

The Hot Come-on Line

by Cassie Ingaben

(sequel to The Hotline)

Bodie glanced at his crowded appointment book for the day, making a face; then he applied himself to scrawl—just below the date, February, 14—florist: roses". Sighing in satisfaction, he leaned back in his chair, and thumbed the intercom: "OK, Betty, let the first one in". "Sir? There is an unexpected visitor here. It's mister Lander, sir. He says it's urgent, if you could see him now."

Bodie made a puzzled face: "Of course Betty. Let him—"

Before Bodie could finish his sentence, the door slammed open and Stephen Lander, Head of MI5, strode in.

"William!!!"

Bodie winced. "Hello Lander, how are you?"

Lander grinned the manic grin Bodie privately labelled shark-like. "It is a great day, William. A great day!"

In the instant of silence that followed, Bodie decided he did not at all like the glinting sparkle in Lander's eye, and automatically sat up, barely stopping himself from reaching for his gun. "Would you like a cup of tea, Lander? I can ask Betty—" Bodie was interrupted by a swift gesture of refusal, and went on almost smoothly, eyes narrowing imperceptibly: "Well then, Lander, what is so urgent that cannot even wait for a cuppa?"

Lander stood in perfect silence, shining eyes fixed on Bodie's face. "I knew it. The instant it happened, I *knew* it had to be you . . . I almost didn't bother to have it checked—discreetly of course."

Bodie could not follow this at all, but he realised he was in trouble. Big trouble.

Lander slowly moved towards Bodie, circling round the desk. "At last. I have

been waiting for this . . ." He pounced, and landed rather heavily on a flabbergasted Bodie, who was divided between weighing the pros and cons of killing the head of a quasi-rival governmental agency, and trying to catch the many flailing arms Lander seemed to have grown while not being squashed. Then all thoughts fled as Bodie felt a large, wet and warm object trying to force itself into his mouth—*what the fuck!*—Bodie whipped away, screaming in outrage at the attempted kiss, barely hearing what Lander was blabbering in the vicinity of his ears: "Oh, I always wanted you, big tough man, and when you made that phone call, I . . ."

Lander landed against the farthest wall with a rather sickening thud. His vision blurred, he guessed more than saw Bodie looming over him—he was thankful he could not make out the man's expression at all—and growling: "*What* phone call, Lander?"

As Lander whimpered and covered his face with his hands, a horrible thought started to dawn on Bodie. There was a minute of silence. Then two minutes. Then three. Lander timidly peeked between two fingers, still poised for the fatal blow. No-one. He shakily got up, and trying to recompose his clothes, went out of the office. A rather surprised Betty stared at him, as he asked with patently false nonchalance the whereabouts of Mr. Bodie.

Betty shrugged, more than a bit confused. "I don't know, sir. Must have been some pretty dire emergency, because he didn't say where he was going. Actually, I don't think he noticed me at all—he was screaming something but the only thing I could understand was 'the next one is gonna be a death story' . . ."

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