

and his foot tapping as he absorbed the bassy emanations from the Walkman clamped to his ears. Ray too was scruffy, sweaty, and unkempt—but that style suited Ray Doyle, from the stubble on his chin to the well-worn look of his jeans and the light drifting odour of his sweat: While Bodie, in creased cords, mouth like a vulture's crotch, felt rank and bristly. He had in fact many complaints, and from time to time he would list them all in his head, a little entertainment for himself. For example: they had left home at seven this morning—correction, yesterday morning—and it was now five AM the next morning. They had been travelling 22 hours: they would not arrive at their destination until seven tonight. He wanted a shower. He needed a beer. He had never needed a beer more. There was of course no beer, but instead the grumpy driver's assistant would arrive by each seat every five hours offering cups of boiling water, brownish in hue, which he called coffee: he would then take fifty pence from you and slop the drink into your lap. Bodie felt the man could learn a lot from air hostesses—

"Let's fly next time, Doyle," Bodie said aloud.

"Me wings get too tired," came the mumbled reply.

Presumably conditions were similar in the many other coaches which were all part of this ongoing convoy bound for Rome. Their own coach was number 99, which seemed somehow to suggest it was a bit of a failure of a coach, undistinguished, not even smart enough for triple figures. Its occupants were all packed as close together as 64 sardines in a sardine tin. Bags and plastic carriers spilled everywhere, in every free centimetre of space. Everyone else seemed to eat more or less constantly, crunching and munching their way through vast mounds of provisions. When they weren't eating they were asleep, dozing, mouths agape, heads lolling to one side, snoring, or in their brief moments of consciousness having rivetting conversations about the weather and kids' TV programmes from the 1960s.

Bodie looked down at the map again. 9" inches till page 36. It's Hell, Bodie thought with conviction, that must be it: he'd died and gone to Hell. The coach would never arrive. It would just travel on, and on, into Eternity.

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Inches and hours and continents later, when the door of the coach finally opened to disgorge its bleary-eyed, unshaven, unwashed passengers it was 8 PM Italian time.

Ray Doyle unfolded himself like a flower beneath the sun, breathed in the fresh Italian air, and grinned as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

"This is a bit of all right, isn't it?"

"Yeah," croaked Bodie, stumbling along behind him on woolly legs, one huge grip bag in each hand. Doyle lightly tossed his Walkman from hand to hand and looked around. "No, look, Bodie. It's brilliant."

From somewhere Bodie found the energy to lift his hanging head.

All around them, reaching high to each side, were snowtipped mountains, little redtiled houses perching on the slopes as far up as the eye could see, nearly up to the clouds. They were standing in a little piazza, the sun was shining, and the scent of fresh coffee was in the air. Bodie's nose lifted. Doyle was watching him, grinning.

"Glad you came?" and behind them the coach, unloaded, melted away as if it had never been.

▼ Neither of them spoke a word of Italian. In the clean, sparse bedroom allotted to them they were surprised to find not two beds, but one.

Admittedly it was a huge bed, five feet or more across. Bodie was already on it, stretching out, really luxuriating for the first time in 36 long, cramped hours. They had their own little bathroom and a small wrought-iron balcony with views to the mountains and the little piazza below. But Doyle was not happy.

"Does it really matter, Doyle?" Bodie yawned, a hand over his eyes.

"Yes, it does. If you think I'm sleeping in there with you—! You need all that space, my son."

So, after they had showered—no shower curtain, indeed, no shower tray, the water flooded the bathroom floor and drained slowly into a hole in the corner—the two agents went down to the lobby to explain the problem to the grimfaced Italian proprietor.

"One bed," Bodie shouted. He pointed at Doyle, then turned the finger towards his own chest. "Two of us."

Like an opera star the proprietor made a flamboyant gesture in the air, and all but spat on the floor. "Maricones!"

"He doesn't get it," Doyle said, amused now, from where he leaned against the wall with his arms crossed. "In fact, I think he thinks you're saying we're the sort of fellas who want one bed."

Bodie turned violent at that. He grabbed the proprietor's jacket, puce in the face. "Look, mate. We've got one bed. One—fucking—bed. We need two—fucking—beds." He accompanied this with a double-fingered depiction of the numbers involved. The proprietor appeared to misinterpret this.

Doyle would have separated them earlier, but laughter prevented him. They ended up back in the room some minutes later.

“You obviously don’t remember old Puggers shouting: ‘Roger the cabin boy!’”

Doyle wasn’t convinced. “Just your dirty mind, that, mate.”

“Yeah? Well, what about the first mate—remember him? Master Bates.”

A crease appeared in Doyle’s cheek, a flash of white teeth. “Really?”

“Not forgetting,” Bodie played his trump card with a flourish, “good old Seaman Staines—!”

Doyle choked on a gurgle of laughter. “You’re kidding me.”

“—I’m not.”

“Seaman Staines!” Doyle chuckled, rolling onto his back.

“Logical, innit? Master Bates, Seaman Staines,” Bodie grinned with him, highly delighted, but Doyle’s laughter subsided into a sudden groan.

“Well, thanks, Bodie.”

“Wha’for?”

“There I was, tryin’ to keep me thoughts on the straight an’ narrow. I’ll have to do it now, never get to sleep otherwise.”

Doyle was flinging back the covers, a lean and compact figure darkly shadowed at chest and groin. He stalked into the bathroom, but he didn’t shut the door, and tossed himself off standing there, ten or twelve fast strokes, used a piece of toilet paper, chucked it down the loo, washed his hands, came back and got into bed where he settled himself down, turning this way and that until he got comfortable, said ‘night’ and closed his eyes.

Bodie’s heart was still thudding with shock. Well, that just about took the prize for cool, didn’t it?

Cool—or kinky.

He was forever getting little hints about Ray Doyle’s offbeat sexuality, just little things, the way Doyle never missed the chance to take a look at Bodie’s cock, for example: nothing furtive at all, just that in the men’s room Doyle would stand nearby, back against the wall, might even keep talking, and his eyes would move down and never leave until Bodie tucked himself away and zipped himself up.

Bodie had lost count of the times Doyle had done that.

Well, everyone had their own little quirks. Bodie himself had a bit of a thing about women in football shorts. Not an obsession, exactly, nothing as strong as that. Just he found it a fierce turn-on, that was all.

But to toss yourself off, five feet away from another

man then walk back into the room as cool as you like...

Weird? Or not?

Doyle might have his kinks, okay. But it didn’t stop one of Bodie’s girlfriends, who had gone out with Doyle some months before, from describing him as the sexiest man she had ever made it with. Given Bodie something to live up to, anyway. Never knew whether he’d succeeded or not, but he’d risen to the challenge. Yeah, Doyle had it all right. Knew how to turn a woman on.

Bodie too, right at this moment. He wanted nothing so much as an action replay as he lay there in the near-dark, eyes closed, feigning sleep while his heart pounded with excitement and his body ached for him to touch it. It had happened too quickly, it was already fading in his mind, the little movements of Doyle’s elbow as his hand blurred on his cock, the tiny sounds he had made, the way, practical, he had held the tissue to the end of his cock as he came, wiped off the spunk, and dumped it down the pan.

Wouldn’t he, if he’d been lying down in the bed and alone, have played with it for a while? Bodie would have expected him to dabble with it, admire the silken slippery texture of it, maybe even the milky taste—

But perhaps that was kinky. Maybe Ray Doyle would think that more perverted than what he had just done.

Bodie fell asleep, into restless dreams.

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Breakfast time at the Pensione Alberto. Bacon, eggs and a fried slice he had not been expecting. But the little basket of stony bread with two stamp-sized butter pats and a thimbleful of yellow jam—

Doyle eyed it without appetite. “No thanks. Think I’ll wait for the cereal.”

“Doyle,” Bodie said patiently, “there isn’t going to be any cereal.”

“Sausages?” Doyle hazarded.

“Coffee,” Bodie said, and held out his cup meaningfully as a haughty dark-eyed woman passed by with two steaming jugs. She had done several circuits of the tables, he reckoned, without ever actually pausing to fill anyone’s cup. It was a little game, probably: she would try to evade his eye for as long as possible, but when it persisted she would have to capitulate and fill his cup without a grudge. And yes: she did. First round to Bodie, then. But one battle won didn’t mean the end of the war: there was still the matter of the refill.

“Where’d you say we were going today?”

years, now disinterred for modern man to get his eerie kicks.

Those people had been real once, and here was the proof. There was a rich man's villa, with a pool, a garden, and frescos on the walls. One of the paintings was very rude. At Bodie's side Doyle looked at Priapus weighing his overlarge male organ on a pair of scales and laughed crudely with him.

"Looks like yours," Doyle snorted, hitting him on the arm, and Bodie noticed one or two people in their party glance their way. Next stop was a little house with a low doorway: this was, their guide explained, one of the many brothels in the town. And indeed, remarkably preserved and explicit pictures on the wall depicted the many and varied services Pompeiian man might like to avail himself of on the way home to the wife. And all for the price of a cup of wine.

"Isn't it open today?" Doyle mourned into Bodie's ear as they jostled for position in the crowd for a better look. Again several people heard him and smiled; Bodie thought that at least it might wipe out the effect of Doyle's earlier remark which seemed destined to mark them out as a pair of nancys.

He sighed. "Can't do without it for one bloody week, can you?" Abruptly he remembered last night, and his eyes flew open wide.

"We'll see, won't we?" was Doyle's reply, and the dark glasses which shadowed his eyes made him enigmatic as the sphinx.

The tour was topped off by a visit to the museum. Here, plaster poured into the holes in the lava where bodies had long ago rotted away meant that one could view the death agonies of many citizens in nastily graphic detail. Bodie turned away from the cast of a dog, teeth bared in rictus, legs frozen as they paddled in panic while the boiling lava melted its skin—

"Bit creepy, this, innit?"

"Don't let it put you off your lunch."

"Nothing puts me off my lunch, Doyle." And they left the haunting, timeless drama of the ruined city behind and passed out through the City Gates, there to run the gauntlet of the countless souvenir stalls manned by small dark hyperactive Italians grabbing at them, pestering them to look, to hold, to buy. The driver of Coach 99 informed his passengers that there would be a three-course meal available at a nearby hotel for a very reasonable price. Bodie was tempted by the thought of it, tablecloths, waitresses, a hearty main course between two tasty fripperies, but Doyle didn't fancy it so instead they bought warm pizzas and a beer at a roadside stall and sat on a wall to watch the world go by.

A happy interlude: the pizza was filling and tasty, the beer cold and moreish. So moreish, in fact, that they had another bottle. After all, they were on holiday, the sun was warm, the air fresh, and they had had a rare glimpse into precious antiquity this morning. It was all a long, long way from the hot plastic aroma of CI5, the tensions there: the 'keep your wits about you or you die' frame they lived in day by day. This was what normal people did: sat in the sun, drank a beer.

"We could come back in October," Doyle said, uncanny, right there with him, sunglasses dangling idly from one hand.

"Yeah," Bodie drawled, uncomplicatedly happy, and on a swift alcohol high he slung his arm around Doyle's shoulders. It was only after a moment he realised that Doyle's green eyes were dwelling curiously on him as if he were mad.

He withdrew his arm so quickly it seemed to enhance the awkwardness of the moment; did Doyle think that was some kind of a pass at him or something?

"Next time we'll bring some birds along," Doyle said, reflectively, which only seemed to confirm it.

He ought to feel sorry for Doyle really. Bodie had met people like him before, far too many of them, never content with what they had in the here and now, a pint of beer and a full belly and the sun on your back and the company you had, instead of the company you wished for.

He didn't reply. Doyle nudged him after a moment. "Agreed, eh? Next time we bring Sylvie and whatsername along."

Bodie got down from the wall and began to dust himself off. "Shall we go? About time we meet up with the coach, I reckon."

"Don't you fancy it, then?" Doyle asked him as they trekked down the hot dusty street towards the coach park.

"Fancy what? There. Pliny."

"Coming back in October."

"Ah, come off it, Doyle. Can't look that far ahead. *Carpe diem*, and all that."

"It was you who said we ought to come back."

"Yeah, pipe dream." Try as he might, standing in a hot carpark in a long queue for a stinking urinal, he couldn't recapture the euphoria that had made him suggest it in the first place.

"Bit bitter and twisted all of a sudden?" Doyle was jogging gently on the spot, the beer obviously on its way through.

"Look, Doyle, you can tell yourself anything you like. Don't need my say-so, do you? Let's see, bringing Sylvie,

“Could we ‘ave died without noticing, Doyle?”
 At the top was another courtyard and more steps.
 “Can’t be Heaven, even if we ‘ave,” Doyle said grimly. “There’d be at least a coffee machine.”
 “God,” Bodie groaned with feeling, “Doesn’t Architecture say anything to you, Doyle?”
 “Yeah,” Doyle drawled. “It says—build a coffee shop. About there.”

No coffee shop, alas, but instead a chapel. Here the annoying child from three seats behind raised a smile when its perpetually cross mother, clearly desperate to keep it quiet in this most hallowed place, hissed at it:

“Be quiet!”

“Why?” it questioned, predictably, as it did one hundred times a day.

Mother said slowly and impressively—“This is God’s House.”

Pause. The child whispered at fifty decibels “Is he in?”

▼ Even Doyle sniggered. But God, were he indeed in, would surely care little about the antics of mere Humans in the face of this, perhaps one of the more minor of his Houses, but glorious for all that. “Wait till you see the Sistine Chapel,” whispered Fred, gliding past, but this one here was good enough for the obviously lower cultural expectations of your average CI5 agent; Doyle was even silenced on the subject of coffee shops (lack of) as they prowled slowly around the magnificent interior of the chapel. Huge Renaissance-style Old Masters in rich oil colours stretched along every wall, and every candlestick, every scroll, gleamed dully with the opulence of gold. Every seat was furnished with the plushiest, deepest crimson velvet. Far from striking one as an ideal setting for the purity of prayer, it was like wandering around the insides of a rich lady’s trinket box. And here it was, right out in the middle of nowhere, in acres of barren olive-growing land. Bodie doubted that many people even knew of its existence.

“This say anything to you about man’s relationship with God, Doyle?”

Doyle smiled, said deeply, “No, but it says quite a lot about this order’s relationship with church funds.” He stopped and craned his neck to stare upwards at the mightiest organ he had ever seen; it stretched from floor to the huge domed ceiling, and each of its massive pipes was richly golden in hue. “Imagine that belting out ‘Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus’ come Sunday morning.”

“Wanna watch out,” Bodie warned him. “Some people hear voices, y’know, calling them to be Saved.”

Doyle cocked his head. “Ang on—is that what I heard?”

“Shall I,” Bodie asked primly, “propose you as a

novice?” Having completed the circuit by now they were heading out through the huge carved wooden doors and briskly taking the steps down, Doyle’s head swivelling about from side to side as if checking for assassins. Or—
 “Don’t tell me,” Bodie said into Doyle’s ear, “Now you’re looking for the souvenir shop?”

But ironically enough, a souvenir shop there was, albeit souvenirs of the oddest kind: lumpy beeswax candles—“Hand-hewn by the monks,” Bodie opined—rosaries by the dozen, and little plastic models of the Virgin Mary.

They signed the visitors’ book under the names Leyton and Bentley and left the splendour of religious glory behind, taking the trail downwards and finding something much more to their taste, an ice cream stand. They sat on a wall to eat, waiting for the rallying-call to rejoin Coach 99.

“Does have a certain appeal, though, doesn’t it?”

“What does?” Bodie shoved the last of his cornetto down his throat, licked his fingers and looked sideways at Doyle as the other man dangled his shades from one idle hand.

“Life of a monk,” Doyle replied, meditative, and lifted his eyes.

“You a monk?” scoffed Bodie, to escape the strange green blaze. “Not got the nature for it, Doyle.”

“How d’you mean?” Doyle asked him, and yawned: the heat rising off the gold stone walls was making him sleepy, hazy.

Bodie gazed in disbelief. “Come off it. You’d have to give up too many earthly pleasures, m’lad.”

“Ah. But you get unearthly ones in exchange,” Doyle remarked; and strangely enough, at that moment Bodie could imagine him as a monk, every day the will of steel battling to subdue his leanings to sin. And what a battle it would be: Doyle, with his tastes for wild sex, and mood-altering substances both legal and illegal, and the flair he had for seriously harming other people who got in his way: killing people, dealing out the retribution of death, was a part of Doyle’s life, and not often a part he seemed particularly to regret, either.

Challenging material, to say the least.

But then those who had the greatest struggle and the thorniest path attained, it was said, the greatest glory. Purity: to extreme. Bodie could just see Doyle there alone in his cell: the whips, the bleeding palms, those eyes burning green fire from that strange saint’s face.

Bodie tensed all over with shock as he realised that for some reason he was hard: cock straining at the fly of his cords. And all tied up with it was the sudden memory of last night: Doyle, masturbating for him, the

getting birds, despite what he said. Mind you, Bodie had nothing to grumble about on his own account: women found him attractive, full stop. Dark hair, eyes, powerful male strength. Never one to be modest, Bodie knew it. But Doyle, Bodie considered, had something of his own. A remote kind of—it could take you unawares, stop your heart, the way he looked sometimes.

Bodie jumped as a pair of lean fingers snapped briskly underneath his nose. “You there?” Doyle said caustically.

“Just thinking.”

“Something good, was it?”

“Why’d you say that?” Bodie said sourly. “You’re right, mind you—I was thinking about my chances of getting you to pay the bill.”

“All right,” Doyle said amiably enough, and Bodie did a double take as Doyle raised a finger and an eyebrow to summon the waiter.

“Starting on that long hard path to salvation, Doyle?”

▼ They were back at the hotel in five minutes. “Drink?” Bodie jerked an eye at the gloomy bartender, alone in the empty bar, polishing a glass very slowly.

“Nah, he’d only have to dirty another one. We’ve got something in the room, haven’t we?”

Only one toothmug (plastic) and they took turns with it. The little room looked clean and cosy as the day outside grew darker. For a while they had the balcony doors open so that they could see the stars and the lights of the villages dotted about the mountains and let the smell and the spirit of Italy enter: but by ten PM the air blowing in was too chilly, so they shut it. At one side of the room was a desk and one chair which looked uncomfortable, so they shoved a bolster along the head of the bed and lounged on it side by side.

Doyle had a paperback Harold Robbins which he read with one arm propped behind his head, legs crossed at the ankles. When it was his turn for the toothglass of whisky he balanced that precariously on his belly and risked a spillage every time he had to let go to turn the page. Bodie was reading the guidebook from Pompeii: he found a page with illustrations from the brothel wall and held it up for Doyle to see.

“What d’you think, eh?”

Doyle passed over the empty glass and took the book, which he brought close to his eyes—then took it abruptly away. “Ang on. Just trying to get me going, aren’t you?”

Bodie raised an eyebrow. “Would I?”

“Yeah, you like to watch me suffer.”

“Shouldn’t wear such tight jeans then, should you.

Go on, Doyle, at least you can tell yourself it’s Art.”

One of the scenes depicted fellatio, one a man taking a woman from behind. “Pretty forward for their age, weren’t they?” Doyle commented.

“How d’you mean?”

Doyle took his time: clearly the whisky was taking its toll on the transfer of electrons. “What I mean is, considering the human race ’ad only been on the evolutionary clock face about half a second, seems funny they got into fellatio that early on.”

Bodie was wincing. “It rhymes with ‘ratio’, Doyle.”

“How d’you know?” Doyle challenged swiftly.

“Debriefing from Cowley, was it?” This he found amusing, convulsing with a fit of laughter. Bodie stayed dignified.

“Hasn’t anyone ever put you right before?”

Doyle stopped laughing to observe: “Well, I’ve never had to ask for it.”

No answer to that. Bodie tried to snatch back the book. Doyle put up a fight for it then surrendered, sweeping his paperback off the bed and onto the floor and closing his eyes. “Fellatio,” he tried out, a couple of times

Bodie yawned suddenly. Long, hard day. Another tomorrow. Rome.

“What time shall I set the alarm for?” Doyle was reaching out for the little clock.

“Breakfast at seven,” Bodie yawned again.

His partner said grimly, “We get breakfast tomorrow, do we?” He threw back the covers; the bed creaked.

The moment was upon him.

Bodie’s hand shot out and caught Doyle’s vanishing arm. Doyle turned, brow mildly creased in query.

“Don’t go away, “ Bodie said, low, strung-out, and Doyle stared at him as if he were unreal.

“Wha—?”

Bodie swallowed over the sudden dryness in his throat, but his smile was devilish enough as he tilted his head at Doyle:

“Shouldn’t have started something if you didn’t want to finish it, Ray.”

“What are you on about?” Doyle said, but Bodie saw the very moment that sudden understanding struck in and Doyle’s eyes narrowed on him, still as a cat and tensed: Bodie grinned again.

“Ah, don’t be like that. Weren’t so innocent last night, were you? Why else’d you do it, if not to give me a thrill? Well, I gotta hand it to you. Thrill’s about right.” He lifted a finger, touched Doyle’s hand, trailing it down and around to his palm, making a caress of it; perhaps a sardonic one. “Must have felt pretty good for you, came

Doyle's whiplash rebuff was instant, every sinew in his wrist resisting. But Bodie, ruthless, overpowered him and pressed Doyle's slick hand to his cock and closed the fingers around the aching, throbbing length of it. His voice sounded harsh, sadistic almost: "Just do it, Ray." He squeezed his eyes shut: erotic visions beguiled him. "Do it for me."

"Oh, Bodie," Doyle murmured; angry? disturbed? but he stroked Bodie's cock, oh the sweet feelings that evoked, kneaded it hard, harder, and Bodie convulsed as he got there, painful lust melting suddenly into a wonderful release, holding Doyle's hand hard onto himself until the very last.

Even in the fading glow he clutched Doyle hard and would not let him go.

"Jesus, Bodie," Doyle whispered to him again, breath warm and close against his face.

"It's all right," Bodie murmured. "Ssh, it's okay." Sleepy now, he muttered a little protest as Doyle extricated himself from his grip, and then fell back into sleep.

Doyle put the light off: went to the bathroom and washed, used the toilet, then came back to bed. Stretching over Bodie, careful not to touch him, he switched out the bedside lamp and the room went dark.



Bodie opened his eyes to the morning light coming in between the shutters, his brain engaging bit by bit, running the startup routine: who am I—? where am I—? Feeling okay—?

Everything checked out. But then higher brain function struck in and caused instant chaos.

Did I really—? Did he—?

Doyle was still peacefully asleep, breathing light and quick. Looking at him, at the hand curled around the bedclothes, Bodie experienced a detailed physical memory of Doyle touching him last night, making him come the way he had. His insides dissolved: they were not tender men, and yet it had been a peculiarly tender thing they had done.

He looked at Doyle's sleeping mouth, the shape of it, and knew what he was going to do. Careful to move gently he slipped an arm around Doyle and pulled himself closer, close enough to catch the warm, sleepy smell of his body and his breath. He kissed him on the mouth. At the same time his fingers brushed against Doyle's cheek.

"Wha' the hell—"

"Ssh," Bodie said. He closed his eyes in bliss and moved himself against Doyle's warm thigh.

"Bodie—"

"Just shut up, will you?" His hand rubbed down Doyle's chest to distract him and went lower, found his warm and willing cock waking up and ready to play. He gave it an encouraging squeeze and it seemed to like him, shy but sexy, nudging gently at his palm.

Bodie murmured again in pure pleasure, and then Doyle whipped himself and his sweet cock away. He glared.

"What the hell are you up to?"

"Oh." Bodie murmured in reproach, "He was enjoying that." He threw back the covers and nodded down at Doyle's cock, now drooping disconsolately over his belly.

"Well, 'e shouldn't have been, then," Doyle snapped. "For godsake, Bodie... are you trying to turn me queer or something?"

"Why not, you haven't got far to go, have you?" All this time Bodie was following him around the bed and Doyle was trying to evade him, not always successfully, slapping his hands away, eventually laughing:

"Bodie, stop it—! Stop it now!"

"Ah, come on, Ray," Bodie said, serious now, sitting back on his heels. "We did it last night."

"Yeah, but that didn't mean we 'ad to do it again this morning."

"Ah, just once more. Please."

"Get off me, Bodie! Look, for the fifth and final time, I'm not queer, okay? An' I'm beginning to wonder about you."

Bodie groaned in exasperation, hands resting empty on his thighs. "Lots of blokes do it, Ray, doesn't make them queer."

"Yeah?" Doyle challenged. "Mates of yours, are they?"

"Look, we're both in the mood for it, and there's no women around unless you fancy trying your luck with Edna. They even have a name for it in the States—"

"Yeah, I just bet they do."

"Fuck buddies," Bodie pronounced.

Doyle looked as if he were going to be sick. Seizing his chance Bodie was on him again, seizing him by the upper arms and pushing him down to the pillow and throwing everything he could into the look he gave him—

"Just a kiss then, Doyle. One kiss."

Utter stillness and silence. Doyle looked up at him, and Bodie smiled down, as tender and intoxicated as he had ever been in his life.

Meaning to let fly with something sharp Doyle looked up into his partner's eyes; soft, dark blue, a sort of gentleness about him as he waited: "All right," he heard himself say, astonishing himself, and Bodie came in for it: he knew, somehow, just how to kiss Doyle to make him want it, and as his tongue, gentle, dipped into and caressed the inside of his mouth he ran his hand down Doyle's chest

“Too late now,” Doyle shrugged. “Gonna look even worse, innit, if I tap ‘im on the shoulder now going ‘you know just now, when you thought I said ‘the bed’s comfy’? What I really said was, the beds are—”

“Ah, stoppit and shuddup.” Bodie stretched out as far as possible—about three inches—and pressed his thigh to Doyle’s. The answering pressure he perhaps imagined, for when he opened his eyes Doyle was looking away from him, out of the window.

Bodie dozed, jerking in and out of sleep with the swaying of the coach and the piercing chatter of the child. The journey seemed, as ever, very long. As they turned onto the Rome ringroad he foolishly imagined that they must be nearly there, and sat up to look around with interest. However, one and a half hours later he began to understand that Rome consisted of 31 huge Zonas, through every one of which they had to pass before they arrived at the tiny bit in the middle containing anything of interest. And by the time they did he was hot, tired, bored, and fit to strangle the singing child behind.

“Shame, innit,” Doyle muttered beside him, “Just think, they could have bought a cat instead.”

And then the coach swung around a corner in heavy traffic to enter a long, impressive avenue. Huge white marble columns every few yards along the wide pavements signalled grandeur, the sense that the road led to somewhere highly important. The roadsides were lined with coaches, and at the end of the avenue could be seen a domed edifice.

“What’s that then?” Bodie said blankly.

“Church or something,” Doyle shrugged.

Fred turned around, unable to overlook such ignorance. “That’s the Vatican.”

“The Vatican!” Bodie breathed, and when Fred’s eyes had swivelled frontwards, wiggled his eyebrows irreverently at Doyle. Their driver gave them their instructions, two and a half hours of freedom before they were collected up again. The next thing was to stand up, wincing with cramp and stiffness, shuffle down the aisles hopping over people’s legs, bags and rubbish, waiting politely every so often for exceptionally large, slow people to amass their bags and waddle, puffing, out of their seats—Bodie grimly remarked they’d need a week of training to recover.

“You absolutely must go to the Sistine Chapel,” Edna instructed them with great firmness.

They never got there. Perhaps the glories of an imagined Paradise meant less to a CI5 agent than to the average man in the street: they had seen death, they

knew it. And as they could testify, death was not about some dazzling golden vision of angels, trumpets, and the Lord. Far more pressing than such fancies were the calls of freedom—fresh air—! so that, perfectly happy in their own way, they wandered along the streets between the columns, bought warm pizza from a street vendor and chilled cans of drink. They investigated dozens of dark little shops selling jewellery, clothes, postcards, with old Italian women dressed in black sitting beady-eyed behind the tills. Bodie bought a Liverpool football shirt—

“What the ‘ell’s that for?”

“Always wanted one,” Bodie said shamefaced, “and it was cheap.”

Doyle spent a long time browsing through the racks of T-shirts which, they discovered, cost no more than £1 each: but being particularly fussy, despite there being a choice of thousands he found neither the exact shade nor style to please him.

“Come on, Doyle. There must be one you fancy... how about this one?”

“I don’t want a picture of the Coliseum stretched across me chest.”

“Don’t blame you, mate. Why’d anyone want a flickhouse on his chest?”

Doyle looked at him askance. “D’you think we’d better buy a guidebook—?”

But there was so much to do and see in that one street that it took them over an hour to walk the 200 yards to St Peter’s Square. And they found it wonderful: a huge circle laid out like the rays of the sun, and after so much time in their half a cubic metre of Coach 99 it was bliss, just to stand out in the sun in so much open space. There was even a fountain and squabbling pigeons in case they felt homesick for Trafalgar. Before they could enter they had to pass the inspection of the Swiss Guard, who took a distrust to both of them and frisked them officiously. Bodie rolled his eyes as he raised his hands; so strange, these young uniformed men so arrogant, so important of themselves, versus himself and Doyle, so apparently tame, Doyle standing so patient and still for the search: and yet Bodie had the feeling that for all the guns and the Hitler boots and the macho posturings of strength they were cream puffs: that he and Doyle could take them all if they tried.

The thought of violence and Doyle on to kill set off a chain reaction; he looked down at his partner kneeling casually on the stone paving adjusting the focus of his camera, and Doyle, acute, looked up. Time stopped: it froze the moment like a snapshot, sealing them into a private world.

blew him an impromptu kiss. Sharp-eyed Suki spotted it and telegraphed a speaking glance to her husband. Bodie saw Doyle track the exchange but not react to it. Good on you, Doyle. What do we care what they think, anyway?

But in a way he did care.

The next stop was the Coliseum, a giant antiquity, far huger than one would ever imagine from its regular appearances on mugs, jugs and ladies' headscarves. Doyle and Bodie peered through solid iron bars at the vast circus ring inside, the tiers of seats rising to the skyline, and tried to visualise screaming Christians scattered by leaping, pouncing lions as crowds of ancient Romans roared and cheered. The violence of the past seemed so much nobler and more magnificent than the violence of today: it was only moments before they faced their first brush with the roguery they had been warned was rife in modern Rome when a crowd of narrowfaced blank-eyed gipsy children milled about them, young girls who looked no more than twelve carrying dirty, pretty babies on their skinny hips—

"Oi!" Bodie jumped and slapped a hand away from his pocket: Doyle caught the offending wrist as it withdrew bearing Bodie's wallet. "Prego, prego, signori," muttered the girl and melted away into the crowd, but others were not so lucky, several inhabitants of Coach 99 returning to it without their purses.

Back onto the coach. On and off again. After a while it all became a bit of a blur. People began to argue about which famous antiquity they had just been whisked past because after a while everything began to look the same, all huge, all fabulous, all ancient.

But there was one place they never forgot. Hustled off the coach, whisked down narrow alleyways, all 64 inhabitants of Coach 99 arrived in a tiny square at the back of which loomed a huge snowy marble sculpture of pillars and men and horses ejecting plumes of water into a bluish pool. Tourists thronged around this pool in their hundreds. Bodie and Doyle pushed their way right to the front in seconds: they were young, they were arrogant, they had no manners. Doyle knelt and dipped a hand into the cool water.

"Wait a minute," Bodie said, looking down at Doyle meditatively, "This is something famous, this is. 'Ang on. It'll come to me."

"Well, don't force it."

"No, it's coming. 'S a fountain, innit? Three coins—something about three coins in a fountain—"

"It's the heat, Bodie, it's getting to you. Here—sit down. I'll duck your head in."

Dodging—"It's the Trevi Fountain," Bodie arrived at it

triumphantly. "You 'ave to throw a coin in, it's traditional."

Doyle snorted where he knelt, one wrist draped artistically across his knee. "Yeah, sounds like a tradition worth encouragin'."

"Cynic. You throw in a coin, see, and that means you're sure to come back to Rome one day."

Obviously thinking deeply Doyle tossed up the alternatives and came to a decision. "Nope: think I'll keep the money." He began to rise and Bodie thumped him. Laughing, Doyle half-fell against the low fountain wall, might have tipped backwards over it if Bodie hadn't rescued him with a lazy hand.

"Tighter than Cowley's arse, aren't you, mate?"

"—only you would know that, Bodie—"

"Okay, okay. I'll pay for you, that's what you want, isn't it." Bodie fished in his pocket for a coin but Doyle slapped his hand away.

"No thanks, I'll pay for meself. Won't work otherwise."

They stood there on the steps of the Trevi fountain, each with a lire coin in their hand, looking at the blue water, the dazzling white marble, the thronging holiday crowds. Then Doyle drew back his arm, let gently fly with his coin: it twisted through the air, glistening in the strong sunlight and fell with a gentle splash into the water. Bodie did the same, the coin describing an arc through the air before it fell. Bodie had a good eye for such things; he reckoned that if he could dive beneath the surface his own coin would be as near to Doyle's as it could be, perhaps even atop it. And Doyle turned and grinned at him, acknowledging without words the little feat of skill, and Bodie watched his hair change colour as the sun drifted in and out of clouds, and the patterns of moving water rippling across the green of his eyes; and into his mind came the thought, curiously exact and complete:

I'm going to fall in love with you. And you won't fight.

A shout recalled them to rejoin ranks: rounded up and counted they left the Trevi fountain and their coins, slumbering together on the ancient fountain floor.

They were going back up through the maze of alleyways, Bodie and Doyle dropping back to the rear of the party, loping along at a steady pace, soaking up the unexpectedly atmospheric aura of this back-street vista, not intended for tourists—narrow cobbled paths, scraggy washing hanging everywhere from windows, rubbish in the gutters and urchins running barefoot. Squalour: but somehow rather splendid squalour, the smell of Italian cooking herbs in the air. Then they became aware of a

swaying with the rhythm of the journey, heavy and limp against Bodie as the coach took corners. Bodie, as always the only one left awake, took the opportunity to unwind the bloody hanky and examine his hand—the cut, extending from his wrist to his forearm, was long but not deep and the bleeding had slowed to a reddish ooze.

He looked up from the wound to find Doyle's eyes unexpectedly watching him, drowsy green. "That bothering you?" Doyle asked, yawning; he took Bodie's hand into his and drew it onto his lap, turning it gently this way and that. The touch sent little shocks racing along Bodie's nerves and raised all the hairs on his skin. Doyle's fingers were so tender on him, the small pain he was causing quite exquisite—"I'll look at it later for you," Doyle promised, green gaze dwelling intently on his face; Bodie wondered, winded, if Doyle knew what the look, the touch, was doing to him. His hand lay on Doyle's lap; gently, almost imperceptibly, he pressed his knuckles against him. Doyle stayed very still, head down, as if just looking at Bodie's arm; beneath his touch Bodie sensed a tension, a springing to life. Heart pounding, head spinning, he lifted his arm away and stared for some time out of the window across the aisle without seeing a thing.

What a risk to take, all but touching Doyle up in public. Yet it had been—thrilling. He felt—brilliant, boundless with life and energy and excitement. He was just, so, glad that they had taken this path. Whatever came of it, something, nothing, it was a strange and wonderful new dimension to his life.

He must have dozed off himself, for the next he knew was the world filtering back into his ears and Doyle shifting about next to him as the coach drew up outside Pensione Alberto. The time was 6.30PM. They went to their room for a pee and a wash. Doyle came out of the bathroom yawning widely: "Hard work this, innit?"

"Need a holiday when you get back to recover from the holiday," Bodie agreed, flopping back full length on the bed.

"I tell you what, though. We'd better jog off to the shop—no chance tomorrow, full day out."

"Where is it tomorrow. Just remind me."

"Capri. Where the cars come from."

"Ah yeah," Bodie sighed romantically, "Napoleon's Isle."

Doyle canted a disbelieving glance his way. "Nah, don't think so. This is the one with the volcano."

"No way. You're thinking of Sicily."

"What makes you think Capri's an island anyway?"

Doyle was opening the bedroom door. Wishing he could

stay where he was Bodie swung his weary legs off the bed and followed him.

"Why else would we be going by boat, Mastermind?"

"Because we're on an island now, of course."

"Italy isn't an island, Doyle. What's the matter with you?"

"Well, it's part of one, innit? Came across by ferry, didn't we? Can't walk off Italy, can you?"

"Yeh, you can. But only if you're going to Switzerland." They were clattering down the narrow stairway by now, jostling and laughing as Bodie tried to get past Doyle and take the lead, Doyle neatly retaining pole position by dint of some fancy footwork. "Going out to eat?" kindly Fred asked of them as they arrived in the foyer.

"Haven't decided yet," Doyle was answering, flying off the bottom step with the help of a hefty thump to the small of his back. "Of!—But I can't say I fancy Bodie's cold sausages and bottled water."

"We've found a little place down the road. Fancy joining us? Suki and Gianni are coming, and Don and Eileen, and—"

Bodie met Doyle's eyes, read no violent dissent there, so that was settled. First of all though they went to the little supermarket because it might be their last shopping opportunity, and stocked up on beer and bottled water and a few duty-frees to take back home—some Italian Scotch for Cowley, which should annoy him nicely, and a fancy bottle of olive oil for Doyle, who had chef-like pretensions. Then they joined the others on a party-spirited expedition to the local pizza restaurant.

Throughout this evening Bodie was peripherally aware of a feeling of alienation: it didn't unsettle him, he was too used to it: he could watch these ordinary human beings at play, even join in for a while, but he was essentially apart. Doyle too. Was it that life in CI5 was so desensitising, so that everywhere they looked they saw life's blackest side, always ready to draw a gun and fire, that they had lost the knack of being normal?

Or, Bodie mused, was it the other way round entirely. That they had always been different, and that was how and why George Cowley had spotted them, and recruited them for CI5?

Of all the people here, he could be close only to one: another outsider, like himself, one who would also be a devil if he had not been cast by George Cowley in the role of saint. They did not fit in here among this party of chattering tourists; six days away playing in this dreamtime was long enough, it was time he and Doyle were back in their world.

Doyle nudged him. "Oi. What's on your mind?"

darkened eyes in the mirror. Still that sensation in the pit of his stomach: dread? excitement? When he got back into the bedroom Doyle was closing up the shutters and locking the windows. The air in the room was fresh and chilly. Bodie threw off his clothes quickly and got in between the covers, lying on his back with his hands behind his head.

For the first time in his life it felt odd to be lying here with Ray Doyle in the room, and to be naked. Yet to abandon normal practice and wear some token garment would be equally odd: what sort of message would that give out? I am unafraid to be naked with you = you are no threat to me: I must garb myself in your presence = there is some doubt about your intentions.

Oh yeah, it was even almost funny, put like that. Maybe one day they could share the joke. He lay quite still, open-eyed, as Doyle pulled back the covers and got in beside him. Bodie said nothing, and had nothing in mind to say. For Doyle must know how he felt. Bodie knew quite well his response must have been obvious as Doyle knelt there before him: if not quite trembling, he had certainly been hard enough to show.

"Light out?" Doyle queried.
"Yeh."

The sudden blackness and silence was disorienting. Bodie's senses fought for and gained some meaning out of it: gradually dark shapes appeared here and there around the room. Still Doyle did not touch him.

Oh, get real, Bodie. Doyle wasn't going to, was he?

The realisation came to him in a rush, and almost as a relief. His fingers began to unclench on the sheet. It had all been a fantasy. He had been mad to even dream that Doyle might be going to make some sexual overture towards him: no such thing was ever going to happen, and that was just how it should be.

"Bodie?"

The whisper made him jump. "What?"

And in disbelief he heard Doyle do it, take that astonishing leap into the dark: "Still fancy it, do you?"

Bodie had to force the answer out through dry lips. "How d'you mean?"

"Ah, come on. You haven't forgotten this morning, have you? I've been thinking about it all day."

Christ almighty. His heart jolting and his blood singing in his ears Bodie said, lips hardly moving, "Have you?"

"Course I have. Haven't you?"

Bodie swallowed, and made the no-way-back admission: "Yeah."

"Well, come on then."

As Doyle moved closer to him Bodie felt the brush of

his skin across the lifted hairs on his body, Doyle's breath light and warm on his face. "We've gotta keep this closer than MI5, Bodie," the soft voice warned, "We'd lose our jobs just like that if anyone even knew about last night, let alone anything else."

"You think I don't know that? I read the bloody small-print too, y'know."

"Just wanna get it straight. Whatever we do out here—it's not going back with us, okay?"

Bodie always had lived for the moment in hand and the promise came from him easily: "Yeah—now stop carryin' on like an old woman."

"And if anyone did twig it—let's get the story right—we're on holiday and these things happen," Doyle improvised rapidly, "—we 'ad too much to drink one night, we tried it for a laugh, can't remember exactly what we did but nothing much happened, that sound okay?"

"Look, Doyle," Bodie was surprised at the acid thinness of his own voice, "it's not gonna make the *Nine O'clock News* when we get back, y'know."

"Just in case. What if Cowley put a tail on us?"

"Why the hell would he do that?" Bodie gazed at him in disbelief. "And use your bloody common sense—where would it all end? If he's that suspicious he'd have to put a tail on the tail, and another tail on that and he's short of manpower as it is with us away. We've never been asked to tail anyone, have we—3.7, 4.5, would ye mind tailing Murph and Jones tae Amsterdam, just tae make sure they're no' bonking each other on the quiet, ye understand—!" and he felt Doyle laughing a little beside him, paranoia edged out by absurdity. He went on, groping for and finding Doyle's hand, placing it on himself, "And in any case, even if we did have a bloody tail it's not here in the room with us now, is it, so shut up or I'll lose interest."

Doyle moved closer, seemed to be hesitating. "I'm nearly asleep as it is," Bodie yawned, "reckon you can wake me up?" He shut his eyes as he felt Doyle's hand pass across his chest in a brief, heartstopping caress; then, implausibly, deliciously, thin cool fingers travelling lower, running lightly over his sensitive skin. Bodie winced and shivered as Doyle touched him on his nipples, rougher than a woman but surer; after a moment he seized Doyle's wandering hand and pushed it down to where he wanted it. Doyle seemed to understand that, murmuring sexily to Bodie: "Yeah, you liked this last night didn't you, you made me do it," and squeezed him long and hard. Bodie made a low, helpless sound, turning his head away from Doyle and then towards him again, searching for his face, but he could

them Bodie's, obviously enjoying the little condescension: Bodie then had to fight with himself to get the expected syllable of gratitude out. Suki seemed to spend most of the time leaning across the table and staring deeply and meaningfully into Doyle's eyes, at least when he deigned to lift them from his plate.

"Ever go to any of the London clubs, Ray?"

"Yeh, sometimes."

"He go with you?" she nodded at Bodie.

"Nope," Doyle said, "Not a clubbing type."

"Oh, you never asked me," Bodie camped. Doyle ignored him: Bodie's expression did not change, though his senses registered the direct hit. Reaction's certainly set in there, then.

Doyle left the table soon afterwards to go back to the room with five minutes to spare. "You two fallen out?" Suki asked Bodie, big brown eyes peering over the rim of her very expensive glasses.

"Not as far as I know... still, Ray's the moody type. You won't believe this. He's booking again for October, got the idea to bring his bird back with him: good luck to her, I say." Bodie dropped this in with a cool smile and did not look their way as they tried hard not to exchange glances. Doyle was weaving his way back through the tables at that point: "Isn't that right, Ray," Bodie said as Doyle came within earshot

"What?" Doyle picked up his last piece of dry bread and looked at it without appetite.

"Bringing Sylvie with you next time, weren't you saying?"

"Not if she hears about breakfast," was Doyle's only comment, dropping the bread back onto the table.

▼ By 6.30 AM they were on their way. In his seat Bodie shut his eyes and tipped his head back and made no attempt at conversation. He was, he realised, very tired: travelling nonstop, so many impressions coming and going, lack of a regular routine or even the chance to stop and breathe and take stock between things of large historical or cultural importance. Every minute of their time seemed to be accounted for by the tour itinerary, except of course for the hours between dusk and dawn, and those too had their story.

He was awoken by a nudge in his side and there was Doyle, holding two steaming cups of the liquid which the driver's grumpy assistant passed off as coffee.

"Thanks," Bodie grunted, still half asleep, and took it.

Doyle pushed back the bracelet on his arm and grinned at him as he yawned and stretched in his seat. "Worn you out, have I?" His voice was quiet, but not unduly so.

"You're not kidding." He took a sip of the coffee, grimaced. "Talking to me now, are you?"

"Shouldn't I be?" His hand was lying alongside Bodie's between them, and for one moment Bodie felt the hair-raising sensation of a fingertip touching his, though Doyle's head was turned away, looking out of the window.

"Thought I'd upset you," Bodie said, and took another cautious sip.

Doyle turned his way, and his expression was cool, appraising: "Oh, you have."

Bodie's heart flipped over in his chest. He gulped the coffee down and crumpled the plastic cup in his hand, staring ahead.

"Might never be the same again," Doyle added, unsmiling; and then he seemed to look away from troubling inner thoughts to see Bodie himself, his lips curving up, his eyes suddenly friendly, warm. As if he would touch him, if he could. Kiss him, perhaps.

Bodie's heart quickened in a way it did not under gunfire. Things had changed; it scared him a little bit, excited him more. And there was still the night to come.

Meanwhile there were the motions of tourism to be gone through. Coach 99 was left forlornly at the Naples harbour alongside Coach 101 to watch all of its 64 inhabitants board a ferry and sail away across the Mediterranean. Today had a truly holiday feel to it, away from the dusty roads of cities ancient and modern and out onto the deep blue ocean. On deck it was breezy, and they soon got chilled standing there by the railings watching the ferry's white and foaming wake streaming out behind them, the hot reek of engine oil in the air; it was time to go below decks, where to their delight they found a bar. Also many of their fellow Coach 99-ers, but as Bodie said, nothing in life was perfect. He bought two beers—

"Bit early, innit?"

"We're on holiday—" they chorused together and rounded the corner in search of a private spot to drink it. And there behind a capstan coiled about with thick rope lurked the Coach 99 child, with something sticky in its hand. Bodie smiled at it pleasantly then goggled his eyes— "Boo!" he said quietly. The child fled, wide-eyed.

Acknowledging the success of this Doyle raised an eyebrow at Bodie, then took up a pose leaning on the capstan and had a swig from his can. "Like kids, do you?"

"All right in their place, I suppose."

"Want some of your own?" Doyle tipped up his can again, one hand raking through his hair; he looked out to sea, at the factories and the smoke of Naples all along the coastline.

Withdrawing his gaze from the view, Doyle looked down at the dark head, felt the graze of Bodie's mouth gentle on his skin, and said: "If Fred and Edna come around that corner right now you can do the talking," but he didn't sound bothered.

Against his lips the other man's skin was salty, warm. Bodie said, quiet, intense, "I want—"

"Yeah, I noticed."

"Let's do it again. Ray. Let's."

"Right here?" Doyle scoffed, but there was tension in his own body now, the veins in his forearms standing out stark and blue. Desire spread through Bodie's blood like a sickness: he slipped an arm around Doyle, found and fingered the tiny bud of his nipple through damp cotton. And Doyle stood there registering the shock of it, eyes closing for a second, blanking out the blue dazzle of the sea and Bodie's eyes beguiling him, the better to focus on the feel of Bodie's warm, strong fingers pinching him, sending thrilling messages all across his nerves and down to his cock.

Bodie came closer still, grazed his sensitive ear with the lightest of whispers, a thought which had come to him last night at a crucial moment—

"I'll go down on you, Ray, just say you want me to."

The offer was mad, extravagant, dangerous: anyone could come round here at any moment, but Doyle's eyes, wild, tempted, met his, and for a moment time stood still for them—

"Oh yes, I want you to," Doyle whispered back to him at last. "Gonna swallow it for me, are you?"

A huge jolt hit Bodie just like that, his cock swelling, throbbing. He stared at Doyle without saying anything. Electricity alive between them: the heat in the air beating down. And then a sudden babble of voices nearby, coming nearer. Doyle actually jumped, fingers whipping into his armpit for his gun, and then his arm dropped empty down by his side as he moved to look out at the view again, and Bodie's own hand trembled as he raised it to smooth down his hair and aim a friendly grin at the tourists coming their way.

Without a word Doyle swung away from the sea view and began to move off fast down the narrow path. Bodie followed him, heart like a hammer in his chest; sweat prickled all over him, his loins as heavy as lead, the pulse of his blood banging in his veins.

That was the end of Bodie's sightseeing: to this day he could tell you nothing about the elegant little town of AnaCapri and the beautiful white villa of Axel Munthe, save that the heat of the sun beat down on him and his head swam with the wine they had with an untasted lunch, and desire for Doyle intoxicated him still more

than that; so that every sense in him urged him on to hunt him, kiss him, force him if he had to.

They were lunching on the terrace of the first hotel they had come to, overlooking the magnificent panorama of the cliff and the ocean: the food was going to cost a packet but Bodie was not thinking about that. In the shade of a potted cypress tree, beneath the white iron fretwork table his knee pressed against Doyle's, hard. His partner was leaning forward, chin almost on his forearms, peering out over the terrace to the cliffs below. His curls shone copper in the sun; the nape of his neck was damp.

"Come in the heads with me," Bodie said, low and fast, and Doyle turned a fierce little smile on him, the chipped tooth flashing.

"No thanks, Bodie, be just my luck to get done for indecent behaviour."

Just the way he said it, low and sexy, *indecent* made Bodie's heart thrill and flutter, nor less the knowledge that Doyle had said it to arouse him. He sought out Doyle's eyes and stared at him very hard. "You look good enough to eat today."

Doyle lowered his lashes. "Yeah, so you said." He looked up quickly, to catch the hard and hungry gaze. "What is it with you today, Bodie? Oysters or something?"

"It's you, something about you's just getting to me."

Doyle met his eyes amused; but Bodie's intensity, the moody passion of the man, seemed to be altering the very air around them; he was finding it very hard to breathe. Bodie looked very trim today; wearing the white trousers which suited him, almost a James Bond figure, cool and dark—and sexy. If Bodie just touched him again—

And Bodie did touch him; his hand gripped Doyle's knee under cover of the table then slipped upwards over the hardness of his thigh and traced over the line of his cock with a finger.

"You're half way there already," he said softly, oddly touched by that, and it made him all but beg in uncharacteristic submission, voice low: "Come to the heads with me Ray, just get ourselves off so I can think straight again."

Doyle shook his head, his cock throbbing under the careless touch of Bodie's hand. Oh, brilliant. Now he was as desperate as Bodie. But not quite to the point of insanity.

"In a hotel? Come on, Bodie, this isn't a Hampstead cottage, y'know. Be waiters and tourists an' all in and out the whole time. Forget it. Look down there."

Leaning right over him to look, fingers still caressing

Loners by nature, the claustrophobic togetherness of Coach 99 did not suit them, and it was so beautiful here, the sky azure blue and the sea sparkling and glittering beneath, the little yacht, the fresh warm air. Then they began to lope up the path, enjoying the sheer physicality of it, making a little unspoken war of it, keeping in front, taking the shallowest breaths etc., until they came out onto the streets again, back in mainstream life.

They took a minibus down from the elusive heights of AnaCapri down to a halfway point, where there was a pleasant park to wander around—more of those glorious views out to sea—Bodie snapped Doyle sitting on a wall with a palm tree behind, brown skin, white shirt, cheeky grin. Then they meandered through the narrow cobbled streets window-shopping and found themselves eventually back at the harbour.

“Ever ‘eard of the Blue Grotto?” Bodie asked of Doyle, reading one of the many signs chalked on blackboards.

“Nope,” said Doyle thoughtfully, “Blue as in movie, d’you think?”

“Go and find out, shall we?”

Another magical experience, though Bodie had not been expecting anything. They went in a motorboat with about twenty other tourists, captained by an Italian youth with a deep and swarthy tan and the habit of crooning throaty Italian love songs to the lady passengers as he pulled the tiller this way and that and the boat sailed around the spectacular coastline. Bodie leaned over the edge of the boat and thrust his hands into the cool water rushing past the prow. Doyle raised an eyebrow at him, commenting deeply, “Sticky fingers?” and Bodie grinned back at him, knowing, cocky as the wind blew briskly and coolly through his hair, and Doyle’s hands joined his in the water, feeling the pull and the force of it as the boat ploughed on through. They must be in deep water, and perhaps over rocks: the sea was a dark blue, the darkest, with a silvery sparkle in it put there by the rays of the sun.

“Colour of your eyes,” Doyle said. He looked from one to the other, assessingly.

“Exactly.”

It struck through him like a power surge: Ray Doyle, looking at him in that way. Made him shiver— “Careful, Ray,” Bodie warned, low, sardonic. “As you keep sayin’, no point starting off the romance of the century.”

“Just makin’ conversation,” was Doyle’s comment, and stayed quiet thereafter, eyes drifting over the horizon.

Loud shouts heralded arrival at their destination—which was an uncompromisingly small hole at the foot

of a huge, black cliff towering to the skyline. Little rowing boats lay at anchor nearby, each crewed by another sunblackened Italian, now upping anchors and rowing as fast as they could towards the pleasure boats in the race for customers. When their turn came Bodie followed Doyle over the edge into the narrow, rocking boat indicated to them and the boatman began to row fast and furious for the hole.

“No preety ladies,” he observed, looking back over his shoulder.

“Not this time,” Doyle said.

“You like preety ladies?”

Doyle met Bodie’s eye, gave him a little smirky grin. “You bet, mate,” Bodie said, amiably enough, just in case the chap had some sort of a threesome in mind, though surely nothing much could be accomplished in a narrow rocking rowboat. The boat, propelled by those muscular Italian arms, was now approaching the impossibly tiny hole in the side of the cliff.

“Tell me we’re not going in there,” Bodie said, claustrophobia or whatever phobia it would be regarding tiny holes in the sides of mountainous cliffs striking in, but yes, going in they were, ordered imperiously by the boatman to lie almost flat on the floor of the boat as the low arch of rock passed overhead and sudden darkness made them blink.

They emerged into a vast black rocky cavern, highroofed. In here where no sunshine ever reached the air was dank and chill. But, astonishingly, the seawater had changed into the lightest, brightest turquoise, sparkling like liquid aquamarine all around the boat.

“That’s amazing,” Bodie said.

“You being sarcastic?”

“No, it’s really amazing.”

“Yeah, I was thinkin’ that.”

“Underwater floodlights?”

“No, I think it’s a natural phenomenon. Didn’t that American guy back on the boat say so?”

“Engleesh?” The boatman, moodily lounging on his oar, interrupted this exchange.

“Yup.”

“I donta like Engleesh.”

“Oh, right,” Doyle said faintly, exchanging a look with Bodie.

“Know where we stand then mate, don’t we?” Bodie said with a humorous curve to his lips.

“Smoll teeps,” said the boatman with meaning.

Bodie met Doyle’s eyes. “I suppose we could swim out if it came to it.”

“Just give ‘im a beeg teep, Bodie, and let’s stay dry.”

Bodie handed over a 5000 lire note. The boatman

beers as well and set off back to the Pensione with his shopping bags, meeting Fred and Edna on the way and managing to be a touch more gracious than he felt he had probably been of late. When he got back to the room he shut the door and locked it behind him and turned to look at the bed.

The shutters were closed and the curtains drawn. It took his eyes a moment to adjust. Doyle was lying on his back, asleep, long legs sprawling. His jeans were in a heap on the floor; he wore only the white aertex and dark underpants, one leg drawn up with bent knee, one hanging off the bed.

Bodie remembered to breathe after a moment, his lungs sucking in a vast amount of air; slowly, quietly, he set the shopping down on the floor, eyes never leaving the bed.

Christ, but he was turned on to Doyle at the moment and no mistake. Every hair on his skin was erect; he was so fiercely aroused, cock throbbing with an urgency he seldom felt these days, nerves screaming at him to whip it out and jerk himself off just standing there and who cared if Doyle woke up and saw him? That need not stop him, not any more.

And it would be wiser, too: get it over with, get rid of it before it had a chance to settle and take root, because he was getting into trouble here. He knew all the signs: deep, deep water. For he knew what he wanted now. What he wanted was not to mess around with Doyle on the fringes: he wanted to take him all the way, as far as they could go, take them both out to the limit and stay there.

His hand clenched. Sorry, Ray. Doyle, who had only wanted to play around a bit, have his fancy tickled for him; caught instead in the web of Bodie's obsession. Unless Bodie could stop it in its tracks before he ever knew.

And he did not want to. He knew he should be shocked at himself, but what he wanted now was the clearest, most direct and most primitive of urges, expressed at its most crude: to give it to Doyle long and hard up the arse, spit him like a pig on the prong of his cock and never mind if he squealed, thrust and thrust until he emptied out this huge and terrifying desire into Doyle's body. Here it is: pass it on.

Perhaps alarmed on some psychic level by the resonances in the room, Doyle stirred; his breathing faltered, then changed its rhythm. He opened his eyes to see his partner standing at the foot of the bed staring at him. He smiled, but Bodie did not smile back, just kept up that powerful smouldering stare.

"Whassamatter?" Doyle said, coming fully awake,

propping himself up on an elbow, and at the sound of his voice the demons fled back into the shadows, the fixed blaze of Bodie's eyes shattering as he blinked. After a moment the tense set of his mouth broke and reformed into a smile, a smile of great charm, tenderness almost, and it dragged an answering smile from Doyle.

"Did you get it?" he yawned, remembering Bodie's mission, and the bed dipped under Bodie's weight as Bodie rapidly knelt and took Doyle's bare foot in his hand, bringing it to his mouth and kissing the sole.

"Christ, Bodie, you're shaking." Doyle's head was falling back onto the pillow as Bodie kissed warmly and swiftly from his ankle bone right up his leg to the sensitive inner thigh. "Wha'happened? Suki chase you back or something?"

"Ssh." Bodie was deftly pulling the tight underpants down a little more. Doyle lifted his rump obligingly off the bed but Bodie did not take the offered chance to rip them off, simply settled them beneath his cock so that the tight cotton band rubbed against his balls, a welcome pressure which made his eyes fly wide: clever of Bodie, intuitive, or perhaps more intimate even than that, perhaps an echo of Bodie's own secrets "Nice," he said aloud, his body springing to life. He reached behind him to thump the pillow back into plumpness, propped it behind his head so that he could watch Bodie touch him, stroking his balls very carefully, stretching the skin tight over the precious sacs inside, tracing the line between them with a fingertip. Something women didn't seem to know about, yet it could bring him off quicker than almost anything. Then Bodie's lips touched him there, gently, almost reverently. "Oh, Bodie," he said, and shut his eyes for an instant.

"Bodie," he said again after a moment, just for the hell of it, just to hear his name. The touch of Bodie's mouth was so sweet it was making stars dance before his eyes—I didn't know anything could be so bloody wonderful, I want him to go on doing this forever—and that was when he remembered Bodie's promise.

"Want me to have a shower?" but Bodie shook his head briefly, nuzzled at his groin in the dark curls of hair there, and Doyle remembered that Bodie had a thing for words—

His voice was soft, seductive as he reached down and ran his fingertips through Bodie's dark hair: "Gonna make me happy, then? Suck it for me." His cock leapt off his belly as he spoke: obviously wasn't only Bodie liked to hear it.

And he watched all the while, stiffly aroused by the sight of Bodie opening his mouth wide and taking in his cock, sucking it immediately and deliciously deep, lips

by the way Murph, good old Doyle let me screw him when we were in Italy'—"

Bodie was shaking his head in disbelief. "Ray, you know I wouldn't."

Still lying there, cool and relaxed, Doyle gave him a smile, surprisingly sweet. "Just checkin'. Wouldn't do much for my macho image if they knew I let you up my arse, now would it?"

He meant it. Bodie felt a sense of disbelief: he was going to get what he wanted. For all the wrong reasons, probably, but anyway he was going to get it. He leaned up on one elbow over Doyle, touched his hair, stroked a curl around one finger, hardly aware. "You won't like it," he said, bluntly, abruptly.

Doyle looked up at him for a moment, and then a quirky little smile twisted his mouth; the flawed tooth flashed rakishly. "Well, that's okay, Bodie. I don't plan to get the taste for it, y'know."

Something about the way he said it, a sort of sadness, courage, moved Bodie: go out in a blaze of glory, is that what you're thinking? Well, how wrong can you be.

Helpless nonetheless, Bodie leaned down to kiss him, and found the taste of his mouth intoxicating enough to stay for a while. But all while thoughts raced around his mind: temptation warred with intuition. And temptation won. At last he withdrew to whisper ironically, "I've got a feeling we shouldn't do this, Ray. So don't blame me afterwards."

Doyle said, almost bitterly, "I won't."

Bodie kissed him again, and let his hands range over him freely and possessively, and whispered to him, "Suntan oil?"

Doyle only took a moment to answer, though Bodie heard him catch his breath; perhaps that made it all too real for him, brought it right down out of the hearts and flowers, blaze of glory league, but Doyle was always practical: "Olive—in my gripbag."

Trancelike, Bodie got out of bed and groped around in the bag and the heavy bottle came straight away to his hand. Back on the bed he unscrewed the cap and the peculiar aromatic scent of it was in the air: very Italian. His erection seemed to have subsided, awed perhaps by the sense that something more profound than sheer lust was abroad, but Doyle took care of that for him, sitting up, stripping off his own shirt, and Bodie looked at him, the neat, well-defined muscles overlying bone, and touched his nipples then kissed each in turn, lips suckling, yearning, while Doyle caressed his cock, stroking it back into stiffness, finger and thumb ringing him as carefully and exactly as he might oil the barrel of his Browning.

Doyle poured the stuff into the palm of his hand and smoothed it onto Bodie's cock and Bodie tipped his head back to watch: the tall rod rising, redly tipped, from the dark hair at his groin and Doyle's fingers on him, stroking, then slipping beneath to cradle his testes in a firm, comforting grip and Doyle's curly head tilted up to look into Bodie's face, a slow grin beginning: "That nice, was it?" He tossed Bodie the bottle. "Do me—just for fun." And as Bodie began to unscrew it— "Ang on. This is going to be messy, Bodie, better chuck some towels on the bed."

Good job one of them was thinking straight. Bodie eyed the white counterpane with horror, stripped it off and left it over the chair, then got their own bath towels from the bathroom, where they still hung over the rail ready for last-minute packing in the morning. While Doyle shunted over Bodie laid the towels side by side on top of the sheets. "Just make sure you don't slip through the crack."

Doyle leaned back on both elbows and grinned lopsidedly up at him. "As the actress said to the bishop."

"Drycleaning bill arriving in London could be embarrassing." Bodie poured out the last of the whisky, took two small sips, and gave the rest to Doyle, whose eyes regarded him thoughtfully over the rim of the glass as he downed it in three rapid swallows.

"Think I need to be anaesthetised, do you?"

"Might help." He poured some of the oil into his hands, rolled it about to warm it. Doyle's cock grew bolder as he rubbed it sweetly and seductively, but it was time to move on, his body was arrogant, demanding my turn. He's had his.

"Turn over," Bodie said. If Doyle was nervous he wasn't showing it, rolling in one neat quick movement onto his stomach, then drawing himself up onto his knees and burying his forehead in the hard white pillow. The muffled voice floated back to Bodie, "Leave enough for a stir-fry, will you? That was expensive, you know, extra-virgin."

"Like you then." Bodie bit him lightly on the buttocks: lean, muscular, very different from a woman's. He laid his face there for a moment. The smell of the oil and Doyle's body was making him feel strange, heated.

"Ray..."

"What—?"

"Nothing." He was thinking—that for all their bravado, this was a tragedy in the making. The end of it all, before they were truly ready for the beginning. And like the song—*there's no-one left can help us now/we're in too deep/there's no way out.*

Bodie stroked him between the cheeks of his arse,

another deep, calming breath, "Or it's all going to be a bit too fast and furious for you... You've got the sexiest mouth on the squad," tracing it with a slow finger.

"Anyone ever tell you that?"

"Nope, you're the first," Doyle said, considering, breathing. Probably relieved at the break he was getting. Die before he'd admit it, though, and Bodie loved him for that.

"Mm. Lovely mouth. I'd love to see it round my cock..."

But now I never will.

As a calming thought this was not well-qualified. Maybe kissing him, with its diffuse pleasures, would slow the dizzying pace of things. Still it was only moments later that Bodie raised his head, a last lingering parting of their lips, and breathed in again, gathering strength. "This isn't going to take long, Ray. Can you stand it this way?" Rearing up he slid his hands beneath Doyle's thighs, urged them onto his own shoulders, and his cock, quick on the uptake, found the angle for him. Doyle the yoga expert adapted to it with ease, knotting his legs behind Bodie's neck and arching his hips:

"Come on then Bodie, go for it, I can take it."

"I know you can," whispered Bodie, eyes closing as he entered Doyle for the second time, *the last time*, easier now, as if Doyle's body knew him now. As if he belonged.

And he did belong.

Oh, we shouldn't have done this.

We shouldn't...

Once and once only. A sweet, sharp pain stabbed Bodie's heart, like the pain he was all the time aware of causing Doyle, and Doyle taking it for his sake without a murmur, with a sort of tender understanding that Bodie could not help it, did not want to hurt him, it was just implicit in the act. He tried to hold onto the feelings, every one of them, so that he would have something to remember; Doyle's wide-open eyes the only glimmer of light in the darkness of the room, the sweetness of the mouth beneath his own, the abrasion of stubble as their chins grazed together, the willing lips that parted for his tongue. Doyle's hands gripping his hips, not to hold him off but to pull him closer; the sights and sounds and smells, oh, the sweet intoxicating scents of the two of them, his sweat rubbing on Doyle's, his cock deep, deep inside him, lovely, the feeling of it...

He rested his head against Doyle's on the pillow, and felt their hearts beating together, and the pulses of his own body inside the other man's, way outside his control now, he had lost it for sure, lost it all.

"You see? I knew it. Now look what you've done—"

and Doyle's eyes were wide, wider as he began to understand: "I'm going to come, Ray," Bodie whispered, feeling it start to happen; a last moment of stillness, of peace for them, and then it began; the last and most powerful thrust, the moment of glory suddenly there inside him, spreading, and then a shattering shockwave of pleasure breaking inside him, his body lifting and coming and falling apart all in one go.

And then afterwards an astonished, exhausted wonder at the beauty of it all, and the fierce, possessive gratitude for Doyle, who had let him do this, not knowing what he would unleash upon them: well, but how could he have known? How could either of them: Bodie had earlier dreamed of rape and feared it; by what means could he have known it was not violence but tenderness which would defeat them?

He was gripping onto Doyle's hand like a lifeline. At one point he lifted his head, but Doyle drew him back down again against his own wet body, sweat drying, cooling off now. They lay there together, quiet, hit by all the same things. All the universe off-centre, and only themselves to blame.

"Sorry, Doyle," Bodie said at last, his cheek pressed, hard, to the thinly fleshed bones of Doyle's shoulder, "Just happened..."

"Can't blame you. My idea, wasn't it? And it was special for you all right, wasn't it?"

That bloke had got it wrong, about the universe. Not with a whimper, but a bang... "Bit too special, mate... I'll get over it," Bodie added, harshly. In about ten years.

"Will you?" was Doyle's response to that.

Bodie lifted his head again and looked at the clock, and deciphered the numbers. It was still early evening, they could go out, get a meal, try to rediscover some normality.

But at the moment he could not stand that there were other people in the world: all he wanted to do was stay here, and lie close against the other man's side, and look at him, and feel him breathe.

He felt so possessive that it hurt him, fiercely jealous, another side-effect he had not counted on. What price the lovely Sylvie now—? He would take a gun and make her eat it if she so much as looked at Ray as if she owned him.

Owned him! She wasn't fit to touch him.

"This must be how women feel," Doyle said, a little later. "Virgins. You know." Outside the window someone shrieked down in the square below and someone else replied. Fun and games. "The first time. No wonder they fall in love."

"Don't, Doyle." He squeezed his eyes shut.

