

## Floral Arrangement

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"Sorry, Mrs. Wishart," he said, feeling like a child as first she glowered at him, then followed that with a heaved sigh of severely tested patience and picked up the dirty mug he had just had the temerity to put into her nice clean kitchen sink.

"Aye, well, I suppose it's what you're paying me for, isn't it? To pick up behind you, clean your manky mess..." she muttered on, but Doyle wasn't paying any more attention to her moaning than he usually did. He tucked the envelope with her week's money into the capacious pocket of her faded pinny, gave her an absently charming smile, and wandered off into his bedroom, to the thinning sound of her habitual complainings. She had already finished in here, polish and Windoline lingering in memorial to her efforts, and in a few minutes she'd have made the kitchen gleam brighter than the Savoy's. Then she'd be gone, and he'd be finally be by himself.

Perched on the edge of the bed, he looked around himself, at all the things that weren't the same, at all the things that bore no echo of what he had once been. In a fit of '80s sloughing, every last bit of '60s or '70s style had been dumped to make way for the new clean lines, the once cutting-edge of Habitat become banal mainstream, his bedroom more uncluttered than ever it had been. Even the infamous half-a-nude had been tossed into the dustbin, shoved in quickly before memory should intrude and nostalgia make him carry the artifact back up to the flat to be tucked once more into the back of the built-in wardrobe. Instead of that vaguely druggy psychedelia, there was now the stark sensuality of a discreet Mapplethorpe orchid, a very, very subtle clue for anyone 'inside' enough to recognise it. Not much, perhaps, but more than he had dared before.

Despite his bedroom door being firmly closed, he still couldn't miss the harrumphing departure of the terminally complaining Mrs. Wishart who slammed the front door shut with an energy admirable from one so plagued by every illness under the sun (including many the doctors had yet to find names for). But at least she was gone, the flat now soothingly empty, silence whispering in to fill the empty corners, and himself off-duty, not even on call. One of the many favours owed to him by Simmons had been worth enough to have even his personal-line phone calls answered by the central switchboard and blocked there, leaving no-one to disturb him, not now.

Still, for all that he'd been planning this, the actual moment left him at something of a loss. All the plans seemed so self-consciously pretentious now that they were imminent, but yet... But yet, it still needed to be done: he still needed to bid a formal farewell, to make the definitive break. So many months had flowed past, sometimes smoothly, sometimes stumbling like cripples, sometimes shrieking like banshees, and there had been no sense of ending, no definitive moment that he could point to and say, here, at this time, this was when it was over...

Funerals, he had finally come to understand that sunny afternoon half a decade before, were for the living, the dead merely a focus for the mourners' loss and their sudden confrontation with mortality. For the dead, a funeral was something that happened once they were no longer aware, but for the living, for him—Bodie's funeral had been an absolute nightmare of conformity and stiff upper lips, of being nothing more than the grieving partner, of being nothing more than a man who'd lost a friend. Imprisoned, even in the wide-open serenity of a lush and green graveyard, he hadn't been free to say goodbye, or show his agony, and certainly not his love. Lying, even at the end, and denied, even at the end, the right to show the truth about himself and

Bodie, and the depth of love and commitment they had shared. No, it would never have done to break their cover then, would it? Would never have done to let the world know that the blue rumours had indeed been true, and that CI5 had cradled perverts to its bosom. Oh, no, it would never have done to let out a truth that everyone knew, but of which no-one spoke. Especially not himself, standing there so stiff and sombre in his best jacket—the only thing he owned that matched the black misery inside him—as he had to so stoically watch as they buried half his life and left him alone, all of the bonds still firmly attached to him, but one end gone slack in death. And him standing there, feeling like a liar and a cheat and a betrayer, holding all the feelings inside, tangling him in the deceitful tissue that had been the outer skin of his life with Bodie. Too much pain to show it, too deadening a blanket of conventional society to really let Bodie go.

The sun warm on his face, the muted racket of the city surrounding him, he felt he was completely alone, an island of inner silence amongst the demented hurry going on all around. And for that false claim to peace, he called himself a liar once more. He was silent only because there was still so much of him afraid of facing this final moment: fear of not being able to finally let Bodie go, but more fear still that there was nothing left to say goodbye to. The insidious taint of disloyalty stalked him, trying to convince him that he was wrong to do this, that he was doing it out of nothing more than an impatience to forget everything that Bodie had been, and then hurry out to have fun without the dampening memories.

Which wasn't true. He'd long since fulfilled the promise he and Bodie had made each other when first they'd become lovers. It had taken three years, but he had started living life again, had shed his inner mourning clothes and long since started feeling the vitality his protective façade had pretended to a world held at bay. None of that had been easy, all of it begun out of a sense of obligation to promises whispered in the tumbled warmth of a shared bed. But that, he felt, spring light warm on his skin, old winters of sorrow tapping him on the back, that had been nothing, really. It was this final saying farewell, the ineluctable ending of what had once been, of what he'd once thought would never be over, this was the hardest part. Bodie would have called it one of his airy-fairy notions, that belief he'd had that nothing could sever them, not even if one of them should die without the other, as Bodie had done to him...

The familiar tingle of quickly repressed fear chilled him again at the memory of losing Bodie, and the worse fear of giving up the last remnant he had of Bodie. But he'd never been one for being a coward, never been one from running away from truth, no matter how acrid. The time had come, five years to the day that Bodie had died, and he had to say the goodbyes he'd stifled inside at the graveside. No vicar for Bodie, that day, no such hypocrisy for a man who'd had no time for false piety in life and didn't believe that there was anything beyond death but oblivion. Cowley had spoken, traditional words delivered in a bleakly resonant voice, words that had reached Doyle not at all: he hadn't dared let them, for fear of tears. But it was time for words now. He had it all worked out in his mind, every last detail: a little private ceremony, the memorial that had been denied him by the conventions of society at large and the goldfish bowl of life in the security forces. Now all his grand declarations and ritual adieuing seemed too precious and silly, and because they were to be the final goodbye, they seemed disloyal as well, which was sillier still.

“Oh, stop being so bloody stupid,” he said aloud, getting up from the bed in one smooth motion. Donning an air of resoluteness, he marched into the living room and poured himself a hefty measure of whisky, taking it and himself over to the window where he could see the sky and nothing but the clouds could see him. The words he'd planned stuck in his craw, too much to be uttered even in solitude, too true to bear and too much the sort of hymnal that a living Bodie would slag him off for. So he raised his glass in silent toast and silent farewell, giving himself a

distinct moment to mark as the time when he finally relinquished Bodie to the past. He savoured the warmth of the whisky, letting happy memories run laughing through his mind, reliving the joys and the passions and the friendship, paging through the cherished images for the last time. Wishing his lover some kind of happy afterlife, Doyle finally, a long five years after the event, closed the door on the life he'd once had with Bodie.

"Oh, that's nice, that is!"

Emotion convulsed his hand, stopping him from actually dropping the glass as he whirled round, bone white with shock. Mouth gaping, mind scrabbling frantically to make sense of what his eyes were insisting they were seeing, he stared at the...he didn't know quite what to call it.

The thing he couldn't believe he was seeing kept on talking to him. "Really nice, Ray. A bloke dies and what do you do—"

"Bodie?"

"In the flesh," the solid vision replied heartily, arms spread wide to display the magnificence of that flesh, which seemed to be none the worse for being dead. The so-familiar grin was just as warm, the eyes twinkled with the same gleeful humour as they always had, and the voice was as redolent with indulgent affection as it had ever been.

"Bodie?" Doyle said again.

"What?" Bodie said, mock astonished. "Forgotten me so soon? Tsk, tsk, shame on you, Ray. Thought you lot never forgot?"

"That's elephants, not coppers and anyway—" And anyway, he was standing here talking to a ghost. Common sense stepped in, and he stopped looking at the spirit standing in front of him and started looking at the spirit that was in his glass. That was it. He'd thought Murph hadn't done anything to get him for April Fool's Day, but the bugger must've spiked his whisky, expecting him to have a nip on the day—in fact, hadn't Murphy been going on at him to have a drink? Yeh, that was it. A psychedelic Mickey Finn, a bit of something funny dropped into the bottle, making him see things that he only wished were there.

"You're wrong there, sunshine," his imagination informed him in a voice that sounded remarkably like his Bodie. "Don't know how to break this to you, but it's not a tab in your booze—I really am here. Honest."

Doyle closed his eyes for a second, then opened them again, paying careful attention to the pattern in the carpet. "Don't be stupid," he muttered under his breath. "He can't be here, it's just the drink—"

"But I am here," that voice insisted, a thin edge of hurt to it under a cajoling sweetness Doyle ached at hearing again. "Okay, so not quite in the flesh, but—" and Doyle swore he could hear a laugh in that voice that he couldn't possibly be hearing, "—twice as gorgeous. Oh, come on, Ray," a never-forgotten wheedle seduced him, "look at me. I've waited a long time to get back to you, the least you can do is look at me."

Slowly, reluctantly, scared there was going to be nothing there and he was going insane, terrified that there was going to be something there and that he was going *really* insane, Doyle looked up. To see Bodie, William Andrew Philip Bodie, standing astride, arms on hips in such a typically Bodie-ish pose, he couldn't help but smile. He got a very pleased smile in return, one eyebrow quirked conspiratorially at him. Typical Bodie, in every way. Just like Doyle had seen him a million times before. But this time, Bodie was naked. Very naked. And dead. Very, very dead. So dead in fact, that Doyle had seen his body, white and cold, in a man-sized metal drawer, with Cowley standing at his shoulder and an off-handed, harried coroner asking all the routine questions.

“What is it, Ray?” Bodie was asking, in the same tone of voice he’d used a billion times before, inviting Doyle to lean on him, confess to him, confide in him. “C’mon, mate, what’s the matter?”

Doyle started to laugh, hysteria creeping in round the edges. “I’m standing here talking to my dead mate, and you ask me what’s the matter?”

“Yeh, well,” Bodie muttered, looking down to where his toe scuffed the carpet—or would have done, all things being equal, and if he hadn’t actually been a ghost, “suppose it is a bit much.” He looked up again, bright blue eyes meeting Doyle’s with an almost frightening wisdom. “Took me a bit of getting used to,” he said, “and I kept on telling them that I didn’t believe any of this crap, not that it did much good.”

Flabbergasted, Doyle stared as Bodie perched himself on the back of an armchair—or did he only *seem* to do that, a voice babbled in his head; after all, ghosts weren’t supposed to be able to touch anything, were they?—and sat there, for all the world as if nothing had happened since last they’d seen each other.

“It came as a bit of a shock, I don’t mind telling you,” Bodie was saying, with an air of casualness that was more suited to football results than coming back from the dead. “I mean, I’ve never believed in any of that crap, and there I was, being proved wrong and just to add insult to injury, they were fitting me up for a white frock and wings!”

“Yeh,” Doyle heard himself saying, as if there were nothing more normal than chatting to the ghost of your dead lover on a Thursday afternoon in April. Must be something in the drink, he told himself, has to be... “Suppose meeting the Almighty must be a bit of a surprise for an atheist.”

“The Almighty?” Bodie scoffed. “The likes of me doesn’t get to meet the likes of the bloody Almighty. All I got was some fat, bald American geezer who kept on rabbiting on about Eternity and Heaven and fucking harps!”

Doyle managed a suitably sympathetic noise, whilst wondering if he still had enough marbles left to phone HQ and have himself taken off to the nearest loony bin.

“Yeh, and you know what I think of all that classical music shit—or even worse, can you picture me sitting on a fluffy white cloud playing folk music on a harp? Be pure hell for me, that would. Anyway, that’s what I told him.” He paused, scratched his knee for a second, Doyle’s eyes following the movement as if hypnotised. “That’s when I found out that Hell’s a *very* naughty word up There.” He grinned again, death obviously not stinging hard enough to cure Bodie of his disrespect for authority. “If he hadn’t already snuffed it, the poor old bastard would’ve had a heart-attack!”

“I suppose he would,” Doyle agreed, a hysterical part of his mind thinking that this was all very civilised and normal considering it was a confrontation with a ghost, and perhaps he should offer Bodie tea.

“So the next thing they do, is this poor old bloke who’s been landed with getting me all prepared, he goes all blank for a minute, and then he says to me that as the standard package doesn’t suit me, I get to decide what form Heaven’s going to take for me.”

“Heaven?” That brought him back to earth with a thump. “What the hell were *you* doing in Heaven?” And I’m not having this conversation, he told himself. Must be something in the drink. Must be. I’ll get Murphy for this...

“Someone as handsome, intelligent, perfect and charming as me, where else would I go?”

Doyle wasn’t going to answer that on the grounds that merely thinking might bring up another vision: after all, this had to be some kind of hallucination brought on by the spiked drink and

he'd been wishing Bodie some sort of happy afterlife just before Bodie'd appeared, large as life and twice as dead.

Bodie didn't seem to be having any trouble at all with this being dead thing: in fact, if Doyle hadn't been so sure of his facts, he would've wondered if Bodie hadn't pulled an elaborate disappearing act five years ago. In *real* fact, Doyle was still beginning to wonder if five years ago hadn't been the infamous 'Dallas' shower scene instead of a Hitchcockian one.

Completely unhampered by Doyle's galloping incredulity, Bodie was still talking. "So this bloke's waiting for me to come up with my answer, and..."

Even as a bloodless ghost, that fair skin still showed a blush.

"And, well, I sort of realised that the only thing I wanted was to be back with you..."

Doyle'd had people declare love for him before. He'd even had Bodie heap endearments on him. But it was the first time a ghost had ever said that to him. This was not the sort of situation covered in Lady Marjorie's Book of Good Manners, the police procedures book or even one of Cowley's endless string of courses. Which left him, still gaping like a gutted fish.

"Aren't you going to say something?" Bodie asked him, all bruised baby and pouting puppy.

"Such as? Oh, thanks, mate, I'm glad I'm the one you picked to come back and haunt?" Doyle took a gulp of whisky, closing his eyes as the spirit went down—and almost choking on his own hysteria. Now was not the time to be thinking about spirits doing anything at all, let alone going down, which had been one of Bodie's special talents. "Look, whatever you are—and I still think I'm going to wake up with a hell of a hangover and a weird dream—it's very nice to see you, but you can crawl back into whatever mad bit of my brain you popped out of and—"

"Since when's it taken one drink, one measly little whisky, to get you drunk, eh? Come on, Ray, open your eyes! Look at me! I'm here, Ray, I've come back to you."

Doyle opened his eyes, and looked. Really looked. And saw Bodie, earnest-faced, body tight with tension, still naked, and still, undeniably, sitting right in front of him. Doyle swallowed, hard, ran his hand through his hair, looked everywhere but at Bodie. "But Bodie," he said, not knowing what else to say, "you're *dead*. D. E. A. D."

"That's the ticket! I'm glad you're coming round to all this," Bodie agreed cheerfully, "I was beginning to think I was going to have to walk through a few walls to convince you."

"So," Doyle said slowly, not sure if he should be booking himself a nice long holiday at a nicely discreet rest-home for insane security agents or opening up a sideshow complete with crystal ball and incense, "you're telling me that you're dead—"

"Finito, caput, kicked the bucket, snuffed it, passed over, gone on to the Great Hereafter—"

"Except you haven't gone on to the Great Hereafter, you've—gone on to where you started from in the first place..."

"Near enough, Ray, although you must admit," and he preened with the same self-deprecating vanity that had made Bodie's conceit charming, "this is better than me coming back in nappies, innit?"

"Oh, yeh, definitely," Doyle said, staring at the ghost posing in front of him. "Um...so, how come you, em, came back, then?" Christ, he didn't believe he was saying that! As if he believed that this really was Bodie, come back to him. It had to be a product of his imagination: he had had that nagging worry that he might not be able to let Bodie go, but this was ridiculous. Surreptitiously, he pinched himself hard. Then harder. And Bodie was still there, and still gabbing away merrily.

"Told you. It's amazing, Ray, you should see it! Well, you will, but you're not due to see it for fifty-odd years."

And with you around, Doyle thought, we're talking about oddest fifty years in history.

“It’s not like everyone says it is, you know. There’s the bright light everyone talks about, you know—”

How many times had they had that conversation, discussing other people’s near-death experiences, then Doyle finally confessing his own, and Bodie arguing it was only the hospital lights registering somewhere on his unconscious brain?

“And after the light—leaves terrible spots in front of your eyes, I don’t mind telling you, by the way—after the light, you don’t feel any different from the way you did before you died. But the thing is, if you don’t want the Pearly Gates routine, you can pick something else. So when this bloke asked me what I wanted... I asked them if you’d be going up there, and if I’d get to see you. And they said not for at least half a century.”

And when had Bodie been willing to wait—off the job—for more than five minutes? Doyle gulped more of his drink, needing the Scotch courage: there was a horrible thread of...reasonableness running through this, and he was beginning to really wonder.

Bodie was looking at Doyle, concern frowning small between his eyebrows, an expression that was achingly familiar. “That’s when I told them that I wanted to come back to you. They weren’t keen on that, I can tell you, but I...” he grinned then, the way Bodie always had, when he’d bested Cowley, “persuaded them. So here I am.”

All right. Something that looked and sounded and acted like Bodie was standing right there in front of him, in his birthday suit—minus a few wrinkles and many scars, the trained observer in Doyle noted, surprised—and insisting that this really was Bodie. A dead Bodie, but Bodie nonetheless. So, Doyle decided, taking a deep breath, humour it. Or humour himself, for there was an exultant joy in him at seeing Bodie again. Or what looked like Bodie.

Doyle said the first semi-sane thing that came into his head. “What took you so long?”

“Give me a break, Ray! Not everyone could even get used to being a ghost, and it takes a man of my exceptional talent and abilities...”

It was disturbingly easy to slip back into the old pattern, and give this Bodie ghost the old look that meant ‘cut the crap’. And more disturbing still to feel the shiver of reaction inside himself as this vision in front of him smiled back at him with unmitigated love.

“Oh, all right, I confess. It was the bloke at the Gates. He was an American, and you know what they’re like with accents, we all sound the same to them.” Bodie paused, the way he always had before delivering the laconic punchline. “So he sent me to Australia.”

“And you never got your wings—” Christ on a crutch, what am I *saying*? Doyle’s mind gibbered at him, “—so you couldn’t just fly over here.”

“Ray! Don’t be so bloody insulting—I’m no angel. Nah, it’s just that spirits can’t cross water.”

Now it was getting too loony to have even the faintest shred of rationality to it. “But you’re here now.”

“Yeh,” Bodie grinned, obviously thoroughly chuffed with himself. “Brilliant invention, those double-hulled oil tankers.”

That niggling shred of rationality was creeping back in. Double-hulled, so technically speaking, the deck would be over metal, not water. No, a small voice inside him started to cackle, I’ve got to have flipped to even think I’m having this conversation.

“You all right, Ray?”

“What? Me? Oh, yeh, I’m absolutely fine, couldn’t be better. A ghost turns up on my doorstep and starts going on at me about oil tankers—no problem. Happens every day.”

“Come on, Ray, don’t take on like that. Listen, I know it’s hard, but it’ll be all right, I promise. Look at it this way, all this just proves one of the Cow’s old sayings, dunnit?”

Doyle didn't think he should ask: but this was Bodie, even if only in his mind, and Bodie was irresistible. "What saying?"

Bodie slid his hand along his own cock, stroking slowly, sweetly, putting on a show the way he had a hundred times...before. "That you can't keep a good man down."

And as Bodie had been very, very good, it was no surprise that certain bits of him certainly weren't staying down. That was the precise moment, standing there in his own living room, contemplating how bloody typical it was of Bodie to get hard just when Doyle needed the fewest possible distractions, that Doyle realised that he had to have gone completely stark staring bonkers. What else could he be, if all he could think about when confronted with a dead man was how big his cock was, and how beautiful, and how hard, and how much he missed that man? What else could he be, but completely off his rocker.

How about haunted?

Bodie walked towards him, body making no sound, and reached out, and then through, the wall behind Doyle. "See that, Ray?" he whispered. "See what I can do now? But I've had a long time to practise, so I can do this as well now." And he reached out again, and this time, his hand skimmed the surface of the wall. "I can touch things now. Even move them, if I think hard enough. Caress them, even." Frozen in position and growing more and more tense as it came nearer and nearer, Doyle watched the hand out of the corner of his eye. The first inconceivable brush of finger on his shoulder, and he was gone, moving skittishly out of reach.

Behind him, Bodie stood stock still, one hand still raised, immolated by the rejection and worse even than that, by the edge of fear apparent in Ray's eyes.

He was never quite sure what, but something made Doyle turn round then, to see Bodie in that moment of abjection and despair. Such misery actually made the minor matter of alive or dead a moot point. "Bodie?" he asked, reacting to this vision as surely as if it were his own Bodie.

"It's all right, Ray," Bodie said, a glittering grin pasted to his face as he turned towards the man he had turned down Nirvana for. "It took me a bit of time to get used to the idea—about me being dead, I mean." The grin wobbled a bit, fading a little, as Doyle realised Bodie himself was fading. "Shouldn't've expected you to welcome me with open arms, should I?"

"Christ, but I need a drink!" Doyle plashed an extremely generous dose into his glass, taking a slug from the bottle just for good measure. "Want one?" he offered automatically.

"Oh, thanks a lot, mate," Bodie answered, voice not quite convincing as he tried to turn it all light-hearted again. "Us dead blokes can't drink, and here you are tormenting me with what I can't have..."

Considering what Doyle had just done when Bodie had tried to touch him, that was probably the single worst thing to say when trying to make light.

"Oh," was all Doyle said, staring into his drink instead of staring into blue eyes that hadn't changed, hadn't been forgotten in the five years since Bodie's death.

"Listen, Ray," a tremendously gentle voice said very, very softly, a tone of tenderness that not even Bodie had used often, "I know this must be tough, but it'll be all right. Honest, it will. Once you get used to the idea..."

Some perverse demon driven by unreasoning fear made him ask: "And what if I don't?"

The pause was protracted, until Doyle had to look up to see if the figment of his imagination had left. It hadn't, and he was finding it harder and harder to dismiss this entirely absurd situation. "If you don't..." The smile that went with that was enough to melt a heart far harder than Doyle's. "If you don't," Bodie shrugged, then went on, speaking an obvious anathema, "then I'll go away again."

Defensiveness sliding him into the spurious calm of objective observer, Doyle noted that Bodie was blurring round the edges, the sunlight no longer gleaming on his hair, his extremities dissolving into pallid smoke.

“Where will you go?” he asked.

Bodie didn’t quite shrug. “Dunno.” He waved a hand vaguely skywards. “I suppose I’ll either go back to the Yank at the Gates or I’ll hang around until my stint’s over.”

Over half a century, Doyle thought, remembering how long Bodie had said it would be until Doyle himself died. Over half a century. Nothing, if this whole mad afternoon were nothing, just some hallucination from a Mickey Finn. But if, oh, god, if all this were true, if there really were stranger things in Heaven and on Earth... His Gram had always believed in that kind of stuff, used to tell him stories about it, until his Da came within earshot, anyway. And now here was Bodie, telling him the same thing—not that his Empiric old Gram had ever had any notion of anything so sacrilegious as Americans in Heaven! All right, he told himself, taking himself and his glass over to the chair, this isn’t going away, you haven’t had enough to drink to make you see Bodies all over the place, and you weren’t dippy this morning. Which leaves...

He wasn’t quite ready to buy *that*. But what if he just...pretended. Went along with whatever this was, enjoyed it if only because it gave him Bodie back for a while.

“Let’s say for a minute that I believe all this Heaven and ghosts and oil-tanker bit...”

“Now that’s what I call a good idea, Batman.”

It really was as if Bodie had never been gone, something as comforting as it was unnerving. “Right,” Doyle said, making himself look unblinkingly at Bodie, letting the dispassionate observer in him catalogue what was in front of him. It was, to all intents and purposes, Bodie, even if he did have a disturbing habit of going fuzzy round the edges. “Wish you’d stop doing that,” he said.

“Doing what?” Bodie said with consummate innocence, casually draping both hands over his genitals, hiding himself and his enthusiasm from view: not that he could be blamed for his reaction, of course. Five years is a very long time, even if one expected disembodied spirits to leave the pleasures of the flesh behind with their bodies.

“Fading,” Doyle said, throwing Bodie a bit.

“What d’you mean—fading? Oh, I get it. You mean when I start to go out of focus?” Doyle nodded and Bodie closed his eyes for a second in concentration, sharpening his own image as if he were a programme on the telly. “There, that should do the trick. Sorry—just that I forget sometimes.”

Doyle wanted to get this straight: after all, he was supposed to be taking this all quite, quite seriously, wasn’t he? “You forget to...” he hesitated for a second, then reminded himself that as he was going along with this, then the least he could do was use the proper words, “...manifest sometimes, is that what you’re telling me?”

Bodie wouldn’t quite look at him, bringing back memories of Bodie doing his best to wriggle out of admitting something or being caught, if not in an outright lie, then in a certain refurbishment of the truth. Before some joke could be made to get Bodie off the hook, Doyle was speaking again, discovering that the old rapport hadn’t gone after all—he still knew when he couldn’t trust Bodie as far as he could spit. “So if it’s not that, then what is it?”

Bodie shifted, body language unchanged by so minor a matter as the patent lack of said body. “It’s not so much me forgetting, not all the time... It’s more you not believing makes it harder and harder...”

So now he had a ghost sitting there telling him that if he didn’t believe in Bodie coming back, then Bodie was going to fade away into the ether. Again, that was nothing, if Bodie was nothing



more than a figment of his imagination. But that was true only if he let convention rule his mind, as he had at the funeral in the first place. And he was finding, unsurprisingly, that he liked having Bodie back, even if only as a projection of his own mind. Perhaps his old art school friends had been right: perhaps reality was a perversion. But still, to start believing in ghosts... Opposite him, Bodie was sitting down, crossing his legs in something akin to embarrassment, which was a novelty in and of itself, although, Doyle supposed, quite understandable. Bodie always did have a weird streak of modesty running through him, and it always showed up when the poor sod was embarrassed the way he was now.

And since he was now thinking of Bodie in the present tense, perhaps this pretending it was all real might be easier than he had hoped. "Yeh, well, it just might take me a couple of minutes to get used to this life-after-death crap, Bodie."

"Nah, not you." Bodie was grinning again, and whole, as if he were as solid as the chair he sat on. "I always said you were..." he lowered his voice, and the grin slid languorously into a sensual smile, everything about him taking Doyle back to that very first night and the seductive conversation that had led to invitation and Bodie persuading him into bed, "...flexible. Always open to suggestion..."

But then he remembered. Bodie was dead. Even if it were, by some stretch of a miracle, Bodie sitting opposite him, Bodie was dead, and the thought of sex with him... Doyle didn't even want to think about it, not seriously, not now he was willing to concede that this just might be something stranger than fiction. Restless, he got to his feet, rubbing the tension in the back of his neck, jumping reflexively when someone else's hand touched him, beginning what had been, in the past, a welcome massage that always, unfailingly, led to more passionate pursuit.

He wasn't ready for that. Wasn't ready for any of it. Suddenly faced with this foretaste of Bodie's newly reborn rôle in his life, he didn't know if he ever could be. It was too much, too much too soon, too strange and unexpected and—frightening. If it were Bodie... Scary, and unnerving, but perhaps, possible to accept. But if he were now willing to wonder if all this might be real, then the atavism of his nation's mythology made him fear soul-hungry devils disguised as lovers, of demons come to suck the life from the living, of monstrosities too horrible to name. Which he knew to be absurd, preposterous, nothing more than stupid superstition.

But if you'd asked him about ghosts half an hour ago, that's exactly what he would have said: ridiculous and superstitious bunk. Only now, he had Bodie sitting there, watching him, the hunger in him almost palpable. An insidious whisper wormed into his mind: and what if it's not Bodie and that hunger isn't for love at all?

"Christ, this is mad!" he shouted, pent up confusion and frustration bursting from him. "Absolutely pathetic. I don't know what's wrong with me," he went on, pacing the room, prowling what had been his familiar domain. "Fucking insane, that's what, stupid—"

"Ray."

Doyle stopped, recognising, perhaps unwillingly, the familiar warning in that voice, the signal that he was losing control and needed to get himself reined in. "Yeh, yeh, right," he muttered. "Mustn't get upset, have to stay cool, stay uninvolved, keep my distance. But Bodie! This isn't some manor house or one of those ancient abbeys or some haunted castle in fucking Scotland where you're *supposed* to see ghosts clanking chains and carrying their head under their arm. This is *my* living room, in *my* flat, in London, and there's nothing in here over four years old and—" He took a deep breath, and Bodie, knowing as always, held his peace, waiting for Doyle to calm himself down. A uneasy laugh trickled from Doyle, and he turned round to face Bodie again, not wanting to admit that Bodie was fading like an expensive special effect. "Always said you took Randall and Hopkirk too much to bloody heart."

“Who, me?” Bodie said, putting the effort in, making himself sound suitably outraged. “Too much class for that. Anyway, in case you hadn’t noticed,” and he was falling back on the one thing that had always seen them through, the one line of communication that had never failed them, “not only am I not wearing that god-awful white suit, but *I* am sitting here in all my natural glory.”

It couldn’t work, not when Doyle wasn’t even sure if this wasn’t some sort of mental collapse on his part, something that would end when he blinked his eyes and found himself staring at Doctor Ross. “I don’t know, Bodie,” he said, abruptly worn out by all this, suddenly weary of dealing with it, desperate now for some time by himself, some time to think this through. “I don’t know what to think, how to react, what to feel...”

“It’s still me, love,” Bodie said, getting to his feet, coming slowly to stand near, but carefully, not so near that Doyle would bolt again, the agony of rejection hot in Bodie’s mind. “It’s just a bit different from the way it used to be, that’s all. I still love you.”

Doyle knew what was being asked, didn’t know if he wanted to answer it.

“Do you? Still love me, I mean?”

He’d never been able to abandon Bodie when that tone crept into his lover’s voice. “If I didn’t, I’d’ve been gone like a shot, screaming all the way,” he said, not looking into Bodie’s eyes.

“Least I’ve still got that then. That’s always something, isn’t it? Be enough an’ all.” A pause, weighty, melancholy, as Bodie started to see the possibilities of his return to reality. “Might have to be, mightn’t it? I’m not going to push, Ray. I think I’d even understand if you don’t want me around. Don’t think I’d’ve been too keen on a ghost having it off with me when I was still...before I was...” All his optimism and bravado had fled in the face of Doyle’s reaction, and miserable regret was creeping in. “Well, you know what I mean.” Another pause, and still Doyle volunteered nothing. Bodie swallowed, a reflex left over from before, and asked, unwillingly, but in all fairness. “D’you want me to leave you?”

“I never wanted you to leave me in the first place, you stupid pillock!”

“But it’s not the same any more, is it?”

“Not if you want to split hairs, seeing as how you don’t have a body—always supposing this really is real.”

“How about if we do it the same way we did last time? Give it a bit of time, see how it works out, see if we want to make it into something?”

He should say no. Should stop all this nonsense now, cut it off, get a grip on himself. But god, that might be Bodie! If it were... And even if it were, how the hell was he supposed to fit a ghost into his normal day-to-day life? “And how the hell am I supposed to explain to everyone that I’ve got a ghost living with me these days?”

“No-one can see me. At least I don’t think they can, so how would anyone ever know, unless you told them.” A hesitation, then a question asked with patently false casualness. “Is there anyone you’d need to tell?”

Doyle refused to get into that, not now, not when he wasn’t sure of anything in this world any more. “Look, just give me time, let me think about this.”

Bodie was slowly stepping away, moving backwards, surreal as all those films and stories about ghosts, unnerving, unsettling, and despite it all, incredibly alluring. This looked so like his Bodie, so much like him, and could, perhaps, bring all the love back.

“Can I come back?” Bodie was asking, voice muffled, image dim, and Doyle felt a surge of fear that all his chances would be gone, and his disbelief would cause Bodie to disappear from everywhere but his own memory.

“Yes!” he shouted. “Come back again, when I’ve had time to get used to all this...”

The last thing he saw was the glimmer of a smile, then even that faded into the plain white of his walls, and he was alone again, with only a whisper of hope to hang on to.

It was amazing what a man could get used to, and Doyle had become very accustomed to having his very own resident ghost. Not that Bodie was there all the time, but he always seemed to show up when Doyle needed him most, when work was a nightmare and cynicism threatened or when the tumult of emotion and confusion grew too tangled to bear alone.

Bone weary, he trudged home, dropping his jacket on the bottom of his bed, putting his gun away with hasty relief. It had been bad today, really dreadful, for all that the operation had ended a success. One of their own dead, two more injured, one of them Murphy, in hospital and under sedation for the night. Pity that, and not purely from Murphy's point of view. He could've done with Murphy's company tonight, needed it, in fact.

For the first time, he made the conscious decision to deliberately call up Bodie, not that he knew how to go about it. Ouija boards and mediums and smoking candles smacked too much of death and darkness, two things that seemed very distant from his Bodie, a certain grave to the contrary. Perhaps if he just gave him a shout...

"Bodie!"

Nothing.

"*Bodie!*"

The now-familiar prickle of awareness, then Bodie was standing right in front of him, nearly bursting with happiness at being called. "You rang, m'lud?" he said, bowing elegantly despite his nudity.

"Maybe I should get one of those little bells to jingle at that," Doyle muttered, throwing himself spreadeagled across his bed, some part of him comforted and content with nothing more than Bodie's reappearance.

"Or you could," and Bodie, kneeling between Doyle's legs, one hand resting on the bulge in Doyle's denims, "get one of your little balls to jiggle instead."

Not yet, not quite yet. Doyle pulled away, propping himself up against the headboard, making a joke of yet another rejection. "Told you, Bodie, I'm not as kinky as you are."

"Oh, yes," Bodie said, bitter sarcasm barely disguised as humour, "the abcs of Doyle sexuality. Absolutely no animals, Bloody-well definitely no children and Couldn't possibly consider necrophilia."

"Don't start, Bodie, I don't fucking need any pressure from you tonight."

Bodie rose from the bed, walked away, came back slowly. "Suppose I ought to apologise," he said, obviously not actually believing that he really should.

"Nah, it's me who should apologise to you. But it's just—" He shrugged, expecting Bodie to know that it was one thing to get used to having a ghost around, another thing entirely to consider making love to a spirit. "One day," he added, hoping it was true. "Give me time."

Bodie sighed, sitting down on the foot of the bed, watching Doyle with a mixture of love and purest frustration. "Don't have much choice, do I? It's either be patient now, or wait fifty years, innit?"

Surprising, still, what a reassurance it was to know that he wasn't supposed to die of anything but old age. Comforting, but a temptation to take an extra risk on the job, to take bigger chances, trusting in Bodie's foreknowledge. One of the reasons, perhaps, that Cowley was finally taking him—and by extension, his partner—off active duty and putting them into the backroom duties. Today had been his last day in the A Squad, and he should've been out drowning mutual sorrows with Murphy.

"I've been demoted," he said into the silence.

"You?" A careful examination of him, taking in the greying hair, the new lines on the face, the aura of tiredness that was more than the merely physical. "Yeh, it's about time you stood down, I suppose. At least now I know how you get to last so long! What's the Cow got you doing?"

"Training. Murphy's in Intelligence—"

"Maybe some of it'll rub off."

Doyle looked at him sharply, not liking the cutting edge to the comment. They had both slagged Murphy off together, many a time, and over any subject they could find or invent, but there was a near nastiness eroding the old fun.

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing!" Bodie was the very picture of innocence, a fact which showed his guilt all the more clearly.

"Now you listen to me, Bodie," Doyle was starting, temper flaring, "you've got no right to make digs at Murphy. What's he ever done to you?"

"Fucked you." There. It was said, the one thing that Doyle had avoided mentioning, the one subject that was strictly taboo between them: the one subject that made Ray's inability to sleep with him all the more painful to Bodie.

Doyle's eyes narrowed with suspicion and building anger, born as much of tiredness and worry as it was of righteous indignation. "How d'you know that? I haven't brought him here since you showed up, so that means you've been spying on me. Have you been doing that, you bastard? Following me around, watching me, peeking through keyholes? Peeping Tom, is that the level you've sunk to? What'd you go and spy on me for, eh, Bodie, what'd you go and do that for?"

"Because it's the closest I'm ever going to get to you!" A strangled shout, a sound of deep pain.. "Christ, Ray, how d'you think it makes me feel when you can't bear to let me touch you? And then you go off to him, and let him do all the things you won't let me do... I know, I know, it's not exactly a nice, straightforward situation, but it hurts like hell, Ray, and you can't expect me to hang around like Jane fucking Eyre!"

Now it was Doyle's turn to backpedal away from causing more hurt to his former—and soon-to-be incubus?—lover and take back some of the bite in his words. "Wouldn't suit the frocks anyway. Although you would look fetching in—"

"Oh, stop patronising me, you stupid sod. An' I don't know why you keep on running away from this either, you know—you never used to be a coward and you never used to hide from things that needed sorting out."

"And you never used to be a ghost."

"Yeh, well," Bodie prevaricated, rubbing his nose, shifting uneasily. "I keep on telling myself it's only a matter of time, you know, be patient, give you a chance to get used to it, but for god's sake, Ray, it's been a month now!"

The response stung with the flail of guilt, and before he found himself yielding to the old desires and love between them, Doyle snapped a question at Bodie, "An' how long did it take *you* to get used to the idea?" There remained his lingering disquiet with the idea of making love to a dead man, no matter how lively the supposed corpse turned out to be.

Bodie turned away, fading round the edges as he hadn't done for a fortnight, and for once Doyle knew it wasn't his fault, not this time. "Would you believe I keep on forgetting I'm dead? That part doesn't seem real, most of the time. Usually, I feel like my old self, except with more...freedom, really." He turned to face Doyle, a conciliatory smile on his face. "But before that, it took me about three years to get the hang of all this." An outrageous wink, designed to

belie his worries and woes. “Hope it doesn’t take *you* that long, otherwise I’ll develop a permanent case of blue balls.”

Doyle looked at the pertinent object of the sentence, and offered his own smile of conciliation, another step in the ever-easier road to reunion. “Not something you’d be able to hide, really, if you think about it.”

“Oh, I do, I do. I think about *it* day and night, night and day, morning, noon and—”

The phone rang, an unwelcome intrusion from outside, and it took merest moments for Doyle to have listened to the even more unwelcome message on the other end and discover that his step-down was going to be postponed for at least one more operation. A whirlwind of preparation, tiredness forgotten, and he was off and running, another crisis to be dealt with.

But for once, he left a happy Bodie in his wake: it was the first time Doyle hadn’t skittered away from a fleeting caress, and for the first time after his rose-tinted bubble had burst on the prickle of Doyle’s uneasiness with him, Bodie was beginning to truly believe that it might all work out in the end after all.

Murphy was back on the job, had been for a few weeks now, had even been up to the flat for coffee just the other night, before they went out to the pictures. Which was, in Doyle’s opinion, the reason for all the wary little glances he’d been getting ever since. Bodie hadn’t shown himself, not physically. But oh, how he’d made his presence felt! Small things moved from where Murphy had left them, the instant Murph’s back was turned. The bathroom lock latched by the time Murph was finished and ready to leave, his coffee overfilled with sugar on his return, and his wallet lay on the floor under his jacket, money and bankcards spread in a fan around it. Nothing had been said at the time, but there had been looks then, and even more funny looks now. Doyle wriggled in his seat, pretending not to notice the way Murphy was noticing him. He made quite a point of concentrating on every syllable of every word Cowley was saying, gazing at his boss with such rapt attention that even the redoubtable Mr. Cowley was on the verge of fidgeting under such suspicious behaviour. He was going on about some new duties that were going to be added to Doyle’s current load. A page turned, and the flash of white was matched by a flash of something that was equally pale against the evening sky.

Startled, Doyle looked to see what was outside, only to find Bodie, as naked as always standing outside the window. The third-floor window. The one with nothing *extending beyond* for anyone to stand on. Not, naturally enough, that Bodie needed anything to stand on these days. Doyle glowered at him, willing him to *go away*, with that odd twist of thought that sometimes reached Bodie. Tonight, either it wasn’t working, or Bodie wasn’t listening. Despite the perfectly readable expression on Doyle’s face, Bodie was showing no signs whatsoever of departing. In fact, Bodie had an ominously mischievous expression on his face, one that made Doyle fervently glad that he was the only one who could see his lunatic partner—lunatic *ex-partner*, he reminded himself.

It was a measure of how much had changed in the past several weeks that the only thing that registered with Doyle was that gleeful intent written all over Bodie: it no longer was worthy of note that Bodie was hovering in mid-air, or that no-one else could see him, or that he was, officially and physically, dead. Even the ‘touching’ had become something that happened more frequently, although never yet going beyond the slow caress of a hand stroking his hair as he sank into sleep, or a quick kiss on the nape of his neck as he bent over to brush his teeth. Doyle knew that Bodie was biding his time, being more patient than he had ever been in real life, but for all that, Ray had been waiting for some chink to show in this saintly armour. And tonight seemed like it just might be that chink.

*Go away!* he thought as loudly as he could, scowling as fiercely as he knew how.

Bodie smiled, sweetly, standing on the outside window sill, arms and legs spread until he was a pale X across the wooden squares of window frame.

Doyle wished he could open the window and give Bodie a proper talking to, but that would convince Cowley and Murphy that he was a complete doolally-dip. He settled instead for giving Bodie a look that meant *I'll-kill-you-later-when-I-get-you-home*. Which odd expression on his face made both Cowley and Murphy give him surreptitious glances of concern. Nothing in the conversation warranted such a reaction, and Murphy for one, was worried by the escalating incidences of...oddness around Doyle, and by the ever decreasing intimacy between the two of them. He couldn't help but dwell on the encroaching evidence—despite his conviction that Doyle loved him (or had, once, eventually)—that there was definitely someone else, and his time with Doyle was burning away as slowly and as inexorably as a candle.

Doyle, feeling eyes on him, stopped staring at Bodie and slowly turned to look at his boss and his current partner with an innocence that defied them to ask him a single question or dare to make a single comment. And then felt as guilty as hell when Murphy looked away, hurt, although precious few people would recognise the minute signals that were all that gave Murphy's secret away.

Someone else Doyle was going to have to talk to tonight. Christ, what a complicated situation he'd got himself into! A man he still loved to distraction had come back to haunt him, offering him everything they had had with one another before. But there was another man, actually and physically at his side, who'd been a wonderful lover to him and the only friend who'd been able to get him through Bodie's death. He owed his two lovers so much, and to tangle it all even more, Doyle knew himself to be loved and needed by both men. The worst was that he loved Murphy. Oh, not the way he loved Bodie, yet love all the same, a depth of friendship that anyone would count themselves lucky to have just once in a lifetime. But here Doyle was now, with an embarrassment of riches. One of whom was moving, slightly, in the window, the constant motion drawing Doyle's gaze back in spite of all his good intentions of not encouraging his barmy mate.

Bodie didn't look as if he needed much encouraging. His hips undulated in lissome circles, and his right hand was sliding with slow pleasure across smooth skin to touch the roughness of hair, then on to the rising power of his erection. What was that they said about the spirit being willing and the flesh weak? Doyle devoured Bodie with the passion in his eyes, calling himself weak and foolish to give so much as an inch to the desire Bodie was drawing from him. He found himself completely fixated on the vision in front of him, wondering if Bodie could feel the sensations, if sexual pleasure really had been included as part of his reward... He swallowed, hard, as Bodie's cock arched up, even harder. Biting his inner cheek for want of any other kind of cold shower, Doyle forced himself to look away, back at his boss, who was still talking, words Doyle wasn't even hearing. All he could think of was Bodie making love to himself, enticing Doyle with something that had always been a special indulgence for him, to see Bodie so uninhibited and so trusting of him, willing to put himself on display for Doyle's pleasure.

It was working, as foolproof as it had been before. His cock was echoing Bodie's, strangling itself in his underwear, his balls squirming with pleasure.

"Did you..." Cowley asked in a most peculiar voice, half-glancing over his shoulder towards the window behind him, the one that Bodie was using as frame for his display. "No, no, you couldn't." Cowley shook his head as if to clear it, picked his glasses up again, went back to his sheaf of papers. But then, another aborted glance, and an uncontrolled shiver.

Doyle suddenly lost all traces of arousal, fear being a better saltpeter than the coldest of cold showers. They'd always said Cowley had a direct line with God, and the old bastard always knew

more than he should, and they all said he had a gift for seeing right through people, and hell's bells, what if the Cow were bloody 'sensitive'? What if all those stories about the Scots and the Irish were true, and Cowley could 'feel' Bodie?

But Murphy was talking now, words that Doyle's distraction turned into garbled noise. Murphy hadn't seen Bodie—but then Murphy was Irish in his step-father's name only. Which still didn't ease the worry that all the vicious and superstitious things they had all muttered about Cowley weren't true. Doyle dared another look at the window, to meet Bodie's eyes, narrowed in passion, his hand blurring on his cock, skin flushed with arousal. Desire hit him like a blow to his stomach, bringing his arousal back full force, making him fidget in his chair. Cowley didn't look at him, went, instead, to look out the window, standing at crotch level with the rampant Bodie. And shook his head, blinking in wide-eyed disbelief, running a trembling hand over his face. "I think I'd better call it a night," he said in a voice that sounded surprisingly old and shaken. "You'd never believe what I think I just saw." He pulled himself together and just as firmly pulled the curtains shut.

Murphy threw a concerned look at Doyle, obviously adding Cowley to his list of people to worry about. "What d'you think you saw, sir?" he asked in a carefully neutral voice.

"Something I'd never expected to have thought of in a million years, laddie, and you can make do with that." Involuntarily, his hand rose as if to open the curtains, but he stopped himself as his fingers touched fabric. "Go on, get on with the pair of you, we'll have to finish this in the morning." With a last uneasy glance over his shoulder at the window, he strode back to his desk, grabbing manilla folders up in uncharacteristic haste and muddle. "Back here, tomorrow morning, eight sharp. And you can put the lights out behind you."

He was gone like a bat out of hell before either of his top agents could even give him a yessir. And he was gone barely five seconds before Murphy pinned Doyle like a butterfly under glass and demanded: "All right, Ray, that tears it."

Doyle took a leaf out of Bodie's book and turned the whole thing into a joke. "Nah, the Cow would never tear the curtains—would break his stingy little soul to have to buy new ones."

Murphy, never one given to dramatics, looked for all the world as if he wanted to bolt. "Sometimes you sound more like Bodie than Bodie did."

Doyle looked away quickly, not willing to discuss Bodie with Murphy of all people. It felt almost like...cheating. As if he were being unfaithful to one by discussing him with the other. As if anything, even a falling out, were better than opening up this can of worms and risk Murphy winking out the truth from him. If Murph found out, not only about Bodie, but about Bodie watching them... And then to have that compounded with the knowledge that Doyle knew, and had let it continue, giving Bodie that one indulgence...

"I'm not going to give in until you tell me what's going on," Murphy said conversationally, sounding as unruffled as ever. Also, unfortunately, as mulishly stubborn and tenacious as only Murphy could ever be.

"As the Cow said, nothing you would believe, mate, so let's leave it at that, eh?"

Murphy stretched out, crossing his legs at the ankles, making himself quite, quite comfortable. "Actually, no, I don't think we shall. I want to know, and I'm not letting this one pass."

That was below the belt, referring as it so tacitly did, to all the things Murphy had let pass before, all the things he'd put up with, all the crap he'd taken, all in the interest of helping Doyle and slowly, so very slowly, bringing him back to life, and love.

"Murph..."

"You know, that's something else I've always found interesting. You never use my Christian name. Bodie never called me John either."

“Not many do, do they?” Playing for time, and they both knew it, Murphy watching him, cat with mouse.

“People close to me always do. And I’d consider a lover to be close to me, wouldn’t you?”

“Well, of course, but...” A shrug, this truth offered freely to take his mind off the bigger truth he was concealing. “To be honest, I got to know you as Murphy, and John just doesn’t sound right for you. It’s too plain, too old-fashioned.” He warmed to his topic, bringing Murphy into this as escape. “And that’s not how I think of you, you know that. If you had a different name, like—”

“I don’t like being lied to, Ray.”

He kicked himself for trying embellishment as an easy way out.

“Are you going to tell me?”

Christ, what was he supposed to say? Well, the truth is that I’m being haunted by the lusty ghost of my old partner, you know, the bloke I was so involved with I never even noticed you fancied me. Although I noticed you fancied him something chronic, and he was convinced you were head over heels for me, which just goes to show how observant I was. Oh, yeh, he could just picture Murph’s reaction to that. I’m being haunted, Murph, d’you fancy coming home to meet my pet ghost? He’d be in Ross’ office so quickly, his head wouldn’t stop spinning for a week.

“Tell you what,” Murphy was saying in his even tones, “when you’re ready to trust me, you can come and talk to me.”

Doyle couldn’t believe his luck: not only was Murphy being more than reasonable about this, but Bodie hadn’t materialised to add a few more spanners to the works.

“Of course, until then, I don’t much fancy seeing you.”

“What?”

Murphy shrugged, pausing at the door. “I took a hell of a lot of shite from you for a long time after Bodie died. But you had a good excuse and I knew that. Right now... Well, if you can’t trust me, then there’s not much point in keeping going, is there?”

“You mean finish it, just like that, because I don’t want to tell you something? Want me to bring my secret diary to give you some light reading?”

“It’s more than not wanting to tell me something, and you know it. You haven’t been really close to me in weeks—when was the last time you let me come home with you? It’s always my place, but half the time, you don’t even stay the whole night. And recently—I dunno. It’s as if I’m not the only one you’re making love to.” He paused, pointedly, then pushed the dagger home. “Or having sex with.”

“Murphy...”

“See you in the morning. Don’t forget to turn the lights out as you leave.”

Steps faded down the corridor, and the moment they were out of hearing, Doyle threw his head back and roared. “BODIE!”

Nothing. Not a stirring of air, not a hint of presence, not even the subliminal awareness he had come so recently to recognise as Bodie being there, but invisibly, not manifesting enough to be seen even by Ray himself. “Oh, you just wait,” he muttered to himself as he put the lights out and checked all the security locks that Cowley usually took care of himself. “You just wait till I get my hands on you, Bodie.”

Half way home, his temper cooled enough to bring some semblance of reason back. Nobody had ever been able to do anything about Bodie’s sense of humour, and remembering the expression on that gleeful face, Bodie had never intended any harm. But that still left Doyle with Murphy walking away from him.



He was surprised to find out how much that mattered to him.

Which made his position even more awkward, eliminating, as it did, any possibility of an easy choice. If Bodie were alive, body warm and breathing because it had to and not because that's the way Bodie thought of himself, then the choice would be easier: still not easy, but at least not quite so difficult. But caring about both of them, this much... He wished he'd never listened to Bodie, wished he'd never made that promise to go on living without him and look for happiness elsewhere. Wished, a little, that he'd done what he so desperately had wanted to when he came home from the funeral. What he would have done, if Murphy hadn't used Cowley's official key to his flat and come in, carefully talking him into taking the gun out of his mouth... He'd told Murphy about himself and Bodie that night, the first person he had ever told the truth. Instead of shock, Murphy had simply plonked a mug of sweet tea down in front of him and said, "I know." Just like that, as casual as anything, making Doyle worry about just how successful he and Bodie had been in keeping their secret. Not half as successful as he and Murphy were, that was for bloody sure. The soul of discretion, that was Murphy, never putting a hand on him in public, never making a risqué comment, doing nothing to show that he mattered to Doyle as anything more than the someone Doyle could work with. He owed Murphy something for that alone. Owed him better than dumping him. Owed himself more than giving Murphy up. But there was Bodie to think about too. Where was a *ménage à trois* when you needed one? Murphy would share, he knew that. But with a ghost? And what the hell would the ghost have to say about it?

He got home in one piece, despite a close call with a lorry he hadn't even seen until it was almost too late. Slumped on his couch, he waited for Bodie to appear.

He didn't show up. Not that night. Not the night after. Doyle wore himself out at night tossing and turning with worry about Bodie never coming back, and exhausted himself during the day, trying to deal with Murphy's steadfastly platonic and polite working partnership. Something had to give, and Doyle wouldn't be at all surprised if it didn't turn out to be him.

Payday, and in compensation for his own misery and as hopeful bribery for his once-upon-a-time partner, he had indulged himself with good food, good wine and a sinful artery-clogger of a cake. Bodie might not be able to eat, but Doyle half-hoped Bodie to find the sight of mandarin orange gâteau to be irresistible. For that matter, he'd dance naked on Cowley's desk if that's what it was going to take to get Bodie to show up again. As for Murphy, well, he had a few ideas there too. But he needed Bodie on his side first.

Food simmering aromatically on the cooker (could Bodie still smell things, he wondered, wishing he could ask), a glass of chilled wine on the table beside him, Doyle sat down, ready to wait.

It didn't take long. A shimmer of non-colour in the corner, a lightness coalescing gradually, warily into Bodie's familiar figure.

"Where've you been, mate?" Doyle asked him as soon as Bodie was fully formed.

Not quite a shrug. "Wasn't sure if you wanted me to. I mean, what I did at Cowley's, well, I meant it to be a joke, bit of a laugh, that's all. But it didn't turn out that way, did it?"

"Not from my point of view it didn't."

Bodie shuffled uneasily. "Murph didn't take it well, did he?"

Doyle gave him a measuring look. "Yeh, I've been wondering if you were hanging about there and just not showing yourself. You know all about me and Murph then, don't you? Know about the way he's been with me, know that he doesn't talk to me off the job, won't let me touch him, won't let me near him."

"Yeh, well..."

“Mind you, it has taught me a thing or two.”

Bodie was instantly on edge, a stag scenting the air for danger.

“Taught me how much I don’t want to give him up.”

Bodie crumpled in on himself, fading dramatically at the edges, his imaging hollowing out and eroding into translucence as the shock hit him.

“But it also gave me a taste of what I’ve been doing to you.”

Literally and visibly, Bodie pulled himself together, but he didn’t say a word.

“And you doing a disappearing act showed me that I want you around as well.” He sat back, the ball in Bodie’s court, and waited for some kind of reaction.

“So you want both of us?”

“That’s it—have my cake and eat it too.”

The answer was a long time coming. “I’ve been mulling this over myself, you know.”

“I should think so!”

Bodie circumnavigated the table, doing a very creditable impersonation of a deeply pondering philosopher, which fooled Doyle not at all. If Bodie said he’d been thinking about the whole situation, then the decision would have been arrived at long before Bodie showed his face again. So it was a matter of reigning in his own impatience and giving Bodie enough room to pretend that he was the one making the final decision. But nothing in his own sense of fair play forbade him from making sure the decision was the one that he, personally, wanted. After all, Bodie would have already taken his decision on this, but Doyle knew one way to guarantee that it would fit his plans precisely.

Timing it so that Bodie would be right in front of him to get the full benefit of his efforts, Doyle reached over and stroked his finger across the top of the gâteau, a soft furrow following as he gathered cream.

By now, Bodie had stopped moving.

Lips already parted, Ray brought the finger to his mouth and began lapping, delicately, at the thick white cream and then sucking it to the knuckle into his mouth, cheeks hollowing as he sucked, opening his mouth just far enough that Bodie could see his technique. A technique that Doyle was quite sure Bodie wouldn’t’ve forgotten.

Bodie was crouching down now, arms leaning on the table edge, eyes addicted to the sight in front of him.

Sex and food, Doyle thought smugly to himself, sex and food. Never fails.

Bodie was living—or dead—proof of that. He stood up straight, so that his cock came into view, swollen and lengthened, arching out over the heavy sway of his balls.

“Nice,” Doyle said, using his well-sucked finger to point. The flat of his palm strayed over the cake again, and deliberately, remembering clearly how much Bodie had always loved it when he did this, he licked his palm clean of the white stuff, as he always had when Bodie had come in his hand. Eyes hooded, sultry with the arousal he was now finally able to cope with, he flicked his tongue over his hand, consuming the last of the cream. “Very nice,” he added, as if it were Bodie’s cum. “Always been one of my favourites, that. As a matter of interest,” he went on, with no more emphasis than if he were chatting about the weather and not trying to steamroller a decision that would change two lives and one afterlife, “if you’re manifesting, will your cum be visible as well? Would I be able to feel it on me?”

Bodie was, apparently, having trouble thinking coherently enough to answer that particular question. He cleared his throat, fumbled over his words, and finally made his point cogently. “It wouldn’t be fair of me to expect you to give up Murphy. I mean, that would be near enough asking you to stop living in the real world and spend half your life with the spirit world. So

it's..." he wasn't going to lie and say that he was keen on the idea, but he could get used to—could get used to anything if it meant staying with Ray—sharing with someone else, would have to, at some point, disembodiment a distinct disadvantage in keeping a lover happy all of the time. Better Murphy, whom he liked as a friend, and whom, had Doyle not been so firmly entrenched in his heart and so dangerous in his jealousy, Bodie would cheerfully have buggered against the nearest wall. If it had to be someone, and he was sure that it would, eventually, then it should be someone he himself could deal with, and someone that Ray... Admitting that Ray had learned to love someone else was a lovely tribute to him, and a nice epitaph, but completely comforting only as long as he stayed fully, irrevocably and utterly dead. Coming back like this could bollocks everything up something royal, if he didn't get his head on straight. Which meant being reasonable, and practical, and not stupid enough to lose Ray out of pig-headed pride or jealousy. "Well," he finally continued, "it's all right as far as I'm concerned."

"You sure about this?"

"Wouldn't make much difference if I weren't, would it? You need to have someone who can be with you in the real world, someone on the job with you, someone to go down the pub with, or to the Cup Final—always supposing you can blackmail the Cow into giving you a Saturday off. I can—" he broke off, laughing, if not sincerely, then at least heartily. "I was going to say I can *live* with that! But you know what I mean."

Doyle rose to his feet too, moving until he was close enough that Bodie could count every eyelash if he wanted to. "So it's all right with you if I go and phone Murph and invite him over?"

Bodie stepped back, not expecting it to be so soon, trying not to feel any hurt over this. It's the only way, he reminded himself. It's the only way not to fuck up Ray's real life. "Course it's fine," he said, with the same sincerity he had laughed. "Go ahead." That sounded stark and ungenerous even to his own ears, so he raced into his usual refuge, turning on the lisp and limping his wrist. "Ooh, do give him a ring—just as long as it's not an engagement ring, petal. The boys might talk if you did *that*, darling."

"You're a prat, you know that, don't you?" But there was a smile with the comment. "Just as well I've got a thing about great wallies like you, isn't it?" Doyle knew Bodie was following him as he went into the living room to phone Murph. "But I'll tell you something else for nothing: *you* can be the one to explain all this to our Murphy."

Our Murphy. That blunted some of the cutting edge of having to share. Better Murphy than anyone else, Bodie reminded himself, believing it more every time he thought it. He'd been getting used to the idea for a couple of days now, and it was gradually getting less and less difficult. He still wasn't sure, though, despite all his fond fantasies when he'd still been alive of him and Ray getting Murphy in the middle and making a meat sandwich out of him. On the verge of coming true, it didn't seem quite so appealing. "Ray..." he said, the tone of his voice enough to make Doyle hang up before Murph had answered. "Don't suppose there's any chance of it just being you and me the first time?"

"I can't. I honestly can't. I've thought about it, but... For god's sake, Bodie, you're *dead*. And I'm going to need something else to anchor me. I mean, what would you do if we tried it, just the two of us, and I went daft on you? What if I couldn't get past the fact that I shouldn't be able to feel your hands on me or your tongue in me? What if I was fucking you and you got so distracted you forgot to fix your horizontal hold and started fading out on me again?"

"So Murph'll be a bit of a distraction, someone actually there so that you can blame wandering paws on him?"

"More or less. Although Murphy'll be more than a *bit* of a distraction."

Not a comment to sit well with a man who was not only as competitive about cock size as the next bloke, but who was also trying to deal with the major handicap of being as dead as the proverbial dodo. It was a very insecure Bodie indeed who watched as Doyle dialled Murphy's phone number and who leant back to prop up the wall as he listened to one end of the conversation.

"H'lo, Murph, it's me...Yeh, I know what you said, and that's why I'm giving you a buzz...Course I'm ready to talk, guv'nor! No, seriously, pal, I've got a lot to tell you. You might not like it and you probably won't believe it, but at least then I'll've got it off my chest...Right now, unless you're too tired?...Don't be stupid, for christ's sake."

It was a guilty pleasure, but a pleasure nonetheless that Doyle might not be able to persuade Murphy: if that happened, then maybe, given enough time, Bodie might be able to bring Doyle round to letting it be just the two of them.

"I'm not going to ring you up just to pretend I want you to come over so I can say that I was the one who tried and it was you who wouldn't be reasonable...I was *not* hinting when I asked if you were too tired."

But the pleasure had faded, and now all Bodie had was the guilt. Poor Ray was really getting a bit on the upset side about all this, and the least Bodie owed him was to be as fair to him in death as he had been in life. Not that he was keen on the idea: it was just the right thing to do and one day he'd be genuinely happy about it. He hoped...

"Look, Murph, I know you probably don't believe it right now, but you're my best friend. Well, best friend still alive at any rate. And I'm not going to risk that just to score points over you."

That gave Bodie pause. Murphy was the winner in the Best Friend (living) category, which had to mean something. More proof drowning his own insecurities and doubts: Ray needed someone he could, literally, be seen with. Someone who wouldn't dissolve when his energies were used up. Someone who could lend a hand with all the day-to-day difficulties of living. The things that Bodie could only watch now as Doyle dealt with so many of the irritants that Bodie had always done his share of before.

"Yeh, right now, that'd be great...Nah, don't worry about it...I've got food in as well. It's nearly ready, so I'll stick a plate in the oven for you...Okay, half an hour then."

A long span of silence from Doyle, a smile gentling his face, one hand idly tangling in the phone cord, a multitude of details that Bodie remembered only too, too well: he just hadn't expected to see them in Doyle for someone other than Bodie himself. More evidence of how much Ray was going to keep on needing Murphy, another proof that Bodie was going to have to be every inch the gentleman if he were to stand a chance of Ray wanting him around for any real length of time.

"Oi, you with us, or are you off communing with the fairies?" asked Doyle, an odd undercurrent in his voice as he hung the phone up.

"Ooh, ducky, you're the only fairy *I* want to deal with!" Bodie camped back outrageously, automatically trying to ease Doyle's unease.

"God, it's a bloody miracle we ever managed to keep us a secret with you prancing around as camp as a Boy Scout Jamboree! Look, though..."

But Doyle wasn't looking at him. Bodie was really getting used to that, almost able to accept that there were times when Doyle couldn't quite look at him. This time it was more proof of how uneasy Ray still was about making love to him. Not that Bodie could blame him, given the circumstances. Nor, perhaps more importantly could Bodie blame Doyle for the unspoken reason for some of this discomfort. Ray was loyal to an extreme and Bodie knew that Doyle could never

simply either walk away from from Murphy nor cheat on him. A small part of Bodie even whispered that Bodie should leave, let Ray get on with his new life... But there was too much love between them for that. There was nothing for it but to do their best possible, and part of that meant Bodie sharing Ray and not letting the hurt show when his lover couldn't look at him. Very gently, soothing the distress that his very presence caused, Bodie asked, "What's the matter, Ray?"

Doyle was looking at him now, unease fading with the familiarity of having some form of Bodie back. "You will be all right about all this, won't you? I mean, you'll be able to handle all this?"

"I'll have you know I can handle you, Murph and the better half of the Household Cavalry," Bodie announced with fulsome pride, knowing that the first two parts were true at least: it was more handling the sight of his Ray with 'our' Murphy that was going to be hard.

"I'm being serious, Bodie!"

"So'm I. I'll be fine, Ray, honest. And I'll try not to scare him. Always supposing he can see me, that is."

That had Doyle gaping like a guppy. "You mean you won't manifest if he's here?"

"No, you twerp, I mean that he might not be able to see me. You're the only one that's guaranteed by the management, and as far as I know, anyone else who sees me has to be a bit on the fey side. He doesn't see me when I drop in on you and him, does he?"

"Yeh, but neither did I till I gave you permission and you started really *showing* up."

"But even then, he still didn't notice, did he? I may be wrong on this one, but I have a sneaking suspicion he might just mention—in passing, like—if he'd noticed your dead lover leaning watching you fuck his brains out."

Doyle didn't answer that question, smouldering instead with a combination of seduction and desire, creating the mood that would give this encounter some chance of working. "Like seeing me fuck him, did you?"

"If you want the truth," Bodie said off-handedly while he didn't lessen the intensity of his stare, "I liked it even better when he fucked you."

"That what you want tonight, sunshine?"

"You offering?"

"I'm offering."

"I'm buying!" His grin widened, delighted that Doyle should offer him so sexy an olive branch. "Least I would, if I had any pockets to keep money in."

It never failed to stir Doyle, looking at Bodie's nakedness, but still, he couldn't quite risk touching him, not without some kind of backup, something as familiar as Bodie was, but nowhere nearly as unsettling as what Bodie had become. He'd never be able to forgive himself if he started to make love and freaked on Bodie: that was something that would scar too deeply. But if he had Murphy there, literally holding his hand—or another part of his anatomy, for that matter—he'd have something solid to cling to, to get him over any strangeness that threatened him. Awkward, despite his recent practice, about rejecting Bodie, Doyle sought sanctuary in his kitchen, a mumbled excuse about needing to make sure nothing was burning giving them both the chosen illusion of there being no remnant problems.

Twenty-five minutes after he'd hung up the phone, Murphy was ringing the doorbell, the soft chimes making Doyle jump nervously.

"That'll be him," he said, inanely, to Bodie.

"Never! And there I was thinking it was the man to read the meter!"

"Don't you start, mate. If you can't face up to this, then disappear now, all right?"

Serious threat there, a warning Bodie took to heart. With ruthless good intentions, he stomped the life out of his jealousy, reminding himself over and over and over that this was the only way he had a chance of making it work in the long term, reminding himself that Murphy had been his friend as well, and that he'd fancied him something chronic.

Fifteen seconds after Doyle had ushered Murphy in and through to the kitchen, a paranoid Bodie came drifting through the nearest wall and into the room, heart in mouth as he saw Ray standing merest inches away from Murph.

"I don't much fancy a drink, Ray. I'd rather just get this sorted out—unless you didn't plan on telling me anything and were planning on going straight to the seduction?"

"Would that work?" Doyle asked, half seriously.

"Not a snowball's, pal. It's a case of speak now or forever hold your peace."

"Yeh, well, by the time I'm finished, you're probably going to wish I'd never opened my trap."

Bodie, not wanting to make this any more difficult on Ray, still hadn't materialised, preferring to hang around near the wall, able to watch and listen. God, but Murphy was handsome enough. It was so easy to conjure up memories of Murph in bed with Ray, sweat gleaming on his smooth skin and beading in the curl of chest hair, face twisting in the last throes of passion, Ray's arms and legs locked around him, pulling him deeper inside... Old habits die hard, and he shook his head to clear his thoughts, making a serious effort to concentrate on what was going on between Murphy and Ray.

"Will you stop beating around the bush?" Murphy was saying, showing uncommon impatience. In fact, from here, Bodie could see the knotted tension in the other man's nape. "C'mon, Ray, just come right out and say it."

Oh, yeh, right, Doyle thought. I can see you don't have a clue about what I'm going to tell you, or you wouldn't be trying to hurry me on.

"No, this needs a bit of building up to, pal. Em...this is going to sound a bit dotty, but... D'you believe in ghosts?"

Murphy didn't even have to pause to consider his answer. "Course I do."

Doyle was sitting beside Murphy at the table now, endlessly turning a spoon over and over again. "Ever seen one?"

"No such luck. I can't even do Ouija boards. But if you don't mind telling me—what the hell have ghosts got to do with any of this?"

You'll fall off your chair when you find out, Murph, Bodie thought, hanging on to his sense of humour as he slowly drifted over to where Ray and Murph were standing.

"You're not going to believe this, but..." Doyle racked his brains again, still not even coming close to a nice, reasonable way to tell Murphy this, so he shrugged, and went for what the general public would label as absolutely unreasonable, not to mention absurd. "It's Bodie," he said flatly. "He's come back."

Murphy blinked slowly, several times, and when he spoke, his voice had the gentle tolerance people usually reserve for those who are losing their grip on reality. "But he's dead, Ray.

"Yeh, I had noticed, now you mention it. I know he's fucking dead, Murph—I was there, remember? But that doesn't alter the fact that he's come back."

"Which explains you asking me about ghosts."

And Doyle was just the tiniest bit envious that what had turned him into a babbling baboon didn't seem to be phasing Murphy at all. "That's it. So he's shown up again, but this time he's a ghost."

Murphy shrugged, taking this all far easier than Doyle had had any hope of him ever doing. “Fair enough. Always did say that Bodie wouldn’t be happy unless he could play your Guardian Angel. Is he around right now?”

“Hang on a minute, Murph. Is that all you’ve got to say? Aren’t you taking this all a bit too calmly?” Suspicion was looming large: Murphy was being unwarrantedly co-operative about this. “You don’t believe me, do you?”

Murphy never had been one for lying, and he didn’t intend to start that now. “So what if I don’t? You believe it, and that’s what counts. To be honest,” he said quietly, fingertips tracing the curve of Doyle’s lips, “I’d rather it was Bodie back to haunt you than you finding yourself some new fella or girl.”

“Don’t humour me, Murph!” Doyle was bristling now, hating the very idea that Murphy might be coddling him again. “If you can’t believe me—”

“It doesn’t matter a toss, because I believe *in* you, and that’s what’s important. What I need to know is if this your way of telling me to sling my hook or if you want me to hang around...

“You were the one to tell me that I could confess all to you if I wanted you to stay with me, so what d’you think?”

I think if it’s what keeps you happy, if it’s what’s going to keep you with me, then I’ll believe that Cowley’s having a sex change. “I told you, I believe in ghosts, and I’m willing to believe that you’ve got Bodie floating round you again.”

Doyle started, startled by a touch to the small of his back, even though he was standing slightly beyond Murphy’s reach. It served as a reminder of how extreme some of his own reactions had been, and he was embarrassed to realise that he was in danger of tossing Murphy’s generosity back in his face, and all because Murphy was handing him his agreement on an embellished silver platter. “Sorry,” he muttered, stopping his hand half-way before it could reach the place where Bodie had touched him: he still wasn’t quite willing to chance starting something he wasn’t sure he would be able to finish. “Bodie’s standing right behind me—can you see him?”

Murphy, bless his imperturbable nature, looked, then shrugged. “Fraid not. Are you sure he’s manifested?”

“Course I’m—”

Bodie chose that moment to materialise in the space between Murphy and Doyle. “Boo!” he said, making Doyle jump, while Murphy didn’t even blink.

“Told you he might not even be able to see me,” Bodie said conversationally while he scrambled for a way to make sure that Doyle would still let the loving happen. “Might be the best way, if you think about it.”

“You’d say that no matter what he did, up to and including running away screaming.”

“Are you talking to Bodie?” Murphy asked, revealing nothing of his feelings regarding Doyle talking to something that Murphy had no evidence even existed, apart from Ray’s conviction.

Doyle was peering over at something Murphy couldn’t see. “Are you *sure* you can’t hear him? Or see him? Can’t you feel anything at all?”

“I can feel something,” Bodie answered before Murphy spoke, Doyle’s sudden distraction making Murph fall silent and simply watch the play of emotions across Doyle’s face.

“Talk to him,” Bodie murmured, moving around slowly, Doyle automatically moving with him until he had Bodie at his front and Murphy a scant few inches at his back, “tell him that you want him to touch you.”

Bodie’s eyes were full of the promise of pleasure, his cock rigid with the promise of passion, and Doyle decided not to analyse this situation to death: if Murphy were willing to play along, then he’d accept it at face value and worry about the details later. Bodie was positively redolent

with his need to love Doyle, and that hunger fed Doyle's own needs and desires. "Make love to me, Murph," he barely whispered, leaning back just a little, strong hands catching him, turning the firm grip into a sliding caress.

"That's it, Ray," Bodie whispered, "that's it. Close your eyes, think about what Murph's doing to you." And it was easier to watch now than it had been when first he'd sneaked into Murphy's bedroom, because this time, Murphy had at least been told, Bodie not caring one whit whether or not Murph actually believed any of it, and easier because this time, Bodie wasn't going to be shut out, was going to finally be able to touch Ray, make love to him, drown himself in passion. Delicately, his hands reached out to skim firm, warm flesh.

Doyle's eyes dropped closed, and he arched back into Murphy's reassuring embrace, learning how groundless his own fears had been, and how easy it was to let Bodie love him again.

"You think he's big?" Bodie's voice breathed in Doyle's ear. "Well I've got a bigger cock than him." He moved forward, his naked arousal brushing Ray's trousers, purest happiness soaring through him when Doyle didn't flinch, but instead pushed his hips forward, intensifying the contact, mouth dropping open when Bodie's hands caressed his chest alongside Murphy's strong hands. "I'm a better kisser than he is," Bodie whispered, tongue trailing a tingling path down the side of Ray's neck, setting Ray's nerves jumping with pleasure, Murphy's expected and absolutely normal presence enough to calm his nervousness, the warmth of Bodie's body dissipating the last of his uneasiness.

And even if Murphy didn't believe any of this, or even if he did, he had the sense to be quiet, to hold all his comments inside and respond only with his body to every subtle move Ray made.

"And I suck you off better than Murphy ever could, don't I, Ray?"

"Yesss..."

Murphy took that as an invitation to continue divesting Doyle of his clothes, loosening tie, unbuttoning shirt, unbelting trousers—and paid no attention as all the ungainly details like socks and shoes seemed to take care of themselves.

"And I fuck you better than he does." Bodie was pressing his cock hard against the tenderness of Doyle's balls, pre-cum slickness sliding between the soft hair of Ray's inner thighs. Behind him, Murphy was slithering out of his own clothes, and Doyle groaned as he felt the hard heat of Murphy's cock pry the cleft of his arse open.

He was, Doyle thought, caught between a rock and a hard place. Not that he was complaining, not by a long chalk. And certainly not by two even longer cocks, Bodie fucking him between his legs, Murphy teasing him, filling the furrow of his arse. This was even more an embarrassment of riches than before, and he was as intoxicated with his wealth as Midas. He opened his mouth to Bodie, sucked his tongue inside, and reached behind, hands fumbling to find, and hold, Murphy's cock, Murphy biting the lobe of his ear, laving his cheek, coming close, so close to Bodie. It was stunning, exhilarating, to be loved so much by each man that they were willing to do anything from suspend disbelief to accept someone else in his life. It was also more than he had ever thought he could have in this life.

Bodie withdrew from his mouth, and whispered to him, his voice perfect counterpoint to the murblings of pleasure that Murphy was making as his cock was stroked by strong hands and pressed in towards Doyle's tight arsehole. "See, Ray?" Bodie, a seductive satyr, heat plastered down Doyle's chest, hot cock clenched between Ray's legs. "Like that kiss, did you? Told you I kissed you better, and I love you better..."

"It's all right," Ray answered, mumbling round the distraction of his two lovers' passions. "I'm not going to kick you out, love."



“Should hope not,” Murphy this time, breath tickling warm, moving round towards Doyle’s front.

“No!” His eyes flew open, left hand shooting out to stop Murphy. “Stay behind me, Murph.”

An affectionately wicked smile, and Murphy was behind him again, on his knees, big hands taking possession of Doyle’s backside. “So that’s how you want it, is it, Ray? From behind, here in the kitchen, like rabid teenagers?”

Doyle looked at Bodie, and Bodie answered the unspoken question. “It’s a bit much to take in all of a sudden, so don’t say anything else about me. If we start talking about it now, he won’t be in any mood for fucking and I—” he swooped down, taking Ray’s nipple between his teeth, tugging with just enough pressure to cause a tide of salacious pleasure to flood through Doyle, “I want to fuck you too much to waste time flapping my lips about existentialism!” Then Bodie’s mouth was busy again, swirling through chest hair, sucking on the sensitive underarm skin, the faint taste of sweat a glory to him and an even more acute pleasure for Doyle. Almost helpless with the attentions fore and aft, Ray pressed Bodie’s head in hard against his skin, and spread his legs to give Murph better access to rim him, the smooth wetness of tongue making his arse even hungrier to be fed.

He was too excited to have any hope of control, too ecstatic to be with both his lovers to give a damn about making it last: he was voracious with need, lush with passion and so desperate to seal this new life for the three of them. “C’mon, Murph,” he half groaned, “fuck me. I want you in me, c’mon, c’mon, give it to me...”

A devouring of Bodie’s mouth, and then he was pushing Bodie down his body, his own cock weeping with arousal, and then Bodie’s mouth was on him, nipping and licking and sucking, swallowing him down, only to rise again and sink, lower, to suck his balls, one by one, into that wet cavern, until he couldn’t bear the unfinished pleasure any more and made Bodie swallow his cock again. And all this time, behind him, Murphy was muttering obscenities in praise of his beauty and his sexiness, open mouth roving the hollows of his back, laving the dimples just above the curve of his arse. Murphy’s fingers were inside him, one at first, then two, then three, until he was open enough that Murphy could stand, wet his own cock with spit, then slide it home into a hot, clinging arse, Doyle’s experience with being fucked making it all smooth as heaven.

“Oh, christ, yeh, that’s it...” was as much coherency as Doyle could muster, as he was caught between his two loves, Bodie’s heat providing a refuge in passion at the front, Murphy’s heat piercing him from the rear, every thrust pushing him deeper into Bodie’s mouth, every push of Bodie’s hands impaling him all the harder on Murphy’s cock.

Doyle was incapable of thinking, lost in the experience of being consumed and fulfilled at the same time, of being drenched in so much love. It was the happiest he’d ever been, and the sheer joy of it made the whole thing profoundly natural. Bodie was groaning, the movement of his throat resonating through Doyle’s cock, and then there was a sudden splash of liquid heat on his foot, and he knew Bodie had come, felt the relaxation in the mouth around his cock before Bodie bent himself fully to Ray’s satisfaction again. Doyle felt his own orgasm gather sweetly, and shivered when he felt Bodie’s hand slide between his legs and heard Murphy’s responsive gasp. He knew what Bodie was up to, could feel the soft hair of Bodie’s forearm caress the underside of his balls, grinned to himself as he thought of Murphy, fucking him mindless, with Bodie’s hand stroking Murphy’s balls in the most perfect way. He felt Murphy arch behind him, cock shoving into him so hard, so deep, convulsive pleasure making it swell within him, Murphy’s cry heralding his coming. Bodie sucked on him harder, one hand stroking the rimple between his balls and his arse, pressing his flesh all the tighter around Murphy’s streaming orgasm. It was too

much, sending him over the edge, and he ejaculated into Bodie, hearing his lover swallowing his semen, taking that part of him inside, just as he was taking Murphy into him.

Murphy slipped away from him, sliding down the wall onto the floor, and Doyle collapsed beside him, not thinking about anything other than the pleasure they all three had just shared. Murphy hadn't gone dotty on him when he'd mentioned Bodie, and Ray was rightly convinced that given time combined with Murphy's famous open-mindedness, there would be no problems there. And Bodie? Slowly, half asleep in the afterglow, he turned to look at Bodie, to be met by a cheeky grin, and a reclining Bodie already stroking his own cock back into readiness.

"One advantage of being dead, sunshine," Bodie said gleefully, flicking a hand towards the gasping and utterly flaccid Murphy, "is that since I don't have a body, I don't have too worry about how long it's going to take to get it back up, do I?"

Doyle chuckled, a sexy sound at the best of times, an invitation to a libidinous delights right now. He let his eyes drift slowly closed, promising himself vaguely that he'd get up and drag Murphy to bed, but in a minute, in just a minute.

As he fell asleep, his mind was filled with the future joys of a truly insatiable lover.

*Happily plagiarised from the Brazilian film Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands.*