



Continuing our darker tone, here is Alexandra's story set during the stormy period of 'Wild Justice'. What, she speculates, was really going on between Bodie and Doyle in this important episode?

With thanks to Erzsebet.

he door stood closed before Doyle, taunting him as if it were an extension of his partner—impassive, hardened, unresponsive. Doyle pressed the buzzer again. Bodie was home. He *felt* his presence. He was there, waiting, lurking. *Open up, you bastard.* He'd make a scene if necessary. No more games, no more being shoved aside.

He'd been shut out before, those rare times when Bodie's past had resurfaced. Doyle hadn't cared for

THE KILLER IN ME

ALEXANDRA

Bodie's cold self-sufficiency during those times, but he'd survived his friend's withdrawal. Not this time. Not when Bodie's moods changed so drastically from day to day. Not when, after a tense training session, Bodie pulled a gun on him. It was time for an explanation, and he damn well wasn't leaving without one.

Fuck it. Doyle abandoned the buzzer to pound on the door, hammering the wood with both fists. "C'mon, Bodie—I know you're there!" He delivered a powerful kick to the door which sent a reverberating tremble through his leg. As Doyle paused to rub his thigh, Bodie's voice growled through the intercom.

"What do you want?"

"What do you think? Let me in!"

The door opened. Bodie stood there in slacks and shirt, looking casual, unconcerned. He didn't move aside. "It's one in the morning, Doyle," he

said calmly. "What do you want?"

"An explanation." Doyle tried to push past, and met firm resistance. He glared at his partner. "You want to argue in the fucking hallway?"

Bodie met his gaze, held it for a moment, then stepped out of the way. Doyle shouldered past as Bodie shut the door.

Step one accomplished, Doyle thought as he strolled into the sitting room. *Now for step two.* He made for the drinks cabinet. "You're going to talk to me, mate," he said as he grabbed a bottle of whisky and two glasses. "You're going to tell me what it's all about." He held a glass up.

"No, thanks." Bodie stood in the center of the room, immobile.

Doyle shrugged and fixed a drink for himself. Then he leaned against the cabinet, staring at Bodie. It wasn't going to be easy—it never was whenever Bodie refused to let him past the barriers. But Doyle

was ready to stick it out, prepared to hammer away until he got what he wanted—a reason for Bodie’s unpredictable behavior. And this time, he was going to get the truth. “Talk to me, Bodie.”

“There’s nothing to say.” Bodie’s voice sounded weary.

Doyle swallowed half his drink, sputtering as the fiery liquid blazed along his throat. “No? You don’t want to tell me what’s wrong with you? Why you’ve been fucking up in training, playing stupid pranks? You don’t want to tell me why you pulled a gun on me?” The image from that day, of Bodie’s fierce eyes on him, predatory, burned in Doyle’s mind. There had been a real danger there, something over the edge in Bodie’s normally controlled manner which had shaken Doyle. Was Bodie cracking up? “Well?”

There was no sign of remorse in Bodie’s restrained expression. “It was a joke,” he replied coolly.

“Yeah?” Doyle guzzled the rest of his whisky. “Guess I missed the punch line.” He slammed the glass down and moved in close to the other man. “I’ve had it, *mate*.” He jabbed at Bodie’s chest. “Tell me what the hell is going on.”

Bodie didn’t move; his face remained unreadable. “It’s not your business.”

“Ah,” Doyle nodded, pleased at the chink he’d made. “So you’ll admit there *is* something going on.”

“Leave it, Doyle.” Bodie turned away, but Doyle snatched at his sleeve, pulling him back.

“How can I? If you’re in trouble—”

“I can handle it myself!” Bodie’s mask broke as he shoved Doyle away. “I don’t want you involved.”

Doyle edged in close again, breathing hard. “Why not? We’re partners.”

“This is personal.” Bodie’s voice went cold.

“Personal?” Doyle snapped. “What the hell does that mean? I’m only allowed to help if it’s part of the damn job?” He turned away, trying to control his breathing. This wasn’t working. Bodie just might reveal something if he got angry enough, but so far Doyle had only managed to annoy him. Maybe if he landed a low blow—he turned back to face Bodie. “Don’t do this to me.” He prodded Bodie’s chest again. “Look at the shit you landed in last time you cut me off. Or maybe you’ve forgotten Marikka—”

Bodie batted Doyle’s hand aside. “Shut up.” His

eyes glittered. “I told you I can handle it, now just go.” He pushed Doyle towards the door.

“No, dammit!” Doyle twisted away. “I’m not going ‘til I get a real answer.” He strode back to the drinks cabinet and grabbed the whisky bottle.

“Put it down.”

Doyle heard the edge in Bodie’s voice and chose to ignore it. Whatever Bodie was involved in, there was no reason they couldn’t sort it out together. He poured the whisky into his glass.

He sensed the movement behind him and turned to find Bodie mere inches away, his face flushed. Bodie gripped Doyle’s wrist; the liquid sloshed over the glass rim. “Put it down,” he repeated, “and get out.”

“Let go.” Doyle resisted the grip, holding the glass firmly. He returned Bodie’s stare. “What the fuck is it with you? We’re supposed to be friends, remember? *Best mates*? ‘S a bit one-sided though, isn’t it?” He wrenched his wrist free, spilling more of the drink. “You only let me get close when things are going well.” Doyle quickly drank the remaining whisky in the glass, not taking his eyes off Bodie, who stood glowering at him. “But you won’t let anyone near you when things are bad. It’s okay for me to come to *you* when I’m upset—yeah, it’s okay for *me* to admit I’m not made of fucking stone—but not you. Why not, Bodie? Afraid it’ll make me feel better than you?” Doyle slammed the glass down. “Or are you just too proud to need anyone? Who the fuck do you think you are?” Sick of Bodie’s unrelenting glare, Doyle grabbed his arm and shook it. He felt Bodie shiver. The response puzzled Doyle, but it didn’t distract from his anger. He shook Bodie again, hard. “Come on, you bastard—why the hell won’t you tell me what you’re afraid of?”

Bodie suddenly gripped Doyle’s shoulders, and Doyle’s eyes widened at the fire in Bodie’s gaze. *Bloody hell*, he thought, I got him angry all right—he’s going to thump me one. Doyle felt Bodie’s hands move up to clench the back of his neck, forcing his head forward. *What the hell*—suddenly, Bodie’s mouth was on his, wresting his lips open. Doyle gasped, too shocked to resist. He squeezed his eyes shut as Bodie kissed him, plunging within, fiercely taking without giving, then brutally releasing him.

Doyle swayed, then steadied himself. When he opened his eyes, he saw Bodie striding towards the front door. *Shit*. Doyle tried to catch his breath,

taking deep gulps of air. *Bodie?* It wasn't possible.

Bodie stood by the door, holding it open. "That's why," he said calmly, as remote as before.

Utterly confused, Doyle walked unsteadily to the door, finding it hard to focus. He stopped near the threshold, facing his partner, unable to frame a sensible question. Nothing made sense at that moment. "Why...what did you...do you want—" No, he couldn't ask it—didn't even believe it.

Bodie lifted a hand to brush Doyle's cheek, his gaze fierce. "Showed you what I want, Ray."

Doyle shook his head, twisting away from the touch. He sagged against the door frame, using it to prop himself up. "You can't," he stammered. "You can't want that...not with me—"

"Oh, yes." Bodie's eyes narrowed, then his lips twitched into a half-smile. "You're the only one I do want. Really want." He reached out again, cupping Doyle's face in both hands. Something in his voice and expression kept Doyle from flinching away again. Bodie released him. "Yeah, and I need you. I need you to want *me*."

Doyle couldn't take it in. What he'd wanted tonight had been so simple—to get Bodie to ask for his help. He looked at his friend, expecting, after the bruising revelation of that kiss, to be looking at a stranger. But he wasn't.

Bodie released his hold. "Go home, Ray."

Doyle glanced down the dimly-lit corridor. It would be the safest thing to do...just walk away, get in his car, drive back to his flat, pretend everything was all right...but when had he ever needed to be safe?

"No." He looked steadily at Bodie. Though stunned by Bodie's act, he was also aware that he hadn't gotten what he'd come for. "No," he repeated stubbornly, "not until you tell me what's going on."

Bodie let out an exasperated sigh. "Oh, hell." He rubbed a hand over his face. "What does it take to get rid of you?"

"How about the truth?"

Doyle thought he saw a flicker of pain cross Bodie's face. Then Bodie nodded. "All right," he said dully, "we'll see where that gets us." He pulled Doyle back inside and shut the door, then pushed him towards the kitchen.

His senses reeling, Doyle sank onto a chair at the tiny kitchen table. He warily watched Bodie as he set about making a pot of coffee. *Be careful what you ask for...* the old saying popped into his head. A

shiver ran up his spine. Doyle ran his fingers over his lips, still feeling Bodie's mouth on his, a tingling, shadowy sensation. It was mad. He looked up as Bodie poured the coffee into two mugs. But Bodie wasn't mad, that was the odd part.

"Here you go." Bodie slid a mug over as he sat down. "Drink up."

Doyle sipped at the steaming liquid. "Gonna be up all night peeing," he muttered as he drank some more, glad of the warmth it gave him.

"It's your own fault." Bodie barely touched his mug to his lips, then set it down again. He leaned back, folding his arms across his chest. "I had a friend once," he said casually, "name of Williams. He used to drink my booze uninvited, too."

"Sorry." Doyle frowned; he couldn't place the name. "Where's he from, then?"

"Williams? Special Services."

"Oh."

"He died not too long ago."

"Did he? 'M sorry." Doyle buried his nose in the coffee mug.

"Yeah. He was murdered."

Doyle jerked his head up. He suddenly realized that Bodie was telling him what was happening, was finally giving him what he wanted. He cradled the mug, rolling it between his palms, alert now. "Who did it? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know. Bastard's name is Billy—'King Billy' he calls himself. Head of a motorcycle gang. Just your run-of-the-mill psychopath."

"Okay. So take your evidence to the police—" Doyle paused as Bodie raised his eyebrows. "You don't have any evidence?"

"I've got one eye-witness," Bodie replied.

"Williams' girlfriend, Cheryl. But she's too scared to talk. She hangs out at the biker pubs—and she knows what they're capable of doing to her."

The more Doyle heard, the less he liked it. "Just what were you planning to do, then?"

"Not sure yet." Bodie picked up his mug and took a few sips. "Been keeping tabs on the bastard. He has a fondness for bike races. There's one on tomorrow—thought I'd go out for a look."

"Bodie, it's police business—"

"Police haven't gotten anywhere." Bodie gave Doyle a quizzical look. "You've still got your bike, haven't you?"

Doyle saw the calculating expression. "Whatever it is, forget it."

"Thought you wanted to help, *mate*."

“I do, but—”

“But, nothing, Doyle. I told you, he’s a psycho. I’ve checked out his record. This isn’t the first killing he’s gotten away with, and it won’t be the last.” He paused. “Unless someone stops him.”

Doyle felt a chill lodge in his gut. “Who made you judge and jury?”

“I did.”

It shouldn’t have surprised him that Bodie would go so far to avenge a friend. Bodie’s sense of personal loyalty had gotten him into trouble more than once on the job. Still, was he really talking murder? “Did Williams mean that much to you?”

“He was a good mate,” Bodie replied quietly. “And he would’ve done the same for me.”

“Done what? Kill? You can’t do that—”

“No?” Bodie shook his head, a slight smile breaking the hard features. “Have you forgotten who we work for? Or maybe you hadn’t noticed that in CI5, the end justifies the means. Isn’t it a bit late in the game to be getting moral qualms?”

“It’s not a game,” Doyle protested.

“Isn’t it?”

“Not when you’re messing about with people’s lives, it isn’t! And it’s not CI5 business—”

“It’s *my* business,” Bodie said calmly. “What difference does it make? This is what I do for a living, mate, with or without the fine print.”

Doyle shivered. “You don’t really mean that.”

“No? You asked for the truth.” Bodie picked up his mug and drank. “Why don’t you come out to the races with me tomorrow?”

Doyle sighed. Trying to figure Bodie out was hard work. “Thought you didn’t want me involved.”

“You could bring your bike,” Bodie went on, ignoring the remark. “Might be fun—get a bit of racing in—what do you say?”

“Why?”

“Why not?”

Doyle realized he’d gotten all he was going to get out of Bodie on the subject. Time to ask about that incredible kiss, which he had a feeling Bodie wasn’t going to discuss. “Okay,” Doyle said carefully, “I’ll come with you.”

“Good.” Bodie pushed his chair back and stood, scooping up both mugs and tossing them into the sink.

“One more thing.” Doyle stayed seated. “You want to tell me what that little scene in the doorway was all about?”

Bodie shook his head. “You know what they say.” He moved in close, leaning his hands on the table top. He stared at Doyle with a sweeping, sensual look. “Actions speak louder than words.”

Doyle trembled, afraid that Bodie would kiss him again, and even more afraid at the faint flicker of desire that whispered through him. But then Bodie smiled and shifted, moving towards the kitchen entrance. “C’mon, sunshine. Time to go home and get some rest.”

Moving slowly, Doyle followed him out to the front door once more. He gave Bodie a searching look as Bodie held the door open, feeling more confused now than when he’d arrived. “What time?” he finally muttered.

“Races start around two—pick you up at noon?”

“Fine.” Doyle took a deep breath. “You know I’m only going ’cause I want to keep an eye on you.”

“Yeah, I know that.” Bodie’s eyes brightened as he gave Doyle a warm smile. “Gotta make sure I don’t do anything *you* wouldn’t do, right?” He lightly punched Doyle’s shoulder.

“Right,” Doyle replied uneasily, unsure why the sudden confidence in Bodie’s face disturbed him. But he’d had enough for one night—no more questioning, no more uneasy answers. He needed to get away, go home, and try not to think about what it all meant, though he knew he would do nothing else. The night was a long way from over.

Doyle walked out of the flat, and heard the door click shut behind him.

COLD air hit Doyle’s cheeks as he wrenched his helmet off. He shook his head and looked back at the race course he’d just finished riding, with its bumpy hills and mud-clogged pits. A disaster area. But at least he’d survived it. Barely.

Doyle scanned the race grounds, which were bounded by a group of hills to one side, thick woods to the other. He spotted Bodie near a makeshift refreshment table. Next to him stood Williams’ girlfriend Cheryl, a striking redhead. She looked wary, obviously uncomfortable there. Doyle shook his head, still unable to fathom Bodie’s reasons for being here, and pissed at being used.

Bodie snatched a bottle of champagne and loped over to where Doyle stood, giving him a hug. “Great race, mate.”

Doyle shrugged the arm off. He shoved his

mud-splattered helmet into Bodie's hands. "What the hell was all that?"

"Only a race." Bodie grinned.

"Yeah?" Doyle felt bruised, battered, and exhausted. "Well, 'King' Billy's band rides rough, or didn't you know that?" He wiped at the dirt on his face. "The bastards rode to block me out, dammit. I don't know what you're trying to prove here, but I'm through. You got that?"

"No need to be like that." Bodie punched him lightly on the shoulder, still smiling. "What's it matter? You beat the bastard."

Doyle looked at the dirty, disheveled gang of bikers huddled around their machines. "Yeah, 'bastard' is the right word." He looked pointedly at Bodie. "All around. I'm leaving."

Bodie tossed the helmet back to him. "Fine, have it your way. I think I'll go celebrate." As Doyle watched, Bodie strode over to King Billy's group. He popped the cork off the champagne and shook it up, spraying the foam over the gang members. After listening to Bodie's taunting jeers for a few minutes, Doyle gave up and rolled the bike off to one side.

The gear he'd changed into for the race was soaked through, cold wet cloth clinging to his flesh. Doyle grabbed his regular clothes from their jeep, making sure he retrieved his gun from the glove box. Then he followed the other mud-splattered racers to a washing-up area.

He came out feeling refreshed, with a thoroughly scrubbed body and clean clothes, his gun and holster hidden beneath his leather jacket. But when he looked around for his partner, Bodie was nowhere to be seen.

Doyle took a deep breath. All he wanted was to go home, some place where it didn't smell of petrol, somewhere he could work the autumn chill out of his bones. Where the hell was Bodie...

He heard a hum—then a roar as a bike came to life, and another. More racing? Doyle couldn't see anyone on the track. Then he spotted Cheryl striding towards the engine noise, towards the curve of a steep hill. Doyle ran to catch her up, calling her name.

She started, then cast him an angry glare. "Why don't you stop them? I thought Bodie was your friend—"

Doyle grabbed her arm. "Where is he?"

Cheryl twisted her arm free. "He's challenged Billy to a one-on-one. There." She nodded up-

wards. "That's the Widowmaker."

"Shit." Doyle loped off, rounding the hill. Bodie was on his bike, already driving madly up the steep side, twisting, digging in, roaring upwards, possessed. Doyle stood, unable to move, anger and fear warring within. In a final, reckless burst, Bodie shot to the top as dirt and rocks flew out from the wheels, cascading behind him. He idled the bike triumphantly, then spun it round to make a headlong, plunging descent.

King Billy kicked his own bike to life and attacked the hill, the wheels turning crazily as he viciously twisted the machine up the path. Doyle watched, unable to think of any action to take. He glanced at Bodie, who stared upward, transfixed by Billy's progress; his triumphant expression chilled Doyle. Bodie wanted Billy dead, that was terribly clear. But this way? And if this didn't work—what the hell would he try next?

Doyle started towards Bodie, but stopped at the sound of Billy's bike dying. He looked up in time to see the bike shut off from under Billy, flipping with an ominous *ka-chunk* as Billy was thrown off. The figure tumbled down, his friends rushing to help. Bodie smiled and turned away, calmly walking the bike back towards the parking area. Doyle called out again, but Bodie only spared him one glance, his face blank. Then he moved on. Doyle frowned, hoping the worst was over, but far from sure.

He turned and ran after Bodie, catching up to him as he reached the parking area. Cheryl was there, slumped against the jeep, hands shoved deep in the pockets of her jacket. Bodie ignored her and set about putting the bike away.

"We finally getting out of here?" Doyle dug into his coat pockets for the car keys, anxious to speed things up. He glanced over towards the hill. King Billy and his gang had started back as well, and now they milled near the track, watching Bodie.

Bodie finished securing the bike, and turned to follow Doyle's gaze. Doyle bit his lower lip. *Dammit*. He brandished the keys in front of Bodie's face. "It's time to *leave*."

Not quite." Bodie looked steadily at Billy's group in the distance. They'd gone very quiet, and were simply standing there, staring back.

"What the hell do you mean, 'not quite'?" Doyle gripped Bodie's arm, roughly jerking him round. "Come *on*."

Bodie shoved him away. "It's not over yet."

Doyle saw Billy jerk his head at the woods

bordering the track. In response, Bodie nodded. Then he smiled and calmly sauntered off towards the trees.

Cheryl started at the movement. "Where's he going?"

"To hell," Doyle muttered. Then he took off after him.

He caught up with Bodie, matching his partner's stride. "What the fuck are you up to now?"

"Gonna take a leak." Bodie walked on, casual and confident. "That okay with you?"

"Don't lie to me, dammit. You coulda done that back there."

"Maybe I like a bit more privacy." Bodie paused at the edge of the woods to look back. Doyle did the same, and saw Billy and his gang moving across the racetrack towards them. He automatically reached for his gun. Bodie's hand shot out, grasping Doyle's wrist. "No. This is my fight."

"It's not a fight—it's madness."

"Is it?" Bodie held Doyle's arm in a painful clench. His eyes bore into Doyle's, unnervingly calm, yet predatory. Not mad. Resolute, but not mad. Doyle stared back at his friend, not sure if this relentless determination was better than outright insanity, and certain that it didn't make Bodie less dangerous. More so, in fact. A sense of foreboding knotted within him, mingled with anger at Bodie for escalating the danger.

Bodie released him. "You know what it's about, Doyle." Before Doyle could react, Bodie turned and sprinted into the woods, dashing out of sight among the trees.

Doyle tried to follow him. It wasn't long before he became confused. The towering trees blocked the late afternoon light, creating a shadowy world of mist and darkness. He stopped, listening, straining to hear any sound of movement. All he heard was the whispering of falling leaves.

He stood still, looking left, right, checking behind. Nothing. He had to find them. Something, somebody had to stop this.

Doyle heard scuffling sounds. He moved, picking his way through thick undergrowth, trying to pinpoint the direction of the sound. As he worked towards a lighter patch among the gloom, the noise grew louder, and then he heard shouts and grunts. Doyle ran.

He broke through the low brush into a clearing, ringed by tall trees. He stopped to take in the scene. Bodie stood balanced in the center, a long, straight

branch in his hands. Billy and four other men circled him, wary, already sounding winded. Two of them rushed Bodie, who jabbed out with the staff, quickly knocking both to the ground. They didn't get up.

King Billy flashed a foot-long knife whose blade shimmered in the filtered light. The remaining two men were unarmed. Doyle dropped into a fighting stance as one of the men came at him. Doyle kicked out and landed a blow in the midriff, knocking the wind from his opponent. The man doubled over, clutching his abdomen. Doyle moved in, bringing both fists down hard on the back of his neck. He crumpled.

Looking up, Doyle saw that the other gang member was now down, and only Billy was left facing Bodie. Doyle started towards them. Suddenly Bodie whipped round, aiming the staff directly at him. The blow caught Doyle in the gut and he staggered back, stunned and out of breath. *This is my fight...* Doyle shook his head, taking in great, gasping breaths. Bodie's attention had immediately riveted back to King Billy, as if Doyle had been an annoying insect.

Doyle watched them stalk each other, an invisible cord of tension binding the two men. Bodie darted in and out, each movement swift and critical, a controlled but deadly dance. Billy fought with a fierce savagery, desperate and grim, the knife slashing closer and closer. Doyle staggered to his feet. Billy was getting bolder—too close—Doyle cried out as Billy whipped beneath Bodie's guard. But with one agile move, Bodie released the branch and stepped aside. He lashed out with his hand, chopping down on Billy's knife arm, knocking the weapon to the ground.

Bodie followed with a kick to the groin, bringing Billy to his knees. In an instant he was behind the man, grabbing him in a stranglehold, arms locked around his neck. Doyle knew it was a killing hold. He moved—and by the time he reached Bodie's side, his gun was drawn. Heart pounding, Doyle pointed the weapon at the two entwined figures, wavering between them. "Bodie! He's had enough—let him go!"

Bodie looked up at him, a feral glint in his eyes. "He's insane, Doyle. And he's a killer." His grip on Billy's neck tightened.

Sweat trickled down Doyle's forehead. He shivered. "Told you," he said, his voice shaking, "nobody made you judge and jury."

“No?” Bodie’s lips twitched into a half-smile. “And what are *you* going to do, Ray? You going to shoot me?”

Doyle moved closer, only inches away, aiming the gun at Bodie’s head, terrified of what Bodie would do, terrified of what *he* would do. He heard the sharp crack of a broken twig and risked a quick look. Cheryl stood on the edge of the clearing. Doyle shouted her name, and she stepped a few feet forward, then froze. Doyle saw the shock on her face as she took the scene in.

Doyle held his stance, the gun in a firm grip. “She’ll testify,” he said to Bodie, hoping the words would get through. “You don’t have to do this.” He yelled at Cheryl, not taking his eyes off his partner. “Tell him you’ll speak in court! *Tell* him!”

She hesitated. Then she spoke clearly and boldly. “Yes, I will—I will testify!”

Doyle waited, every second agonizing, waiting for Bodie to let loose the death grip. But Bodie just gave a gentle shake of his head and, his voice edged with weariness, said, “They’re only empty words, that’s all.” He stared up at Doyle, the predatory gleam in his eyes fading, leaving only a strange sadness. “Told you before,” he went on quietly, “actions speak louder than words.”

Doyle gazed at the gun in his own hands. A sense of desolation slowly settled into the core of his being. Bodie was right. This was his whole life, right here, right now, this choice. Doyle held the gun steady, knowing he was capable of shooting Bodie. Somehow, he also knew that Bodie would let go. And he knew that it wouldn’t matter what Bodie did. Billy was going to die, and Doyle knew it, as surely as he knew what he was. What they all were.

He made the token statement one more time, detached, suddenly calm. “*Let him go.*”

Bodie’s expression went blank again. “He’s a vicious animal, Doyle.” His voice was as empty as his face. “What do you do with vicious animals?” Then he released his grip.

Billy hurtled upwards with surprising speed, knocking them both off-balance. Doyle stumbled back as Billy snatched up the knife and lunged towards him. Doyle dropped to one knee and fired. The bullet smashed into Billy’s chest. He fell, rolling onto his side, gasping. Doyle rocked back slightly, releasing the muscle tension from firing. He watched Billy’s twitching form, listening to his gurgling chest.

It didn’t take long. The ragged noise in Billy’s throat changed to a ratchety sound, and then he went still, eyes open, unblinking, a trickle of spittle down his chin.

Doyle heard one of Billy’s men moan, and saw him stirring. Doyle tensed, on guard again, and then Bodie was at his side, tugging at him, pulling him to his feet. “Come on—we have to get out of here.”

Doyle carefully replaced his gun in his holster. “Where’s Cheryl?”

“She took off. Let’s just go—she’ll be all right.”

Doyle nodded, still numb. He allowed Bodie to half-lead, half-drag him out of the woods.

THREE days later, on the first day off since the shooting, Doyle woke to a ringing phone. He picked it up—Bodie. He replaced the receiver without saying a word. The phone rang again. Doyle ignored it.

He went out for a walk in the late morning, down to a nearby park. He strolled across the wide expanse of well-trimmed lawn, the grass slowly turning brown, the gold-red leaves drifting from sparse trees. The leaves carpeted the paths and crunched beneath his boots.

Doyle found a bench beneath a tree, brushed the twigs and leaves from its surface, and sat down. He closed his eyes, wishing the cool breeze that touched his face was colder, harsher. It would give him something to focus on, something other than the ache in his heart.

So many times he’d run the scene in the woods through his mind, played it over and over—no matter how he tried to change it, it always came out the same.

They had reported the ‘incident’, and the local police, who were more than familiar with King Billy’s gang, had not been displeased. A simple case of self-defense against a vicious attack—perfectly justifiable. Even Cowley hadn’t given it more than a perfunctory admonition to “stay away from trouble” on their time off. He had given King Billy only a few seconds thought; he had more important concerns.

Doyle sighed. He opened his eyes to watch the other people who had chosen this crisp fall day for a walk. A young couple, arm in arm, ambled along, oblivious to their surroundings. Another couple with two children had set a blanket under one of

the larger trees; the children were busy collecting leaves. An old man and his equally aged terrier meandered from bush to bush. Ordinary people leading ordinary lives. For the first time in his life, Doyle looked not at them, but straight through them. For the first time in his life, they were a mystery to him.

So many times he kept running the scene through his mind... If he had shot Bodie...but he hadn't. If he had, what would he have now? Doyle looked around. There was nothing there that he could make his own.

"Nice, isn't it?"

Unsurprised, Doyle looked up at the smooth, self-possessed face of his friend and partner. He'd been expecting Bodie to show up sooner or later, and here he was, sliding onto the bench beside him. "What's nice?" Doyle asked flatly.

Bodie nodded towards the people in the park. "Them. All the comfortable little families out for their Saturday stroll. Very *nice*." He said it as if it were the most obscene word he knew. "Yeah, it's all quite cosy. Until someone like us comes along and starts rooting around in the garbage." He turned to Doyle and smiled. "Come here a lot, do you?"

"Shut up."

Bodie shook his head. "No, I don't think so. We're going to talk, Ray." He favored Doyle with a long, attentive look. "Aren't we?"

Doyle returned the look. He saw a man he trusted with his life; he saw the one person in his life he couldn't face the world without. He shivered. "Yeah," he replied, "let's talk. Let's talk about King Billy. You knew exactly what he'd do, didn't you?"

"You mean, what he would do if I let him go?" Bodie sat back, relaxed, draping an arm along the back of the bench.

Doyle glanced at him, then looked away. "That's right."

"Well, I did warn you he was mad."

"I suppose you did." Doyle rubbed his hand over his eyes. He found it hard to concentrate. Days of thinking in circles hadn't gotten him anywhere. What he felt right now was a vague sense that something had been lost. And he needed to understand what remained.

He felt Bodie's hand touch his cheek, felt him gently brush the curls against his neck. Doyle turned back, and found a passion in Bodie's eyes

that he had seen before. This time he felt no urge to walk away. Yet something was missing, something was still unsettled.

"Wouldn't mind a drink." Bodie's voice was soft and low. "How 'bout going back to your flat?"

Doyle shook his head. "No." He glanced up as a flurry of leaves blew off the tree above them, shorn by a sudden gust. His mind flashed again to a scene of woods and trees and darkness.

"Ray?" Bodie rested his hand on Doyle's shoulder. "What do you want?"

Doyle took one more look at the perfectly normal park around him. He abruptly stood. "There's somewhere I have to go." He reached over to grab Bodie's arm, hauling him up. "And you're coming with me."

DEAD leaves crackled beneath his feet.

Why here? Bodie had asked him when Doyle pulled the car to a stop beside the race track. Doyle had gotten out and calmly walked towards the woods. *Why here?* Doyle hadn't answered.

Sunlight touched his face. He paused, then turned and moved off again, finding his way by intuition. Bodie was right behind him, a quiet shadow. Doyle wove between the trees, light changing to cool darkness within their concealing shelter. He didn't look back.

Why had he come here...he knew and he didn't know. Rational thought had fled, and all he felt was a compulsion that had drawn him here, unresisting. A hunger. He didn't want to think anymore, not in this place, not now. Here, he felt removed, in neither the clean park nor the dirty streets; in this strange sanctuary there was nothing to distract him from what he was. Doyle listened to the heartbeat of the wilderness. He listened to the pulse of the killer echo in his veins.

Bodie was near. A presence...part and counterpart. One who stood strong and separate, yet one who stood solidly at the center of Doyle's being. He sensed the danger of touching Bodie's soul—feared it, and craved it. Bodie's words came back to him...*I need you to want me...* They were only words.

Doyle broke through the underbrush, broke free of the sheltering trees into the clearing, where afternoon sunshine shimmered down. He walked slowly around the open, leaf-strewn space, remembering. There—where he'd knocked down his

opponent. There—where Bodie had hit him. And there he had held the gun in his well-trained hands. *What have they made of me...* he shook his head. *What I have made of myself.* Would he ever feel the hurt of someone's death again... would this numbing ache inside remain forever... Doyle kicked at the dry leaves, at the spot where Billy had died. There was no sign that anything had ever happened here.

He looked up to meet Bodie's puzzled gaze. "What do you want here, Ray?" The soft voice was a caress. Bodie stepped closer, so very near, and touched Doyle's face, fingertips brushing his cheek, his lips. The hunger in Doyle's heart burned; it had a name. *Desire.*

"Nothing," Doyle replied, a sudden, reckless delirium seizing him. "I don't want, Bodie." He grasped the hand that caressed him, gripping it, pulling Bodie to him. "I need." He drove his mouth against Bodie's, pushing inside, commanding response. As he invaded Bodie's mouth, tongue against tongue, he felt his fingers digging into Bodie's wrist. Bodie wrenched away and stared at him. Doyle saw the uncertainty flicker across his face, and then it was gone, replaced by longing.

"Don't say anything," Doyle whispered fiercely. "Do you hear me? Not one word."

Bodie nodded.

Doyle slipped his jacket off, then carefully began unbuttoning his own shirt, eyes never leaving Bodie's face. Bodie shrugged out of his own coat, unfastened his shirt, and pulled it free. As Doyle let his shirt drop, the cool air hit his chest and back. He worked his shoes off, quickly undid his belt and zip, struggled out of jeans, pants, and socks, knowing Bodie was doing the same.

He straightened and lifted a hand to trace a line across Bodie's lips, then drew it along his throat. Spreading his fingers, he moved his palm along Bodie's smooth chest, holding it still over his heart. Heartbeat of a killer; heartbeat of a lover. Doyle closed his eyes, moaning softly. *Make it your own...* a phantom voice, impelling him, urging him on. He moved his hand lower, stroking Bodie's abdomen. Bodie groaned, and Doyle broke his gaze as Bodie pulled him into an embrace, hands clutching at him as Bodie kissed him fiercely. Doyle felt strength meeting strength, hardness meeting hardness. He pushed Bodie downward; together they tumbled to the ground. They rolled across the unyielding earth, leaves and twigs scratching their skin. They ended side by side, panting, entwined.

Doyle rubbed his hips and thighs against Bodie's, pushing their erections together. He licked at Bodie's throat, lips sucking. His tongue found drops of sweat, he tasted the saltiness. He massaged Bodie's chest and abdomen, taut and smooth, wanting the power there, wanting to take and to give. He felt Bodie's legs against his, and ran his foot along the strong calves. More—he needed more...

Bodie thrust against him in a frenzied rhythm, eyes tightly shut, head thrown back. Doyle ran his hands over Bodie's back and then down his thighs, shoving between them to meet the tight, heavy sac, to wrap around the straining cock, touching Bodie, Bodie touching him—hands, mouths, flesh—not one, not two, but something beyond identity, part and counterpart, obliteration and culmination, separate and whole. In a blinding haze, Doyle came, his mind and body shattering into climax. He cried out, his body jerking, the warm fluid spurting against Bodie's body. Doyle sank against Bodie as Bodie continued to rub hard against him, hearing Bodie's ragged cries and shuddering breaths, feeling him come moments later, the semen spilling over his abdomen. The shaking went on for a long time, and then the world was still.

Gradually Doyle's senses stopped reeling, and he slowly returned to reality. He disentangled himself and sat, drawing up his knees, clasping his arms around them. He rested his head on his arms, his back to his partner. He listened to Bodie's even, slowing breaths.

At last, releasing the grip on his knees, he turned to see Bodie propped up on an elbow, studying him. What was in Bodie's eyes wasn't contentment. Doyle looked at him, a hand on the ground to brace himself. Neither of them smiled.

"It's not love, is it," Bodie said, and it wasn't a question.

Doyle's hand twitched. "Not sure what the word means anymore."

Bodie sat up, shifting closer. He gently brushed the leaves and twigs off Doyle's back.

Doyle stared out across the clearing to the encircling trees. "I just know I need you."

"Yeah." Bodie rested his hand on Doyle's thigh. "There's always that."

Doyle turned to look at him, meeting intense, sensual eyes. "Not just sex, Bodie." There wasn't a word for what they had. He only knew that Bodie was the one person he could make love to without

feeling disconnected.

“No,” Bodie replied. He wrapped his arms around Doyle’s waist, resting his chin on Doyle’s shoulder. “Stay with me.”

Doyle sighed. “Already made that choice.” He felt Bodie hug him more tightly, taking the autumn chill away. Doyle studied the spot where they had just made love; it seemed barely disturbed. In spite of the warm embrace, Doyle shivered.

“You want to go home?” Bodie asked.

Doyle nodded. They got to their feet, retrieved their clothing, and dressed. They found their way

out of the woods and headed back to the car. They climbed in, but before Doyle could start the engine, Bodie reached over to clasp Doyle’s arm. “Ray—”

Tired, Doyle muttered, “What?” He met Bodie’s calm gaze.

“It won’t change me,” Bodie said, voice clear and strong.

Doyle gave him an accepting smile. “I know.” He shook his arm free, and turned the key in the ignition. The car roared to life. He pulled away, driving fast, quickly leaving the woods behind him.

The long trip back to town was spent in silence.