



PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

M. FAE GLASGOW

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by M. Fae Glasgow
(approximately 20,500 words)
design by Caroline K. Carbis

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Note to the 2003 republication: This new edition of PROMETHEUS UNBOUND has been remastered in InDesign and converted to pdf format.

PREFACE

THERE is a tale behind this story. Once upon a time... Oh no, let's not bother with that. The name then: *Prometheus Unbound*. That's from Shelley. Percy Bysshe Shelley that is. This story has nothing to do with him or his works but the title was so beautiful and pertinent to the piece that I insisted we use it. M. Fae went along with me. (Sometimes she's easy to persuade.) But why Prometheus? Well...Pomona College (the oldest of the Claremont Colleges in California) has a wonderful mural of Prometheus done by the Mexican artist Orozco. Prometheus, rather larger than life, presides over one of the campus' main dining halls and if you look carefully (actually you'd have to be blind not to notice), you will see that he 'lacks' something.

Now as to setting and plot: you may recognize chunks as M. Fae has shamelessly plundered Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night* and added just a touch or two of the *St. Trinian* films. But remember that these are works of fiction and so, too, is *Prometheus Unbound*. Ms. Sayers put it very nicely: "...I have arranged the weather and the moon's changes to suit my own fancy. For, however realistic the background, the novelist's only native country is Cloud-Cuckooland, where they do but jest, poison in jest: no offence in the world."

—Caroline K. Carbis, editor

THIS remastering of Prometheus comes ten years after the tale was originally distributed to the Pros circuit. For those who are interested, a fairly heated discussion on the *original* online slashlist—about a year and a half into that list's existence—served as inspiration.

—Caroline K. Carbis
October 2003

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN A SWORD
-ESPECIALLY WHEN WIELDED BY AN EXPERT.
-M. FAE GLASGOW



ONE

"COWLEY,"

Doyle muttered aggrievedly under his breath.

"Bloody Cowley," Bodie agreed.

"Yeh."

Silence.

"Babysitting," Bodie sneered.

"Fucking babysitting," Doyle agreed.

"Yeh."

Another silence from the two men, while the radio blared and the car horns blasted, and the sun shone fitfully through clouds determined to burst on them and ruin everyone's fun.

Two more miles, crawling along roads bordered with hedgerows so traditional as to be an anachronism, even here amidst the dotted villages of biscuit-tin prettiness.

"Cowley," Bodie said again in disgust.

"Bastard," Doyle replied with feeling.

"Yeh."

No silence this time, this drive turning into enough of an endurance rally that the conversations in HQ seemed a very long time ago. Time to pick up the complaining once more.

"Investigate the situation," Doyle said under his breath, foot tapping in time to the beat from the radio, the sole of his trainers squeaking against the glove compartment.

With a speaking glare, Bodie switched the radio off, shutting the damned thing up before Tony Blackburn could start yattering and smirking again. "Investigate the situation," Bodie repeated, his inflection nastier than Doyle's, aimed as much at his partner as his boss.

"Don't you go starting," Doyle warned, mood darkening. "If anyone's going to land the blame round here—"

"It'll be you, mate," Bodie told him sharply, justifiably pissed off. "You were the one who had to open your big mouth—"

"Only so you would keep your trap shut. If I'd left it to you, it wouldn't be some toffee-nosed private college we'd be on our way to, would it?"

"No? Oh? So where would we be going then, eh?" Bodie demanded, hand hard on the horn as he overtook an old biddy too nervous to cope with roads the likes of these. "Go on, Galahad, if you hadn't've rescued us, where'd we be going?"

"The JobCentre, if we were lucky and he was feeling merciful. That new fucking Ministerial liaisons office—"

That was something Bodie didn't even want to think about. "All right, all right, so you saved us from my big mouth and a fate worse than death. But couldn't you have been a bit more tactful about it? I mean, calling the Home Secretary's daughter a stupid, neurotic bint didn't exactly help the cause, did it?"

"And what you had in mind would've?"

Silence. The two of them subsided into their seats, the sun brightening the road ahead less and less, until the rain finally started, great fat gobs of water splashing onto the windscreen.

Bodie cast a glance at his partner, caught Doyle doing the same thing to him, shared a grin. Nodded, conciliatory, at the heavy, grey skies and the rain that was coming faster and faster, the windscreen streaking with wetted dust. "Could do with that," Bodie said, falling back on that age-old mainstay of British conversation the world over, "what with the

drought this summer an' everything." A pause, while Bodie looked at Doyle's profile, while the rain came down heavier, sheeting the city muck from the windows and bonnet of the car. "Course, it's been getting so cold, we're lucky it's just rain and not snow, aren't we?"

"You'll be saying the nights are drawing in, next," Doyle said, not half as tartly as most people would expect, his voice more a slow drawl of pointed affection.

Bodie grinned at him. Gave him a friendly thump on the thigh, so used to basking in Doyle's rarely exhibited warmth that he didn't even notice how quick Doyle was to respond. "Yeh, well, 's better than us having a go at each other, innit?"

"Not by much," Doyle told him, giving him a look, reaching forward to turn the radio back on again, getting rid of the repetitive beat of rock music and fiddling with the dial until he found Radio Four and a bit of Mozart that Bodie had once confessed to liking. "Did you get anything out of our Betty?"

"Oh, you're such a coarse bugger," Bodie tut-tutted, answering properly when on the receiving end of one of Doyle's meaningful glowers. "About this? Nah, not much. Just what Cowley told us: get on our white steeds, ride to the rescue. Apparently they're all worked up about this, Betty says they're falling over backwards to make us feel at home." Mind you, she had been nigh near giggling when she said it, but Doyle's mood was chancy, and it really wasn't worth setting him off just because Betty was in a good mood. "She said that the Home Sec's spinster—"

"Unmarried, Bodie," Doyle said, either reproving Bodie's sexism or imitating his boss.

"The Home Sec's *unmarried* daughter's convinced someone's after her, strange goings on in academe," a quick, suggestive waggling of his eyebrows, "things going bump in the night."

"Or things going bang in the night," Doyle added, relaxing into the intimations of sex.

"Nah, can't be that—it's an all-girl college."

They both paused then, Bodie taking his eyes off the road longer than he ought, his face brightening in a slow, delighted grin to match Doyle's.

"Unless there's a bit of you-know-what going on."

"A bit of what?" Doyle asked, playing the innocent, making Bodie laugh, easing aside some of the annoyance of being cast out into the boondocks to play nursemaid to a nervous Lady.

"A bit of tribadism," Bodie said as if he were pulling a rabbit out of a hat, another one-up for him in their ongoing game of ever-so-proper words for the naughty bits.

"Never?" Doyle said in mock-shock, one step ahead of Bodie in the euphemism league. "What would dear old Queen Victoria say?"

"Probably not half as much as Cowley if we don't keep the Home Sec happy on this one," Bodie concluded miserably.

"You know something," Doyle said suddenly, much more briskly, his mind obviously working over this whole thing, "I don't like this."

"Who ever would have guessed?" Bodie asked drily, signaling before leaving the two lane road for one even more rural, the illumination of other car lights fading behind them, only the bright headlights of their own car cutting through winter's early darkness. "What, in particular," he said absently, negotiating round the sort of wide puddle it didn't do to trust on old country roads, "is it you don't like about all this?"

"The sycophancy, right, not to mention the abuse of power," Doyle replied, voice growing considerably warmer than the weather now the last of the sun was long gone. "You know, don't you, the only reason CI5's involved is because the Home Sec thinks his darling daughter's not safe and he wants an eye kept on her till they break for their Christmas holidays?"

Bodie hated it when Doyle felt it necessary to repeat self-evident facts and when he sounded so wounded when politicians behaved like politicians and Cowley behaved like the civil servant he (technically) was. "Oh, yeh?" he asked resign-

edly, knowing well enough that it was best to let Doyle rant and rave, blunting Doyle's sharp tongue before letting his partner loose on the not-necessarily innocent public.

"Yes," Doyle snapped at him, giving him a sour look, obviously suspecting that he was being indulged again. "The Home Secretary's pressuring Cowley, and so what happens? Cowley sends CI5 in to something the local coppers should be taking care of. Anything so he can lick the bum of the hand that feeds him."

Bodie didn't think this was the time to mention mixed metaphors, so he just made a suitably enquiring noise, letting his mind wander while Doyle vented some frustration.

"Cowley sucking up to the Home Sec, that's the only reason CI5's here. And the only reason we're here—" Doyle broke off abruptly, the real reason for them being sent here one neither he nor Bodie was quite ready to think about, never mind start talking out loud about.

"After what you said to him, it could be worse," Bodie said after a while, ignoring all the many reasons for the past few months, bringing attention to only the most recent, the most easily explained away reason for Cowley's increasing displeasure with them. "He could've sent us to the Outer Hebrides to count trawlers."

Something Cowley had threatened both of them with recently, and with just cause. Still, not something Doyle wanted to think about, something best left unsaid. Ignore it, and maybe it would go away. Or come to a head, and they'd deal with it then. But not now. Just...not now.

"Cowley," Doyle eventually said.

"Bastard," Bodie added, and then they were quiet while the rain poured down and the miles slowly passed, and neither one of them admitted to thinking about anything much at all.



TWO

"IT WAS down there,

I tell you," Doyle snapped, thumb jerking back in the direction they had just driven. "There was a road—"

"I know it's a bit primitive out here, but even the locals wouldn't count that as a road."

"The directions said—"

"I know what the fucking directions say, I'm the one who wrote them down while Cowley was chewing you up and spitting you back out again. And I'm telling you, that wasn't a road and even if it was a road, it's not the one we're looking for, right? Now will you just shut up and let me drive in peace? I need to concentrate—"

"Concentrate, he says," Doyle muttered, shifting uncomfortably in the seat, his bum sore from too many hours trapped in a small car with a lowering Bodie. "What you need to do, mate, is admit you're lost and stop off to find someone who knows where the fuck this college is."

"I am not lost," Bodie replied with all the dignity of a man who has survived SAS training in worse countryside and worse weather than this. "We still haven't passed the road—"

"Now we have," Doyle said smugly, Bodie's face a picture as he realised he'd been so busy arguing he had missed the road after all. "Going to turn round then, are we?" Doyle continued sweetly, never failing to be amused by Bodie's

Action Man routine. "Or are we just going to keep on driving till we reach the sea?"

"I wouldn't have missed that if you'd let me concentrate and kept your mouth shut the way I asked." Which was true as far as it went, but then, he reminded himself in all fairness, if Doyle had kept his mouth shut in Cowley's office, Bodie would have said a hell of a lot more than even he could get away with, and then he'd be wishing Cowley had sent them off on something as pleasant, if as useless, as babysitting a nervous politician's more nervous daughter. By way of apology, he said: "I hope they know we're coming. If we have to find somewhere to put us up tonight, I think I'll go bonkers. Been in this car too long already."

"S all right," Doyle told him, not polite enough to accept the tacit apology silently. "The way things've been, it's a miracle we haven't both gone off the deep end."

The way things had been, it was a miracle they were both still here, and whole, and they both knew it.

"Ray," Bodie began, thinking about what would have happened if Doyle hadn't worked out what had been going on that Tuesday, and if Doyle hadn't come charging in to the rescue, an irate and shouting Cowley hot on his heels. "About last Tuesday—"

"Told you," Doyle said, a peculiar gentleness in his voice that both men pretended not to hear, "it's all right."

"Yeh, well, thanks," Bodie said, embarrassment and gratitude making him sound both ungrateful and ungracious. "Anyway," he went on, burying all those unnerving emotions under a metaphoric carpet, the car tyres crunching as they finally started along the long, cypress-lined drive that would eventually lead to the hallowed halls of Montclare College, "at least there won't be anyone shooting at us here."

"Or trying to cut your balls off and feed them to you for revenge."

If he hadn't been driving, Bodie would have crossed his legs in memory of what had almost happened to him last Tuesday. "Glad it was you who came in doing his Lone Ranger."

"You're only saying that cos after that first week together, I can't slag you off for wetting yourself, can I?"

That was one of the best things about Doyle, Bodie decided for the umpteenth time: he was never one for hiding behind polite euphemism, and a man didn't have to put on any airs and graces round him. Natural, that was Doyle. Unabashed, unashamed, and Bodie thought he should probably be uneasy by just how little pride he indulged in around Doyle. So much for keeping cool, so much for keeping his distance... He glanced at the man sitting beside him, and couldn't help but smile. Doyle was scruffy as always, his green T-shirt showing the ill-effects of too many washings, the jeans the favourite old ones that should have been in the bin several years and at least two patches ago, his hair needing a cut, the perm growing out into long, loose ringlets, five-o'clock shadow darkening his cheeks and chin.

"You know, they're going to eat you alive in here," Bodie mentioned conversationally, the only sort of compliment a man like him could offer to his best mate.

"Nah," Doyle replied, easily. "These are all well-brought up women, they'll probably just lie there and—"

"And think about England."

Doyle continued as if Bodie hadn't interrupted him, although he was almost smiling. "And let me fuck them into next week. Tell you what, though," he murmured as Bodie stopped the car in front of an impressive, pseudo-Gothic portico, "I'll let you keep a couple of them happy, you know, let you warm them up for a bit of the real stuff."

"Oh, you're too, too kind," Bodie told him drily, resisting the urge to caress him, permitting himself only a platonic ruffling of curls. "Come on, Casanova, your harem awaits you."

Luck was with them: the rain had paused, gathering strength for a real downpour later, so they were dry enough as they stood there waiting for the old-fashioned bell to be answered.

Two minutes later, the rain began again, not bothering with a delicate pitter-pattering, going straight to a full-blooded roar, the clouds opening and drenching them with coldness.

Bodie leaned on the bell and kicked the door for good measure.

"All right, all right," a voice came primly from the other side of the good oak door, "there's no need to be so rude."

"Tell that to my good leather jacket," Bodie mumbled, trying to squeeze in closer to the door and farther from the rain. "Good evening," he smiled sweetly, sweeping in through the doorway before the woman standing there could do much more than gape. "I'm Bodie, he's Doyle, and we're here to protect you."

"But—"

"Just tell us where we can put our things," Doyle said, shaking some of the rain out of his hair, pausing to look round himself at the burnished hall heavy with portraits and class photos, "and we'll sort ourselves out."

"But—"

Bet that would explain why Betty was looking so smug today—sweet revenge for the way they'd landed her with the new lad panting after her every word. "Oh, come on, don't tell us you weren't expecting us?" Bodie moaned, sparing a dirty look for Doyle as he hauled both their holdalls and equipment bags in out of the wet. "It's a bit late to expect us to find somewhere else."

"But—"

"And it doesn't make any sense for us to base ourselves in some village when everything's here," Doyle told her, only now stopping to really notice her and take in the expression of absolute dismay on her face.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, hand automatically going inside his jacket. "What's happened?"

Bodie eased round behind Doyle, recognising that tone of voice, the woman's look of horror warning them of something gone terribly wrong.

"But Sir David said George Cowley would send someone proper—"

That was all it was? Bodie drew himself up to his full height, and put on his poshest voice, his instant dislike of this woman's snobbery too evident for politeness. "I did say we should have left the silver spoons in, Doyle old chap," he said nastily. "One wouldn't want to offend one's peers, would one?"

"No, no," the woman said, recovering a little, backing down from Bodie's anger, an expression of *faux* welcome plastered over her face. "It's just that, well, you're really not what we expected. Sir David said—"

"Are those the CI5 agents, MacIn?" an acrid voice called from the unlit half-landing, footsteps and voice coming closer, approaching the small bright patch in the main hall. "Why didn't you bring them up to the sitting room? Did you have Mrs. Hudson take care of their luggage? Have you shown them—"

The voice broke off abruptly as the woman came into view. She stopped dead and just stared at them. "What the hell is this?"

"Well, Ms. Scrivener" the woman called MacIn replied, "these are the CI5 agents..."

"No, they are not," Ms. Scrivener said sharply, descending the stairs one staccato click at a time. "Sir David promised me that he would send someone appropriate—"

"Yeh, well, we've heard that from your mouthpiece here already," Doyle interrupted nastily, "but sorry, all the blue bloods were busy protecting the fucking corgis. And yes," he added with patent falsehood, "I do apologise for my language. Sir David leaned on our boss, our boss leaned on us, and here we are, and if you don't like it—"

"You can join the club, because we don't like it either. But we're here, and we're stuck with each other," Bodie threw a warning glower at Doyle, "so how about showing us our rooms and letting us get on with things?"

"You are not staying here," Ms. Scrivener replied, not in the least intimidated by either Bodie or Doyle, looking, rather, as if the two men were snotty, grubby little boys dribbling on her new carpet. "I won't have it—"

"Yeh, well, we're not interested in your sex life," Doyle replied, "and the only way we're going to get to the bottom of all this is if we're on the scene—"

"You obviously didn't hear me," Ms. Scrivener snapped, stepping round them as fastidiously as a cat at a flea circus. "I said you weren't going to stay here."

"Oh, and why not, eh?" Bodie asked, tired and pissed off and really put out by the lack of welcome—some people, he thought, come here to help them, and what do they do? "We are house-trained, you know."

Ms. Scrivener's expression made it clear that she doubted that. Or knew that at best, they still left the toilet seat up. "This," she said rather grandly, "is an all-women's college. And you," she stared at them disdainfully, "are men."

Bodie looked at Doyle, Doyle looked at Bodie, then, in unison, each one looked down the length of his own body, Doyle automatically cocking his hip. "Gosh," he said, all breathless *ingénu*, "are we really?"

"Yes, who ever would have guessed," Bodie fluted outrageously, although his expression was dark and furious. "Look, Mrs.—"

"Ms."

"Oh, yeh, I should have known. Ms. Scribbler, is it?"

Standing on her dignity now, glaring at the two upstarts. "Scrivener, actually."

"Yeh, well, Ms. Scrivener, all we want is to do our job and get out of here in time for our leave. So why don't you—"

"Oh, gentlemen, I didn't realise you were here," a new voice said, the woman's approach muffled by the heavy carpeting in the side corridor. "I'm Ms. Eubanks—"

"I'm dealing with these..." Ms. Scrivener looked as if she couldn't come up with a suitably disgusting epithet for the two men. "I'll take care of them."

"Oh, no, I couldn't let you do that," Ms. Eubanks said very nicely, winking at Bodie and Doyle behind Ms. Scrivener's back. "You've already done so much today, and you have such a busy day tomorrow. Why don't you let me do this for you?"

"Well..."

"After all, this could take quite some time, and you do want to be fresh for the meeting with the Ethics Committee in the morning."

"That is more important, I suppose..."

"Oh, good, then it's all settled. Why don't you come this way," Ms. Eubanks said pleasantly, heading rapidly off down the side corridor she had come from in the first place, "and we'll get this all sorted out."

With one last sniff of disapprobation, Ms. Scrivener turned and went smartly up the stairs again, MacIn trailing in her wake.

"Charming," Bodie said as he hefted the duffel bag and the two holdalls, Doyle generously picking up the small attaché case.

"Charming? Ms. Scrivener?" Ms. Eubanks said over her shoulder. "Well, that's certainly a novel description."

She threw the door open, ushering Bodie and Doyle into a room overflowing with heat, music, and brightness. "Now," she went on, "let's get started. You're obviously the help Sir David promised us. What would you gentlemen like to drink?"



THREE

BEHIND

Ms. Eubanks' bustling back, Bodie and Doyle disposed of both luggage and their unfamiliarity with the room, sharp eyes taking in every detail, from means of possible ingress to quality of reading material, from taste in décor to the ultra modernity of the sound system.

"I'm Doyle and I'll have a gin and tonic, if you have it," Doyle said as he walked quickly and quietly from his scan of Ms. Eubanks' laden *escritoire*. "That's Bodie and he'll have a vodka and orange."

"Oh, I'm sorry, I don't have any orange—would some tonic do? Or perhaps lemonade?"

"I'll just have a whisky, if that's all right with you," Bodie said to Ms. Eubanks even though he was looking, rather pointedly, at Doyle. He reached out quickly, rescuing his glass from the Schweppes bottle. "Plain's fine," he added before she could add any pollution to the whisky, his years working for George Cowley having taught him more than just murder and mayhem.

"And here's yours," Ms. Eubanks said with smile, handing Doyle's glass over, ushering the two men to the sofa, everyone settled smoothly and conversation started before either guest had the chance to make any awkward remarks about the unfortunate Ms. Scrivener.

"Yes, I'm quite sure it must have been a dreadful drive, coming this far out, and in such horrible weather. People usually have considerable difficulty finding us, too—"

"Well, you don't exactly advertise yourselves, do you?" Doyle put in, not overly bothered with good manners and breeding at this time of night and after the welcome they hadn't received. "Our boss, George Cowley, sent us here because there had been some incidents—"

"A tempest in a teapot," Ms. Eubanks snapped, softening politely to add, "or at least that's what Gabrielle calls it. One or two minor events, a possible intruder—certainly nothing worth calling CI5 in for."

"Couldn't agree more," Bodie said, stifling a yawn. "But some people obviously don't agree with us, so here we are. If you could fill us in, starting with why your Ms. Scrivener—"

"Well," Ms. Eubanks rose to her feet, "all in good time. Why don't you gentlemen follow me, I'll show you where you can sleep, and we'll sort all this out in the morning, shall we?"

"Fair enough," Doyle said slowly, picking up the attaché case on the grounds that as Bodie was the one who had dumped all the other stuff there, then Bodie could shift them himself. "We could probably do with a good night's sleep anyway before we do our Sherlock Holmes."

"Yeh, an' who gets to play Watson?" Bodie muttered behind Doyle's back.

It took several corridors and altogether too many stairs, but eventually, they were standing, gaping, at the room that was to be all theirs.

Doyle's expression was a picture—not a pretty one, but certainly worth more than a thousand words.

"Yes, well, I am sorry that we can't offer you better hospitality," Ms. Eubanks said politely as she backed out of the room, "but it was either this or send you off to sleep in one of the dorms, and that really wouldn't do."

"What, afraid we'd rape all the delicate young ladies?" Doyle demanded nastily.

"Don't be silly," Ms. Eubanks replied sharply, halfway out the door, making good her escape as she finished her comment: "We were worried there'd be riots while they fought over who got to rape you first!"

"Look at this place," Bodie said, nearly at a loss for words. "Would you just look at it?"

Stepping forward to sling the attaché case onto the ancient leather chair, Doyle managed to hit his head on the light fixture hanging from the middle of the bowed and stained ceiling. "Christ!" he shouted, loudly enough to disturb their neighbours, always supposing anyone else had been relegated to this particular level of purgatory. "Oh, this is nice," he muttered, flinging himself down onto the bed, wincing at the puff of patchouli that rose from the bedspread. Foul-tempered, sour-mouthed, he glared round the room, taking in all the same, miserable details that Bodie was unhappily cataloguing, everything from the hideous beaten-copper lamp shade that would have shamed the cheapest of curry shops to the garish night-sky paint job on the tallboy. "How long are we going to be stuck here?"

"Too long—and that's if we leave right now." Cautiously, Bodie opened the wardrobe, stepping back hurriedly at the first whiff. "Someone," he said drily, "has a passion for Eastern perfumes. Not to mention," he added, peering inside and fetching out a small plastic bag, "a few herbs and weeds."

"Is that what I think it is?"

"That, my son, depends on whether or not you think this is high-grade hemp."

"Thought so," Doyle replied, face much more cheerful now that they had started uncovering some of the college's dirty washing. "Wonder where she is?"

"The woman whose room this is? Dunno. Down the local nick?"

"Gone off home early for the Christmas holidays?"

Bodie put the attaché case under the small window table, cramming it in behind the fringed shawl hanging down over

the stacks of books, magazines, and pooling clothes. The cracked leather creaked ominously as he sat in the old chair, the back shifting like a seat on an aeroplane, giving far enough and quickly enough that Bodie jumped up with a pretence of casual interest in looking out the dormer window. "Great view of chimney pots," he said, peering round the magenta curtains. "Can't see in a single window, more's the pity."

"Considering what we *have* seen, that might be more a blessing than a pity. Especially for them." Doyle was right behind Bodie now, chin leaning on his partner, trying to see out the window a good enough excuse to permit such physical closeness. He stayed there for a while, far longer than either one of them needed to take in all the minutiae of the view, but it was pleasant to stand together like that, each able to feel the cadence of the other man's breathing, each touched by the other's warmth, by the easy companionship that they had once struggled so hard to attain. Pressed by Doyle's heat, uncomfortably aware of his own growing carnal interest, Bodie shifted, moved away tensely, mouth downturned, mood suddenly out of sorts.

Still at the window, one hand clenched round the tassled edge of the horrible curtains, the other hand sifting through the dropped petals of flowers long-dead in their green vase, Doyle wasn't looking at Bodie when he spoke. "I don't like this," he said, bitterly. "I don't like this one bit."

"Yeh, well, I'll let you be the one to tell Cowley that."

Only, Doyle already had, and had earned them both too intent a stare from their boss, sharp eyes gathering details for a sharper mind, and none of them wanted Cowley to come up with the truth. Not now, hopefully not ever. But at least not until they had come up with some sort of answer themselves.

"Bed's big enough," Bodie suddenly said, ostentatiously casual.

And what was that supposed to mean? Doyle wondered, keeping his eyes focussed on the way the moonlight glis-

tened on wet roof slates, the rain turned to sleet, the draught through the window damp and cold. "Depends on what you were planning to do in it, I suppose."

"All I was planning, Doyle," said very sharply, with that thin edge of hurt that was slowly widening into a wedge driving them apart, "all I was fucking planning on doing was getting some kip, all right? Is that okay? You don't mind if—"

A heavy sigh, the audible sound of Bodie reining in his temper. "Sorry. Bit tired, bit worked up..."

Not too long ago, they hadn't needed to explain themselves to each other.

"What I meant was this bed's bigger than you'd expect from a college room, isn't it? Safe enough for us to share..."

Was it?

Was that something either one of them believed for an instant?

"Just as well, because I'm not sleeping on the fucking floor."

A pause, even more laden than the silences that had haunted them all the way here.

"What d'you think of the ones we've met so far?"

"Not a lot, and not enough to have any idea what the hell's going on."

Doyle's back a pillar of tension, Bodie kept as far from him as he could, treading carefully, literally and figuratively, his own anger too close to the surface to risk adding Doyle's temper to the fire. Stretching, he was able to get the case out from where he'd shoved it, when he'd thought it was going to be as simple as pretending nothing had changed between them and then off to sleep, the problems of the job and their relationship postponed until morning when they would both be awake and less inclined to bite each other's head off.

But the tension in the room was too thick, too distracting, his own moodiness feeding off and feeding Doyle's, their awareness of each other the threatening prickle of a sharp knife against soft skin.

The stench of patchouli was getting to him, so Bodie hauled the bedspread off, chucking it into the wardrobe on top of the small bag of drugs they should at least have discussed. The bed wasn't too bad now, and he sat cross-legged on it, back against the wall, and divided his unwilling attention evenly between the files in the attaché case and the grim figure staring out the window at the cold night beyond.



FOUR

VERY late, Bodie knew as he snapped awake, instinct keeping his body perfectly still, his breathing even and sleepy. Or very early, depending on how you looked at it, he thought, relaxing when his memory caught up with his instincts and told him where he was, then tensing as he remembered just who had come into bed beside him. Not that there was any contact, oh, no, of course not, never that. Not something they dared, not something either one of them was keen on chancing. Doyle had obviously drawn the curtain before he'd come to bed, for there was almost no light coming in through the window, and only the faintest chink of lesser darkness around the door itself.

It was too quiet, lacking even the normal sounds of an old building at night, no cars driving in the distance, no planes jetting off overhead. All Bodie could hear was his own heart and his own breathing, and the equally false calm of his partner. Doyle wasn't asleep, no closer to it than Bodie was, but they were both lying here side by side in the dark, pretending like teenagers scared to make the first move.

"Did I ever tell you about my first time?" Bodie whispered into the dark cold, his loneliness seeking Doyle's warmth.

"Fiona," Doyle replied without whispering, and there was a hunger in his voice that they would both do well to starve.

But Bodie couldn't, too close to that hunger himself, too afraid of what would happen if he tried to deny all of this completely. Best to throw it a few scraps, keep it happy, stop it from becoming a ravening need that could destroy them both.

"Not Fiona."

For a long time, it seemed as if Doyle would deny them both, forcing them to a straight and narrow that was more of a tightrope without a safety net.

Then Doyle shifted uneasily, and his foot almost brushed against Bodie's. "Your first fella?" Doyle asked, whispering now as Bodie had, drawing the darkness and the quiet around them like a cocoon.

"Yeh. His name was David Johnston, but we all called him Dirty Davey because he'd raise the mast as soon as he looked at you. Course, he always had an excuse, blamed it on some girl walking past, or if it was just all us blokes, he'd say he was thinking about Cathy O'Rourke or Sheila Thornwood."

"Until..."

"Can't even remember how it happened," Bodie whispered, trying to dredge up long-forgotten details, only the important moments of that night still bright in his memory. "However we wangled it, I ended up staying at his house one weekend. His ma was in hospital having another baby I think, or off seeing her mother or something. His dad worked nights down the shipping yard, and always left before the pubs shut so's he could have a pint or two with his mates before they went in."

Lying beside him in the dark, Doyle shifted again, and the unpleasant tension had changed, sliding quickly to heat, sexual desire building between them. "Did you two share a bed like this?"

"Nah, Davey wouldn't be caught dead in patchouli. But that night..." He hesitated, knowing this was a stupid idea, but unable to resist it, the need coiling between them threatening to slip out of his control. Beside him, Doyle wasn't fidgeting, wasn't moving at all, was a listening stillness that called

to Bodie, wanted him to conjure up these memories for both of them. "That night though, we were in his bed, just a single, and there wasn't enough room, so we were lying right beside each other, you know, and I could feel him all down my side."

Not like now, Doyle thought, shifting slightly farther away, shoving his hands behind his head so that he wouldn't touch Bodie, or himself, his fingers clenching in his own hair, his eyes squeezing shut as he pictured Bodie—Christ, what age had he been? Didn't matter, wasn't thinking about him then, wasn't thinking about Bodie's old friend, thinking about himself, and Bodie, as they were now, lying together, doing the things Bodie was talking about.

"Davey was complaining his bum was half out the bed, so he got me to lie on my side, and then he curled up behind me, getting closer and closer, until he was right up against me."

"Was he hard?" Doyle asked, voice betraying him even while his hands stayed resolutely behind his head and out of temptation's way. "Go on, Bodie, tell me—was he hard, pressing into you?"

"Yeh," Bodie said quietly, his cock stirring along his thigh, arousal beginning its heavy pulse through him. Stupid, doing this, he told himself, incredibly fucking stupid. "Listen, Ray, I'm sorry, I shouldn't've started this—"

"Why not? It's not as if it's the first time we've told each other what we've been up to."

"Yeh, but..."

"It's not even as if it's the first time we've let on what we get up to with other blokes, is it?"

"But it's the first time we've done it lying together in bed."

The words fell between them, conjuring up all their fears and all the dangers growing between them. "Afraid I'll have designs on your virtue?" Doyle snapped, and could hear how his own hurts and fears made him sound vicious, had no time now to worry about Bodie's delicate sensibilities. The loneliness was eating at him again, and he clenched his hands

into hurtful fists, his hair tugged too tightly, but that was better than doing what he wanted to: stretching his hands out to Bodie, touching soft skin, or the roughness of his jaw, or the hardness of his cock. Oh, God, those were the things he wanted to do, not lie here like a maiden aunt with his legs crossed.

"We've already talked about this, Ray," Bodie answered eventually, strained, grappling with needs and fears of his own. "We can't fuck, it'd be the stupidest fucking thing—"

Oh, yes, they had discussed fucking, had discussed the joys and risks of two partners having sex, had weighed the gains and losses, the advantages and disadvantages, all very clear, very coherent, very reasonable. Then. Now... Now, things had changed, and there was more than sex lurking, more than the simple appetites of the flesh.

"If it was only sex," Doyle began, and then stopped, not wanting to actually put this encroaching fear into words.

Bodie said nothing for one, two, three, four heartbeats, and then he cleared his throat, the sound unpleasantly loud, his voice melodic and quiet, the roots of his childhood coming through more than he usually allowed. "So there we were lying there like that," he said, and knew that Doyle would know that he was trying to make it all just sex again, turn it into lust and libidinous shenanigans, denying what it might yet prove to be. "Me and Davey, and we didn't have any pyjamas on, only our underwear. And I could feel him inching closer, and I knew I should move away or say something—I mean, I knew queers liked that sort of thing and we weren't supposed to, but I wanted him there."

"I know," Doyle said quietly, that topic broached between them a long time ago now, back in the first weeks and months when common sense had ruled and they'd accepted non-fraternisation and no sex. It was strange to think of himself as ever being so young, and so naive, and so blind. "First time I did it with a bloke, I was blotto, didn't even remember the details, just woke up the next morning and knew."

"And felt as if everyone who looked at you knew as well, right?"

Walking down his street, facing his mum and his dad, his sister making her usual comments, then school, and all his mates, but not the bloke he'd met the night before—

"That first time," Bodie continued, "we didn't even know what we were supposed to do. I mean, we'd *heard* what blokes did with each other, but we didn't believe it, did we? Stick your prick up someone's bum? Let *him* do that to *you*? That night, we just pretended we didn't have enough room, so we had to lie on our sides—"

"Facing each other?"

"Course. At that age, the only thing you're interested in is your prick, right? Don't know about the other bits—"

"What turns you on, eh, Bodie?" Doyle asked suddenly, going farther than they usually did, taking it beyond distant sexual experiences or last night's conquest into what they liked, what they wanted. What Bodie would want Doyle to do if they should let themselves be that stupid. A couple of months ago, Bodie standing sleepy-eyed beside the car, the day's job forgotten, Doyle teasing and saying 'you look well-fucked' and Bodie, oh, Bodie, with that expression on his face, so sated, his mouth lush, saying, 'better than that. Well-sucked,' and Doyle going home hours later to his own flat and his own imagination, right hand blurring— "Apart from being sucked."

Bodie wriggled under the covers, bending his leg to tent the covers, hiding his erection, removing the temptation to rub his cock against the smooth cotton sheet. He'd said too much already, Doyle's turn not to reveal himself, keep the balance between them. "I've never seen anyone turn on as quick as you do," he murmured, mind supplying a cavalcade of images. "What gets you going?"

"Me?" Listening to you talk about what you've done, Doyle thought, but was too sensible to say. "Having someone work on my tits. Feeling a woman round me, all wet."

A pause, both of them knowing what else Doyle liked, arousal rising between them as they waited for the words to go with the pictures in their minds.

"Fucking," Doyle near-whispered, and there was a sound like a sigh from Bodie, and the murmur of skin moving against skin, and now Doyle was talking, his voice a web of desire. "Shoving my cock into... Shoving my cock into some bloke's arse, listening to him as it goes in, all the way, right up inside—" They should push the fantasies back, deny them, but there were other needs crowding the purely sexual, pushing the sex forward, more insistent, lust loud enough to drown out the other unspoken needs. "I think about you like that, Bodie. Spread under me, split open on my cock—"

"On my back?"

"Yeh, on your back, or me on my back and you in me, your cock right up inside me and your balls slapping my arse every time you plough me—"

A mad scramble, and Bodie was a blur of white in the dark room, clambering over Doyle, elbows and knees and feet digging into his partner, tracksuit trousers grabbed from his holdall, his erection sticking out straight from the black hair of his groin, tapping against his belly as he bent to pull the trousers on, and then hidden behind dull grey stretch cotton, the white of his back seen too briefly in the opening door, and then all was darkness again, and Doyle lay in the dark of someone else's bedroom, his hand closing into a fist around his cock, blankets shoved out of the way, other hand tugging gently at his balls as his mind and memory gave him Bodie, and he gave himself over into lonely, bitter pleasure.

DOYLE had been waiting for that flare of light, lay still, apparently undisturbed, for in sleep there could be no questions and if there were no questions, then there could be no answers. The bed dipped as Bodie climbed carefully back

in to the space Doyle had left for him, Bodie as quiet as a mouse, conniving with Doyle to keep this all unspoken.

Once more, lying side by side, like Bodie and Davey all those years ago. Lust spent, but desire unfulfilled, still gnawing them like hunger. Best, surely, to pretend that all the needs were just sex, libidos gone mad, the natural outgrowth of two healthy men in an unhealthy job. Excuses, excuses, there were excuses for them everywhere. And not one that Doyle could use to explain away what he might have done, what might have happened—what he surely had done and what surely had happened, if only he had the courage or insanity to admit it.

Side by side. Untouching. Awake, alone for all their closeness, unsatisfied for all their sexual play.

One of these days, Bodie thought, going no farther. One of these days...

The body beside him shifted, Doyle restless and uneasy. A month, two months ago, Bodie would have moaned at him, complained and thumped him, but now he kept his mouth firmly shut and his hands firmly at his sides. But one of these days, soon, they wouldn't be able to keep on pretending, and then what the hell would happen?

Keep cool. Keep a distance. Don't get involved...

Quickly, quickly enough to be nothing but his imagination, Doyle moved again, and there was the touch, gone too soon, of lips against his own, but then Doyle was lying still and silent as if asleep, and Bodie could do nothing but lie there and wonder, and think about the sweetness of those lips touching his.



FIVE

GRITTY

eyed, Bodie wished to hell he'd had the drink that went with feeling this awful this early. This wasn't even a hangover from a pleasantly debauched night, just the aches and pains of a too-soft bed and the gippy stomach worry always gave him. Lovely. Adding insult to injury, he was cold, his bladder was about to explode, and worst of all, he had no idea where Doyle was.

Grumbling, Bodie dragged himself out of bed, skin flinching from the cold, spine complaining about the mattress, bladder threatening embarrassment at any second. Shivering, he tossed some clothes on, a quick look around the room showing that Doyle had put the files deep inside the wardrobe, had put on a clean shirt and had taken his shaving gear off with him, presumably to breakfast. He was still grumbling as he took care of all the necessary evils of morning, and it was with jaundiced eye that he stared at his reflection in the mirror, the pre-War bathroom a great white cavern behind him. Horrible place, this, Bodie decided, clattering down the worn stairs, the walls either hideous institutional green or dark and pitted wood. Obviously, it wasn't only the portico that was pseudo-Gothic, the corridors long and dark and festooned with portraits and busts and locked doors.

Finally on the ground floor, following his nose, he found the small refectory that he assumed was reserved for senior

staff and honoured guests—which he supposed meant he and Doyle might be having their breakfast out in the scullery. The door, as clichéd as any Hammer horror film, creaked as he opened it, and Bodie stepped into a room of excessive heat and interrogating eyes.

"Morning," he said breezily, resisting the temptation to cover his balls with protective hands—Christ, he thought, half of them look as if they want to eat me alive, and the other half just look as if they want to bite my balls off! Whistling insouciantly, he winked at those still staring, then made free with the chafing dishes so copiously lined up on the monolithic sideboard, piling his plate high with a manly feast of enough protein to feed an elephant and enough cholesterol to fell an army.

"Mind if I sit here?" he asked, smiling cheerfully as he sat down without waiting for a response from a sour-faced glower. "Morning," he said again, nodding pleasantly at several people.

He was met with, at best, polite blankness, and at worst, open hostility.

Sod it, he thought, already in a bad mood just thinking about what was probably going through Doyle's head and what was probably going to be his lot in life when he finally caught up with his obstreperous partner. Ignoring the lot of them, he turned his attention to his breakfast, refusing to be put off either by the lukewarm temperature of the food or the sub-zero measure of his welcome.

"Mr. Bodie, isn't it?" someone asked pleasantly from half-way down the table.

Bodie gulped down his mouthful of sausage and tomato, managing not to choke. "Just Bodie," he corrected, having a good look at the woman who was making the effort to be nice. "No mister about it."

"Oh," she said as if he had made some revelation. "You must be one of those men who hates all his first names, so he goes only by his last name to prevent any attempted encroachment

of intimacy requiring him to offer someone the liberty of his forename."

Well, that was one way of putting it. "Only three names," he said, regaining enough manners to neither cram his mouth with food nor stare rudely the way half his companions were. "Just plain Bodie's easiest. And you are Ms.?"

"Oh, no Ms.," she told him, eyes twinkling, "just plain Vivienne's easiest. I must say," she added with a decorous glance at some of the thunderous faces round the table, "you're really not what we were expecting."

That was something Bodie had more or less worked out for himself. "Bit on the butch side?"

"Well, certainly a touch on the masculine side," she said with a less than kind look at one very butch colleague who was masticating her breakfast with a pointed pleasure that made Bodie want to cross his legs. "The Warden said that Sir David had promised us someone suitable to investigate this whole sorry business—"

"Nothing sorry about it," one slightly timorous voice interrupted. "Ms. Scrivener says that those and such as those deserve every last letter—"

"MacIn!" a woman at the head of the table called. "How can you say such a thing—even if the Warden said it first?"

There hadn't been any photos in the file, but the speaker had to be Ms. Gabrielle Horne, whose hair was far too red ever to be called sandy, and wouldn't Cowley be jealous of a head of hair like that? "So not everyone in the college disagrees with these letters then, do they?"

"Well, of course they do," Ms. Eubanks said, and Bodie kicked himself for slacking off so much that he hadn't even noticed the Secretary sitting there. "While some people might agree with some of the *sentiments* expressed, surely not one of us can agree with sending such vile, anonymous letters to our valued colleagues?"

Pouring oil on troubled waters never did help much, but it was always interesting to watch the end results.

"Well," the woman who had been chewing with such avacious pleasure announced, "if *he* is going to join us for breakfast, then I believe I have lost my appetite." She rose to her feet, with only MacIn following her. "I have better things to do with my time than sit here ogling a pretty, brainless boy."

Bodie restrained the urge to do his cross-eyed, brain-dead moron routine, finding much better revenge in smiling sweetly and rising with old-fashioned and insulting courtesy. "Good morning, miss," he said politely, trying to put a name from the file list to the face, but all he could think was how closely her head resembled an over-ripe melon.

The door shut behind the two departing women with as near a slam as ever indulged in by those who think themselves well-bred.

The atmosphere immediately thawed, and Bodie relaxed back in his seat, enjoying the stares now that they ranged from the merely curious to the outright admiring. There was one woman over there, the intense one, that he thought would be keen on a bit of mutual sexual satisfaction. Should keep that in mind, next time he got it into his head to talk to Doyle the way he had last night—

He was not going to think about that, not right now. There was a job that needed to be done, concentrate on that, he told himself, because they couldn't let any of this mess between them ruin them on the job. "You know, our information doesn't mention anyone by the name of MacIn," he mentioned casually to Ms. Horne.

"Oh, that's not her real name," the Bursar replied round a mouthful of thickly marmaladed toast. "One of our old students, an American, gave her that as a nickname. You know, short for MacIntosh, because the American claimed she didn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain."

Judging by MacIn's performances last night with Ms. Scrivener and this morning as Ms. Scrivener's mouthpiece, Bodie was inclined to agree with the absent Yank.

"I'll go through your list with you after breakfast if you want," the Bursar added, "you know, give you faces to go with the names, fill you in a little on the various idiosyncrasies of the group."

"Yes, and your colleague is coming to my office at ten sharp," said Ms. Eubanks, "so I can show you all the letters and other—things that have been such a bother to us all."

"Fair enough," Bodie said, thinking that that meant Doyle had been busy already, and at least he knew where his partner would be in an hour or so. "Why don't we finish our coffee in your study and go over the list, Ms. Horne?" Bodie said as he got to his feet, making it awkward for the Bursar to disagree.

"Oh, of course, I'll just get a tray—"

Five minutes later, Bodie had been sent back upstairs to get his files, had been laden with files and tray, had a photo album precariously balanced on top of the tea cosy, and was hurrying after the blithely unencumbered Bursar. She, Bodie decided, had been taking lessons from Doyle.



SIX

TEN, on the dot, and he was sitting not in the Secretary's office—too busy, she had said, people dropping in at any old time and without a word of warning—but in her small, bright sitting-room, the heat blasting out from old-fashioned steam radiators, this room even hotter than the rest of the college. Apart from the attic corridor where he and Doyle had been exiled, this whole building was like an oven, and if it weren't for his gun, Bodie would have his jacket off in a second. And if it weren't for modesty and devouring eyes, he'd have his polo neck off just as quick.

From the other side of the door came the sound of someone singing the theme song from the musical *Annie*, then a clattering of tea things and a knock. Without waiting for permission, the intruder shoved the door open and came in, almost bowed under the weight of a tray that was more like afternoon tea than elevenses.

"Good morning, how nice to meet you, I'm the Infirmarian," the woman said all in one breath, her rather shy eyes not quite meeting Bodie's, although that may have been less shyness and more interest in the very appealing male body on such fine display. "Your *friend* will be along any second now, he was just talking to the Scouts."

Scouts? Bodie wondered for a second—oh, yeh, another one of those stupid traditions, right up there with Warden

and Infirmary. Scouts were what they still called the servants, even though the last place Bodie had ever even come across that was in a crime novel written in the '30s. Scouts, he sneered to himself, eyes widening at the measured manners of a tea-pouring that would do the Japanese proud. This place is a fucking time-warp. He should have brought his monocle and his pipe and walked around saying pip-pip and tally-ho.

And then Doyle walked in, and every last breath of a bygone era was banished, completely eradicated by the way Doyle walked, his clothes—the way he looked at Bodie.

"One can always tell a former policeman," Ms. Eubanks said, coming through from her office and handing Doyle a brimming cup. "They always show up the instant tea is poured. Tell me, Bodie, were you also in the police before you joined CI5?"

"No, I'm ex-Army."

"Ex-SAS," Doyle said, eyes glinting with amusement as that announcement had its usual effect.

"The SAS?"

If she hadn't been such a lady, Ms. Eubanks would have whistled, she was so impressed.

"Ex-SAS, and I was only a sergeant."

"Yes, but to achieve such a rank in the SAS—"

"Isn't half as exciting as it sounds."

"Oh, go on, stop being so modest," Doyle said, egging the two women on, enjoying Bodie's discomfiture.

But it wasn't malicious, it was just Doyle's customary participation in their endless game of landing the other one right in it, and Bodie felt some of the tension ease from him. Nothing had changed then. They were still exactly the way they had been, still safe, that kiss hadn't meant anything—

"Oh, stop, Ray," the Infirmary said, "you're making poor Bodie blush."

Yes, but not for the reason they thought. He shouldn't think about Doyle kissing him, shouldn't think about them both ending up so turned on like that—shouldn't think about it

here, not with two bright and bright-eyed women politely and pointedly not looking at his crotch, and Doyle staring at him there like a starving man at a banquet.

"About those letters..."

"Oh, yes, would you fetch them for me, Senga?"

The Infirmary brought a thick manila envelope over, the sort of envelope usually used to send either important exam results or dirty books. This one contained filthy letters and obscene caricatures, the letters made from words clipped from newspapers—obviously newspapers containing the sort of sleazy story that had made the *News of the World* infamous—and stuck onto the cheapest scratch paper, a children's scribble pad by the looks of it. The sketches were on the same paper, done with either thick, heavy drawing pencils or black felt-tipped pens, all of them drawings of nude women with exaggerated attributes doing wicked or sexually sadistic things to other women cloaked in traditional University gowns.

"Do any of the staff still wear teachers' gowns like these?" Doyle asked.

"Oh, yes, we all do, even those of us who don't teach." Ms. Eubanks went on, answering Doyle's look of enquiry: "We're all Fellows of this college—"

"Surprised they use a word like that," Bodie muttered, not quite quietly enough.

"Don't let Scrivener and MacIn and the others give you the wrong idea, we're not all misandrists here, you know," the Infirmary told them so sincerely it was hard to believe her but for the way she was willingly taking Doyle's hand so nicely. "Some of us are even married."

"In fact, that's why we had to put both of you in that dreadful room—Betty's in Bath, you see, and as this is the last week of term, with Christmas plays and chorales and the prize ceremony, something every single night. All the staff live in for the week, to save them the hazards of driving here in nasty weather."

"And this way," the Infirmarian added tartly, "if it snows, then we'll all be snowed in, not stuck miles from work."

"Yes, it's a good system, isn't it?" the Secretary said with a smile. "In fact, it backfires against us only when we have added guests and nowhere safe to put you."

"Nice of her to protect our virtue," Bodie whispered to Doyle, pretending to press close to him just to show him a particularly nasty letter.

"At least some of us have some virtue left," Doyle said, then added, louder: "Now you say half the staff have received either one of these drawings or a letter, Ms. Eubanks?"

"Half the staff and three of the senior students, I'm sorry to say."

"And they started—when?"

"About three months ago."

"Three months? You weren't exactly in a hurry to do anything about this, were you?"

"Mr. Doyle, you must understand that we are a community here, much like a closely-knit family. When a problem arises, we try to sort it out amongst ourselves."

"So what made you change your minds?" Bodie put in before Doyle could ask the same question with even less tact.

Neither man missed the look that passed between the Secretary and the Infirmarian. "I suppose we really must show them, mustn't we?"

"Oh, come on, we all knew that we would have to. Where is it?"

"My top drawer. Here, you'll need the key."

A minute or two later, and the Infirmarian was handing Doyle a slender manila envelope, sealed and sellotaped.

Doyle opened it, raised his eyebrows and passed the picture to Bodie. No worse than a lot they'd seen, but not the kind of pornography you expected to come across in a prim and old-fashioned ladies' college.

"Someone really has it in for Sir David's daughter, haven't they?"

"That's putting it mildly," Bodie said, turning the picture this way and that, checking to see where the naked and mutilated bodies had been cut from a magazine and where the pasted-on heads had been cut from snapshots. "Do you know when the photographs were taken?"

"Bodie! Really—"

"I think he meant the snapshots of Lindsay Styles, not these other ones."

"Of course, I'm sorry, it's just—well, these are rather upsetting. Not for the nudity or even the graphic sex, but the way whoever did this drew on them, to make them appear so..."

"Mutilated," Bodie supplied absently. "This one," he pointed to one of the faces, "must've been taken recently and out-of-doors, because look, you can just see a tiny bit of a branch there, looks like part of her hair at first, but that looks like a bare branch, and her hair's been blowing in the wind—"

"Then it must have been that day down at the river. We all went down for a sort of lark, you know, picnicking on the bank in defiance of winter, that sort of thing. We were all freezing—"

"Yes, and my infirmary was overflowing with cold and flu cases before the week was over."

"So most of the staff went? Everyone who's received one of these?"

Ms. Eubanks nodded, and Doyle continued: "Who was taking the photographs?"

Silence, and very speaking glances passed between the two women.

"You'll have to tell us if you want us to put a stop to this," Bodie said kindly, making sure his eyes were dark and dangerous, playing the same game he did whenever Cowley needed an intimidating heavy.

"There's no need to look at me like that, young man. I have every intention of telling you, but I do not have to enjoy the process. Here," she handed him a small piece of folded paper, "you'll find the necessary names on here."

"You know, there's something I'm wondering about," Doyle said slowly, sounding casual enough that those who knew him were waiting to see when the sharp tongue would draw blood. "Sir David's very worried about his daughter, these papers are pretty nasty, but not one of you seems to be taking this very seriously. And we haven't seen hide nor hair of Ms. Lindsay Styles since we came here."

"Ah. Yes, well..."

There was a sudden and fortuitous knock at the door, Ms. Horne bursting in, all enthusiasm and hasty speech. "Oh, there you are, Ms. Eubanks, I've been looking all over for you. Hello, Senga, hello gentlemen, you'll excuse Ms. Eubanks and Senga for a minute, won't you? But there's been a bit of a crisis—"

The three women started moving out of the room with considerable and suspicious haste.

"Hang on, just a minute," Bodie interrupted smoothly, getting to the door before they could, blocking them with every appearance of happenstance, with a good heavy dose of threat underlying it. "What crisis?"

"Oh—em, well..."

"I'm sure you gentlemen understand," the Infirmarian said politely, subtly trying to edge round Bodie, who was moving round with her, turning this into an absurd dance. "An all-women's college, delicate female subjects, delicate female sensibilities, problems of a certain nature..."

"Of course we understand," Doyle interposed, shoving Bodie unceremoniously out of the way. "We can finish our chat later."

"Yes, yes, of course, we'll do that, in fact, we shall look forward to that, shan't we?" Ms. Eubanks said, garnering fervent and wholly insincere nods from the other two women.

"Absolutely," Ms. Horne added, taking the time for a quick look at Bodie's trousers.

"No doubt about it," the Infirmarian added, taking the time for a quick grope, escaping before Bodie could say another word.

"Oh, go on, Bodie, let them go," Doyle said tiredly, plonking himself down on the comfortable chintz sofa, helping himself to another cup of tea to replace the one gone cold. "Come on, have a cuppa. They must've known you were coming after all—see? A whole plate of chocolate swiss rolls, and all for you."

"Ray, I don't believe you. It was dead bloody obvious they had that Horne woman standing outside listening so she could come to the rescue, and you just let them—"

"Look, Bodie, you saw those letters, and you saw those pictures, and I've done a bit of prowling around already this morning. One thing I can tell you for nothing, mate, and that's that almost everyone I've met here isn't the least bit worried about any of this, and the only ones that *are* worried are the frustrated spinster types who'd have a canary over any one of the words in these bloody letters. Nah," Doyle said, stretching, legs straight out in front of him, jeans pulled tight across his crotch, T-shirt taut across his chest, Bodie's body reacting helplessly to the sight, "whatever's going on here's nothing to worry about, and I'll bet you a pound to a penny that our Mses. Eubanks and Horne and Penniwhistle and Cowrie—they know who's behind all this, and the only reason we're here is that loony Ms. Scrivener put the wind up Sir David."

"Sounds nice," Bodie mumbled, mouth overflowing with swiss roll, "but what about the delightful Ms. Lindsay Styles?"

"Our Ms. Styles," Doyle said and paused, just until Bodie had another too-large mouthful of cake, "is off the Quad, doing something with person or persons unknown. In other words, she's off shagging her boyfriend!"

Bodie choked, predictably and well.

"Yeh, good, innit? Prissy missy has a boyfriend, one of these dried up old sticks has got her knickers in a twist over it, and she's gone off the deep end a bit."

"And these women know who it is—"

"Which is why they obviously aren't the least bit worried, and why they're bending over backwards to make it look like

they're co-operating, when all they're doing is muddying the evidence."

"Yeh, I thought the glue was still a bit damp on some of those letters."

"And this list of people who had cameras at that picnic—you ever heard of fourteen women all taking a camera to the same picnic?"

"Fourteen? And how many did they say had received the letters?"

"Exactly. How much d'you want to bet the only one that's had a letter is Sir David's daughter?"

"So we've been sent out here, to the back of beyond—for nothing? Oh, that's great, that's just fan-fucking-tastic, that is. Stuck here for god knows how long—"

"Just till Friday afternoon, when term's over and they all start going home. We'll be out of here by Saturday morning at the latest. And before you start complaining, you think about this, Bodie. Who's going to be shooting at us here? Who's going to be trying to kill either one of us, eh? And not only that, no filing, no archives, no hanging about on stand-by, no dragging round Cowley's club—nothing."

"Just—"

Doyle was on his feet, coming closer to Bodie, bearing down on him, and Bodie couldn't think of anything but the fact that Doyle had kissed him last night, right there, on the lips, and Doyle's mouth was coming closer again.

"Think about it, Bodie," Doyle said very gently, kneeling on the floor in front of his partner, his strong hands painfully tight where they gripped Bodie's knees. "You know the way we've been going, you know how close we've come to fucking the job up royally. We've been that close to getting one of us done in, and we've never had a second to stop and think about it or sort it out."

"But stuck out here, like this—"

"Nearly a week, Bodie. Just you and me, for nearly a week."

It sounded more a threat than a promise. Sorting 'this' out, just the two of them, no job to distract them, no Cowley to send them haring off to save the world, just a non-existent case to keep an old man happy, and the two of them.

Oh, yes, definitely a threat.

"You think about it," Doyle repeated, very softly, and his hand was terribly, frighteningly gentle as he caressed Bodie's cheek and then was gone.



SEVEN

"SO THERE you are,"

Doyle called, coming up behind Bodie, his footsteps crunching across grass that was beginning to frost as the afternoon drew to a cold end. "I've been looking for you."

I'll just bet you have, Bodie thought unkindly, refusing to be moved by the warmth of Doyle's smile or the pulse of arousal in his own body. "What d'you need me for?"

"Ah, well, haven't worked that out yet," Doyle replied serenely, unnerving Bodie all the more. "Not all of it, at any rate. But there's something I wanted to show you, so come here, get in out of the cold, and come and look at this."

"Where are we going?" Bodie complained, breath pluming in the air as he hurried after Doyle, shivering until he stepped inside the hothouse atmosphere of the college. "Fucking hell," he muttered, pulling his jacket off, not giving a damn who saw his gun, "they must spend a fortune on heating in this place."

"According to the Bursar, it's some lunatic endowment, something about some undergrad who was permanently freezing when she was here before the First World War, left them a pile of money that had to be used to heat the place. According to the Bursar, they're still running the electricity on the *interest* of the endowment—but they can't afford decent language equipment, because they don't have any loose endowments for equipment running around."

"But they can afford to keep this place like a bloody sauna. Bunch of fucking lunatics, if you ask me."

"If that's what you think now, you just wait until you see what's in the formal refectory."

What was in the formal refectory, as far as Bodie could tell, was half the female population of the world, and all of them looking at him and Doyle. A pleasant experience, normally, but he felt as if he'd just walked in stark naked and farting, the way they were all staring at him. Every step he took felt like he'd committed yet another ultimate *faux pas*, and he only felt even more unmanned when he realised that not one of the ones staring at him in such profound disgust was sparing so much as a glance at his exposed gun. No, all that disgust and distrust was reserved for yours truly, and if it hadn't been for Doyle dragging him along forcibly, Bodie would have taken his threatened balls and run.

"Come on, Bodie, come *on*. You can eye the local talent later..."

If that's what Doyle thought he was doing, then Doyle needed his eyes examined.

For some reason, Doyle had dragged them to the foot of a scaffold, and was standing there, with all the anticipation of a cat presenting its people with a half-chewed bird. "Well? What d'you think of that, then?"

Behind him, making his skin prickle, Bodie could hear the low murmur of all those female voices, and was willing to bet that every single one of them was cataloguing his charms, either for the enjoyment thereof, or the disposal thereof. Casually, Bodie edged closer to Doyle, and put his jacket on—his nice, long jacket that hid a multitude of sins. "Oh, very nice," he said sarcastically, one hand tapping the shiny silver scaffolding tubing. "Fact is, I've never seen such a lovely scaffold—"

"You're a right berk, you know that, don't you, Bodie? Not the scaffolding, you prat, the painting."

What painting? Bodie looked up, and up, to where ancient timbers vaulted to form a ceiling, and the side wall ended

in an arch. And there, in the arch, was the reason Doyle had made him run this gauntlet of talking, pointing females.

"It's Prometheus," Doyle was telling him. "Some artist called Orozco, came over here one year, and landed them with this when they asked him for a Greek mythological theme, apparently."

"Prometheus, eh?" Bodie stared at it, making sure it wasn't just a trick of the light or the funny angle they were seeing it from, or the reason why someone had built a scaffolding up to it. "Well, it's certainly Prometheus Unbound, innit?"

"More Prometheus unbalanced."

"Poor bugger," Bodie muttered. "Up there, stark naked in all his glory, and they've gone and painted all his glorious bits out."

"Crying shame, isn't it?"

Bodie knew that tone of voice. "Raymond Doyle, don't you dare—"

"Dare, Bodie?" Doyle said, laughing at Bodie, working very hard to rekindle the easy, comfortable friendship between them. "Did you just dare me?"

"No, I fucking well did not," Bodie hissed, grabbing Doyle and rushing him out of there, before either Doyle could do something that would have Cowley breathing down their necks for a year and just before any one of those ever-near-ing voices could actually get close enough to either clutch or damage. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded once they were in the corridor and on their own. "You keep your hands off him—"

"Why?" Doyle asked sharply, eyes burning into Bodie. "You jealous?"

Where the hell had that come from? A minute ago, in there, and Doyle had seemed just like his old self before they had ever admitted that they were both willing to have it off with a bloke if the situation presented itself. Certainly an echo of the old friendship that had existed before it had got to the point where Bodie was having a hell of a time pretending it

was only coiling sexual awareness between them, that there was nothing there but a lust they'd be best advised not to act on.

"You are jealous," Doyle said smugly into Bodie's silence.

"Of a fucking painting with no balls and no prick? Don't be so fucking stupid, Doyle."

"Not Prometheus, but it's true, isn't it? Every time I tell you about some bloke—"

"With an imagination like that, you should be a reporter." He stormed off through the door to the garden, letting the door slam behind him, making a point of not holding it open for Doyle, making it abundantly clear that he didn't care where Doyle was or what Doyle did.

Doyle, unfortunately, didn't seem to get the message. "Who are you trying to kid, eh, Bodie? Come on, this is me you're talking to, not fucking McCabe." A bit breathless, lengthening his stride to keep up with Bodie, too focussed on chasing after his partner to notice that it was bloody freezing outside. "You think I don't see the expression on your face? You think I don't know what's going on inside that thick skull of yours?"

Without warning, Bodie whirled round and slammed Doyle up against the nearest wall, tiny flakes of dried-out mortar drifting down like dirty snow. "Oh, you think you're so fucking clever, don't you? Think you know what I'm thinking better than I know it myself, so fucking sure of me, aren't you? Well, Mr. Clever Clogs, what am I thinking now? Go on," he shook Doyle, lightly, like a jacket left in the rain, some part of him wondering why the rest of his brain wasn't in total shock at Doyle's passivity. "Tell me what I'm thinking."

"You're wondering why the fuck I can't leave well enough alone and leave us both in peace."

Oh, nasty that, to challenge someone and find that they can read your mind as casually as the cornflakes package. "Then if you know what I'm thinking, then why don't you just leave it, eh, Ray? Why're you doing this to us?"

"What am I doing? Making us face the facts before Cowley comes and rams them down our throats. I'm not making us *feel* anything, I'm not the one changing things—"

"Are you saying I am? Same old routine, I get the blame for it all—"

"I'm not blaming you—"

"No? But it's not *you* that's making us feel anything, it's not *you* changing things. Oh, Christ," he broke off abruptly, letting go of Doyle before his body could convince his brain that he liked being this close to Doyle regardless of what else was going on. "Why do I even bother?"

With that, Bodie was gone, a fading shadow dimming into the darkness. Mouth tight, Doyle turned and neatly, concisely, slammed his fist into the wall. Oh, he could just imagine his phoned-in report tonight: situation normal, all fucked up.

Dispiritedly, wondering why these things always seemed like such a good idea at the time, Doyle went back into the warmth and the light, and left his partner to calm down in his own good time.

Bodie's own good time was some time after two A.M., Doyle's watch face luminous in the dark. The wind outside was making more noise than Bodie, but Doyle hadn't been asleep, not even the useless, boring files soporific enough to get him to sleep when his whole body was still listening for Bodie. There was the rasp of a zip, the slither of cloth, the clatter of a coat hanger.

"That you?" Doyle asked quietly, and could kick himself for coming up with such a stupid opener. Clever, he congratulated himself acidly, definitely guaranteed to get the sod talking.

"Nah, it's Father Fucking Christmas," Bodie muttered, his voice slurred, limbs unco-ordinated as he struggled his way into bed.

"You've never been drinking, have you?"

"Course I've been drinking. Been drinking with you before, haven't I? Forgotten, have you? Going ga-ga in your old age?"

"Just wondering where the hell you got the booze from tonight."

"Lovely women. Lots and lots of lovely women. Had a drinking game, watched a film—that was when we weren't reading from a book, 'course—an' every time someone said the right word or someone did something—in the book an' in the film, I mean, would be cheating otherwise, wouldn't it?—an' every time, we 'ad to have a drink, an' so we did." Something else, mumbled and muttered so that Doyle couldn't hear it, then: "Lovely women. Lovely booze as well." A huge yawn, and splutterings and snufflings, and then a heavy, warm arm was slung across Doyle, and ninety percent proof breath wafted across Doyle's face. "Lovely Doyle. Lovely, warm, Doyle." Another restless shifting around, until Bodie had managed to arrange himself to his, if not Doyle's, comfort. "Best of all, that's my Ray, innit?"

Bodie snoring in his ear, Doyle wasn't about to fall asleep quickly, so he shoved the drunken lump off onto his own side of the bed and lay there in the dark for a while, remembering how Bodie had felt wrapped around him so affectionately, and thought about what Bodie had said in the garden, as opposed to what Bodie had said with a tongue loosened by drink.

Poor old sod, Doyle thought, curling himself around Bodie, their bodies fitting together comfortably, far more comfortably than they themselves were fitting together these days. But still, Doyle knew, they had to get all this out in the open, clear the air before they ended up getting themselves killed, and all because...

Well, he thought, all because they really cared about each other, really liked each other...

Easier, still, to think that, and to say that it was Bodie who was too scared to look truth in the eye.

So easy, and Doyle couldn't even see himself doing it.



EIGHT

AT LEAST this morning, he had had the night to go with the hangover. Bodie's mouth felt like the bottom of a budgie cage, his head a vast cavern overflowing with all Seven Dwarfs, and his stomach an overworked rollercoaster.

It must have been quite a night, that's all he could say—mainly because the details were still a bit on the fuzzy side. What the hell had he been up to, in a women's college, on the job, for God's sake?

Oh, yeh. The drinking game.

He was going to kill Gabrielle. If Doyle didn't kill him first.

And thinking of Doyle...

There was a vague memory of bony heat pressed all down his back, but a tentative groping provided nothing more interesting than cold sheets, and one half-opened eye showed only a pigsty of a room that had been a dog's dinner before. And light, dull, grey, winter light, but full daylight, nonetheless. Oh, god, Bodie groaned, not really wanting to know the details, but it had to be well after nine, probably more like ten. Or eleven. He looked at his watch. Or a quarter past twelve.

Doyle was going to murder him, slowly and with great imagination.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

Spry as a man of ninety, Bodie dragged himself off to the bathroom, and it wasn't until he'd finished dunking the last of the soap from his hair that he realised he'd forgotten a towel.

Today, obviously, was going to be one of his great successes.

"Need one of these?" a familiar voice asked, and with less sarcasm than Bodie thought he deserved.

"If it's the headman's axe to put me out of my misery, then bring it over."

"Here," Doyle said, pulling the plug and unceremoniously hauling Bodie to his feet, a huge, vaguely pink towel engulfing Bodie in comfort.

There was something very wrong with this picture.

"Aren't you pissed off with me?" Bodie asked, but quietly, so that his head wouldn't fall off.

"What's the point?"

"There's always a point! You only don't bother with people you don't—" He wasn't still so drunk that he'd actually come flat out and say 'care about' like *Women's Weekly*. "With people you don't need to watch your back."

Between the touseled, miserable figure slumped in the bath and the towelled, defensive figure on the bathmat, Doyle's expression had soured. "Yeh, but I don't need you to watch my fucking back, do I?"

Befuddled, thinking less than clearly, Bodie stood on his dignity. "Then I'll have a word with Cowley as soon as—"

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Bodie, I didn't mean that, and why d'you have to run away the minute life starts getting sticky, eh?"

"Who's running away—"

"You are. I'm talking about this stupid college where the Secretary and the Bursar and the other normal ones have got the whole thing under control, and you're talking about out there, and throwing Cowley in my face, you stupid prat. You're a coward, Bodie, you know that? A fucking coward—"

"Oh, so I'm a coward, am I? Oh, that's rich, that just takes the fucking cake. I'm a coward, because just the same as you, I won't come right out and say we've got a fucking problem because we fucking love each other, well, let me just tell you..."

The words trailed off, the dripping of a tap horribly loud, Doyle's eyes too wide, Bodie's mouth gaping. With an audible click of his teeth, he snapped his mouth shut, and Doyle turned away, fiddling with the towel, neither man quite looking at the other, the words, the unspeakable words just sitting there between them.

Not what either of them had expected.

Bodie fingered his jaw, began shaving, aware of his tongue in his mouth, of the way his cheeks moved affecting his mouth as he shaved, the smoothness of his teeth, all perfectly normal, nothing to show that he'd just said the unsayable.

My god, he thought, hand trembling as he rinsed the razor in the steaming water, I said I loved him.

I said he loved me, as well.

And he hasn't said no.

In the mirror, glass and silvering between them, safety barrier of sorts, he looked over his own shoulder, at Doyle, at his partner whose face was pinker than the towel—where the hell had he dug that up from anyway—but look at his face, the way his eyes have narrowed, the unhappy droop to his mouth—

Oh, Christ, Ray hadn't known.

And you had? Bodie asked his reflection, black humour or hysteria bubbling up slowly.

I love him.

And he loves me.

"Right," Doyle said suddenly briskly, "I'll see you down in the refectory for lunch in ten minutes then, shall I?"

Then he was gone, bolting like a startled rabbit, and Bodie finished his shaving and dressing trying very hard not to think at all.



NINE

WHAT with trying to find the toothpaste and tame his hair so that it didn't look like a poor man's Ray Doyle, it was nearly twenty minutes later that Bodie made his way into the refectory. Looming overhead like a Harpy's promise was poor, unmanned Prometheus, body and face twisted in a way that Bodie could more than sympathise with. If someone had cut his balls off, he'd be tied in knots like that himself.

Face a perfect mask of unconcern, Bodie surveyed the roomful of staring women, and didn't once yield to the temptation to check that his fly wasn't undone or that he hadn't grown an extra head somewhere between upstairs and down. Over in the corner, he could see a small knot of women, Scrivener, MacIn, the one whose name he never could remember—the squashed melon, some shrinking violet he vaguely remembered from the night before, pressing him with equal parts politeness and misandry. From behind him came Doyle's voice, misquoting with ghoulish pleasure:

"Hubble, bubble, toil and—"

"Trouble," Bodie supplied to the personification of his own troubles. "You're a bitch, Doyle," he added mildly, relieved as hell that his voice wasn't shaking and his heart didn't leap out of his mouth.

"Bitch? Tut, tut, you'll be showing yourself up as a male chauvinist pig in a minute."

"Spend the morning with our Ms. Scrivener, did you?"

"That obvious, is it?"

"Positively reeking from you. Of course, it could be that you're wearing your balls as earrings..."

"Which is just about how I feel. I tell you—" Doyle took a look at Bodie, and could almost see that beautiful mouth saying again what it had said upstairs.

And which one of them was the coward then?

"Tell you what," he whispered, leaning in far too close for Bodie's comfort and not quite close enough to satisfy the dissatisfied stares bearing down on them, "why don't we just shove the food on a tray and have our lunch outside?"

"It's freezing out there—"

"A tough SAS man like you bleating over the cold? And after all your exploits in the Brecon Beacons?"

What the hell had he said last night? The way Doyle's eyes were glinting with faintly malicious, wholly delighted humour, whatever he'd said, Gabrielle or Vivienne or someone had obviously relayed everything, and in expanded detail. "I was younger and much more foolish then—"

"Never? Well, we're not staying in here with Macbeth's bitches over there, so come on, grab yourself some grub and we'll find somewhere sheltered in the grounds."

"Round the back of the bicycle shed?"

Touch or go there for a minute, but the sudden flare of temper receded, and Doyle was grinning at the joke. "Something like that. That enough food for you?"

Bodie glanced down at his tray: small wonder Doyle had sounded a bit taken aback, there was enough on his tray to feed half the squad.

He didn't want to remind himself of the squad. Just him and Doyle, that's what Ray had said. And a case that wasn't a case at all, the pair of them needed as much as an extra hole in the head. No worries, no dangers, no risks—at least, not from the job.

Refusing to worry the thing to death, Bodie grinned, kicked Doyle and said: "Unlike some undersized shrimps round here, I'm a growing lad. So go on, take me away from all this."

The four disapproving women in the corner were glowering and slowly coming nearer.

"And get a move on before that lot make us match that poor bastard up on the wall."

Through the door, down the path, the wind cutting into them, the day not as cold as expected, if it weren't for the wind. "Round here," Doyle said, following a wall, coming across a nice new gate set into the very old granite blocks.

"You can't go in there!"

Ms. Scrivener, of course. "I swear that woman models herself on Hitler. Yes, Ms. Scrivener?" Doyle added loud enough for her and her cronies to hear only the latter part of his comments. "Is there any reason why we can't use this part of the garden?"

"That's, that's, well, it's a special place..."

"Then it's just the sort of place we're looking for to have our lunch, isn't it?" Bodie replied reasonably, wishing he had his gun on him and a good—or even a bad—excuse for shooting this officious woman.

"No, no, you don't understand," MacIn said, flustered. "It's well, it really is a, a, well, it's *private*, you know," Bodie half expected her to look furtively over her shoulder, but she just made some contorted grimace and nodded significantly towards the gate, "it's for *women*."

"Strange place to have a gynæcologist, don't you think?" Doyle said, so perfectly puzzled. "But as it doesn't seem to be occupied—"

Someone was singing Wagner as if *Die Valkür* were a top forty hit. "Ah, there you are, ladies," the Infirmary said cheerfully as she rounded the corner, "we've been looking all over the place for you. We really need someone to make a decision about where to put the mistletoe up, and we thought

we should really consult you so that we don't put it anywhere inappropriate—"

"Mistletoe?" Ms. Scrivener all but shrieked. "Who authorised mistletoe without consulting me first? My goodness, don't these idiots know what mistletoe can lead to? And amongst ladies too! Really, something will have to be done—"

Grinning happily, once more amusing herself with Wagner, the Infirmarian winked at Bodie and Doyle as she began to follow behind the outraged and irate coterie.

Bodie had just started through the gate when he heard one last comment: "Oh, boys, enjoy yourselves!"

"We will," Doyle called back happily, and stepped into the garden. Only to walk bang smack into Bodie. "Will you shift your carcass, you stupid great wally, stopping there like—"

Doyle had just seen what Bodie had seen.

Friezes, in the classical mode, was probably what the staff told the parents of new students. But the mode in question was Greek, and this was the sort of 'art' usually only seen in the locked pottery room of the Greek section. Everywhere they looked, there were men. And these men more than made up for Prometheus' shortcomings.

Bodie swallowed, hard, and his ears were, fetchingly, pink.

"Christ," Doyle was laughing, plonking himself down on one of the benches, put completely at his ease by Bodie's unease, "small wonder they didn't want us coming in here. Still waters run deep, eh?"

"Bunch of fucking hypocrites if you ask me," Bodie mumbled, starting in on his lunch even while he couldn't take his eyes off the friezes surrounding him. It was only when he spilled his drink he realised he'd canted his head to the side to check that yes, that one there really was doing *that* to that one there...

"Good, innit?" Doyle asked cheerfully, and there was no way he was talking about the food.

"Find out anything else about those letters?" Bodie asked a bit desperately. If he didn't get his mind off what was hap-

pening on those walls, he wouldn't be held responsible for what might happen inside these walls.

"Letters and such started right after the delectable Lindsay—nice girl, by the way, but too good for you, mind—was seen to return in the wee sma' hours of the morning looking well-fucked. She was confronted, not only didn't deny it, but made some remarks along the lines of the only reason Scrivener was objecting was because Scrivener had never had a man and wouldn't know what to do with a real one if he was given her as a gift."

"Our Lindsay's obviously a graduate of the Doyle School of Charm."

"One of our best students, by the sounds of it. Right up your alley."

Not, perhaps, the best thing to say, given their current surroundings. Bodie began to feel positively affectionate towards the unfortunate Prometheus.

"So Ms. Eubanks and her lot know who's been doing all this?"

"Yeh, they've known for months, but they were just going to ignore it till everyone got used to our Ms. Styles, and then one of those bloody letters showed up on Sir David's hall mat, and that was it."

"We were packed off here—"

"Which might not be a bad thing."

Not talking about a few days in academe. Oh, no, talking about what Bodie had said in the bathroom—how romantic can a person get? he thought, smiling to himself—and the fact that neither one of them was doing the macho super-straight stud of the week routine.

"Yeh, might not be too bad at all," Bodie said casually, glancing quickly at Doyle.

Doyle was staring at him. "In fact," Doyle said carefully, "it might be the best thing that ever happened to us."

Bodie's heart was doing some very unnerving things in his chest.

I said we love each other, he thought again, bemused. And he didn't deny it.

"Yeh, it might be not half bad," Bodie finally said, and felt his own face take on the same stupid, fatuous expression as on Doyle's.

"Well, that's it then," Doyle said, still grinning like a loon.

"Yeh, s'pose it is," Bodie agreed. "You know, if I look half as bad as you do, we must look a right pair of twits sitting here."

"Could always do something about that..."

"Could, couldn't we?"

And it was going to happen again, and not in the dark, not in pretence. The two of them, eyes wide open, knowing what they were getting into, scared as hell of the implications, but willing to take the risk. Just thinking about it was enough to make Bodie hard, and out of the corner of his eye, he could see his arousal through his light coloured cords. Sighed, as Doyle's hand closed over him, there, reassuring, adding lust to the potent, terrifying mix of emotions. His own hand traced and caressed Doyle's growing erection, there, where the old jeans were most faded, and Bodie swore he could make out Doyle's every detail. Closer, they leaned in towards each other, their lips parting, breath coming more quickly, almost there—

And the gate squeaked. Loudly, but not as loudly as the 'shh!' and the 'belt up!' and the 'now you've torn it' that came from the other side of the gate.

"Ever felt," Bodie said conversationally, now that his heart had stopped pounding and he had leapt back as far from Doyle as he could get and still be in the same small, walled garden, "like a fucking goldfish in a bowl?"

"Yeh, so let's go and see who the kitty watching us was, right, Bodie?"

There was a frantic scrambling on the other side of the wall, and instants later, they knew they were on their own this time.

They looked at each other. They had almost done it, right here, with people watching...

"Last one back to the room's a rotten egg!" Bodie shouted, and the race was on.

Unfortunately, the race was also soon over, in the form of Ms. Eubanks informing them of a phone call from Cowley, and the knowing looks and speculative whisperings of half the population of the school.

Doyle simply loped along looking as dangerous as ever, but Bodie crossed the refectory with every ounce of dignity he could muster, and a long, long look at Prometheus. As he tried to casually cover his too-slowly fading erection, Bodie looked up at the painting and thought that maybe the poor bugger had the right idea after all.



TEN

QUITE a bit later, Bodie

lying on the faintly patchouli scented bed, his imagination giving him all too many and all too serpentine reasons why a woman who collected books called *Herpetology as a Religious Rite* would also have a very large glass cage right next to a hamster run. Distracting himself was fun, though, thinking about Ray, and what they were going to do.

Speaking of Ray, Bodie would recognise those footsteps anywhere.

Unfortunately, he would also recognise that voice anywhere. It had to be the woman with a head like a melon, and that cold fish she was always lurking with. And there was Doyle, snide, sneering and defensive, not a pleasant combination.

"Yes, yes, of course I understand that it's nothing personal, that Ms. Scrivener has no choice," Doyle was saying, so nicely as to make Bodie's hackles rise.

"It's just that with Betty coming back from Bath..."

That was the cringing little MacIn, and she obviously annoyed Doyle just as much as she did Bodie.

"Yes, I can understand that she'll be needing her room back, and that's fine, we'll manage. Anyway, it's not as if it's for long, is it?"

"Until Friday at least." That was the cold fish.

"And it's going to be frightfully cold." That was the melon head.

Christ, Bodie thought, that makes them sound like a bad lunch. But then, listening to the venom in their voices—nothing personal, though, of course—it was more like food poisoning.

"Actually, we won't be feeling the cold," Doyle, sweet enough to make a dentist recoil.

Dead bloody right we won't, Bodie thought with some satisfaction.

"Because we'll be on Guernsey."

Guernsey?

The door opened, a grim-faced Doyle slipping through before any of Macbeth's extras could haunt him any farther.

"Guernsey?" Bodie said. "Guernsey? When the fuck did Guernsey happen?"

"Round about the same time as the White Cliffs of Dover, if my geology's right. Nah, it was Cowley."

"Oh, no," Bodie groaned, sitting up, staring at Doyle with genuine dismay and pleading. "Not Cowley *and* Guernsey?"

"Yeh, that's right. Lucas managed to break a leg slipping on some black ice, which means he's out of commission, which means he and McCabe can't do the undercover job on Guernsey—"

"Which means muggins here gets to suffer the joys and excitement of Guernsey in the dead of winter."

"Don't know what you're complaining about," Doyle muttered, slinging his clothes into his holdall. "At least you'll be out there doing something, I'm going to be stuck in London—"

"What d'you mean? Two weeks ago, Cowley said that if something happened, we were the back-up replacements for Lucas and McCabe, right?"

"But that was two weeks ago, and in our line of work, that's as good as a lifetime. Now the Cow's decided that since we won't have time to do a proper job cramming for the oppo, he's going to send you in, and put McCabe in there as your

on-site back-up because McCabe knows all the ins and outs of the case. And he's leaving me in London..."

"Christ," was all Bodie could say, his skin paling more than normal even for him. "Splitting us up... When'm I supposed to leave?"

"Saturday."

"Saturday? How the fuck am I supposed to get a new character down pat by Saturday?"

"Intensive round-the-clock training, according to Cowley."

Said so mildly, so terribly mildly.

"You didn't say anything stupid to the Old Man, did you, Ray?"

Doyle made a great fuss over folding his dirty T-shirt just so, and packing it, ever so carefully.

"You did, didn't you? You—"

"Yeh, well I didn't think it was stupid, did I?"

"But he did. All right, what's the damage this time? Trawlers in the Outer Hebrides?"

Doyle fumbled and muttered, and much to the strain of Bodie's cardiovascular system, Raymond Doyle blushed.

"Ray," Bodie said very gently, taking a much-folded pair of Y-fronts from Doyle's hand, "what's Cowley set you up for?"

"Another undercover oppo, while you're in Guernsey."

"Doing what?"

A completely indecipherable mutter.

"Come on, Ray, don't make me ask Cowley."

"Harper," Doyle said miserably.

"As in—Marj?"

A dejected, defeated nod.

It took Bodie all of ten minutes to finally stop laughing.

"It isn't funny," Doyle snapped, even though he was beginning to see the sick side of the joke himself.

"Course it isn't," Bodie said as if he were the Archbishop presiding over a dirty joke contest.

"Well, how would you feel, you shifty-eyed lout?"

Which just started Bodie off all over again.

They ended up in the Refectory, for no apparent reason that Bodie could discern. The place was in darkness, apart from the faint light seeping in through the huge, uncurtained window. Overhead, poor Prometheus was decently covered, a tarpaulin hung to protect that which he did not have.

"I see they've finally decided to show that poor bastard some mercy," Bodie said by way of an olive branch.

"Nah," Doyle told him, fidgeting with something he'd picked up off the floor.

Filthy bugger, Bodie thought fondly. "So if it's not out of mercy for him, then why've they covered him up?"

"It's an all-women's college, right?"

"I had just about managed to work that out, yeh."

"Well, the only painters they could get to come in and do the ceiling were men, right?"

"You know, I've seen oracles deliver stories quicker than you."

"D'you want to hear this or not?"

Course he wanted to hear this: if he were sitting here listening to Doyle going on about that painting, then he wasn't on his way to London and therefore Guernsey and therefore no Doyle, was he? "Will you get on with it?"

"All right, all right. Anyway, the charming Ms. Scrivener refuses to have hordes of men hanging round her young ladies, so she won't let the painters do any work during term. So now the restorers have finished with poor old Prometheus Unballed up there, the normal decorators are coming in just before Christmas to do the ceiling and the plain bits on the wall."

"So Prometheus is covered up so they don't splatter him with emulsion."

"And so that none of those disgusting, nasty male painters gets the smart idea of...adding anything to Prometheus."

"Doyle," Bodie said, only making it sound like a warning, when they both knew it was much closer to an invitation, "don't you dare. I mean, you wouldn't, would you?"

"Who me?" Doyle said with profound innocence. And spoiled it all by taking a nice, thick sable-haired brush out of his holdall. "Nicked this from the art teacher, the one who's all thumbs. Nice woman, that, told me to help myself to anything I needed to do anything I fancied."

"Yeh, but I bet she didn't mean painting tackle on Prometheus up there."

"Wouldn't bet on that, Bodie, not after spending as much time with them as I have."

All right, so he'd been too drunk to take notes one night, and too hung-over to do anything much the next morning, but that was a bit below the belt.

"So who's going to be the model then? You'll need someone a bit luckier than you, won't you, mate?"

"I do have one or two ideas..."

"I'm not stripping off in the fucking refectory—"

There were voices coming down the hall that led from the staff wing to the student halls, obviously a group of teachers going down to sample the thespian joys of the third and fourth year senior students. Although perhaps the attraction was more the generous and primarily liquid buffet laid on afterwards.

"...crying shame that they have to leave so early."

"That's Ms. Priamsdottir," Doyle whispered, "and that other one is Ms. Stanford. And behind them, I think she's a visiting lecturer from the Continent."

"...mind telling you, when it comes to arses, I'd much rather look at those two gorgeous rumps than old Betty any day of the week."

"I know. It's awful—when was the last time we were able to sneak men in right under Scrivener's nose like that? And now they have to leave before the end of term, right before the dance, and before we even had the chance of asking them to 'help out' with the art poses and biology research."

"Criminal, that's what it is," someone said, and Doyle whispered, right into Bodie's ear, the touch of warm breath on him

so distracting he almost missed Doyle telling him that was Ms. Colm. "Our having to go to this dratted play when we could find out where those luscious young men are and sit and watch them instead. They're so easy on the eye—"

"If only they were just as easy on the morals—"

"Which we shall never know because they're leaving so damned *soon*."

"Yes," sighed someone Doyle identified as Ms. Short, "I was so looking forward to watching them going at it..."

"Really, you're too old for that sort of thing, but me, well—"

"That's one of the Cleveland sisters, not sure which one," Doyle murmured as the last of the voices and footsteps faded. "Don't know about you, but I feel a bit set up here."

"Only a bit? Christ, I wonder if any of those notes were legit at all."

"Oh, some of them were, but they had all that under control."

"Yeh. Waste of time coming here."

The silence spoke volumes.

"From Cowley's point of view, I meant," Bodie added hurriedly, not wanting to give the wrong impression, not now when they were only hours away from being separated.

What a mind-numbingly depressing thought. Never mind a nice cosy Christmas together, unpacking stockings and other, more interesting, articles of clothing. Him on Guernsey, Ray in London, in the clutches of Marj Harper. And to think that once upon a time, he had actually liked and admired Cowley.

"We haven't really talked about it, have we?" Doyle said in the near dark, only his profile really visible, moonlight highlighting his cheek, making his hair a colourless mass. "Not about what would happen if we did."

If we did. If we had sex, knowing that it'd be more than just mucking about with blokes the way they both did occasionally.

It would be weeks, possibly even a month or two before they'd be back together as a team.

Two months. A hell of a long time for Ray Doyle to think about something.

"Can't really think too much about the future in our line of work, can we, Ray? Take each day as it comes, live it to the hilt..."

"For tomorrow we might die. Some second-rate terrorist—"

"If you think a second-rate terrorist can take you, then forget Marj Harper, you ought to be spending Christmas with Macklin."

An aborted gesture, sudden tension. "That's not what I meant. It's just—for fuck's sake, Bodie, we were *that* close to it, and then what? Split up, because of the fucking job, sent off all over the fucking place. Either one of us could stop a bullet, or a knife—"

"Or a Number 9 bus. Come on, Ray, be reasonable. It might never happen. Or we might get hit by a bus."

"Or fall down the stair and break our necks."

"Or get food poisoning."

"Or cancer, rabies, get hit on the head by a falling brick..."

"That's the spirit," Bodie said, genuinely cheered. There was no point in dwelling on the specific risks of their job, best to make a black joke of it, turn it aside, steal some of Death's thunder.

"So we could drive back to Town, some lorry driver could fall asleep at the wheel, and that would be it."

Perhaps he had cheered a touch too early.

"I don't like it, Bodie."

"I wouldn't be too keen on it myself."

"No, I mean, about you and me, coming this close, and then doing nothing about it, even though we know the risks."

Put like that...

Doyle was on his feet, shoes barely making a sound on the flagstone floor. The door made an awful racket as he shut it, though, and the lock turning sounded as loud as a fire alarm.

"There," Doyle said, dropping the enormous key into Bodie's hand. "That should keep all the Nosy Parkers at bay, shouldn't it?"

And now they were sitting there, side by side, on one of the huge refectory tables, each knowing that the other one wanted to have sex, needed to do something about what had been so rudely interrupted that afternoon, was quietly desperate to do something about those words that had just slipped out in anger, but meant the opposite.

So one of them had to make the first move.

They sat there like teenagers, or two men unwilling to concede the upper hand.

Time passed.

Not very long, in truth, but it felt like several ice ages.

Then Bodie noticed what Doyle's deft fingers were doing. "What the hell are you fiddling with?" he demanded, positive Doyle had come up with some not-too-embarrassing way of getting them started.

"Oh, this? Just something I picked up." He shrugged, theatrically. "My belt-buckle was the only place I could stick it."

"And what is *it*—or don't I want to know?"

"Oh, I think you want to know," Doyle whispered, and his voice was deep and husky, the way it had been that night he and Bodie had come perilously close to having a foursome with two very willing young women. "In fact, I'm *positive* you want to know."

"So go on then, what is it?"

"What," Doyle asked huskily, drawing Bodie close and casting all fears and threats of the future aside for the pleasure of this one moment, "does Ms. Scrivener disapprove of?"

"The male of the species," Bodie replied without a moment's hesitation. "Of any species."

"Apart from that. What was it that the lovely Senga managed to prise her away from us with?"

It wasn't easy, thinking, with Doyle breathing down his neck in so appealing and arousing a fashion. "Em," Bodie said wittily, his mind full of what he'd rather be doing instead of chatting. "Wasn't it mistletoe or something?"

"That's right, mistletoe. After all, it might encourage young minds down from the lofty planes of pure contemplation, mightn't it?"

That sounded disgustingly like a quote of the Scrivener sort.

"So she got rid of the mistletoe, but not before you got your grubby little paws on some..."

"And being the generous type, I'm quite happy for you to get your grubby little paws on it as well."

Under his fingertips, Bodie could feel the smooth leather of Doyle's belt, and the slightly pilled fabric of old jeans, and then the faintly rubbery springiness of plant life. A nice little sprig of mistletoe, hanging not from a lintel, and not above a doorway.

"So aren't you going to kiss me under the mistletoe then?" Doyle asked, and didn't care that his voice was unsteady with arousal, and didn't mind that his hands were as unsteady as Bodie's.

"You want me to kiss you there, then, hmm?"

"Wouldn't mind."

"A kiss under the mistletoe?"

"It'd do for starters..."

Mindless of any implication save that this was Doyle, here and now, and for as long as they could keep on dodging the bullets with their names on them, Bodie slowly leaned down, twisting until he was stretched flat out along the old table. Gently, teasingly, he kissed Doyle under the mistletoe, the denim a disgusting taste, but worth it, for the involuntary shudder that even that brought.

"Come on, Bodie, need more'n that—" An indrawn gasp, as Bodie gave him more, the zip being lowered, and strong, sure fingers drawing him out from the tight cocoon of fabric, exposing him to the coolness of the air and the heat of Bodie's mouth. His flesh was caressed and laved and worshipped, Bodie's instinct carrying over into this also, knowing exactly what Doyle would need, exactly what Doyle wanted. Sucking

him inside, turning him inside out, and all from the touch of his mouth on Doyle's flesh.

"Get up here," Doyle groaned, Bodie's hair too short to allow him any purchase, slipping through his fingers as he tried to persuade Bodie into a position that would allow Doyle the same liberties with Bodie that were turning Doyle's bones to water. "Come on, I want to feel you."

His hands were everywhere, peeling Bodie's polo neck away from skin that gleamed in the faint light, muscles faintly shadowed, the sudden sweet glimpse of a nipple.

Both of them now, struggling to get clothes out of the way, mouths wide and hungry, tasting flesh, lapping at skin, hands rubbing and exploring and possessing. Bodie's trousers now, either he or Doyle the one to finally shove the clinging cords down and out of the way, Doyle's hands urging him on as Bodie pulled his own underwear down, Doyle's hands greedy as they grasped Bodie's erection, arching cock limned in moonlight. Doyle under him now, naked from thigh to chest, shirt and trousers crumpled and creased but that didn't matter, for the cloth was out of the way, so that their skins could press close together, clinging, briefly, as they pressed against each other, as Bodie lay atop Doyle, their cocks rubbing together, Bodie's hand sliding down Doyle's belly to hold Ray's cock tight against his own, the two of them held in Bodie's strong hand.

Oh, yes, this was what Doyle had been waiting for, needing for a longer time than he knew. Bodie, on top of him for now, but there would be other times, Bodie under him, spread and eager and Doyle's cock buried right inside of him. For now though, just having Bodie squeezing his cock was enough, Bodie's mouth on his nipples, biting, licking, kissing, Bodie's back flexing and strong under Doyle's caresses. Almost enough, passion rising in him, his entire body alive with the purest pleasure of having Bodie, of loving him, here and now.

Doyle was incredibly handsome in the moonlight, his eyes dark and brilliant with lust, his body a sinuous mass

of delight, every inch of Doyle's skin and hair a joy where it rubbed against Bodie. And the feel of Doyle's cock in his hand—incredible. Better than anything else he'd ever known, male or female, his mind a riot of arousal because this was Ray Doyle he was making love to. Ray Doyle, the light touching him here and there, Bodie's lips following the brief flickers of light on pale skin.

Both of them were close to coming, now, their cocks so hard against the other's, their skin so sweat slick and moist. Helpless with need, Bodie leaned down and covered Doyle's mouth with his own, his tongue welcomed into wet darkness, Doyle's tongue coming to explore his mouth, so possessive a touch, so demanding a caress, and Bodie permitted it, revelled in Doyle's strength and his certainty and his passion. Devouring each other with their mouths, their bodies thrusting tight and hard against each other, they came, Bodie first, his cry taken inside Doyle's mouth, feeding Doyle's fire, Bodie's slowing movements a torment to Doyle, until Bodie slid down his body again, and took Doyle's cock inside him, and gave him over to pleasure.

Over too soon, and too brief for something that meant more than either one would ever dream of confessing. But still, for all the threat of Guernsey hanging over their heads, their partnership had changed, and that was something to see them through the uncertainties of separation. Over too soon, definitely, but that was only the sex, and they lay there together for a long time, saying nothing, for words might only tangle this new bond between them, and what could they say better than this tacit indulgence in emotion?

It was the cold that finally made them stir.

"Don't suppose someone's dining table is the most romantic of places, is it?" Doyle asked, too lazy and too sated to actually move yet, although the cold draught was making its presence felt.

"But at least it's better than the bathroom." And that, Bodie thought with something akin to satisfaction, his masculinity

unthreatened in spite of all his fears of the contrary, was as close as they were going to get to mentioning that embarrassing little scene again.

"True. And it's a hell of a lot better than you on Guernsey and me in London."

"Not much could be worse than that."

"Still doesn't mean I have to like it."

"Yeh."

Not much to say after that. Neither one wanted to move, certainly didn't want to be the first one to stir, and it was the cold and the sounds of other people's lives that finally did it. By the time the first set of footsteps resounded along the corridor outside, Bodie and Doyle were simply sitting side by side, perfectly decently dressed—if one ignored the rumpling and crumpling and creases—and as cool as cucumbers behind that locked door.

"Suppose we'd best get started," Doyle said, very reluctantly, only the vivid memory of Cowley's direst threats enough to make him end this moment.

"Suppose we ought."

"I don't like it, though."

"Then that makes two of us, doesn't it?"

Dispiritedly, they gathered up their various belongings, or rather, Bodie gathered while Doyle watched.

"Why don't you take that lot out to the car?" Doyle suggested.

Not that Bodie was fooled, not for one second. "You'll get us both hung if you do anything to Prometheus."

"They'll never know it was me."

"No," Bodie said, having no delusions about his partner and loving him anyway, "they'll think it was me."

"They will think it was the painters, Bodie, because the tarp's up, and it won't be coming down until the day before term starts. Which means, that when the painters pull the tarp and the scaffolding down, they'll think the painting was supposed to look like that, cos they won't have seen it before, will

they—" and adding, before Bodie's only too obvious caveat could be said, "because it was the restorers who put the scaffolding up in the first place. So these painters take the tarp down, take the scaffolding down—"

"And Ms. Scrivener walks in on the first morning of term—"

"Has a heart attack—"

"And everybody else lives happily ever after. Oh, you are awful."

"But you like me."

Bodie's smile was slow and satisfied, and he dared what he shouldn't when doors were unlocked and other people were abroad. He kissed Ray Doyle, deeply and sincerely and for no good reason at all, apart from the simple fact that he wanted to. "Like you?" he finally said. "Yeh, you could say that..."

"In that case, get this stuff in the car while I do my good deed for poor old bloody Prometheus."

"Don't take all night, will you? I'd like to be at least in the right vicinity for our meeting with Cowley at nine tomorrow, if that's not too much bother? And the sooner we leave..."

"The better the chance that we might have an hour or three at home before we have to go in and face the miserable old bastard," Doyle concluded for him.

And both of them would have been appalled to know just how much of their feelings showed. So much for poker faces and CI5 training.



ELEVEN

ON THE ROAD

again, paintbrush in pride of place on the dashboard, the car still fairly reeking of paint, and Doyle still grinning like the Cheshire cat, now that Prometheus was hung there in all Bodie's glory. Well, he had had to use *someone* as a model, and it would be worth dragging Bodie back for that Open House that Doyle had half-promised Ms. Eubanks that they'd attend. Oh, yes, Doyle could just imagine a smug Bodie walking into the main student refectory, looking up—and seeing his own cock and balls festooned there for all the world to see.

Definitely, definitely worth it.

"Oh, I like this," Doyle said with profound satisfaction, all well with his world this early morning.

"Glad to hear someone does."

"What's the matter with you?" Inclined to be indulgent now, things sorted out between them, the pair of them irrevocably setting off on a new path Doyle had picked out himself. "Someone steal all your marbles?"

"At least I have enough to spare a few."

Doyle gave Bodie a look for that: after last night, why the hell was Bodie doing his impersonation of Heathcliffe? Easy to answer that question.

"Cowley," Doyle spat.

"Fucking bastard Cowley," Bodie said with even more venom.

Silence.

Silence.

And then—

Doyle's voice, meditative in the dark of early winter morning. "We could always tell Cowley what we've done."

Bodie nearly crashed the car for that.

"Not about fucking, you fool. About lying around, letting them do our job for us and letting Lindsay Styles have it off with the local barman without us sending her home to daddy."

Bodie looked at him as if he needed his head screwed back on, the right way round this time. "And why the fuck should we tell Cowley that?"

"Because then," Doyle said as if he were explaining quantum physics to a squashed snail, "he'd have an apopleptic fit—"

"Exactly! And we'd end up watching trawlers in the Outer fucking Hebrides!"

Doyle took the ace from up his sleeve and played it. "Yeh, but at least we'd be doing it together."

Silence.

"Christmas in Scotland?" Bodie said, ever so casually, as if someone had just handed him a brochure for Holidays in the Highlands.

"Better yet, Hogmonay in Scotland."

Silence.

"Together?"

"Together."

Bodie turned round to glance at his partner, to find Doyle already staring at him, a silly grin of unalloyed affection on his face.

"Hogmonay in Scotland," Bodie said with satisfaction, and they both knew neither one of them was thinking about anything other than the fact that they'd be together.

By the time they reached London, they had come up with several interesting, innovating and anatomically impossible variations on everything from "Scotland the Brave" to "Auld Lang Syne." Cowley would not have been amused. If he'd known just exactly what his two best agents were planning, he'd have been even less amused. But Bodie and Doyle were delighted.

And they never did tell the rest of the squad exactly why the threat of watching trawlers in the Outer Hebrides always made them smile.

