Thrusting the thought away, Bodie tightened his grip on Doyle, dropping his head to let his cheek brush the wet curls.

As if they were a band of assassins lying in wait, his emotions ambushed him, their attack signalled by that fleeting touch: fierce protectiveness, an impossible tenderness twisting his stomach, pity wringing his heart, fury at anything that could dare hurt Doyle... and sexual desire, fountaining through him, boiling up in his veins.

It caught him totally unprepared, shocking him into a kind of mental numbness, even as his arms pulled Ray even closer. The contact was intoxicating, setting his heart pounding and blood burning into his groin, raising a full erection before he understood what was happening.

Desperately, he fought the dangerous urge to turn Ray's face upwards and kiss him. He wanted... he needed...

Notes

This work is a sort of sequel to 'Tiger by the Tail'. However, it starts with an alternative ending to that story. If you need detail, it starts after the words 'Doyle did not answer' in the last scene of 'Tiger by the Tail'.

It was written in the early 1980s and contains attitudes and vocabulary from the UK in that period - some of these may be considered offensive now. Do not assume that these were ever the author's attitudes.

This has been produced from a bad text scan and there may still be errors. The author would...
appreciate anyone telling her about them. There has been a small amount of re-writing which should be almost unnoticeable, even to those in possession of the original duplicated zine.

Please note the original publication date and forgive the thing its sins.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Lowering Doyle onto the broken stone steps, Bodie slid down beside him, trying to support the drooping body and peel off his own camouflage jacket at the same time. Somehow, he accomplished both tasks, and wrapped the jacket around his partner's shoulders, feeling him shiver beneath his hands. A cocktail of blood and sweat and rain was streaking the white face in tiger-striped stripes of pink and red as, eyes closed, he leaned against Bodie, slumping closer as arms automatically closed about him, circling him in warmth.

Outside the shelter of the church porch, the rain had nearly stopped. A shaft of sunlight broke through the cloud and touched the ruined tower, the broken cross standing black against brightness. Around them, the world was desolate. They might have been the only people on the planet.

Bodie carefully shifted position, settling Doyle more comfortably, while sharing more of his own body heat. He could feel Doyle's breathing steadying and deepening, and the trembling was beginning to still.

Life.

Oh Christ, but it was still almost impossible to believe, that Krivas could have fired at point blank range and not killed...

Thrusting the thought away, Bodie tightened his grip on Doyle, dropping his head to let his cheek brush the wet curls.

As if they were a band of assassins lying in wait, his emotions ambushed him, their attack signalled by that fleeting touch: fierce protectiveness, an impossible tenderness twisting his stomach, pity wringing his heart, fury at anything that could dare hurt Doyle... and sexual desire, fountaining through him, boiling up in his veins.

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Desperately, he fought the dangerous urge to turn Ray's face upwards and kiss him. He wanted... he needed...

No. This wasn't real. His body could not be acting this way. He cared for Ray, yes, perhaps even loved him, but as a friend... not... not...

The touch of every hair was defined against his skin, every curve of muscle and bone against his body, his hands, and he knew, deliriously, that he was losing the battle against his own emotions.

What would happen if he...?
"Bodie!"

The voice was a cutting wind, slapping him into reality.

Bodie raised his head to see Cowley and Elliott splashing towards him, and felt grateful for the restoration of near normality, though a deeper part of him twisted in disappointment and anger.

"How is he?" Cowley asked, kneeling on the wet stone beside them.


"The ambulance will be here in a minute." Even as Cowley spoke, sirens provided a counterpointing crescendo.

Bodie started to lift Doyle's limp body, biting back an instinctive protest as Cowley and Elliott moved to help, not wanting anyone else to touch Doyle. He could not reject Cowley's support, but his glare stopped the Chief Superintendent dead.

Doyle stirred briefly, snuggling against Bodie's shoulder.

Thank God he was only semi-conscious, unable to comprehend what was happening to him... what had happened. He wouldn't remember... anything. At least Bodie hoped so.

The ambulance had pulled up as close to the church as possible. As they loaded Doyle into it, Cowley said, "You can ride with him to the hospital, if—"

"No." The brusqueness of the reply startled Cowley, but Bodie was already out of the vehicle and striding towards the gates before he could respond. The desertion wasn't going to help placate Cowley for his earlier disobedience, but he had to get away from Doyle, to try and reason away these new and terrifying feelings.

I'm not a bloody poufter.

No. Don't even think about it.

"Bodie!" The high voice caught him by surprise. He turned to find Jan and Mick standing by the gates, both wearing expressions of anxiety overlaid by a much stronger excitement.

"Is Ray really okay?" Mick demanded.

"Did Krivas shoot 'im?"

"Did you shoot Krivas?"

"Is he really dead?"

"Can we see?"

"Hold it!" Bodie finally managed to interrupt and put a temporary halt to the torrent of questions. He looked sternly at the two children. "What are you two doing here? You should be back with your parents by now."

"Aw, Bodie, you don't really mean that."

"You bet I do. Come on, kids, out of here."
"You're mean," Mick protested, as Bodie caught hold of one arm of each child and propelled them out of the gates and into the Ramsden Road.

"Right," he replied, favouring them with his best sergeant's glower. "You wouldn't believe how mean I can be." He was all too aware that, behind him, Elliott would be supervising the removal of Krivas's body, and he had no intention of letting these young ghouls witness that.

"What about Ray?" Jan asked again.

Bodie relented a little. "Ray's fine. Just a little bullet crease, like in the movies. We sent him to the hospital to have him checked out."

"Really? You're not kiddin' us?"

"People do, just 'cos they think we're too young."

"We don' need to be protected."

"Tha's right."

"If Ray's gonner die, we—"

"Ray's not going to die!" Bodie heard the anger in his own voice and caught his breath. Steady.

"Look, Jan, if Ray was badly hurt I wouldn't be here now, would I? I'd be with him at the hospital, wouldn't I? Like you would be if Mick was hurt."

Jan looked somewhat disappointed. "Guess you're right." She brightened. "Krivas's dead, though, innee?"

"Yeh."

"Did y'shoot 'im?"

"No, Ray did," Bodie admitted, capitulating, because there was no other way of stopping the incessant questioning.

"Good. Wish I coulda seen it," Mick said wistfully.

"No you don't." Bodie's voice was sharp. "It's not like on the telly, Mick. Sometimes it has to be done but that doesn't make it any less revolting. You wouldn't like it."

"How d'you know that?"

"Well, I don't."

Jan put her head on one side, for all the world like a curly-haired sparrow, and looked at him searchingly. "You don't?"

"No."

"Suppose you don' at that. Sorry, Bodie. We got Ray into trouble an' I guess you don't like us much more than the cops do." She looked so woebegone that Bodie couldn't stop himself smiling at her.
"I like you both very much, Jan, but I think you'd better do a lot more growing up before you take on someone like Krivas again."

"Grown-ups alus says that," Mick commented.

"An – just sometimes – we're right," Bodie told him. "Com'on, Mick, let's go and find your Mum."

Mick pulled a face.

"See? If you can't face your Mum, you're hardly ready for criminal masterminds."

"You," said Mick gloomily, "don't know me Mum."

Twenty minutes later, Bodie found himself, mentally at least, conceding Mick's point. Mrs Barr reminded him of the formidable, be-pinafored, Liverpool matrons who had plagued his childhood, all rolled into one pink-curlered, powerful package. He almost expected to hear shrill complaints about "that there William Bodie."

In consequence, he smeared on the charm, but it ran off Mick's mum as if she was waxed. She grabbed Mick's hand, belted him one round the ears, glared at Bodie while growling perfunctory thanks, and stomped off, Mick in tow.

Her husband, a little man with Mick's fair mop and a big grin, took Bodie's hand in a grip of iron, said, "Thanks, mate. I'd better go rescue the kid, this time," and departed, leaving Bodie to quirk his eyebrows at Jan's Mum, who was hugging her daughter, both of them convulsed with laughter at his discomfiture.

"Frank'll manage Joyce," she told him, still giggling; "but he's the only one who can."

Bodie returned her grin, looking about as old as Jan and twice as mischievous. "For a minute there I thought she was going to belt me one."

"Wouldja've belted 'er back, Bodie?" Jan demanded hopefully.

"I never belt ladies." Bodie frowned heavily at her. "Though I'm getting awfully tempted to belt one of them."

Jan giggled.

"You have my permission at any time," said her mother. "After a while, my hand gets tired."

"Aw, Mum..."

"You have my eternal sympathy, Mrs Corrigan," Bodie told her.

"Aw, Bodie..."

"Did she cause you a lot of trouble?" Mrs Corrigan asked, with some concern.

Bodie pretended to consider the question, then winked at Jan. "I think I was in the one situation where she was more likely to be a help than a hindrance. As a matter of fact, she and Mick were very sensible and very brave."

Jan fell into an uncharacteristic silence. Bodie was still, obviously, unaware that she and Mick had
got Ray beaten up by Krivas, and she certainly wasn't going to be the one to tell him. Her
behaviour immediately aroused her mother's suspicions: she had expected the adventure to go to
her daughter's head. She determined to extract the whole story as soon as humanly possible, but, for
now, she was simply happy to have her scapegrace daughter back in one piece, and immensely
grateful to the man who had rescued her.

"I can't thank you enough," she said quietly, "for Mick as well as Jan. They're awful children, I
know, but—"

"They'll grow out of being awful."

"But how long will it take?"

They both laughed.

Jan looked miffed.

"D'you want me to arrange for a car to take you home?" Bodie asked.

"No, thank you. We live only five minutes walk away."

"Mum!"

"I'll drive you back myself, if you like. It really is no trouble."

"You're very kind but, no, thank you. I'm really very grateful to you for all you've done, Mr Bodie."

She looked meaningfully at her daughter.

"Won't we ever see you again?" Jan wailed, ignoring the silent instruction.

Bodie knelt and put his arm around her thin shoulders. "Perhaps. You never know your luck, love.
Just don't go getting kidnapped by strange men, again, hear?"

"You'll tell Ray we're sorry he got hurt?"

"I'll tell him." All the emotions that Bodie had, with some success, tried to push to the back of his
mind came surging forward again, and a very small portion of his attention remained with Jan as he
automatically acknowledged her goodbyes and returned her fierce hug.

When Cowley found him, he was apparently still watching the woman and child make their way
down the road though, in fact, he had forgotten their existence.

"That child is going to be terrifying in 15 years time," the CI5 Controller remarked. "Whoever is
running CI5 then has my sympathy... Bodie?" Then, he added, more sharply, "Bodie!"

Bodie jumped. "Uh? Oh, sorry, sir. What did you say?"

"It wasn't important. Your report, however, is. You can drive me back to Whitehall and brief me as
we go."

"Yes, sir," Bodie agreed meekly, causing Cowley to look at him in much the same way as Jan's
mother had looked at her daughter.
The trip back to the city confirmed Cowley's suspicion that something was wrong, though it did not give him any indication of what that something might be. Normally, Bodie's verbal reports, while crisp and accurate, were punctuated by outrageous comments, and by his very personal black wit. This time, the agent simply recited facts, his thoughts quite obviously elsewhere.

Knowing Bodie as well as he did, Cowley decided to ignore the matter and to postpone the reprimand the other man so richly deserved. Bodie was perfectly capable of sorting out any minor personal problems, given time, as he had sorted out the situation at St Catherine's. Cowley was secretly most pleased by the way in which he had handled that, though it was the last thing he was going to tell him.

"Aye, well, Bodie, it's a messy business," he said at last. "The fact that you fired the shot that killed Krivas needn't go in your written report, by the way."

"No, sir." Bodie kept his eyes on the road as he swung the car expertly around a hairpin bend.

"I understand your motives, but I wouldn't like to have to explain a mercy killing to the popular press."

"Yes, sir."

"Turn right at the next junction. We'll call at the hospital and check up on Doyle."

Bodie felt his stomach contract. Not trusting his voice to answer, he turned the car as directed, switching to a mental autopilot so he could concentrate on more important questions.

Had it really happened? he asked himself for the fifteenth time. Had he really sat with Ray Doyle in his arms and lusted after him like a schoolboy getting his first glimpse of Bo Derek?

Well, there was only one way to find out. After all, it might simply have been the effect of an adrenalin high, that surge of sexual feelings that so often followed moments of danger, or even just imagination. He'd been so relieved that Ray was still alive that he might have even meant it, just for a moment...

Well, he'd know soon enough.

Yeh, Cowley was right. They'd go to the hospital, see Ray, and... and he'd prove to himself that it had been nothing more that a momentary aberration.

But apprehension tightened the grip of his hands on the wheel until his nails cut into the soft pads of muscle at the bases of his thumbs. He dared not even glance at Cowley. No-one must know what had happened, must ever even suspect...

The Ward Sister was a pretty Asian girl, who would normally have attracted Bodie's immediate attention – and appreciation – but he was far too blinkered by his own worries to notice her as anything but an obstacle between himself and Doyle, and the possible resolution of his confusion. Now he had reached the hospital he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible, prove that it hadn't meant anything, and forget it had ever happened...

"There's no fracture, and the concussion is only slight, but we're keeping him in for observation," the Sister was explaining to Cowley. "It's simply a precaution; Dr. Wainwright doesn't like to take chances with head injuries."
"Aye, and he's right," said Cowley. "You understand that CI5 must be informed immediately if there is any change in his condition?"

"Of course, Mr Cowley."

"May we see him?" Bodie interrupted.

The Sister appeared to see him for the first time. "Are you a relative?"

"No, but—"

"Then I can't—"

"Listen, love, Ray hasn't got any relatives that he'd want to see."

"Mr Doyle is asleep at the moment. Perhaps tomorrow."

I can't wait that long, Bodie protested silently. I have to know now.

"Just a few minutes, love," he pleaded, trying to stop his panic from showing. "I won't wake him up, honest."

Cowley spoke quietly: "Sister, please give him a few moments. I'll explain."

Bodie shot him a look in which surprise and gratitude were mingled.

"Two minutes," the Sister conceded, "but you're not to wake him."

"Thanks." Bodie rewarded her with his most blinding smile, and slipped into Doyle's private ward, closing the door softly behind him. He crossed to the bed, but found himself extremely reluctant to look down at its occupant.

Moment of truth, he thought, and gathered his courage.

Doyle was curled, child-like, at the head of the bed, the fingers on one hand twisted in the sheet, face half-hidden by the pillow and the tumbled mass of curls.

His vulnerability was a detonator, touching off an explosion of primitive emotions within Bodie, shattering the restraints fear and reason had placed upon them, restraints that he had subconsciously known would not hold.

Instinct swept him to Doyle's side, urging him to touch, to hold, to possess...

Christ Almighty!

He halted, with his fingers a fraction of an inch from Doyle's face, and his insides melting, tears tingling in his eyes.

Get out of here, you bloody fool!

He wrenched himself around and charged for the door, almost bowling over the nurse who was just arriving to eject him. During the apologies that followed, Bodie managed to cover his confusion, but his heart was still pounding as he rejoined Cowley, and the ache in his groin would not go away.

He had to clear his throat three times before his voice came out normally. "HQ now, sir?"
"You can drop me there. The Home Secretary will be wanting a report. After that, you can go home, Bodie. You can clear up the paperwork in the morning. I want to see you in my office at 11. We'll have our little discussion then."

"What? Oh, yes, sir."

Cowley gave him another penetrating stare, but decided to let everything ride until morning. Whatever Bodie's present preoccupation, it would not really become his business unless it started interfering with his efficiency. For the moment, he half-regretted the loss of the short-lived psychological unit foisted on him during a security scare, but he had never trusted its results. He did not believe that you could quantify human reactions like ingredients in a cake, and he had sacrificed the unit during the first available economy drive. The loss was not noticeable.

Bodie cradled the glass of Scotch in his hand, staring unseeingly into the umber liquid. The normality and security of his own home had not helped to still the turmoil inside him, nor, he knew, would the whisky, but it might help him sleep.

And everything will look different in the morning, he told himself, with heavy irony. Yeh, just like it did at the hospital.

The thought brought back the memory of how Ray had looked, and re-awakened desire.

Hell.

Bodie took another swig of his whisky.

Okay, he instructed himself. Face it. I want Ray – want him sexually – and there's no future in denying it. Use the words: homosexual, queen, poufter, queer. All too easy to be tolerant when it doesn't concern you, but what do you do when you have to face the need in yourself?

I've never felt this way before – about anyone. No woman – or man, come to that – has ever raised quite this depth of... desire.

God, but he's beautiful...

The phone rang, interrupting this unprofitable train of thought. He reached for it thankfully. "Bodie."

"Bodie, are you all right?" The voice was Karen's.

"Yeah. Sure. I'm fine. Look, Karen, I'm sorry I had to abandon you like that, but—"

"I know. It was on the News. It's all right, Bodie. I was mad at first, I admit it, but it's your job and it's part of you and I accept that. Those two kids you saved are more important than a ruined afternoon, darling, I know that. I just wanted to be sure you were all right."

All right. All right... The words mocked Bodie. Yeh, he was all right...

"I wasn't hurt," he said.

"Someone was. The TV said so."

"Yeh. Ray, my partner... but it's not serious."
Not serious. Jesus! If this isn't serious then I'd like to know what is!

"I'm sorry, but I can't help being glad it wasn't you. Have you eaten?"

"No, I—"

"I thought not. I'll be there in half an hour. You need someone to look after you."

Yeh, Bodie thought. Come over here, Karen. Drive Ray out of my head, out of my blood... He started to say, "That's a great idea," but stopped himself before the words were uttered.

Yeh, a great idea. For me. Damn it, I like Karen. I can't... use her... like that. She deserves better.

"Bodie?"

"Karen, look, leave it for tonight, huh? I... I won't be very good company."

"I don't expect you to be," the gentle voice said. Only a few hours ago, its tones and the promise in them had set his blood racing. Now, they could have been those of a complete stranger, and an unattractive one at that. "I think you need someone. I want it to be me."

I know who I need. Oh, shit.

"Leave it, Karen. Please. I... I need my own company for a while. There... there are some things I have to sort out."

"Bodie, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Good-bye, Karen. I'll call you." He put the phone down on her protests.

Terrific. Did you have to hurt her like that? Bodie asked himself.

He slammed his whisky glass down on the table, then strode to the window, staring out into the late-evening twilight.

24 hours ago it was Karen you wanted, he reminded himself. She's still the same; beautiful, gentle, spirited and generous – and she cares for you. What more could you want?

The answer was immediate: Ray Doyle.

Why? What was so different now? When had it changed, and how had his long-time trust and affection metamorphosed into this desperate sexual need?

While those questions required an answer for his own peace of mind, there remained a far more urgent one.

What the hell am I going to do about it?

Well, the only answers were in his own head. There was no-one to turn to, no-one to whom he could confide this particular secret.

"Hell," he said aloud. "I need some air."

He couldn't run away from his problems, no matter how fast or far he went, but movement was suddenly imperative. Ignoring the self-mockery coiling inside him, he snatched up his jacket and...
car keys, then plunged out of the flat as if its walls were collapsing about him in the same way that his certainties had done only a few hours ago.

Dawn found him standing gazing out over a barely-rippling sea. He had no notion where he was. Once behind the wheel of his Capri he had simply started the engine and started to drive, choosing his route at random while his mind churned over the facts of his predicament. Only the sea had stopped him.

Leaving the car parked on the edge of the dunes, he had paced the beach in both moonlight and pre-dawn grey until finally, exhausted but clear-headed, he saw the choice ahead of him, and what his decision had to be.

He was in love with Ray. That was a fact he could acknowledge now, a love grown out of their long dependence, probably smouldering for years below his conscious mind, uncovered in a single moment by the horror of death, and fanned into a bonfire by touch, by Ray's need of his help, protection. He could not smother it now. The genie was not going to return to the bottle at his command, however much he might want it to do so.

Well, he could not continue with their former relationship. That had been made clear to him at the hospital. Sooner or later he would lose control... probably sooner. He had come close to doing so twice already today... no, yesterday.

For a little while he had spun himself a fantasy of telling Ray the truth, and finding a need to match his own, but realism intruded. Ray, he knew, would be horrified, disgusted and angry, until, probably, he started to feel guilty. Not that Bodie could see any way in which Ray might be considered to blame, but, no doubt, his partner would find one. Then... God, he'd rather face Ray's disgust and anger than forced tolerance, wariness, and pity, which was the best he could hope for.

No, Ray must never know.

So, if he couldn't continue to work with Ray on the old terms, and as he couldn't change those terms, his only alternative was to cease working with Ray.

Which meant persuading Cowley to break up his most successful team – without telling him the real reason. It wasn't going to be easy or pleasant, but the only alternative was to leave CI5, and he wasn't going to do that unless he was forced into it. His work, after all, was just about all he had left.

Ripples swished wet sand. The tide was turning, the red-gilt wave humps sighing into their small deaths on the shore.

A new day: time for decision.

I have to see Cowley this morning. I'll do it then.

Bodie turned his back on the sun and plodded back along the shore, shoulders hunched against internal pain, head down. Behind him, the dying waves ate his footprints. Ahead, there was only grey mist, and a bleak and lonely world.

"...I will not be threatened, Bodie. Any value you have to CI5 depends on your ability to follow orders – is that clear?" Cowley paused, the silence demanding an answer from the man who stood
before his desk.

Bodie, lost in a daze of tiredness and apprehension, had been letting Cowley's lecture flow over him without bothering to pick out more than one word in twenty, so the question took him by surprise. His first recognition of the fact that it had been asked at all was when he noticed that the tirade had ceased.

Hurriedly, he looked at his chief, to be met by a chill blue stare.

"Bodie, if I can take the time and trouble to instruct you in the error of your ways, the least you can do is take the trouble to listen."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't 'Yes, sir' me in that tone. I understand that you believe that you are more capable of making decisions than I am, but the Home Secretary does not share your opinion—and neither do I. You have certain abilities that are useful to me, Bodie, but they are not essential. You are also impetuous, pig-headed and insubordinate. Those are not valuable qualities. At times, you become a liability—to me, to CI5, and to yourself. Do you have any suggestions as to what I might do about it?"

It was the opening for which Bodie had been waiting, but now his throat was tight, vocal chords almost too taut to vibrate. The words came out in a strangled gabble, just as Cowley, having given up waiting for an answer, opened his mouth to continue his harangue. "Split up me and Doyle."

It hadn't been the way that he'd meant to say it, but it did get Cowley's attention. In fact, it robbed him of all ability to reply as Bodie rushed on into the silence.

"Re-team us, sir. That's a formal request. If you don't things'll only get worse."

Though Cowley had now recovered his composure, he still looked somewhat bemused. "Now let us get this straight, Bodie. Do I understand you to mean that you're blaming Doyle for your recent behaviour."

"No! Yes. I mean, none of this is his fault—but I can't—I mean—"

"Bodie! Pull yourself together and explain what, exactly, you do mean, because right now you are making no sense at all. And sit down before you fall down, man."

The only part of the order that was easy to obey was the one Bodie followed, collapsing into the nearest chair, and scrubbing at his face with his hands. You almost blew it!

He took a series of deep breaths, deliberately calming himself. It was all proving far harder than he had anticipated. Still, nothing had been lost: he had Cowley's attention and there was nothing to stop him giving his prepared speech. If, of course, he could remember it.

Dropping his hands and clasping them in his lap, he raised his eyes to meet Cowley's. The Chief had moved to sit on the edge of his desk, only a foot or so away, and was regarding him with quiet concern.

He said, "Sorry, sir. What I'm trying to say is, while I'm still teamed with Doyle, there's a good chance that what happened yesterday will happen again. I behaved the way I did because I was worried about him—not about the kids, or what Krivas would do, or the lives of innocent
bystanders, or—"

"I'm well aware of that, Bodie. It is not, after all, as if it's the first time it has happened, but I do think that you're exaggerating a little. I expect you to worry about Doyle – you would be a poor partner if you did not."

"Perhaps, but there are limits to how much I can allow myself – how much you can allow me – to worry about him. We're your longest serving team, sir, and we've grown too close over the years. I can't speak for Ray, but yesterday taught me that I'm approaching the point where, if I'm asked to chose between his life and that of some innocent member of the public, I might not make the right choice." He tried a smile that did not quite come off. "Leave us teamed and... well, sooner or later, I'm going to be 'impetuous, pig-headed and insubordinate' again. I won't be able to stop myself. I'll be less of a 'liability' working with someone else who isn't such a close friend. So my suggestion is that you team me with someone other than Doyle. It's the best I can offer."

Cowley looked at him for almost a minute without saying a word, then reached for the intercom button. "Betty, can we have some coffee in here, please?"

"At once, sir."

Letting the intercom button rise again, he turned back to his agent. "This is all very problematical, Bodie. You may do this, you say, unless I follow your 'advice'. Theory. What is fact is the success of your partnership with Doyle. Breaking that team must not be a spur of the moment decision."

"I've given it a lot of thought, sir."

"Since all this came to you in a blinding revelation when you went up against Krivas, less than 24 hours ago?"

Bodie said nothing, but his mouth was pursed and his jaw thrust forward in an unmistakable expression.

"So, you've been awake all night worrying about it – which is why you look like something a couple of breaths away from a shroud. You think you've looked at the problem from every angle, but I—" Cowley broke off as Betty entered with the promised coffee, which she placed neatly on the desk. She was too well trained a secretary to make any comment, but the look she bestowed on Bodie was very old fashioned indeed. He could hear the words, "Hung-over again?" as if she had spoken them aloud.

Cowley was, perhaps, aware of the unexpressed opinion, for he waited until she had gone before producing a bottle of Scotch and adding a healthy swig of one to the cups.

Bodie was startled into comment. "That's a waste."

Cowley put the cup into his hands. "You need it. Drink it, be quiet, and listen to me."

This time, Bodie's smile was genuine. "Yes, sir."

"I told you to be quiet." Cowley pulled a chair across the rug so that he could seat himself close to the other man, with their eyes on a level and no barriers between them. When he spoke, his tone had changed. "Don't over react, lad. Yesterday's situation wasn't normal and it's going to be a long time, if ever, before you have to deal with something as emotionally charged. You were facing a man you hated and feared, a man who had already killed your fellow agents. You were worried about your partner, and the children, and you were blaming yourself for not being there when you were needed. When you did manage to rescue Doyle and the children, and thought you'd seen them
safe, it was only to see Doyle shot before your eyes. Finally, you had to kill a man in cold blood. It is not surprising that you were shaken by the experience, and you haven't given yourself a chance to recover.

"All right, you have lessons to learn from what happened yesterday – for instance, I very much doubt that you will go out of touch again – but the children are safe, Doyle is alive and Krivas is dead. Those are the consequences of your actions, Bodie. Do you dispute that this is the very best we could have hoped for?"

"No, sir. It's not what happened that worries me: it's what might happen."

"Yet this is not the first time you've disobeyed my orders for Doyle's sake. You didn't react in this way after the Ojuka business—"

"There was no problem then. I didn't have to choose between Ray's life and the Colonel's... hell, I didn't even think about it. I did what I thought needed to rescue both of them, but if I had been forced to choose, or to choose between saving Doyle and saving Jan and Mick, I—"

"You would have made the correct choice." Then, as Bodie shook his head, Cowley went on, "I believe that, Bodie. I believe it because I know you. Will you accept my judgement on that?"

"I don't think we can take the chance."

"Isn't it my job to decide that?"

Bodie regarded him bleakly. "Do you really want my resignation, sir?"

"Don't be ridiculous." Cowley's voice, which had risen sharply, dropped to a growl. "Are you trying to blackmail me?"

"Hell, no, but you don't seem to realise how serious this is. If that's what it'll take to convince you—" He stopped, and swallowed hard. "D'you think I'm enjoying this? That I want to put Ray's life into the hands of some idiot who may not know how to take care of it? That I'd break up our partnership for nothing? D'you really believe I'm a bloody fool, sir?" Horrified at his own outburst, he turned away from Cowley, fighting for control.

The Controller's soft Scottish voice came to him carrying gentleness and a massive sanity. "No, Bodie, you aren't a fool – but you are overwrought, and understandably so. I'm certainly not going to argue with you while you're in this state. What I am going to do is to give you some orders, which you are to obey without argument: go home, catch up on your sleep, then go and see Doyle, talk to him. After that, if you're still worried, come and talk to me."

Bodie looked up at him. "And if I still feel the same way you'll re-team us?"

Cowley hesitated. "Obviously, it would be difficult for you and Doyle to continue to function efficiently, if you were determined to force me into separating you, but I am extremely reluctant to do so."

It was the best he could have hoped for. Now all he had to do was out-stubborn Cowley. "All right, sir. I'll do as you say."

"Good. I'll get someone to drive you home – and then I don't want to see you again until next week."

"I can drive—"
"Aye, probably, but you'll humour the Old Man." Rising, Cowley dropped a hand onto Bodie's shoulder and squeezed gently. "We all have our moments of doubt, laddie. By the time your leave's over, you'll have forgotten all about this one. I'll bet a bottle of Scotch on it."

"Yes, sir." Bodie grinned up at him. "But if I've forgotten, how're you going to collect?"

It was a world of misery. There was a constant throbbing pain revolving around his head to a background hum that came not from his ears but from his mind.

He shifted restlessly, the sheets covering him scraping his skin, sticking to sweat. Too hot and too cold by turns, he could not stop shivering even as he sweated.

Slowly, he identified the room about him as a hospital ward.

Safe. It was a safe place.

He relaxed, opening his mind for the blackness to come back and take him into painless sleep. Instead, its hot haze was shot through with images of fear... a dark tower and crashing stone... twilit gloom and thundering light... a stocky, swarthy man, familiar and yet unfamiliar, holding gun and knife... a policeman falling with a vast hole in his chest... a child sobbing... Bodie lying helpless, and the feel of a rifle in his hands, the shock vibrating in his finger as he fired... the familiar/unfamiliar man screaming, falling, spouting blood... Bodie, face rigid with control, ending a dying man's agony with a single shot...

Doyle moaned, pressing his face into the pillows, feeling each thread prick his hot skin.

No. Please. Make it go away... Pain and blood and helpless terror...

Make it go away. Damn you, Bodie... please... please make it go away...

At the edge of consciousness, hands and voice soothed him. They were... unsatisfactory. He wanted... he wanted... but he didn't know what... or who... or why.

Blood... pain... terror...

He was the one sobbing now.

Please make it stop.

Another memory appeared, of gentle hands, the comfort of a familiar touch, a warm, concerned voice.

It gave him relief and, finally, sleep.

When Doyle woke again he felt perfectly normal, save for a slight headache. For a while he lay still, looking up at the sun-patterns on the ceiling, wondering where he was and how he came to be there. Then one, at least, of his questions was answered as a cheerful, plain-faced nurse bustled in.

"Hello, Mr Doyle. Feeling better now?"

"Yeh, but—"
"Good. You're just in time for lunch. Here, let me help you sit up. That's better. Still got a headache?"

"A trace of one, y—"

"I'll get Doctor to prescribe a painkiller for you. You'll be relieved to know that there's no fracture, but we're keeping you under observation for a couple of days, just to be sure. You never can tell, with concussion. Now, just you lie still and I'll get you your medication and tell Sister that you're awake." The final words were spoken on a shutting door, leaving a stunned Doyle behind her. He had a feeling that he wasn't going to get any answers to his questions from that particular nurse...

He grinned to himself and, as instructed, lay back in the pillows, lacing his fingers behind his head.

Memory jarred through him.

Krivas!

He started to sit up, then let himself fall back as he remembered that the mercenary leader was dead. Christ, what a mess of an operation. Bodies all over the place... more like a Middle East war than a search for an escaped criminal, which was probably why Bodie had seemed so at home in the middle of it. Well, whatever the reason, the kids – little horrors! – owed their lives to Bodie. He himself... but then, they had given up counting how many times they had rescued each other long ago. What the hell had his partner been playing at, anyway, getting into a hand-to-hand battle with Krivas when the mercenary had had a gun...? He hadn't explained that afterwards...

Afterwards.

Doyle's light green eyes cat-slitted and, unnoticed, his fingers balled as he remembered what had happened afterwards.

It was totally vivid, real, a memory so strong he could feel it with every nerve ending: Bodie's strong arms hugging him fiercely, the speed of hot breath stirring his hair, the thundering race of his partner's heartbeat as he was cradled against his chest and, most powerfully recalled of all, the warm stirring against his hip that could have had only one cause, pushing harder and harder against him...

Fucking hell!

Bodie? Bodie?

It was crazy, absurd. If there was anyone in the world he knew as well as he knew himself, it was Bodie... and Bodie was no more queer than he was. In fact, the very thought was ridiculous, would have been laughable if hadn't been so... frightening.

Yet it had happened...

...or had it?

Doyle seized on the thought with relief. That was it. He must have been hallucinating. After all, he'd been shot in the head, concussed. Were hallucinations an after effect of concussion? He wasn't sure, but he was sure that he had been feverish last night. He had vague memories of pain, heat and fleeting nightmares.

The memories of Bodie's touch were far from vague.
Yet both hallucinations and dreams could be extremely realistic. This one certainly had been – and from where in his subconscious had he drawn the source material? Doyle didn't like to think that that particular nightmare was lurking in some murky part of his mind.

Jesus, if Bodie ever found out about it his life wouldn't be worth living. He could imagine the initial anger, then the wicked, incessant teasing with horrible clarity. It wasn't something they would ever be able to laugh about together, and, as far as he was concerned, Bodie was never going to have the chance.

Jesus, but the memory was real, sickeningly real. And he hadn't protested, either, which was the final proof that it had really been an hallucination since, even when injured, he wouldn't have accepted homosexual advances from anyone, let alone Bodie.

Dream or hallucination, he had better start forgetting quickly – Bodie would be bouncing in fairly soon, he supposed, and he was incredibly quick at picking things out of the air... but his aggressive, masculine presence would destroy the dream-memories.

Doyle shook his head. He must be crazy himself, to imagine for a moment that it was real.

Only...

The talkative nurse arrived in a rush. "Here you are, Mr Doyle. Just you take these and don't you worry about anything."

It seemed like a good idea, at that. Doyle decided to follow her advice.

Only it wasn't that easy. All through the long afternoon, Doyle was plagued by those unwanted, recurring memories. He found it impossible to sleep, and the radio aggravated his headache, as did the chatter of Nurse O'Keefe. Indeed, he finally had to resort to a pretense of sleep every time she "popped in to see how he was."

He half expected Bodie to arrive during the afternoon visiting hour. When he had been seriously ill from gunshot wounds only just over a year ago, his partner had been a constant visitor to the hospital. Doyle had got used to his cheeky grin appearing round the edge of the door, the appalling practical jokes he had played on the nurses, the ridiculous gifts that appeared when Bodie himself could not and, above all, his quiet, supportive presence when the pain was so bad the Doyle had despaired of ever getting well. His mind slipped easily back over the months and he felt ridiculously disappointed that Bodie wasn't there now, though after his performance yesterday, Cowley had probably cancelled his leave and sent him out on a job somewhere. Still, he would normally have slopped off for a few minutes to come and see how his partner was doing. Lousy habit. Perhaps Cowley had given him such a bawling out that he didn't dare...

Despite all his rationales, Bodie's absence did not improve Doyle's temper.

When someone finally did turn up it was Cowley, and he came in the evening, well after visiting hours. The Chief looked tired.

"Well, Doyle," he greeted, "and how are you feeling?"

"Fine. When are they going to let me out of this place?"

"Another thirty-six hours, as I understand it."
Doyle pulled a face.

"You'll do as you're told. Let's not take any chances, Doyle. A couple of nights in hospital won't do you any harm."

"No, sir," Doyle agreed dutifully.

"However, there is no reason that you should not exercise your memory and your tongue. I'd like a full report on what happened yesterday."

"Yes, sir." Doyle settled easily into his calm, factual reporting style, a legacy of his early days in the Met. It took him perhaps half an hour but, when he had finished, he was surprised to find the Cow regarding him dubiously.

"That's all, Doyle?"

"Sir?" Doyle asked, startled. Then, realising that Cowley required an answer, he added, "Yes, that's all."

"Nothing else? You're sure?"

"Should there be?" Doyle asked guardedly, every instinct alerted.

"No. No... with something like this I just wanted to be sure I had all the facts." Cowley seemed to hesitate, then abruptly changed the subject. "Have you spoken to Bodie since yesterday?"

"No." Doyle felt a small flutter of disquiet. "Isn't he off on a job for you?"

Cowley's face was enigmatic. "I hope he is following my orders. He seemed somewhat... shaken... by yesterday's events."

"Nothing shakes Bodie for long," Doyle opined. "It might make him think twice before he does his vanishing act again, though."

"Yes. It might well. Now, I think we can keep the truth of how Krivas actually died between the three of us. I dinnae want to complicate matters by having to defend the decision of one of my men to perform a mercy killing."

Doyle's expression bleakened. "If anyone had heard Krivas scream, sir... they wouldn't have blamed Bodie."

"I did – from a distance – and I don't, but the official story must be that you shot Krivas twice. You shot him because you believed he was still trying to kill Bodie. Clear?"

"Yes, sir. Quite clear."

I killed him anyway, Doyle thought. Oh God, why couldn't I have made it clean?

Cowley rose to his feet. "You did a good job, Doyle." He paused in the doorway to add, "Remember that you and Bodie could not have accomplished so much if you had not been a long-standing team." Then he was gone, leaving a very puzzled Doyle behind him.

Cowley didn't need to tell him that, anymore than he would have needed to tell Bodie. There had been a weird element in the entire conversation, but he was damned if he could isolate it. Perhaps Bodie would have some idea about what was bothering the Cow when he turned up.
Bodie, however, did not arrive, either that evening or the next day, and the fact irritated Doyle. He preferred people to act predictably, which meant that, on all the previous evidence, Bodie's arrival at the hospital was the safest bet since Arkle's second Cheltenham Gold Cup. With the smothered memories continuing to surface and plague him at intervals, his temper began to fray. He continued to jump every time the door opened, a fact which finally came to the attention of Nurse Bailey on the evening shift.

"No visitors, Mr Doyle?" she enquired with a smile. "Were you expecting someone?"

Doyle gave her a truculent glare. "What makes you think that? They let me out of his dump in the morning, remember?"

"Maybe, but every time I come in, you look round faster than a kid waiting for Santa – and then your face falls like you've finally discovered he doesn't exist."

Doyle's jaw set. "I wasn't expecting anyone."

Nurse Bailey grinned. "And here I was, hoping that that good-looking friend of yours would come and see you again."

Doyle blinked. "I don't want to impugn your taste, but, if you're referring to my boss, I can recommend a good optician."

"Oh, not *him*. The man who was with him the night they brought you in; broad shoulders, dark hair, lovely deep blue eyes, nice smile..."

"Yeah, on the face of the tiger. Watch yourself, sweetheart. Bodie eats nice girls like you for breakfast."

"Might be fun... Bodie? He's the one who's been ringing up about you, then."

"He has?" Doyle was slightly mollified. Bodie must be on a job for Cowley, then, and unable to get to the hospital.

"Yes – a couple of times yesterday and once today. He must be worried about you."

"More probably about how long it'll be before I get back to share the work."

Nurse Bailey pouted. "Well, he can come and knock me over again any time."

"Again?" Doyle asked, interested. "When was the first time?"

"Oh, the night you were brought in. Sister had allowed him to see you for a couple of minutes – you were still unconscious – and when I came in to tell him he'd got to leave, he was coming out. He just didn't see me. Knocked me flying. He was very apologetic..."

"He would be," Doyle interjected. "And then he tried to pick you up, right? It's not a new line for him."

"No, he didn't," said Nurse Bailey, sadly. "I don't think he even noticed me, and me with that new perfume guaranteed to slay 'em at ten paces."

"I never suspected it before, but he must need glasses too."
"Get on with you."

"Bodie may not appreciate your charms, darlin', but I, on the other hand, can be extremely appreciative." He leered.

"Sorry, Mr Doyle." She dimpled and patted his head. "I'm afraid you just aren't my type. Mary O'Keefe, on the other hand, thinks you're just gorgeous. If you aren't a good boy, I'll call her up and tell her you're lonely."

"You wouldn't do that to me? No-one so beautiful could be so cruel."

Nurse Bailey gave a evil little giggle. "Try me, Mr Doyle, just try me."

It was with no regret at all that Doyle shook the non-existent hospital dust from his sneakers, but he did allow himself a certain amount of self-pity when no-one came to pick him up. It was the first time that that had happened since... well, since he had been teamed with Bodie, if it came to it, and now it felt distinctly odd to be walking down the steps without his partner hovering protectively close.

All right, he could have rung Angela or Chrissy and asked one of them to drive over to fetch him, but he was growing tired of Angie, and Chrissy would have fussed almost as much as Nurse O'Keefe.

It was a shock to realise that he was lonely.

Stupid. His own company was as satisfactory as anyone's, he assured himself, as he climbed into a taxi and gave the driver his home address. Besides, all he needed at the moment was to curl up in his bed with a good book, or the radio...

He wondered what mission Bodie was tied up in, and when he'd break free. Still, he knew that his partner would call as soon as he could... call, and finally kill the memory of that crazy dream or hallucination or whatever it had been. It was already beginning to fade. With any luck, it might even be gone completely before Bodie got back.

Doyle rather hoped that it would.

Once back at his flat, he celebrated by pouring himself a hitherto forbidden – and still inadvisable – drink, flinging himself into his favourite chair, and phoning CI5.

"Ray Doyle, Jacquie," he told the switchboard operator. "Can you find out for me if I'm on leave, sick-leave, or active, and when I'm supposed to be reporting in to the office."

"One minute," she said. Then, less than thirty seconds later, she came back on the line. "I'm putting you through to Mr Cowley's office."

"Hello, Ray. How are you feeling?" Betty's cool voice was a little warmer than usual – say about three degrees above freezing.

"Fine. What's my status, pet? Does the Old Man want me back at HQ today?"

"You're on sick leave, and if you weren't, you'd still be on leave, remember? Major Cowley wants you to put in a special report on the Krivas affair, naturally."
"Naturally."

"But, apart from that, you've been signed off until the end of the week. You're to report in on Monday. Bodie'll be back from leave, then, too, so—"

"Bodie? I thought he was on a job—"

"You know as well as I do that Bodie is on leave," Betty pointed out.

"Yes, but he—" Doyle bit off the words. "Where's he gone, love?"

"Nowhere, as far as I know. He's supposed to tell us if he's leaving London for a significant length of time, of course – but he's not very good at keeping to that rule."

"Oh. Well, thanks. See you next week." Doyle hung up quickly before Betty asked him any more questions. Silly, really, but he felt puzzled and hurt. Yet, he had no right to expect anything else. Bodie was on leave, with no official responsibilities towards his partner... only that wasn't how he had seen it in the past.

Doyle reached out again for the phone, then withdrew his hand before it touched plastic. What had he been going to do? He certainly wasn't about to chase after Bodie. Anyone would think that he was his keeper, or something.

Then a thought paralysed him: if no-one knew what had happened to Bodie, perhaps he was in trouble, hurt...

No. That couldn't be right. Bodie had phoned the hospital.

Someone who had said he was Bodie had phoned the hospital.

Only why would anyone else say that?

Perhaps to convince Doyle himself that Bodie was alive and free.

Except that such a hypothetical person couldn't have been sure that anyone would tell him about the calls.

Idle speculation, Doyle reminded himself, and quite stupid. There was a simple way to find the answer.

This time, he did not hesitate as he reached for the phone and dialled Bodie's number.

Standing in the lift, watching the light ascend the numbers beside the door, Doyle wondered if he had gone crazy. Why was he on his way to Bodie's flat when he knew his partner was on leave, and therefore was most unlikely to be at home in the afternoon?

The afternoon, though, had worn away into evening, and Bodie still hadn't answered his calls. All Doyle's worries had finally surfaced, driving him out of his warm, comfortable chair, and over here to this modern block of flats where Bodie had been living for the last six months.

The lift jarred to a stop, decanting Doyle into the landing. He stopped short in surprise. There was a young woman sitting on the carpet outside Bodie's front door. She was tall and slim, with masses of auburn curls tumbling to her shoulders, and she simply sat with her chin on her denim-covered knees, hugging her long legs.
Doyle had ceased to be surprised by anything that happened around Bodie. Possibly the girl was conducting a sit-in. He gave her a brief smile, which she ignored, and hit the button on the entry-phone.

"He isn't answering," the girl stated flatly. "He wasn't answering at six o'clock and he hasn't answered since. When it gets to midnight, I'm going to call the police."

Doyle regarded her. She was, in fact, very pleasant to regard. "Don't be silly, love. Bodie's not exactly going to be pleased if he rolls in at four am and finds the Force waiting for him. He isn't a child, you know, and he's not a man anyone'll ever tie down, in case you hadn't realised it."

On a man, he would have called the girl's expression stubborn, but, on her, he decided that it was just quietly determined. "I know that," she said. "I've got other reasons. Good reasons. Anyway, you needn't worry about it, need you? I'm the one who's taking the risks – if any."

"Wouldn't want you arrested for a breach of the peace," Doyle told her, holding back a smile. "Suppose we try an easier way?" He pulled out a bunch of keys and inserted one in the lock.

"What're you doing with the key to Bodie's flat?" the girl demanded, jumping to her feet, her suspicions plainly aroused.

"It's a sensible precaution. He has the key to mine." Doyle's reply was clipped, in response to memories of which the girl could know nothing. Since that day when Mayli Kuolo had waited for him in his own flat, a gun in her hand, he had felt... safer... knowing that Bodie would not have to break in if, God forbid, it should happen again. Or, even worse, if it should happen to Bodie, he...

Banishing the thought, he pushed the door open. "I'm Ray Doyle. Bodie and I work together."

"Oh, of course! Are you all right now? Bodie said it was you who'd been shot at St Catherine's."

"I'm fine," said Doyle. Then, he added, "You seem to have heard of me, but I'm afraid I don't—"

"I'm Karen Webster."

The name did ring a small bell. "Oh yes, Karen. Bodie mentioned you."

"He talks about you quite a bit."

"Don't believe a word of it." Doyle stepped into the flat, Karen at his heels. "Bodie!" he called. "Bodie, it's Ray. You in here, mate?"

There was no reply.

Closing the door behind Karen, Doyle ushered her into the sitting room. There was no sign of Bodie.

"Stay here," Doyle ordered, then hurried forward. It did not take him long to search the rest of the flat, which was as empty of human life as the sitting room, and he was left with the instinctive feeling that, while everything seemed normal, there was something off key about the place.

That Bodie had been home the night before, he was sure – a fingertip on the soap in the bathroom had told him that much – and there was no sign of a struggle. Yet there was something wrong, he was certain. Standing in the centre of the room, he surveyed every detail with an expert's eye, trying to decide what it was.
Finally he came to the conclusion that it was simply the general untidiness of the place; half a dozen books strewn haphazardly on chairs and tables, as many cassettes on top of the stereo, an empty whisky bottle on the floor beside the sofa, and a glass on the coffee table. In the kitchen, the sink had been piled with washing up. It was all most unlike Bodie, who had an ex-soldier's neatness. Still, it didn't exactly add up to an emergency.

He suddenly became aware that Karen was looking at him curiously, and said, "If we're going to wait for him then we might as well do it in comfort. How about a cup of tea? Coffee?"

"Tea." Karen followed him into the kitchen and watched him as he plugged in the kettle, then found some clean mugs in the cupboard.

As he rinsed out the teapot, Doyle glanced sideways at the girl. "Mind telling me what your 'good reasons' were for sitting outside Bodie's door like a guard dog – a very pretty one, I must say."

Karen leaned on the draining board. "I suppose I can tell you. I think you must be who you say you are – you had a key and you know your way around in here." She ranged her huge green eyes directly on him. "I'm so worried about him, Ray. I've talked to him two or three times on the phone since... well, since you got shot... and he didn't sound normal."

"In what way?" Doyle asked, pouring boiling water into the pot.

"Well, he didn't want to see me, didn't want me to come over here. But he sounded so upset, Ray. He said that he had something to work out, that he needed to be alone. Then he said he'd call me and hung up. Only he didn't call me back, so the next night I rang him. Perhaps I shouldn't have, but I was worried. I think he was drunk. Anyway, he told me he was no good for me and I didn't ought to try and contact him again – so would I please go away."

"Bodie said that?"

"Yes. I hung up on him, that time."

"I don't blame you – but what're you doing here, then?" Doyle asked. "Sugar?"

"No, thanks. I'm here because I'm very fond of Bodie, Ray. There's something wrong and I want to find out what. So I rang him again this morning. You know what he did?"

"Something stupid, probably."

"He said, 'I'm sorry, Karen. I'm sorry you were involved. Just forget the whole thing and leave me alone. Please.'"

"Definitely stupid, but it still doesn't sound like Bodie."

"It didn't sound like Bodie. He's always so self-confident, so buoyant. You can see why I was worried?"

"Yeah..." In fact, Doyle was wondering how he was going to put his opinion delicately. "Have you thought, Karen, that maybe... well, maybe he just wanted to break things off?"

"But why, Ray? Everything was just perfect between us, then... then this. Can you give me a reason?"

"No. Only Bodie can do that – if he wants to. We'll have to wait until we see him to find out."
Bodie had to concentrate all his mind on putting the car away in the garage, or the paintwork would have suffered irreparable damage. He had left the flat that morning with the simple intention of physically exhausting himself. Perhaps, now that he had succeeded, he would be able to get some sleep. At least it was better than drowning himself in the whisky bottle, which held the danger of making him say too much, as it had done with Karen.

He should never have let Cowley push him into taking this vacation. It gave him far too much time to think. Tomorrow... tomorrow he would do something about it... but that did not include discussing anything with Ray. Never that. He just couldn't face him. Twice, he'd picked up the telephone, but cowardice had won out. He'd spent five minutes that very morning getting rid of his attempts to put that explanation on paper.

Still acting on remote control, he locked the garage door and made his way up to his flat. At last, he had driven Ray from his thoughts, which had no room for anything but the desire to reach his bed.

The closed door behind him shut out the world, but only for a moment. He halted, as it finally penetrated his mind that the lights were on and that sound of quiet voices was coming from the sitting room.

What the hell?

Moving with a deadly lightness that took no account of exhaustion, Bodie advanced to the sitting room door. Carefully, he eased it open an inch, and peered through the gap...

The two people he least wanted to see in the entire world were sitting together on the sofa, looking almost like brother and sister as their curly heads bent towards each other, glinting red in the warm light. The resemblance hit Bodie like a blow.

Oh Christ... she could almost be a female version of Ray. Was that why I wanted her? Was it working in me even then? What the hell am I going to do?

Gathering up the sherds of his courage, he used them to clothe himself with insouciance as he stepped into the room and slammed the door behind him.

Doyle started to rise, hand travelling towards his missing shoulder-holster. "Bodie!"

"Who were you expecting? Al Capone? This happens to be my flat, or had you forgotten?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, Karen ran to him. "Don't be angry, love. It wasn't Ray's fault," she said, sliding her arms around his neck and raising her lips to his.

It was astonishing how little he felt, and how aware he was of Doyle, standing watching them with a benevolent expression. He returned the kiss automatically, and it felt like a farewell.

Then Karen pulled away a little, and looked at him anxiously. "You look awful. What's the matter, darling?"

Bodie pulled her arms away from his neck, while glaring past her at Doyle. "I suppose you let her in."

"Was I supposed to leave her sitting on your doorstep?"
Bodie sidestepped that question. "And what the hell are you doing here, anyway?"

Doyle's jaw thrust forward. "Taking care of your girlfriend. And she's right; you look terrible."

"No-one asked you for your opinion – or even asked you in here." Bodie pushed past Karen and stamped towards the bedroom. "Having my key doesn't give you a licence to use this flat as a home from home."

"Karen was worried about you. We were worried about you, though God knows why."

"I'm not the one who stuck his silly head in the way of a bullet," Bodie snapped. Pausing at the door, he turned and let his eyes examine Doyle for a moment, seeing, with relief, that he looked tired – and angry – but otherwise quite fit. "Well, go on, make free with the place – but keep it quiet because I want to sleep."

With the door firmly in place behind him, he leaned his back against the wood and closed his eyes. Shit! What a bloody fiasco. He'd have to change the locks in the morning.

Yet, despite his anger, something in his heart lifted. Ray was worried about him. In fact, Ray had cared enough to come here and look for him when he did not turn up at the hospital...

Stop that, he told himself. Stop it, because the last thing you should want is for Ray to care. Do you want to hurt him any more than you have to?

Doyle stared at the closed door, his eyes narrowed with anger. Then he marched up to it and rapped on it. "Bodie!" he shouted.

There was no answer.

Scowling, Doyle put his hand on the door handle.

The door wouldn't open. Odd. He'd never noticed before that it could be locked.

"Bodie, I want to talk to you!"

Nothing.

Seething now, Doyle actually contemplated forcing the door, but his respect for property finally won out.

Instead, he pulled out his keys, wrestled Bodie's from the ring, and slammed it down on the table. "If you don't trust me why the hell should I trust you, Bodie?" he yelled at the closed door.

There was no response.

With a curse aimed at his own stupidity, Doyle spun on his heel in preparation for a swift exit, but found himself face to face with Karen. Having previously forgotten her existence, he suddenly saw her as a way to pay Bodie back for his appalling behaviour.

"Come on," he growled. "Let's get out of here. We're obviously not wanted."

"I don't think he really knew I was here," Karen said, in a very small voice.
"Come on." Doyle put his arm around her and steered her out of the flat. "We both need a drink. They'll be open for another hour."

"I don't know, Ray. I think I'll just go home..."

"Doctor's orders," Doyle said firmly. Well, she was beautiful and he was lonely. It would serve Bodie right anyway.

"Well, just one then."

"We'll see," said Doyle.

"Feel better now?" Doyle asked, putting a second glass of brandy and soda into Karen's hands.

"A little. It's just not easy to accept that an affair can end that quickly – and I still don't even know what I've done."

"I don't suppose you've done anything," Doyle said briskly. Then he added, with a sudden grin, "I don't know what I've done, either. I know it's not the same, but—"

"It isn't," Karen agreed, "and at least... well, at least he was angry with you."

Doyle did a well-practiced double-take. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Karen twirled the stem of her glass in her fingers, watching the last of the bubbles swirl and pop away. "It didn't matter to Bodie that I was there – he hardly even saw me. Everything he did – said – was aimed at you."

"Ridiculous," Doyle retorted. "He was just mad at me because I let you in. If he wants to break it off, there's not much you can do except forget it. Don't tell me that there're no other men waiting and ready to fall at your feet."

"Now you're being ridiculous."

"Not at all. I might be inclined to do some falling myself, if you'll let me."

Karen smiled suddenly. "Thanks for the thought, Ray. My ego is slightly battered, after tonight, but I think I'd rather just sit around and nurse it for a while."

"At least let me buy you another drink."

"No, I've had enough, really."

"I'll drive you home then."

Karen shook her curls. "No. My car's just around the block. Thanks, Ray, but I need some time to myself."

"He isn't worth it, you know," Doyle told her, reaching over to squeeze her hand.

"You don't believe that." She took her hand away and rose to her feet. "Ray..." She was very obviously hesitating, her bag clutched tightly in her hands. "Help him... you can... he cares about you." She whirled and ran out through the bar door. Doyle had the impression she was crying.
"Karen!" He barged out after her into the cool summer night, but the street was empty. With a muttered, "Damn," he went back to his abandoned drink and shook his head over it. "Bodie, old mate, you're barmy," he told it. And usually a lot more subtle, he added silently. He had always been slightly envious of Bodie's ability to slide out of a relationship with the minimum of pain and hassle. This time, though, was very different.

Damn it, it was all too complicated. So complicated that he wasn't going to attempt to work it out. It would probably seem simpler in the morning... after a few drinks.

Doyle drained his glass of the last dregs of IPA and, with an air of determination, pushed his way through to the bar.

"Hi, Betty, is the Chief in?" If Bodie's grin was a trifle too bright and his face a little paler than usual, it was not enough for Betty to remark on the fact.

Instead, she looked at him severely. "No, Bodie, he isn't in – and I thought you were on leave to the beginning of next week."

"Mind telling me where he is then, love?"

Betty's face assumed what Bodie always thought of as the Iron Curtain look. "Why?"

"Because I want to talk to him, sweetheart." Bodie applied his best melt-a-heart-of-stone look.

Betty stared back with the basilisk glare of a headmistress. "Is it important, Bodie?"

"Yeh, it's important."

"But will Mr Cowley think it's important?"

"Yes." Bodie attempted to copy the clipped tones of his SAS Colonel. "What sort of an organisation is this, anyway, where an agent can't contact the boss?"

"One that doesn't waste its Controller's valuable time."

"I see. And his secretary decides what is and what is not important?" Bodie's voice had acquired an edge.

Betty bridled. "Yes. In this case."

Bodie had been seeking something on which to vent his frustration for the last two days. "Just who the hell is the CI5 agent around here, woman? Me or you?"

"Mr Cowley—"

"Are you going to tell me where he is or do I have to go and pull rank in the radio control room?"

Betty took a deep breath. She had a reputation to maintain and she was going to maintain it in the face of all provocation – even this. "Very well, Bodie, but I shall have to explain to Mr Cowley—"

"Explain what you like. Just tell me where he is."

"Out on Clapham Common. The IRA have a dump out there and there's been a lot of activity..."
"I know the place."

Bodie left the Capri in a backstreet chosen for its air of respectability – might be false, of course, but he didn't have time to investigate – and made his way to the edge of the Common on foot. It didn't take him long to spot the CI5 stakeout positions; a car parked on the kerb, a couple loitering with intent in the grass, and more casual pedestrians than the cool weather actually called for. Bodie hadn't seen so many CI5 agents in one place since the last Christmas party.

The target of their attentions was a seedy corner shop at the end of a run-down and as yet un-gentrified terrace, its windows blank-boarded, and its pale green paint peeling in swathes. A rusty sign proclaiming the virtues of Woodbines was bolted to the grimy brickwork, reminding Bodie of the clandestine smoking parties of his youth, when a pack of ten Woodies had seemed the height of sophistication.

He was smiling slightly to himself as he sauntered casually towards the CI5 car, sure that Cowley would be ensconced inside it, out of the chill wind.

Despite his preoccupation with his own problems, the atmosphere of watchfulness began to alert his instincts, and that professional part of him that was never quite asleep came to full wakefulness.

He could not have said why the man sitting on the bench caught his eye, or why the sight prickled him with the knowledge of danger. Perhaps it was the very ordinariness of the bloke; the short, neat, mousy hair, the blue jeans that were fashionably faded but clean, the white T-shirt... or perhaps it was that he remained seated on the bench in that thin gear, despite the cold, late-summer wind.

When he looked up from his book, it would be precisely in the direction of Cowley's car.

Bodie lengthened his stride. He didn't seem to hurry but, all the same, he was moving quickly towards the park bench even as the casual CI5 pedestrians began to home in on the shop.

The man on the park bench closed his book, rose to his feet, and started to walk away across the Common.

If Cowley's got him staked out, he'll have my hide, Bodie thought, as he broke into a run.

The man must have heard him, for he looked back, and alarm twisted his features. He threw a single glance towards the corner shop, then took to his heels, abandoning the book to any ambitiously-intellectual worm lurking in the grass.

Behind him, Bodie heard a car engine cough and purr.

They're moving in. Oh Christ.

Everything was supernaturally clear, and he could think of nothing better to do than drag his gun from its holster and yell, "Stand right there!"

The man spun, and Bodie saw the dull dark sheen of the weapon in his hand before it came to bear. He fired first, the shot missing its target, but causing the other man to shoot prematurely, so that bullet also went astray. Bodie's second shot took his target high in the shoulder, and the next downed him, the gun flying from an outflung hand to further edify the insect life.

Bodie ignored his victim and fled back towards the shop, emptying his gun into the air as he did so.
It wasn't much of a warning, but it would reach further than his voice.

Then Murphy came pelting into view, his own gun drawn. "Bodie!"

"Got an R/T?"

"What?"

"You got your R/T?"

"Of course, but—"

"Give it 'ere." Ignoring his colleague's protest, Bodie reached inside his jacket to snatch the transceiver from its pocket. "3/7 to all operatives. It's a set-up. Get out of there – get away from the shop – now!"

Cowley's voice came in, overriding his, "Alpha to all operatives: order confirmed. Clear the area. Pull back to your former positions and await further instructions."

Bodie let out a breath of relief. He'd half-expected the Old Man to add a nasty rider to the effect that 3/7 had better know what he was doing, but the R/T remained silent.

"There's a gunman back there with a couple of slugs in him," Bodie told Murphy. "You'd better collect him. I've a feeling the Cow wants to see me."

Murphy chuckled. "He just might at that – and I wouldn't like to be you if you're wrong, Bodie."

You wouldn't like to be me anyway, Bodie thought glumly, as he trudged off to find Cowley.

"I trust you have good and sufficient reasons for your actions, Bodie."

Bodie settled into the back seat of the BMW and closed the door before replying to the Controller's question with one of his own. "You held back when you heard the shots?"

"Natura—"

Cowley's voice was drowned in detonation. Every head twisted towards the source of the noise, and saw the walls of the shop bulge outwards, shudder, and part at the seams, sagging into collapse.

After their ears had recovered enough for speech to be useful, Bodie said, "Would you consider that good and sufficient reason, sir?"

"Aye, I would – except that I know you're not endowed with extrasensory perception, Bodie. Explain."

"You were being watched. When you moved in, he moved out and, when challenged, he tried to shoot me. I didn't think he was so keen to get out of here because he'd just remembered a date with his girlfriend, so... Well, he's still alive. We might get something out of him."

"Aye, well, you were right. This time, at least," Cowley admitted, then reached for the radio mike to issue orders to the forensic team to come and sift through the wreckage. When he was satisfied with the arrangements, he turned back to Bodie. "How did you get here?"
"I drove in. My car's parked."

"That is not what I meant, Bodie, as you are well aware. You are supposed to be on leave. What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to talk to you, sir, but when I called at HQ and found out what you were doing I decided to come and join in the fun."

Cowley eyed him sourly. "I hope it was to your taste, Bodie."

"I didn't realise that there were going to be fireworks. If I had I'd've brought me own bomb."

"It was to your taste. Bad, as usual. Ach, very well, Bodie: if you feel you have to break off your leave to see me, I suppose I can give you a few minutes. What is it you want to see me about?"

Bodie hesitated, glancing at Suzie, who was in the driver's seat. "It's about the matter we discussed the other day, sir. I'd prefer to... well... to talk about it in private."

Cowley's face was still. "Very well, 3/7. You can drive me back to the office. We'll use your car."

"Yes, sir."

"Susan, I want a watch kept at the hospital on the man Bodie shot. He's to be guarded twenty-four hours a day and I am to be informed the instant he recovers consciousness."

"Yes, Major." Suzie was eyeing Bodie curiously from behind her sunglasses.

"Come along, then. Let's see if you can remember where you parked your car."

The silence in the Capri was a strained one. Bodie drove with absent care while Cowley busied himself issuing yet more orders over the radio. Finally, though, he replaced the microphone, and turned his attention, most reluctantly, back to his agent.

"Well, Bodie, I trust you have reconsidered your somewhat ill-advised request?"

"I've thought very hard about it, sir."

"And you've talked it over with Doyle?"

"I've spoken with Doyle, yes, sir." Which was true enough.

"Good, and what is his opinion of this ridiculous notion of yours?"

"I think you'd better ask him that, sir. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. I've put in my formal request for a change of partner. It's on your desk."

"Och, for the Lord's sake, Bodie, I thought we'd agreed that—"

"That I'd think it over and if I still felt the same way you'd re-team me with someone other than Doyle. I've thought it over and I know I'm right. It's better if you do it now while Doyle is on sick leave. Make a clean break."

"Stop the car," Cowley ordered.
"Sir?"

"I can't talk to you while you're looking at the road, man."

Bodie shrugged, but pulled the car into the kerb of the suburban street down which they had been cruising, then shifted in his seat to face Cowley, waiting silently for the Chief to begin.

"Bodie, do you really think I have time to waste on your personal problems?"

"I'm not asking you to waste any more time."

"You aren't? If I accept your request I will have to find new partners for both you and Doyle. D'you think that'll be easy? Or have you both suddenly developed excessively tolerant and amiable personalities?"

"No," Bodie admitted, with a trace of a smile, "but, despite whatever personality problems you think we had – have – we learned to work together. We can both learn to work with someone else."

"As well as you work with each other?"

"Maybe not – for a while. I don't expect anyone else to be Ray—"

"You will. The first time someone takes a shot at you, you'll react as if it was Doyle who was with you."

"I know better than that," Bodie said defensively. "Hell, sir, I've spent my life fighting beside other people—"

"You haven't spent five years of your life in the sort of close partnership you have with Doyle. You've become a unit, thinking as—"

"You don't have to give me your lecture on partnership, sir – I know it all by heart. And, unlike you, I'm part of such a unit, one in which all your theories worked – far too well. Do you really want some sort of tragedy to convince you?"

"No, Bodie. What I need to convince me is the truth."

For a moment there was a spark of panic in Bodie's eyes, then he replied, his voice neutral. "I have told you the truth, sir."

"All of it?" Cowley leaned forward, every line of his face, from bristling eyebrows to jutted chin demanding an answer.

Bodie's face stiffened into a military stone-wall. "Yes, sir."

Cowley's hand fastened on his shoulder. "Do you really think that I don't know you by now, lad? You could have come to me at any time in the past five years with the arguments you've put forward so far. There must be something more. What is it? What has happened between you and Doyle to cause this?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You canna expect me to believe that."

"You can believe it or not, sir, but there is nothing else. I also request permission to return to duty, sir."
Cowley made an inarticulate, exasperated sound. When Bodie was in this mood he was completely unreachable. Well, there was another way to approach the problem.

"As you wish, Bodie," he said coldly and formally, removing his hand. "When we reach headquarters I want you to co-ordinate the search for these bombers. If someone sets a trap for CI5, they can't be allowed to get away with it. It sets a bad example. They're to be found and stopped. That's your job, Bodie."

"Yes, sir."

"The other matter is not yet settled," Cowley warned him. "Well, what are you waiting for? You have work to do."

Bodie backed the car away from the kerb, startling three pigeons into a startled clatter of wings and seriously discommoding the tabby cat who had been stalking them.

The cat spat at the Capri, then sat down in the road to wash itself with lofty disinterest.

For the first time in days, Bodie began to laugh. He pulled a ferocious face in the mirror at the disappointed hunter, then concentrated on getting Cowley to HQ in the shortest possible time.

The buzz of the entry-phone finally hauled Doyle to wakefulness. He sat up and rolled his feet off the bed, blinking in the midday glare from the windows.

Door, he told himself, rubbing his face with the palms of his hands. That's the door. I suppose I'd better answer it.

It took him upwards of sixty seconds to find his dressing gown, which was in its usual position, thrown over the back of a chair, and those sixty plus seconds convinced him that he shouldn't have moved at all. Damn it, he hadn't had more than half a dozen drinks, but he felt sick and weak, and his head was pounding.

The entry-phone buzzed again.

Doyle muttered imprecations on the inventor and manufacturer of the device, but shuffled down the steps and towards the door. It occurred to him that the drinks had not been a particularly good idea after all.

Who the hell could it be at the door, anyway? Maybe it was Bodie, coming over to apologise. Well, if it was, he was going to give him a piece of his mind.

"Yeh?" he growled into the unit's microphone.

"Cowley here. Let me in, Doyle."

Doyle stared at the machine as if it had suddenly developed a life of its own, and started a conversation of its own accord.

Cowley?

The machine squawked at him again.

"Come," he said automatically, releasing the lock.
The Controller looked as dapper as he usually did, which gave point to his disapproving stare at Doyle's bleary-eyed and unshaven aspect. "You are supposed to be resting."

"I was, sir. You woke me up."

"It is one o'clock in the afternoon, Doyle."

"Is it?" came the vague reply.


Doyle pulled himself together. "Can I get you anything, sir?" he asked, crowbarring a smile onto his aching face. "A small malt?"

"Not at the moment, Doyle. Sit down, man. If you're in any way awake, I'd like a few words with you."

Trying to look somewhat more alert than he felt, Doyle seated himself on the sofa opposite Cowley, who laced his fingers and regarded his agent over the top of them.

"I understand you have spoken with Bodie?"

"Yeh. Well, you could say that, if you were feeling generous."

"So I hope you can throw some light on his recent behaviour."

"Wish someone'd hold a spotlight for me," Doyle said gloomily.

"Ah, so you're puzzled too. It's as I expected. I take it you're not going to accept it without a fight?"

Doyle blinked at him, decided that it wasn't worth the trouble of asking him to explain the remark, and retreated back into the company of his headache.

"So we shall have to put our heads together and come up with a solution. Now, what reasons did he give you in explanation?"

"Sir?"

"I presume he did give you a reason?"

Doyle squinted Cowley into focus again. From the expression on the Old Man's face he was going to have to supply an answer to this question he didn't understand. "Reason, sir?"

"Damn it man, did you realise he has now made the demand formal? Neither of us can ignore it and hope it will go away. I will have to take action on it, and soon."

The fog in Doyle's brain wasn't clearing. He tried another feeder line. "Action, sir?" Maybe that was the way to get through this interview... perhaps he could even get some sleep until Cowley started making sense.

"Yes. If Bodie insists I will have to consider granting his request, at least temporarily."

"Ummm." If Bodie could actually get the Cow to agree to something he wanted it would be a new record.

"You seem surprisingly undisturbed, Doyle."
"Uh? Do I, sir?"

"Yes. Well, come on, man, out with it. What explanation did Bodie give you for wanting to split your unit?"

"Bodie isn't in an explaining mood at—" Doyle's head jerked up, eyes goggling. "For wanting to what?" He half-rose to his feet, glaring at Cowley. "What the fuckin' 'ell is goin' on 'ere?"

It was Cowley's turn for startlement. "Bodie said that he'd spoken to you about it, and you just said—"

"Look, I had a yelling match with Bodie and one of his girlfriends last night but no-one said anything about splitting the unit, so are you going crazy or am I or what?"

Cowley had, by now, recovered his poise. "This is something of a surprise to me, Doyle. I ordered Bodie to talk this over with you, and he assured me—"

"Talk what over?" Doyle howled, then put his hands to his head, wincing with pain. His voice was a good deal lower as he added, "Sir, would you just explain it slowly and simply, because I think we must have got our wires crossed somewhere."

Cowley complied. "Bodie has put in a formal request of a change of partner. He has even threatened to resign if I do not grant it."

Simple as it was, Doyle had to struggle to take it in. Perhaps it was the after effect of the alcohol, but this whole conversation didn't seem real. "That's crazy..." he whispered. "Crazy. Why'd he want to do that?"

"According to him, because he no longer trusts himself to put innocent lives before yours. He says that if he is forced to make a choice it may not be the right one."

"Bodie... Bodie said that?" Doyle forced a laugh. "Look, sir, this has got to be one of Bodie's awful jokes. You know his appalling sense of humour as well as I do. The laugh dissolved into a belligerent scowl. "I don't think it's funny."

"Bodie isn't joking. I'm sure of that, if of nothing else. However, I am nowhere near as sure that he has given me his real reasons. I was hoping that he might have said more to you."

Doyle ran both hands through his hair as he paced the room. "Said more to me? Don't make me laugh!" He swung to face Cowley. "He didn't even fuckin' well tell me what he was doing. Not one damn word. You'd think five bloody years would count for something."

"I suspect that it counts for a good deal."

"Like hell." Doyle was working himself into a rage. "He's even using me as an excuse. Me! How dare he?"

"Doyle..."

"Well, he isn't bleedin' well going to get away with it."

"Doyle!" Cowley's bark of command stopped Doyle at the bottom of the stairs. "What, exactly, do you intend to do?"

"I'm going to put some clothes on and then I'm going to find Bodie and beat some sense into his
"thick head." He started upward again.

"Doyle!" Cowley repeated sharply. "I do not think that that will help matters."

"So what the hell will?"

"Whatever else Bodie is holding back, his affection for you is genuine."

"Affection?"

"And if you use the brains you were born with you'll take advantage of that fact when you talk to him."

"Oh, I'm going to talk to him, all right. Mean more to him than his job, do I? He's never shown any bloody sign of it, if I do. He's got to have another reason – a real reason, and I intend to find out what it is, if I 'ave to talk to 'im all night."

"What you mean is that you'll fight rather than talk. That isn't going to help, Doyle. Think. Just for once, think before you deal with Bodie. If you want to keep him as your partner, that is." Cowley rose to his feet. "I take it that you do want to keep him?"

"Why the hell should I?"

"That is for you to answer, Doyle." Cowley moved to the door.

"And what's your angle on this?"

"Use your brains, man. You and Bodie are more valuable to me as a team than as individuals – more efficient, and the efficiency of CI5 is my only concern. You might also use those brains when you speak to Bodie. Think, if you want to keep him as your partner."

The door closed behind him.

Doyle sank down slowly on the stairs and dropped his head onto his knees. "Shit," he said tiredly. "Oh, shit. I suppose I do want to keep him. Christ knows why... Oh Christ, what the fuckin' 'ell is 'appenin' around 'ere?"

Think, Cowley had said, but all that Doyle could think was that Bodie had gone off his rocker. Maybe a shower would clear his head; it certainly needed clearing.

With a great effort, Doyle heaved himself to his feet and resumed his interrupted journey upstairs.

Crazy.

No longer trusts himself to put innocent lives before yours

Oh yeah. You should have seen him with those kids, Cowley. Half the bloody roof falling in on us – and I didn't notice him hesitate over who he was going to save.

The thought brought a vivid mental picture of the black-clad figure of Krivas kneeling before the shattered clock face, rifle at the ready, starkly illuminated by the lightning.

You could paint that, Doyle thought. Perhaps I'll try. Oils. Lots of texture.

He held the thought of the proposed picture at the front of his mind as he stripped off his dressing gown and turned on the shower.
Leaning with his hands against the tiled wall, he let his thoughts drift as the warm water washed down his relaxed body.

Water... like rain...

Without warning, Doyle's memory catapulted him back to St Catherine's, to rain soaking him, cold and pain racking his body, horror searing his mind... and Bodie's arms holding him, driving out the cold with the warmth of his body, the horror with the—

Jesus Christ!

Doyle's head came up. Staring at nothing, he slowly straightened until he was fully upright.

The nightmare was back, except that... Oh God, if it had been real...

If it had been real, Bodie hadn't gone off his rocker at all.

If it had been real, Bodie had a very good reason indeed for requesting a change of partner.

If it was real... if it is real...

What the hell am I going to do about it?

Think, Cowley had said. But what am I to think? Whatever it is, I've got to sort it out in my own mind before I see Bodie.

"Coffee, Bodie?"

"Um? Oh, thanks." Gratefully, Bodie took the offered mug from Suzie's hand, then glanced at his watch. "You still here?"

"Eyesight going?" Suzie grinned at him.

"No, it's just that it's getting late. I've got to wait for a phone call from Norman at the Anti-Terrorist Squad, but there's nothing you can do here. If you've any particular contacts who might help, you shouldn't be here either. Out on the streets, girl, or home to bed."

"Stop trying to sound like Cowley." Suzie settled herself on the desk's edge and swung a long, nylon-clad leg directly under Bodie's nose. "Do we have an identification on the man you shot?"

"No." Bodie stretched back in the chair, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand. "No-one's in a hurry to claim him and he isn't in a hurry to come round. Lang's taken over duty at the hospital."

"When he does come round, are you going to interview him, or will George do it?"

Bodie shrugged. "How would I know?"

"Well, he seems to have handed this over to you – dragged you back off leave to do it, too. Which makes you teacher's pet, right?"

Bodie winced, remembering the look Cowley had thrown at him when he had returned to the office a few hours ago. The Chief had said nothing, but his anger and reproach had been plain, and there had been no doubt about the force with which the door had been closed behind him.
"More like in the doghouse," Bodie answered her. "Being stuck behind a desk is a punishment, sweetheart. You ought to know that—"

"Bodie."

The mug nearly slipped out of Bodie's hand at the sound of that particular voice. His heart leaping wildly, he had to steady himself before he turned.

"Hello, Ray," Suzie was saying. "Has the Chief got desperate enough to drag you back from sick leave?"

"Hello, Suzie." It was bare acknowledgement. Doyle's eyes were on his partner.

Bodie was astonished to hear his own voice say, perfectly calmly, "Evening, Ray. Want some coffee?"

"No. I want to talk to you."

"Well, here I am." Bodie's guts had turned to writhing, white-hot snakes. This was it. Showdown. It was now obvious where Cowley had been in the early afternoon, obvious from the belligerence of Ray's expression, the anger – and the hurt – in his eyes, and the cold fury in his voice.

Suzie recognised all of them, and rose to her feet. "I'll be getting along, then."

"There's no need." Bodie began, suddenly aware that her presence was a kind of protection.

"Yes there is," Doyle interrupted, overriding Bodie. "Thank you, Suzie."

"If it's going to be pistols at dawn, I'll referee."

Bodie bowed to the inevitable. "No, thanks, Suzie. I'm not taking 'im on with pistols. Swords, maybe."

"I though you were going to suggest sub-machine guns." Suzie paused at the door. "You all right now, Ray?"

"Yeh, just great. 'Night, love."

"Okay, okay. I can see when I'm not wanted." With one final backward glance that betrayed her curiosity, Suzie left, closing the door behind her.

Doyle waited until she had time to get well out of earshot before he spoke again. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"I had a fascinating conversation with Cowley earlier today. He made me look like a bloody fool – or rather, you did."

Bodie closed his eyes. "I'm sorry about that, Ray. I should have told you. I was going to—"

"You were going to present me with a fait accompli, right? Suddenly, I was going to acquire a new partner, without even knowing why the old one had—"

"I said I was sorry."

"'Sorry' isn't good enough, Bodie. 'Sorry' isn't any kind of explanation."
Bodie's eyes shot open. "Didn't Cowley tell—?"

"Oh, yes." Doyle moved closer. "He gave me the official story – but he didn't believe it any more than I do. Give me the truth, Bodie, or don't you think I deserve it?"

Bodie didn't answer, wouldn't meet his eyes.

"What's the matter? Are you scared to face me with more lies? Is that it?"

Bodie gathered himself to meet Doyle's direct gaze. "What lies?" he demanded. When in doubt, go on the attack, he told himself.

"This whole soddin' lie about bein' too emotionally involved to work with me, for a start."

"It's not a lie, Ray. Please try to understand—"

"Like hell it isn't," Doyle's voice was rising. "We both know what happened at Hazely, and it didn't include you agonising over who to save!"

"I know how I felt, Ray. That's why—"

"Don't lie to me!" Doyle reached for Bodie's shoulders to shake him – and stopped, pulled back, even as Bodie himself twisted aside.

The two men stared at each other in a kind of horror, shared realisation leaping back and forth between them.

Doyle took another step backwards. "So it was real," he whispered, still unbelieving, though the guilt and dismay on Bodie's face was confirmation enough. "It's true. I didn't imagine it."

Bodie had to hold on to the edge of the desk to steady himself. "Ray... don't..." This time his voice shook.

"My God, and I thought I knew you." Doyle wasn't really talking to Bodie but to himself. "I swallowed the Casanova act hook, line and sinker, and all the time you were as bent as a bloody corkscrew!"

"It—" Bodie had started to say, "It's not like that," but had caught the words in time. It was better this way. "If you know," he said steadily, "why the Inquisition?"

"Because I didn't want to believe that my partner was a goddam Nancy-boy," Doyle snarled. "How long have you been lusting after me, Bodie? Enjoy the free show everytime you saw me naked, did you? Pawing at me... Christ, I pity the poor bugger the Cow teams you with. Is that it? Is that why you wanted a new partner? Because I wouldn't play Fairies with you and you hoped Cowley'd team you with another queer?"

"Damn you, I don't want anyone else! It's you I can't trust myself with." Even as he spoke, Bodie was dismayed by his lack of control. The last thing he ought to be doing was defending himself, even under Doyle's brutal tongue-lashing. Luckily, the other man was too angry to heed him.

"And Cowley wanted your 'real reasons'. Bloody hell! If he only knew..."

Bodie's heart was travelling down towards Australia at an ever-increasing rate. "Do you intend to tell him?" he asked.

"Why not? At least it'll stop some poor innocent kid being saddled with a raving poufter for a
Stunned, Bodie was unable to do anything but stare at Doyle, his emotions suddenly naked on his face. Shocked himself, Doyle glared defiantly back into a silence that was suddenly murderous. The phone shrilled into the hiatus. For what seemed like hours, neither man moved.

Then Doyle said, very clearly, "Oh, shit!" turned on his heel, and stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Moving very slowly, Bodie rounded the desk and sat down. It took him over a minute to find the strength to reach for the ringing phone and, when he did, his hand was trembling.

He never remembered what he said to Norman or what the Chief Inspector said to him. Somehow, he got the call finished and the phone back on the hook, then he sat for a long time with his elbows on the desk and his temples pressed into the palms of his hands, his head hammering with pain, and perilously close to tears.

Don't be a fool, he told himself sternly. You knew from the start that Ray would take it like this...

But I thought he'd never remember.

So I was wrong. Accept it. I have to accept that it was always going to be like this. I haven't lost anything: it was always lost. So why do I feel so empty, so hurt?

I suppose I was still hoping against hope that he'd... respond. Or at least understand. Oh dear God, I wish I was dead. Maybe that's it, maybe I'm in Hell. That's what it feels like, at any rate.

Angrily, Bodie shook himself, reached for his stone-cold cup of coffee and gulped it down.

That's enough, he chided himself. I'm getting as bad as Ray for wallowing in self-pity... but what happens now? If he tells Cowley, what the hell am I going to do?

What am I going to do, anyway?

After leaving Bodie, Doyle had stamped straight to Cowley's office, only to find it unoccupied, which meant, as Betty wasn't there either, that the Controller had probably gone home.

Doyle didn't intend to be thwarted. Still seething with rage at Bodie's sheer, unmitigated nerve, he picked up the phone and dialled the Cow's home number. So, the Controller would have to lever himself out of a comfortable chair – or a warm bed – to answer it. Good. Serve him right for not telling him where Bodie was from the start, and pay him back for those long, galling hours he had spent looking for him.

The ringing tone ceased after about thirty seconds, followed by Cowley's voice, its Scottishness emphasised by the telephone speaker, giving the number.

"Doyle 'ere, sir. Remember you asked me if I wanted to keep Bodie as my partner? Well, I've got an answer for you: not in a million years. I don't care who you team me with, as long as it's not 'im."

Cowley's sigh of exasperation was audible even over the telephone. "I told you to think things through before you spoke to Bodie. Plainly, you did not heed my advice."

"Think things through! Listen, sir, that bastard is—"
"I take it that 'knocking some sense into his thick head' didn't work, then? Well, I warned you that it would not."

"Listen 'ere—"

"And this is hardly a matter to be discussed down the telephone, Doyle. It is also one that cannot be profitably discussed at all until you have regained control of your temper."

"I am in control of my temper!"

"In the morning, Doyle. In my office."

"Hang on a minute. There's something you don't understand. Bodie—"

"And I will expect you to be sober. Goodnight, Doyle."

The phone clicked dead in his hand. Doyle glared at it in frustration, then slammed it down and charged out of the office.

It was during the drive home that his anger began to seep away, leaving space in his mind for the memories of the pain on Bodie's face. He tried to banish those by topping up his reservoir of anger, reminding himself of what Bodie had done.

Only Bodie hadn't actually done anything except request a change of partner.

Yeh. Because I'd found out what he was. Just as I suspected.

That can't be true, the precise, logical part of Doyle that, along with his doggedness, made his such a good detective, objected. He isn't that good an actor, and he was shocked and dismayed to find out that I knew.

So why the sudden request for a change of partner? He'd got it made. No-one would ever have suspected him of being gay. Not with the number of birds he can pull.

Like Karen.

Karen.

Bodie jilted Karen just as suddenly as he started avoiding me – and at the same time. The only explanation for that is...

Oh my God.

He braked the car to a shrieking halt, as kaleidoscopic memories of conversation whirled through his mind.

"...a couple of time yesterday and once today. He must be worried about you..."

"...he no longer trusts himself to put innocent lives before yours..."

"...told me he was no good for me and I wasn't to try and contact him again..."

"...whatever else Bodie is holding back, his affection for you is genuine..."
"...it's not a lie, Ray..."

"...it didn't matter to Bodie that I was there... everything he did – said – was aimed at you..."

"...I don't want anyone else. It's you I can't trust myself with..."

"...don't think he even noticed me... and me with that new perfume guaranteed to slay 'em at ten paces..."

"...no-one... even asked you in here..."

"...it's just not that easy to accept that an affair can end that quickly – and I don't even know what I've done..."

"...put in a formal request for a change of partner... threatened to resign if I do not grant it...

The pattern stilled, was clear.

It had all changed that day at Hazely, not because Doyle had found out that Bodie was gay but because Bodie had.

It was as much a shock to him as it was to me, Doyle admitted to himself. No, far worse. How would I have felt? As if the world was falling apart? As if I wasn't a man anymore? And what would I have done?

What Bodie had done was to break off his relationship with Karen, and then try to break up our partnership. There was nothing wrong or dishonourable about either action. In fact...

He has been trying to do what is best for all of us.

So what did I do? He's confused and hurting, so I shout insults at him.

Oh Christ... the things I said.

He asked nothing of me except a hearing, a little understanding, but I wouldn't even give him that.

"Help him," Karen had said. "You can. He cares about you."

Only I can't. Not now. However much I want to. What I said to him was unforgivable... and... Oh Jesus... I nearly did something far worse. If Cowley hadn't hung up on me...

Jesus, how can I ever face Bodie again?

Except that I'm going to have to try – and now. I can't expect him to forgive me, even to accept an apology, but I can't let him go on worrying about what I might say to the Cow. He has enough to cope with—

"Excuse me, sir. Is something wrong?"

Doyle jumped. There was a policeman bending beside the window and a patrol car was drawn up alongside.

"No... er... no. There's nothing wrong."

"Then why have you been parked in the middle of the road for the last ten minutes?"
"Have I?" Doyle regretted that the instant it was said, but his mind was still on Bodie's predicament rather than his own.

"Yes, I'm afraid you have, sir. Could I see your license and insurance certificate, please."

It took nearly twenty minutes to disentangle himself from the Law, and he had had to pull CI5 rank to do it. The wild drive back to the office didn't take quite as long but, when he got there, it was to find that Bodie had gone and no-one knew where he was.

Frustrated, Doyle drove to Bodie's flat, but the entry-phone gave back no answer.

Damn, why had he given back that key? Sheer bad temper.

Bodie had needed help then, too, but he'd been too angry to realise it.

He didn't look well, Doyle remembered guiltily, picturing Bodie as he had looked that night. How much sleep had he had recently, I wonder? I should have known something was wrong... tried to find out what it was.

He contemplated the door. He could break into Bodie's flat, but that wouldn't be a very good way to start an apology. Of course, he could emulate Karen and sit outside and wait, but there was no guarantee that Bodie was going to come home. That phone call could have summoned him anywhere.

The only sensible thing to do, Doyle decided, was to go back home, get some sleep, and see Bodie first thing in the morning, before—

Shit! What was he going to say to Cowley? Well, he had time to think of a suitable story. Right now, he was far more troubled by the thought of what he was going to say to Bodie.

He was still by no means sure of the latter as he drove into the office car park in the early morning, despite having spent the night playing variations of the projected confrontation over and over again in his mind. Sleep had been impossible when guilt had been waiting to nag him awake the instant he began to doze. It nagged him now.

He'd always hated prejudice, lashed out at anyone he suspected of harbouring it. It was an article of his personal faith: colour, religion, politics, sexual preference – none of them were important.

People are people are people – and he and Bodie had been partners for six years. Doyle was as close to him as he had ever been to anyone.

And he had acted with appalling prejudice. Not only that, he had been deliberately cruel. Anger did not excuse either.

Bodie's car wasn't in the car park.

Not knowing whether to be pleased or sorry, Doyle made his way into headquarters. It seemed he'd have to get his interview with Cowley over with first. It would be the easier one, in any event.

Despite the early hour, Betty was at her desk in the outer office, looking as immaculate as ever.

"The boss free, love?" Doyle asked her.

"Not at the moment."
"He wanted to see me."

"Then you'd better wait, hadn't you?" Having settled the matter to her satisfaction, she returned to her typing.

Doyle scowled at her, then, when that had no effect, sat on the edge of her desk and started flicking papers in her in-tray. This worked, in that Betty stopped typing, looked up, and opened her mouth to issue a reprimand, when the phone rang. Reluctantly, she chose duty, and answered it. "Mr Cowley's office. Yes, Jacquie, Bodie's here, but he's with Mr Cowley at the moment. Can you get your caller to ring back—? Ray, what d'you think you're doing? You can't—"

Her protests came too late. By that time Doyle was through the door into Cowley's office.

The Controller looked astonished at his sudden appearance, and Bodie visibly flinched as he recognised him. Internally, Doyle winced in sympathy.

"Mr Cowley," Betty's voice wailed from behind him. "I'm sorry. I told him you were busy, but he—"

"It's all right, Betty. Thank you. I'll deal with Doyle," Cowley told her grimly.

Betty sniffed, and retreated, her back stiff.

"Well, Doyle?" Cowley's expression was icy.

The question put Doyle in a quandary. Thus far, he had acted purely on instinct, and the reasons that had driven him here were not ones he could share with Cowley. "I thought... Well, I... If you're talking with Bodie about re-teaming us, I have a right to be here— you wanted to see me about that, remember?" he finished defiantly.

"As it happens, Doyle, I have more pressing concerns than your personal problems with Bodie." Deliberately, Cowley turned back to address the other man who had, by now, recovered his poise. "I think we can dismiss the Landis information; it's nothing more than a distorted version of the original rumour. This lead of Watson's may be worth following, though."

"I'll get right on it." Bodie sounded eager to escape, and his eyes did not move from Cowley's face.

"No. I'll assign someone else. I want you here, at HQ."

"Why, sir? I'm no desk man," Bodie protested.

"You'll be what I want you to be – is that clear, Bodie?"

"Yes, sir."

Doyle, watching him, understood why Cowley wanted him here rather than in the field, for he was paler than normal, with shadows and strain lines on his face. Suddenly, he found himself aching with pity.

He's going through hell – and it's my fault.

He was surprised to realise that Cowley was speaking to him.

"...Doyle, since you insist upon it, let us indeed return to the subject of your teaming with Bodie. I presume you wish to reconsider what you said on the telephone last night?"
Doyle's speech on this subject had been rehearsed so many times that he could have recited it in his sleep. "I want to apologise for the tone of that call, sir. I was upset, but you were right to slap me down. However, I still think that Bodie is right: you ought to re-team us." He reached into the pocket of his most disreputable leather jacket. "I've written out a formal request..."

"Have you lost your mind, too?" Cowley demanded. "What possible reason do you have for this... this 'request'?"

Doyle glanced quickly at Bodie, saw him straighten in his chair, bracing himself for the answer, seemingly not even breathing, eyes focussed somewhere behind Cowley's head, and answered quickly. "Because Bodie's right, sir. We've grown too close."

We were close, but after last night...

Bodie's eyes turned to meet his; straight, appraising, surprised and questioning blue.

Doyle tried to convey reassurance in his own look: it's all right, the secret's safe. I'm not going to tell anyone, Bodie, please believe me.

"Are you trying to tell me that you'd abandon your duty, too, if Bodie was at risk?"

They had both forgotten Cowley.

"I don't know," Doyle answered, re-gathering his wits, "but the chance is there." He tried to ignore the scepticism on Cowley's face, and his own doubts. This was what Bodie's need insisted that he say, whether true or the biggest lie of his life, and he wasn't sure which, if either, it was.

Cowley snorted. "The 'chance' has always been there. It is there with most of my agents. It is, in fact, a chance I choose to take, because I believe that, for our type of organisation, a two man unit, operating in close harmony, achieves the highest possible efficiency – as you and Bodie have been know to do, Doyle. It also means that you try very hard to keep each other alive, and you're no use to me dead. I want you to worry about each other..."

"But not to the exclusion of the job, right?" Bodie put in.

"You've not done that in the past, and I don't believe you'll do it in the future."

"I don't agree with you," Bodie said quietly. "And, with due respect, sir, I think I am in a better position to make a correct assessment."

Doyle raced in to support him. "Bodie's right. You can't know about our feelings the way we do."

Cowley looked from one stubborn face to the other, and sighed. "I wish you could have chosen some other way to demonstrate how well you work together. Very well, I will consider the matter and let you know in due course. Meanwhile, you will remain as a unit – let me finish, Bodie – and I will endeavour to avoid placing you in a situation where you might have to choose between your partner and your duty to this organisation."

It was, Doyle admitted, a typically crafty manoeuvre. They were now faced with a choice of staying together, or of abandoning their present explanation, which Cowley obviously doubted.

Bodie hesitated for some time before he spoke. When he did it was with a particularly mild comment. "Doyle's still on sick leave."

"For another forty-eight hours," Cowley agreed. "You are supposed to be on leave yourself and, to
be frank, Bodie, you look as if you need it as much as he does... if not more so."
"I'm all right."
"I've received the report from the car pool, Bodie."
"Yes, sir. I'm sorry about that, sir. The damage isn't—"
"I'm not concerned about the car, man. What worries me is why the accident happened at all."
"It was my fault," Bodie admitted. "I—"
"Precisely."

Doyle watched them try to stare each other out and held his tongue, though he wanted to demand a detailed explanation. At least Bodie did not seem to have been physically injured.

But he might have been, Doyle thought. And he's normally a brilliant driver – completely safe. At least it explains why he wasn't at his flat last night. Oh God... it must have happened right after our fight... I know he was upset; too upset to drive straight, apparently. All because of me... my filthy temper. I could have killed him...

It was Bodie who finally dropped his eyes, signalling capitulation. "What about the Clapham bombing?" he asked.

"You are not indispensable, Bodie."

"No, sir. I'll do as you say, sir." He sounded defeated, with none of his usual bounce or aggression. Doyle began to understand Cowley's worry; a Bodie without fight was almost unbelievable – and frightening.

"Good. Doyle, take him home and see that he gets some sleep."

Doyle held out his hand, saying, "Of course. Come on, mate," just as Bodie protested, "I can manage by myself, y'know."

The words hit Doyle like the butt end of a rifle in the stomach.

Hell, I forgot. After what I said, there's no way he's going to let me help him.

He dropped the hand and stepped back.

Cowley, however, brushed the protest away. "I'll decide that, Bodie. I can't spare anyone else to look after you, so we might as well acknowledge this friendship that you're so insistent about. Out, the pair of you – and make some attempt to sort out your personal problems before I see you again."

There seemed to be nothing else to say. Bodie heaved himself to his feet and Doyle hurried to open the door for him. As Bodie passed him, Doyle looked back at Cowley seeing, for a moment, both puzzlement and deep concern on his face. Then, noticing his agent's scrutiny, the Controller's face blanked, and he turned abruptly to the papers on his desk.

Doyle closed the door softly and hurried after Bodie, catching him on the stairs, but his partner did not even look at him as they matched strides into the lobby. Once out of the door, Bodie started towards the street, but Doyle – who had been half-expecting that move – caught his arm, spinning
him about the face him.

"Don't touch me!" Bodie jerked free, stepping backwards as he did so.

"All right, but only if you come quietly, sunshine. Cowley ordered me to drive you home, and
that's what I'm going to do, even if I have to tie you up and carry you."

"Orders! Hell, since when have you cared about orders?"

"Cowley thinks you need help – and so do I."

Bodie did not reply for a while. Instead, he studied Doyle's anxious face. His partner got the
impression that he was waiting for something.

Doyle said: "Please, Bodie. We have to talk."

Bodie seemed to relax a little and, quite suddenly, he smiled. "Talk, as opposed to shout?"

"Bodie, I..." Doyle stopped, finding it easier to return the smile than to explain. "Yeah, as opposed
to shout. Come on, let's find the car."

Once into the busy London streets, the occupants of the car did not find it easy to break the silence
that had fallen between them. Doyle steered neatly through the traffic, while Bodie leaned against
the front passenger door and stared out of the window. Glancing sideways at his companion, Doyle
realised that it was up to him to open the conversation, for Bodie would not. At least he had a
captive audience.

"About last night... Bodie, I'm sorry. I know that isn't adequate, but there's nothing else I can say. I
lost my temper. That doesn't excuse anything, I know, and I don't expect you to forgive me, but I
give you my word that it won't go any further... And, if there's anything I can do to help..."

Bodie shifted slightly. "Thanks, Ray, but the only thing you can do is what you're doing already –
back me up against Cowley, until he splits us. And it would be better if you avoid me as much as
possible. As for last night – forget it. You had a right to be angry."

"I had – you mean you'll forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive."

"Like hell there isn't! If someone had said to me what I said to you, I'd've smashed their face in."

"If someone had said it to you, it wouldn't have been true."

"There wasn't much truth in what I said, either. You swing both ways. So what? It was a shock – to
both of us – but it doesn't make any difference to what you are, Bodie. There's nothing to be
ashamed of."

"I'm not ashamed."

"Good. Look, that was the first time you'd wanted another man, that time at St Catherine's... wasn't
it?"

"Yes."

"You were under stress, too. So the homosexual side of you can't be very strong, can it? In fact...
hell, most of us have weird sexual feelings occasionally, Bodie. Maybe we've both been over-
reacting. Why don't you dust off your address book, ring up a bird or three, and have yourself a very dirty weekend. By Monday, you'll probably be wondering what all the fuss was about and St Catherine's will seem like a bad dream."

Bodie's answer was careful. "It's not quite like that, Ray. I'm not even sure I could get it up for a woman now. I didn't feel a thing with Karen, and right now I'm having to fight to keep my hands off you."

Something deep inside Doyle tensed and shivered. Almost imperceptibly, he drew further away from Bodie, and, for a while, neither of them said anything while Doyle forced himself to relax his muscles and unclench his hands from the wheel.

Finally, he said, "I want to help you, Bodie. It doesn't matter to me that you're gay—"

"It matters that I want you," Bodie interrupted.

"I can cope with that."

"I can't."

"Why not?" Doyle was genuinely puzzled. "I don't see that there's any difference between working with me and working with a woman you fancy who doesn't fancy you – someone like Betty or Suzie."

"No," Bodie said softly, "I don't think you do."

Doyle pulled the car to a stop outside Bodie's flat and twisted in his seat to face him. "We're going to have to work together for a while, anyway, until Cowley actually re-teams us."

"No... I can't..." It was a whisper of protest.

"Bodie, I... I know what you must be going through. I wish to hell this hadn't happened to you – but don't shut me out now. Let me make up for hurting you last night. You can talk to me..."

"I don't want your pity!" Bodie snarled. "And lay off the guilt, damn you." He shoved open the door and leaped out onto the pavement. "None of this is your fault, so just leave me alone to work it out by myself, okay?" He tried to slam the door, but Doyle got a hand to it first.

"How can I do that, Bodie? We're friends as well as partners. That hasn't changed."

The anger drained from Bodie's face, leaving it looking old and desperately tired. "Ray... if you care about me at all... forget about being either." He swung on his heel and hurried towards the building, breaking into a run on Doyle's shout of,

"Bodie!"

Doyle scrambled over the passenger seat and out of the door after him, but even as he bounded up to the entrance, he knew it was hopeless. He would never catch Bodie before he reached his flat.

The door safely locked behind him, Bodie collapsed into an armchair and closed his eyes, but the pain on Doyle's face and the puzzlement on Cowley's still haunted him.

Wasn't the nightmare ever going to end?
Apparently not, for the entry-phone began to buzz. Bodie ignored it. When it finally ceased, he crossed to his window and waited until he saw Doyle come down the path to his car. As his partner opened the door, he paused and looked up. Despite the distance, Bodie could see the stubborn set of his jaw.

Doyle wasn't going to give up, Bodie knew. A mixture of pity and guilt would drive him to continue to try to help.

I can't take any more of this, Bodie admitted to himself. Being with him is a kind of exquisite torture. How long before I give in to temptation? So you can cope with me wanting you, can you, Ray? On an intellectual level, maybe – if your idealism holds up – but last night's reaction was your emotional one, the one I'd get again if I did anything more that talk about wanting you. Besides, the strain is already telling on you, too. Poor Ray... so tired and puzzled and hurt. I'd love to drive all that away...

Ridiculous. Do I really want to pull Ray into this quagmire too? He's much better off without me. I can't live with his pity, anyway.

So if he won't let me go, I will.

As Bodie made the decision, he was suddenly conscious of the fact that he had expected to make it from the beginning. He had been fooling himself, because he had wanted to stay close to Ray, to keep working in a job he loved, for a man he liked and respected. But the break had to be made. Now.

He looked round the flat – his home. Possessions were something he had always tried to avoid, but over the last few years they had caught up with him. Time to let go of those, too. It shouldn't hurt, not compared with what else he was losing.

Bodie smiled bitterly as Cowley's words came back to him: "You are not indispensable, Bodie."

True enough, but he didn't think the Cow had anticipated the proof that would soon be heading his way.

Shrugging away the thought, he turned away from the window. There was a lot to do.

At least he had not lost his temper. That was the one consolation Doyle could find as he drove away from Bodie's flat. He had not lost his temper, despite the provocation, and that meant that the break with Bodie was not final.

Except that Bodie had made it sound final.

Shit! He'd accept the break-up of their partnership, if that was what Bodie wanted, but he saw no reason to break up their friendship too.

"...if you care about me at all..."

Damn it, of course he cared. That was why he was trying to help.

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

And damn Bodie's pride. Arrogant bastard, trying to pretend that he didn't need that help. If he kept
on like that he'd end up in hospital.

Serve him right, too.

Doyle hoped to God that he'd gone to bed as Cowley had ordered. If only he'd kept that fuckin' key —

"...just leave me alone to work it out by myself..."

Only Bodie hadn't been in any fit state to be left alone.

Bodie's tough, Doyle told himself. He will work it out in the end.

Only why had he been so adamant that they couldn't at least try to work together?

Doyle had known many men who were gay. Some of them had been members of the underworld, but there had been others he would have called friends... and some of both groups had probably wanted him. Shit, of course they had. He'd fended off enough advances, some of them far from casual, but his decision had been accepted without fuss. Why couldn't Bodie do that?

And, come to that, why had he himself reacted so badly to the idea that Bodie wanted him? He wasn't exactly the product of a sheltered upbringing...

Doyle shook his head in confusion. None of it made sense. Bodie didn't make sense. He was not sure he was making sense himself.

I have to sort this out, he decided. I'm missing something, that's obvious. What's not so obvious is what it is.

Time to go back to the beginning.

It hadn't even been a nine days wonder. A couple of days ago, the area around St Catherine's would probably have been crowded with thrill-seekers, but now it was empty, and the ruined church louring behind its high walls as if there had never been an avenging madman to destroy its dark peace.

Doyle rattled the chains on the newly-secured gate, then wandered along the route he and Krivas had taken five days before.

It seemed like a different country, a different world.

"Ray! Ray!"

The excited shout only just alerted him in time to brace himself for the impact of Jan's body as she hurled herself into his arms.

"Hello, love." He hugged her, grinning over her head at Mick, who was toiling up behind her. "I see your mums didn't slaughter you after all."

Mick pulled a face. "Came close t' it."

"I'll bet."

"An' she keeps on abart 'ow we got inter the church."
"I'd like to know that too," said another voice, and Doyle dropped Jan hurriedly and straightened up as he found himself facing a slim, chestnut-haired young woman dressed in denims and a T-shirt announcing that 'The Celts Got Here First'.

"This is Ray, Mum. You remember, he helped rescue us, an'—"

"Yes, I know, you've talked about nothing else for days. I'm Lindsay Corrigan, Mr Doyle, and I'm very pleased to meet you. I hope you're better now?"

"I'm fine, and I'm very pleased to meet you too, though you don't look old enough to be anyone's mother."

"You should see me after 18 hours of coping with this pair. Then I feel about ninety."

"I can believe it, though I don't see any grey hairs yet."

"You're not really old, Mum," Jan said, hastening to reassure her, "Just sort of middle-aged."

"Naw, me Mum's middle-aged," Mick broke in. "She alus says it's catchin' up wi' 'er but, meself, I fink she were never in fronter it."

"Mick!" Lindsay reproved sharply.

"Sorry, Mus Corrigan, but you alus say t' tell 'truth, an'..."

"That's enough, Mick." Lindsay ran both hands through her cap of thick, straight hair. "At least your Mum can keep you in order. Now scat, the pair of you. I want to talk to Mr Doyle."

"Aw, Mum..."

"We wanter talk t' Ray, too."

"An' Bodie. Is Bodie here, Ray?"

"No, he isn't – and I'll still be here when you get back, so do as your mother says, Jan."

Jan pulled a face at him. "Sometimes you soun' jus' like all the other grown-ups. You promise?"

"I promise."

"Then com'on, Fish-Face, let's check out you-know-what. Don' go away, Ray."

As the children disappeared, Lindsay said, "I didn't think I'd ever have the chance to thank you for what you did."

"I didn't do a lot. Bodie had to rescue all of us—"

"I met Mr Bodie, but we didn't have much of a chance to talk. He was very polite but he obviously had a lot on his mind, so I decided that the best thing I could do was to get Jan out of his hair. She can be very wearing."

"So can Bodie. He likes Jan and Mick, though – and so do I."

"But they're more acceptable in small doses?"

They both laughed, suddenly feeling comfortable with each other.
"Will you do me a favour, Ray – I can call you Ray? – and tell me what really happened at St Catherine's? Jan and Mick talk about nothing else, but they're holding something back, and they do tend to colour their stories with chunks of whatever they happen to be reading at the moment."

Doyle briefly considered the security aspect, but decided that there was no reason why Lindsay shouldn't be told the whole story – well, most of it. "I'm always ready to do a favour for a beautiful woman."

"Even married women with appalling daughters?"

Doyle had to grin. "Especially married women with appalling daughters. Let's find somewhere dry to sit."

Once settled comfortably on a grassy bank behind a windbreak of gorse bushes, Doyle found it surprisingly easy to talk about the Krivas affair. Partly, this was because Lindsay was a good listener, but it was also a relief to be able to immerse himself in a time when his relationship with Bodie had been perfectly normal. The nightmare of being captured by Krivas was infinitely preferable to the nightmare that had succeeded it.

"So that's it!" Lindsay exclaimed, suddenly interrupting his narrative. "The little horrors! Ray, I am sorry. It must have been because you said you were a policeman. They had this terrible feud with poor P.C. Evans."

"When I was their age I'd probably have felt the same way – it's funny how you forget."

"None of this is your fault..."

"People change. Jan and Mick will probably grow into responsible citizens, with mortgages, nine to five jobs and large families. They'll probably even end up voting Conservative."

"I hope not. Thanks for the encouragement, though. Right now, they don't trust anyone, and people like you get hurt because of it. I'm sorry."

"Not your fault—" Doyle caught his breath as he seemed to hear Bodie's voice say:

"None of this is your fault..."

Hell! Couldn't he forget for just five minutes?

"D'you want to hear the rest of the story or not?"

"Of course I do. Go on."

Doyle finished his tale, but the mood had been broken, and he was relieved to be able to say, "Krivas shot at me, and the bullet creased my skull. When I came to, Bodie was on the ground and Krivas was about to use a knife on him, so I grabbed the Remington and shot him. I was lucky... I expected it to explode on me." He met Lindsay's direct gaze, so reminiscent of her daughter's. "I had no choice."

"Of course you didn't. The man who won't kill to save a friend isn't human."

"I've lost track of the number of men I've killed, Lindsay," Doyle told her, "and the reasons I killed them."
"Did you ever kill for any other reason but to save life?"

Doyle thought about that question for a long time. "No..." he answered, at last, but with doubt in his voice, "at least, not deliberately."

"Then that's all right. I can safely let the kids go on hero-worshipping you and Bodie – don't look so alarmed, Ray. That was bound to happen." Lindsay frowned, studying Doyle. "Are you really all right? I mean, are you normally this pale?"

"Do you normally ask perfect strangers personal questions?" Doyle countered.

"Yes, if I like them. Now answer my question."

Doyle lay back and looked at the sky, so he would not have to meet her eyes. "The doctors say I'm fine now."

"That isn't an answer, either."

"Are you always this persistent too?"

"Why do you think Jan is so appalling? She is my daughter. There is something wrong, isn't there? And if it's not physical, it has to be emotional."

"And this bright?"

Lindsay chuckled. "I like people – and I'm nosy. You know, Ray, sometimes it helps to talk to someone who isn't involved and I know how to keep my mouth shut. It's a prerequisite for someone as inquisitive as I am if I want to keep my friends. What is it? A girl? With looks like yours you're bound to have broken a few hearts – or is it the other way around?"

Doyle could hear real sympathy in her voice, and felt deeply tempted to confide in her, but there was no way he could do so without betraying Bodie. "Maybe it would help to talk, but I can't, Lindsay. There's someone else involved – and that person's been hurt enough already."

Lindsay considered that. "It's difficult for me to help if you won't talk to me," she pointed out.

"I didn't ask for any help, Lindsay."

"No, but I want to help you. It might start to repay you for giving me my daughter back alive."

"I just did my job."

There was a stubbornness about Doyle that Lindsay recognised. Afraid that he was about to clam up completely, she changed tack. "All right. All I can do, in that case, is to give you some hard won Corrigan advice. Sometimes, it's impossible to decide what you really want, until a moment comes when you realise that there's something that you can't bear to happen – and that's the moment to go for broke. Prevent it, whatever the cost."

She sounded so forceful that she caught Doyle's attention. He rolled up on one elbow to look at her. "Hard won Corrigan advice?"

Lindsay hugged her knees and gazed into the distance. "When I was eighteen I had to decide whether to go and live with a completely unsuitable man, who might never be free to marry me. I knew that if I did I'd lose everything else that mattered; my family, most of my friends, the boy I'd been going to marry since I was thirteen, the University place I'd spent years working for, a
comfortable life – but I simply could not bear to let Jack go. I've never regretted the decision, though the cost still hurts. What sacrifice you're prepared to make depends on the stakes and, as far as I'm concerned, the kind of love Jack and I share is the highest kind of stake there is. I don't know what stakes you're playing for, Ray, but if you're not prepared to sacrifice what you have to win them, they're not worth it."

"It's not that clear cut," Doyle protested. "More like total confusion. And what happens next doesn't depend on me, either. I'm trying to help, but I'm not being allowed to and, even if I was, I can't make the decisions – not that I know what decisions I'd want to make if I could!"

The look Lindsay gave him was very dubious indeed. "Are you sure about that, Ray?"

"It's the one bloody thing I'm sure about in this whole mess," Doyle insisted gloomily.

"Then perhaps it isn't really important to you. If it was you'd—"

She broke off as Jan and Mick stampeded through the bushes. Mick's face was red and Jan's expression was thunderous.

"They've bloody blocked it up!" she yelled at her mother.

Lindsay rose to her feet. "Janice, you've had fair warning about language like that."

"But, Mum—"

"And one more such word from you, and I'll ban TV for you for the next month."

"Sorry, Mum," Jan said quickly. Plainly, a threat from Lindsay was to be taken seriously. "But they've gone an' blocked it up!"

" Blocked what up?"

"Our... private way into St Catherine's." Jan suddenly whirled on Ray. "Did you tell 'em?"

"As it happens, no, but—"

"An' Bodie wouldn't've – anyway, 'e promised." Suddenly uncertain, Jan looked pleadingly at Doyle. "'E wouldn't've, would 'e?"

"Bodie doesn't break promises," Doyle told her gently.

"Must've bin that Cowley feller," Mick put in.

"Don't be silly," Lindsay said bracingly. "Once the authorities knew the drain was there they were bound to find it."

"Ow d'y'know about it?" Mick demanded.

"I told her," said Doyle. Then, as the children glared at him, "Well, I didn't even know it was a secret, and, even if I had, that place is dangerous."

"You sound more like a grown-up every minute."

"That's because he is," Lindsay told her daughter, "but some grown-ups are special, right?"

"Aw, Mum..."
"Some grown-ups are very special," Doyle agreed, looking at Lindsay. Then he grinned, "Never mind, Jan. I expect you'll find some other way to annoy the Force. Meanwhile, let me buy you all lunch. Didn't I see a hamburger joint back on the Ramsden Road?"

"Gosh, yes. Can I 'ave a double super bacon cheese-burger, an' a chocolate an' peanut brittle sundae —?"

"Jan, really! Ray, you needn't—"


Mick's eyes gleamed. "They do make the most fantastic strawberry ice-cream milk shakes."

"You're outvoted," Doyle informed Lindsay.

"They'll never eat their dinners. Come to think of it, neither will I." Lindsay linked her arm through Doyle's. "Be it on your own head, my lad. I warn you, that's a very good hamburger joint, and all three of us have incredible appetites."

"Not half as incredible as mine."

"Then lay on, McDuff – let the vultures descend."

"Shouldn't that be McDoyle?" Jan asked, trying to keep her face straight.

Lindsay made an obviously inaccurate grab at her daughter, who danced away, laughing. "I ought to drown both of you hooligans in the canal before you bankrupt Ray and send me round the twist."

"Couldn't," Mick smirked. "I can swim over two lengths under water now, an' 'old me breath fer three minutes."

"So can I."

"No yer can't. Girls ain't strong enuff."

"Can."

"Can't."

"Can."

"Can't."

"If we run," Doyle said to Lindsay, "we'll be eating when they're still standing here arguing."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

"Hey! Wait for us!"

Racing hand in hand with Lindsay, and the kids in hot pursuit, the day no longer seemed quite so bleak to Doyle.

It had been a good afternoon. More than good. Once he had – without too much difficulty – persuaded Lindsay to let him take her and the kids to the funfair, the remnants of his misery had
been routed by their enjoyment. Only at the odd moment had he had time to think how much Bodie would have loved the outing. Perhaps that accounted for vague feeling that there was something missing that had pestered him all day. At times he had almost started to turn, expecting to see his partner behind him. Anyhow, in the moments he had time to think, like now, as they were walking back to the car park, his problems had begun to seem less insoluble. After all, Cowley had made it clear that he was to continue working with Bodie, so all he had to do was to play things coolly until his partner realised that the situation wasn't as difficult as he had thought.

It was only when they reached the car that Doyle's illusion was shattered by the insistent bleep of the R/T. With an apologetic look at Lindsay, and ignoring the children's goggle-eyed excitement, he reached for the mike.

"4/5 receiving."

"4/5, report at once to Alpha at 3/7's flat. It's urgent. Over."


"No information, 4/5, but Alpha doesn't sound too pleased. Over."

"On my way. Over and out." Doyle re-hooked the mike. "Lindsay, I..."

"Bad news, Ray?"

"I don't know," he said, but his thoughts were swirling in a kind of panic.

Oh Jesus, Bodie, what have you done?

"We'll take the bus home," Lindsay decided. "Get going, Ray."

"Aw, Mum, can't we go with Ray? Maybe Mick an' me can help. We did before."

"Certainly not," Lindsay replied absently, watching Doyle's face with a growing anxiety. As if aware of this, he slammed the car door.

"Thanks, Lindsay. Bless you."

"Let me know if things work out. Good luck!" Her shout was almost lost as Doyle slewed the car out of the car park and into the road.

He was trying frantically to stop himself thinking, but it was impossible.

Christ... the way Bodie had looked and acted this morning, nothing was impossible... even... No, don't think it. Bodie wouldn't... couldn't...

I should never have left him... should have stopped him getting out of the car... broken into his flat after him. I've spent the afternoon enjoying myself while—

He was unable to banish the horrifying pictures forming in his mind; all he could do was put his foot to the floor and drive as if sheer speed could leave them behind.

Disdaining the lifts as too slow, Doyle took the stairs three at a time, steamrolling past a CI5 agent he didn't even see, and slid to an exhausted halt in the middle of Bodie's living room. Looking wildly about him, he found that the only person present was Cowley, who was sitting
upright in an armchair by the telephone, his face white with tight-lipped anger.

"Where's Bodie?" Doyle demanded.

"That is what I would like to know, Doyle. When did you last see him?"

"This morning. I brought him back here. For God's sake, sir, what's goin' on? Is he all right?"

Cowley picked up a buff envelope lying on the table at his side. "You had better read this."

Doyle took it reluctantly. It was addressed to Cowley at CI5 HQ, and the handwriting was Bodie's. Doyle suddenly didn't want to read it.

"What is it?" he asked.

Cowley answered with controlled precision: "About ninety minutes ago, I received a call from Chief Inspector Norman of the Anti-Terrorist Squad concerning some information he wished to add to that he had apparently conveyed to Bodie last night – information that Bodie withheld at our meeting this morning. When I tried to telephone Bodie, I received no answer. Nor could I contact him by radio. I also failed to get in touch with you. So I came here in person. As I was ringing the doorbell, a young lady poked her head out from the flat opposite and informed me that Bodie was out and she didn't think he'd be back today, as he'd been carrying luggage when he left. Then, as an afterthought, she asked me if my name was George Cowley. When I produced proof of my identity, she gave me that letter, explaining that Bodie had asked her to post it for him, recorded delivery, tomorrow morning, but that it didn't seem worth it as I was here now. Well, go on, read it."

Doyle extracted the single sheet of paper from the envelope and scanned it quickly. It was a crisply formal letter of resignation, explaining that, 'for personal reasons' Bodie could not serve his period of notice, but that he was enclosing his I.D. and would leave his officially-issued CI5 weapons here at the flat. Only for one line did the formality break, in what looked like a hastily scrawled addition. 'None of this is Doyle's fault. Please find him a partner who'll look after him.'

For a few seconds, all Doyle felt was overriding panic.

Damn it, Bodie couldn't leave... couldn't walk out of his life like this...

He knew now that Lindsay was right: there was something he could not bear to let happen – but it had happened and there was no way to stop it.

"Why?" he asked aloud. "Why?"

"I presumed that you could provide an answer to that question."

"Well, I can't," Doyle snarled. There could be no rational reason for Bodie to take such drastic action, even had it been in character, which it wasn't.

What the hell is he doing? he asked himself. Running away to join the Foreign Legion or whatever the present equivalent happens to be? Bloody stupid romantic notion.

Well, it is a traditional escape from unrequited love, he added bitterly.

Unrequited love.

Doyle cursed himself for his blindness. That was the missing factor, the one his mind had been
seeking all day. Bodie's actions suddenly made – well, if not sense, at least some kind of sense. Bodie loves me... is desperately in love with me. Damn you to hell, Bodie, why didn't you tell me? How could you expect me to understand if—?

"Doyle!" Cowley's voice was sharp.

"Uh? Yes, sir?"

"You do want to read it?" Then, at Doyle's blank look, he amplified. "The letter Bodie left for you, man."

Doyle snatched the second envelope from Cowley's hands. It was slit along the top; Doyle glared accusingly at the Controller.

"Naturally, I opened it. We could not locate you, and it might have contained some clue to Bodie's whereabouts."

Turning his back on Cowley, Doyle took out the letter and unfolded it.

'Dear Ray,

By the time you read this, Cowley will have received my resignation (well, he did tell me I was dispensable!) and I'll be touting my dubious skills somewhere overseas, where I'll be out of range of the explosion. A nice little war sounds almost tempting in comparison.

Anyhow, it's a logical solution to my problem. I know – I'm running away. That's the first thing a mercenary learns – when to run. Call it cowardice, if you like – more like lack of willpower, actually – but, whatever it is, it's to blame for this, nothing else, and certainly not you.

The keys to my flat (and the key I had to yours) are enclosed. I won't be needing them, or the contents of the flat. Keep what you fancy and do what you like with the rest.

There's a witnessed letter in my desk to confirm that. Perhaps it'll be some sort of recompense for all the trouble I'm causing.

I hope your next partnership is as effective as ours was.

Take care.

Bodie.

Doyle slowly folded the letter, blinking to ward off the stinging in his eyes. All the flippancy, even the deliberate aggravation ('some sort of recompense' indeed!) could not disguise either the pain behind it, or the nature of Bodie's feelings for him. Not now.

Transparent, that's what you are, Bodie. Crazy romantic fool... you'll only destroy yourself. D'you think I want that?

It had happened and there was no way to stop it. Bodie had decided to leave, and—

Like hell there wasn't!

Doyle whirled about, hooking the telephone handset from its cradle.
"What are you doing?" Cowley asked.

"Bodie has to travel on his own passport," Doyle stated, dialling from memory. "He doesn't 'ave time to get a false one. That means he's travelling under 'is own name. Which means I can trace him, find him, shake some sense into 'im..."

"When I have finished with him and not before. Put the phone down, Doyle. Do you really think I hadn't thought of that before you got here? Bodie is not going to get out of this country, so why don't you pour us both a drink? I take it you do know where the man keeps his Scotch?"

Doyle obeyed, shaking his head admiringly at Cowley as he did so. "I should 'ave known. What's your plan?"

"The obvious: a nationwide alert at the ports. I've circulated Bodie's name, description, and the fact that he is wanted for questioning by CI5. He's to be apprehended, but no chances are to be taken with him."

"Which they'll interpret as meaning that he could be dangerous, so they won't leave him any opportunity for escape."

"Naturally." Cowley picked up Bodie's letter of resignation from where it lay on the dining table and deliberately ripped it to shreds. "I've been patient long enough, Doyle. Now, I'm going to have the truth from you. Did you—"

The phone interrupted him. Both men leaped for it, but Cowley was closer. "Yes? This is he. Right. Good, good. Tell them to hold him until we arrive." He slammed down the instrument with an air of triumph.

"Where?"

"Harwich." Cowley paused, head to one side, obviously puzzled. "Why there?"

"Ferry to Rotterdam or Hamburg. He'll have contacts in both Hamburg and Amsterdam."

"And he wouldn't want to risk the lightning strikes the Air Controllers have planned for this weekend," Cowley said, in agreement, picking up his coat on his way to the door. "How long will it take us by road?"

"Two hours."

"Let's hope the harbour police can hold him that long."

At the wheel of his own car, roaring down the A12 into the deeper reaches of Essex, Doyle was able to think clearly for the first time.

Step by step, he was able to re-interpret Bodie's words and actions in the light of his new knowledge. Finally, he created a complete – and stunning – picture of his partner's motives and emotions, a picture that filled him with both pity and fury.

How dare Bodie treat him like this?

Determinedly, Doyle crushed down the anger and, with some reluctance, turned his attention to a more considered view of his own reactions. Oddly, the knowledge that Bodie was in love with him had not brought shock, disgust or fear, but a kind of relief. So had the news of his detention at Harwich.
Despite all that's happened, I still don't want to lose him, Doyle decided. Reasons? I don't know... I didn't realise that I cared this much. Friendship is a kind of love, too, and ours is very special.

Some friend I turned out to be. I didn't even notice what was happening to him until it was too late, and then I didn't help, in fact, I made it worse. Even when I recovered enough sense to try, I couldn't reach him. My fault again. I couldn't help because I've never really known him. From the beginning, I just let our relationship drift, let it happen to me, rather than taking control. Hell, I couldn't even control my temper, let alone...

Never again, Bodie.

If there is an 'again.' What the fuck am I going to do next?

I may have to let him go after all.

That thought hurt. But what alternative was there?

It was obvious – and terrifying. He couldn't do it. Simply could not. The cost would be...

Do it, or lose him.

Doyle contemplated the alternatives, the sacrifices, and his own mixed emotions.

Whatever I do is going to hurt, but the only alternative is unbearable and the stakes are high.

Okay, Lindsay, I'm going for broke.

Emerging from a long and unprofitable consideration of the situation, Cowley suddenly realised that they had left the A12 and were negotiating a maze of narrow lanes running through open farmland. A grey autumn mist was rippling in from the sea, hiding all signs of habitation.

"Why are we going this way?" he demanded.

"Traffic jam just outside Colchester," was the laconic reply.

"Humph. Just so long as you're not lost."]

"No, sir." In fact, Doyle knew exactly where he was. He also knew exactly where he was going: into Cowley's bad books and perhaps out of CI5 – but he had to see Bodie alone before Cowley did. Therefore...

This spot looked as good as anywhere. He hadn't seen a house or phone box for nearly two miles.

"Shit!" Doyle exclaimed, braking so violently that the car parked itself across the road.

"What—?" Cowley began, but Doyle had flung open the door, catapulted himself out of the now-stationary car, and was now pelting down the road like an Olympic sprinter. "Doyle!"

Doyle's head turned, and he shouted something unintelligible before disappearing through a gate into the worst of the mist.

After allowing himself an angry mutter, Cowley reported their approximate position to HQ, then scrambled out of the car. The evening was becoming cold, and the birds had retreated, leaving silence behind them.
Cowley shouted again, but the thickening mist seemed to absorb the noise. Certainly, there was no response. The Controller was growing uneasy. Doyle was not a man to behave unaccountably without good reason, or to disappear for any length of time without reporting in. He might very well need help.

Giving in to his anxiety – and curiosity – Cowley followed his agent. As he reached the gate, he glanced back towards the car to fix its position in his mind, only to see Doyle sprinting across the field, leaping the fence, and flinging himself into the driving seat. Before Cowley had quite had time to absorb what was happening, the car's engine burst forth into a full-throated roar, and the vehicle rocketed away, Doyle reaching out with one hand to slam a swinging door.

"Doyle!" Cowley bellowed, but the sound of the car engine had died away before his shout ceased to echo. "By God, you'll regret this, Doyle," he growled, but his mind was running ahead of his words.

Confound it, he had totally misjudged the situation. Whatever Bodie was up to, Doyle was in it just as deeply, his denials and, presumably, Bodie's letters, designed as a feint. Well, he was still going to have his explanation – and their hides. Meanwhile, he had to find a telephone.

Bodie rested his forehead on the heels of his hands, wishing for no more than some kind of oblivion. Lack of sleep had taken its toll, but it was defeat that bowed his head and slumped his shoulders.

Defeat at Cowley's hands was nothing new, but he still did not understand how the Controller had even known that he was leaving the country. The letter of resignation would not arrive on his desk until Monday morning, by which time Bodie had planned to be well out of reach.

Free.

But who wants that kind of freedom? Bodie asked himself.

The answer was simple: it's the only kind I can have. Could have. Hell, what am I going to tell Cowley?

The answer to that was not so simple, nor was discovering the one that would give him the means of escape from this room, which was as secure as the harbour police could make it. The way certainly did not lie through his guards, who jumped every time he blinked. In other circumstances, he would have enjoyed playing on their nerves but, at the moment, he could summon no interest in terrifying the local fuzz.

His earlier 'innocent citizen outraged at official high-handedness' act had not done any good, either, and had not entirely been acting. Seeing the power of CI5 from the other side of the fence had been a chastening experience. Did he really approve of a civilian organisation which could have one of its employees arrested for trying to leave the country?

"We're always glad to be of help to CI5," said a loud voice from outside the door. Bodie recognised it as belonging to a police sergeant who had refused his perfectly legal request to know what charges were going to be made against him, and to make a telephone call – though he was not sure who he would have called. Certainly not Cowley, though it was, no doubt, the CI5 chief who was outside now.

"Of course, sir," the sergeant bellowed. "If you'll just sign here. Right you are, sir. He's in here."
The door opened.

"Dangerous, is he?" the sergeant asked, with relish.

Bodie braced himself.

"Very," said a voice that most definitely wasn't Cowley's.

Bodie's head jerked up.

Doyle was standing watching him with a cold, angry expression. "Let's go, Bodie," was all that he said by way of greeting.

"Where's Cowley?"

"Mister Cowley to you – and it's none of your business," Doyle said sternly. He moved forward as if to haul Bodie to his feet; the other man stood up hurriedly.

With the world shaking under his feet – Why Ray? Oh God, why couldn't Cowley have sent anyone else? – Bodie took refuge in almost hysterical humour.

"I'll cum quietly, hofficer," he said, in an outrageously cockney accent. "It weren't really me fault. I done if fer me six wives an' twenny-seven kids."

This performance seriously discommoded the harbour policemen, but did not have any apparent effect on Doyle.

"Aren't you going to cuff him?" the sergeant demanded.

Bodie clapped his wrists together and rolled his eyes heavenward. "Put on the darbies, hofficer."

"Shut up," Doyle ordered. "You aren't funny and you aren't helping. It's all right, sergeant. I can handle this one if he gives me any trouble." He patted his armpit significantly. Bodie, who had already noticed that his partner wasn't wearing a gun, was suddenly hit by an urge to giggle.

"Out," Doyle snapped, the harshness of his voice acting like a slap on the cheek.

Bodie obeyed meekly. Indeed, there didn't seem to be anything else to do. As Doyle opened the twin doors that led out into the car park, the telephone on the duty desk rang. The sergeant picked it up. "Yes? Yes, he's here..."

Doyle grabbed Bodie's arm and hauled him forwards. "Run!"

"Huh?" Bodie knew that he was far too tired to run, but Doyle's urgency propelled him forward, if somewhat reluctantly.

"Run, damn you!"

Bodie did as he was ordered, though he wondered if Ray had finally cracked up under the strain of the last few days. It was an impression that did not fade at all as Doyle snatched Bodie's luggage from the hands of an astonished young man who had been about to deposit them into the back seat. Leaning over to fling wide the passenger door, he snarled at Bodie to, "Get in."

The young man had finally gathered his wits. "Sir, you've got to sign—" He stopped. There didn't seem to be any point in finishing the sentence, for the car and its driver were now well out of earshot.
"What was all that about?" Bodie asked.

"Cowley, sunshine. He's going to eat you alive, and then start on me for dessert."

"But why...? I mean, why you?"

"Because I had to dump him in the middle of the Essex countryside. A couple of miles walk on his bad leg won't've done his temper any good."

Bodie looked at his partner in astonishment. "You dumped Cowley? Are you out of your mind?"

"That's good, coming from you. If there's anyone in this car who's out of his mind, it certainly isn't me."

"But—"

"Shut up, Bodie."

"I was only—"

"I said, 'Shut up!' I don't want to hear another word out of you."

Bewildered, Bodie obeyed. Too tired to protest at Doyle's cavalier treatment he settled back in the seat, and allowed himself the simple pleasure of watching his friend drive. It was pure self-indulgence but, after all, it was also something he had believed he would never see again.

If Doyle was conscious of the scrutiny, he did not remark on it, but continued to drive North and West with his usual competence. There was something about his quiet skill and, in the gathering dusk, the interior of the car had become a warm, peaceful haven from all the trials of the world outside. Bodie had begun to doze when, almost an hour after they had left Harwich, Doyle broke his silence.

"When did you eat last?"

"Uh? Oh, I'm all right."

"I didn't ask if you were all right; I asked when you ate last."

"I had a sandwich at Liverpool Street."

Doyle shuddered. "Before that?"

"I don't remember. Look, Ray, there's no need for you to stick your neck out like this. Cowley's going to—"

"Forget Cowley. You have to worry about me, first." In the slight glow from the dashboard instruments, Doyle's face was impassive, like something carved on an Eastern temple wall, touched by torchlight. Bodie had never seen this kind of cold anger in him, and he found it far more frightening than his usual bouts of flaring temper. He was no longer sure he knew him...

Without warning, Doyle signalled a right turn, swinging the car into the forecourt of a small roadside restaurant. "Out," he ordered.

"Why?" Bodie asked, not budging.
"Just do as you're told. Unless you want me to make you."

"You and whose army?"

"Army? Right now, you berk, a six year old could beat you to a pulp, with one hand tied behind her. Out."

Acknowledging that this was little less than the truth, Bodie scrambled out into cold night air that banished his drowsiness but made him shiver as he was steered inside. Once there, he made a half-hearted move in the direction of the bar, only to be halted by Doyle's grip on his arm. "Not on an empty stomach. I'd rather deal with you sober."

"For Christ's sake stop muckin' me around. I'm not a kid."

"Aren't you? You've certainly been behaving like one." Doyle pushed him into a chair and stood over him threateningly. "You don't like it? Well, let me tell you something, Bodie, neither do I." With that, he swung away to intercept the waitress who was just in the process of noticing their existence. Bodie sat and watched him charm her, feeling dazed and confused. Doyle's behaviour wasn't making any sense at all.

The waitress made notes on her pad, then left in the direction of the kitchen, while Doyle, looking quietly satisfied, returned to the table.

"Don't we get to see the menu?" Bodie asked plaintively.

"You'll eat what's put in front of you."

Bodie contemplated rebellion, particularly when a large bowl of thin chicken soup appeared in front of him, but throwing a scene – or throwing the soup at Doyle – would expend more energy than he could afford. In response to his reproachful look, Doyle leaned forward, closed a warm hand around his left wrist, and spoke very gently. "Look, you probably haven't eaten for days. You can gorge yourself sick tomorrow, if you like, but tonight, just humour me, okay?"

Bodie looked up and instantly knew that it was a mistake. Doyle's concerned green eyes suddenly filled the whole universe, stilling his heartbeat, his breathing. Desperately, he wrenched his gaze away, picked up a spoon, and took refuge in his soup.

Satisfied, Doyle let go of his wrist and turned his attention to his own food.

Bodie ate the rest of the meal without further protest, though his resolution was strained when he found himself faced with a plain omelette. Even if he hadn't known that Doyle was right, he would have remained silent, unwilling to acknowledge the other man's existence because he simply couldn't cope with it. For the first time since he was a child, Bodie felt totally lost, with no idea what he was going to do next, unable to see how he could avoid whatever Ray had planned. If, that was, his unpredictable friend had anything planned at all... and if he himself really wanted to escape. Oh shit... why was it so difficult to think...?

"Are you all right?" Doyle's sharply anxious voice brought Bodie out of a reverie that had become semi-drowse.

"Yeh. Just thinking."

"Don't. I'm doing all the thinking that needs to be done around here, mate. Com'on. Let's get out of here."
"What about the bill?"

"Paid, sunshine, while you were half asleep. Come on, on your feet."

Again, Bodie did not give argument, allowing himself to be shepherded back to the car. They rolled on into the night, headlights zooming hypnotically past...

Like the lights, Bodie's thoughts darted at his problems, but they slipped past and receded... again... and again...

"Wake up, sleeping beauty. We're here."

"Go 'way." Bodie made vague fending motions, but he was hauled unceremoniously from his comfortable seat and into the cold drizzle. "Ow! Sadist—"

It was the nearest thing to a normal reaction that Doyle had received from Bodie since Harwich and he was heartened by it.

"Where the hell are we?" Bodie asked querulously, pulling his coat collar up around his ears.

Doyle shook rain from his hair and grinned. "Never you mind. While you were snoring I found us a night's lodging and booked us in. Grab a bag and let's get in out of the rain."

Still dazed, Bodie found himself hustled through, in quick succession, a hotel lobby, a lift, and a seemingly endless corridor, before Doyle stopped, unlocked a door, leaned inside to switch on the light, then, putting a hand on Bodie's shoulder, pushed him through and to the left, into the bathroom.

"Think you can take a shower without falling over?"

Taking Bodie's grunt as affirmation, he withdrew, leaving his partner staring bleakly at the haggard face reflected in the mirror over the handbasin. After a few moments he sighed, pulled a face at the apparition, then followed orders. It was not until he was standing under the shower, and beginning to feel a little more alert, that he realised exactly what was happening.

What the hell did Ray think he was playing at? Shit! He knew the situation... well, most of it. What was he trying to prove? That he wasn't prejudiced? Bodie had never thought, even for an instant, that he was. That he could spend the night in a hotel room with him without being raped? Ridiculous. Ray knew him better than that. Proof that they could go on working together? Yeh, that was probably it. Spend a night in the same room... prove it isn't real... make it all go away?

Oh Ray, love, if only it was that easy...

I can't do it, Bodie decided. I have to get out of here.

Except, of course, that I have no money, no means of transport... I don't even know where I am.

Oh, sod it. I'm going to have to talk with Ray... discuss this... explain...

Bodie winced. Talking to Ray Doyle was the last thing on Earth that he wanted to do. Reluctantly, he switched off the shower and towelled himself dry. He ought, he knew, to climb back into his clothes, but the effort was something his weary mind and body couldn't face. Instead, he retrieved his dressing gown from the top of his bag, thankful that Doyle had not taken it with him into the
bedroom, wrapped himself in its concealing warmth and, tying the belt very firmly indeed, steeled himself to face his partner.

Doyle turned towards him and smiled as he entered, and Bodie brought up short, swallowing. Stripped to the waist, barefoot, his hair still tightly curled from the rain, Doyle was frighteningly beautiful.

"That's better," he said. "You look as close to being human as you ever get. I'm going to borrow your razor – didn't have time to pack. All right?"

"...Yes..."

"Good. You'd better go to bed. I won't be long." Doyle moved towards the bathroom door, and Bodie stepped hurriedly aside to avoid any contact with him. Brought up short by the bed, he sat down thankfully.

So tired...

Bed.

It was a double bed.

'...go to bed. I won't be long...'

Oh Christ.

"Doyle!"

At Bodie's angry shout, Doyle appeared from the bathroom, naked, and dripping wet. "What's the matter?"

"What the hell d'y' think you're doing?"

"Taking a shower – if you'll give me the chance, that is."

"That's not what I mean and you know it!" Bodie rose to his feet to meet Doyle's eyes on level terms. "Was it your intention to share that bed with me?"

"It is my intention," Doyle replied steadily. "Just do as you're told, Bodie."

"Like hell! I'm not going to stand for it, Ray."

"Well, no, I quite agree. The bed'll be much more comfortable."

Bodie grabbed hold of his temper and wrestled it into a reluctant submission. "This isn't a joke, Ray," he growled.

"Of course it isn't, but it isn't a subject for argument, either. Get to bed and I'll join you in a minute."

"No! Dammit, stop trying to give me orders. You're not my commanding officer. I still have some choice—"

"Like hell you have!" Doyle stepped forward, every line of his body bristling with anger, like a terrier in the preliminaries of a dog fight. Bodie almost expected the water on his skin to start steaming. "You didn't give me a choice, so I'm not giving you one now."
Bodie was taken aback. "I didn't—"

"Right from the start you've treated me as if I was six. You couldn't tell me anything, could you? I had to discover it all for myself. Of course I didn't understand – you never gave me a chance. But I understand now, Bodie. All of it."

Something inside Bodie was beginning to panic. Doyle's new conviction was frightening. "Ray... I was only trying..."

"To protect me. You've been doing that for years. Only it's over. Finished. Ended. This time, I get to choose, the way you ought to allowed me to choose at the beginning. You know, I used to think you trusted me..." He paused, taking a deep breath. "Well, anyway, I'm quite capable of picking who I want to go to bed with. I've decided. Are you trying to tell me you don't want me?"

"You know I want you. But I won't have you sleeping with me out of pity."

"Pity? Who said anything about pity?" Doyle moved forward until his eyes were less than six inches from Bodie's. This was the moment. One half-truth, and he would be committed. "Try love, instead, Bodie. Try need."

Bodie's world shattered at the words, flowed and melted about him. This could not be real, but, paradoxically, the only solidity within the flux of doubt and incredulity was the man who still stood less than a foot away, watching him anxiously. Bodie searched that familiar face, seeking any hint of doubt, but seeing only defiance, concern and... expectancy? Oh God, could it be real? He wanted it to be real... If Ray had lied...

The green eyes held his unflinchingly. His own, though he did not realise it, were shouting the question he dared not even whisper.

Do you mean it?

Doyle answered that question with a sincerity that finally brought dawning belief. "You bloody fool, Bodie. Would I do anything this crazy for someone I didn't love? Isn't it obvious that I can't bear to let you go?"

It was with a feeling of dreamlike unreality that Bodie reached out, gripped Doyle's shoulders, and pulled him into a kiss, but the strong body was solid under his hands, slippery with water, and Doyle moved unresistingly into the embrace, returning the kiss with a fierce intensity that finally convinced Bodie of the truth of what he most wanted to believe.

When the kiss finally ended, Bodie pressed his face into Doyle's shoulder, and, after a few moments, began to laugh helplessly.

"For God's sake, Bodie, what's so damn funny?" Doyle sounded annoyed and somewhat hurt.

"Sorry... it's just... Hell, I've spent every second I've been with you since Hazely fighting down desire... and, suddenly... when I don't have to fight any more... I'm falling asleep on my feet. I'm sorry, love."

He felt Doyle tremble, but then the other man's arms tightened around him.

"It's all right. We'll still be here tomorrow." Doyle, sensing that Bodie's laughter was close to turning into tears, stroked the soft hair with gentle fingers. "Shhhh. It's all right. Come on, old son. Into bed. It's all over now. I'm not going to let you go."
Somehow, despite Bodie's reluctance to release him, even for an instant, Doyle managed to winkle him out of his dressing gown. It was much easier to climb into bed with him than to prise him loose. Once there, Doyle tucked the covers round them both, switched off the light, and wrapped his arms around the human limpet clinging to his body.

"...love you, Ray..." It was an almost inaudible mumble. A few seconds later, the desperate grip began to relax.

Lying on his back, with the darkness almost as heavy as the warm body pressed against him, Doyle could feel panic creeping up on him, like a panther stalking him in the blackness.

Jesus! How was he going to go through with this? Affection for Bodie, mental preparation and sheer acting ability had carried him this far – but how much further could it go? When he had planned this, he had assumed that he could react sexually to Bodie, but all he'd felt in his arms had been the emotions that had driven him into this corner in the first place; tenderness, affection and protectiveness. That was a kind of love, but it was not the kind he'd led Bodie into believing he felt.

Thank God Bodie hadn't asked the one question he didn't want to have to answer: do you really want me?

Could he have lied? Well, if he was one of that minority of humans totally incapable of homosexual activity, it wouldn't matter anyway: Bodie would know soon enough.

And then...

He remembered the incredulous joy on Bodie's face, then saw it turn, in imagination, to betrayal and anger and despair.

No. He wasn't going to hurt Bodie that much. He'd manage, somehow, even if it meant living a lie for the rest of his life... but why couldn't he have felt something?

Bodie was now deeply asleep. God only knew how he'd kept going this long. Nothing would wake him, so Doyle could get out of bed and... finish... up in the... bathroom...

...in a minute... he'd just rest here...

...make sure Bodie really was... asleep...

He awoke in a room hot with sunshine, his limbs cramped and numb, still entangled with Bodie, both of them sticky with sweat.

There was a moment of disorientation, before he realised that he was not in a tropical jungle, but in a hotel bedroom with Bodie, and, as memory returned, his first reaction was relief that he had remembered to hang the 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the doorknob the night before. He could imagine, with uncomfortable clarity, the reaction of any self-respecting chambermaid to their present position.

He had to unravel himself from Bodie before he could stretch, and then he had to spend some time massaging blood back into his right arm and leg, cursing Bodie softly as the returning circulation jabbed his nerves. The other man slept serenely through this performance, his face buried in the pillows.

Doyle still felt drowsy and lethargic, as if he'd slept too long rather than had his fill of sleep. A
glance at his bare wrist reminded him of his precipitate exit from the bathroom the night before and, with his bladder prodding him into action, he rolled out of bed, leaving Bodie sprawled out in complete possession.

His watch was on the bathroom shelf, where he had left it, but he was startled by what the figures told him. It was thirty-five minutes past noon – a reminder that Bodie wasn't the only one who hadn't had much sleep in the last twenty-four hours.

He took his time over shaving and showering, ending up feeling far more awake, though apprehensive. Indeed, he had to steel himself before he entered the bedroom. Bodie, though, hadn't moved. Doyle sagged with relief, then told himself sternly that putting off the moment of truth wasn't going to help. All the same, there was no need to wake Bodie. Yet.

Doyle busied himself by opening the window, pulling the curtains closed to cut off the worst of the heat, then by putting on the kettle. It was as he was reaching for the switch on the plug, that he realised he was being watched from the bed.

"Tea or coffee, sunshine?"

"Tea. My mouth feels like the Gobi Desert parked itself there."

Doyle grinned at him. "You look as if you've been parked there for a couple of months."

"You turn a nice compliment, Raymond." Bodie sat up, caught sight of himself in the mirror, and winced. "Maybe you have a point, though. Hold up on the tea for five minutes, will you?" He heaved himself out of bed and made his way to the bathroom but, as he passed Doyle, he reached out to run a fingertip along his shoulderblade, making him jump.

"Don't worry, Ray." He paused at the bathroom door. "I was just making sure you were real. It wasn't a pass – yet."

Recognising the plea for reassurance behind the frivolity, Doyle responded in kind. "Promises, promises. You goin' to keep me waiting forever?"

"Patience," said Bodie, "is a virtue. Just remember what you're always telling me when we're on stakeout and practice what you preach." He slammed the door behind him, then opened it again to add, "Five minutes," before disappearing for a second time.

Doyle switched off the kettle, then wandered across to straighten the bed. They might as well be comfortable.

The practical approach wasn't working. His stomach was churning and his hands visibly trembling. In an effort to still them, he slid down onto the floor, coiled his legs into a half-lotus, and tried to make his breathing confirm to meditation techniques, but Bodie was whistling in the bathroom, distracting him so it was impossible to listen to his own mind.

Oh Christ, but he couldn't remember being so scared of another human being in his life... No, it wasn't that he was actually scared of Bodie. He was scared for him... and for himself.

"What, no tea?"

Doyle started guiltily at Bodie's voice, but before he could get to his feet the other man had discarded the towel with which he had been rubbing his hair and was kneeling on the floor beside him. "Ray, what's the matter?"
"Nothing."

Hands settled on his shoulders. "You don't start this routine unless there's something wrong."

"I meant 'nothing much'." Doyle managed a smile. "First night nerves, that's all."

The hands squeezed reassuringly. "You think I'm not scared too, love? Hell, I'm just as much a virgin as you are, y'know? Not the sort that any self-respecting dragon would look at twice, mind you."

Doyle began to laugh. "Clown. I don't know why I put up with you."

"Maybe because I'm going to make you some tea?" Bodie rose to his feet, hauling Doyle up with him. "Do you more good than sitting around with your knees knotted. I thought you'd given that up."

"You know it helps."

"Yeh. Maybe. Tell you what – I'll buy you a yellow robe and a begging bowl for your birthday, we'll do a Kojak on the curls, an' Cowley can use you for a paperweight."

"You leave my curls alone!"

"No chance, sunshine." Bodie's grin was wicked as he poured boiling water onto the tea bags with a flourish. "You know, I'll swear this UHT stuff never came out of a cow."

"There isn't anything else, so pour it in and shut up. I'm parched."

"Ah, I wondered when yesterday's martinet was going to put in an appearance. Sorry, Captain Bligh, but it's 'Mutiny on the Bounty' time."

"D'you think I enjoyed doing that?" Doyle retorted in annoyance. "What else was I supposed to do? You weren't—"

"Ray." Bodie's interruption was gentle but firm. "Joke. You should know by now when I'm teasing you."

"I don't want to joke about yesterday. Every time I think about how close you came to getting away with that lunatic scheme of yours my stomach turns over. You scared the hell out of me, Bodie."

"I'm sorry."

"And the only reason I didn't beat your head in yesterday was that you'd got yourself into such a state that you didn't know what you were doing."

"I'm sorry," Bodie repeated, "and grateful." He handed over the cup of tea and sat down beside Doyle on the bed. "You've no idea how grateful..."

"Forget it, Bodie." Doyle felt an unfamiliar creeping embarrassment.

"Never. How could I? Yesterday, I came face to face with a new aspect of Ray Doyle; that of a man who understood me completely and still loved me enough to put everything else at risk for me, all my craziest dreams made real. I'll apologise, in any way you want, for misjudging you, but I'm not forgetting any of it." Bodie's expression was implacably serious, his eyes fixed on Doyle's face.
Doyle swallowed. Oh God, if Bodie ever found out...

Sensing his friend's discomfort, Bodie forced a chuckle. "You really threw the Cow out of your car in the middle of darkest Essex?"

"Yeh."

"He isn't going to love you for that, my Raymond."

"I don't suppose so."

"But I do." Bodie took the empty cup from Doyle's hand, placing it carefully beside his own on the bedside table. "Last chance to back out."

If I do back out now it will destroy him, Doyle thought, as sure of that fact as he was of the panic in his own heartbeat. "You goin' t'keep me waitin' any longer, Bodie?" He couldn't still the shake in his voice but knew Bodie wouldn't question its source.

"Uhuh..." Bodie's right hand brushed his cheek, sliding down behind his neck to pull him forward, unresisting, into a gentle kiss. As their lips touched, Doyle, desperate to find a response, closed his eyes, conjuring up images of women he had desired, but they did not stir him. Indeed, as the kiss deepened, they were pushed into the background by the insistent reality of his senses; the unique taste of Bodie's mouth, the size and power of the hands stroking his back, the iron-hard muscle under his own fingers, the scent of soap and maleness...

In panic, he tried to summon Ann Holly, but he... couldn't even... remember... her face... as it metamorphosed into familiar dark blue eyes under quizzical brows, a turned-up nose and a mischievous grin, the face he would see if... when... he opened his eyes...

He gasped when the kiss broke, astonished how empty his mouth felt without Bodie's tongue, which was now tracing the curve of his jaw towards his ear lobe.

The long line of Bodie's exposed throat was unexpectedly tempting, so he filled his need by fastening his lips on the soft skin, tasting sweat and soap.

Bodie gave a little moan of pleasure, clutching Doyle even closer, fitting their bodies together, overwhelming Doyle with his presence, hands hot on waist and thigh.

The heat wasn't only in Bodie's hands, Doyle realised with a surge of joy, it was in his own body, and his heart was no longer hammering in panic but in excitement, driving blood into his hardening groin.

Relief drowned him. As he relaxed into it, he was suddenly conscious of the glorious fire that had been there all the time, waiting for him to recognise, to welcome it. Now it swept into him, driven by a hurricane of passion.

He slid down onto the bed, drawing the other man on top of him, feeling Bodie's erection brush his stomach, the touch of muscle again his own awakening arousal.

The blue eyes were as he had known they would be, shining with tenderness in a face alight with desire. Doyle could not remember when he had ever seen such beauty.

"I love you," he whispered, knowing it was true. "Oh Christ, Bodie, I love you..."

Bodie's lips came down to silence him, and the rest of the world dissolved in the heat of their
In the dim light filtering through the curtains, Bodie could distinguish little of the man lying beside him, save the curve of his back and the dark froth of his hair, but even those looked defeated. He wanted desperately to take him into his arms but, after what had happened earlier, he didn't dare. All he could find to comfort him was the fact that Ray's fingers were wrapped possessively around his.

Pushing aside his own misery, Bodie tried to isolate the reasons why everything had gone wrong. It had been partly their inexperienced clumsiness and lack of knowledge, but not entirely... Ray had been almost desperate in his haste, as if he had been scared that Bodie – or his own desire – would suddenly disappear, while he himself had been frightened of hurting Ray, particularly after he had been hurt himself.

He smiled wryly. When you looked at it logically, it was surprising that they had gained any pleasure at all from each other. Which didn't reduce either their disappointment or their frustration.

He voiced his conclusions into the oppressive silence. "We could hardly have expected anything else, could we? I think we need a bit more practice, sunshine."

Doyle's voice was muffled. "I wanted it to be perfect."

"It will be," Bodie promised, lifting Doyle's fingers to his lips and kissing them.

"I hurt you."

"No more than I hurt you. Don't be angry, Ray, please."

Doyle rolled right over to look up at him. "I'm not angry at you. I'm angry with me."

"That's even worse. Problem is, Ray, that we both think of ourselves as skilled lovers. It's a hell of a knock to our pride to learn we're not. And some things work and some things don't and we've no way of telling which is which until we try..." He grinned at the idea that had just popped into his head. "I suppose what we really need is a Gay sex manual – and us with only a Gideon bible!"

He was rewarded by a flicker of humour. "We could always ring Room Service... Do they actually publish such things, Bodie? Outside the hard porno market, that is?"

"What, Gideon Bibles? Ow! That hurt." Bodie rubbed the twisted wrist, looking deeply wounded, but his spirits were rising. "The sex manuals, you mean? I presume so. What else is the Permissive Society good for? I tell you what; put on those shades of yours and we'll send you to find out."

"Uuhh. You do your own porno shopping. I'll just reap the benefits."

Bodie tried to exude virtue, and failed dismally. "I've led too sheltered a life to find a shop that sold things like that. It's back to trial and error, I'm afraid. Still, I'm a fast learner. Did I ever tell you about my first time with a girl? She—"

"I don't want to hear about it!"

Bodie was delighted by Doyle's vehemence. "Jealous, Raymond?"

"Yeh, and possessive," Doyle growled. "So just watch it."
The threat was a mistake. Bodie promptly pounced on him, tickling him unmercifully, laughing aloud at his helpless squirming. "Stop it..." Doyle hiccuped, between giggles. "Oh God... I'm going to get even... j... just you wait..." One flailing leg connected, knocking Bodie aside and giving Doyle a chance to retaliate.

The resulting wrestling match only ended when Bodie used his greater weight to pin Doyle flat to the bed. "Geroff..." Doyle panted, laughing.

"No way." Bodie leered down at him. "Not when I've finally got you in my power. Surrender?"

"Never!"

Bodie laughed, then kissed him thoroughly, feeling the released arms circle his neck and shoulders. When the kiss ended, they lay still and breathless on the bed, holding each other tightly, both desperately relived that the other man's feelings hadn't changed, though neither would have admitted it.

In the intimacy of the moment, Bodie threw aside his last emotional defences. "You want to know something weird, Ray? The sex might've been a lot better if one or both of us had been experienced – but I'm still glad we weren't."

He counted thirty of his own heartbeats before Doyle answered, in a whisper. "You feel that way too?"

"Yeh. Crazy, isn't it?" He kissed Doyle again. "It's called 'love', sunshine."

"You're a romantic!" Doyle exclaimed, with delight.

"Yeh. Makes two of us." Bodie suddenly released Doyle, then hauled him to his feet. "Let's go out for a walk."

"Uh?"

"A walk. Out. While there's still some daylight left. We've a lot to talk out and we'll think better away from this room. Besides, I might even get to find out where we are."

Doyle was still looking a little lost. "I thought... I thought we were going to... get in some more practice."

"And how much talking would we get done? This is important too, lover. Cowley's goin' to be lookin' for us. We've got to work things out before we face him. Besides, you promised me a proper meal. I perform better on a full stomach," he added hopefully, as an inducement.

"I'll believe it when I see it." Doyle began searching for his clothes, then remembered his jeans and underpants were still in the bathroom.

"She wasn't a pretty as you, either—"

Doyle snatched up the towel from the chair where Bodie had left it.

"Oh, and Ray, about that girl—" Doyle turned, his expression thunderous. "I enjoyed it with her a hell of a lot less than I did with you, but then, her living room floor was a lot less comfortable than that bed."

Bodie waited until he was at a safe distance, then said, "Ow, and Ray, about that girl—" Doyle turned, his expression thunderous. "I enjoyed it with her a hell of a lot less than I did with you, but then, her living room floor was a lot less comfortable than that bed."

Doyle snatched up the towel from the chair where Bodie had left it.

"She wasn't a pretty as you, either—"
"—but she was a lot better tempered."

Giving up, Doyle went to fetch his jeans.

Doyle hitched himself to sit on the gate and looked out over the flat expanse of fields, roads and ditches, the green and gold broken by splashes of woodland, picked out in ripples of silver as the sun dusted its fingers along ditch, pond and canal. Bird song and insect noises mixed pleasantly with the far-off clatter of a tractor, but there was no other sound, not other trace of humanity to disturb his thoughts.

For all that Bodie had insisted that they needed to talk, he had spoken very little during the short drive from Stamford and their subsequent tramp through the tranquil countryside. Doyle was grateful to him for the opportunity to think, and to come to terms with his own feelings.

When he had come to that decision, out on the A12 not far from Colchester, that the only thing he could not bear was to lose Bodie, he had not expected to be snatched from his secure peak of passionless affection by a hurricane of emotional and physical love and stripped of every defence, leaving him shaken and unsure of his masculinity, forced to accept the revealed Ray Doyle, a man capable of loving another man... more, because he had never felt so deeply, so... terrifyingly deeply... about anyone...

And it hit me so quickly, so totally. I had no defences...

Oh, come on. Even before I knew I loved him, I was willing to risk losing everything else to keep him. I just hadn't realised I was in love with him.

I was scared – terrified – because subconsciously I knew I was bent for him. And I dared to pity him, to vent my anger on him, just because I couldn't face my own needs, feelings I would've gone on pushing away forever, if he hadn't forced me to commit myself, despite all my fears and self-disgust.

It all comes down to one simple fact: I love him. I'll always need him. It's too late now to try to let go.

That settled in his mind, Doyle could face up to their equally immediate but less personal problems. "So what are we going to do about Cowley?" he asked aloud.

Bodie rested his arms on the top of the gate and stared unseeingly towards the horizon. "What's Cowley going to do about us would be more to the point. I resigned, you dumped him miles from anywhere, and now we're lovers. I can't see him approving of any of it. He'll probably throw us out of CI5."

"Well, there's nothing much we can do if he does."

"Or he might try and split us – we've given him the perfect opportunity—"

"In that case, we resign."

"And what do we do afterwards? Do you have an easy answer to that, too?"

"There are no easy answers," Doyle snapped back. "I just know what's most important. I thought you did, too."
The blue eyes flashed to his face. "Goddamn it, Ray, I agree with you, but I have to be sure you know what you're getting into—"

"Of course I know! I told you to stop treating me like some mentally defective kid. I was a London cop, Bodie. Hell, I could give you lectures on the problems we're goin' t'ave t'face – hey!" Doyle found himself yanked from his perch into a kiss that drained away the anger, finally releasing him into the contentment of Bodie's arms, his face buried in the side of his neck.

Bodie's lips moved in a whisper against his ear. "Sorry, love, but how dare I ask you for commitment unless I'm sure you know what it will mean for us?"

Doyle sighed and rubbed the broad back with circling fingertips. "I've always known what I was doing, Bodie. I know what I'm doing now..." He hesitated for a moment, then went on, "D'you remember, years ago, we found a woman called Ann Seaford murdered, by the river?"

"I remember you scared me silly, getting yourself shot."

"It was before that. You lost me my current girlfriend – God, I can't even remember her name – by telling her that the reason we'd had to leave when things were getting interesting was that we'd found out we were Gay for each other or something?"

"No. She's can't have been very bright if she believed me, can she? Not then. Though, when you think about it, that wasn't a bad bit of fortune-telling on my part, was it? Must have Romany blood somewhere..."

"Half Irish in bad enough. Shut up, will you."

"Never knew you were prejudiced—" Bodie's sentence finished in a splutter behind Doyle's hand.

"I told you then I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on Earth."

Unable to speak, Bodie used his eyebrows as a question mark.

"I've changed my mind." Dropping his hand, he replaced it with his lips, melting into an embrace he wanted to last forever...

There was a noise from behind him, a sound like a startled camel.

Reluctantly, Doyle freed himself and turned, to find himself facing an outraged middle-aged couple. The woman wore the expression of a disgusted Pekinese, and the man was red-faced, holding his walking stick as it was a headmaster's cane. Probably, that was how he was considering using it.

Doyle felt the heat rising into his face, but Bodie's arm was firm about his shoulders as he steered him forward.

"Good evening," Bodie greeted them, ignoring their gawps, but he couldn't resist turning back to add, "You'll have to excuse our enthusiasm. We just got married."

It was only as they made their escape round a corner of the track that they heard rising squawks of protest from behind them. Doyle swung on his partner with almost equal anger. "Bodie, for Christ's sake—"

"D'you want to keep your feelings hidden for the rest of your life?"
"No – but there is a difference between not hiding our relationship and flaunting it!"

"Stop worrying so much, sunshine. We just made their day. Old Quelch back there'll dine out on our brazen behaviour for weeks, shock all his friends – if he has any – and write letters to the Mail, Lord Longford – ah, that's better, lover. While we can laugh about it, it can't hurt us."

Doyle was shaking his head. "Jesus, Bodie, how the hell am I goin' to live with you?"

"I don't know... but you'll try, won't you? Please?" The look that accompanied the words was so wistful that Doyle burst out laughing again.

"Well, at least I won't be bored."

"I hope not. Com'on Goldilocks, let's get some food."

Walking back to the hotel through the deepening dusk, Doyle felt faintly light-headed, a euphoria that did not come from the effects of wine and brandy, but from the man walking close beside him; silent, in step, so in-tune that there was no need for word or gesture, even for thought.

They hadn't said much during their return to Stamford or the lingering meal at the best restaurant they had been able to locate, but their eyes had done all the talking necessary. Now, though they were not touching, Bodie's very presence intoxicated Doyle, filling him with wild anticipation, spiced with a hint of fear.

His stomach tensed and warmth flared in his groin as he thought about the night to come, and all the tomorrows to follow.

Tomorrow.

Damn.

Doyle considered the immediate future with some reluctance, weighing alternatives. Finally, as they entered the hotel grounds, he said, "I've been thinking about Cowley."

"That's not what I'm thinking about." Bodie's arm slid possessively round Doyle's waist. "I've just remembered there are condoms and lube in my washbag."

Firmly putting aside the temptation to turn into Bodie's arms, Doyle took hold of the other man's wrist and disengaged himself. "Behave yourself for a moment and listen, if that's possible."

"Spoilsport."

Doyle swung to face Bodie, trying to avoid looking into eyes that were the same colour as the blue deepening to night above them. "Once we get to the hotel room, we're not going to be interested in discussion."

"I hope not."

"So listen now. Cowley—"

"Never mind Cowley. Did you know that your eyes are the colour of Chinese jade?"

Doyle ignored the comment. "If we want to stay with CI5 – and I take it you do? – we've got to prove that being lovers won't make any difference to our efficiency as a team."
"Won't it?"

"I don't know," Doyle admitted. "It's not only Cowley we have to prove things to, mate, but to us as well – right?"

"Yeh. Your hair's got little red flickers in it, like firelight."

Doyle could feel himself blushing. "You were the one who dragged us out of bed because you wanted to talk things out!" he snapped, exasperated.

"And eat, don't forget that. Ray, I wanted to give you time to think... but right now all I want to do is make love to you." Bodie reached out to touch Doyle's hair delicately, winding a curl around one finger. "Do you really object to hearing how beautiful you are?"

Doyle braced his unsteady legs and dropped his eyes. "Daft clown," he whispered, but he turned his head so his lips brushed Bodie's hand. Then he swallowed, pulled back, and said as briskly as he could, "Look, Bodie, I know you don't like the idea of secrecy, but—"

"Trying to keep it quiet will only make things worse, and we'll be under enough stress as it is—"

"I know, but suppose it's only for a couple of months, right? Until we've proved it makes no difference. Then we tell Cowley. That'd make it difficult for him to chuck us out, wouldn't it? His best team."

Bodie was just as serious as his partner as he replied. "All right, Ray, I agree. It might work... but only for a couple of months. We go back tomorrow, tell Cowley we've ironed out our differences and get on with the job. Meanwhile..." – the blue eyes began to dance again – "I think it's time we forgot Cowley and went to bed."

"Stop rushing me, Bodie. What I want to know is how the hell we're going to explain to the Cow about you resigning an' me dumping him an' both of us vanishing for – ulpmn." He was silenced as Bodie pulled him close and kissed him, but managed to control his instinctive response and to struggle free. "I told you to behave yourself!"

"Why? No-one was watching."

"Bodie, I want this settled now so I can forget it for tonight. I don't want any thoughts of the Cow sharing my bed – only you."

Bodie sighed. "My God, you're a worrier. Why explain anything?"

"What?"

"Good old military tradition; we just stand there and say, 'No excuse, sir.' Then we just watch while he kills himself trying to find out why. Satisfied? Good, because I'm damned if I'm waiting any longer—" He reached for Doyle again, but the other man slipped away from him and, with a joyous yell of,

"You'll have to catch me first!" plunged off the path and into the grove of ornamental trees.

Bodie hadn't played tag since his childhood and, even then, the game had lacked this wild exhilaration. As he pursued Doyle, jinking between the spindly trunks, he realised that that had been because, then, there hadn't been this kind of prize.

They burst out of the trees and across a grey lawn, with Bodie beginning to gain ground. Doyle's
face flashed pale like an owl's in the dimness as he glanced back, then he swerved right, hurdling a
clump of low shrubs, and on down a small flight of steps in a single bound, feet thudding dully on
the crazy paving.

As they charged out onto the short drive leading to the car park, headlights scythed across their
path. Doyle spurted forwards recklessly, just clearing the road as the car squealed to a stop. The
driver's head appeared through the window, shouting abuse even as Bodie vaulted over the bonnet,
giving the driver the full effect of his very best smile, before chasing after Doyle's rapidly
vanishing figure.

As sprinters, they were almost evenly matched, and Bodie only just kept Doyle in sight as they
circuited the hotel. Pursuing Doyle into the lobby, Bodie was just in time to see his partner grinning
at him through the rapidly closing lift doors. Ignoring that, he galloped up the stairs, judging that,
as Ray didn't really want to lose him, he would head for their room. Slamming through the fire-
doors onto the landing, he paused just long enough to make sure that the lift was indeed on this
floor, then continued on down the corridor, reaching their room just as Doyle was putting the key
in the lock. With a triumphant whoop, he pounced.

They wrestled with each other over the key for a few moments then, suddenly, the door swung
inwards under their combined weight, just as Doyle managed to twist free.

Bodie stumbled, clutched at the door frame to save himself, but ended up inside the tiny lobby with
his back against the bathroom wall. Carefully, he slid down into a sitting position, his eyes never
leaving Doyle as the other man closed the door and leaned back against it, the world shut firmly
outside. Both men were panting.

"Out of training... If Cowley could see us... we'd be heading for Macklin's processing plant right
now," Doyle gasped. Then he added, "And what the hell are you doing down there?"

"Admiring my taste."

Doyle placed his fists on his hips and tried a mock-glare. "I prefer my taste, actually. Thinking of
taking possession, Bodie? Or don't you have the energy?"

Bodie leered at him. "Issue challenges like that and by the time I've finished with you you won't
have the strength to get out of bed, sunshine."

"We'll see who's got stamina. You're going to 'ave to put your money where your mouth is. Come
on, Don Juan. On your feet." He offered Bodie his hand.

Coming swiftly to his feet, Bodie caught Doyle in his arms, losing himself in taste and touch,
exploring with tongue and hands, desire boiling through him as Doyle responded eagerly.

Wait.

It was a small voice of caution, alien to Bodie, but one which he knew he must heed. This was too
important...

Gently, he broke the kiss and, drawing away a little, stroked his hand over Doyle's cheek and neck.
His lover leaned into the touch, eyes closing, arms tightening around Bodie's waist to pull their
hips and thighs together, groin pulsing against groin.

Bodie gasped, and had to steady himself before he could speak. "Gently, Ray... we've all the time
there is..." He drew his breath sharply. "Oh, God..." Hands were sliding up beneath his shirt,
caressing the hard muscle of his back, as lips and tongue probed and nibbled his right ear. Then
Doyle shifted position slightly, thrusting his captive erection against Bodie's thigh.

"Slow down... 's what... went wrong... las' time..." Bodie protested, but his hands had a life of their own, finding their way to Ray's hips, buttocks...

There was a husky whisper in his ear. "'S wha' 'm I doin' wron'?"

"Nothing." Bodie dropped his head to the hollow of Doyle's throat. "Don' wan' it t' be t' quick, 's all..."

With a supreme effort of will, he pushed Doyle back and stood, breathing heavily, his hands resting on the other man's shoulders. "Let's go to bed, Ray. Do this properly..."

Doyle shook his head, like a man who had just surfaced from deep sleep, though his eyes were... supernaturally... awake.

"Jesus!" He straightened and ran a hand through his hair. "Sorry, Bodie." He took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. "You're right. Of course you're right, but... God, I've never wanted anyone the way I want you. I couldn't even think."

"Yeh... I know..." Bodie was still shaking, his groin still throbbing with waves of pleasure and need. He kept his eyes from Ray's face and occupied his hands in fumbling open the buttons of his shirt, cursing as his suddenly clumsy fingers tore the fabric.

"Let me do that," Doyle chuckled. "I'll enjoy it more than you will."

"I'll just bet. So long as the arrangement's reciprocal..." He reached for the buckle of Doyle's belt.

"Hoped you'd say that," his lover whispered, kissing his way down Bodie's chest in pursuit of his fingers.

They continued to undress each other slowly, both keeping a strong curb on the desire that was threatening to bolt with them, making the caresses light and teasing rather than arousing.

Finally, when they were both naked, they lay facing each other on the bed, eyes and fingers exploring in admiration, and a need that was driven by more than lust.

Bodie tried to quell the overwhelming tide of desire, wanting to touch every inch of Doyle's body, to seek out every sensitive spot, to give the other man the greatest possible pleasure, but his control was slipping as his own flesh reacted to the electrifying touch of slender, gentle hands and full, soft lips.

His own searching mouth found a nipple and nursed on it. The strangeness of hair tickling his nose and cheek was somehow arousing, as was the more familiar convulsive stroking of hands along his back, their rhythm changing to keep time with his suckling of the hardening nub of flesh.

Reluctantly abandoning the nipple, he kissed his way upwards, unwilling to lose contact even for a moment, but needing the thrilling softness of his lover's mouth; contradictory sensations of burning and drowning, dampness and heat, pleasure so intense that it hurt...

He wanted to take Doyle then, to possess him utterly, but vestiges of memory restrained him... then, suddenly, hard arms encircled him and the world turned over as he was rolled onto his back. Doyle's body lay hot and heavy against his own, pinning him, sandwiching their erections tightly between muscled stomachs in a way that forced a desperate moan from Bodie. His hands gripped hard around Doyle's buttocks, clawing him even closer.
Doyle moved again, fighting free as Bodie protested the loss with another moan and tried to recapture him, but Doyle avoided his hands, bending, instead, to draw patterns on Bodie's smooth chest with hands and tongue and breath, dipping to probe his navel and travelling across his stomach to kiss the soft skin on his inner thighs. Bodie's mind whirled into incoherence, all control lost as his body arched upwards, a mute, unconscious plea to Doyle to climax the exquisite agony, even as fingers gentled and cupped the heavy sacs beneath the swollen, straining shaft.

A gossamer tongue-touch triggered a shudder that shook every atom in his body and, when Doyle's lips finally enfolded him, he thrust upwards convulsively, almost choking a startled Doyle as he writhed and jerked into violent orgasm.

He came to himself slowly aware, first of all, of the pounding of his heart, the rasping of air into his lungs, then the satisfied languor in his body, and of hands brushing his damp hair, lips touching his eyelids...

"Ray..." he whispered, opening his eyes to see Doyle bending over him, his face flushed, body glistening with sweat in the low illumination of the headboard light, his face straining with the effort of holding down his very obvious desire.

All the same, he managed to smile at Bodie. "That better, sunshine?"

"Yeh." Bodie reached out and grasped his shoulders. "Just how much better, you're about to find out."

Later, as they lay in each other's arms, exchanging soft caresses and endearments while they waited for desire to return, Bodie knew that the final restraints had been severed. Later that night, or perhaps some other night – it wasn't important, now – they would find their path to full possession and, if there was pain, it wouldn't really matter, because it would come from love.

He wanted to own Doyle, to be owned by him, and he found himself looking forward to feeling the other man inside him, not something to be endured, but to be welcomed, as he had welcomed the warm, salty semen spurting into his throat. Now he tried to put his feelings into words for Ray, no longer embarrassed – not now – but finding it difficult to make his emotions sound real.

When he finally stumbled to a halt, Doyle mumbled, "Me, too," and snuggled closer.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to, love."

"You keep doubtin' me. If you don't stop, I'm goin' to get angry."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't wan' y't' be angry. Want you to love me."

Very tenderly, Bodie stroked the mass of curls lying on his shoulder. "I love you, Raymond Doyle."

The voice from the darkness was soft and serious. "I love you too, William Andrew Phillip Bodie," but it was followed by a chuckle. "I bet I can get away with calling you anything I like, can't I, lover? Bill, maybe, or Andy..."

"Watch it, Goldilocks."
"Willie might be... er..."

"Raymond!"

"I've got it! The very thing." Doyle sniggered happily into Bodie's neck. "Suits you perfectly. Should have thought of it years ago."

"I can still divorce you for extreme mental cruelty."

Doyle's giggles were shaking his whole body. "M going to call you 'Pip' as in 'Pipsqueak'."

"You do, and you'll end up as 'Wilfred'."

"You're showing your age, 3/7."

"I'm younger than you are, gollywog. Much more mature, mind you."

Doyle laughed and nibbled Bodie's earlobe with careful delicacy. "You could've fooled me, mate, after all the childish stunts you've pulled over the last week. If you ask me, Jan an' Mick have more sense. What you need is someone to look after you."

"You volunteering?"

"No. I was press ganged." Doyle wound himself tightly around Bodie, breath and lips stirring the short-cropped hair as he cradled his lover against his chest.

Bodie rested his face in the angle of Doyle's neck and shoulders, pressing close against the slim, strong body, accepting the protectiveness because he knew that what Doyle needed most was to be allowed to give, to be convinced that Bodie needed him and that he would not betray his trust.

Oh God, but Ray was so vulnerable, such a strange mixture of self-confidence and insecurity, belligerence and tenderness, pragmatism and idealism, so intelligent, but with so many blind spots, particularly about people. He had always exasperated Bodie by reaching out to those too simple or selfish to understand his desperate need to be loved, while fending away anyone who seemed able to give him what he wanted... and feared?

But that pattern was broken now, Bodie thought, and he was going to make damn sure it was never re-created.

He lifted his head and looked down into Doyle's shadowed face, tracing its lines and curves with the tips of his fingers. "My beautiful Ray..." It was a whisper, a breath. "How in God's name could I ever have imagined I could walk away...?"

"I don't know, but you'll never get a second chance to find out," Doyle replied, sliding his arms around Bodie's neck.

"Promise? Scout's honour?"

"Cross me heart an' 'ope to die."

"Don't even think about it. You can't die, lover. You're the whole universe."

"We're the whole universe." Doyle drew Bodie's mouth down to meet his, and words were forgotten in the building fire.
The hotel manager drew his dressing gown collar up about his ears, glaring at the night porter who had evicted him from his warm bed, and at the man with whom said porter had been unable to cope.

"Couldn't this wait until morning, Mr Cowley? It's 2am..."

"I am well aware of the time, Mr Grainger, and I don't like being out of bed, either."

"You don't have a search warrant."

"I don't need one. You're not dealing wi' the police, man, but with CI5. Now, if you'll just hand me the pass key..."

The manager stuck out a stubbled jaw. It being only his second month in the job, he was somewhat touchy about his position. "If you insist, but I must accompany you."

Cowley shrugged. "As you wish."

With a glare in the Scotsman's direction, the manager grabbed the key from the porter's hand and stamped towards the lift. Cowley followed.

There was a strained silence all the way to the second floor and down the corridors to room 216. The manager's curiosity was slowly beginning to awaken, but he was too annoyed to ask, and Cowley volunteered nothing.

"This is the room." Grainger paused with the key in the lock, suddenly uneasy as he remembered his staff's speculation about the occupants of room 216. "There's something I think—"

"Open up."

With an air of distaste, the manager twisted his pass key in the lock, pushed the door open, and stood aside to let Cowley through. The Controller swept past him into the room, reaching for the main light switch as he did so.

Whatever he had expected to see, it was not the scene revealed by the sudden illumination: Doyle, sprawled face down on the bed, fingers clutching the undersheet in slow, convulsive movements, like the claws of a purring cat, and Bodie, pressing down upon him in the unmistakable rhythms of sexual possession, bodies welded together, faces ecstatic, the only sound their heavy breathing and the soft creaking of the bedsprings.

Stunned, appalled, Cowley forgot the caustic words he had planned and simply stared, unable to take his eyes from the couple on the bed.

Doyle had been aware of nothing but the unexpected pleasure that had buried initial pain, pleasure he had doubted when he had seen it in Bodie not so long ago.

Then light stabbed through his head and a voice that wasn't Bodie's but that was familiar all the same said, "Almighty God!"

Bodie's movements, inside him and above him, stilled.

"Fuckin' 'ell!" That was Bodie.

The withdrawal that followed was swift and shocking, leaving Doyle with an empty ache that was partly sexual disappointment and partly strained muscles.
It was only then that he identified the first voice.

Cowley.

Oh, Jesus Christ.

He rolled over swiftly, sending most of the bed clothes sliding onto the floor. Bodie, who was on his feet and pulling on his dressing gown, took one look and, reflexively, hauled the heap of bed clothes back on top of him. Doyle was about to protest when he caught sight of the two men in the doorway: George Cowley, white faced, one hand on the wall as if he needed its support, and a dark-jowled, moustached young man whose flaming skin indicated a desire to fade through the floor.

Suddenly, Doyle was embarrassed by his nakedness. He drew the covers about him, wishing he had a robe or dressing gown, but thankful for anything that covered his arousal.

It was Bodie who broke the silence. "That'll teach you to bloody well knock in future."

Newly sensitised to his partner's moods, Doyle could hear the suppressed fury in his voice, for all its quietness, contrasting with his own fear and dismay. He wasn't ready for this. He wanted to run, to disappear completely, to Timbuktu or the South Pole or anywhere, so long as it was far away from Cowley.

Not that the Chief looked angry. Indeed, he seemed to be in a state of shock.

"In God's name, Bodie," he whispered, "was I supposed to guess...? To know what was happening...?"

Bodie's anger seemed to abate a little. His eyes shifted to the manager. "I think," he said icily, "that you'd better go. Oh, and get Room Service to send us a bottle of whisky. A good single malt if you've got it. I think Mr Cowley needs it."

Grainger glanced at Cowley but, failing to detect either confirmation or contradiction of the order, he followed his instincts and retreated. The idea of a very large Scotch appealed to him, too.

The door closed on simmering tension. Doyle felt himself flush under its influence, trying to think of something to say but finding nothing, recognising the defensiveness of Bodie's stance between Cowley and the bed.

The Controller, meanwhile, seemed to have recovered his poise, his eyes flicking contemptuously over Doyle before coming to rest on Bodie. "So this is what you meant by 'caring too much' for Doyle, eh, Bodie? I could put another name to it. I've made allowances for your promiscuity, even overruling the warnings of Internal Security, but you've overstepped the limit. I don't believe even I.S. expected that, having attempted to bed every woman with whom you came into contact, you'd then start in on the men. CI5 canna tolerate—"

"Don't confuse what CI5 can 'tolerate' with your own puritan prejudices," Bodie snarled back. "Ray and I didn't choose to fall in love—"

"Love!? Stop exaggerating, man." Cowley deliberately softened his voice. "Don't be a fool. Stress can do strange things to even the most stable of us and I'm sure that, when you've had time to think, to come to your senses, you'll realise that this... nightmare... is something to be put aside, forgotten—"

"No. You're wrong."
"You're in no position to judge, Bodie. I am. I've seen this happen in the past—"

"Not like this. You don't—"

Cowley's voice was hard as he interrupted. "Do you really want to risk ruining your life – and Doyle's – for a few hours of... of sexual experiment? No more protests or excuses. The subject is closed. Get dressed, both of you. I have an undercover job for you, Doyle, that should occupy your time more effectively than this type of under cover work, and as for you, Bodie—"

"You're going to split us," Doyle stated, a heavy weight settling onto his stomach.

"It should be obvious that I cannot leave you together. There are good reasons why CI5 operatives should not be... involved... with each other, and this... this..."

"Marriage?" Bodie suggested helpfully.

"This affaire... is particularly dangerous. You know quite well that even a normal sexual relationship between partners would be unacceptable. It's one of the reasons I rarely team a man and a woman together."

Bodie's voice was still calm, but his fists were clenched. "Well, you've made your position quite clear, haven't you? Ours is equally simple: we either work for you as partners or we don't work for you at all."

"I've told you before that I will not be blackmailed. You requested a change of partner, Bodie, an official request I am now granting."

"Then stuff your job – and CI5 with it!"

Cowley's lips whitened. "I suppose you think you can speak for Doyle, too?"

"He can answer for himself." Bodie sounded utterly confident, and he did not even glance at his partner for confirmation.

Doyle swallowed. "Don't make me choose, sir, because if you do, I've got to choose Bodie."

"You don't have a choice. I refuse to accept resignations from either of you. You are no longer partners and the subject is closed."

Deliberately, Bodie turned on his heel, strode to the bed and seated himself beside Doyle, slipping his arm around his shoulders, stirring up, in the process, a muddied cloud of emotions in the other man that included relief and annoyance, resentment and affection, desire and embarrassment.

Doyle felt the heat of the blood reddening his skin once again – damn Bodie. He'd warned him not to flaunt their relationship – and the flutter of panic in his chest and stomach, but he could also sense the need for reassurance that Bodie was trying to conceal, and everything else was overwhelmed by the same desperate need to protect that had compelled him to follow Bodie into this mess in the first place.

Sod it, none of this was Bodie's fault, and he had assured him that he could handle the problems caused by the changed relationship. That it was even harder than he'd expected was no reason to let him down.

He was already totally committed; there was no going back. Which meant that it was about time he stopped allowing Bodie to take all the flak and gave him some support.
"You can't refuse to accept our resignations, sir," he pointed out. "Not without just cause or in the
overriding national interest and, even then, we can appeal to the Home Secretary."

"We can?" Bodie sounded surprised.

"Yeah, an' he'll probably be glad to see the back of a couple of pouffs." Suddenly feeling more
confident, Doyle hooked his arm around Bodie's waist and squeezed. "You've got to start reading
the small print, sunshine."

"Why, when I've got you to take care of it for me?"

Cowley's expression suggested that he would like to have wound some red tape around Doyle's
neck and strangled him, but, at that moment, there was a knock on the door. The Chief marched
across the room, flung open the door, snatched the tray from the surprised and curious young man
behind it, snarled, "Put it on the bill," at him, and slammed the door on the proffered receipt.

Lips touched Doyle's ear. "Don't worry, love. It can only get better..."

Cowley deposited the tray with a clatter on the dressing table. "Don't think you're going to be able
to put this on expenses," he warned, opening the bottle with an experienced twist and pouring the
golden-brown liquid into the glasses with a flourish.

"As if we would." Bodie tried a tentative grin in Cowley's direction. It looked as if the Old Man
was beginning to calm down, which meant it might be worth another attempt at explanation. "I'm
sorry you had to find out like this, sir. It was quite a shock to us, to, y'know. I never thought of
Doyle as being my type – too macho by half – and I'd always assumed he had this thing for busty,
redheaded nymphomaniacs—"

"We've no time to discuss your personal problems, lad, urgent as they may seem to you." Cowley
handed out the glasses, then seated himself in the room's only comfortable chair. "You may have
been too... shall we say preoccupied?... to notice, but the Clapham bombing was only the first of
what appears to be a series of attacks aimed at the British internal security services. Both Special
Branch and MI5 have also suffered – and they were not as fortunate as we were. They have lost
fourteen operatives between them in the last thirty-six hours..."

As Cowley spoke, Bodie could feel Doyle beginning to relax, but he himself was mistrustful of the
Cow's sudden amiability. His original bewildered anger was undoubtedly his natural reaction, so
this new approach must be a calculated one. Bodie understood Cowley's position all too well. He
did not want to lose either of them as operatives of CI5, but he was equally determined that their
sexual relationship should end. He would do everything he could to destroy their love, and Bodie
had a very healthy respect for the deviousness of his boss' mind.

So, too, had Doyle, but he was too relieved that this crisis had been averted to worry too much
about the next one. Pushing aside his doubts, he concentrated on the normality of receiving a
briefing from Cowley.

"...and we still have no idea who is behind the attacks, or the reason they seem to have developed
such a dislike for the peacekeepers of this island."

"The IRA—" Bodie began.

"You should know that the IRA were as surprised by the bomb as we were. Norman of the Anti-
Terrorist Squad insists he told you this the night before you decided to take a continental holiday."

"He wha—? Yes, sir. He probably did. I'm sorry. I don't remember."
"That was my fault." Doyle rushed in protectively. "I'd—"

"I told you before that your personal problems will have to wait. The situation is urgent, and I will tolerate no further inefficiency."

"He's still unconscious, but we have identified him. His name is Daniel Franklin Milne, known as Danny to his dubious associates. Thirty five years old, born in Scranton in the U.S.A., and still holds American citizenship. He was trained as a demolition saboteur in Vietnam, and he worked for the C.I.A. between 1972 and 1978. Since then, according to the Interpol report, he's been acting as consultant on demolition and explosives to the New York Syndicate. He had, apparently, built up something of a reputation by the time he departed to Europe, one hour ahead of the F.B.I."

"Sounds more right wing than left," Bodie observed. "The Firm doesn't like to employ anyone tinted even faintly pink. Do we know about his political affiliations?"

"Not yet. I doubt that he is a committed revolutionary, though he may have been hired by a terrorist organisation either too newly established or too small to have acquired his particular skills within its own ranks."

"You think they're looking for a replacement?"

"I know they're looking for a replacement. Get dressed; there's no time to waste. There's someone I want you to meet."

Ray Doyle, sprawled across the rear seat of the car with his eyes closed as ineffective protection against the disapproval emanating from the front passenger seat, listened to the purr of the engine, the swish of tyres on the wet road and the slop of the windscreen wipers, and ran over Cowley's full briefing in his mind, putting the facts into order in the hope that then they might make some sort of sense, not to mention block out other, more personally disturbing worries.

Doyle still found it astonishing that he and Bodie could have been so completely unaware of the events of the last thirty-six hours. Even as they had driven northwards, an explosion had wrecked an MI5 safe house in Maidstone, killing the agents who had been checking it prior to its occupation by a defecting minor Bulgarian official. That had been passed off as a gas explosion – as had their own fiasco in Clapham – in the Press, but there had been no way of stopping the screaming headlines that had greeted the murder of six members of Special Branch. They had finished their escort duty and been returning to London when the machine guns had opened up, leaving very little of the two cars unchewed by bullets, and even the most sensation-hungry tabloids had backed away from publishing photographs of the mangled remains removed from the wreckage.

The bomb in the safe house had, apparently, been triggered by a trembler device and could have been planted days ago, so it looked like another example of Milne's work. The machine-gun attack, however, had made it clear that the capture of Milne had not incapacitated his employers.

Conclusion: the attacks would continue.

And the Cabinet, in its wisdom, had decided that the problem of stopping any further attacks and of bringing the culprits to justice was a task for CI5.

Miracles take a little longer.

No wonder the Cow had been spitting mad at the disappearance of his two top agents, even before he had found out why...

Doyle shifted on the seat, discomfort another reminder of the reasons for that disappearance. Damn
it, how could they function properly with their personal situation still unresolved. Yet they couldn't resign now, not until this case was over.

We're just going to have to manage somehow, he decided. Maybe even prove something while we're doing it.

He opened his eyes to reassure himself by the simple act of watching Bodie, though all he could see was the back of his head, dark hair curling over the collar of his jacket, the strong, competent hands on the wheel, and the occasional glimpse of an expressionless profile.

Bodie had definitely got the worst of it, Doyle decided. He was stuck in the driver's seat, probably aching as badly as Doyle himself, but unable to shift position, and with Cowley beside him as a constant reminder of the rough waters in which they were struggling to stay afloat.

A sudden rush of sympathy for his partner's predicament made Doyle decide to break the silence and attract Cowley's unwelcome attention. "Who is this man you want us to meet, sir?"

Cowley twisted round to look at him. "Jasper Williamson."

"The Broker?" Doyle's voice held astonishment. "No-one's ever been able to lay a finger on 'im."

"Remember that you're talking about a respectable businessman, Doyle," Cowley commented dryly. Then he chuckled. "I'd like to see hands laid on his collar too, but I doubt that it'll happen in my lifetime."

"Never thought I'd hear you admit that, sir," said Bodie. "Who is this Williamson character, anyway? Some sort of Godfather figure?"

"Naw. You haven't 'eard of him, sunshine?"

"Uhuh."

"Well, he runs a sort of computer dating service..."

"Not my scene, mate. I mean, they'd've never sent me you, would they? 'S nothing illegal about that, though, is there? 'Cept maybe under the Trades Description Act."

"Uhuh, but the Broker never needs to advertise. He prob'ly could use you on his books, though. Anyone wanted a bone-headed nutter who likes to shoot at things an' he'd be able to send you, gift-wrapped."

Bodie shot Doyle a backwards glance, the very fact that he'd taken his eyes from the road betraying his astonishment. "Are you trying to tell me that this joker runs an employment agency for terrorists?"

"For criminals," said Cowley. "Jasper doesna approve of terrorists, which is why, when he was approached to supply a second demolition expert after two such large... er... gas explosions had been reported in the press, he contacted me to sound me out. Jasper has a suspicious mind."

"Yeh, an' a lucrative business, obviously. Why hasn't he been nicked for aiding and abetting a felony?"

"No evidence," Doyle told him gloomily. "There are no flies on our Jasper. When I was in the Met, rumour had it that he had his place checked three times a day for bugs and phone taps."
"Four," said Cowley. "It's in Kensington, Bodie."

"Yeh, well, that'll be another half hour if we don't have any trouble with traffic. We'll be routing your friend Jasper out of bed, sir. You'll 'ave to watch that: it's getting to be a habit."

"Jasper does not share your proclivities, Bodie. Besides, he'll be expecting us."

Doyle leaned back against the side of the BMW, face lifting into the rain as he stared up at the balcony-bedecked building, its white facade stained yellow by the streetlamps. "Is this it?"

"Yes. Jasper runs his business from here, too."

"Blimey," said Doyle.

"We're in the wrong profession, mate," Bodie informed him. "Wonder if he'd consider taking on a couple of junior partners?"

Cowley looked at him sharply; Bodie gave him a choirboy smile in return.

Playing with fire, was how Doyle thought of it, but then that was Bodie all over. He'd keep on pushing at the Cow, just for the hell of it, reminding him that nothing had been settled, when what they all needed was to concentrate on the job in hand. Doyle made a mental note to drag Bodie aside at the first opportunity and tell him exactly what he thought of these tactics. Not that that had ever done any good in the past, but maybe things had changed...

Suddenly realising that he was still standing brooding in the rain while his companions were already in the shelter of the porch being interrogated by the doorphone. Doyle hurried after them and arrived just in time to hear a beneficent, "Come in, George, you must be freezing out there," issue from the speaker under the television camera. There was a trace of a regional accent under the Standard Received Pronunciation that Doyle tentatively identified as Welsh from its musicality. Then the doors slid back and they found themselves in a plush white-and-gilt lobby, leading to a private lift. Inside, there were no controls visible on the padded cream leather walls, only a slit, presumably designed to take a card key, but the doors closed behind them at once and the sudden pressure of the floor under their feet informed them that they were ascending.

When the door re-opened, Cowley led the way into a startlingly modern, if luxurious, office of stainless steel, rio rosewood and black leather.

The man rising from the Eames chair to greet them was rather short, his superbly cut pin-stripe suit not quite disguising his tendency to plumpness. His thinning black hair was untidy and the bright blue eyes behind the thick spectacle lenses were humorous and friendly. "Mornin', George," he greeted, as his visitors waded through brown-and-cream Wilton, "I see you found your problem children."

"Good morning, Jasper." Cowley, to the surprise of his agents, accepted the outstretched hand. "Bodie and Doyle."

Jasper grinned at them, "Morning, boys. I'm surprised you're still alive. George was fit to be tied last night when the police phoned him to say they'd located your car up in Stamford, of all places."

"Ah," said Bodie, returning the grin, "but he still needs us for something. Just wait until we finish the job – then he'll kill us."
"That sounds like George. Why don't you come through into the flat. You look like you could do with a drink."

"I can always do with a drink."

"You're a man after my own heart, son. Right this way." Jasper steered them through the office into a warm study, where the carpet was as thick, but the chairs were worn and comfortable, paperbacks rubbed shoulders with antique volumes in happy confusion on the shelves, a battered portable typewriter held pride of place on a Victorian desk and, despite the time of year, a small fire crackled in the hearth. "Make yourselves comfortable. What'll you boys have? George'll be patriotic and have a single malt, I know."

"Same for me," Doyle was feeling bewildered. Cowley and Jasper were acting like bosom buddies, Bodie had plainly taken an immediate liking to the man, and even Doyle himself felt drawn to him, in spite of everything he knew about his activities. It was disturbing, in the same way that the Goya over the fireplace was disturbing in the context of this untidy, comfortable room.

"What about you, Mr Bodie?"

"That looks like a very fine brandy," said Bodie, who had recognised the bottle.

"It is." Jasper poured a generous measure for himself as well as Bodie, and distributed the glasses before settling into a wing-backed chair beside the fire. "Which of these two is it to be, George?"

"Doyle."

Jasper surveyed the agent in question somewhat critically over the edge of his glass. "Hmmm. A bit distinctive, isn't he. Whoever these people are, they seem to know a lot about your organisation. He might be recognised."

"I don't intend to send him in without changing his appearance."

"Well, you'll have to do something about his hair. Even then—"

"Send Doyle in where?" Bodie interrupted. "And where do you come into this, Mr Williamson?"

Jasper looked assessingly at Bodie. "Didn't George brief you?"

"Yes, but I prefer my information first hand."

Jasper raised his eyebrows at Cowley, but merely said, "Very wise. You understand that I will deny that any part of this conversation ever took place if you were so unwise as to bring me to a Court of Law?"

Cowley snorted. "Stop talking nonsense, man. We're not fools."

Jasper rolled his brandy glass between his palms, looking narrowly at Bodie and Doyle. "You understand the nature of my business?" Both men nodded. "Good. Well, my clients come to me by recommendation, and I demand detailed references, after which all transactions take place under a code name known only to my client and myself.

"Now, about two months ago, a client with the code name of Bilbo Baggins contacted me in search of an explosives expert. As all this seemed to be in order, I put him in touch with Danny Milne, who was newly arrived in this country, but came highly recommended by my U.S. contacts. I collected my fee and thought no more about it, until the same Bilbo Baggins contacted me
yesterday with a 'very urgent' request for a replacement. Coming, as it did, so soon after two large, if seemingly innocent, explosions, I decided to run a check on Mr Baggins, only to find he was overseas and had been for some time. Apparently, someone else – as yet unidentified – had obtained his code name, and was using it to gain my services. By then the word was out that the 'gas explosions' were in fact terrorist bombings aimed at CI5 and MI5 respectively. So, naturally, I contacted George."

"Why 'naturally'?'" Doyle interrupted. "What did it matter to you if the bombing were terrorist rather than criminal?"

"My dear Mr Doyle, my business depends on the existence of a stable, criminal society and, for there to be a stable, criminal society there must be a stable, non-criminal society to support it. A parasite needs a healthy host."

"You see yourself as a parasite?"

"Of course I am a parasite, Mr Doyle – in your society. In mine, I fill a much needed role."

"We're not here to discuss philosophy, Jasper," Cowley growled. Then he smiled briefly. "The Iron Curtain countries also threaten Jasper's 'host'," he explained to Bodie and Doyle. "When I was with MI5, he made it his business to pass on any information he came across which might be of use against the Soviets, and he has helped me occasionally since, when our interests did not clash."

"Which happens all too frequently," Jasper sighed. "I've lost some valuable clients because of you boys. However, this is one of those times when we can help each other. We both want to find and destroy this organisation that has dared to misuse my services, and I have acquired a way of planting a man inside it. George can, he tells me, provide the man to take advantage of my opportunity. Apparently, that is you, Mr Doyle. I take it you have the necessary qualifications. What do you know about explosives?"

"Enough."

"Not as much as I do," Bodie put in, aware that he was treading on dangerous ground with both Cowley and Doyle, but unable to stop himself.

"He is a far better undercover agent than you, and I need your questionable talents elsewhere," Cowley snapped. "Are you disputing my judgement, Bodie?"

"Anyone who did would be a fool, George, and if Bodie was a fool then he wouldn't be working for you," Jasper said smoothly, sensing the tensions between the three men, if not their underlying cause. "Mr Doyle, I prepared two basic identities for you using information in my files. Which one we use depends on your acting ability. How good are you at accents?"

"Depends on the accent."

"Australian?"

"That's easy."

"Yes. It's very close to your own, of course. You see, if we make you a foreigner, you're less likely to be caught out in a mistake."

"Unless he bumps into a real Aussie, eh, cobber?" Bodie objected, feeling scared and helpless. They were going to send Ray where he couldn't protect him and it seemed as if there was nothing he could do to stop them.
Doyle regarded him with an expression of tolerant amusement. "I can talk my way out of that, Bodie."

Yeh. Sure. But can you talk your way through a hail of bullets, Ray?

There was no need to speak the question aloud: the answer was in the sickness of fear churning in his stomach. For the first time, Bodie fully understood the emotional cost of continuing to work with Ray in CI5. He was used to feeling fear for his partner, had learned to cope with that, to push it aside and get on with the job. He had also half-expected their new relationship to intensify that fear – but not into this chilling agony.

Christ. He couldn't live with this. Perhaps they should quit now – but he couldn't quit without Ray's agreement, and Ray appeared to be completely untroubled as he accepted a heavy file from Jasper.

"The life and times of Jim Fenlow. Our ersatz hobbit will make contact at 1630. You have until then to make Mr Fenlow real. Good luck, Mr Doyle."

Bodie had hoped for a few minutes private conversation with Doyle but, the instant they were through the doors of CI5 headquarters, Cowley had dispatched him to the forensic section while he hustled Doyle away to arrange his transformation into Jim Fenlow, Australian Milne-clone.

Not that the forensic section proved to be much help to Bodie. The bullets used in the attack on the Special Branch were the ubiquitous 9mm parabellum, fired from at least six different guns, all probably Uzi smgs, which didn't help much as even the PLO occasionally laid hands on that weapon, much to Israeli chagrin.

Still, as Bodie remarked to Cowley when the Chief rejoined him, they had to come from somewhere.

"That's your job," was the Cow's reply. "You have the contacts. Find out who bought the guns, who sold them, and when and how the transaction took place."

"Yes, sir. What'd I do for an encore? Have a go at raising the dead so I can question the witnesses?"

Cowley's face stiffened. "We can't change the past, but we can refrain from making sick jokes at the expense of men who died doing their duty. On your bike, Bodie."

Recognising Cowley's fury, Bodie turned to go, but he couldn't resist pausing in the doorway to have the final word. "You're right, sir. I can't turn back the clock – but neither can you."

This act of defiance made him feel better, but he would not have been so happy if he had seen the look on Cowley's face after he left the room, or heard his grim, "We'll see about that, laddie. We'll certainly see about that."

Marty Martell, dapper as ever, looked singularly out of place among the young plane spotters whose presence dominated the Heathrow observation area. He also looked most displeased to see Bodie.

"I have a shipment loading in half an hour," was the way he greeted him.

"Yeh, I know. You heard of anyone with a big shopping list inside the U.K. recently? Uzis?
Plastique? That kind of thing."

Marty shook his head. "I don't sell on the home market. You never know where the stuff ends up. Which reminds me: what happened to that partner of yours?"

"He's around, Marty, make no mistake about that. And don't try to change the subject. You keep your fingers on the pulse. There's Cusak, for example. What hole has he hidden down. I've been trying to trace him all day."

"Even if I knew, why the hell should I tell you, Bodie?"

The smile didn't leave Bodie's face and his voice was soft, but Martell had heard the note of steel before and did not fail to recognise it. "For old time's sake?"

"Oh, come on, Bodie. The last time I did you a favour I ended up trying to explain to the cops and Customs how I'd managed to supply you with on M10 plus laserlock."

"And you want that shipment cleared today, not in two or three months – maybe."

"You'd do it too, wouldn't you?" Martell gave an exasperated sigh and scrubbed at his hair. "I don't know where Cusak is, Bodie, but he went into partnership with Greatorix. Not that I know where Greatorix is, nowadays, either, but it might give you a lead. And I'll keep my ear to the ground. That's all I can do for you."

"It's somewhere to start. Thanks, Marty. I owe you."

"Just keep out of my hair, Bodie. I don't want any trouble with your mob, not after the last time."

"Trouble, Marty?" Bodie cocked his head to look up. "Your only trouble is going to be finding a new office. This one's far too noisy."

If Marty had a retort, it was lost in the roar of the descending Jumbo jet.

When he reached his car, Bodie found a small gaggle of children listening to the beeping radio. Firmly ignoring them, he manoeuvred the car right out of the airport and onto the feeder roads before he answered it.

The message was terse: Cowley wanted to see him back at HQ. No explanation was given for the order.

Bodie was not loath to obey. If he was lucky, he might be able to catch Ray before he left, to reassure himself that, at the very least, nothing had changed...

When he reached the HQ building, however, he was waylaid and informed that Mr Cowley wanted to see him in his office on the double.

Bracing himself for the encounter, Bodie presented himself in front of the Chief's desk with a air of military stoicism, only to be waved affably into a chair and left to wait in uneasy silence while Cowley finished reading a report and took two phone calls. This was followed by 15 minutes of incessant but trivial questioning about his activities of the previous ten hours, until it became clear to Bodie that Cowley was stalling, probably trying to keep him occupied until Doyle was well on his way to the Baggins rendezvous. It was also clear that, as he had no idea where Doyle was now, there was nothing he could do about it.

The phone rang. Cowley picked it up. "Yes? Thank you, Betty. I'll be out in a moment." He rose to
his feet. "This won't take long, Bodie."

Nodding glumly, Bodie settled back in his chair and watched Cowley make his exit.

Damn it, he wished he knew what, exactly the Cow was playing at. Well, trying to destroy his relationship with Doyle, obviously – but how was he going to set about it? Until Bodie knew that he could do nothing to counter it...

Gradually he became aware of the murmur of voices. Turning his head, he saw, with surprise, that Cowley had left the door to the outer office standing wide. Cowley himself was at the far side of Betty's office, standing beside the outer door, talking to a man Bodie could not immediately recognise from the back of his sleek, light brown head and well-cut sports jacket. The Chief flicked a glance towards Bodie, then turned his attention back to his companion, opening the outer door to usher him out.

It was as the other man turned to leave that shocked recognition jabbed Bodie to his feet. He couldn't believe he hadn't realised at once, hadn't known instinctively but—

"Ray...?"

The sleek head jerked round, and eyes shielded by heavy-framed glasses met Bodie's in startlement.

Bodie was stunned, horrified by the transformation Doyle had undergone and, just for a moment, his face showed it.

Even as Cowley said, "That will be all, Doyle. Good luck," Doyle was diving through the open door as if it were a foxhole in the middle of a battlefield.

"Ray! Wait—!"

The door slammed shut. Bodie glanced at Cowley, sensing the satisfaction that the impassive expression concealed, then started after Doyle.

"Bodie, stay where you are," Cowley snapped. "I haven't finished with – Bodie!" He caught at his agent's arm as he passed, but Bodie shook himself loose with shocking violence, then charged out of the door and down the corridor in pursuit of Doyle.

Cowley said a word that was not normally in his vocabulary, thereby flabbergasting Betty, and followed.

With a last, desperate sprint across the CI5 car park, Bodie reached the VW Golf just as Doyle was closing the door, yanked it back open, and pulled his partner unceremoniously out of the driver's seat and into his arms.

"Ouff!" Doyle struggled free. "Bodie, you're demented! Here, of all places—"

"No-one's watching... us..." Bodie panted, gripping Doyle's shoulders and holding him at arm's length. "An' they'd never recognise you, anyway. I'ad to look twice. So let's have a proper butchers..." His voice faded away he took in the details of the transformation Cowley's experts had wrought on his partner. The riot of curls had been cut short and the remnants straightened and lightened to give the new-straw effect of having been exposed to too much sun. Tanning cream had been used to darken the fair skin, and the thick, straight eyebrows had been plucked to near-invisibility.
"You 'ad something to say?" Doyle demanded belligerently, but the eyes behind the brown-tinted lenses were dark with misery.

Hiding his dismay as best he could, Bodie answered the defensive snarl with a cheeky grin. "When Jasper said an Australian I didn't think they were going to call in a sheep shearer, sunshine."

"I suppose I'm lucky it wasn't the saffron robe an' the begging bowl." Despite his attempt at jocularity, Doyle's shoulder muscles were tensed under Bodie's hands, and his partner cursed both himself and George Cowley. Why the hell had he laid so much stress on how good-looking he thought Ray was, let his fascination with that mass of curls show? And Cowley – the old bastard had done this on purpose...

Bodie held back all the words he wanted to say: As if the damn hair matters. I love you, Ray, and I'm terrified of losing you. Please, let's pack it in now, before it's too late. Oh, for Christ's sake be careful, love...

None of that would help. It might even alienate Ray, or put him in danger, for too much caution could be as dangerous as too little...

He kept his voice light. "Get back soon. I'll be waiting for you."

"You'd better be. I told you I was possessive." To Bodie's surprise, Doyle leaned forward to kiss him fleetingly.

"Ummm." Bodie drew him closer and kissed him again. "Those damn specs get in the way..."

Before Ray could stop him, he snatched the heavy spectacles from his nose and gazed soulfully into green eyes. "Gad, but you're beautiful without your glasses."

Doyle tried to maintain a reproving expression, but failed completely, collapsing in giggles against Bodie's shoulder. Bodie stroked the shorn hair, holding him close, not wanting to let go... but Doyle hauled himself back under control all too quickly. He straightened up, grabbing for his purloined spectacles.

"Give those 'ere. Blimey, I can't take you anywhere, can I?"

"Yeh. Put 'em back, four eyes. They're a great idea. So's the short back an' sides. We don't want to put temptation in anybody's way, do we? So just stay clear of beautiful terrorists, Raymond – female or otherwise."

Doyle sniggered, then struck a tragic pose. "I can't stand it." He flung an arm in front of his eyes and put a sob into his voice. "Doubtin' me fidelity an' us still on our honeymoon. You'll break me heart, you will, mate. Besides," he added, in a return to his normal manner, "you're the one with the sex maniac rep. Think you can hold out 'til I get back? Or will you end up raping Cowley?"

"He'll be lucky if I don't end up killing him," Bodie retorted grimly.

"Uhuh. Save some of him for me."

The two men stared at each other for a moment, then Doyle said, softly, "Hey, Bodie... take care."

"And you."

Doyle smiled, thumped his fist down on Bodie's shoulder then, without looking at him again, climbed into his car and departed in a cloud of burning rubber. Bodie stared forlornly after him, feeling cold and lost and very lonely. Hearing footsteps behind him, he knew that their parting had
been observed, but he did not turn until Doyle's car had disappeared from view. By then, also, he had himself under complete control.

His face was impassive as he faced Cowley, but there was bitterness in his voice as he said, "Enjoy that, did you?"

"Not a great deal. Why, Bodie? Just answer that question: why?"

"Because I'm in love with him."

Cowley started to say something, thought better of it, and sighed. "Come up to my office, lad. I think we both need a drink."

Cowley handed the whisky glass to Bodie, then sat down on the edge of his desk, looking at his operative with an air of exasperation. "Now that Doyle's left, can we be rational about this for just a while? I don't want any more wild emotional declarations from you – just facts."

Bodie settled back in his chair feeling, if the truth be told, happier dealing with Cowley in these circumstances than if Doyle had still been here. Also, Cowley seemed willing to talk to him, rather than issue orders, which was a hopeful sign. "It's an emotional issue," he replied carefully. "I'm aware of all the rational arguments against it. It's simply that they aren't important compared with what I feel for Doyle."

"Aye... what you feel for Doyle. Now. But what happens when the first wild excitement wears off? When outraging conventional morality becomes a burden rather than a thrill? When you have to face up to the ruin of your career, to the aggravation of day to day prejudice? To losing your friends... relatives... and the trust of your colleagues?"

"We've faced worse things. Look, sir, can't the inquisition wait until the job is over? You've got more important things to worry about." Bodie's tactics were simple enough: to put off the reckoning for a long enough time to show Cowley that their work hadn't been affected by the change in their relationship – if it hadn't, of course.

Cowley's answer was quiet, rational, and shocking. "No, Bodie. Important, maybe but not more important. Do I have to put it into words? You – and Doyle – are as important to this organisation as I am, and maybe even more important to its future. I can trust you – up, of course, to a point – to control any situation where I'm not present, to get the job done, perhaps not by my own methods, but with the end result I require. Most of the men I recruited in the early days of CI5 remained products of their background, be it the S.I.S., the military, police or whatever, but you and Doyle were the first who became wholly CI5. You helped create our identity, and CI5 created you. You've grown, Bodie. I expect you to keep growing and this... madness... threatens that."

Bodie was shaken. He had understood in a vague, never verbalised way, that he and Doyle were expected to take charge whenever Cowley could not – it was something he did instinctively, anyway – but what Cowley was implying was far more than that. He must be really worried even to hint at it.

Bodie suddenly saw the situation from Cowley's point of view and felt an unexpected and unwanted sympathy for him. He said, gently, "It hasn't been easy for any of us to accept, sir, but it's not as big a problem as you seem to think. Homosexuality is no longer a crime and, as Ray and I have no intention of hiding our relationship, there's no opportunity for blackmail. All you really have to worry about is whether it'll affect our performance in the field – and you're about to find
that out, aren't you?"

"Perhaps." Cowley did not sound convinced. "However, for the moment, you will keep this strange infatuation of yours a secret, Bodie."

"But—"

"That's an order, man. And one you may very well thank me for in the future."

"Sir, how can I convince you that keeping it a secret isn't going to—"

"I'll be the judge of that. As you rightly point out, I am about to discover the extent to which your efficiency has been affected. Until this matter is resolved, your position with CI5 must remain under review. I want to you think very carefully about your future, Bodie, very carefully indeed. Homosexuality may not be a crime but it is only barely tolerated by society. It could ruin any chance you have for further promotion – and it would make you very vulnerable. Do you really think you could still give your full attention to the job under the strain the extra problems would impose?"

Bodie shrugged. "If we can't then that's it, isn't it. You fire us."

Cowley made an annoyed Gaelic noise. "All I'm asking you to do is to think about it. And to think about the effect on Doyle. I know you never doubt your own ability to cope, but what about his? He isn't going to find it easy to ignore the moral issues, or the condemnation—" The intercom's buzz interrupted Cowley. "Yes?" he snapped, leaning back to switch it on.

"Sorry to interrupt, sir, but there's word from the hospital. Milne seems about to regain consciousness."

"We're on our way." Cowley drained his glass. "Come on, Bodie. We'll continue this discussion later."

Hoping that the opportunity would not occur until a good deal later, Bodie followed him.

No word was spoken during the drive to the hospital, not even when Bodie slotted the BMW into a space marked 'Consultants Only' in the staff car park. It was an odd and disquieting experience for both men, to be so deeply at loggerheads, but neither was willing to move from his entrenched position. They matched strides in silence up hospital stairs and along corridors, Bodie automatically adjusting to Cowley's slower pace and letting the Controller negotiate the shoals of police, security staff and concerned doctors and nurses, until they reached the door of Milne's private room. The CI5 agent seated outside made a grab for his armpit before self-consciously withdrawing his hand and adjusting his jacket as he recognised the newcomers.

"Afternoon, sir. Come to check up on your handiwork, Bodie?" he greeted.

Bodie grinned. "When I stop 'em, they stay stopped, Mike."

"Humph," said Cowley. "Well, Heston, how's the patient?"

"Drifting in and out of consciousness. Gerry Baxter's been sitting listening to him all afternoon. He's getting a bit pis – cheesed off." Heston pushed the door open.

A cold wind slapped their faces.
It was blowing through a shattered window, sweeping over the body of Gerry Baxter which sprawled on the floor amid blood and broken glass. On the bed, Milne lay still, almost as if he had fallen back into unconsciousness, but there was a small black hole in the centre of his forehead, and the pillow was stained red.

"Gerry..." Heston whispered. "Oh, God..."

Bodie stepped over Baxter's body and peered out of the window, then he whirled and was out of the door at a dead run. Cowley turned to follow him but, realising that he would never be able to catch him, changed his mind before he reached the door. Bodie knew his job; his own was to cope with two bodies and a CI5 agent who was still standing motionless, gawping at his partner's body.

Crossing to the bed, he reached for the button that called the nurse.

Doyle sat in warm sunlight, legs stretched out in front of him, on a bench beneath the statue of the Duke of Wellington that turns a determinedly upright back on the City's financial institutions and looks towards St Paul's. In an effort to think himself into the character of Jim Fenlow, he was staring over the top of his glasses at everyone who passed, and getting some very strange reactions in the process.

Normally, that would have bothered him a little, for he had never liked being conspicuous, but now he hardly noticed the glares, grins and nervous starts, as his mind kept returning to his personal problems. There had been that uncomfortable interview with Cowley, for a start.

The Chief had spoken more in sorrow than in anger, and his concern that what he regarded as a temporary aberration might ruin their lives seemed quite genuine. When Doyle had tried to explain why he and Bodie were willing to take that risk, Cowley had replied: "Tell me, Doyle, how long does Bodie's infatuation with a pretty face usually last?"

Doyle's protests, both at the implication and the turn of phrase had been loud and angry, but seeds of doubt had been sown in his mind, and when he had caught sight of himself in a mirror they had burgeoned into triffid-like proportions. He had been almost desperate to avoid any meeting with Bodie – who surely could not want him when he looked like this – and when they had come face to face, his partner's obvious dismay had confirmed his worst fears.

Just as his performance in the car park had dispelled them, mad bastard that he was. Beautifully, gloriously mad...

He loves me.

The thought filled him with a warm, secure glow, an upsurging of joy that, though he did not realise it, brought a fond, indulgent smile to his lips.

"Mr Fenlow?"

Startled, Doyle jerked round to meet a pair of bright blue eyes belonging to the heavy-featured, powerful man who had been leaning on the railings of the Underground entrance since before Doyle had arrived.

"Yeh. You this... er... Mr Baggins?"

"A close relative. The Broker gives you a high recommendation, Mr Fenlow."
"I'll blow up whatever y'want blown up, if that's what y'mean. What's the target? That place?" He jerked his head towards the white fortress of the Bank of England.

"Not exactly, Mr Fenlow. Not exactly. But we have use for your talents, you can be sure of that. Come on."

"Hey, hold up. What about my motor? It's down in a lot by the Thames."

"Forget it. By the end of this operation, you'll be able to buy a Roller to replace it."

"You're rushing me, mate, an' I'm not sure if I like that..."

"The Broker says you need a job and we need a demolitions man – fast. The choice is yours: come with me or forget the whole thing."

"Okay, okay." Doyle clattered in pursuit down the concrete steps into the maze of the Bank underpasses.

"Keep close on my heels, Mr Fenlow. You're about to get a guided tour of the Tube."

"I don't see why we don't just pick up my motor—"

"You could have been followed," the stranger snapped, feeding coins into a ticket machine.

"Followed?"

"Never underestimate the enemy."

"Enemy?"

A hand gripped Doyle's arm. "Later, Mr Fenlow – and don't stand on the left on the escalators. Come along."

When Cowley limped out of the service tower onto the windswept roof, he found Bodie standing on a parapet, one hand resting on the angular metal stanchion of a travelling crane.

"So that's what it was," he said.

Bodie glanced back at him, then returned to his survey of the car park a hundred and fifty feet below. "Yeh, they ran the window cleaning cradle down to Milne's room and just smashed their way in. Left the same way. The only problem I can see is: how did they do it without enough noise to wake the dead, let alone Heston?"

"That was simple enough. About twenty-five minutes before we arrived, a tea trolley was being wheeled down the corridor outside Milne's room. Unaccountably, it overturned, spilling a large amount of crockery and cutlery on the floor. The noise was heard over six floors."

"And covered the noise of a breaking window – and a silenced gun?"

Cowley nodded.

Bodie jumped down from the parapet. "Their timing must have been beautiful," he observed with professional admiration.

"Aye. I doubt that we'll find anything here, but it'll be gone into thoroughly, though Baxter's death leaves us even more shorthanded. I doubt that Heston'll be much use to us for a while, either, poor
lad. That makes us four operatives understrength – five, with Doyle undercover."

"When's he scheduled to make contact?"

"Whenever he might get the chance. He's on his own, Bodie. There's no help we can give him with his part of the assignment – and our only lead has just been eliminated. Our best chance now is for you to locate whoever supplied their armoury."

Bodie wanted to shout at him: D'you think I'm not trying? With Ray's life on the line? What he actually said was, 'I'll do my best, sir. If you give me the chance to get on with the job.'

Cowley's eyes met his squarely. "Aye. So why are you standing about here, instead—" There was no need for him to complete the sentence. Bodie had gone.

By the time Doyle surfaced, in company with the hobbit's relative, from Swiss Cottage tube station, he had succeeded in becoming Jim Fenlow. During their tube-hopping session he had lingered time and again to gawp at the route maps, and had taken great delight in starting in the wrong direction down a number of platforms. His companion had said little as he had steered him through the maze of Holborn, the complexities of King's Cross and the jungle of Oxford Circus, though Doyle had noticed signs of his exasperation at having to deal with such an awkward colonial.

Once clear of the station, they weaved down tree-lined, traffic infested streets, until they turned in through a modest gate labelled 'KEEPSAFE (SECURITY TRANSPORTATION) LTD'. A neat block of offices and warehousing, together with an inordinate amount of hardstanding, had been deposited in the garden of a rambling Victorian house, newly renovated and repainted, which seemed primly unamused by its modern, downmarket bedfellows.

They entered the office block through a pair of glass doors, and a matronly receptionist nodded a greeting from behind a switchboard as they crossed the jungle-planted lobby.

"Some set-up," Doyle muttered, as some comment seemed called for.

"More so than you know, Mr Fenlow," McGeary chuckled. "Through here."

A locked door led into a link corridor and through into the house, where a wood panelled hallway gave access to a large, plainly decorated room, pinked by evening sunshine, that bore the muddled, purposeful air of an operations centre.

"Ah, Simon." It was a briskly alert man in his early forties who spoke. "You found our Mr Fenlow, then?"

"Yes, sir. He wasn't trailing a tail, either."

"Well, according to Gary, the Broker does not have that sort of reputation."

"It wasn't a normal transaction, even for him. Our... haste?... might have made him suspicious."

"You worry too much, Simon – a good quality in an aide."

Fenlow, Doyle decided, would feel the need to assert himself. "Hey, just what the heck are you two playing at? I want to know what's going on around here."
"All in good time, Mr Fenlow." The fresh-faced man circled the desk and held out his hand. "The name is Rainham. Major Rainham."

"Oh yeah? Major in what? The Sally Army?"

"Not exactly. And you won't see much of me. Your operational commander will be Captain McGeary, here."

"Captain McGeary? Military as all hell, aren't we? Look, the Broker said—"

"That we needed a demolitions man – one who knows how to keep his mouth shut. You can keep your mouth shut, can't you, Fenlow?"

The only acceptable reply seemed to be a nod. Doyle nodded.

"Good. Keep it that way, do as you're told, and you'll be rewarded beyond your wildest colonial dreams."

"A cottage by a billabong all to yourself," McGeary added, grinning.

"Oh, yeah. What's that in hard cash?"

"One million."

Doyle blinked, which might have been Fenlow's reaction, too, had he considered it. He swallowed and tried to look blase. "Dollars?"

"Don't be absurd. Sterling. One million Sterling. That will be your share of the take."

"Bloody hell. What's the target? The Crown Jewels?"

McGeary and Rainham exchanged glances. "Not exactly," said the latter, "but you're thinking along the right lines, Mr Fenlow. Interested?"

And if I'm not you'll dispose of me, right?

"Yeah," Doyle growled. "Who wouldn't be? What do you want me to do?"

"Just what you're good at. I take it you've no objection if people are hurt in the process – police, security guards and that sort of scum?"

What are you planning, you mad bastard?

"Hell, no. Just so long as no-one pins a murder rap on me."

"They won't. We'll fill you in on the details later, but we're not asking you to take any greater risks than you can handle. Risk-taking's our job – not yours – you're being paid for your expertise."

"Fine by me."

"And let's hope it's third time lucky."

"Third time?"

"Yeh. We had our own demolitions man but – you've heard of Sod's Law? – he had a heart attack just before we were about to start this operation. Your friend the Broker found us a replacement,
but he had to see his little firework explode, right? He was spotted and shot."

"My opportunity. Well, anyone who gets his kicks from hearing the bangs shouldn't be playing with the big boys." Doyle made the statement brash and totally self-confident. When it came to explosives, Fenlow was THE BEST – or thought he was, at any rate.

"You don't, I take it?"

"The only sound I'm interested in hearing is the rustle of banknotes. A million, you said?"

"A million Sterling, but payable in whatever currency is acceptable to you. When the job's done."

"Meanwhile, you'll be staying here," Rainham added. "There's a room ready for you. Your hotel bill was paid half an hour ago and your clothes brought here. Dinner is in one hour, and then you'll meet the rest of the team..." He paused as the door opened and two men in blue overalls made their appearance. They looked at Doyle with unconcealed interest, but said nothing.

"Well?" Rainham demanded.

"Operation successfully completed, sir. Just one problem, though: Bodie's resurfaced again."

"Damn. Are you sure?"

"Saw him arrive with Cowley, just as we were leaving."

"What about his partner – Doyle?"

"The one with the curls? No sign of him. He may still be on sick leave... remember, he was shot during the Krivas thing."

McGeary idly kicked the desk leg. "I wish to hell that Krivas had taken those two out."

"Yes, and Cowley too, while he was at it." Rainham's voice was sarcastic. "There's no place for wishful thinking in this organisation. I'll take Mr Bodie under consideration."

McGeary's frown made him look like a contender for a part in 'Planet of the Apes'. "He's a threat."

"All of CI5 is a threat. I told you I'd think about it, Simon." Rainham turned back to the newcomers. "Meanwhile, some introductions are in order. This is Jim Fenlow. He's taking over from Milne. Fenlow, Kiddy and Henshaw. You'll be working together..." Doyle's puzzlement had to be pushed aside as he acknowledged the introductions, but his newly-hatched fear stood its ground. Nor did it retreat as the evening wore on.

Doyle unravelled himself from a tangle of bedclothes and focused blearily on the figure on the face of his watch.

2.24 am.

Oh, shit.

There was no good reason for this attack of insomnia; the bed was comfortable and sleeping in strange surroundings was too commonplace for it to have a disruptive effect. It wasn't as if he wasn't tired, either. It had been a long day, and he'd had no sleep the previous night...
The images conjured up by this thought were disturbing. In an effort to exorcise them, Doyle rolled onto his back, and stretched to his full length, hands laced behind his head, the short hair feeling strange against his skin. The room felt even stranger, lit only by curtain-constrained moonlight and the London skyglow.

Well, as he couldn't sleep, he might as well surrender and use the opportunity to review the events of the last few hours, and try to tease out the answers to the questions buzzing in his mind.

In an evening spent in conversation with his new colleagues he had gained little more than the commitment to memory of faces and names; Parson, Alexander, Thomas, Henshaw, Kiddy, Barralon, Schmidt, Lasky and Rogers, men who had little in common, save, Doyle was increasingly certain, a military background. They had showed no traces of the fanaticism that Doyle associated with terrorists, only a much more familiar competent alertness that did not advertise its motives. Doyle had never met with a terrorist who wasn't eager to lecture, to justify his actions – but these men didn't want to talk about anything more political than the cricket scores.

"One million Sterling. That will be your share of the take."

Which led to the big question: was that a line for Fenlow or a genuine offer? And were the attacks on the Security Forces politically motivated, or did they have another purpose? If Rainham's group were not political activists – and they were hardly typical of the breed – what were they? Whatever they were planning, the stakes seemed to be astronomical.

But what were those stakes? And suppose he was wrong? Suppose it was political. He was damned if he understood these people. Bodie, ex-military himself, might have stood a better chance. He was more expert with explosives too, a legacy of his stint with the SAS. Maybe Cowley should have sent him...

But then he would have been recognised and killed. These people knew Bodie, and were particularly frightened of him, for some reason as yet unexplained. They wanted him dead.

Oh Jesus... If Cowley had changed his mind then Bodie would have been dead by now... might still be in terrible danger. Rainham and McGeary were planning to kill him... might have already planned... acted...

Unexpectedly, Doyle was caught in an overwhelming surge of fear, in a contraction of chest and stomach muscles that made him feel physically sick.

Reaching, he turned his face to the pillow, drawing his knees up to his chest, fingers clenching the sheets, tears burning beneath clamped-down eyelids.

Jesus... no... oh, no... please...

He was never sure how long the panic lasted but it finally ebbed away before a repeated commonsense litany.

Bodie's all right. If they'd killed him they'd be crowing over the fact. So he's alive. Rainham only said that he was going to 'consider' the matter. He hasn't had time to do anything else. Besides, better men than this bunch have tried to kill Bodie and he's still here. And he's alert to the danger, knows he could be a target, even if he doesn't realise he's a special one. He'll be careful. He's all right – and he's going to stay that way, even if I have to blow this mission to do it.

Oddly unsurprised by this decision, Doyle lay quietly for a long time, replaying the comforting words over and over in his head until he stopped shaking and the sound of his heartbeat no longer
threatened to split his skull. The weakness in his limbs, though, remained. So did the urge to get a
gun and kill both Rainham and McGeary, but that was easily controlled.

Finally, he threw off the damp sheets, ran a basinful of tepid water, and sponged the sweat from his
body.

Oh Christ, if Bodie ever found out about this he'd laugh himself silly.

Doyle took a deep, shuddering breath, started to shove his hand through non-existent curls, swore
without force, and sat down heavily on the bed.

You have to start being rational, he told himself sternly. You aren't helping anyone by worrying
about Bodie. Certainly not helping him... or the mission... or yourself...

It didn't ease the ache in his guts.

Christ, I can't allow Cowley to split us again if this is what it's going to be like whenever I'm
working away from Bodie. It's damn near impossible to be frightened for him when he's there...
but...

Oh God, what has this done to us? I never dreamed I could need anyone so much.

Don't be bloody silly, Doyle admonished himself as he wrapped the bedclothes around his body
and burrowed into the pillows. You only saw him a few hours ago...

His mind moved into reassuring memory, then drifted into a even more pleasant daydream which
finally merged into exhausted sleep.

Suzie dropped a sheaf of printouts in front of Bodie and said, "The summary's on top."

The only answer was a grunt.

"Grace asked me to bring these in. What on Earth've you been doing to her, Bodie? She was almost
in tears."

"Nothing," Bodie snapped, not lifting his eyes from the papers he was examining avidly. "Which is
what we've got here... always said that bloody computer was a waste of money."

"Any computer is only as good as the information we feed it," the woman pointed out sharply.
"GIGO, remember? If you want a miracle, try saying a prayer – if you remember how, that is."

"Oh, I remember. I also remember that it's just as bloody useless as all this rubbish. What progress
did you and Les make at the hospital?"

"None," Suzie admitted, hitching herself up on the edge of the desk. "We can't even build up a
photofit of the auxiliary who overturned the trolley – we're not even sure if it was a man or a
woman, or come to that, a thing from Alpha Centauri. Whoever these people are, they're pros."

"So are you and Les— supposedly."

Suzie bristled. If Bodie wanted to bully the computer-room staff – particularly one with whom he'd
had a red-hot affair some six months before – it might be reprehensible, but it was none of her
business. Inflicting his grizzly-with-a-migraine impersonations on herself was quite another matter.
"If you think you can do better then you're welcome to try," she said frostily.
"Good idea." Bodie snatched his jacket from the back of his chair and stumped towards the door. "The only way to get anything done around here is to do it yourself. If Cowley wants to know where I am, I'm out on the streets, trying to track down those shooters."

"What about 9/9?"

"What about her?"

"Grace said you'd sent her over to MoD to trace—"

"Yeh, well, it'll keep her out of mischief."

"She's supposed to be working with you while Ray's—"

"I've no time for fuckin' babysittin'!" Bodie paused in the doorway. "An' you can tell the Cow, from me, that his tactics stink."

The door closed with a resounding crash, sending papers billowing to the floor. Suzie bent to retrieve them, then stood looking down at them unseeingly, a puzzled scowl on her face as she shoved her slipping glasses back into place.

Odd. Bodie was rarely bad-tempered and you'd've thought he'd've been pleased to have Josie working with him. It was hardly in character for him to ignore such a heaven-sent opportunity... and, come to think of it, it was most unlike George Cowley to hand him one on a plate. In fact, she seemed to remember that the Chief had already removed Josie from Bodie's clutches, just after he and Doyle had run a series of seminars on field tactics for the new intake just a couple of months back. Josie hadn't seemed too grateful at being saved from falling into temptation, for which Suzie did not entirely blame her. She sometimes wondered why she kept up the struggle to hold Bodie at arm's length herself.

Definitely odd. In fact, Bodie hadn't been behaving normally since... well, since the Krivas affair. Suzie was becoming very curious. It was a pity Ray was on assignment, or she might have been able to extract some information from that quarter, but all she could do for the moment was observe and speculate.

The room was full of tension – anticipation. The assembled members of Rainham's team might be lounging around the Ops room, but their alertness was as familiar to Doyle as the excitement building inside him. There was an added danger in that, for he was not Ray Doyle, but Jim Fenlow, and this was not a CI5 or Met briefing, but something far more sinister. He had to be very, very cautious. Still, it was what he was good at, and his panic of the night before now seemed unreal, silly and embarrassing, but it had left traces of unease to trouble him.

Then Rainham swept into the room, McGeary at his heels, and Doyle wrapped Jim Fenlow about him like a blanket as the assembled company rose to its feet.

Military as all hell, Doyle thought, rising a little more slowly than the rest. God, this reminded him of school. Old Finchley used to insist on it...

"At ease." Rainham sat on the edge of a vaguely central desk, McGeary looming at his elbow and studied each of his men in turn as they resettled themselves. "I have some good news for you. Our intelligence sources have notified me that we have achieved our objective; the first stage of our plan is complete. Every security officer from the rawest probationary copper to the top agent in MI5 is chasing his tail looking for a non-existent terrorist organisation. We will be able to move
against our main objective on schedule."

A thin, black man whose name, Doyle remembered, was Alexander, caught Rainham's eye. "With your permission, Major... It seems to me that we've got to keep them chasing their own tails until we go."

"Correct." Rainham beamed at him, reinforcing the schoolmasterly impression. "That means we need to make at least one more raid against the security forces. I've decided to take Simon's advice and kill two birds with one stone. CI5 has always been a major threat, even without consideration of the extra danger posed by Bodie and Cowley. So, we take out its Controller, and one half of its number one team – all of it, if Doyle is back. Your job, Simon."

"Thanks," McGeary said, grinning. "But we can't let anyone see that we're aiming for a specific hit on Bodie or Cowley, or they might start wondering why."

"I'm wondering," Doyle interposed. Perhaps it was stupidity to draw attention to himself, but he couldn't control his renewed panic.

"Sorry, Mr Fenlow. I'd forgotten you weren't acquainted with the situation. Briefly, we are not professional criminals but a military unit, using military tactics to commit one of the biggest robberies in history."

"Which is?"

"That's strictly 'need to know', Mr Fenlow. Only three men are aware of our target but, believe me, it is a most remunerative one."

"So what's the problem with these CI5 characters?"

"Much as I'd like to claim the whole credit for inventing this type of operation, it has been tried before. CI5 destroyed that operation. In particular, Cowley, Bodie and another CI5 agent called Doyle defeated the unit involved. However, it's Bodie who poses the main problem. He's ex-army and, what's more, an ex-mercenary. Also, he has good personal reasons for remembering the other affair. If anyone realises what we're about and calls our bluff, it's going to be Bodie or Cowley."

"So we take them out," Doyle mused. "With as much fuss as possible?"

"You catch on quickly, Mr Fenlow."

I wish I could catch on to what the hell you've just been talking about, was what Doyle thought. What he said was, "It sounds risky to me."

"We don't take risks," said McGeary. "That's why Bodie and Cowley have to go. Doyle too, if we can locate him."

"If he's on sick leave, we needn't worry about him. By the time he gets back it'll be too late."

Doyle raised an eyebrow and regarded McGeary sceptically. "Don't take risks, huh? I'll believe that when I see it."

Bite, damn you.

"We don't know how good you are, either, Fenlow," McGeary snapped back, stung.

"Then perhaps both of you should have a chance to find out," Rainham said smoothly. "An
evaluation of Mr Fenlow's talents and an opportunity for him to learn to trust ours. A little explosion for the benefit of Mr Bodie and Mr Cowley, I think, Simon."

"Fine by me. I'd like to see just how good Fenlow is."

"That's mutual, mate."

"Then I take it you have no objections, Mr Fenlow? No? Good. It's all yours, Simon."

As Rainham left the room, Doyle breathed a silent prayer of thanks and relief. He had succeeded in taking the first step, that of joining the squad detailed to kill Bodie and Cowley. His next was to make sure that it did not accomplish its task.

Bodie extracted himself from the Metro, slammed the door, and regarded the vehicle, the car park and the CI5 offices with undiscriminatory loathing. He missed his Capri – which was still in dock having the dents beaten out after his unexpected shunt the other morning – Cowley was no doubt lying in wait for him inside the crumbling office block, wanting information he didn't possess and, while the car park was inoffensive enough, he didn't see why it should be left out when he was tired, exasperated and worried.

Damn it, Cowley could wait. He'd have lunch first.

The Fox and Goose would hold a cheery barmaid and any CI5 agents who had managed to finagle enough time to buy a couple of pints, and the White Hart would be packed to the gunnels. Neither suited his mood. There was, however, an Italian restaurant a couple of streets away that did most of its trade in the evening. It was rather expensive for a snack lunch but he hadn't felt like breakfast and God only knew when he'd get dinner.

Luigi's it was.

By the time he had gulped down the minestrone and was ploughing his way through a huge plate of Spaghetti Carbonara, he had begun to feel better. Well enough, at any rate, to start formulating his explanations to Cowley as to how the present villains occupying his attention had managed to obtain their weapons from thin air, into which Cusak had also vanished...

"Bodie..."

He had not expected to be interrupted, and he had certainly not expected to look up at the sound of his name to find Karen standing at the opposite end of the table, handbag clutched nervously in both hands.

Bloody hell! As if life wasn't complicated enough...

From somewhere, he summoned a belated smile, though he knew that his shock and uneasiness must have shown, and rose to his feet. "Hello, Karen. What brings you here?"

"I... was just passing... and I saw you through the window... and I thought... well, you know... that we could talk..."

"Sure. Sit down, love. Let me buy you lunch." Though Bodie's response was one of polite charm, he was alerted into wariness by the woman's embarrassment. She looked as if she would rather be lunching in Hell than seating herself at his table – and yet that was what she seemed determined to do.
"Thank you, Bodie, but I've already had lunch."

"A drink then? Not even a cup of coffee?"

"No. Thanks all the same, but... Bodie, about that night at your flat..."

"I was appallingly rude. I was tired and I had personal problems, but that was no excuse to take it out on you."

"Don't worry. It doesn't matter. It hurt, at the time, but I got over that. What about Ray? He was furious."

Bodie grinned. "Yeh, in a regular pet, wasn't he? S'okay, Karen. The eruptions of that particular volcano tend to die down pretty quickly. All the same, I'm sorry you had to go through that scene."

"I told you it's all right. I don't mind. I just wanted – Bodie, can't we forget it?"

"If that's what you want, it's already forgotten."

"Good." The warmth and the – pleading? – in Karen's expression startled him, as did her next words. "Can we start all over again, love? Please?"

"No." He knew the blunt refusal would hurt her the instant it was shocked out of him, but by then it was too late. The smile had died in the green eyes.

Goddam it, why did she have to look so much like Ray?

Yeh, and who's to blame for that, Bodie?

"Look, Karen," he rushed on, "please try to understand: we had a lot of fun but it's over—"

"Why? Why is it over? Why won't you explain?"

"I should have, I suppose. It's no fault of yours, Karen, I'm just... otherwise engaged."

"I never expected to be the only woman in your life."

"I never expected to want to be faithful to one person, Karen... but this is very special."

"Are you in love with her?"

"Yes." There seemed no point in correcting the pronoun.

"You're going to marry her?"

"I'm committed – for the rest of my life."

"I... see. She's a lucky woman. Well, so long as you're happy, it's all right. I've been worried about you ever since you phoned me that night. That's why, when your Mr Cowley asked—"

Bodie hadn't moved, hadn't spoken, but Karen stopped all the same, suddenly aware that the blue eyes had storms in their depths, that the arched eyebrows had begun to draw down and together, and that an aura of fury was gathering about this man she had thought she knew. It frightened her. Desperately, she rushed into explanation. "He's worried about you. He... he asked to see me and he... he said you'd got yourself involved with someone so totally unsuitable that it could ruin your life. He said you wouldn't listen to him, but that... that I might have some influence. I asked about...
I suppose I was curious about your girlfriend, but he wouldn't tell me. I didn't want to interfere, but he obviously cares about you, so I thought I'd see you... see if you were all right."

"And now you know that I am all right?" Bodie did not wait for an answer, but rose to his feet, calling to the waiter for his bill as he did so. That employee scuttled over, plainly alarmed by this air of precipitate departure.

"There was-a something-a wrong with the meal, sir?"

"No." Bodie thrust bank notes into his hand. "Just with the company."

"Bodie! Bodie, wait..." He was already out through the door before Karen caught up with him, but there he turned to face her, at his most sardonic, one eyebrow cocked in query.

"I... I... I'm sorry, Bodie. I hope Mr Cowley's wrong about your girl. I suppose I envy her... but I didn't mean..."

Bodie looked down into her flushed face and saw something there that provided a temporary leash for his anger. Taking her face between his hands, he kissed her gently in farewell. "Good luck, Karen. Find yourself a bloke who deserves all that loyalty and kindness, hear?"

"I'll try. Be happy, Bodie." She kissed his cheek in return, turned, and walked away. Her head was up and she did not look back.

Bodie smiled briefly after her, then the expression died as his anger strained against the leash he had placed on it in response to Karen's distress.

Cowley was going to pay for that, too.

...you're the one with the sex-manic rep. Think you can hold out 'til I get back?

His own words had rebounded on Ray Doyle, words he'd originally spoken in jest, the memory of which was now almost too painful to bear.

You'll break me heart, you will, mate...

Oh Christ, why was I fool enough to put it into your hands?

He didn't dare look directly at Bodie's jaunty figure heading back towards CI5 HQ with that familiar loose-limbed stride. If he did, he might finally lose control, leap out of this damn claustrophobic Mini and beat him to a pulp.

...jealous...?

Yeah. And possessive...

Did you think that was a joke too, damn you? Well, you're going to learn just how true it was...

"God, just look at that," McGeary commented from his seat behind the wheel. "Did you ever see a more tempting target? One shot, 'an he'd be out of our way for good – and no-one would have seen anything."

Sobered by the lightning discovery that his desire to knock Bodie senseless did not extend to cover the possibility of McGeary shooting him, Doyle spoke quickly, "Yeah, but I though you didn't want
to draw attention to the fact that Bodie's a specific target – and you'd still have to deal with Cowley."

"Maybe," McGeary grunted, steering the Mini past Bodie and CI5 HQ. "It's just tempting, that's all."

"Unless they're living together or something, you can't be sure of gunning down the pair of 'em together. Mind you, I don't suppose smuggling a bomb into that HQ is going to be a walkover."

McGeary pulled into the kerb. Ignoring the expectant meter, he turned to look at Doyle. "You're right. It looks pretty well impossible for anyone except a CI5 agent – and we don't have anyone on the inside of that bunch."

Which meant that they had inside men elsewhere. Doyle huddled down in his seat, wondering who and where they were, but images of Karen and Bodie kept intruding.

Damn, oh damn...

He said, "Mailman, tradesmen—?"

"Don't get beyond that door without being checked six ways from Sunday."

"I take it you have a missile available, then – or someone willing to commit suicide?"

"Rush job, Fenlow, remember?"

Doyle shrugged, feeling suddenly more cheerful. "Maybe you'd better forget this place, Cobber."

Only what sort of slaughter would his suggestion invoke if McGeary took it up on it?

"Uhuh. There's nowhere else we can count on finding Cowley and Bodie together, just like you said."

Doyle shrugged again. "You're the one who decides how to deliver the bomb – I'm just here to build it."

"And I want to be the one who gets Bodie," McGeary said.

"You make it sound like a vendetta."

"More like counting coup, taking out someone with his rep. There're a lot of places in the world where that would mean something, even though he went legit over ten years ago."

"Doesn't matter to me, mate, but seein' as we can't get the bloody Prime Minster to plant the bomb for us..."

"Wait a second. Maybe a woman... that one Bodie was with just now, perhaps."

"They'd check her out. Some of the world's worst terrorists have been women."

Why the hell am I protecting Karen?

"They'd check anyone out," McGeary muttered. "No-one's innocent in their eyes." He stopped short. "Except... Hey, how about a kid? A kid wouldn't be suspected of carrying a bomb."

Doyle burst out laughing. "You're telling me they'd let a child into CI5 HQ to see the boss, for
Christ's sake?"

It stopped McGeary in mid-flight. "Shit. You're right. There isn't a kid on Earth who could get in to see them both."

I can think of two, actually...

Doyle tried to forget that insidious thought, but it wouldn't go away. Two kids who could get in to see Bodie and Cowley. Who could be trusted to pick up the smallest hint, to act with coolness and a total lack of fear.

No. It was a risk he had no right to take.

There was silence in the little car as McGeary tried to come up with a plan and Doyle struggled with his conscience.

"Damn," McGeary said at last, without heat. "We've too little time. I hate these spur-of-the-moment jobs. We'll have to take Bodie and Cowley out separately and hope no-one makes the connection. Bodie'll probably be out again soon. I'll get the rifle from the boot. Always did want to take a shot at the bastard."

No.

"Say, McGeary, I've just had a thought. Wasn't it CI5 which rescued those kids from the nutter in the church tower last week?"

"Krivas!" McGeary exploded.

"Whoever. I suppose there's no chance that those kids met Bodie or Cowley or both? Because if they had then they might be allowed—"

"Fuckin' 'ell. How the shit could I have missed that one?" There was triumph in McGeary's voice.

Lindsay, forgive me...

Doyle was dismayed by what he'd done, astounded by what he would do for Bodie... even if Bodie didn't care anymore...

He had to get control of himself. He couldn't call the words back now, though he would have given anything to be able to do so.

Except Bodie's life.

"You may not know it, Fenlow," McGeary was continuing, "but it was Bodie who brought those kids down from that tower, and Cowley who masterminded the operation. So one of those kids might, as you said, get into CI5 HQ—"

"To see them," Doyle agreed. "You could end up with a pair of very dead kids."

"Casualties of war – or have you lost your taste for that million?"

Doyle forced a grin. "No way. Suppose we go find a local library and check the paper for details on those kids."

"Didn't think you had it in you, Fenlow," McGeary chortled, thumping Doyle's shoulder. "Get out the A-Z and let's find that library."
Bodie didn't even hear Betty's protests as he barged into Cowley's office, planted himself in front of the Controller's desk, and snarled, "I want to talk to you, Cowley's office, planted himself in front of the Controller's desk, and snarled, "I want to talk to you, Cowley."

The stare from across the desk was scorching. "It is customary to knock, Bodie, and I doubt if your business is so urgent that it cannot wait until I have finished briefing Murphy and Styles."

It was only then that Bodie registered the presence of the astonished agents. Ignoring them, he leaned across the desk, palms pressed flat on its top, so that his face was only inches from Cowley's. "Uhuh. I'm going to talk to you now, an' you know damn well what it's about, so unless you want to air the dirty linen in front of Murph and Seb, I suggest you get rid of them."

Cowley hesitated for a moment, as if weighing Bodie's anger and resolution against his own chances of enforcing discipline, then he nodded at the two fascinated spectators. "I'll talk to you two later."

"Sir." With shocked looks at Bodie, the two men beat a somewhat-reluctant retreat. Bodie waited until the door had closed behind them, then spoke quietly but with concentrated venom. "You devious, unprincipled bastard. Pull another trick like that and I'll—"

"You will do nothing, Bodie. We will not even continue this conversation until you have yourself under control."

"If I wasn't under control you'd be scattered all over this office in pieces. Hell, I'd expected you to try to manipulate me an' Ray, but by what goddam right d'you involve innocents like Karen?"

"I would not have involved Miss Webster if she had not wished to be involved. She's a grand lass, Bodie, and obviously fond of you."

"I'm fond of her, but why can't you get it through your thick head that I'm in love with Ray. If you can't live with that, then sack us, but for Christ's sake stop playing pimp before—"

"Bodie! I won't tolerate—"

"What else can you call it?" Bodie deliberately muted his voice to a reasonable level. "It's not infatuation, sir. You're either going to have to accept that or get rid of us, because as far as we're concerned it's a lifetime commitment."

"You believe you can claim that for Doyle too, do you?"

"Yeah. An' lay off him, Cowley, or I will take you apart."

"You could try... Och, lad, can't you see that I'm trying to help you both?"

"You've a funny way of going about it."

Cowley leaned back in his chair, facing the younger man's fury with equanimity. "Do you really think that you're going to convince me of anything by shouting at me, Bodie?"

There was a pause, then Bodie sighed, straightened, and gave Cowley a small, rueful grin. "No, sir, but it helped relieve my feelings – and you're not going to change them by throwing every woman in sight in my direction."
"Perhaps not. I don't doubt your loyalty to Doyle, or your affection for him. God knows that this situation is as much my fault as anyone's. I should have never left you teamed with him for so long, but I never dreamed you'd... there was no indication of...

"Deviant sexual tendencies?" Bodie supplied caustically.

Cowley winced. "I also underestimated your persuasiveness and overestimated Doyle's resistance to it."

Bodie's left eyebrow climbed. "What makes you so sure it was my idea?"

"Are you suggesting it was his? That he seduced you?"

Bodie smiled reminiscently. "Well, actually..."

"Och, stop being ridiculous. You know as well as I do that Doyle would never take such a step of his own accord."

"Don't underestimate him. He's full of surprises."

"Not to me – or you." Cowley's expression was not so much one of anger but of exasperation. "If I didn't know both of you so well I might have been a little more willing to... 'live with the situation' as you put it, despite the dangers, but I do know you – and I'm not just speaking as head of CI5 here, lad – and I don't want to see either of you badly hurt. No, wait—" as Bodie started to protest, "—let me finish. While the differences in your temperaments make you and Doyle an ideal working partnership, they're a recipe for disaster in a... a marriage. Don't let your feelings for Doyle blind you to the fact that he's known you for nearly six years without even realising that you need some emotional support, let alone offering it to you. That might not have mattered so much when you had other, closer, relationships, other people to turn to, but, damn it, do you really think you can shoulder all his guilt, shame, fear and resentment, when you've no outlet for your own? And what about his need for security, stability, normality? Can you supply that?"

Bodie didn't dare meet Cowley's eyes. "Even if you were right," he said carefully, "and I don't accept that you are, I'd have no choice but to try. Ray's worth any—"

"For Christ's sake, man, show some sense! This isn't a Romantic novel. Are you going to insist on ruining both your lives when Doyle can't satisfy your emotional needs any more than—"

"At least I won't be wasting my time hankering after a self-centred, power-mad religious nutter!"

Cowley turned deathly white. His voice was ice-chilled. "You will withdraw that comment, Bodie. Now."

"Like hell I will! I've had to stand here and listen to you slanging Ray but, damn you, he loves me, even if he's the wrong sex to suit your prejudices – which is something the Irvine woman never felt for you so don't you dare lecture me about emotional needs! I'll be anything Ray wants me to be, d'you understand? He's worth it."

"That's enough!" Cowley rounded the desk with startling speed, his hands grabbing Bodie's lapels to shake him viciously. "I've been too damn patient with you, Bodie. Now, you'll—"

"Take your hands off me," Bodie interposed, very gently.

"—do as you're told. You think you can fight me, boy? Well—"
"I don't fight old men – or cripples." Bodie tore himself loose with a surge of powerful muscles and strode to the door. "I'll sort out this mess because Ray's in the middle of it – then you can go to hell, \textit{Mister} Cowley."

The door slammed behind him.

"God, just look at them. It's like wildebeest migrating through the Serengeti!" McGeary exclaimed, peering through the Mini's window at the herd of children streaming through the school gates. "Pity the stuff in the press dried up so quickly – CI5 must have clamped down. Can you see 'em?"

"No." Even as he spoke, Doyle spotted Mick's fair mop in the crowd, next to the red head of an unknown, lanky boy, with Jan stalking along in front. At that moment, someone pushed her in the back. Executing a pirouette worthy of a prima ballerina, she belted the unfortunate miscreant with her roll bag. Even McGeary couldn't miss the resulting free for all.

"There they are. Nice right the Barr kid's got. D'you suppose the girl always carries that roll bag? It was satchels when I went to school."

"If the rest of that mob are anything to go by, the fashion's changed since then."

"Yeh, well, it'll take a decent-sized explosive device."

Doyle grunted. The more he considered the likelihood that Cowley would dock any damage to CI5 HQ out of his pay, the more certain he was that, if there had to be a bomb at all, it would be as small as he could possibly make it. "Size isn't everything. What we need is something that'll do the job. Besides, remember that the kid's got to carry the bag."

"Without noticing the bomb – and other things, maybe. Uuhhh. Here comes the heavy squad." McGeary had noticed a convoy of teachers steaming down the drive in battle formation. "And there they go."

As Mick, Jan and their cohorts fled down the road, the Mini glided into pursuit.

Bodie eyed the liquorice allsort mock-Tudor house with misgivings. It looked innocent – the expression of the hardened criminal in the dock – and that meant trouble; trouble from the occupants if the impression was false, and even more trouble from Cowley if it wasn't.

The phone call from Marty had been hurried and not particularly informative: "Bodie, just thought you might like to know that Ginger thinks that Greatorix might have had a little argument with Chopper about a shipment, so there's a chance Chop might be keeping tabs on him."

"Where's Chop?"

"No idea. You owe me, Bodie. See you sometime."

Bodie had had no idea, until then, that Jim 'Chopper' Brown was in the country and it had taken most of the afternoon to track him down.

Finally, in a City pub right on top of the local refuse incinerator, Bodie had cornered Chopper, only to have to sit through a long diatribe on the subject of British arms dealers in general and Greatorix in particular before the grizzled American – a dead ringer for John Wayne if it hadn't been for his
Bostonian accent – fumbled his way to the admission that he had been keeping obbo on his new enemy.

"I wanna little talk with Mr Greatorix, only he isn't in the country at the moment. Probably heard I want to see him."

"It's actually Cusak I want to see. I don't like the way he's vanished. It makes me nervous."

"That, I'd give a lot to see. I only have to remember that stunt in Jordan and even I feel airsick. Those were the days, Bodie."

"It was a long time ago."

"Yeah. Sure you don't want to come in with me again? Some of the South Americans are... No, I suppose not."

"Cusak, Chop."

"Yeh, Cusak. Far as I know, he's at Greatorix's place in Reading. Ted's been watching it for me, on and off. I don't think the local zone planners know about the ammunition dumps round the back."

Looking at the frenzied structure, Bodie was inclined to agree. Any Planning Department that could have let that monstrosity escape from paper and ink into wood, plastic and render had to be blind, catatonic, or both.

"I take it he's in there, Chop."

"So Ted said. Along with Greatorix's bit of skirt – sorry, personal secretary."

Bodie raised an eyebrow. "Cusak?" Then, regretfully, "No, he wouldn't have the nerve."

"Appearances can be deceptive, pal. Anyway, according to Ted, she always leaves before midnight."

"Maybe if she doesn't, she turns into a pumpkin." Bodie looked up and down the quiet, tree-lined street, noting an old biddy weeding the immaculate garden of the house next to Greatorix's humbug, when she wasn't yelling at a gang of kids on chopper bikes who were running their own version of Le Mans on the shadow patched pavement, and the middle-aged man and his teenage daughter who had littered the opposite drive with the innards of a 1950s Norton they must have salvaged from a junk heap. The garden of the house on the far side of the Humbug sported a belligerent Pekinese, whose head seemed permanently jammed between the bars of the gate.

With that lot, Bodie decided, Cusak hardly needed an alarm system, though he undoubtedly had one. He said, "I think this calls for a little patience, Chop."

"So what're y'gonna do?"

"Me?" Bodie settled back in the passenger seat. "I'm gonna grab some kip."

It was nearly twelve and most of the house was in darkness as Doyle stole down the corridor towards the briefing room. The last two times he had tried this manoeuvre, he had been forced to retreat by light filtering under the closed door, but this time he was able, after checking for electronic eyes and trip wires, to slip inside and pick up the only telephone he had seen in this part
of the building.

He started to dial the CI5 number by touch but after the first two digits the dialling tone returned, informing him that he was not on a direct line. He tried dialling 8, then 9, but the machine obstinately refused to give him an outside line. Zero produced a ringing tone, which meant it had connected him with the switchboard, and he joggled the rest quickly. Damn it, if all the outside lines went through the switch it meant that he couldn't contact CI5.

Christ – there had to be some way he could warn Bodie – and Cowley – protect Jan and Mick—

A sudden, if small, increase in illumination alerted Doyle to the fact that the lights had been switched on on the other side of the door, and he dived across the room and squeezed into the space between the row of filing cabinets and the window, trying to avoid the ends of the horizontal blinds sticking into his face as he hunkered down out of sight.

The light tubes flashed spasmodically to life and footsteps crossed the carpet to the filing cabinets, a sound followed by the click of a released lock, then the slithering of a drawer being opened.

"Here it is. Thought I'd filed it in here."

McGeary.

"It should have been in my office, Simon. Well, no harm done."

The drawer slammed shut.

"Are you sure you'll have no problems tomorrow? May's getting jumpy."

"No, Major. None that need trouble either of you about, at any rate."

"You still have to get that bomb into CI5 HQ."

"Oh, Fenlow and I have that sorted out. Forget it."

Rainham chuckled. "You seem to have become sold on Fenlow remarkably quickly, Simon."

"Fenlow's okay. If he can build bombs as well as the Broker says he can, we've nothing to worry about. He can think, he's tougher than he looks, and he's as ruthless as any man we have."

"Need any help from me?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, Captain. You don't want to tell me and I've a feeling I don't want to know. Just get the job done."

"Don't I always, Major?"

There was laughter, which faded towards the door and disappeared with the light, but it was some time before Doyle eased himself out of his bolt hole and started an examination of every piece of paper he could find.

The white TR7 had buzzed away with Mr Greatorix's glamorous personal secretary behind the wheel, leaving Bodie to contemplate the happy memory of an enormous length of nylon-clad leg as
he sauntered up the dimly lit driveway and leaned on the doorbell.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," said a querulous voice, muffled by stained oak and pseudo cast iron. "Really, Fiona, you'd forget your head if it was loose..." Cusak's voice petered out as he pulled open the door and Bodie's visage appeared round the edge of it.

"Hello, sweetie," that gentleman cooed, with a grin as wide as the Pacific. "Remember me?"

Cusak cursed and tried to slam the door, but by then Bodie's shoulder was pressing hard against it. Giving up the unequal struggle, the arms dealer yelped an obscenity and scuttled back into the house.

Bodie made no attempt to chase him. Instead, he stepped inside, closed, chained, locked and bolted the door, then wandered down the hall, opening doors and peering into the rooms beyond.

He had discovered what appeared to be an office and was rooting through the files when Chopper appeared, dragging Cusak by the scruff of his neck.

"You called it right, Bodie. Straight out of the bolt hole at the back." He gave his captive a shake that rattled his teeth and wagged the forefinger of his free hand in front of a face that was slowly turning purple. "I call that downright unfriendly, Mr Cusak."

"Put him down, Chop. If he can't breathe, he can't talk."

"He can't yell, either."

"He won't yell. If he yells, the neighbours might call the Police, mightn't they, Cusak? Then I'll show 'em my ID card and they'll let me take Mr Cusak away while they search every square inch of this highly desirable property. I'm sure Mr Greatorix will love that – so just put him down, Chop, there's a good lad."

Chopper snorted and flung Cusak down into a chair, where he sat rubbing the red weal his own collar had cut into his throat, and glowering at Bodie.

"You got a warrant?"

"Now, what would I be doing with a warrant for you, sunshine? An old mate like you, eh? Funny how you turned tail and ran when you saw me, innit? Changed, have I?"

"Look, Bodie, I'm just jumpy, all right? The word was out that you wanted to see me, and you know I don't want any trouble with the Law..." He gulped down the last words as Bodie leaned over the back of his chair. "Look, I want to help you, Bodie. Of course I do. Just tell me what you want and I'll do everything in my power—"

"I'm interested in one of your contracts. Supplied to someone local. P.E. Smgs. Rifles. Small arms. Maybe grenades. A big order from someone who doesn't like nice, peaceful law-abiding coppers and spies and various other security-minded blokes, some of whom might just decide to put you out of business."

"There's plenty of other people in my game, Bodie. What makes you think it was—?"

"A little bird whispered in my ear. It reminded me that you aren't at all fussy about what you supply, or to whom. Not fussy at all." Suddenly, he grabbed a handful of Cusak's pullover and hauled him half out of his chair. "But I am. Very fussy."
"Bodie, I swear to God, there hasn't been any such order. Honest, there hasn't!"

"You'd lie to the Almighty just as soon as you'd lie to me. So you're going to produce your records and prove what you say." He dropped Cusak back into the chair. "Where's your order book?"

"We... we don't... k... keep one."

"Not even for the VAT man? Shame on you! You'll be telling me next you fiddle your income tax. Don't mind if we check that out, do you? I have this terribly suspicious mind— Watch him, Chop!"

Chopper grinned his infamous death's head grin. "My pleasure."

Cusak huddled further down into the chair and stared blankly ahead as Bodie went to work.

Still fully clothed, Doyle flopped down onto his bed and stared disconsolately at the shadowed ceiling. No telephones, and no way out of the building – at least not without blowing his cover – left him stranded here with an increasingly unpalatable choice of actions. The house was a prison, and he was denied all visiting privileges.

Oh hell.

It began to look as if he was going to have to chance far too many lives on his own expertise and Jan's understanding. Too many lives... Jan's own. Mick's. Cowley's. And Bodie's.

Especially Bodie's.

He closed his eyes tightly, seeing only the tableau that had haunted him for hours.

Bodie and Karen.

Damn them both to hell...

But, oh God, if anything happened to Bodie...

This was insane; Bodie had betrayed him. It shouldn't matter anymore.

Except that it mattered more than anything had ever mattered before.

Well, maybe... oh, please... maybe he was wrong about Bodie and Karen... maybe Bodie'd be able to explain and—

Oh yeh. Some detective you are, Ray. Can't you recognise airtight evidence when you see it?

Only there was other contradictory evidence. All his memories... all the assurance he should have needed that Bodie loved him...

Yeh, but he'd forced that situation on Bodie. Kidnapped him, ordered – no, blackmailed – him into bed.

But it had been Bodie who had given and asked – demanded – total commitment.

Perhaps that had been an overly emotional reaction. Maybe, once Doyle had gone, he'd realised that he didn't care that much, not enough to face Cowley's antagonism, all the shock and outrage...
Except that didn't make sense either, because it had been Bodie who had despised the very idea of secrecy, Bodie who had seemed to delight in displaying his love, even at the most inappropriate times and the most public places.

Maybe the excitement of that had palled. Maybe Bodie had decided that Karen was a safer alternative, or maybe he'd discovered he really cared for her... More than he did for Doyle.

Bodie had broken off his relationship with Karen before... before he could've even guessed that Doyle might love him in return – and he'd tried to run rather than seen his partner hurt.

Oh Jesus, Bodie, you're hurting me now.

Perhaps it was some sort of smokescreen to ward off Cowley.

Cowley wasn't there. I was.

Bodie didn't know that.

Oh hell, Doyle thought, maybe I should just let him go. Karen could probably make him much happier than I could. If he has changed his mind, it's probably better for both of us.

I won't hold you against your will, Bodie, you know that.

But, Jesus, it hurts so much.

Must never let him see that. Never let him think I can't live without him – but I don't think I can.

You bastard, Bodie. I'm sorry I couldn't be what you wanted. All I can do is to go on loving you, because I can't stop.

Go for broke, Lindsay had said.

Well, he had. And he'd lost.

"Eureka!"

Bodie's head jerked up from the account book he'd been examining at Chopper's shout. "What've you got?"

"The goods, Bodie, the goods. Here, on the printout. 'S strange sort of order – far too small to be supplies for an army or a guerrilla movement, far too big to be going to an individual."

"Give."

"P.E., like you said, an' all the gear to go with it, pal; detonators, timers, switches, casings: regular little bomb-maker's kit. Twenty smgs, twenty Armalites, fifteen nine millimetre pistols, grenades, stun grenades, commando knives. R/Ts, ammo. Plus a few oddities thrown in; couple of Remington hunting rifles – sights too – silencers, three Colt Pythons, a point forty-four Magnum – someone wants to be Dirty Harry – half a dozen PPKs, short shotguns... Hell, Bodie, what is all this? Supplies for a private army?"

"Something that's behaving like one." Bodie moved to tower over the slumped rat-bag figure of Cusak. "All right, mate. This is where you start talking or I stop handling you with kid gloves."
Cusak cringed. "Listen, Bodie, it's not what you think..."

"Telepathic now, are we? Listen, Uri Geller, because I'm only going to tell you once. My partner's life is on the line – you remember my partner? – and if anything happens to him, it's going to happen to you too."

"You can't. You may be with the Big A, but even they don't—"

"Not the Big A, Cusak. Me. And Chopper won't say one damn word if I cut you up in little pieces, will you, Chop?"

Chopper nodded, with enthusiasm.

"I'm sure there are parts you can spare, right?" Bodie leaned forward, one hand resting lightly on Cusak's thigh. "Starting with your balls. You can't've used 'em for years."

Cusak squirmed, but was trapped by the solidity of the upholstery. "Chopper, you'll be implicated —"

"D'you want him gagged, Bodie? That way he won't be able to scream, and he can always nod when he's willing to talk."

Cusak looked from side to side, from face to face, his muscles tensing under Bodie's hand.

"Don't try it, little man." The drawl was deceptively gentle. "All you have to do is to tell me about that contract, and you – and this lovely hideout of Greatorix's – will stay intact."

"Not that he's likely to miss his balls," Chopper mused aloud. "Doubt if he has any."

"Look – that contract – Lebrun recommended that customer, right?" Cusak squawked. "Can you imagine Lebrun recommending a terrorist? It isn't the contract you want, Bodie."

"Then it won't matter if you tell me all about it, will it? Who's the client, son?"

"McGeary. Name's McGeary. Look, he's clean, Bodie. We know his rep: FNLA, then some Gulf skirmishes, nothing in this country, nothing to do with our kind of terrorist."

"McGeary. Heard of him, Chop?"

"Uhuh. What's his first name, Cusak?"

"I don't know. Hell, you both know the score. When did either of you two maniacs use your full names?"

He had a point, but Bodie wasn't going to admit it. "Where was the shipment delivered?"

"It wasn't. They collected. Paid through a Swiss numbered account. In dollars. In advance. I don't know anything else."

"If you do, we'll jog your memory for you, won't we, Chop?"

A knife flicked open in Chopper's hand. "It'll be a pleasure, Bodie."

Doyle carefully moulded the plastic explosive around the inside of the cylindrical metal casing and
fitted the detonator into position, before commencing the task of wiring it to a small but powerful radio transceiver. He was working slowly, conscious that McGeary was watching every move he made. Conscious, also, that he was desperately tired after an almost sleepless night.

Yet, in the course of that night he had found a new serenity; whatever happened, he was going to do all he could to make Bodie happy, even if he destroyed himself in the process.

If this bomb doesn't destroy me first, he reminded himself sharply, trying to keep his thoughts from wandering. If he made a fatal mistake it might solve his immediate problems, but it wouldn't stop Rainham going ahead with whatever mayhem he was planning, and it wouldn't stop them trying to kill Bodie.

This thing might do that yet, Doyle told himself. If I don't get it right, or if Bodie isn't sharp enough – hell, of course he is. It's Jan and Mick I've got to worry about – or if...

For Christ's sake would you stop thinking about it!

"Not a lot of explosive there," McGeary commented.

"Enough to do the job," Doyle retorted. Damn it, how much did McGeary know about explosives? If only he could be sure... There were so many ways he could gimmick this device so it wouldn't go off – but he had to assume that McGeary would notice any single one of them. On the other hand, if he turned away, just for a few seconds...

"Slow but sure, huh?"

"It pays with explosives."

"It's a beautiful job, Jim. All we need to do is listen for Bodie's and Cowley's voices coming over the R/T, then push the button."

"Yeh." It was impossible to stall any longer without making McGeary suspicious, so Doyle gave up the fight and sealed his explosive package. "Ready."

"Good. We're going to have to move fast to pick up those kids on their way to school. Sure you want to come along?"

"Try keeping me away."

"Who was it said that it was stupid to be in your game and want to see things go bang?"

"You won't see this go bang – we'll be lucky if we hear it. Bodie and Cowley will, though, and that's what counts."

McGeary slapped him on the shoulder. "The Broker certainly knew what he was doing when he sent you to us. Come on, Jim. Let's go make that bang."

Bodie propelled Cusak out of the lift and into Jasper's office, watched by the interested owner of the flat, who was resplendent in a red and gold Chinese silk dressing gown.

"Good morning, Bodie," Jasper greeted him politely, peering at agent and prisoner over the top of his spectacles. "Did you know that George has been looking for you?"

"No, but you don't need a deerstalker to deduce it. You got somewhere I can lock this character up
for a few hours?"
"Yes – but I can't imagine why you don't take him to your own HQ."

"I want to be able to lay hands on him again if Cowley boots me out – and I want your word you
won't tell him he's here."

"And if I don't give it?"

Bodie caught hold of Cusak's collar and hauled him back towards the lift.

"Don't be so precipitate, my boy. Naturally, you have my word if feel you can accept it from a
sinner like myself."

Bodie grinned. "There are sinners and sinners. Thanks, Jasper. Just show me where to sling him
and I'll be on my way."

"Surely, but I hope you'll have breakfast with me first."

"That sounds like a great idea."

"What about me?" Cusak yelped.

"Bread and water for you, sunshine. Come along."

Ray Doyle balanced himself carefully on the side of a rusting oil barrel, turned up his collar against
the rain and the water dripping from the root of the abandoned warehouse, and wondered why no-
one had ever realised that Hell must be wet. Sitting amid the dereliction, it was almost impossible
to believe that St Catherine's and the open land of Hazely Heath lay less than half a mile away.

They had followed Jan and Mick to this place the night before, abandoning the Mini as too
conspicuous in the nearby cross hatch of back-streets that divided ancient factories, old warehouses
and barren 'development land'. The kids had threaded the maze with the air of long familiarity,
cutting along the bank of a canal that few inhabitants of Hazely knew existed at all, then through
the private car park and factory that had been built over the murky waters, before emerging onto
the Heath.

The old warehouse had provided the ideal place to hide the twenty hundredweight hire van and the
wrecked yard, scattered with debris that testified to its continued use as an unofficial tip, held
plenty of cover for McGeary, Barralon and himself.

Maybe the kids wouldn't come to school this way.

Maybe.

He wondered if Lindsay knew about this place, and about the canal inlet that festered on this side
of rotting lock gates; once, there had been a wharf to load and unload goods transported on the
narrow canal that lay stagnant behind a low brick wall and the remains of a towpath, but now the
water was no more than a death trap for anyone foolish enough to fall into it.

Trust Jan and Mick to use this place as a home from home.

He consulted his watch.
Eight thirty.

Hazely Middle School opened its doors for the supposed education of the masses at 8.40. If Jan and Mick were coming this way, then they wouldn't get to school on time.

The double meaning of that thought frightened Doyle.

He could hear running footsteps now and, turning his head in their direction, he saw the beacon of Mick's blond head bob into view, followed by Jan's chestnut curls, the two children pounding down the track with the head-down determination of those who know that they are already late.

The urge to shout a warning almost overwhelmed Doyle, but before he could act on the impulse McGeary arose right in their path and hooked an arm around Mick's waist, as Barralon sprang from cover to block Jan's retreat.

Jan, however, showed no sign of even thinking about retreat. Instead, in a well-practised manoeuvre, her foot lashed up into McGeary's groin.

With a howl of pain, he dropped Mick and hit out reflexively at Jan, catching her head a glancing blow with his fist. She stumbled sideways, falling to one knee.

Mick, meanwhile, had scrambled to his feet, but he did not notice Barralon approaching from behind him until his hands were grabbed and secured with little more than minimal resistance. Jan, though, rolled sideways to avoid McGeary's clutches, bounced upright, and took to her heels.

"Fenlow, stop her!"

They already had Mick and they had guns and they could, almost certainly, catch Jan without his help, yet Doyle still felt like a traitor as he reached out and snagged Jan's arm, hauling her round into an unbreakable grip.

Furious blue-green eyes glared at him over inches, but then he saw recognition dawn in them and, as Jan opened her mouth, he snarled, "Be quiet, kiddo, and you and your chum may stay alive a while longer."

Jan's eyes remained locked on his for a long, an eternal moment, then she demanded, "Wha'y'wan', Mister?" in tones that suggested she saw herself as Bogart rather than Bacall.

"Me an' my friends over there want you and your friend to do us a small favour. Obey orders, and everything'll be fine. You got that?"

"Yeh, I got that. I guess we'll play along, for now."

"You'd better," Doyle told her, and winked, getting a fleeting grin in return. He steered her over to where McGeary and Barralon were struggling to secure Mick's' arms and legs with a length of rope, to the accompaniment of much appalling language from all three participants.

"Put a sock in it, Mick," Jan ordered. "They copped us fair and square. We're gonner 'ave t'play along with their plan."

"Bugger it, Jan," Mick howled. "Ain't it 'appened once too offen? Y'know what me Mum's gonner do, dontcha?"

"Maybe – but put a sock in it."
Mick glared at her rebelliously, then took in Doyle, whom he did not appear to recognise. "Didn't see that 'un."

"Well I did."

McGeary picked up Mick. "Barralon, tie her up. Fenlow, you know what to do." He jerked his head towards Jan's rollbag.

Doyle pulled it from the girl's shoulders and left her to Barralon's tender mercies, hoping to get back to the van before McGeary, and make some minor 'adjustments' to his device, but the other man paced him to the van, dumped Mick in the back, and climbed in beside Doyle as the latter unzipped the bag. There was nothing for it but to place the untouched device in among the cluttered contents of the bag; school books and pens, a lunch box, a battered copy of 'Dr. No' and various other items that Doyle did not wish to examine closely.

Barralon arrived, carrying Jan, and climbed into the back with the kids. "Want me to gag 'em?" He was a man of few words, and all of them to the point.

"We'll be quiet, honest we will, mister..."

"One peep out of either of you and you'll be sorry you weren't," Doyle growled, pre-empting McGeary. "Leave it, Barralon. We need their co-operation, an' they already know what'll happen to them if we don't get it." He hoped that the Australian accent wasn't too thick, but he didn't dare give Mick a chance to recognise his voice.

"We're co-operating. Honest we are."

"Then shut up, kid."

For a wonder, Jan shut up.

Tucking into a huge plate of bacon, sausage and egg in the Concorde-cockpit that doubled as Jasper's kitchen, Bodie began to relax for the first time in hours, and to show a greater willingness to talk to his host.

"Just who is it I'm holding against his will, Bodie?" Jasper questioned as he sipped Blue Mountain coffee.

"Name's Cusak. He supplied the armoury to the nutters we're chasing. Which reminds me: does the name McGeary mean anything to you?"

Jasper considered the question carefully. "No," he said at last. "I don't think so, but I'll check my records. Ought I to know him?"

"I'm not sure. He's the bloke who purchased the armoury from Cusak. Apparently he's a mercenary – known around, but after my time."

"You were in that game? George only said you were ex-army. Where were you? Angola?"

"Among other places, but well before the big fracas in seventy-five. I'd thrown in that lark by then, decided that if I was going to be shot at it might as well be for my own country. When you spoke to Cowley, did he say anything about Doyle?"
"No, Bodie. Sorry... Tell me something – why did you come here? There must be other places you could have dumped Cusak. With the man in the car who dropped you here, for example."

"Chopper? The only thing I'd trust him with is my life."

"Could it be that you're trying to involve me further in this, Bodie?"

"You're already involved up to your neck. What I want to do is use your ears, Jasper. It's quite possible I won't be allowed to use CI5's."

"Stop being ridiculous, son. It's obvious that George thinks the world of you."

"Is it? You could have fooled me. Anyway, that's another reason I'm here: it's a place Cowley won't look for me."

"You're wrong. He's already been looking for you here."

"Sure. He was mad enough to try anywhere but, as you're his contact and he's been in touch with you about me, he'll expect you to phone him the moment I turn up."

"What makes you think I won't?"

"You can't until I'm gone, and then you won't have me and you will have Cusak, and you'll find him hard to conceal if Cowley does come storming over here – and you've already given me your word on that score. Too much double dealing can get you into trouble, Jasper. Besides, I'm going over to CI5 HQ now. You want me to give Cowley a message?"

"Not if you want to keep Cusak's location a secret, my boy. Go and make your peace with George. I've a feeling he'll be with you when you come back."

"Don't count on it." Bodie rose to his feet and held out a hand. "Thank you for your help, Jasper."

"I didn't have much choice," was the wry comment. "Remember to come back for Cusak, Bodie. I wouldn't want him as a permanent house guest."

"Who would?" Bodie grinned and, his good humour restored, bounced out of the flat towards the nearest Tube station.

McGeary pulled the van into a space created by an 'OUT OF ORDER' sign on a parking meter up the road from CI5 HQ, and a man in a traffic warden's uniform sauntered over and removed the bag. When McGeary leaned out of the window and spoke to him, the reply was succinct.

"Cowley's in the building. No sign of Bodie yet."

"Thanks, Joe. We'll take over from here on in."

"Good thing too. The real warden's due back in five minutes," Joe Kiddy replied, making his exit.

"And now, Jim, we wait," McGeary told Doyle, leaning back in his seat.

"Yeh. Until Bodie turns up. If he turns up."

"He will," McGeary replied, smiling. "You get an instinct for these things, and mine says that this operation is running our way."
"Ah, George. Your black sheep was just here."
"Just – Isn't he still there?"
"No."
"Jasper—"
"No. I just fed him and let him go."
"I told you—"
"Look, George, he's much larger than me. I couldn't've stopped him short of shooting him. Besides, he's on his way to see you."
"Oh he is, is he?"
"Yes – and you'd better go easy on him, George."
"I don't need your advice—"
"On how to handle your own men, I know. But you don't seem to be having much success with this one, do you?"
"The boy is totally pig-headed."
"Yes, and so are you. I'm not at all sure I should have got involved in this. Bodie's blackmail sounds a lot like yours."
Cowley chuckled. "What's he been blackmailing you about?"
"Why don't you ask him? Ring me back when you've talked to him. I've got some checking up to do."
McGeary nudged Doyle. "There's Bodie now."
"Good." Doyle watched Bodie crossing the road some two hundred yards away with a strange mixture of feelings. Bodie looked tired, almost dispirited, and Doyle suddenly ached with the need to comfort him. He said, brusquely, "If we move fast we might catch him in the lobby." Action is always a good antidote to emotion, he told himself, hopping out of the cab and going round to open the back doors of the van.
"Come on, kid," he ordered, untying Jan's wrists and ankles. "This is where you do your stuff."
Mick frowned at him in puzzlement, then suddenly his eyes widened. "Cor! You 'ad me fool – ow!"
"Shurrup an' do what they tell you, Mick," Jan ordered, glaring at him, the foot that had just connected with his backside visibly twitching. "I'm gonner tell Bodie, an' then these twerps'll get their comeuppance, you see if they don't. Bodie'll get 'em – 'im an' Ray."
Blessing Jan's quick wits, Doyle slung the rollbag over her shoulders, then squatted down in front of her holding her tightly by the arms. His eyes were desperately sincere and he spoke earnestly. "Listen, Jan, you do just as we told you, see? That way no-one – including your chum Mick – will be hurt. Go right on in, insist on seeing Bodie and Cowley, and give 'em the message." As he spoke, his right hand slid down Jan's arm, and long fingers pressed a tiny, screwed-up wad of paper into her palm. Her thumb closed down on it, but the aquamarine eyes did not even blink. "An' just remember that we've got ways of telling what you do and what you say."

"Bodie'll get you, mister. An' that lot there. You see if he doesn't."

"Just do as you're told, kid," Barralon snarled, even as McGeary said,

"Bodie's just gone in."

"Okay, kid. Move!"

Doyle rose and watched Jan race across the car park, praying that the child's nerve wouldn't fail her. If only she had the wit to understand... If she simply raced in and told Bodie she had seen him... well, they were all dead.

Then he saw her pause before entering the building, examining something in her hand which was invisible from the van, and realised that she was taking the time to stop and read his message to Bodie. Oh Christ, if she decided to abandon the bag...

The glass doors swung open and a pair of agents clattered out, both turning to stare in amazement as Jan plunged past them into the building, still bearing the rollbag. Doyle jumped into the rear of the van, firmly appropriating both the radio and bomb control. McGeary came to join him, while Barralon strapped a gag over Mick's mouth and Jan's voice spoke clearly from the receiver.

"My name's Jan Corrigan. I've got to see Bodie. It's important."

The security officer on the reception desk had three young children of his own, and he was kind but firm with Jan. "Shouldn't you be in school, young lady?"

"A'course I should be in school, but me'n Mick were grabbed by these nutters, see? An' I gorrer message fer Bodie, an' he gonner be awful mad if you don't tell 'im I'm 'ere."

"Now, see here, Mr Bodie hasn't got time to waste—"

"Waste! Lissen 'ere, you moron—"

Bodie, on the stairs above, stopped as he heard his name shouted in an angry child's voice.

"I wanna see Bodie – or Cowley'll do. I tell yer, Mick's been kidnapped..."

That was Jan Corrigan.

Bodie whirled and hurtled back down the stairs, arriving in the lobby just in time to see Security Guard Bob Massey trying to hand Jan over to Suzie.

"It's all right, Bob," he called, "I'll—"

"Bodie!" Jan howled. "Bodie, you tell 'im!"
"Let her go, Bob." Bodie strode over to the entangled trio and the growing crowd of interested spectators attracted by the racket. "Okay, Jan, I'm here. Now what's all this about Mick?"

"E's been kidnapped, that's wot." Jan was in the process of regaining her dignity, but her face was red.

"Kidnapped, eh?" Bodie looked suspiciously at the girl. She was perfectly capable of fabricating such a story to get herself into CI5 HQ – but that begged another question: how had she known where HQ was?

"Yeh. They sent me with a message for you an' Mr Cowley," As she was speaking, Jan thrust out an envelope, her thumb pinning a small and grubby piece of paper on top of it. "I'm suppose t' give it t' 'im, personally."

Bodie's heart lurched at the sight of the familiar clear printing on the crumpled paper. It also dispelled all his doubts. There were two sections, but only the first mattered now.

ROLL BAG CONTAINS OPEN R/T AND EXPLO. DEV. (3oz P.E.). WILL ACTIVATE HEARING VOICES BODIE AND COWLEY. 3 SECS DELAY.

"You'd better come and see Mr Cowley, then, hadn't you?" said Bodie, winking at Jan as he took Doyle's note from her hand. He made a slow circle, finger to lips, making sure the assembled company knew the need for silence. "All right, you lot, break it up before the Cow sees you lounging about." He showed the message to Suzie, then took the reception clipboard to scribble a note for all of them.

ACT NORMALLY UNTIL I'M GONE, THEN CLEAR BASEMT/GR FLOOR SILENTLY. EXPECT EXPLOSION FIRING RANGE.

"Come on, love, let's go find Mr Cowley." As he spoke, Bodie lifted the rollbag from Jan's shoulder, shaking his head at her and pointing at the floor to indicate that she should stay exactly where she was. However, as he moved towards the stair well, the child avoided Suzie's grab and followed him.

"They snatched us on the way to school. Cheek, I call it. Bodie, y'll get Mick back, won't you?"

"Of course I will," Bodie replied, glaring at her, shaking his head and waving her back to the lobby. She ignored him. "What d'y' suppose they want?"

Resigned to the fact that he couldn't lose her without risking alarming the enemy and making them detonate the bomb, Bodie continued down towards the basement. "Didn't they tell you?"

"Uhuh. They were mean, Bodie. Still, I got a good kick into their leader's goolies."

"Janice!"

"You ain't me mother. I did, too."

"I bet you did, and I bet that's how you came by that bruise as well."

"So I got 'it. I 'urt 'im more than 'e did me."

"Maybe you did, sunbeam, but that's not going to help Mick, is it?" He was walking slowly down the corridor, giving Suzie time to clear the building. Somehow or other he was going to have to get
rid of Jan, but he was damned if he could figure out how. Of course, there was always a chance that the thick walls and being underground would mask the radio signals and stop the bomb going off, but he couldn't bet Jan's life on it.

Ray had bet Jan's life.

He must have been crazy... or desperate. What kind of mess had his partner got himself into?

Well, concentrate on cases. If he could get the bomb into the firing range, the reinforced walls would either jam the radio signals or confine the blast. It wouldn't help reception at Doyle's end, either, and that—

"Are you gonner call out the Flying Squad?" Jan was asking, but Bodie's attention had been caught by McCabe, stalking along silently behind them.

"No," he said shortly. "Shut up for a bit, Jan. I want to think."

"Okay, Bodie," Jan agreed meekly. Then, even as she opened her mouth to give lie to her own words, McCabe grabbed her from behind, slapping a hand firmly over her mouth and stoically ignoring her attempts to chew it.

Bodie made a quick hand signal.

Get out.

McCabe nodded, and went. Jan, perforce, went with him.

Bodie opened the door to the firing range, and found the room empty beyond. "Just sit down for a bit, Jan. Here, give me that thing." Bodie jiggled the roll bag about for a little while, then placed it on the floor before pulling off his shoes so that he could move silently. Retreating a little towards the door, he announced, "Here's Mr Cowley now—"

And counted: One thousand and one.

Pausing just outside the doorway, he raised his voice in his very best imitation of Cowley, the one that won the 'best Cow' contest at the last CI5 Christmas party.

"Ach, Bodie, where the Devil's this message?"

One thousand and two.

"Here, sir."

Slamming the door behind him, Bodie sprinted down the corridor.

The universe shattered.

Doyle sat looking at the transmitter, and his thumb pressed down on the trigger button.

The speaker was silent. Dead. There had been a single sharp crack from it as the device detonated, then they had heard the sound of the explosion itself; just a dull thud, hardly loud enough to ruffle a blase London pigeon.

He had had to press the button. By taking on the task himself he had been able to give Bodie a little
extra time. It was only when McGear's hand had started to move towards his that he had acted.

Acted.

Done his job – and perhaps killed the only person he had ever really loved.

No.

It was obvious Bodie had seen his note and had conceived a plan of action. That hadn't been Cowley's voice, but Bodie's impersonation, and Jan had been too quiet for the last half minute or so. Clearly, Bodie had deliberately set up the explosion and he wouldn't have done that unless it was safe.

Doyle hoped. Prayed.

"You took your time," McGear was saying, a small note of what might have been suspicion in his voice.

"Had to get them as close to the bag as possible, right? And as a matter of interest, aren't you supposed to be gettin' us out of here?"

"Right now," McGear replied, amused, as he backed the van out of the parking slot. "That was very nice, Jim. Soon, you get to work on the big one."

"Hope so. This may be fun, Simon, but it's not profitable."

"It will be—" McGear broke off to answer the radio telephone. "Van 3. Yeh, speaking. Check. When? Umm. We'll join you there. Out."

"What was that about?" Doyle asked as McGear replaced the handset.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"Still don't trust me, eh? Even after this last show? Okay, McGear, if you want proof, you've got it." Doyle's voice rose with belligerent anger. "You've still got to get rid of that brat in the back, right? If I do that, will you trust me?"

McGear twisted his head sideways to study him. "We don't want him found too soon. CI5'll be a lot more circumspect if they think we're still holding him as a hostage. So will the cops, come to that."

"Yeh, but we don't want to hold on to him, or his body, right? Head back to that warehouse where we picked him up, McGear, and we'll get rid of the kid and give you your proof."

Grinning like a manic, McGear obeyed.

Bodie was hardly aware of his surroundings; of the cool floor against his cheek, of the acrid smoke that made it difficult to breathe, of the yelling voices and the hiss of fire extinguishers and the cacophony of the electric alarm bells, or of the feet that clattered by him and leaped over him. All that he recognised was that his ears were ringing more loudly than the bells and that his whole body was bruised and aching.

Hands ran along his limbs, seeking fractures that weren't there, and Bodie regained enough hold on reality to open his eyes and to try to sit up.
"Steady lad." The voice reached his ears as no more than a faint whisper, but it was undoubtedly Cowley's, and so were the supportive hands. "Are you all right?"

Bodie's voice wouldn't work, so he tried a nod instead. It was a mistake, as was the deep breath that resulted in a fit of coughing.

"Can you walk?"

"Y... yeah..." Bodie heaved himself to his feet, leaning heavily on Cowley. "J... just shaken. 'M all right."

"Aye. We'll see. McCabe!"

"Sir?"

"I want Bodie out of here. Take him to the rest room and make sure he lies down for a while. No argument, Bodie. You're only in the way here."

"Come on, old son." McCabe pulled Bodie's right arm over his shoulders. "Accident prone, that's what you are, mate. Good job you didn't go and get yourself killed. I've lost my black tie and I can't afford another until the end of the month."

The stream of good-natured ribbing continued as McCabe manoeuvred Bodie into the lift and conveyed him to the second floor. Bodie himself maintained a dignified silence, mainly because he was concentrating on getting there without falling flat on his face.

Once inside the standby room used by the field agents – which bore the 'VIP Lounge' notice that had been transferred through five different buildings – McCabe lowered Bodie onto the camp bed that occupied one corner.

"Thank God. You're getting fat, Bodie," that agent opined.

"Yeh," Bodie answered absently, relaxing and closing his eyes in the fond hope that it would stop the room waltzing.

"Want me to call a quack?"

"No... Oh, shit!" Bodie sat up suddenly and had to clutch at McCabe's jacket for support. "I've got to see Cowley."

"Uhuh." McCabe disengaged his fingers and pushed him back down on the bed. "More than my job's worth, mate."

"But—oh, hell. Look, Mac, give him this." Bodie extracted a crumpled and dirty piece of paper from his jacket pocket. "And tell him to talk to Jan Corrigan before he does anything. You got that?"

McCabe regarded the paper dubiously. "Bodie, the Cow isn't—"

"Just do it. Now."

McCabe shrugged. "Okay. It's your funeral. Be good."

Bodie heard the door slam faintly, then his impaired hearing plunged him in silence. He shivered, feeling weary and lethargic.
Shock.

Yeh, well, he'd better get over that sharpish. He couldn't allow himself to be sidelined at this stage of the game, not when Ray might need him.

Christ, his partner had taken a risk. And it wouldn't be long before Cowley arrived, demanding answers. He supposed he'd better find some for him – if there were any.

As the van juddered to a halt beside the rotting warehouse, Doyle twisted in his seat to glare at McGeary. "Do I get a gun or do you expect me to bash the kid's head in with a crowbar?"

"Okay, Jim, okay." McGeary was laughing. "How many shells d'you think you'll need?"

"One will do – I don't suppose you'll trust me with more – an' I want a silencer, unless you want to take a chance on someone hearing what's going on?"

Wordlessly, McGeary unshipped his PPK and removed the magazine. "There's one up the spout," he told Doyle, as he screwed the silencer into place. "Sure you don't want any help?"

"With a nine year old kid? Don't make me laugh. Do me a favour, McGeary, and shut your trap. Barralon, shift your fat arse. I want to get in the back."

Mick's brown eyes glared furiously over the top of the gag as Doyle stepped over him and went to open the rear door. He must have heard every word that had been said; Doyle could only hope that he had not yet lost his trust.

I got you into this, son, and I'll get you out – or die trying.

Flinging open the rear doors, Doyle grabbed Mick's ankles and hauled him over the floor towards him, acutely aware that McGeary and Barralon were twisting round in the front seats, watching every move he made.

Dropping Mick's legs outside the doors, he leaned inside as if he was going to pick up the child but, seeming to fumble in his haste, he dropped them both into a heap on the broken concrete.

Instantly, Doyle slashed through Mick's bonds with a knife appropriated from the bomb-building tools, and whispered urgently, "You're still tied up, Mick," before cursing loudly and slamming his fist into the palm of his hand. "That'll teach you, brat!" he snarled and, hauling Mick upright, he flung him across his shoulder and marched swiftly across the littered yard towards the canal loading dock. Mick lay limply, wrists and ankles pressed doggedly together.

"Good lad," Doyle muttered. "I just hope you're as good a swimmer as you say you are. Once I drop you into the water, get under the landing stage and stay there until we're gone. Then go straight to Mrs Corrigan and have her call CI5."

He didn't dare look back, but he could hear McGeary and Barralon scrambling after him and he increased his own pace, trying to resist the temptation to run.

Leaping down onto the rickety landing stage, he slipped on the sodden wood and nearly found himself in the water himself as it creaked squelchily under him. He dumped Mick at the very edge of the stage, holding onto his shirt as his head and upper body hung out over the water. Knowing McGeary and Barralon were right behind him, but that they had not yet reached the landing stage, Doyle pulled the gun, aimed, fired, and let Mick topple backwards into the water. He disappeared
at once, hidden by the murk, mud, and rainbow reflections from the floating oil. Someone was going to have to pump Mick full of antibiotics – if he came out alive in the first place.

Straightening, Doyle turned to face McGeary and handed the gun to him.

"Satisfied?"

"You should have weighted the body."

"With what?" Doyle demanded, looking pointedly about him. "You see anything suitable? Besides, why d'you think I picked this spot? Those lock gates are rotting, so there's going to be an undertow which should hold the body against them until the police drag it out. Satisfied now?"

McGeary stared at the fading ripples. "I guess you must be right. There's no sign of the body, at any rate. No harm done. Let's move out."

As they climbed back into the van, Doyle said, "Do I get to hear about this phone call now?"

"We're moving our base to a location nearer the target."

"And just what is our target?"

McGeary chuckled. "The Major will never forgive me if I spoil his surprise, Jim, but I'll tell you this much – you're going to get the chance to blow a hole in one of London's most famous buildings."

"We are going to steal the crown jewels!" Barralon exclaimed.

"Not exactly, but you're closer to the truth than you might think."

Bodie was just about to get and up go find Cowley when the Controller himself entered the VIP Lounge carrying a bottle of Scotch and a pair of glasses hooked on his fingers. He favoured Bodie with a disapproving stay-where-you-are look, and proceeded to pour whisky with a flourish.

"Feeling better?" he asked, his voice coming over at a mercifully normal pitch.

"Fine."

"Headache?"

"No."

"Then this is definitely the right prescription." Cowley put one of the glasses into Bodie's hand, then settled himself, with the other, in the room's only reasonably comfortable chair.

"Thanks, sir. You ever think about going into medicine? I could just see you doing Dr. Cameron impressions—"

"The Archangel Gabriel himself wouldn't have been able to help you if you'd been caught in that blast – even Scotch can't put people back together, and you came close to misjudging that, Bodie."

Bodie was unrepentant. "Yeh, but it worked, didn't it? Mac give you Doyle's note?"

Cowley nodded, retrieved the paper from his breast pocket, and passed it to Bodie. "I'd like to hear
what you make of it."

Bodie gave his attention to the second part of Doyle's note. "List of names. Ahah. Simon McGeary. These must be the people involved in the attacks. I got Cusak to sing to me, sir. He supplied the armoury, and this McGeary was his customer – ex-mercenary, according to Cusak. And no, I don't know him. None of these other names ring any bells, either. Keepsafe Security, Ltd, eh? That address'll bear checking; it's probably where Doyle was taken. A private security firm'd make a good cover. The rest of it... 'B & C sp. targets.' That's us. He means we're special targets for some reason or another. I just wish he'd indicated why. 'TARGET soon.' That must be the big one. I hate to think what. 'Money motive?' He's not sure these people are terrorists, but he's not sure they aren't, either. 'Inside men – loc. unkn.' Well, this mob are certainly getting inside information from somewhere. I think it's time we check our own security."

"Agreed."

"'Stay dead.' That's obvious, at least."

"Aye, I've already ordered the issue of a press release stating that there were fatalities here. Very restrained, as if..."

"We were sitting on something big? Like the murder of the CI5 Controller?"

"Precisely. So you and I must disappear, along with young Miss Corrigan. Susan is on her way to contact her parents. I suspect that if these villains of ours found out that the bomb had failed to eliminate its targets, Doyle would become an object of suspicion..." He stopped as he recognised the look in Bodie's eyes. "Och, man, d'you really believe I don't care?"

"I know you do." Bodie scrubbed a hand wearily through his hair. "I know and I'm sorry. Not for my relationship with Ray – I'm not going to apologise for that – but for the things I said to you. None of them were true. I've got a big mouth with both feet stuck in it and I'm sorry..."

Cowley's voice was equally serious. "So am I, lad. Sorry for all the pain we're causing each other, but it's impossible for me to stand aside and let you and Doyle destroy your lives without doing something to stop you."

"They're our lives, sir."

"Aye, your lives. I must be getting old if I believe I can protect the young from their own folly. Particularly when they are as stubborn as you and Doyle..." Cowley shook himself. "Perhaps, when this is all over, we can all sit down together and talk through the problem rationally – but it will have to wait for now." He became briskly businesslike again as he prepared to get down to cases. "So you found the arms supplier. Where is he now?"

"Jasper has him. He's also trying to get a line on McGeary."

"So are we, and on every other name on that list."

"Only..."

"Only what?" Cowley demanded, looking sharply at his agent.

"Only... I don't know... There's something wrong, sir, something I'm missing, only I can't quite put my finger on it..."

"Don't push it, lad. Your instincts are sound and it'll come to you in its own good time. Meanwhile,
I think you and I and young Miss Corrigan had better join your friend Cusak in abusing Jasper's hospitality. He has quite excellent communication facilities, and it's a place no-one would ever think of looking for us."

"Yeh, but there's one thing..."

"Oh?"

"You're going to have to send someone to buy me some shoes. I sacrificed mine for the good of CI5."

It was as McGeary threaded the van through Holborn's narrow and congested back streets that the bland sound of Radio Two was halted in mid-bar and a horribly calm voice announced that:

"Reports are coming in of an explosion at a Home Office building in central London—"

"I just bet they are," Barralon chortled.

"Shhhh!"

"According to a Home Office spokesman, there have been a number of fatalities but further details are, as yet, unavailable."

"Ha!"

"They're trying to keep the lid on," McGeary opined. "Bet you that the whole of CI5 is running round in circles, not to mention the Home Office, the Met, MI5, the whole shebang. Nice work, Jim."

"Thanks, mate." Doyle leaned back in his seat, feeling sick and lost and very afraid.

Fatalities.

Well, he'd told Bodie and Cowley to stay dead... Please God that they were alive to obey that order...

He was jerked from brooding by the application of the brakes. The van halted abruptly before a decaying Victorian block with offices layered above boarded-up shops, dripping with scaffolding and bearing a notice announcing that a famous national construction company was about to start restoration work.


Once he and Doyle had decamped onto the pavement, McGeary slammed the van door and waved Barralon onwards.

"He'll get rid of the gear – and the transport," McGeary informed Doyle. "We don't want it traced back to us. Come on, Jim. I don't know about you, but I'm dying for a cup of tea."

Jasper surveyed the occupants of his home with both amusement and exasperation, wondering, once again, why he had been fool enough to become involved in this situation.

The most likely cause was, at that moment, issuing instructions via Jasper's telephone, presumably to his staff at CI5 HQ. The secondary part of the involve-Jasper conspiracy was standing by the
window staring down at the street, a dangerously brooding figure, while that extraordinary child, Jan Corrigan, was ploughing her way through the pile of peanut butter sandwiches he had provided to replace the contents of the lunch box blown to smithereens at C15 HQ. Cusak was locked in the back bedroom.

And it was still only 11.09 am.

Jasper wondered if as much would happen in the next 12 hours.

Cowley replaced the receiver and turned to Bodie. "The birds have flown. Keepsafe Security is closed and deserted. There's a answering machine taking messages, no more."

Bodie shrugged.

"The computers are working on the list of names but it may be some time before we have any definite results."

The only reply he received was another expressive lift of Bodie's shoulders.

"Can I see this list?" Jasper asked.

"Of course." Cowley handed over the fraying piece of paper, but Jasper ignored it for the moment, being more interested in the C15 Controller's question to Bodie. "What about Cusak? D'you think he knows anything more?"

Bodie pursed his lips and considered the question. "No. He's just a businessman with no scruples about what he sells to whom. I ought to have pulled him in years ago, after he supplied Kri—" Bodie stopped dead. "Oh shit."

Cowley frowned, glancing warningly towards Jan, and said, "What is it?"

"Where's that packing list? I must be setting new records for premature senility. Look here." He spread the printout from Cusak's computer in front of Cowley.

Jasper, peering over his shoulder, was the first to comment. "A murderous collection, but I don't see anything significant."

"Nor do I," said Cowley.

Bodie's finger skated down the list. ".44 Magnum, Remington 7mm Magnum rifle, Moonlighter sight, commando knife."

"So?"

"So how was Krivas armed?"

"Almighty God!" It was not often that Cowley was driven to blasphemy.

"Just who did spring Krivas, sir?"

"We don't know – or we didn't. Doyle says that you and I are special targets, so the question is: was Krivas's release the first attempt on you?"

"Maybe – but why me? You, I could understand but – oh hell, none of it makes any sense."

"Maybe it does, Bodie. McGeary, you say, was a mercenary. This looks like something out of your
past, lad. A man who knew about you and Krivas."

"But if we're dealing with terrorists—"

"That's something Doyle appears to doubt."

"He's working among them and even he isn't sure. He just suggested that a money motive might be possible." Bodie shook his head, not so much in denial as confusion. "Mercenaries and money motives and attacks on the security forces..."

"And Krivas," said Cowley. "Krivas is the key to this, Bodie."

"Okay, let's accept that as a working hypothesis. Where does it get us? Krivas – a mercenary who tried to use military skills, military forces to commit large scale crimes—" He broke off, staring at Cowley. "You think that's what we might be dealing with here?"

"It's a possibility."

"But what about the attacks on the security forces?"

"A blind, an attempt to distract attention from the big job Doyle says is coming soon – and it might go some way to explaining the personal attacks on both of us, Bodie."

"Because we'd known Krivas?"

"Precisely. We were familiar with their method of operation and might recognise it. If we did that, CI5 might stop chasing its own tail looking for non-existent terrorists."

"But you're saying that these men are ordinary criminals!" Jasper was horrified.

"Aye, Jasper. Criminals who'd let a maniac like Krivas loose to rape and murder, who'd blow up a wee lassie in order to eliminate men who might – and only might – be a threat to them. You may be bending your own rules to help us, man, but in the name of common humanity..."

"I don't have much choice, George, do I? So you can spare me the pep talk—" He would have said more, but was interrupted by the buzz of the entry-phone. Leaning over to operate the desk controls, he snapped, "Yes?"

"This is Suzie Fischer. I have to see Mr Cowley."

"Let her in, Jasper. She's one of mine."

A few moment later, the lift doors opened to admit Suzie, Lindsay Corrigan, and the somewhat dishevelled figure of Mick Barr.

"Fish face!" Jan yelped. Then, "Hey, Mum, you'll never guess what"

"I know all about your exploits, young lady," Lindsay interrupted repressively. "Mr Cowley, Mr Bodie, I think you'd better hear what Mick has to say. I believe it may be important."

"I'm supposed to be dead," Mick announced proudly. "They were gonner kill me, but Ray fooled 'em, an' jus' pretended to, an' 'e tol' me to go ter Mus Corrigan an'—"

"Slow down, son," said Bodie. "Just tell us what happened. Every detail. It's important, Mick."

"Okay." Mick threw himself into a chair. "Lerrus 'ave one o' them sarnies, Greedyguts."
"Here y'are, Fish Face," Jan replied agreeably, handing him the plate.

"Well," said Mick, around bread and peanut butter, "it wuz like this. Jan an' me were on our way ter school..."

Behind the scaffolding the offices had proved to be almost intact, a maze of small rooms with bare pine floors and dusty Venetian blinds. Girlie calendars over two years old still spotted the souring cream walls, the only remaining trace of the original furnishings. It was here that Rainham's force had swarmed to enconce themselves in moderate comfort, and the whole group was buzzing with anticipation as it settled in an erstwhile boardroom – all dark varnished panelling and fibrous plaster mouldings – to hear Rainham's briefing.

McGeary smiled at Doyle from where he was adjusting a slide projector and looked a question at Barralon as he arrived clutching a mug of tea in one hand and a doorstep sandwich in the other, and got a nod in reply.

Rainham's entrance was a signal for the assembled company to clamber to its feet. He beamed at it.

"Be seated, gentlemen."

At the front of the room, he turned to survey the company, his eyes resting on each face in turn. It was, Doyle conceded, a nice psychological touch. This man knew how to lead.

"Well, gentlemen, this is the moment you've all been waiting for."

The lights went out.

"This is our target."

A familiar, multi-columned building appeared on the screen.

"For those of you unfamiliar with our cultural heritage, this is the British Museum."

"Simon McGeary," said Cowley, reading from the printout. "Born 1943. Commissioned in the Royal Marines in 1964. Rose to the rank of Captain but left the service in 1974. Resigned his Commission. Honourable discharge... hmmm. I don't like the look of his service record. There's a smell of hushed-up scandal somewhere. Anyway, he went to Angola in '75 and served with the FNLA. Vanished after the MPLA victory, then turned up in '77 as part of the bodyguard of a Saudi prince. Later, he seems to have been a training instructor in one of the Emirates. For the last year he's been an 'advisor' to two of the more disreputable right-wing South American governments."

"Well, that fits in with what we already know," said Bodie, "and if this is a terrorist group, then it must be of the extreme right rather than the extreme left."

"That possibility begins to look more and more unlikely."

"As you may know, the British Museum is staging an exhibition arranged with the Soviet government called 'Treasures of the Hermitage.' We are interested in only one part of that exhibition. This..."
Even muted by the technical limitations of the slide film, the display on the screen was dazzling, an ostentatious collection of jewels and ceremonial regalia. Doyle recognised them, and his heart sank. Not the British Crown Jewels, perhaps, but almost as bad.

How the hell were they going to explain this to the Kremlin?

"The Vladivar Collection," Rainham was saying. "Named after the 18th Century adventurer who removed it by force during the sack of the city of Rudan by an invading Persian force in 1770. He gave it to Catherine the Great and she rewarded him with a princedom; they both seem to have been satisfied with the bargain. It remained part of the Tsarist regalia until the Revolution, when it became the property of the State. Before Vladivar appropriated it, it comprised the crown jewels of the Kingdom of Dashtuk, and some of the pieces are now nearly 1800 years old. At a conservative estimate, the value of the stones alone is some 50 million pounds. However, we hope to obtain rather more than that for these little toys."

"We think we've identified this 'Major Rainham' but it's difficult to see how he fits into the picture."

"In what way?" Jasper asked, sitting at his desk and peering over the top of his glasses at Cowley. "Major Stanley Rainham was born in 1934. When he left school he enlisted in the Welsh Guards. He saw distinguished service in Korea and Malaya, was commissioned and rose to the rank of Major, but was then passed over for further promotion."

"Face didn't fit in among the Old Etonians, doncha know," was Bodie's comment.

"A man can overcome that kind of prejudice, if he has real talent," Cowley remarked absently.

"Yeh, of course," the cynic mumbled into the Controller's ear. "'S why y'see so many gay black Jewish generals, innit?"

Cowley ignored this remark; indeed, he hardly heard it, for his attention had been caught by an entry in Rainham's service record. "By God, Bodie, he is our man! Listen to this. Rainham was military liaison officer at Barrersby in 1977." He waved the papers in Bodie's incomprehending face. "When Krivas stole the plutonium, man."

"Yeh, he's our man," Bodie agreed mildly, retreating a step. "That must've been when he picked up the whole idea. Where's he stationed now?"

Cowley put down the printout and looked significantly at Bodie and Jasper in turn. "He isn't. He left the Army eighteen months ago and no-one seems to know where he is."

"Yeh. Except Doyle."

"After the history lesson, I'm going to have to sketch in some current politics. Some of you will already be aware of the situation I'm going to detail, but please bear with me," Rainham sat on the desk and swung his legs, giving a new air of informality to the proceedings. "Seven years ago, there was a revolution in Dashtuk. The Royal family fled for their lives but, being both prudent and adept at keeping their ears to the ground, they had arranged for most of their personal wealth to be salted well away from the Middle East, and they are still one of the half dozen richest families in the world. Estimates of the King's fortune alone run to many billions of pounds. However, he is
dissatisfied with exile and has by no means given up hope of reclaiming his throne. Which is where those jewels come in. The crown and the sword were said to have been personally blessed by Mohammed and, as such, are regarded as conferring great spiritual power. With them, the King might be able to convince his people that the restoration of the monarchy is the will of the Prophet, and therefore of Allah, which would pose a severe problem for the country's current Fundamentalist rulers. Equally, those rulers would like to possess the Crown Jewels themselves in order to confer religious legitimacy on their rule and, of course, Dashtuk is oil rich. Naturally, the British Government is not anxious to offend the Soviets by 'losing' what is regarded as a State treasure." He grinned. "It will be interesting to see who bids most for them, and just how high they will go.

"Firstly, though, we have the problem of obtaining them. Security at the British Museum is, naturally, strict, but we are lucky enough to have a contact on that security staff.

"Now, as you can see from this plan, the main 'Treasures of the Hermitage' exhibition is housed here, on the first floor, but the Vladivar collection has been given a special gallery all to itself. This one: the New Wing Gallery on the ground floor, near to the Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture galleries. Later today, you'll all get a chance to go over the ground personally, but, for now, I'll detail our moves on the map."

Bodie put down the telephone. "The birds have definitely flown the Keepsafe offices."

"Damn." Cowley scowled at the line printer. "All we've got here is a list of holding companies with shares in Keepsafe Ltd. Some of them may even be legitimate. It's going to take days to check them all thoroughly."

"Let me see." Jasper leaned over his shoulder. "No. Never heard of— Wait a second, George. Springtime Holdings. That's one of Gary May's fronts—"

"May!?” Bodie exploded. "There was a 'May' on Doyle's list. You said you didn't know any of the names on it, and now—"

"I was talking about my clients, Bodie. Gary—"

"No time for argument," Cowley snapped. "Jasper, I want to know all you know about this 'Gary May', and Bodie, check on his record."

"He doesn't have one. One of our most respected young stockbrokers, was Gary, until he was left holding the baby after the Wiltshire Mercantile fraud. Oh, he was never suspected of any crime, but he was wiped out. Had to go bankrupt. Since then, well, I've heard rumours that he'd decided that it was better to join 'em than to beat 'em, if you see what I mean. He's been involved in some very shady deals indeed, and he's living proof that crime can pay."

"Like you?" Bodie asked, sotto voce, unquelled by Cowley's glare.

Jasper smiled and tilted his head. "Just so."

"You have an address for him?" Cowley asked, bringing the conversation back on course.

"In my files. I'll get it for you."

"D'you want me to pick up May?" Bodie asked. "Because, if that gets back to Rainham, Doyle's position could become very dangerous."
"No. For the moment, you stay here. I'll have Mr May watched. He might just lead up to Rainham, McGeary and their friends – not to mention Doyle."

"Though the museum does not open until 10, the staff are there by 9. Our inside man will have disabled the alarm systems by 8.00 am and left the building. At 8.20 precisely there will be a car bomb explosion – one of your jobs, Fenlow – outside the MoD building in Whitehall. That will send all the security forces scurrying so that, when we hit the museum, at 8.25, they will be in the process of responding to that first call. Parsons and Barralon, you're detailed to take the Gatehouse. Then Fenlow and I will follow to blow our way into the New Wing. The rest of you – except for Rogers, who has a special assignment – will follow us in the truck, which Alexander will drive."

"It must be a criminal action, but what's the target?"

Cowley turned to indicate the map of Greater London Blu-tacked to the wall. "Anything in that area big enough to warrant this operation – the men, the money, the expertise, the risk, the murders that were designed to draw our attention away from the real target..."

"I'm worried about what sort of diversion they might try next."

"There's nothing we can do about that except to warn the security forces and they're already on full emergency alert. They'll have to protect themselves."

"While we find the target." Bodie glared at the map. "Anything from the Bank of England on down, I suppose."

"Aye, but not too far down. They won't be bothering with anything under a few million."

"Which doesn't help us much," Jasper contributed gloomily. "Dozens of possible targets in the city alone; banks, jewel merchants, bullion dealers, art galleries, museums, the palaces..."

"We could try asking the insurance companies," Bodie suggested. "All the same, sir, that list is going to contain hundreds of possibilities. We can't cover them all."

"Perhaps, but surely you can alert them," Jasper suggested.

"Doyle's note mentioned an 'inside man', sir. If we warn anyone it could get back to Rainham," Bodie said urgently.

"It's a possibility. Thank you for prompting my memory, Bodie." Cowley's voice dripped sarcasm. "Meanwhile, the first thing we must do is check the names Doyle gave us against the names of all the employees in all the possible targets."

Bodie pursed his lips in a silent whistle. "You're going to have to apply a hell of a lot of pressure to get those names."

"Then we'll apply it."

"We must be out of the building and into the truck in less than three minutes. We then drive back here at the greatest possible speed while all of you change back into mufti. You'll be provided with money and identification and given a route for leaving the area and a rendezvous time and place. We should be totally scattered with five minutes of leaving the BM."
"At the same time, three trucks identical to the one we'll be using will enter the area. Their drivers are quite unaware of why they have been hired, but they should confuse the police, if they can be spotted in rush hour traffic.

"The Vladivar collection itself will have been transferred to a safe hiding place in a totally unsuspected vehicle driving through the area. Once we all have rendezvoused, the bargaining can begin – but that's something you won't have to worry about. You'll be living in safety and luxury until the money is in your hands.

"Meanwhile, you all have work to do. Most of you have spent many weeks training for this mission, but now you have some..." he consulted his watch, "...seven hours to learn exactly how to apply that training. Mr Fenlow, of course, has explosive devices to prepare, though I think he will find Mr Milne's notes invaluable. Then we must all get a good night's sleep. We have a very busy – and profitable – day ahead of us tomorrow."

Bodie stared at the branch-latticed river of orange light that lay along the street below Jasper's flat. Behind him, the room was dark except for the glow of the computer screens and the lights on the line printers. Linked by telephone to CI5 HQ, they had allowed Cowley to control the operation without stirring from the flat, but now there was nothing more they could think of to do except wait, Jasper and Cowley had retired to bed. Jan and Mick were being held at a safe house, supervised by Lindsay and Mick's redoubtable parents, and Cusak had been shipped off into a less comfortable form of protective custody.

Which left Bodie.

He had told Cowley he would sleep on the sofa, where he would easily be woken by the alarms on the printers, or the telephone, but, despite the forty-eight hours he had spent on his feet, his usual capacity to sleep anywhere had deserted him completely.

Bloody hell, Ray, where are you? he asked the glowing city, silent behind the triple glazing. Are you all right? Why don't you contact us? I can't help you if I don't know where you are. I want to be at your side, protecting you...

You have to stop this, he told himself sharply. It isn't exactly a unique problem, now is it? It's one faced by anyone who loves a man or woman in a dangerous job.

Yeh, but a lot of them survive by deliberately not knowing what's going on. Once you've experienced the danger yourself, felt it...

Which is just an excuse. An excuse for not having that kind of strength.

So what's the alternative?

Quit? Leave CI5? Lord knows, I'd hate to let Cowley down, but... some things are more important. Like Ray.

If I could only be sure he felt this way too, I'd throw it in tomorrow. We'd manage somehow, and we'd be together...

And safe.

Only I don't think Ray does feel the same way. He didn't seem worried at all by this mission – and he's committed to CI5 ideals. He thinks we can continue to work together in CI5, and if that's what
The buzzer on the line printer cut into his thoughts and he ambled over to see what Suzie had thought worth transmitting. The hooded light over the printer revealed more additions to the list of possible targets.

For a bankrupt country, Bodie thought, there's a hell of a lot of money floating around this city.

Two of those could be dismissed at once; the Simon McGeary employed by the Bank of England and the Frederick Lasky employed by the De Beers could not be suspects. McGeary's identity was already established and the name Lasky on Doyle's list almost certainly applied to mercenary Ed Lasky, who had entered the country at the end of July.

Which left one.

Well, Bodie wouldn't have laid odds before this moment on the target being that particular establishment, but—

"What is it, Bodie?"

The Old Man had an incredible sixth sense and Bodie was not really surprised to hear the voice behind him.

"We've matched up a name on Doyle's list," he said, without turning.

"Hmmm." Cowley shook out his glasses and placed them on his nose to peer at the printout.

"I'll take some of the lads and stake the place out," Bodie suggested, edging towards the lift.

"Stay where you are, Bodie. We can't afford to tie up the manpower."

"Ray said, 'Soon,' sir, and this is the only lead we've got." Bodie attempted to look pathetic. "And you always say that I'm no use to you unless I'm on the streets."

"This isn't exactly the streets," Cowley commented dryly, but he had noted the set of Bodie's jaw and the anger in his eyes, much as he tried to disguise it. There was rebellion brewing here. Cowley pursed his lips, then suddenly pulled off his glasses and looked Bodie directly in the eyes. "Very well. Find Lucas and McCabe. They're probably sleeping. I'll trace the Director's present whereabouts and rout him out of bed, too, but we'll have to be careful not to alert our suspect. Well, what're you waiting for, man?"

"It's all yours," McGeary told Rogers, banging happily on the top of the green Escort with his fist.

The other man looked dubious. "You're sure the bomb won't go off when I turn on the ignition, or something?"

"Nonsense. Just drive it into position and leave it. Jim's fixed it to go off to the second and no
"Quartz timer," said Doyle, not adding that neither timer nor ignition would set off this particular bomb. McGeary was much more trusting now he believed Fenlow to have killed for the organisation, and Doyle had not hesitated to take advantage of the fact.

Or had Fenlow killed for the organisation? Had Mick managed to climb out of the canal? And what about Jan, and Cowley... and Bodie?

"D'you want me to stick around and watch the explosion?" Rogers was asking. Doyle held his breath. He hadn't anticipated that possibility.

"No. There's no point in you taking the risk."

"Thanks," Rogers comment ironically, sliding into the driving seat. "Good luck."

As he watched the car pull away, Doyle wondered how the Devil he was going to get himself out of this mess. Rainham's plan was pretty close to perfection, with a back-up for every facet, including his own. Simon McGeary himself was perfectly capable of building any bomb needed – so Doyle, in order to stay alive and to make sure that everyone else stayed alive too, was going to have to blow a large hole in the British Museum.

Cowley's going to love this, and I'm not paid enough for him to dock the cost of the damage from my wages.

"You're very quiet, Jim," McGeary commented. "Nervous?"

"I'll feel better with a gun in my hand."

" Shooters'll be issued when we start to move in. Come on, son. Let's have breakfast."

Bodie's personal R/T bleeped urgently, jerking him out of his half-doze.

"3/7."

"Alpha. May left home ten minutes ago. He's just diverted from his normal route into the City and may be heading in your direction."

"Our long shot's paying off then?"

"Perhaps, but I'm not counting my chickens when they havena returned to the coop. 9/8 and 11/3 should be arriving to join you at any moment; I sent them some time ago to relieve your team."

"Good. We're a bit thin on the ground here, and our suspect guard has just gone off duty. If there's going to be trouble, it may happen soon. 3/7 out."

At 8.25 precisely, two men on foot arrived at the black and gilt main gates of the British Museum. Both were neatly dressed and carried black attache cases. The first simply presented his employee's security pass and was waved through, but the other seemed to find this procedure more of a problem. Firstly, he presented his LT season ticket by mistake, then began an ultimately futile search of his pockets before juggling his attache case open. Unfortunately, he proved to be an
unskillful act, for he managed to tip the case's entire contents onto the road.

The pass lay on top.

Handing it to the guard, he scabbled his belongings together as the first man returned, calling out some insulting comment about ham-fisted tortoises. It was as the guard handed back the pass that the case was jerked open and gas gushed from its gape into his face. The guard gagged, clutched at his throat, and fell to his knees.

In the other Gatehouse, the second guard reached for the alarm button, but the bells remained obstinately silent and the telephone dead under his hands. Outside, his colleague lay still on the ground while his assailant struggled with the man who had preceded him through the gates, and who now seemed to be in imminent danger of defeat. Unable to contact anyone, the guard took the opportunity to flee the Gatehouse, only to find himself seized by both men, now in an unexpected alliance against him.

Within 30 seconds he was stripped of his uniform coat and was lying bound and gagged on the cramped floor of the Gatehouse, while his colleague, in a similar plight, slept beside him.

Barralon and Parsons had just finished stowing away the guards and removing all barriers to vehicles entry when a car turned through the gates and raced up the drive, before swerving left, knocking a wooden bench high into the air, and screeching to a halt in the deserted bicycle park.

In the front seat, Rainham adjusted his mask and hefted his Uzi in one hand. "Let's go, Fenlow."

The newly acquired gun weighing heavily in his belt, Doyle slid out of the car and, accompanied by Rainham, ran the few yards to the high wall that rose to the columned terrace which formed a L-shape across the front of the museum. Rainham cupped his hands and boosted him up, then grasped the offered hand to spring up lightly beside him.

With Rainham standing guard, Doyle placed his prepared charges against the wall, then retreated.

The explosion shattered the early morning calm, overriding the roar of the armoured van as it charged through the open gates, slowed for a moment to allow guns to be flung at Barralon and Parsons, then swirled on its own length to back, at speed, into the bicycle park.

Doyle and Rainham did not wait for the dust to settle but raced forward through the smoke and the ragged hole that had been blasted through the grey-white stone. The noise must have already alerted the guards and there was a second charge to be planted before they arrived: the one that would open the way into the gallery itself.

As they disappeared, the van stopped, its rear doors were flung wide and McGeary's forces tumbled out and swarmed up the wall.

"What the hell was that?" McCabe yelled, clattering down the main stairs beneath the Benin bronzes in the foyer where Bodie, Keen and Davis were drawn together in tight formation, guns raised to cover the exits. Keen and Davis were by no means sure why Cowley had sent them to the BM in the first place, but the sound of the explosion had confirmed the necessity and told them more of the situation than Bodie could have done.

The senior agent ignored McCabe's shout and concentrated, instead, on contacting Cowley on his R/T. "3/7 to Alpha. Explosion in the New Wing. Seal off the area."

"Alpha. It's being done. We'll be there in five minutes. Out."

"After those bloody jewels," McCabe guessed as he skidded across the marble.

"Maybe. Ron, Ernie, try to take them from inside. It's down there, through the bookshop and to your left – and for Christ's sake don't shoot Doyle, if he's with them." Bodie's last warning was bellowed after the departing figures. "Mac, with me. Where's Lucas?"

"Up top," McCabe replied, as they plunged out of the main doors into a cool, mist-laden morning. To their right, the calm, pillared facade of the museum was punctured by a hole that the architect had never intended as part of the fenestration. A big van was parked in front of it.

Then a cry from the gate warned them they had been spotted and machine-gun fire chewed on the pillars, spitting splinters of stone in all directions as the two CI5 agents dodged between the columns.

McCabe turned to fire at the men on the gate, earning a furious rebuke from Bodie. "Leave 'em. We don't have time," as he threw himself to one knee and fired at what he could see of the driver at the wheel of the van.

Under fire, that gentleman decamped, leaping out of the van and into cover behind his vehicle.

Doyle drew back to let McGeary and his team plunge past him into the dust and smoke filled gallery.

A museum guard was trying to get to his feet, coughing violently as he did so. Kiddy clubbed him down and took up position at the doors into the main building as Schmidt, Lasky, Thomas and McGeary slapped pre-shaped charges into position against the bullet-proof glass of the exhibition cases with practised precision, then retreated beyond the range of the minor explosions. Seconds later, they were back, scooping the jewels into holdalls.

Doyle was suddenly aware of both smg and pistol fire behind him. So was Rainham, who cursed and vanished back through the hole in the outer wall. Doyle followed him, his heart beginning to lift with the knowledge that McGeary and Rainham were not unopposed.

Emerging into the light, he took in the situation immediately. Alexander lay dead beside the truck and McCabe and Bodie – Bodie! – were scurrying into cover behind the double-row of pillars at the sight of Rainham's Uzi swinging into line but, over by the gate, and unnoticed by the two CI5 agents, Barralon had produced a rifle and was taking careful aim at McCabe's exposed back.

Doyle's handgun snapped out and barked once. Barralon jerked and fell, clutching his right shoulder. Rainham spun, but Doyle's gun spoke three times in quick succession, shattering his hands and snatching the jerking Uzi into the air. Rainham screamed but, above the sound, came Bodie's shouted warning.

"Down!"

As Doyle flung himself flat on the hard stone, he heard the crash of Bodie's big handgun and the chatter of automatic fire. Rolling across the terrace, he caught an upsidedown glimpse of McGeary diving back into the hole in the wall and another masked figure he did not immediately recognise lying dead in the rubble.

Then Bodie was beside him, demanding to know if he was all right as he ripped away the mask
that Doyle had almost forgotten.

"Christ!" McCabe gasped. "Ray? Bodie, how did you—?"

"I'm all right, and for God's sake watch your back in future, McCabe," Doyle snarled.

"I recognised the sunny temper," Bodie told McCabe, hauling Doyle to his feet, "and other things." He slapped his partner on the rump. "Come on, let's get—"

Another explosion from inside the building interrupted him.

All three agents plunged back into the museum as the sirens began to wail in the distance.

The New Wing Gallery was empty. Some of the jewels still lay in their shattered cases and others added specks of colour to the glass shards littering the floor, but most of the major pieces were missing. So were McGeary and his men.

Bodie signalled to McCabe and Doyle to stay back, then made his way to the open doors and peered, very cautiously, around them. Then he swore and sprang forward, caution cast aside, and Doyle and McCabe chased him – into devastation.

The whole of the small gallery had been shattered and the bodies of Keen and Davis lay blasted and half-buried in the debris.

"Grenade," Doyle snarled through his teeth as he caught a glimpse of their quarry fleeing through a maze of Egyptian sculpture. "Let's get the bastards."

Before they could act on that suggestion, gunfire sent them scurrying for cover.

Bodie went to ground behind the toppled statue of an Assyrian king, while Doyle sprinted into the safety provided by a massive block from Nimrud, carved in high relief with the figure of a snarling lion. McCabe disappeared into the Greek Bronze Age galleries, no doubt intending to outflank the gunmen.

Leaning around the side of the lion, Doyle emptied his gun up the gallery, giving Bodie the covering fire he needed to run forward until he reached a pair of seated figures carves in some black stone. Leaping up into the lap of the taller, he used his vantage point to survey the gallery-turned-battlefield.

"Pardon me," he muttered into the Pharaoh's head-dress as he fired over the stone shoulder, so that Doyle had the opportunity to scoot forward, coming to rest behind another lion, this one a red-rock beast sprawled, on guard, on the right hand side of the gallery.

Once there, Doyle leaned his gun-hand on top of the lion's back and sprayed the whole gallery with the re-loaded weapon, as Bodie launched himself from his perch in a flying leap ending behind the Rosetta stone. Bullets clipped that ancient black rock as he skidded across to a reclining lion, twin to the one behind Doyle which Doyle was kneeling as he re-loaded his gun.

"How many are there?" Bodie called to him.

Doyle held up a hand, fingers spread.

Five.

Bodie signalled back with a touch to the corner of his eye and two raised fingers.
I can only see two.

Doyle sidled round the back of his lion and peered between a stele on a concrete plinth and a reconstructed false door. This gave him a good view down the gallery and he realised that Bodie was right; one man was ensconced behind a row of statues standing along the left wall of the gallery and another was behind the wall separating this part of the gallery from the alcove that led to the first aid room and toilets. So where were the other three?

Only a couple of feet away, on his right behind the stele, was the first entrance to the narrow, recessed gallery that ran parallel to this one.

Doyle looked at Bodie to get his attention, jerked his head at the entrance and raised an eyebrow.

In there?

Then Bodie loosed off a barrage of covering fire and Doyle vaulted upwards between stele and wall, turning sharply right as he landed in the cave-like opening.

Once Doyle had disappeared, Bodie dodged from the lion to another false door, then slid between it and the wall into a deep alcove.

The side gallery was dim and quiet and narrow. Doyle, flattened against the left wall, could see that the right hand side was clear, but that didn't mean that there was no-one in here. He slid cautiously along the wall then, catching a glimpse of a figure crouching behind a plinth that supported a painted sandstone head, right in the middle of the narrow passageway, he loosed a snap shot. In response, three men erupted from cover and charged out of the doorway at the far end of the side gallery.

Using every inch of cover, Bodie had made his way down the main gallery and was kneeling behind three statues and the block on which they stood when the three men burst from the doorway just twenty feet from him.

He shot at them three times as he jumped to his feet and chased them across the open space. The shots missed, but he managed to catch the arm of the last of the fleeing figures and, whirling him about, released his wrist at exactly the right moment to send him spinning straight at a massive, red-granite fist that lay across the gangway. The man thumped into the rock, fell, and did not rise.

Inwardly celebrating the knockout, Bodie looked quickly about him, starting as he noticed three dark figures observing him from the depths of the side gallery. The blank eyes and millennia-old faces seemed to disapprove of the shattered peace.

Grinning, Bodie moved to check on his victim.

The bark of a gun came from behind him, and he dropped flat to the floor, rolling across the stone paving towards the safety of a plinth, but no more shots followed.

Raising his head, he peered around the plinth. A man's figure lay sprawled beneath a block on which squatted the statue of a baboon. The monkey held more life than the man, reminding Bodie vividly and unpleasantly of Africa. He found himself waiting for it to sit up and bare its teeth at him.

Twisting hurriedly about, he saw that Doyle was standing framed in the door of the side gallery, still braced from his shot, gun held in both hands, his face white against the shadows.

Bodie flashed him a relieved grin, then scrambled to his feet, lifted his gun in a quick salute of
thanks, and took off in pursuit of the fleeing crooks.

Doyle saw him turn left and disappear, but he did not move. His knees felt spongy and he was shivering. The sight of Lasky drawing careful aim on Bodie's unprotected figure had had an effect he had never foreseen, even in his worst nightmares.

Oh Jesus...

And it hadn't affected Bodie at all. His partner was actually enjoying himself.

And you have a job to do, Ray.

Bodie had gone towards the Greek and Roman sculpture galleries, and Mac was somewhere in there too. Which meant that he ought to check out the rest of this maze of Egyptian sculpture. Worse than stalking Krivas in the graveyard, but it had to be done. Checking the number of shells he had left, he loped up the room, weaving his way between the pharaohs.

Bodie moved cautiously out of the Egyptian galleries. To his left, winged, man-headed creatures towered on either side of the entrance to another long gallery.

That was empty. There was no movement to his right, either, so he passed on, around the Roman mosaic ringed by low seats, knowing that the Assyrian galleries to his left had only two exits: into this gallery or outside to face Cowley. If they'd gone that way, they were trapped.

The next gallery was large and light, and the Greek sculpture to his left concealed nothing. To his right an entire building – a pillared temple or tomb, he wasn't sure which – dominated the room.

The clatter of feet on tile announced the arrival of McCabe.

"No-one in with the Elgin Marbles," he stated.

Bodie pointed to the temple, whose ten foot high concrete base could have concealed a platoon. "They musta gone thataway," he replied in an appalling U.S. accent.

"Oh, great."

The two men trotted cautiously towards the temple, pincering it from opposite sides. When they met up behind it, they found themselves at the entrance to a smaller gallery where a more-than-life-size caryatid frowned at them from the left, while angular display cases massed in front of them, blocking their view. They ducked instinctively into cover behind them at the sound of shots, before realising that only the noises and not the bullets were ricocheting in the enclosed space. Then both men broke into a run, racing towards the shots.

It took Doyle some time to check out the Northern half of the Egyptian gallery, for there were altogether too many places to hide, including yet another side gallery.

Entering this from the top ramp, he found it apparently empty. Moving down the passageway, he paused to peer back into the main gallery through an opening in the wall above a black offering table, but he saw nothing but statues and horse-trough shaped sarcophagi.

There was one of the latter with an elaborately sculptured lid depicting its putative owner at the end of the passage, and Doyle circled it carefully before exiting into the main gallery.
As he descended the steps towards a massive grey-green scarab, a voice snarled, "Hold it right there, Fenlow – if that is your name, which I doubt." McGeary had risen from the bottom of the nearest sarcophagus, and his Uzi was held steady on Doyle. "Now drop the gun."

Doyle let the weapon fall, but the clash of metal on stone was almost drowned by the muffled rattle of gunfire.

"Hear that, McGeary? You haven't got a chance. CI5 has the whole area surrounded," Doyle taunted.

He hoped.

"Why don't you give yourself up and make it easy on yourself," he continued. "That way you might just stay alive."

"Uhuh. You're forgetting one thing: whoever you are, I've a feeling you'll make a pretty good hostage." The smg nosed into the small of Doyle's back. "Move, Mr Fenlow."

"Two of 'em," McCabe told Bodie, looking across the opening into the Mausoleum Gallery to meet his colleague's questioning eyebrow. "Lucas is in the corner on the steps. We've got 'em bracketed."

Bodie nodded agreement. The two men they were pursuing had taken cover behind a bank of seating directly across from the doorway. With Lucas on the stairs ascending from the lower gallery, their quarry was in a very precarious position. In fact, he could see the backside of one of them protruding from behind the seats. It was irresistible. Bodie took careful aim, and fired.

There was a yelp of pain and Bodie's victim leaped like a startled frog, almost vertically into the air, both hands clutching his injured member. His companion promptly abandoned him and fled towards the wall that effectively divided the room in halves.

Lucas came bounding up the steps and McCabe and Bodie broke cover at the same moment, McCabe heading for the injured man and Bodie, like Lucas, for the retreating one.

Lucas reached him first, sweeping him to the ground and sending the holdall he was clutching flying from his hand. It thunked to the floor, a dazzle of jeweled objects cascading out onto the tile.

Snarling, the man kicked Lucas away and tried to bring his Browning to bear, but Bodie swooped on the massive scimitar that lay at his feet and brought it down in an arc that ended on the man's wrist. Time had blunted the edge, and Bodie had not been able to put much force behind the blow, but blood was drawn, and the gun knocked flying into the air. The man jumped backwards, landing awkwardly, skidded, and fell. Before he could move again, he found himself looking up the length of the curved sword at Bodie's wide grin and mocking eyes.

"It's the old choice, mate: the stolen jewels or your crown jewels."

It was as Doyle and McGeary reached the end of the Egyptian gallery, where two small Greek sphinxes guarded the door, that two things happened simultaneously: the firing from the other galleries stopped and a uniformed man bearing a huge and hideous earthenware jar that sprouted winged women and sea horses at very odd angles came straight through the doors in front of them.

McGeary's attention shifted for no more than an instant, but Doyle used the time to whirl, shove the Uzi aside, and thrust his elbow into McGeary's stomach. McGeary reeled away, still hanging onto his smg, and Doyle went after him, bearing him to the ground, only to realise, too late, that McGeary had been prepared for the move. The Uzi chattered for an instant as they wrestled on the
floor, then there followed a thump and a crash that sounded like the proverbial bull in the china shop. McGeary went limp and, when Doyle had freed himself from the unconscious body, he saw that the earthenware monstrosity was in pieces on the floor, and the keeper was standing looking down at it with an expression of profound regret.

"Two thousand, three hundred years old, that was," he observed glumly.

Doyle picked up an intact seahorse and handed it to him in a gesture of consolation. "I'm sorry. Didn't you hear the shooting and the explosions?"

"I'm a bit deaf, son." He sighed. "It's not your fault. I knew that it was going to be a bad day when the POWERS THAT BE wanted the thing moved down to the Roman Art Room. Damned heavy, it was, and not even Roman at that."

"It was lucky for me, though," said Doyle, absently collecting more bits of pottery. "I think you saved my life." He looked up, tried to push away curls that were no longer there, and asked, "What the hell was it, anyway?"

"Son, that's as much a mystery to me as it is to you." He brightened suddenly. "Still, whatever it was, it came as a pair."

"I don't believe it! There couldn't be two of 'em..."

"'Fraid so—" The keeper broke off as McCabe appeared in the doorway.

"You okay, Ray?"

"Yeh. It's all right, he's one of ours," Doyle told the keeper, hardly daring to ask the question he most wanted answered. He swallowed, and asked it: "Bodie?"

"He'll be along in a minute. We've got the other two, so this looks like the lot." McCabe ambled over to secure McGeary.

Doyle sat down heavily on the plinth of the scarab and closed his eyes, the gun hanging limply from his fingers.

The next thing he knew, he was caught up and turned into Bodie's arms, his mouth being claimed with a possessive urgency that raised an instant conflagration in his blood and in his groin. For seconds, perhaps minutes, all coherent thought was lost in the joy of homecoming. Then memory crept in to spoil it.

Was this how Karen had been greeted too?

He started to pull away, but Bodie wouldn't let him go and, though his mouth was released, the other man drew him even closer.

A voice said, very softly, in his ear, "Sorry, love, but I have to get us de-classified fast. Cowley's been flinging every woman he could find at me. He even got hold of Karen and tried to get her to vamp me."

"Karen...?" Doyle whispered dazedly.

"Ummm." Bodie nuzzled his neck. "Felt sorry for the poor kid... didn't know what she was up against... Oh God, Ray, I've missed you..."
Doyle couldn't answer. He just clung to Bodie for reassurance, pressing his face against his shoulder, finally letting himself believe in the reality of Bodie's presence – and of his love. How could he have been so stupid, let jealousy blind him so easily? Karen... it hadn't been more than a gesture of farewell... Bodie was normally demonstrative...

Demonstrative...

Get us de-classified...

Jesus!

Doyle pulled back sharply, for the first time aware of where they were and of the shocked and curious faces; McCabe, Lucas, the keeper... even the captive Kiddy and Lasky.

He felt his face burn as he met McCabe's popping eyes. Turing ferociously on Bodie, he opened his mouth to bawl him out...

And remembered Karen.

He never doubted me. What does this... minor embarrassment matter when compared with the way I misjudged him... have always misjudged him?

But he doesn't know...

Panic clutched him for a moment.

Must never know.

Doyle glared at McCabe. "What the hell are you staring at?"

Mac took a step backwards, his hands raised, palms outwards. "Ray..."

"Steady on, Ray," said Lucas, recovering from the silence of shock in time to protect his partner. "I mean... well, it's a public place."

"And the pair of you've got nothing better to do, I suppose? Nothing more important than staring —"

"Easy, Ray." Bodie took a restraining grip on Doyle's arms, astonished that the anger was not being aimed in his direction. "It's not their fault. Mac, there are two men to be taken care of down beyond the cross galleries. Lucas, aren't you going to do something about that one? He's starting to come round. Come on, Ray. I think we'd better find the Cow." He hustled Doyle away.

McCabe looked at Lucas; Lucas looked back.

"Was I seeing things?"

"If so, I saw it too."

"Christ, what's the Cow going to say?"

"I don't know, but I do know what he's going to say if we don't tidy up here."

"Christ, yes. We can work out who's gone crazy later. You take care of this lot, I'll go and find what Bodie's left for me."
It was early evening by the time Bodie and Doyle reported to Cowley’s office. According to Betty, the Chief had spent most of the day reassuring the Russians, pacifying museum and government officials and fending off the press, so it was with some trepidation that they entered his office and positioned themselves side by side in front of his desk.

Cowley leaned back in his chair to survey the pair of them. He did not waste time on preliminaries. "What about Rogers?"

"Picked up at the rendezvous point. They're charging him now."

"That's a clean sweep," Bodie added. "Once McGeary decided to shop their contacts it was all over. We picked up Heath – the BM contact – at Gatwick, and Wilmott at New Scotland Yard." He chuckled. The Met aren't too happy about that, but it does explain where Rainham was getting his information on the security forces. The Chief Liaison Officer at Special Branch, yet!"

"The one giving us the most trouble is May," Doyle added morosely. "Fact is, sir, 'e knows nothing at all about those 'idden compartments in 'is car."

Bodie nudged him. "Didn't you know, mate? Rolls fit 'em as standard."

"Anyway, it's all in our report," Doyle said, shoving the papers across the desk with the air of a retriever offering a partridge, his scowl daring Cowley to comment.

The Controller ignored the paperwork. "It could be said you did very well," he remarked. "If, that is, we ignore certain personal aspects of your recent behaviour, particularly your disappearance at the beginning of this case." His eyes suddenly ranged in on Doyle. "You won't fool me so easily again."

"I hope I won't need to, sir."

Cowley noted the exchange of looks that accompanied Doyle's remark, as he had noted that the two men were standing so close together that their shoulders were touching. Mutual support – against him.

Damn it, he didn't want to hurt them, but they were so bloody exasperating... and his plans for them had never included this disastrous sexual liaison.

Push them too hard and you'll lose them, he warned himself.

Accordingly, his voice was mild as he said, "I sincerely hope you won't need to either, Doyle. Very well. You completed the latter part of your mission successfully, and I am therefore willing to forget your earlier disobedience, on condition it never happen again."

"And you won't try and split us up?" That was Bodie, pushing his luck, as always.

"As long as you continue to do your jobs with the same efficiency."

"Who judges that?" Doyle demanded.

"I do." Cowley stared Doyle down. "I'll give you three months to prove yourselves, during which time you will keep this... affair... of yours a secret."

"But—"
"Let me finish, Bodie. At the end of that time, you will abide by my decision – but I give you my word I will not separate you unless there is a real loss in efficiency, or you endanger lives – your own, or other people's."

"And if that happens?"

"Then you cannot remain together within this organisation. You do not need me to tell you that."

"No, sir," said Bodie. "We agree to your terms, only—"

"They are not 'terms': they are my orders and they are not to be taken as an indication that I approve of the situation. Now, get out, the pair of you, before you fall asleep on your feet. I'll see you the day after tomorrow, first thing in the morning. Out."

Doyle moved obediently to the door, but Bodie lingered for a moment. "Just one thing, sir. It's impossible for us to comply with one part of your orders. You can't put the cat back in the bag."

"Bodie, what have you—?"

"Have a word with Lucas, or McCabe, or from their reactions this afternoon, half the office."

Doyle's head reappeared in the doorway. "Bodie!"

"I'm coming. Thanks for the day off, sir. Damn it, Ray, I'm coming."

Cowley sat staring at the closed door for some time. Then, slowly, he rose to his feet and went out to talk to Betty. If there were any rumours, she would have heard them.

But...

God damn you, Bodie, you haven't won yet. I'll save you and Doyle from yourselves.

Somehow.

But, for the time being, he was going to have to let it continue. In the future, though, it might be different.

The drive to Doyle's flat had been accomplished in almost total silence; Doyle concentrating on the road and Bodie concentrating on watching Doyle.

It was difficult to believe that he had him back, alive and unhurt – but how many times would they have to go through this sequence of terror and relief and joy?

There wasn't an answer.

"Want some food?" Doyle asked, as he pushed open the door.

"Not at the moment."

Doyle grinned at him. "I wish I'd got that answer on tape. It's probably the only time I'll ever hear it."

"I've got other things on my mind."
Doyle ignored that, slammed the door behind them, double locked and chained it. Then, to Bodie’s bemusement, he began a systematic circuit of the flat, disconnecting the entry-phone and taking both telephones off the hook.

Finally, Bodie could no longer contain his curiosity. "Ray, what are you doing?"

"Making sure we won't be disturbed," Doyle told him, and took him in his arms.

Bodie bent his head to the parted, eager lips. "We never did get that gay sex manual," he whispered, laughter in his voice.

"By the time we've finished, sunshine, we'll be able to write it. So let's get on—mmm."

Doyle woke slowly, languidly savouring the warmth and comfort of a familiar bed. It seemed like years since he had slept at home. Home...

With a flash of panic, he realised that Bodie was no longer beside him, panic that was vanquished by his memories of the pre-dawn hours. Bodie could never leave him now, not after all he had said and done in the glory of their incredible love-making...

He stretched carefully, easing strained muscles into wakefulness, then peered at the clock.

4.30 – which tied in with the late afternoon sunlight filtering round the edges of the curtains. With a sigh of regret, he pushed back the covers and rolled to his feet, before making his way into the bathroom.

Twenty minutes later, bathed, shaved and feeling reasonably human, he put on a dressing gown and went to find Bodie.

The kitchen was empty of life, but a mug and plate had been placed in the drainer. Doyle opened a carton of orange juice, poured himself a glassful, and carried it with him on his search.

Bodie had not been in the living room, either, but now Doyle looked more carefully, he saw that the patio doors that led to the tiny back terrace were open.

Putting down his empty glass, Doyle padded silently forward, pausing in the opening.

Bodie was seated on the garden bench, his back to Doyle, arms stretched out along the woodwork. He was wearing only a pair of brown cords and the afternoon sunlight gilded and shadowed the skin of his back and shoulders, outlining the powerful muscles and throwing the white scar-lines into an over-emphatic contrast.

Doyle's heart climbed into his throat, set leaping by the beauty and vulnerability of his lover.

I never thought of Bodie as vulnerable... but it's a miracle we're still alive to share all this. And it could end tomorrow.

The panic he had felt on waking returned in even greater force.

We've got to get out of this... get out... get out... get out...

Stumbling, he took the half dozen steps to the bench and bent over the back, encircling Bodie's neck with his arms and rubbing his face, cat-like, against sun-warmed skin and hair, both soft and silky against his cheek, smelling fresh and clean and totally individual.
Bodie chuckled. "So you've woken up, have you, Rip Van Winkle? I thought you'd pricked your finger with a magic spindle or something." He turned his head to kiss Doyle's throat.

"Just re-charging the batteries," Doyle told him, nibbling an ear-lobe.

"You're a bloody sex-maniac – and you've got no shame, my love. Remember, this terrace can be overlooked."

"Well, you're the one who de-classified us!" Doyle retorted, sliding around the bench and into the waiting arms, resorting to a kind of communication more expressive than words.

It was some time later that he forced himself to reach back to words again. "Actually, I do have some shame, y'know. Hadn't we better go inside?"

"Umm." The hand that had been exploring beneath the dressing gown slid over his thighs and into the warmth between them.

Doyle gasped, his head thrown back, fingers clamping on hard muscle, and Bodie chuckled. "Too late."

"Bodie... oh... Jesus... no... oh, please..."

His protest – if protest it was – was lost as flesh responded to caressing fingers. Locking his hands behind Bodie's neck, he clung on desperately as he was drawn, ruthlessly, to a shuddering climax.

Slowly, he became aware of himself again; of the arm that supported his thrown back head, of his sprawled limbs, of the differing textures of wood and stone and cloth and skin, of his gasping breath and racing heart, of the dampness of semen and sweat and the breeze lifting it from his skin in cool waves, and the hardness of Bodie's groin against his hip.

Lips moved along his shoulder in a series of gentle kisses, then he was shifted into a warm embrace.

"You bastard," he whispered, when he had caught sufficient breath.

"Yeh." The arms tightened. "Oh God, Ray, I didn't know I could love anyone this much."

"Crazy bastard," Doyle amended. "Can't think why I love you at all, the way you behave." Yet, even as he spoke, he suddenly realised that one part of the fascination Bodie held for him was in that sheer unpredictability. Bodie lived for excitement, lived for it and created it, and offered it to Doyle as generously as he offered his love.

It was as welcome.

"Ray, what're we going to do about Cowley? About CI5?"

Doyle lifted his head to stare at his lover. "You pick the weirdest times... I was thinking more along the lines of going back inside – unless you want me to take my revenge right here."

Bodie shook his head. "More comfortable inside but, about CI5... Ray, it isn't settled, you know. Cowley may have agreed to let us work together but he hasn't given up. He'll do all he can to split us and not just as partners within CI5. If we make just one mistake..."

One of us could be dead.

"We can't make a mistake. We won't."
Bodie's expression was uncharacteristically serious, and he spoke with a kind of reluctance. "We could always leave CI5... if that was what you wanted..."

For a second, temptation clawed at Doyle, the temptation to say, "Yes, let's quit," and end this nightmare of continuing fear.

But he couldn't do that to Bodie.

He looked into the pleading blue eyes and hastened to reassure him. "Don't be daft. What else could we do? We're going to make the Cow eat every word, hear?" He closed his eyes and hid his face in Bodie's shoulder, because he could feel the prickle of the tears he did not dare let his lover see.

"You bet we will," Bodie murmured, with a sigh of what could only have been relief in the words.

They were silent then, each lost in unutterable thoughts, clinging to each other and knowing that there was nothing else to hold onto... never had been...

After a long time, Doyle became aware that he was shivering, and that Bodie's skin was cool against his cheek.

"Sun's gone in," his partner commented, reading his thoughts with his usual uncanny ease. It was lucky, Doyle thought, that the talent had deserted him until now. "Should we go inside and get warm?"

"Sometimes you have a decent idea." Doyle disentangled himself, got to his feet, and straightened and re-tied his dressing gown, eyeing Bodie sternly as he did so. "Don't think I've forgotten about my revenge."

"I was hoping you hadn't." Bodie also rose to his feet and stood regarding his lover with an expression of awe. Tentatively, he cupped Doyle's face with one hand, caressing the dent in his cheekbone with gentle strokes of his thumb. "Ray, you're... incredible." He smiled, then added, "Though I admit I preferred the curls."

"They'll grow back. That bone won't, though."

"Of course not. You've got to have the scars, Ray. Didn't you know? The Gods are jealous of perfect beauty."

Doyle was astonished and embarrassed. "Can I 'ave that in writing?" he teased, trying to cover his confusion.

"If you want, sunshine."

Doyle threw back his head and laughed joyously. "You would, too, wouldn't you? Next thing I know, you'll be writing me love poetry."

Then Bodie drew him gently forward into his arms, and there was time for no more than a simple, unexpected thought: You know something, sweetheart? I wouldn't be surprised if you did.

FIN
What I remember most about this story is the fun I had working out lines of fire in the British Museum.

Jan and Mick are sort of based on Modesty Blaise and Willie Garvin. (Sorry. So sorry.)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!