

him his escape from the harsh reality of Liverpool’s docks had introduced him to the equal callousness of Glasgow’s reality, demanding payment in kind for the transport, making Bodie kneel in the doorway’s dark and damp, enveloped by the rain-borne smells of the city, diesel and smoke and grit. Just another dock, and after the lorry driver there had been just another docker, like his own father, the man whose name he had slowly asphyxiated with a kind of slow-boiling joy. He had spent over a year in this city, growing up as hard and as calloused as his hands, the tough skin his only protection against the softness inside. Skills learned here and in his home town had carried him far, first here to Glasgow, then all the way to Africa and back, thence to the well-bred cannibalism of the City, pin-striped suits and umbrellas, paper weapons concealed in well-tooled briefcases. Oh, you needed to be hard to survive Whitehall, but the callouses had to be on the inside for that, far from what he had learned when he was growing up.

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And now he was back up North, back to where it had started and ended, following Cowley’s orders and waiting to see if the Scottish contact would come forward to inform on his co-conspirators and confess their sins. Cowley wanted them, wanted the gun-running to Ulster stopped, wanted the money stopped, wanted the foreign contacts stopped. Wanted the whole mess cleaned up before the Troubles crossed the water to his own homeland, and wanted Bodie to be the one to do it. Oh, the Old Man knew it was pie in the sky to stop it all completely, but at least this one organisation would be stymied and there would be a breather before the ugliness began again. It would stop, if only for a day, but stop it would.

“He’s going. Alone,” the old man had said, glowering at Doyle, knowing perfectly well why that young man had wanted Bodie to stay, or for himself to go with Bodie: knowing perfectly well and liking it not one jot. And what Cowley didn’t like, stopped. Just like that.

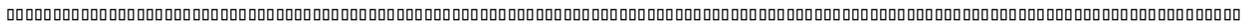
Bodie stared up at the broken-tooth

windows of the old warehouse, the old memories tangling with the newer ones, snaring his feet and bringing him to a halt. Doyle. They were getting careless, too openly sexual with each other, too blatant. Mustn’t forget the rules: do whatever the hell you like, just don’t get caught doing it. And they were perilously close to getting caught *in flagrante delicto*, so to speak. Too casual, too friendly, too complacent. So Cowley had done the best thing: split them up for a while, cool them down, make them appreciate what they had too much to risk losing it all for the coveting of an open life.

So he was here, in a city that harboured too many ghosts for Bodie, and above all the echoing whispers came the banshee wail of what he had been and what he might have become.

The picture chilled him to the bone. The man he would have become... Staying with his family, taking the blame, going to borstal, learning his lessons there... Better this school of hard knocks than that hard school.

He walked on, going past all the derelict monuments to past glory, down to where the city was still alive, joining the Saturday evening hordes rippling down the Gallowgate, the richness of language surrounding him amidst the absence of wealth. On, he walked, through the city centre with its fancy pedestrian precincts, up past the motorway flyover that stopped midair, a modern day Folly. Fancy buildings now, all imbued with the sheen of money, all of it overlain by the patina of pollution, the sand-blasting companies not yet come this far. And then the newly refurbished beauty of the old city, all sandstone and sunset, rose bushes in bloom, heady fragrance filling him with affection. Children still played the game named after this country, although none here called it that. Hopscotch, north of the border, became ‘peeveer’ or ‘beds’, and he remembered some tightly passionate nights spent playing a rather more adult version of the game. His group had been as multi-racial as the children marauding these streets, and their voices just as indistinguishably Glaswegian. But when *he* had ‘played’ round the



back of Woodside Comprehensive, his goal had been far different from the cries of these children.

The park now, trees older than many cities, rhododendron bushes taller than a man, a wonderland wrapped around the ‘cottages’, the public toilets Victorians had disguised from their delicate sensibilities. He hesitated a moment at the foot of the Great War memorial statue, pausing, remembering, then finally moving on. Too dangerous, now, for a CI5 man to have sex in the bogs. If Cowley didn’t kill him, Doyle would—for the sheer stupidity of it, if nothing else. Bodie smiled, not nicely, earning himself a wide berth from the locals, who knew how to handle a hard man.

No, Doyle would be furious with him for doing something that thick, but wouldn’t allow himself to care that Bodie had been having it off with some stranger in the toilet. It always struck Bodie as hysterical that it was Doyle who was forever thinking about marriage, but it was Bodie who was forever signing on the dotted line of commitment: Army, Paras, SAS, CI5. Doyle, for all his talk, had never signed a thing in his life before, until Cowley had finagled him into it, and even then, Doyle was the only agent with a 6 months contract. No, Doyle would fight settling down tooth and nail, no matter how much...

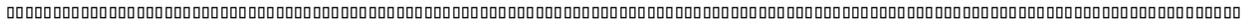
Bodie stopped dead, cheeky comments passing unnoticed right over the top of his head. A dunt, and he moved on, joining the exodus as night slid ethereal dark into the park. He simply went with the flow, finding himself buying a ticket at Byres’ Road subway station, then going down the labyrinthine steps to the platform, the unique smell bringing back so much more of his past to war with the sudden ambush of the present. Mechanically, he stepped onto the royal red carriage, grabbing a pole, letting the old wifies sit, parcels and carrier bags heaped on the floor in front of them, as the younger women sat with children piled all over themselves, prams propped precariously beside the doors. He let the talk eddy around himself, listening not to the

content, but to the rich melody and cacophonous tones. He wanted Doyle. No surprise that—he doubted many people who had seen them together could ever not realise that—but it was *what* he wanted from Doyle. What he wanted *with* Doyle. Commitment. Settling down. Cleaving unto each other and to no one else. Ever. *For ever and ever amen so help me god*, he thought, a fine sweat beginning to chill on his skin.

He clung onto the stainless steel pole as the subway ‘shuggled’ and swayed, hurtling through black tunnel, the train lights flickering out for a breathless heartbeat every time they went over a set of points. In each fragment of darkness, he could see his own reflection, a white face swimming, lost, in the dark. *Oh what can ail thee, knight at arms, alone and palely loitering*, he thought, mocking himself. To want to settle down, in *his* line of work, and with a man as skittish as Doyle, with a man who ran like the wind from every mention of conforming and belonging... Just look at the way Doyle dressed: silently thumbing his nose at everything that could declare his commitment to CI5 and the civil service. *Shall just have to wait until he starts dressing proper before I propose then, shan’t I?* But there was no smile for that thought, barbed as it was, for it would hurt even more being removed than when it had taken root.

Commitment. With Doyle. Risking letting Doyle know just how much Bodie needed him. Risking telling Doyle the truth about his past, when he knew the reaction the prettied-up version had gleaned. The doubts started crawling in then, turning his stomach, twisting round and round like cats settling down for the winter. Moments, always easily explained away as just Doyle being Doyle, just Ray being a funny bugger when it comes to relationships. But what if it weren’t? What if the awkwardness was because Bodie’s feelings made him awkward? What if his reluctance was because he simply didn’t feel as much as Bodie thought he did...as much as Bodie *hoped* he did. What if it were so much more one sided than he already realised?





a taste, a soupçon, a wee dram of the hard stuff, and he'd be able to laugh at his own needs. He would realise that he didn't need all that crap with Doyle. Just the sex. Just the friendship. Just the fun. He wasn't drowning, only waving...

Not only had the old pub survived, it hadn't changed, not deigning to give so much as a nod to the passing of years. The outside was the same, black, glossy wood with only a tiny patch of thick, leaded windows, their light gleaming off the black in minute specks of liveliness. It still looked more like a funeral parlour than a pub, and the door was still as heavy and creaked just as loudly. He took a deep, deep breath, filling his lungs with the remembered air of dockland dirt, a swimmer about to take the plunge. Not drowning, only waving...

There was a wary silence to greet him, hostility barely leashed under the surface, the unspoken 'an' who the hell are you?' swelling around him. So he put on his toughest face, his best sneer and strolled in, a slight sway to hips and shoulders, the 'gallus' walk recognised in docklands all over Britain. And they saw him, saw his strength, saw the way he was eyeing them back and they knew, relaxing into another one of them come home to this pub, another man here for company, another body here for pleasure.

As perfect as the mating ritual of the big cats, a space cleared at the bar and he took it, accepting them as they accepted him. As a newcomer, it would be several minutes before he'd be served, so he spent his time renewing his memory of this place. The walls were ancient, moulded mahogany, arches curling and soaring up to the dark ceiling, neither paintings nor photographs here, just the gleam of the years lingering in the wood. Tables, round and small, equally dark, equally old, even if they had been bought only last week, for everything here was of a muchness, as were the people, the instant they walked through that door. To come here, you had to know someone, for there were no signs, and no locals living nearby to drop in unexpectedly. The bar was, in and of itself, all

the art any pub needed. Long and curved, gilded foot rail glinting softly to itself, myriad elbows polishing the bartop to an almost living shine, the overhead lights casting their glow with generosity. Against the wall were the bottles, dozens and dozens of them, every kind of spirit and liqueur and whisky glittering away merrily amidst the curling carvings and liquid lines, art from a bygone era when MacIntosh was king. Even the pump handles were the originals, shaped first by master craftsmen and then by the hands of those who pulled an ocean of pints. And the publican was standing before him, eyeing him up, folding back his sleeves to display his tattoos, a double check that this bloke knew just exactly what kind of pub he'd got himself into.

A tiny crinkle laughed at the corner of Bodie's eyes, for it wasn't often you saw a burly 6'4" hard man with a loveheart tattooed on his arm—and a man's name reclining on blue ribbon encircling it. "I'll have a pint of heavy, please," he said, making certain to emphasise his old Liverpoolian accent. Sassenachs were never particularly welcome in this city, but Liverpool was considered to be a sister-city, almost Scots, and therefore tolerable. If Doyle had come in here...

"One pint coming up," and with that, so simply, he was forgiven the accident of his birth that had made him English.

A miraculous conception, a man appeared at his elbow, eyes bright with interest. "No' seen you around here afore. You jist get here?"

"Yeh. Used to live here, though."

The man sipped his own drink, never letting his eyes stray from tonight's prey. "Oh aye? An' where was it you were living?"

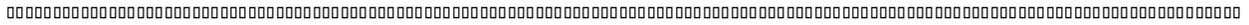
"Up Maryhill Road," he answered, careful to use the proper language, careful not to risk his entrée into this milieu. He needed to forget Ray for a while, needed to purge a little of the dangerous longings from his system. "Just off the Garscube Road."

"Oh, aye," came the reply, same words, completely different intonation. "Aye, I know









stretching up, his brown hand splayed and hot as it slid the length of Bodie’s spine, coming in to a fist to rub, hard, against Bodie’s arse, the exquisite delight of it shivering through all three of them.

They were hard, all of them, and Bodie felt himself the centre of the Universe, omnipotent, omnipresent. He lifted his hand, and felt jolt run through three bodies as he slapped one man, felt the skin under his hand warm as it reddened, felt the tremble when pain turned to pleasure. He thrust again, but this time, the wetness of mouth wasn’t even close to enough. With an anorexic moan, he wrapped his arms around the man whose mouth he plundered, lifting him up, towels scattering hither and yon, turning him, settling him on the table so that he could plunder his body as well. His cock was so hard, so hot, it craved the cooling fire of another body. A hand came up to guide his prick, a tongue came up to lick at his arse, and he pulled down, pushed up and abruptly, with a thrill of strength, he was home, sheathed, pillaging, cock up an arse, tongue up his own, filled and filling.

He looked down, and saw what he loved: a man under him, bending to his will, submitting, white back sweat-pearled, all the muscles quivering. Bodie shouted out loud for the joy of it, Ray coming into his mind as he rejoiced in the simple complexity of sex.

The wetness sucking on him left, and he felt a void, an ache where the circle had been complete, but then it was there again, a hardness promising him all he wanted. Hard slickness pressed against him, and he tensed, deliberately, wanting it to hurt, wanting it rough and hard and callous, all the things—like love—he never had with Ray. All the things he missed from his ill-spent youth and dissolute adulthood, all the things frittered away on dinner and dancing with the birds, and the ‘all good fun’ romps that seemed to be all Ray would allow. For now. And for now, when he needed something more, or perhaps—if you looked at it askance—something less, well, he could come to places like this, and men like this, where it was all bone and

muscle and hot skin, sliding into him, as he poured himself into another man. He thrust, and his cock surged, and the cock inside him surged. His back arched, and his belly pressed against the muscular knob of spine, his own spine curving against the hairless smoothness of belly. As he looked down, he could see where his red cock was engulfed by white skin, and where long brown fingers pressed into the black hair that arched on the whiteness of his own belly. With every gasp of air he dragged in, he dragged in the old, familiar scent: males in rut, he most of all, his own odour intoxicating, mingling with the other two men, a symphony of sex.

The hands on his belly had pressed lower, one hand stopping, splayed fingers framing Bodie’s cock, feeling it as it plunged in and out of the white arse. The cock up his own arse was insistent, pounding at him, slick and heavy, driving him on, whipping him up, taking his mind away and leaving him only the voluptuousness of three men entwined together in lust. A mouth nipped his earlobe, a tongue snaked into him, fucking his ear as a cock fucked his arse as he himself fucked arse. It was wonderful, this completion, and he thrust harder, the pleasure building, compounding the insatiable need that was devouring him from the inside out, hurtling him on, ever faster in the race to orgasm. Teeth dug into his ear as wetness splashed inside him, and he groaned in echo, feeling his own seed rise, pushed out by the semen filling him. He came, hands clutching desperately at the man under him, pulling him up as he plunged in deeper, back clenching as he came, great pulses of pleasure streaming from him.

Weakened, he collapsed to the side, sinking to the floor, propping himself against a tableleg to watch as the man who had fucked him sucked the man he had fucked. He watched, entranced, too sated to rouse, as the pale cock was swallowed; watched, entranced, as the faces contorted once more with pleasure. To them, he was now superfluous, nothing more than the added fillip of a voyeur. The dark man was kneeling now, pressed into Jim’s white arse, his

