don't like the way I look, that's their problem."

"As far as I'm concerned, you're perfect." He tipped Doyle's chin up so they were staring into each other's eyes. "Ray.... I'll wait as long as you like. I won't pressure you into anything you don't wanna do. I'm happy just being with you."

Doyle's eyes looked suspiciously moist and he buried his face in Bodie's shoulder. Eventually he said in a husky whisper : "Thanks...."

"For what?"

"For being the best mate a man could ever want."

"Just that?"

Doyle shook his head. Cupping Bodie's face in his hands, he stared at him for what seemed like an age. Swiftly kissing his lips, he said quietly : "Will you fuck me, help me forget?"

"Ray, are you sure?"

"Don't you want me?" He looked young, vulnerable and frightened.

Bodie said simply : "More than anything in the world. But we'll need something, don't want to hurt you.... "

Doyle dipped into the bag and produced a tube of suncream. "Come with me."

Bodie followed him to the bottom of a huge oak tree. There were wooden steps attached to the trunk. Doyle tested them gingerly. "Feel OK, but watch how you go." He shimmied up them and disappeared into a tree house. Bodie, praying the ladder would hold his greater weight, followed.

The tree house was solid and cosy, with proper windows, posters on the walls and cushions on the floor. The view took in the river and gently rolling hills.

"Wow, this is brilliant," said Bodie.

"Yeah. It was here when Jack and Peggy bought the house, Jack just did it up a bit. I used to spend hours up here. My sister Sarah's kids love it."

"Not surprised. It's a kid's dream."

"I know. And it seemed right for us today."

Bodie nodded, leaning over to kiss Doyle. This time he didn't pull away or flinch. Bodie undressed him gently, unfastening his shirt and peeling down his skin - tight jeans. As Ray lay in front of him, the sunlight dancing off his lithe body, Bodie sat back on his ankles and gazed at him, unable to believe what was happening.

"You gonna do something or just sit gawping?" Doyle's husky voice was heavy with desire, but Bodie detected a faint tremor.

"I'll take it slowly. If you don't like it, say and I'll stop." He prayed that he'd be able to keep his word, as the sight of Doyle's gorgeous body beneath him had made him harder than he'd ever been.

Ray went to turn onto his front, but Bodie stopped him. "Stay where you are, sunshine. I want to see your face while we're doing it. Want to be able to kiss you."

"But it won't work...."

"It will. Trust me." Bodie kissed him thoroughly, concentrating on his face and throat. When Ray started to relax, Bodie worked his way down Doyle's body, tonguing his nipples and leaving a moist trail down to his waist. Then he spread strong, slim thighs, tracing his fingertips up and down the insides until Doyle murmured with anticipation. Gently Bodie brushed his fingers over the tip of Doyle's cock and balls. Instinctively his whole body tensed. Bodie whispered comfortingly to him, stroking his chest and thighs, feeling soft hair and taut muscles beneath silky skin. When he'd relaxed a bit, Bodie slid his forefinger into him. He paused as he met resistance, kissing Ray's face as if to smooth away all tension. As Bodie moved around inside him, Doyle whimpered slightly and wriggled to allow him to probe deeper. Gently Bodie added a second finger, feeling the ring of muscle relax slightly. He withdrew his fingers, reached for the tube of suncream and slicked some in and around the tight opening.

"How about getting me ready?" he said quietly.

The apprehension on Doyle's face was obvious, but tentatively he began to apply the suncream. By now Bodie was so hard it hurt and Doyle's long, slim fingers gripping his cock nearly finished him there and then.

Bodie reached down and caressed his face. "Ray, I want this to be magic for you. But if you don't like it, I'll stop, OK? I won't do anything you don't want me to."

He nodded, but Bodie could sense the tension in his body. He raised Doyle's legs so that his ankles were around Bodie's waist and pressed the tip of his throbbing cock against the tight hole. He opened a fraction and Bodie inched in. When he was fully sheathed he paused to allow Doyle to adjust. Ray's eyes were closed and he was biting his lip.

"Shall I stop, Ray?"

"No.... It's OK.... Go on."

"Please angelfish, open your eyes for me."

He obeyed and Bodie smiled reassuringly at him, taking hold of his hands and pressing each finger to his lips. Hesitantly Doyle reached out and traced his fingers across Bodie's chest. Bodie glanced down to where they were joined, then withdrew halfway. Ray frowned, staring up at him questioningly. Bodie smiled at him again and slid deep into him, rotating his hips as he did so. At the same time he reached between them and wrapped his fingers around Doyle's cock. The dual sensation made Doyle cry out and Bodie watched as his beautiful eyes widened in delight.

Bodie eased most of the way out of him again. Then, when Doyle began to moan, raising his body towards him, Bodie slid all the way in again, making him cry out with pleasure. He didn't last that long, buried deep in this incredible heat, and he came with a sudden shout. A moment or so later, he felt Doyle reach his climax, clasp convulsively around Bodie.

They clung to each other until their breathing steadied. Bodie still couldn't quite believe what was happening, and let his hands roam over Doyle's body, as if to reassure himself that his dream was real. He kissed Doyle's flawed cheekbone and said quietly: "Sunshine, you OK?"

He nodded, burying his face in Bodie's shoulder. Bodie could just pick up his whispered words: "It was brilliant. I didn't think it could ever be like that.... I felt so safe with you...."

"Ray, look at me...." The dazed green eyes turned on him like searchlights and momentarily he forgot what he wanted to say. "Listen, whatever happens, we're in it together, OK?"

"Yeah."

"What do you want to do now?"

"Sleep for a bit. Eat the picnic. Take Peggy and Jack out for a nice meal tonight. And whatever happens next week happens."

"You reckon you'll find the time in your busy schedule to give me a screwing to remember?"

"Oh yeah, see what I can do...."

"Nice of you to fit me in, so to speak."

Doyle sniggered drowsily and hooked himself around Bodie. "It's gonna be OK isn't it?"

"Yeah, I reckon so, goldilocks."

-- THE END --

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