



an infant schoolchild in brandnew uniform, room for growth which was not now going to be needed: horribly affecting, haunting.

Doyle, who had been first to the bodies, winced as he ran and made a silent promise: gonna get you, scum. Four men down. Cowley was going to be mad. He and Bodie on overtime for weeks. Your number's up, mate. Beg for mercy: be my guest. The thought lifted him and he fairly flew up the last flight of stairs.

The last room. No sign of Bodie, checking out the other route. Doyle hesitated for no more than a second: drew up his gun in both hands, and drove a huge kick into the door. It flew open with a bang.

Instantly Doyle was diving to one side, dropping to one knee, gun high and steady—

Only to let it fall slackly, with a sigh. Bodie, a familiar sight in brown leather jacket, was rising to his feet, giving him a clap, surveying this performance with a glint of humour. "Took your time, didn't you?"

Adrenalin flooding through him, fear and effort and arousal. His heart was kicking violently as he rose to his feet, grumbling, "Broke a record getting up those stairs, mate. I suppose you took the lift?"

"Damn right," Bodie agreed. "Trouble with you, Doyle, you like to do things the hard way. Get a kick out of it, do you?"

"I get a kick out of a lot of things," Doyle said shortly. "Running up the bloody stairs is not one of them." Cream shirt fresh, black trousers with knife-edge creases, Bodie was looking pretty damn pleased with himself, as well he might. Their murderer was sitting right here in the room with them in a chair: possibly not of his own volition, since he seemed to be tied to it at ankle and wrist. A piece of sticky tape affixed across his mouth accounted for his relative silence, though what sounds did emerge were not indicative of serenity.

Doyle made a slow motion gesture of turning. "Don't need me, do you mate? I dunno why you don't work solo, it's a waste, innit?" He spoke sarcastically, shoving his Browning down the front of his white jeans.

Dark brows quirked, Bodie watched him with amusement. "Livin' dangerously, yeah?"

"You know me," Doyle remarked, "No thrill too small." He wandered over to the captive, saw into the angry, violent eyes, no remorse there, only fury at the loss of freedom. "Pleased with yourself?" Doyle asked of him rhetorically, anger building anew in him—etched in his mind was the woman, sprawled on the road, badged here and there with red; christ, how Bodie had had to swerve to avoid the body, his neck still ached with whiplash. Now he looked down into the killer's eyes

with great care and attention: "Caused a lot of trouble, you 'ave, 'aven't you?" and his voice was quite soft, quite tender.

"Oh, come on Doyle, be fair," Bodie objected, eyes heavenward, "Anyone can have an off day."

Doyle counted them off on his fingers: "Three more widows out there now, all wanting their pension—'s a drain on the nation, innit? Four mates of mine stretched out with an extra hole or two more than they had this morning. The orphaned kiddie. Wonder if he's still shriekin' for 'is mum? —was when I left. Oh, and the mother whose eyes I 'ad to cover back there in case she saw the mess you made with her kid's brains: very pretty, if you like that sort of thing."

"All part of the plan, was it?" Bodie asked, moving in on him, suddenly hard, threatening, eyes as chill as morning frost.

"Did you get off on it?" Doyle said to the man in the chair, gentle, uninflected: and then he smiled, just a little movement of his facial muscles, could almost be a tic. Without turning his head he said softly, "And Bodie didn't kill you when he had the chance. Now, I call that real self-control."

Saintly, Bodie shook his head. "I waited for you, Doyle," he said, soft and sweet and low.

"He waited for me because—it's more fun together," Doyle said, still gentle as a lover, without lifting his eyes from the man's face, and there it was, what he had been waiting for: the first sign of fear. Only a quick sharp spark in his eyes, but it was there; and Doyle got a rush from it, the first, a warmth inside him beginning to spread—

Had your fun. Now you pay for it.

"Well, and here we all are," Doyle said, amiably, squatting on his haunches, "And what are we gonna do with you? Got any idea?"

Now their victim twiggled it. It was real: he was going to die. There really wasn't going to be a way out. This horrible understanding flashed up starkly in his eyes again, and seeing it, Doyle smiled, quick, feral.

Well. You think death's the worst thing there could be, do you?

He asked, serene, lucid: "You getting off on this too, sunshine? Or isn't it quite so good for you this way around?"

"Shoot to kill, didn't the Cow say?" Bodie murmured, softly, clearly, feet planted squarely apart.

"Yeah, but then Cowley always was too forgiving." Doyle's head was down, he withdrew the gun from his waistband, began to stroke the warm barrel off with his fingertips, obsessive; Doyle liked his weapons clean.



Fiends at play. You could see from his eyes that he had begun to understand, just whose hands he had fallen into; abandoning hope and speech together he began to moan again, blood running from the shattered knee through vainly clutching fingers.

Doyle was looking at the window, attention caught by something he had seen there, a small sandy man in a beige raincoat, coming this way fast—

“Cowley.”

Suddenly all business Bodie spun his gun in automatic reflex, knelt down by the man’s side.

“We’ve got to go now. But thank you for having us.” The mouth of the gun, still warm, just touched the clammy skin, then settled in there, ready, rocksteady.

Doyle came to stand nearby looking down, playtime over, absolutely cold: “That’s it, mate: this is where it all ends for you.”

“Unless there’s a hell, anyway,” Bodie said, and let that get home, sick horror twisting blackly in their victim’s eyes, before he shot him in the head.

▼ Cowley took one look, then turned away in distaste. “Made a mess of him, didn’t you?”

“Sorry, sir.” Following their boss cheerfully on light feet down the stairs, Bodie got out a tube of Polos from his pocket, tore back the wrapper and offered them to Doyle, pushing the top one up with his thumbnail. “He moved the wrong way.”

“Made a break for it,” was Doyle’s offering, taking the mint. “Ta.”

“Well, so long as you stopped him: that was quite some spree. Four men down! Extra shifts for you two, and you’ll not be the only ones.”

Doyle took a close look at Bodie’s hand. “Blood all over

you,” he noted *sotto voce* as he tossed the mint into his mouth and stuck the point of his tongue through the hole.

“So long as it’s not mine.” Bodie bowed to him elaborately: “Or yours.” Cowley was moving at quite a lick for an old man or they would have stopped. Hurrying along, Bodie tossed a sideways glance at his partner. And Doyle looked back at him, eyes bright, curious, excited: for a moment they were alone again, back there together in some private place far, far away from the world.

“Wanna come round to my place tonight?” Bodie said, and gulped down the last of his sweet.

“Yeah, okay.”

“I gotta video we can watch.”

“Something educational, I hope, Bodie?” Cowley rapped back at them.

Bodie smiled at Doyle as he answered Cowley: “Only type there is, isn’t it, Sir?”

Cowley turned around to look at them—cheeky, irrepressible pair! Doyle was leaning artistically on the roof of the car while Bodie, clowning around as usual, knelt to him, Doyle a paper king, knighting the top of Bodie’s bowed dark head with one swipe of his sword.

Cowley let the pride swell: they had not let him or the nation down; they had done their duty, just as he had known and trusted that they would. It had been the dirtiest sort of job, the sort of job no-one should have to do. But these two were strong enough. No shadows on their souls to bring them nightmares: they could handle it. Cowley settled back in his seat for the ride back to HQ, making himself comfortable as Bodie took the wheel and swung the car off into the road.

Good men. His best.

—Sebastian June, 1996

