



BistoCon 2016



THE PROFESSIONALS



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A Note from the Con Comm

When we held the first BistoCon two years ago, and someone (okay, it was Flamingo) suggested we do a con zine, we didn't think we could take on the responsibility. Actually, as first time organizers of a first time con, we thought we'd have to be utterly *crazy* to do a zine on top of everything else. But when someone (okay, it was Flamingo again) suggested we do a con zine for our second BistoCon, and that we do it as an electronic zine, suddenly it didn't seem quite so crazy.

We proceeded to borrow (or steal) SHareCon's very own Cyanne to do the editing and layout for the zine. And then we had so many lovely writers and artists entrust us with their work. You are reading the results of all of their efforts.

If you enjoy the work of our creators, if their stories of Bodie and Doyle inspire you, or their art captivates you, please consider sending them a comment. Each creator has an email address listed where you can contact them. Even a short comment is always appreciated.

Pauline & Sally, 2016

All I Need is the Air That I Breathe

by
Dawnwind

—*And to love you*
~ The Hollies

Missing scene from The Man Without a Past

He waited. There was nothing else he could do but dredge up patience from some inner source and cultivate it, the way a Boy Scout coaxes a tiny flame he's created by rubbing flint and steel together. An intake of breath, sustaining oxygen for both human and fire, then a puff. The flame brightens, bringing heat and hope.

Waiting presumed a resolution, something to attain with persistence. Unfortunately, nurturing patience was not his forte.

Doyle inhaled again, ignoring the pain from undoubtedly cracked, if not broken ribs, and breathed out. Had a temper, he did. From his mother's side of the family. Eilish McCourt Doyle could cut you to the quick with the side of her tongue all the while making porridge. Her children knew to steer clear of her when her eyes burned green.

Raymond McCourt Doyle, her only son, had her fire, her intensity. And that bloody propensity to be a stropy, short tempered git. He could not deny the truth. Felt the growing fire burning in his guts, extinguishing the serenity he'd courted. He simply wasn't a patient person.

His first instinct was always to devise out a solution and jump in, feet first.

Difficult to do when he'd been hit by a car and tossed about like a football. Doyle twisted his wrists, wincing at the rasp of rope on fragile skin. Didn't have to see his arms to know the flesh was scraped and bleeding. No need to dwell on that—focus on what he could change. On what he had at his disposal.

Sod-all. Very little could be accomplished in his condition. And yet—his stubborn disposition was unquenchable. He'd do something or die trying. Gathering the energy when he hurt all over was the most difficult part.

No-one knew where he was. He mentally traced his own steps back to the last place he'd been. Pendle's sister's flat. He'd chased that bleeding sod out behind the building and—the car coming toward him had nearly blanked out any rational thought. No memories of anything after. With one exception—the pain of three thousand pounds of metal slamming into his body.

Waking up to Arthur Bloody Pendle staring at him had been enough to send him back into unconsciousness. Moving on, past that. What could he do, here trussed up like a damned turkey readied for the Christmas feast?

He needed Bodie. Really.

This wasn't a job for one.

Bodie didn't know where he was.

Doyle didn't know where he was, beyond the obvious—a bedroom: four walls, a bed and chest of drawers. Logic dictated that he was still in London. Unless he'd been unconscious longer than he thought. His brain felt like a scrambled egg, but he could see light coming through the curtains. Still day. Assumedly the same day he went to see Sally Pendle.

Good.

That was firmly established.

London was a big place. Mazes of streets. Miles upon miles of paved roads. Taxi cab drivers had to take exams to memorise every little close and lane. Where would Bodie start?

Doyle had to believe. That was almost more difficult than dredging up patience. It wasn't that Doyle didn't believe in his partner, he did. But Bodie was dealing with a lot. Claire Sheldon had been badly injured in the bombing and Bodie was hurting. Not from any injury, but the heavy guilt that he'd been the cause of her pain. Bodie was like that—he put up a casual, even callous front, while underneath, he agonised.

Was he even aware that Doyle had gone off on a tangent to find the Pendles? Where he'd either hit gold, metaphorically speaking, or been caught up in something else all together.

Would Bodie even notice that Doyle hadn't checked in with CI5?

Doyle had to believe he would.

Belief was such a fragile thing—more difficult to coax into existence than that tiny flame. Part faith, not quite hope, grounded in trust.

Drawing in another breath that lanced pain across his chest and tightened the band of hurt, Doyle knew, without a doubt, that Bodie would come. He tendered that belief in his heart, layered with trust. It would happen. He had to wait.

There were still things he could do to kick the rescue into high gear.

Doyle stared across the room at the telephone sitting innocuously on a small stand.

Salvation.

Getting there would be the test of endurance. If Sir Edmund Hillary could climb Everest and Robert Peary could reach the North Pole, Raymond Doyle could crawl—tied hand and foot like a blasted chicken waiting for the pot—six feet across a room.

Moving hurt. God, it hurt.

Doyle pushed himself through the agony where each movement, each breath stabbed intense pain into his chest, his shoulders, his belly. He whimpered, allowing himself that outlet, albeit softly as possible.

Would not do to have Pendle hear. Would not do at all.

Finally, after what seemed like seven lifetimes in hell, he was directly below the phone. Only had to inch around to get his back to the small table, so that he could grasp the cord and pull it down.

Only.

He was so God-dammed tired he could weep. But that flame heated his belly, kept him fighting, kept him alive.

Life meant hope, hope meant Bodie.

He twisted, gasping for air that didn't seem to want to settle into his lungs and curled his swollen fingers around the plastic cord. The phone came down with a jangle of bells that almost scared the shit of out him.

Didn't matter, didn't matter.

Shaking, he located the rotator dial and inserted a finger into the small hole, dialing the familiar number from behind. Faster than he would have thought possible under the circumstances, he flipped over to press his mouth to the receiver. "C'mon, c'mon..." he whispered, praying that there was a sensible girl at the switchboard. Praying that his captors didn't take this moment to come check on him.

"CI5, how many I direct your call?" a perky voice he didn't quite recognise answered.

"It's Doyle." His heart was banging against his ribcage and his blood thundering in his ears. He almost couldn't hear himself speak. As long as she could. As long as someone at CI5 could find him.

"S'Ray Doyle. 4.5," he said desperately, overriding anything she was trying to say. "Get a trace on this call. 4.5, Ray Doyle. Get a trace on this call!"

Bodie had come to his rescue. Doyle swallowed the tightness in the back of his throat, trying to gulp air without further smashing his ribs. He'd have been safe all the same if Murphy or McCabe came for him, but Doyle felt that trust—that hope—settle into him. He'd wanted Bodie, and Bodie came through.

Despite the odds.

All Doyle had to do was wait a bit longer in the destruction that had once been a tidy kitchen—and ring for an ambulance. He'd told Bodie he would.

Stubborn, proud berk, he chided himself. As if he had any energy left whatsoever.

Patience. Ha.

More like fight to live another day. The only time he could dredge up an ounce of patience was on those long stake-outs with Bodie. Then he could sit, trading banter and jokes with his partner all bloody night.

No time like the present. Get to the phone—sure to be one in the lounge since Crabbe had pulled the cord out of the wall in the bedroom.

Doyle examined his blockade with a ragged sigh. By pulling the kitchen shelves down, he'd boxed himself in well and good. Had worked a treat to keep the baddies out, but without a lever, he wasn't going to escape. He hurt too badly. All he wanted to do was sink to the floor and wait for Bodie to return.

Bugger waiting. It wasn't in him.

Doyle glanced around the small room—surely there was something long and metal he could use to shore up the cabinet blocking the door.

A gas cooker, no need of a fire poker.

A long handled spatula? Might do.

Reaching across the counter, Doyle knew the instant the jagged edge of one broken rib pierced the soft, curved flesh of his lung. Pain like nothing he'd ever felt locked his chest, stopping his breath as if he'd been garroted.

Couldn't breathe.

Couldn't think.

Bodie's face flashed across his mind's eye, one finger raised in mock disapproval. Bodie'd expect him to survive.

What would Bodie do if he died?

Life meant hope. Hope meant Bodie would return.

Doyle resolved to live, if only to deny Bodie grief. A good enough reason.

He slid, braced against the cupboards, to the floor, bringing up a cloud of pepper from the lino. Doyle sneezed violently, air squeaking in and out of his labouring lungs. He tasted blood, panting, gasping for even a molecule of oxygen.

As a result of being hit by a car, what used to be an unconscious action, the push and pull of his lungs bringing air to the body, had once become a boring, but necessary agony to endure this afternoon. Now it seemed a vital, if unattainable goal.

Fuck waiting. He needed to breathe.

Already his head felt dull, the lack of oxygen depriving his brain cells of vitality. He knew the signs of shock, of imminent death. He focussed on the lessons Dr Poole had drilled into them in one of those boring courses Cowley required his agents to take.

Safety first! Remain calm.

That was out of the question for the immediate future. Getting air into his lungs was nigh on to impossible, and his heart was galloping, straining to survive. Felt like he was going to pass out.

What was the next thing?

Feet higher than the head. Get blood to the heart and brains.

Now he was getting somewhere.

Where, he wasn't quite sure. What was all this in aid of?

His mouth dry, Doyle concentrated. He'd had an agenda. What the hell was it?

Feet—something about his feet. Instinctively, Doyle went flat on the floor. He choked, gasping—blood was in his throat, he was sure of it, but weirdly his brain did achieve a glimpse at clarity.

Sod it—breathing or thinking. Which was the most important? He scabbled his fingers along the lino, pepper digging into his palms, and heaved himself onto his right—less painful—side.

A pure, unadulterated waft of healing air rushed in, blasting away the fog. Damn, that was good, but only for a moment. The pain on his left side clamped his chest, insidiously bearing down, forcing him to clutch and heave for every tiny breath. He could feel fluid—bubbles—gathering under his ribs, into his throat. Wet, awful, obliterating the space for good oxygen.

He hurt so badly.

With a new perspective on the kitchen, Doyle stared at the shelves angled across the doorway. He could see a sliver of wooden floor and the back of an upholstered chair. Was there space to crawl through? Find Bodie.

Fucking Bodie. Where the bloody hell was he? Off following orders from that shit Cowley when he should be...

Doyle sunk his teeth into his bottom lip and slid a few inches across the well peppered floor. It was only the grit in his eyes—the damned pepper—that wetted his lashes and cheeks, yeah?

He wasn't crying.

He didn't miss Bodie like an arrow directly into his heart. He wasn't giving up.

He was not that bloody stupid.

He gained another couple inches and had to stop, listening to the squeaky, rasping gurgle of his own breathing. His heart throbbed in his ears, Ringo Starr's drumming in the Beatles' song, *Revolution*.

Breath meant life.

Life meant Bodie.

He had to breathe. He couldn't let his partner go without back-up. Too sodding stupid to die like this, trapped in an airless bubble going purplish and then lavender grey around the edges.

Just one more minute, yeah? One more. He had the patience to hang on, the hope to will Bodie back into the kitchen.

Doyle stretched his arm, fingers pressed onto the wooden floor, a very different texture than the cold lino. He forced an inhale that burned like fire in his chest and whimpered. Then heard a sound that wasn't his own wretched gasping.

Footsteps. He could feel the vibrations along the floorboard through his fingers.

"Bo-die," came out strangled and harsh, barely audible.

"Ray?" Bodie sounded dismayed, dropping down beside him. "What the hell happened?"

He'd been heard.

Bodie was there. Doyle could barely see, couldn't breathe, but this would work out, as their bloody obbos always did. "Didn't r-ring..." he whispered, a pitiful, painful squeak past the obstructions in his chest.

"Stupid git," Bodie said roughly, placing one hand on the left side of Doyle's chest.

Comforting warmth.

"Can't breathe?" Bodie asked swiftly. "Feels like you're locked up inside?"

How did he know?

"Fish....tank p-pump," Doyle ground out, because he had to. Had to connect. Had to prove that he'd had the patience to wait for his partner. To live.

"Your lung is punctured," Bodie assessed. "Got to let out the air—and the blood."

Doyle concentrated on breathing, vaguely aware that he was drowning. Fluid crept up his windpipe, cutting off all air, all vitality. He had only one thing left—Bodie.

Bodie was his strength, his hold on life. He gripped tightly, fighting the overwhelming tide rising in his chest.

“Knew you wouldn’t call the ambulance, lazy sod,” Bodie complained, scrabbling around Doyle. Pepper scattered in his wake. “Did it for you, didn’t I? Can hear the siren, can’t I?”

Doyle couldn’t track his partner’s ramblings, letting it wash over him in a familiar stream as he slowly sank under the surface of the water.

“Ray?” Bodie called from miles away. “Ray, stay with me, dammit, you miserable ingrate. Th’ambulance is coming.” Something shockingly cold replaced the warm hand Bodie had on Doyle’s chest.

Then—intense, bright pain yanked Doyle to full consciousness. He choked, coughed, crying and suddenly, as if a magician had shoved his wand into his chest, he could breathe.

Still hurt like blazes, no question. The taste of blood thick on his tongue, but utter bliss to feel his lungs suck in that most basic, and addictive of substances, air. Doyle opened his eyes.

Bodie was so close, their noses touched. Bodie’s mouth was on Doyle’s. A kiss?

“Wha—?”

“Going to give you the kiss of life if gashing you between the ribs and sticking in a drinking straw hadn’t worked,” Bodie babbled, as if he was about to cry.

“What’re you b-banging on—,” Doyle heaved in precious oxygen between each word.

“Jungle doctoring—” Bodie inhaled himself, wiping something off Doyle’s bottom lip.

Doyle didn’t want to look at the glistening red gore on the tip of Bodie’s fingers.

“Seen it done—in the Congo, but never had a go myself.” Bodie sat back on his knees, gazing down at Doyle. “Saved your life. Means you owe me, you do.”

“I do,” Doyle vowed. He meant every word.

I love you hung in the air between them, never voiced.

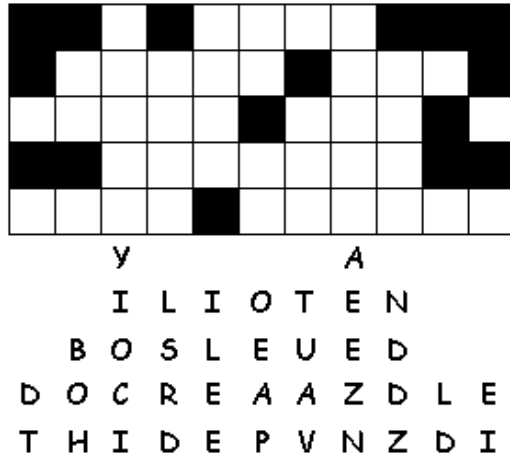
The medics burst into the flat.

Comments may be sent to the author at dawnebeth@comcast.net

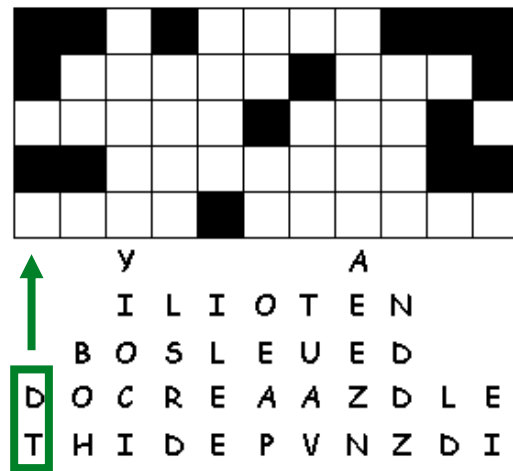
Fallen Phrase Puzzles

by
Cyanne

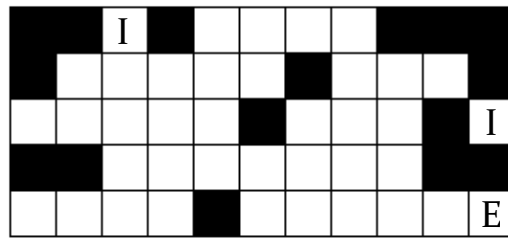
The puzzle is a grid that looks a bit like a crossword puzzle grid with what looks like a jumble of letters underneath. Those letters have fallen out of the puzzle.



The letters belong to the column immediately above them. In this example above, the T goes in one of the spaces in the first column and the D goes in the other, you just need to figure out which one goes where. Each letter in the column can only be used once.



It's easiest to start with the columns with the fewest letters first, so in this case, start with the last column. There's an I and an E, and since I is the only one of the two that is its own word, it has to go in the single box. That means the E goes in the other box. The same logic applies for the first box in the first row, it's a one letter word and since there are no As in that column, it has to be an I.



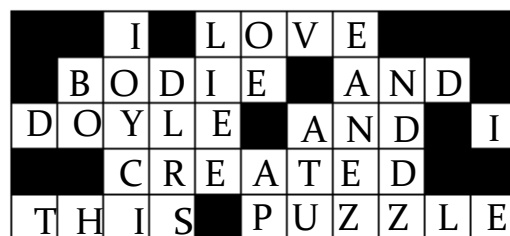
Y A
 I L I O T E N
 B O S L E U E D
 D O C R E A A Z D L E
 T H I D E P V N Z D I

Next, try to fill in any two and three letter words. As you place letters, you'll start to see where other letters fit in...



Y A
 I L I O T E N
 B O S L E U E D
 D O C R E A A Z D L E
 T H I D E P V N Z D I

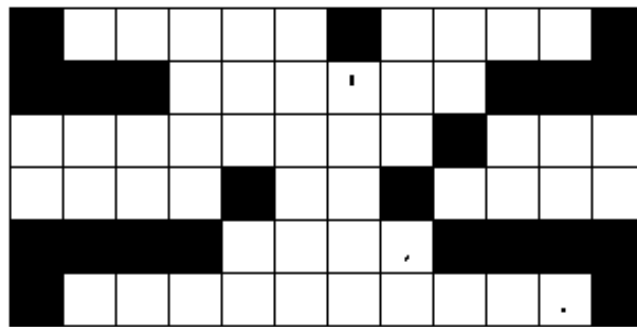
... until you've placed them all and solved the puzzle.



Y A
~~I~~ ~~L~~ ~~I~~ ~~O~~ ~~T~~ ~~E~~ ~~N~~
~~B~~ ~~O~~ ~~S~~ ~~L~~ ~~E~~ ~~U~~ ~~E~~ ~~D~~
~~D~~ ~~O~~ ~~C~~ ~~R~~ ~~E~~ ~~A~~ ~~A~~ ~~Z~~ ~~D~~ ~~L~~ ~~E~~
~~T~~ ~~H~~ ~~I~~ ~~D~~ ~~E~~ ~~P~~ ~~V~~ ~~N~~ ~~Z~~ ~~D~~ ~~I~~

All of the puzzles here are quotes from various Pros eps. There are hints on [page 35](#) and the answers can be found on [page 49](#).

Puzzle #1:



W

Y E S

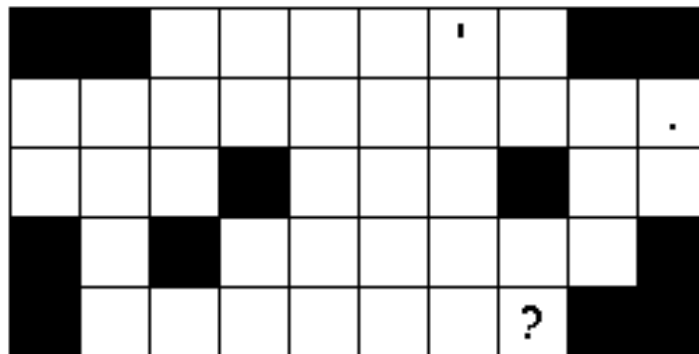
L N G K O N L Y K

U O O I N R S H E

G A A K O U F I I T H R

T A N R D L N G E O U E

Puzzle #2:



E S

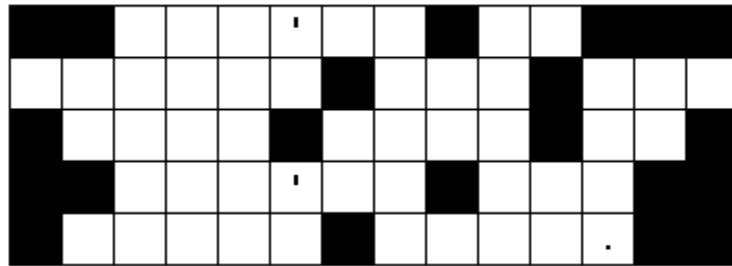
A T H A O U

A N G A N T I C

C A N C Y T T S D

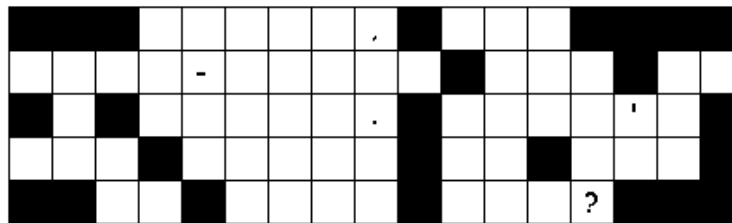
F A C T E R M A N O

Puzzle #3:



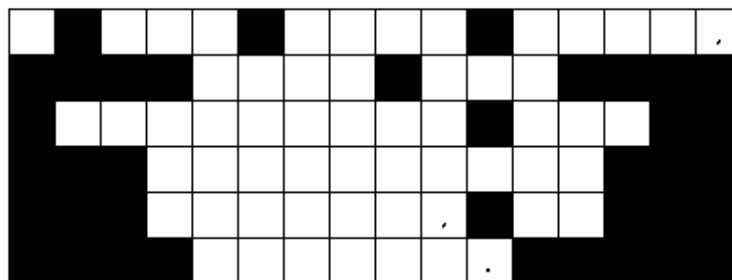
R O U E F
 I O M K D
 F I S T L O E B H A
 A Y R E O T H F N E O N
 P B Y O U D R L I T S E N D

Puzzle #4:



T N N O
 B I I E Y O R
 A L O I T H A A G S A T D
 H O U F O D R I T W O U N D
 Y A D B W A C H S H F H O A N O F

Puzzle #5:



D I K
 N T R R S N O
 A C D U F I E L N
 M S O A S R A A Y
 E E O G E G T L G D A L
 I B W A U A B O U N N T F D L

Comments may be sent to the creator at cyanne@southroad.com

Legends

by
Golden Bastet

*To Moonlight Mead and Minori K, who are very much missed,
and with thanks to Solosundance for her beta.*

Raymond Dowyll was an extremely devout man, and an example to all others.

No longer in the first blush of youth, but in the full bloom of manhood, the slight form topped by a full head of curls was a common sight in the village.

Oh, he was known to have a past, and a dark one, whispered of in hushed tones. It was a tale which, over time, had evolved into an epic quest including Crusaders, faraway lands, infidels, and fighting in the name of God and the Church. Some had him at the head of vast armies, pointing the way forward towards victory; others as having fought for the enemy, for which he now spent his life atoning. But no matter the truth, any suspicion of past darkness meant little to the people of the village. It was true that he could be gruff on occasion; but he led an exemplary life, having established a small church, and held out a helping hand to those in need, and brought a measure of comfort to the valley. Thus the village was willing to leave the past to the past.

Instead, the farmers pointed him out to their children whenever they saw the itch of youth arise amongst their progeny, and said children slipped off down the way to meet lad or maiden in the paddock. Likewise, the wealthier burghers listed his works to their second sons, the ones not expected to continue the family line, the ones destined for a life of the cloth.

Few actually spoke to him, and none at length; but Raymond Dowyll was an extremely devout man, and an example to all others.

Raymond Dowyll sat in a cave, mulling over his past transgressions.

He sometimes came out to the hills, when his past threatened to overwhelm him, and surrounded himself with peace and quiet and the beauty of nature. At times he would arm himself with quill and parchment to capture that beauty—the calmness of a cloud, the stillness of a dewdrop upon a leaf; but such tools were dear, and so not always available. He hated the times he lacked those tools, though, when it was difficult to put a halt to the thoughts in his head—the guilt coursing through him, like the flight of his arrow through that Saracen youth, just barely out of short trousers; the memory of passing through innumerable towns they'd laid waste to in the name of the Holy Roman Empire. And, perhaps most of all, the quiet nights, when some men turned to others for succor and security, performing secret acts that some would turn a blind eye to in the name of the mission, but would have brought instant approbation if caught in the light of day.

He'd been careful, and to a certain extent lucky; and the cloth had called to him as a way to atone. But the memories remained, to torment him.

He swung his head up quickly, perhaps a bit guiltily, at the crunch of gravel coming up the path to the cave. Two voices traveled along with the footsteps, in a somewhat heated debate.

"I'm tellin' ya, it's true! Saw it myself, I did." One voice, light, insistent.

"Yeah, go on with yourself, Next you'll be tellin' me they took you away on a cloud." The second voice was deeper—though not by much—and severely skeptical. *Two of the village boys, then.* He'd hazard a guess it was the two youths, Alfred and Fordwin.

"He was before me, clear as day. Tall, and dark, and a one as would turn the head of the most pious maiden. Was the king, he was." The lighter, younger voice—Alfred—continued.

"And why would Gwyn ap Nudd show himself to the likes of you, then?" Fordwin was having none of it.

"Don't know, now do I? Didn't ask him. Just showed much respect, because no one wants to be on the wrong side of the fair folk."

"True, that." A note of empathy crept in. "Wouldn't want to bring the wrath of such as him down upon my head."

That's enough, then. Raymond Dowyll stood, briefly shook off the stiffness of his seated position, and made his way to the mouth of the cave. "Here, now! What is this?"

The two boys, clearly startled, turned quickly; it was Alfred and Fordwin, indeed. "Ah, it's Raymond Dowyll," Fordwin demurred. "Apologies, sir; we come upon your cave by accident, didn't realize you were here—"

"And stood outside, blaspheming as the day is long," Raymond Dowyll finished the boy's sentence. "Going on about the Fair Family and other such mischief. Speaking of that devil brood, and against your lord and savior. Have ye no shame?"

"Devil brood? I hardly think..."

"Aye, I *know* ye hardly thought. That's the problem, now isn't it? That's the way the devil himself comes in and takes over."

"Nay, Raymond Dowyll, Gwyn ap Nudd is not a devil," Fordwin insisted. "Likes himself a bit o' fun, but nae a devil. And not one who would appreciate being called such."

A bit o' fun. The very way he'd framed his decision to join the Crusade. That was the way to ruin. "A bit o' fun, then. Just as the way to hell is paved with good intentions—and I'm sure Gwyn ap Nudd will be up ahead, playing his pipes to lead you there. Enough of this!"

The two youths, frowning, turned to head back down the mountain. Alfred turned back, looked at him with the defiance of a youth who is sure he is correct. "Aye, Raymond Dowyll, have it your

way. But you have it wrong; Gwyn ap Nudd is not a devil at all, and would not like being spoken of in that way. Mind yerself, the hills have ears. It may be that he himself will hear your accusations.”

“I have no fear; I am more than ready for him.” By then the two youths were now beyond the range of his voice, and Raymond Dowyll again stood alone on the mountain, with only the wind as his companion.

Raymond Dowyll stood before Farmer Ralf's hut in the warming sunshine, exhausted but relieved. The man's firstborn lay inside, sleeping quietly after a night of agony after having been kicked in the head by the bull. It had been a close thing, that; but the herbs he'd brought had offered relief, and the child's eyes finally were clear again. Now it was more a matter of time and healing, he believed.

“Be sure to wake the child each quarter day; feed him a bowl of the broth with the herbs. Hot, mind; they must be very hot. And you must come for me if you notice any fever, or his eyes become bright and teary.”

“Aye, Raymond Dowyll; not sure what we would do without you. Please, take the hen's eggs as payment—”

“Nay, I have no need for your eggs; plus you'll need them for your brood. I have enough for myself; but perhaps I will call upon you to assist with patching the church roof later in the spring.”

A smile broke out across the farmer's face; relief, perhaps, that he wouldn't have to take from his children's mouths to reply the kindness. “Aye, and I will be there before the cock crows!”

“No need for that,” Raymond Dowyll nodded back, “and I will send word when I need your help. But I must go now; several other things need doing. Plus your good wife will need your assistance. Be sure to send for me if things should change.”

“Aye, sir.” Farmer Ralf waved from behind the gate; then, turning, reentered the hut.

It was such a beautiful early spring day after a miserable winter, with all the promise of the sun finally bringing warmth to the land. Raymond Dowyll decided to take the long way back to the church, and enjoy the weather that much more.

He trekked thoughtfully across the fields, through the early spring flowers. Life and companionship filled his senses. He thought of Ralf and his wife, pious folk who had followed God's instructions to be fruitful and multiply, and now had a brood which truly honored the Lord.

Things not meant for the likes of me—

There was a tug at his sleeve.

He turned around, and before him stood a child. A very beautiful child: raven-haired, slight, quiet. A slight point to the nose. And with blue, blue eyes that seemed to know much beyond their young years. And—*alert*, for lack of a better word.

“Aye, child?” He didn’t remember this one’s name, but there were so many children in the village now it was easy enough to forget a few.

“Good morning, Raymond Dowyll. I have been tasked with giving you this.” The voice sounded little like a child’s, but then circumstances rather than age often dictated personal situations.

Two delicate hands unfolded before Raymond Dowyll. A folded, tied paper packet lay nestled against the pale skin.

Paper. Who would have the means to own paper, much less send me a note on it?

He picked it up gingerly. “What is this, child? Who sends messages to poor folk by methods meant for kings?”

“Indeed; a noble man sends you greetings. No—” in response to his fingers running along the sealed flap, “You are to open this once I am gone. But read it you shall, and then make your decision accordingly. That is important—once I am gone, and then decide. Understood?”

Raymond Dowyll nodded his head, somewhat dumbfounded.

“Decide wisely, Raymond Dowyll.” The child turned and headed across the field towards the trees.

Raymond Dowyll looked down at the packet in his hand, then back up at the receding figure.

The child was already gone, more quickly than should have been possible.

“Ordering me about, then?!” Very displeased, Raymond Dowyll looked over the note again.

Devil spawn, am I? You, Raymond Dowyll, know not of what you speak. Perhaps a meeting might convince you of the error of your ways. Come at noon to the top of the Tor.

Raymond Dowyll was angry. He did not notice the regal elegance of the script flowing across the page.

Raymond Dowyll made his way across the village commons, back to his small room in the back of the church. It had been a good morning, all told; the sun was shining brightly; Mrs. Gwynne’s cow had calved rather uneventfully, despite first indications; and he’d been able to knock some sense into the Gwynne boy’s head at last, keep him from running off to join what the lad believed to be the romance of the military life.

As he wished someone had done for him, once upon a time.

But—*all in all, a good morning*, he thought, tired but satisfied.

And then, reaching out for his door, yet another note awaited him. The fifth in as many days.

You wound me to the quick, Raymond Doywill—speaking ill of me and not giving me the opportunity to defend myself.

*Are ye **afraid** then, Raymond Dowyll? Afraid of things beyond your ken?*

No, he wasn't afraid, not at all—and it was time to put an end to this.

He wasn't sure what kind of fool Gwyn ap Nudd took him for, but he would show the being that Raymond Dowyll was no one's fool.

He grabbed his bottle of holy water and marched out the door, determined.

The view from atop the tor was astounding. The sun was bright, with the faint warmth of the early spring; a scattering of clouds dotted the sky, lazily crawling their way across.

All in direct contradiction to Raymond Dowyll's black mood.

Raymond Dowyll was seething. He'd chosen to ignore the taunts of the Fair Man's notes, but it would be deep winter in Hades before he let the odious being call him *afraid*. He'd gone through too much, survived far too many things, to stand by idly while that happened.

He reached the top of the tor, with its magnificent vistas of the countryside round. He truthfully had enjoyed the few times in the past that he had crested the tor, surveying the forests and villages scattering the canopy, felt inspired to capture the view.

But not today.

Call me afraid. You have judged me wrong, sir.

A slight breeze danced across the top of the hill, just hard enough to free the paper note that had lain, clutched and half-forgotten, in Raymond Dowyll's hand. He bent down to retrieve it—

—and rose again to encounter the most beautiful man he'd ever seen.

And beautiful—*beau-teous*—was the correct word for it. Alfred had come nowhere close to describing this being: tall and dark, yes, and apt to turn the heads of all, not just the maidens; but there were blue, blue eyes to lose oneself in, and an odd quirk in the eyebrow that promised much mischief.

Must be him, then. The king, Gwyn ap Nudd.

Thoughts long hidden since he'd been away and back arose unbidden in Raymond Dowyll's mind.

“You are the king of the fair folk, then. Gwyn ap Nudd.” It wasn't a question.

“At your service, Raymond Dowyll. And quite grateful that you have decided to accept my invitation and grace my presence.” Gwyn ap Nudd bowed deeply before the human, a smirk across the perfect lips.

“Aye, you won't be grateful for long, Gwyn ap Nudd.” Inwardly, Raymond Dowyll was amazed at his own powers of comeback, as he was still quite struck by the figure before him. *Must be the devil's work, reaching out to claim yet another.* “What brings you here, to tempt God-fearing folk who do naught to you?”

“Tempting is what you would label it, Dowyll? When I was minding my own business, and a man—a mere human defames me? Am I not to have the chance to defend myself?”

“Who defends against you, then?”

“Raymond Dowyll, I know not who has spoken to you against me, but do not humans have the opportunity to defend themselves against threats to their honor? My understanding is that this is the right of all men.”

“Yes, we do believe that a man has the right to defend himself.”

“Then why not afford me that right as well?”

Raymond Dowyll stared at him, untrusting. “Aye, and have me become one of your Fair Folk. That I'll not have.”

“I well know my reputation amongst men is not sterling, but perhaps not all that you hear is truthful. At least let me defend myself. Come—let me show you my realm and I will prove it. And,” in answer to the look of alarm that swept across the other man's face, “I swear you will come to no harm as I do so.

“Give me your word you shall remain open-minded, and I shall give you my word that naught that you do not wish shall happen to you.”

Raymond Dowyll remembered his travels through the Holy Lands, and how the truth was sometimes far from the legend; then he nodded his consent.

Gwyn ap Nudd, grinning, pleased, swept his arm through the air. Raymond Dowyll turned around

—And before him stood the most wondrous castle he'd ever seen.

“I have given my oath freely, Raymond Dowyll,” repeated Gwyn ap Nudd, “and I truly mean it. You will come to no harm. Allow me to offer my hospitality.”

Raymond Dowyll nodded, mistrusting but honor-bound and truthfully intrigued, though one hand traced the flask of holy water in his pocket.

They proceeded through the gate of the castle, into a vast forecourt. It was filled with many multitudes, all at innumerable tasks. To one side of the great space, archers drew their bows,

practicing their craft. Others jousted with swords and shields. Yet others tuned instruments and practiced dance steps. And still others groomed fierce steeds by expansive stables. Youths and maidens bustled about the vast space. All were dressed in deep greens and vivid golds, and all were just as fair as Gwyn ap Nudd himself.

“These are my people, who depend on me for guidance and leadership. As with any ruler, I do my best to ensure their safety and security; I am tasked with making sure that their lives are redolent of roses and lavender. But please, come this way.” Gwyn ap Nudd gestured towards the castle building itself.

They entered, and journeyed through great halls and immense corridors.

They came to one hall, greater than all the ones before it. Many a campaign banner hung from its rafters, and down its middle ran a massive table, groaning under the weight of a vast feast. Fowl and wild boar, and haunches of venison, and golden steins of mead, and victuals too numerous to name covered every surface.

Gwyn ap Nudd strode to the head, then tapped on a chair to his left. “Please, be seated; you are an honoured guest here. All is at your disposal.”

Raymond Dowyll crossed behind Gwyn ap Nudd, and took the chair to his right. “I think I will be fine here.”

Gwyn ap Nudd gave him a look—then laughed loudly. “Have it your way, then, Raymond Dowyll! This is for your honour, after all.” And he took the seat to the left, leaving the seat at the head empty.

“Why do you not take your seat, then? It awaits such a mighty king.” Raymond Dowyll asked, with a fine trace of a sneer.

“I would like to be on your level, so that I may defend myself as your equal. That way I may stand a chance of being believed.”

Raymond Dowyll, surprised, laughed himself. “It is your domain, and I am but a visitor. Do as you please.”

Servants came, offering prime birds and the choicest cuts of meat. But Raymond Dowyll refused them all.

“Why do you refuse my hospitality, Raymond Dowyll? Is something not to your liking?”

“I know better than to break bread with the Fair Folk. It does not go well with those who do,” he answered simply.

Gwyn ap Nudd gave him a slightly exasperated look, then replied. “You remind me of an ally I once had, when we marched against the Coraniaid. Stubborn as the day is long, could not accept anything as fact. But a fine ally, for all that.”

“You have gone to battle?” Raymond Dowyll frowned. “I thought that the Fair Folk avoided

taking up arms.”

“So you see us as always feasting and stealing babies, then?” Gwyn ap Nudd snorted. “No, that is an invention of your own land. On the contrary, we have had to defend ourselves on more than one occasion.”

“Like what?”

“Like the time that Gwydion fab Dôn enchanted the very trees to roust us from our lands, and steal them from us—all in the name of his beliefs. We had no choice, but to meet them upon the battlefield, rather than let them overrun us and slaughter us in our beds. I would not have that, and I would not do that to my people.

“They came, and they came again; laid siege to us, tried to starve us out; but we repelled them, and eventually sent them on their way.”

Much like we did to the Saracens flitted across Raymond Dowyll's thoughts. “How long did this take you to complete?”

“A good thousand of your years.”

“A thousand years! Is that possible?” He couldn't keep the surprise, and perhaps a bit of the regret, out of his voice.

“Our lifetimes are not like yours, Raymond Dowyll. Many things which may seem wondrous to you are but another day to us.”

“Except for enemies and siege.”

“Yes, that is true.”

“Tell me more of your battles.”

“This could take some time, Raymond Dowyll. I would not wish to detain you here, only to find that much time had passed in your own world. Why don't you return tomorrow? We can then continue our discussion, and I will tell you more of how we live here—if, of course, that pleases you.”

“Yes,” replied Raymond Dowyll, surprised at this answer. “That would please me, indeed.”

The next day, Raymond Dowyll found himself panting up the tor as the bells of the abbey in the town below began to ring the noon hour.

It had been a close thing; Goodwife Martyn had been stopped by to ask for advice on her sorrel plants. They had really needed nothing more than a good watering, and he'd mentioned that a week earlier; but she had insisted on his stopping by personally to look at the plants. He had had the neighbor's boy bring a bucket of water, and given strict, terse instructions on watering the

plants—then had taken off at a clip, leaving the goodwife with her mouth agape, mid-question.

But here he was and just on time, and ready to meet with Gwyn ap Nudd.

Truthfully, the being's story had struck Raymond Dowyll greatly, as it had echoed of what he'd seen happen to the Saracens they'd battled. If Gwyn ap Nudd had truly defended his home in this way—and Raymond Dowyll believed that the oath given had held—then he'd worked in ways inconsistent with what he'd been told the Fair Folk did.

And he was intrigued by the thought of that form in battle. Strong, magical, in a beautiful grand rage—

He had to know more about this being.

“Searching for me, Raymond Dowyll?”

He turned around, and the very being stood before him, his castle behind.

“A bit annoying when you do that. Most folk would walk up and say, 'here I am'.”

“Well, then; but I'm obviously not most folk, am I?”

“No, I suppose not,” Raymond Dowyll mused.

“Let us continue our discussion, then,” and he led Raymond Dowyll forward.

They again passed through the courtyard, filled with various beings hard at various tasks, and entered the building. Once again the great hall was arrayed as for a feast, the table groaning as before with a vast array of tempting foods.

They took the seats that they had had on the prior day. “The oath is still binding, Raymond Dowyll; feel free to partake as you will, with no concern. This feast is in your honor.”

“I am fine, but let us take up from where we left off.” He was anxious to hear more of this story.

“Well, then—and so we shall.” Gwyn ap Nudd poured himself a goblet of mead, then sat back with a sigh, circling the goblet's rim with one finger.

“Long, long, ago, at a time even the fair folk would call ancient, my people dwelt under several empires. We sit here in Annwyn, where all today is fair and disease and want unknown. But at that time, there was several realms in our land.

“The two main realms, Annwyn and Dyfed, existed side by side, with their peoples prospering thoroughly though separately. If things had remained so, all would have been at peace. But one day, the crown prince of Annwyn, out hunting around the borders of the two countries, became lost. He strayed into Dyfed and wandered quite far. He then came upon a hunting lodge, where he entered, seeking shelter for the night.

“In that lodge rested the prince of the other land, after having spent the day on his own hunt. In

disguise to ease his passage through the land, he did not reveal himself to the prince of Annwyn, instead inviting the other in to join in his meal.

“The two bonded well, and became fast friends, deciding to meet again and hunt together. And periodically they did, becoming closer and closer, until they became quite close, and more like a bonded pair.”

The blood drained from Raymond Dowyll's face, with not a little bit a guilt underlining it. “They went against God's will? But—”

“We do not follow your rules here,” interrupted Gwyn ap Nudd, “and I doubt that your God himself would label it so. No, they had a great and true fondness for each other, and there is no crime in that. They brought great honor among their houses even with their mutual affection, and that was what was important.”

“However, they were both princes of their realms, and they had duties which came with those positions. Somehow, the prince of Dyfed's sire, the king, found out what had been going on and forbade him from venturing out to see the prince of Annwyn. The relations between the two realms deteriorated, until the prince of Annwyn became determined to free his partner.

“He gathered a trusted group of men, snuck into Dyfed in the dead of night, and they spirited the prince of Dyfed away. They were able to make it to the border, with the king of Dyfed's forces in hot pursuit.

“They had crossed over, and were on the soil of Annwyn, when one archer let loose with an arrow. And fate is a fickle mistress, and any other time the border would have meant something; but that arrow pierced the prince of Dyfed fair through the heart, striking him dead.

“From then things deteriorated quickly. The prince of Annwyn took the body of his beloved back with him, and gave it a grand state funeral. The king of Dyfed blamed the land of Annwyn for his son and heir's death, and accused the prince of Annwyn of murder. There was war and dark days, and much recrimination between the lands. We were forced to act in warlike ways, which we had never done before.

“I was but a lad then, eager to go forth and fight for my land. It was the right thing to do. But there is no doubt that those days took a toll on both peoples.”

Raymond Dowyll looked into the eyes of Gwyn ap Nudd, and saw much pain there. He imagined it could be not unlike his own pain, which he'd buried deep but which he'd felt every day since coming back from his own wars.

Maybe this being has seen some of the things that I have.

“But it grows late, Raymond Dowyll, and I am sure you wish to return to your own world before long.”

“I could stay a while longer.”

“And I would enjoy the company, but you should not be separated from your own world for too

long.”

Raymond Dowyll thought of the world he was from, and the little that awaited him there. “I suppose,” he said slowly, “that is true.”

“Yes, it is; if I am to keep my promise, you must return now.” Gwyn ap Nudd stood, seemingly tired, and gestured. “Please.”

“As you say, I must return now.” Raymond Dowyll stood as well, then grinned. “And how shall we leave this time?”

Gwyn ap Nudd's eyebrow peaked, and then he laughed. “Any way you desire, Raymond Dowyll, any way you desire.”

Raymond Dowyll went back to his room, his head full of thoughts. The hour or so he'd spent in the castle had translated to evening by time he was off the tor, though he'd barely noticed the time. By time he'd made it back to the valley and approached the church, it was quite late indeed.

“Raymond Dowyll! What brings you out this time of night?” It was Farmer Godwyn, walking up the path in his direction. “Wouldn't have taken you for one to be out this late.”

“Was just... checking on an old patient, making sure everything was fine.” *No need to go into much detail.*

“Anyone could be out this time of night. Might run into one of the Fair Folk—even Gwyn ap Nudd, himself.”

“Gwyn ap Nudd?” Raymond Dowyll's head cleared enough to hear that.

“Yes—you know about him, don't you? He stole his sister Creiddylad from her betrothed, Gwythyr ap Greidawl. and now is condemned to fight Gwythyr every May Day until Judgement Day. He might be about, come to fight you for practice!”

His sister? Red flashed before Raymond Dowyll's eyes. *If he has lied to me, to get on my good side...*

“Then again, they say he rides with the Wild Hunt and those who see it are doomed to an early grave. So just be careful, Raymond Dowyll; get yourself home and seek your bed.” And Farmer Godwyn stumbled off towards his own abode.

Raymond Dowyll was up early the next morning—easy enough, since he had not had any sleep the entire night.

He wasn't sure what to believe any more: a being whose kin were known for their tricks, or a simple man who believed all he was told about the world around him, without any proof. He wanted to believe the former, but had been raised to believe the later. And it was only his time away, his hard-won lessons about the world, which had him even questioning the world he has been raised in.

Which was why he couldn't just dismiss Gwyn ap Nudd out of hand. He *knew* that the world was a cruel place, and that men told themselves lies to get through it. He *knew* there were no happy endings that automatically happen, not even for royalty. And yet he wanted to know what it was that ticked in the Fair King's head, and how the unhappinesses of princes had influenced his own reign.

He found himself almost automatically climbing the tor, until he stood at the top, with the wondrous view of the lands around him. The valley was hidden in a fold of land, though he could just see it off in the distance, a wrinkle in the green carpet spreading into the distance.

Now at the top of the tor, he stared out and turned around. A figure started moving towards him, which grew until it resolved into Gwyn ap Nudd.

“Good day, Raymond Dowyll. How are you fairing today?”

“I am fine. And yourself?”

“Just as fine as you, with your red-rimmed eyes and vacant look. Are you ailing, then?”

“No, just thinking on the world, and my place in it.”

“Don't think too hard; there is no profit in punishing yourself for things which do not find their cause in you.”

“Who are you, Gwyn ap Nudd? Who are you, truly?”

“Who do you think I am, Raymond Dowyll?”

“Truthfully, I do not know. You could be maligned, you could be maligner.”

“You should believe what makes sense to you, and live your life accordingly.”

“But so much has been said about you; can it all be false?”

“You have been away to a war that seemed wrong and senseless to you, and you can still ask that? Look in your heart, Raymond Dowyll, and listen to what it says to you.”

“Did you kidnap your sister from her marriage bed?”

“I have no sister.”

“Did you cause a war over a marriage spat?”

“We could not be married, and we caused no war.”

“You are a king. When were you a prince?”

“Long ago, when the world was young, and kingdoms lived in peace besides each other.”

“And how long have you been alone?”

“For a very long time.”

Raymond Dowyll remembered the look he'd seen in the blue eyes, which had spoken of much time and many hardships.

He pulled a hand out of his pocket, to reach out and touch the other, see if he was real—

And something came flying out, to hit the ground before him and shatter.

The forgotten bottle of holy water, which he'd forgotten there.

Gwyn ap Nudd was gone.

“I believe it's some sort of sickness; perhaps he was out in a fog. He has been out all hours lately.”

“I don't know; he just seems to stare off in the distance. I wish the old Raymond Dowyll would return to us. This one is possessed by some type of spirit.”

Raymond Dowyll listlessly watched the two villagers pass by, just barely registering their presence. A small bit of him thought he should show more interest, perhaps assist as he had before; but the yawning chasm inside him never closed, never saw light, and he overall didn't care. Life would continue on without him.

The days came, the days went, and time passed; but he noticed little about them. He did make the rounds of the villagers, made sure that the basics were attended to; but beyond that, he couldn't much bring himself to care. He had had something more important, twice now; and both times, he had lost hold of it, never to have it return.

Raymond Dowyll turned back to his garden, to check his herbs and give himself something to do. The sun was high, it was fairly hot, and he tried to focus on the feverfew to block all the other thoughts from his mind.

“Excuse me.”

He rose and turned around—and came to a stop. A tall, dark-haired man stood on the path beyond the garden, facing him; fair of skin, and apt to turn the heads of all, not just the maidens; and with the bluest eyes to lose oneself in, and an odd quirk in the eyebrow that promised much mischief.

“You—you can't—”

I am not what I once was, but I can be whatever you believe, Raymond Dowyll. “I come from very far afield, and am looking for honest work. I was told by the folk here that you could be of help. May I come in?”

“Yes, please do.” Raymond Dowyll gestured to the door to his room at the back of the church.

Comments may be sent to the author at golden_bastet@yahoo.com

Hide and Seek

by
merentha13

Thanks to Dawnwind!

Doyle's head snapped back as the bullet shattered the wood frame of the door he'd been using as a shield against Morton's thugs. Aggravated, he emptied his entire clip in the direction of the shot as he rolled across the debris laden lino.

A noise from the floor above had his pursuers clattering up the stairs, leaving him alone. Cursing as he wiped at the slivers embedded in his cheek, he turned back into the hallway to find better cover. Sinking down against the wall, feeling safe for the moment, he took a minute to catch his breath and reload his weapon. They'd been at this for hours, neither side able to get away nor to capture their opposites. Wondering where his errant partner had got off to, he whispered a further impassioned string of profanity that would have impressed even ex-mercenary WAP Bodie.

Bodie. And there was another source of irritation. A month ago, Cowley had given them three days leave and Doyle had invited Bodie to share his bed. Bodie had eagerly accepted the offer. They'd spent most of those seventy-two hours between the sheets and Doyle had found himself in trouble—or more specifically—in love. His attempt to mask those feelings had apparently been a failure. Bodie had left the flat with a smile, but had been running for cover ever since.

Gun loaded, he got back to his feet and started down the hallway, checking rooms as he passed them. A cupboard door at the end of the hallway, slightly ajar, caught his attention. He silently crept closer and aimed his gun. "All right," he called quietly. "Come outta there—slowly, with your hands where I can see them."

"Not very good at this game as a child, eh?" a familiar voice behind the door asked gleefully. Bodie stepped out of the cupboard and raised a hand to shake the remaining splinters out of Doyle's hair. "You're supposed to say 'Come out—come out—wherever you are.'"

Doyle sighed and lowered his gun, half relieved and half incensed. Leave it to Bodie to equate their hunt for Morton with a child's game of hide and seek. "This is no game, mate. Losing this one could prove fatal." Doyle glared at his partner. "And where the fuck 'ave you been?"

"Here and there." Bodie replied with a shrug.

Doyle drew in a deep breath to tell Bodie off but was interrupted when Bodie quickly changed the subject.

"There doesn't appear to be any easy way out of here," Bodie explained. "The explosions collapsed most of the front of the building—so no door or window exits there. I've checked the basement—only one way in and out and Morton's goons have that covered. If we can get upstairs, there may be a window we could climb out of; but if Morton has someone positioned outside, we'd be easy targets."

“Bloody Cowley!” Doyle grouched. “He tells me it’ll be *‘an easy eyes and ears, Doyle. Routine surveillance, Doyle. No need for all this drama, Doyle. All you and Bodie have to do is keep an eye on Morton and report in when he makes contact with the Russians.’* Easy, my arse. I warned him about Morton. Nothing easy about him when I was on the Drugs Squad.” He looked irritably at his partner as Bodie stifled a yawn. “Shut it, Bodie.” He waved his arms around, taking in the building they were currently trapped in. “All this proves I was right to be wary. Bloody Cowley should’ve listened to me.” Shoulders drooping, he ran his hand through untidy curls. His rant over for now he grumbled, “And where the hell is our back up?”

Creaking floorboards had both men diving for cover; Bodie back behind the cupboard door and Doyle hid behind an old wooden trunk. When no-one appeared in the hallway, Doyle lightly tapped his gun against the floor to get Bodie’s attention. With a wave of his fingers, he indicated he was going to move to the top of the stairs. Bodie acknowledged the message with a nod and moved into a better position to cover him.

Doyle slowly crawled from behind the trunk and carefully stood up. With still no sign of their quarry, he slipped quietly down the corridor, staying close to the wall. He noted that Bodie had now situated himself behind the chest, giving him a better view down the hallway. Doyle made it to the staircase without incident and began a cautious climb upwards. Keeping his feet on the very edges of the risers, he was able to climb almost silently. Reaching the landing on the next floor, he looked down at Bodie and gave him a quick smile.

Bodie moved to the bottom of the stairs and Doyle beckoned him up. Turning the corner on the landing, Doyle was met by a shotgun blast that barely missed his head. He stumbled backwards and fell down the stairs, taking Bodie back down to the first floor with him. They came to rest in a tangle of limbs. Heavy footsteps coming down the steps after them had them up and moving. They headed for the cellar, where the collapsed walls could provide some cover.

“All right?” Bodie asked when they had found a place to hide behind a couple of old metal desks.

“Bruised me best asset,” Doyle replied rubbing the affected area.

“Be a shame if you broke that beautiful bum. The female population of London would go into mourning,” Bodie joked.

“Berk.” Doyle laughed. He began to drag some crates closer to their hidey-hole.

“What are you doing? Planning on joining RIBA?” Bodie joined in stacking the wooden boxes.

“Ha-bloody-ha. ’m tired of playing cat and mouse. This ends here.”

“You’ve got a plan, then, Batman?”

“Got it one, wonder boy.”

“That’s Boy Wonder, to you, mate.” Bodie mumbled just loud enough for Doyle to hear.

Doyle turned away to hide his smirk. “Let’s get this done, Bodie.” He motioned for Bodie to take cover and positioned himself on the floor a few feet from the bottom of the cellar stairs. He fired his gun and cried out, “Bodie!”

Watching carefully, Doyle saw a head quickly peek around the corner at the top of the stairs and disappear again. He signalled Bodie and tensed to wait for the bait to be taken. The sound of stealthy footsteps slowly coming down the steps made him smile malevolently. He held up two fingers to let Bodie know how many villains were on their way.

As the first man appeared, Bodie rose from behind the desk and placed a bullet neatly between the man's eyes. As the second villain started to retreat, Doyle let off two shots, and the body of the second thug dropped on the first. Racing up the stairs to take advantage of the chaos caused by their surprise attack, Doyle felled a third man. There was no sign of Morton. Turning and not finding Bodie behind him, Doyle's stomach clenched in fear. He slowly backed down the stairs. Morton held Bodie with an arm around Bodie's throat and a gun pressed to the side of his head.

"What's this then, mate? Entertaining our guests, are we?" Doyle tried for cool to cover his unease.

"Party crasher. He was tucked away down here all the time." Bodie's eyes never left Doyle's face and Doyle could read trust and a bit of fear in that gaze.

"Seems a bit unfriendly." Doyle's words were directed at Bodie, ignoring Morton.

"He didn't take too kindly to our perforating his friends."

"Ah, I see. Maybe we can make it up to him."

Morton's arm tightened around Bodie's neck.

"Shut up, both of you," Morton ordered.

"Definitely unfriendly," Doyle confirmed.

Morton moved forward, keeping his hold on Bodie. He gestured with a nod of his head towards Doyle. "Put your weapon on the floor and kick it to me."

Doyle didn't move.

"Now!" Morton yelled, pushing his gun harder into Bodie's temple.

Doyle bent over slowly and placed his Browning on the floor. As he moved to stand up, he quickly pulled a knife from his boot, yelled "Down!" and sent the dagger flying. The blade took Morton under his ribcage. Freed, Bodie finished the job by slamming Morton's head against the cellar floor.

"Dead?" Doyle asked.

"No. More's the pity—but Father will be pleased."

"You all right?"

"Yeah." Bodie lightly punched Doyle's shoulder. "Thanks."

A flurry of gunshots from outside the building and familiar voices calling for them let them know that their back-up had finally arrived.

Doyle shook his head.

“Better late than never.” Bodie threw an arm around Doyle’s shoulders as they made their way back upstairs.

Well, that ended one game, Doyle thought, as he watched his partner conferring with Cowley. And they had come out on top. Maybe that was a sign that he should try to force an end to the games Bodie was playing, too. No more hiding, no more masks. Put it out there in the open and live with the consequences. *Seek and ye shall find*—or something like that. The problem was—would he find that Bodie felt the same?—Or would he be feeling Bodie’s fist? Distracted by his own thoughts, he didn’t hear Cowley calling to him.

“Off with the fairies, mate?” Bodie’s voice recalled him to the present. “Cowley wants a word with you.”

“And I want a word with him. This was a cock-up straight from the beginning. He should have listened to me about Morton and put more men on the job.” Doyle’s ire was on the rise. He didn’t notice that Bodie had stepped back and he was also unaware that Cowley was standing right behind him as he continued to vent his spleen. “Left us out to dry, the old rat did. You could have been killed. Was only luck that I was able to take down Morton before he shot you. And I would’ve got the blame for that, too. *Ach, Doyle, you were supposed to watch your partner’s back. Bloody, triple-thinking conniving bastard!*”

Doyle was so wrapped up in his diatribe that he missed Bodie’s wince at his choice of words and waved off the warnings Bodie tried to send to get him to shut up. “Madness to think two agents could waltz in and invite Morton and his thugs to tea and that they’d happily oblige. And then to get fucking upset when said agents have to shoot the sodding heavies because his nibs can’t be bothered to send in back-up. What the hell did he—”

“That will be enough, Doyle.” Cowley’s hard, cold words cut straight through Doyle’s tirade.

Surprised, Doyle looked around and saw Cowley fuming behind him, an exasperated Bodie next to him and half the A Squad surrounding him in stupefied silence.

He looked down at his trainers and then back up at Cowley. Straightening his shoulders, raising his chin, glare met glare. “I apologize for the language, but not the opinions,” and he added belatedly, “Sir.”

Bodie cringed.

“Yes, that is all well and good, 4.5,” Cowley replied calmly, but the Controller of CI5 did not look forgiving. “Give Anson your ID and weapons. You are suspended as of now. See me in the morning and we will talk about future—tea parties.”

Doyle nodded sharply and walked away.

As Bodie watched Doyle's retreat, Cowley put a hand on his shoulder. "Go after him, lad. No telling what the hot-head will get up to if left on his own."

"Thank you, sir. I'll keep an eye on him." Bodie started to follow his partner.

Cowley stopped him. "The job was well done, Bodie. Let 4.5 know."

"Yes, sir." Bodie hurried to catch up with Doyle.

Drawing alongside the swiftly moving man, Bodie heard Doyle still muttering. "Suspended—for doing me job. Takes the bloody cake, that does."

"Oi!" Bodie reached out and spun Doyle around by his shoulder. "What was that all about?"

"He suspended me! Me—for doin' me job!"

"Well, if you will throw a wobbler—"

"Belt up, Bodie."

Steering his partner back into the now empty building, Bodie confronted the still angry man. "Ray, it was more than the job that set you off, yeah?"

"He didn't listen to me, Bodie." A stiff finger tapped against Bodie's chest. "Didn't trust what I told him about Morton."

"I know, I was there, remember?"

"Yes, well, his poor planning almost cost you your life." Doyle's shoulders sagged and he whispered, "Almost cost me you."

"And why is it different this time, Ray? We've been in this situation before and you've never—"

"Because I love you, you fucking moron," Doyle shouted and pushed Bodie away.

Gobsmacked by the announcement, unconcerned about the message's suspect delivery, it was all Bodie could do not to break out into laughter as he watched Doyle's face move from belligerent through stropy to uncomfortable, to finally settle on embarrassed.

"Well?!" Doyle demanded stepping in close to Bodie.

"Well, that's all right, then, innit."

Narrowed eyes assessed Bodie with ill temper. "If it's all right, why all the hiding and pulling away? Why'd I wake up alone the mornings after? Why did you always have *plans*—Judy, or Donna, or Sarah, or whoever the bird of the week was—when I'd invite you over to watch the Match of the Day?" The fast and furious flow of words stopped, and Doyle took a deep breath. Softly, he asked, "Why were you always running away from me, Bodie?"

Checking that no-one was around, Bodie reached out and pulled his stubborn, irate partner in close. He cleared his throat and spoke quietly into Doyle's hair. "I'm sorry, Ray." Then he ruffled Doyle's hair and laughed.

Doyle pulled back and stared at Bodie looking offended. "What?"

"I must confess, Raymond, I've wanted to hear you say those three words for ages." He gently kissed the shell of Doyle's ear. "Although, I'd fanaticised I'd hear them in a slightly different tone of voice."

Heated words were mumbled into the shoulder of his polo-neck.

"What's that, sunshine?"

Doyle pulled back far enough to see Bodie's face. His eyes shifted to a spot over Bodie's left shoulder. His face red, his voice hoarse, he replied, "Don't think I could've said it any other way." He dropped his head back onto Bodie's shoulder and groaned.

Bodie could feel him shaking, and smiled when he realised that Doyle was laughing.

"Answer the question," Doyle demanded, "Why all the games?"

"Not sure—was afraid I guess—didn't want to mess up the partnership—the friendship—that's important to me."

"And you think it's not important to me—that I'd risk *us* just to get a leg over? A lot you think of me, *mate*." Doyle turned away.

Bodie closed his hands on Doyle's arms and he shook him fiercely as he spun him around. "Neither one of us has a stellar record as far as relationships go." Bodie's eyes looked intently into Doyle's. "I wasn't sure what you wanted. I—" Releasing Doyle's arms, Bodie placed a finger under Doyle's chin and lifted his head. "So why now, Ray—why me?"

"Laugh if you will, but I'm tired of being alone. I want someone to come home to. And I've tried—but it always turns out wrong. And I'd end up with nothing again. And you—believe me no-one was more surprised than I was when I realised what you mean to me. Never thought I'd find someone who would accept me as I am, you see. And there you were—are." Doyle shrugged.

Bodie beamed. "Olly olly oxen free!"

"Eh?"

"You did lead a deprived childhood, didn't you? No playground games for poor Raymond?"

"Bodie!"

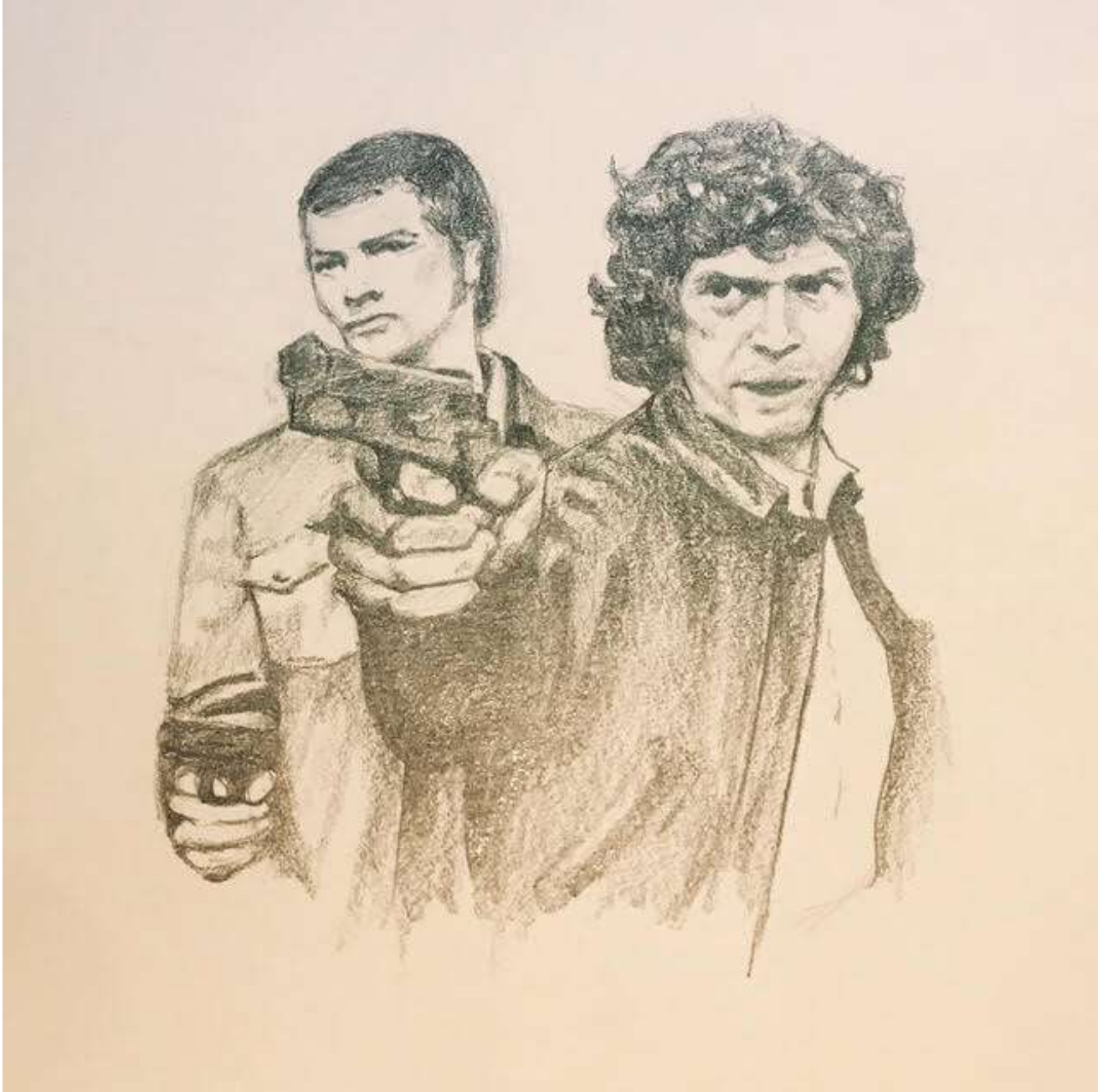
"It means the game is over, Ray. All those in hiding can safely come back to home."

Doyle's smile set Bodie's world to right again. "Then, ready or not, here I come!"

Comments may be sent to the author at martiward@yahoo.com

Focus

by
Julia



Comments may be sent to the artist at cj5mates@gmail.com

Operation Sofa

by
The Hag

“ZAX? Come on, Ray, that's a proper name.”

“Yeah?” Doyle was all innocence. “Who?”

“Bloke in that godawful film Janice made us watch last Christmas because he looked a bit like you donkey's years ago.”

Doyle sighed dramatically. “At least my loving sister remembers my youthful beauty when no one else does.”

“Not to mention your engaging modesty.”

“Caught that off you, mate. It's in Dr Seuss too,” Doyle said.

“What is?”

“The Zax.”

“Still a proper—”

“You challenging? Want the dictionary?”

“All right, spit it out, then, Mr Unabridged Oxford.”

“Tool for trimming roofing tiles.” Doyle grinned smugly. “And the X is on a triple letter so—oi!”

The evening's Great Cat Steeplechase had suddenly launched, bouncing off the back of the sofa into the middle of the board, sending tiles exploding in all directions amid a gush of spilled beer.

With considerable profanity Castor and Pollux were chased into the kitchen and the laborious task of rescuing and counting the tiles began.

“One short,” Bodie concluded morosely.

“If it's just an E or something...” Doyle started making little stacks. “The Q. Wouldn't you bloody know it!”

“Can't play Scrabble without the Q,” Bodie declared. “Half the fun, waiting for it to show up, and hoarding U's.”

“We could ink it in on one of the blanks,” Doyle suggested. “Or we could buy another set. I bet you can get replacement tiles on EBay.”

“Sod that. Must have gone under the sofa.” Bodie crouched and ran a hopeful hand into the darkness. “Ugh, it's wet. Those blasted animals!”

“Just where the beer spilled,” Doyle reassured him. “Probably.”

They looked at each other in mutual acceptance of the inevitable.

“Been talking about doing it for months,” Doyle said. “Tonight's the night, then.”

“Thought we had something better lined up. Not going to have the strength after shifting that blasted sofa. Not as young as I used to be, you know. My arthritis...”

“Come on, you're not that feeble. Wait till you get to be my age! One good heave!”

“Heave the damn cats, right out the window. And what they've got stashed under there...”

“I'll get the broom.”

“Bring some more beer, too,” Bodie called after him. “Could be a long job.”

A few minutes later, cats juggled back into the kitchen with threats and treats, and Bodie fortified with a long swig of brown ale, they had hauled the sofa away from the wall.

“Enough balls to last nine lifetimes,” Doyle observed.

“Nostalgia for what they once had.” Bodie shook his head. “Plastic, rubber, fluffy—there's two shiny ones off the Christmas tree we had last year for half an hour before they did their lumberjack impression. You know, Ray, when you talked me into—”

“Trade 'em in for a puppy?”

“Just what we need. Wouldn't be trading, would it? Surprised you haven't got rabbits in the bathroom and chickens in the window boxes.” Bodie prodded with a cautious toe. “Oh god, is that—?”

“Eerghh... No, it's just a dried up sausage. Wonder why they didn't eat it?”

“One of those extra spicy chicken things we tried that time,” Bodie recalled. “Hope they scorched their horrible little mouths on it!”

“There's your grey sock that went missing.”

“With a tasteful garnish of crushed eggshell. How did they do that? And two—no, three teaspoons. No wonder we can never find any.”

“And what's all those screwed up bits of paper?”

Bodie stooped to retrieve one and flattened it out. "Ah— 'Dear Ray, the child support is past due again. Pay up or I'll send the bailiffs in.' Oh, good, they can take the cats. Well, no shortage of pens back here if you're going to write out a cheque."

"Hey, isn't that the cup off the Thermos?" Doyle started to sweep the clutter into a pile.

Bodie retrieved scattered treasure. "Eight pound coins!"

"Those'll be mine," Doyle claimed. "Do nicely for the child support. You can have that manky dish sponge. Fancy some catnip mice?"

"Trying to give them up. Must have lost their nip by now, anyway. Cor, two whisky miniatures! That's more like it! And a handy bit of string."

Doyle chanted: "Sing, sing, what shall I sing, the cat's run away with the pudding string."

"Lovely steamed pud Gran use to make," Bodie recalled wistfully. "Golden syrup at the bottom of the bowl so it came out on top when it was turned out. Or marmalade sometimes."

"Stodgy," said Doyle. "Well, why don't you make one, then? Oh, don't give me those big blue eyes!"

"You can have the whisky," Bodie coaxed. "And I'll throw in the dish sponge."

"Perhaps... I'll think about it. Stop bloody smirking. What's that black thing over in the corner?" Doyle hooked it with the broom.

Bodie picked it up. "Silicone... bloody hell! Didn't know we had one of these!"

"So that's what the mogs buy with their ill-gotten gains! Gawd only knows what else they were saving up for with that eight quid."

"But—?"

Doyle pondered. "Yeah. Remember that time after we did a late night security job for Wosname and we were out of lube and all the chemists were shut so we went in that boutique? Delia's Den of Daring Delights or some such? All frilly knickers and strap-ons."

"Don't remember buying any toys, though."

"Unadventurous, that's us. No, they had some kind of free gift deal and it was there in the bag. I suppose it rolled off wherever we dumped it."

"Knocked off, more like. Castor's a devil for that. Well, at least it's got nothing worse than dust on it. Still haven't found the Q," Bodie griped.

"Have to be one of the blanks, then, until it shows up. What do we do with all this crap?"

"Stick it in the wastepaper basket and sort it out tomorrow. I've had it for tonight."

“Too tired for a bit of use-it-or-lose-it?”

“Well... Not that tired. Come on, let's shift the sofa back.”

They shifted it, and sat on it for a little alcoholic refreshment, then Doyle said resignedly, “Better let the mogs out before they break the door down.” A couple of minutes later he returned, triumphantly proclaiming: “Got the Q!”

“Where?”

“The water bowl.”

“How—oh, never mind. Get off me, Pollux, it's bedtime.”

“At least we don't have to walk the puppy, though a bit of exercise before bed—”

“Ray, look—” Bodie delved into the wastepaper basket and brandished the butt-plug. “You are the light of my life, music of my heart, steam of my pudding, but sometimes it's a damn close-run thing. And one more word about puppies or guinea pigs or iguanas and I'll—”

“Promises, promises! Got something better than silicone, as I recall.”

They retired for the night's enjoyment.

Castor and Pollux restored the various items from the wastepaper basket to their rightful home. They were almost professional about it.

Comments may be sent to the author at hagsrus@gmail.com

Fallen Phrase Puzzles Hints:

[Puzzle can be found on page 8.](#)

Puzzle #1 is Bodie in *The Ojuka Situation*.

Puzzle #2 is Doyle in *The Purging of CI5*.

Puzzle #3 is Cowley in *Old Dog with New Tricks*.

Puzzle #4 is Doyle in *Klansmen*.

Puzzle #5 is Bodie in *Mixed Doubles*.

Jacob's Dream

by
LilyK

A Professionals/Apparitions story.



Jacob wondered if other priests had the same sort of unsettling desires as he did. Oh, he'd been a priest long enough to understand that the vow of celibacy didn't mean that his dreams would cooperate. He expected to have those. Dreams of sex and love making. He wasn't a virgin, after all.

It was with whom he'd had sex that came back to haunt him. Now, in his later years, those dreams came with regularity.

Jacob remembered his first experience when he was sixteen. She'd been the same age. It had been awkward and demeaning. She'd been willing, very much so. She'd taken off her blouse and bra, and her small breasts were, if not inviting, pretty. They were pink with darker pink nipples. He knew what a woman's nipples looked like. He'd seen the magazines that Derek had stolen from under his older brother's mattress. He knew what a woman's vagina looked like as well. Derek's bounty provided a lot of information.

Jacob realised at that moment, staring at Marjorie's breasts, that he didn't want to touch them. Not now, not ever. And not just hers. *Them*. Girl's—women's—breasts. Women's bodies, those private places. He wasn't disgusted, merely uninterested.

So to keep the peace, Jacob remarked on her beauty, the flawlessness of her skin (and it was flawless and she was beautiful). He hadn't lied. He simply didn't care. A kiss or two, some

fondling, a finger in the right place (something else he learned from Derek and those magazines). Marjorie's world revolved around Jacob.

The next week Jacob changed schools. He made new mates and avoided intimate moments with birds. All the while he longed for something more. Something solid. Something to believe in.

Jacob finally found that *something*. He found God. He pledged himself to his Creator. Starting his studies for seminary, he delved into the scriptures in earnest. This was where he belonged! He'd found his place, and he loved every second of theology training.

It happened while on a short visit to Liverpool to meet up with one of his much-loved seminary teachers who'd taken his own parish. With a few hours of free time he'd volunteered to help out in the local soup kitchen. A young lad came in for a meal. As he picked up his tray and waited in line, Jacob couldn't stop staring. He was thin, not unappealingly so. From under a flat cap, dark hair spilled over his collar. When the lad glanced at Jacob, their eyes met.

Handsome was Jacob's first thought. As he dished out stew, he studied the lad. There was something more. Jacob was drawn to him in a way he couldn't explain. He felt his mouth water as if the lad was a first rate meal at the best place in town. A flush rushed through him. No one had ever affected Jacob like this and it scared him. He didn't understand why this one particular bloke affected him this way. Like he was looking at someone he needed to know, to be close to.

"Billy," the lad said, giving Jacob a warm smile as he held out his bowl.

"Jac—Jacob." Jacob dumped hot stew into the bowl. Some of the gravy dripped down the lip. "Sorry."

"No worries, mate."

Billy's gaze held Jacob's. Billy *was* handsome but there was more to this man. Now that he was closer, Jacob realised he was more man than boy. Those eyes held belligerence but they also spoke of intelligence. This Billy wasn't the run of the mill street kid. He was solid somehow to Jacob, real in a way other men his age didn't seem to be.

Billy gave a lopsided smile, raised an eyebrow. The eyebrow was crooked, giving him a comical appearance.

Thankful that for the moment, Billy was alone in the serving line, Jacob laughed. Billy did as well.

"Food looks good," Billy said.

"I didn't cook it."

"Yeah, I know that," Billy said with a laugh.

That laugh clinched it for Jacob. He knew that they had to talk, to see what had happened between them in the span of two minutes. But not here. The door had opened and several men had filed in.

Billy glanced at the new arrivals, turned to Jacob, and winked. This fellow was confident, and Jacob was attracted to that.

"Pint?" Billy asked.

"Ah, sure."

"When you done serving grub?" Billy asked, taking a second slice of pie from the counter that separated them. He slid it onto his tray, giving Jacob a mischievous grin. Billy knew the rules. One piece each.

Jacob knew the rules but Billy could have all the pie he wanted, as far as Jacob was concerned.

"Half seven," Jacob said, licking his lips nervously.

"You gonna take all night?" said one of the men who'd just arrived. "I'm hungry!"

Billy ignored the intrusion. His eyes sparkled. He poked a finger into the apple pie and licked it slowly. "Then I'll take my time enjoying the nosh."

A wash of delight came over Jacob. He didn't bother trying to fight off the feeling. He couldn't let this Billy lad disappear into the dark! He'd never felt so excited about a pint before in his life. Seven-thirty couldn't come fast enough. An hour left, half an hour, fifteen minutes. Seven-thirty!

Jacob grabbed his jacket. As he rushed across the road, he was thankful he wasn't wearing anything that would have given away his status as a seminary student. Then he laughed. As if Billy would have cared! It wouldn't have stopped his invitation. Jacob was sure of it.

One pint turned into two.

"I like you," Billy said, wiping foam off his upper lip.

"Me too," Jacob said, feeling stupid. Say something intelligent! But what?

Billy finished his beer. Jacob was slowly drinking his. Billy took the glass from Jacob's hand, his fingers lingering.

"Yes?" Billy asked.

"Yes," Jacob answered.

Two minutes later Jacob was up against the rough brick wall of the alley that ran between the pub and the haberdashery. Billy had Jacob's zip down before his knees hit the tarmac. Jacob's cock was in his mouth and Jacob's balls were in his hand. It was heaven on earth! With his head thrown back, Jacob closed his eyes, bit his lip, and let himself *feel*.

This! This is what he needed, wanted... *was!*

Jacob came with a guttural cry. He'd never had an orgasm like that in his life! When he was able to think again, he smiled down at Billy, brushed his cheek with the backs of his fingers. Afraid to dispel the magic, he didn't speak but motioned for Billy to change places.

Standing up, Billy grinned mischievously, his dark blue eyes dancing. He eagerly took Jacob's place, unzipping his own flies. Jacob dropped to his knees, smacking his friend's hand away. With newly acquired confidence, he delved into the tight jeans and sighed happily when he found his prize.

Drawing out Billy's hard cock carefully, he stared at it. Leaned forward; smelled it. Put out a tongue; tasted it. He moaned, opened his lips and sucked. He had not learned this from Derek. Oh, no. This was all Jacob and instinct. Billy's body was wonderful. It called to him: taste me! kiss me! fuck... no, not that. Jacob was a priest. Almost a priest. He had to remain chaste to his vows. This didn't count. Right?

Only intercourse counted. This was merely a passing, mutual bit of fun. When Billy threaded his hands through Jacob's curls and moaned, Jacob returned to his pleasurable task of sucking Billy off. Billy, for his part, remained perfectly still, letting Jacob do as he pleased.

Jacob loved the taste of Billy. He licked and sucked and nibbled until Billy let out a guttural cry. He tried to push away but Jacob latched on. He drank down every drop that Billy gave him.

It was not enough.

But it had to be. He was ready to be a priest. Even now, he had faith and deep devotion to God. He would never forget this day, this time with Billy. He would always have these memories, and they would be what he would hold onto as the years passed by.

Jacob stood up, laughing happily. He captured Billy's gaze and saw the pleasure he'd given reflected there.

Billy looked back, smiled. "Shipping out in two hours. Africa. Just came back for me Gran's wake."

"Sorry about your Gran." Jacob felt tears spring to his eyes. "No."

"No?"

Jacob had never felt so empty, or so stupid. Billy was a man of the world. What had he expected? Love? Jacob knew he was a bloody moron. Angrily he wiped at the tears. *Stupid, stupid, stupid. He's nothing to you. Nothing. Love doesn't happen like this, in a dank alley., minutes after you've met some bloke.*

Besides, he was going to be a priest. Funny how he had to keep reminding himself of that.

"I— thanks. I just thought if you were local..." Jacob sighed. "You know, we'd have another pint some time."

“Sorry. I'd take you up on that if I didn't have to head out.” Billy touched Jacob's cheek before he tucked himself back into his jeans. “Was good, though.” Billy grinned. “Bloody good. You're fantastic, mate. I liked it a lot.”

“Will you be back?”

Billy shrugged. “Hard to say. You never know what happens in the bush.” He put a finger to his own head and pretended to shoot. He must have seen the horror on Jacob's face because he did a surprising thing. He leaned forward and kissed Jacob. Right on the mouth. “Ta, mate. Jacob. I'll remember you.”

Stunned, Jacob covered his lips with his fingertips, his eyes closed. He savoured the touch of Billy's lips on his. The kiss was nice! He opened his eyes at the sound of boots on brick. Looked around. Billy was sauntering down the alley. He turned and waved before he disappeared from sight.

Jacob was stunned and it was a few minutes before he finally moved. He ran down to the road, looked toward where Billy had gone 'round the corner. The road was empty. Billy was gone.

Two years later, Jacob took his vows. He hadn't had sex since that night and he never did again. He respected the oath of chastity that came with his vocation. His life was fulfilled. He prayed for Billy's safety and hoped he had a good life. In his prayers, he never asked for Billy's return.

In his dreams, Jacob always, always asked. And Billy always came back for him.

Comments may be sent to the author/artist at chakbalam@gmail.com

Fortuitous Bedevilment

by
krisser

Ray Doyle poked his head into Bodie's room and could immediately tell by the rhythmic snuffles that his partner was still asleep. The birthday celebration had been just short of a riot and it had been damn fine of the old man to provide transport home. Sleeping on the sofa had been safer than driving home, but it hadn't done his neck any good. He rubbed his face as he padded naked across the room to retrieve the clothes he'd left when he had changed into a pair of Bodie's sweats to run in yesterday. It wouldn't have bothered Bodie anyway. In the doorway of the fitted wardrobe, he glanced back at Bodie's sleeping sprawl and hesitated. He appeared so serene and innocent.

Doyle turned slightly to lean against the doorjamb, arms folded across his chest, as he continued his perusal. He was surprised at how pleased he felt that Bodie remained asleep with him in the room. Any overnight training or stakeout, his partner was usually awake in an instant with gun in hand to boot. There was an implied trust here that wasn't spoken of in the daylight. A happy sigh escaped as he turned to complete his original mission of retrieving his clothes.

Bodie's wardrobe was an odd thing. Clothes hung neatly, not a hanger out of place, but there was a full floor to ceiling mirror. No other mirror could be found in his bedroom, just here, inside the sheltered wardrobe. He had to wonder what he did in here. He stretched tall before he bent down to pick up the only clothing out of place, his own crumpled jeans and shirt.

Before he finished standing with clothes in hand, Doyle could feel Bodie's eyes upon him. He looked into the mirror and could see Bodie's dishevelled and ever-so-slightly confused look. Which exact devilish imp possessed him, he didn't know and at this moment he didn't care. He just went with the whim.

Doyle reached down with his right hand and grabbed his dick and pulled it out as long as he could as he turned to face Bodie. He cocked his head with a lustful chuckle accompaniment. "I was afraid you had sucked it dry, but it still worked."

The expressions that flitted across his partner's face were so brief that they were hard to decipher. Pride, fear, regret, yearning, curiosity, all possible or not. Then he wore his usual impassive expression, the 'no real information is available' expression that adorned his face quite often.

Doyle knew he could, should say, 'just fooling', but the moment passed, and the imp inside decided to play it out for a bit longer. It was rare to really get one over on Bodie. And that's all this was, of course.

He moved over to the bed and slipped in along-side his partner as if it was the space he had just vacated. Bodie rolled onto his side to accommodate him, but remained silent; his expression still unreadable. Doyle didn't let that stop him.

Just to tease, Doyle ran his hand down Bodie's bare skin, chest to hip. Bodie seemed to flinch slightly, but the simultaneous hitched breath could tell a different story. The filling dick tenting the thin sheet was another story altogether.

"I thought it might be just the drink, but you seem up for more." Doyle waited for denial, or a hand to brush his own away, but none came. Just a reddening of Bodie's cheeks and a look of embarrassed mortification. Doyle knew he could be an ass, but he wouldn't deliberately hurt his partner, and this could be cruel.

Without a thought about the act he offered, "Let me return the favour." Doyle reached for the hardening erection as Bodie turned onto his back. Whether to move away or to accommodate his hand was immaterial as Bodie arched into the first touch.

Doyle grasped the warm flesh firmly and worked it like he did his own. The right amount of pressure that birds never achieved had Bodie grinding the back of his head into the pillow. His hips matched the pace of the strokes and he came with an abandon that Doyle had never seen in their shared bedroom escapades.

That he was turned on by what he saw didn't escape his notice, but the satisfaction that he had gained by his bedevilment at finally getting one over on his partner waned. He turned to leave the bed before owning up, but Bodie's hand stayed him.

Doyle didn't know why he didn't put a stop to this charade as the first touch of Bodie's hand enveloped his dick, but the stroke of his tongue inflamed his desire and he didn't dwell on it any longer. The sucking, in and out, and in and out, again and again, was mesmerising. The pressure so sustained was just like fucking. Doyle knew he wasn't in control of this anymore, but he didn't care. He was flying, flying like never before, then he was lost in sensations so intense that they were unmatched in his memory.

He lay still in the aftermath, relishing the lightning-like tingles that continued to shatter his composure. The scent of Bodie filled his nostrils. It turned him on. His balls tightened. He took a deeper breath. The scent of a bird had been synonymous with getting a leg over. Bodie's scent wasn't giving him that same feeling. He found he wanted to bury his nose in Bodie's scent. His eyes sprang open.

He met Bodie's intense gaze. Bodie held his stare for a count of three before it strayed to his burgeoning erection. Bodie glanced back and the look was all carnal, and it turned him on even more, if possible.

Doyle groaned with joy as Bodie's mouth welcomed him once more. Bodie must have had hidden reserves to hold on so firmly, to mimic a tight fucking like he did. Doyle wanted this and knew in that moment before bliss that he wanted to fuck and be fucked by Bodie. The mere thought pushed him over the precipice of his expectation.

Doyle awoke with a start. He realised he must have dozed off. He immediately felt Bodie spooned close against him. Bodie's dick was thick and resting gently along his bum. Doyle relaxed and settled closer to Bodie.

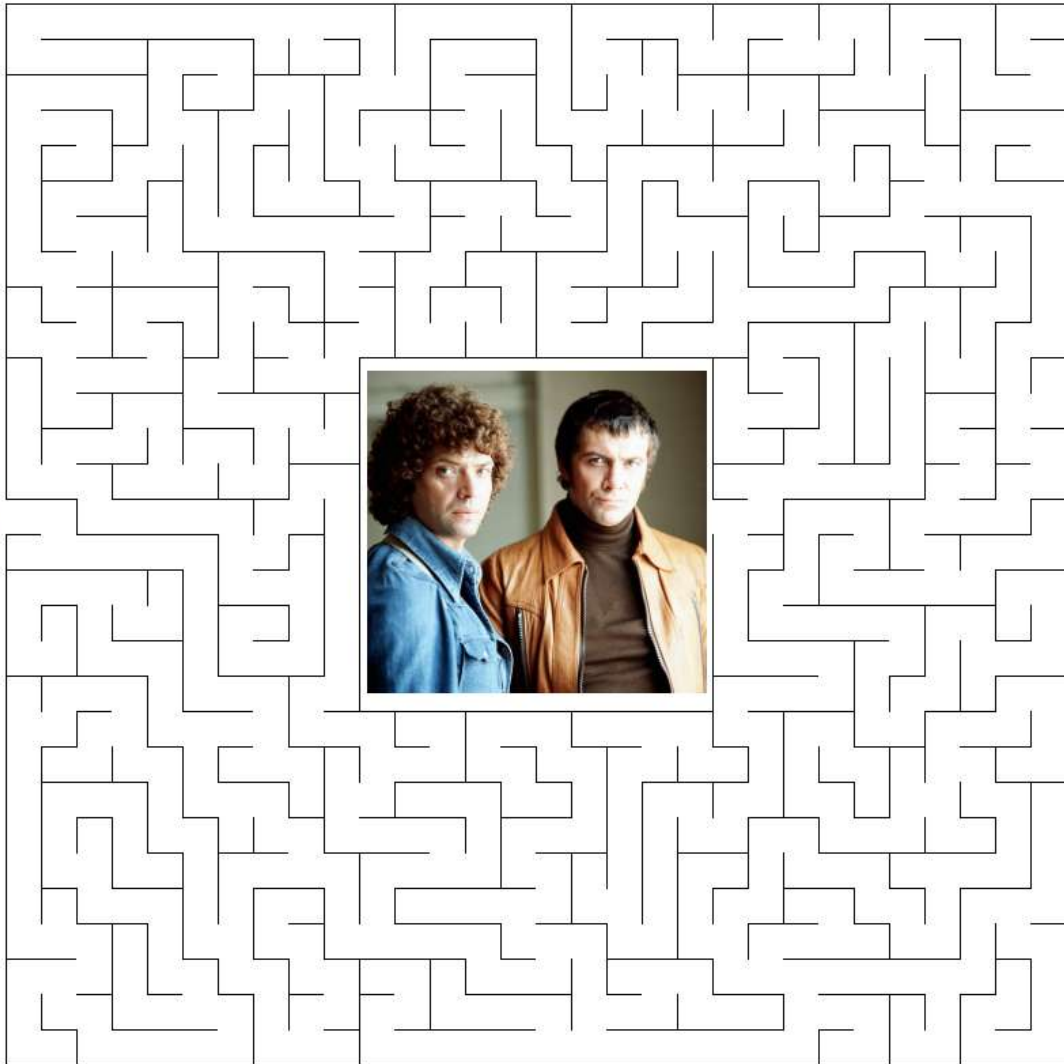
Bodie slung his arm over his waist and pulled him in tighter as he leaned in close to his ear. His breath tickled as much as excited him. The words were whispered with meaning, "Ray, I was never that pissed."

Comments may be sent to the author at krisserci5@gmail.com

Maze

by
Cyanne

Help Bodie and Doyle remember where they parked the Capri.
The solution can be found on [page 54](#).



Comments may be sent to the creator at cyanne@southroad.com

One of a Kind Original

by
Dawnwind

It was one of those rain slicked, foggy nights where the elements seem intent on burrowing under collars, the edges of boots and up under hats, drenching human kind. The air was weighed down with water, so saturated that breathing was a strain. There was a thickness, a wariness that filled Bodie with a strange lethargy.

He shouldn't have had that last Newcastle. He was drunk. Nothing more.

Shoving the collar of his leather jacket close around his neck, Bodie started down the road to where he'd parked the Capri. The dark shapes of buildings wavered and stretched in front of his eyes, his head swimming.

Unintentional pun. He grinned to himself, hanging onto a lamppost for balance, rain sluicing down his face, sticking his fringe to his forehead. He'd expected Doyle all evening—where the hell had he gone? Was it any wonder Bodie'd got pissed, with no-one to share the beer with him?

He peered blearily along the lane—where was the bloody car? Hadn't he left it...?

Ah, he'd gone right when he should have turned left at the street sign. Bodie re-oriented himself, took a step and ploughed into an indistinct figure in the gloaming.

Mop of wild curls, dripping into a soggy tartan scarf, narrow hips clad in denim.

"Ray!" Bodie cried, grasping his partner's arms. "Where the hell've you been?" He turned his friend around with a grin.

"Get yer 'ands off me." The man shoved Bodie back against rough brick, cocking his fist to strike.

Bodie deflected the blow, flummoxed. "Doyle!" he retorted, but this close, the lamppost providing illumination, he realised his mistake. The face was Ray's, but *not quite*. The same exotic eyes, on a slant, like a sprite. Ray's wide planed, high cheekbones.

No misaligned right zygomatic bone. No chipped tooth. This was a flawless Doyle, a façade without the slight imperfections that made him who he was.

"Who'd d'you think you are?" the doppelganger snarled, holding his fist in front of Bodie's nose with intent to harm. Water dripped down his face from the charcoal skies, obscuring his outlines but never erasing the eerie sameness of his features.

"My mistake." Bodie would have backed up but he was leaving a layer of leather jacket on the brick as it was. "You resemble someone I know..."

"Don' know him well enough, then, yeah?" he growled, looking over his shoulder as if expecting back-up.

Bodie sensed another man—no, two. Now three more. Possibly a gang. He hunched, gearing up for a drubbing, when a set of twins stepped into the cone of light. Then more.

Doyle's twins. Or more precisely, twins of his doppelganger. Quadruple copies of the same.

Each had identical features: tilted green eyes, long, broad nose flaring at the base. A sensual mouth with a full, smooth lower lip.

Doyle's face, with minor variations on a theme. One man had his hair military short with crispy clipped sideburns and the straight-backed stance of a Navy man, not Ray's languid slouch. The bloke beside him wore his hair swept over his right ear with a rigid part on the left and a ferocious mustache winged out almost to his flared cheekbones.

There was one with spectacles and mutton-chops, which only emphasized the sweep of Ray Doyle's wide cheekbones and fae eyes. Another had a cap smashed down to his forehead, a pencil thin 'stach like a scar above his upper lip.

Bodie sucked in a breath, sliding along the wall until he came to the gap between buildings. The men gathered, one upon another, completely silent. Not a single foot splashed in a puddle. No sound of a footfall at all.

A crowd with Ray's face but not his soul.

This was not him.

"Where did you come from?" Bodie asked sternly, shoring up his inner grit. He was a trained agent, one-time mercenary. This was weird, mad, even—and he was alone against an army of—what did he call them? Copies? Clones? But he had wits and strength.

He could do this.

"Who d'you think I am?" the first one, the copy most similar to Ray Doyle, demanded belligerently. "Someone else? Someone special?"

"A mate," Bodie said carefully. What was his—their—motivation? Why the threatening attitude? "A partner."

"Oh," he said, and the word rippled through the throng of men still emerging out of the downpour.

Bodie shuddered, and not because of the icy rain dripping down his spine. That sound was the moan of ancient beings rising out of a grave.

"Your partner?" one mocked. He canted a sharp boned hip suggestively, eyes hidden behind mirrored aviator glasses.

Bodie could see his own eyes reflected in Ray's face. He took a step to the left, thinking to duck into the alley. He was free yet the copies pressed closer, enveloping him.

“More than a partner, yeah?” the bloke wearing jeans and Ray’s beaded Indian belt guessed. “A lover?”

“No.” Bodie put both hands on his waist, acting strong while something deep inside—a barrier—was crumbling. An obstacle he’d never scaled, or even acknowledged. “We work together.”

The phrase echoed through the crowd, a wave of incredulity. The laugh that followed started low and increased in volume until Bodie wanted to cover his ears. What were they playing at?

“Just work together,” the first one—Bodie couldn’t call him the original, that was Ray—taunted. “Kiss him.”

“Kiss him. Kiss him.” The sibilant chorus slithered like bacon frying in a pan.

“Bodie!”

He jerked at the sound of his voice. Which one had said it? Which one recognized him for who he was?

“Bodie!”

More forceful this time, accompanied by a pain in his upper thigh. Bodie searched the crowd but they were dispersing, dissolving into the steady rain.

“Wha...?”

Doyle snorted derisively and aimed another gentle kick at Bodie’s thigh. “Wake up! You’re on me door mat.”

“Wasn’t asleep.” Disoriented, Bodie peered up at his partner. He was still half in the other realm, surrounded by—

“I beg to differ, you were snoring.” Doyle leaned over him to slide the key into the lock.

“Ray!” Bodie sprang up so suddenly Doyle toppled backwards, nearly falling down the narrow flight of stairs. Bodie caught him around the waist, pulling Ray into the protective circle of his arms.

He could hear the voices chanting, their command so loud that he was sure Doyle must hear it, too. Doyle stared at him, eyes wide and wary, as if seeing someone he hadn’t expected.

An imposter perhaps, or a new version of an old friend.

Bodie didn’t think, throwing out any sensible caution with the baby in the bath water, and kissed *his* Doyle. Hard. On the lips. The clash of their teeth reverberated inside his skull as he was sucked into Doyle by a startled whoosh of breath.

Doyle flowed inside him, filling every dark corner, inflating him like a helium balloon. They kissed again, and again—every version of William Bodie and Raymond Doyle finding love in a familiar friend.

“Wondered—” Doyle huffed a ragged breath, the keys clutched in his fist jangling discordantly. He grinned self-consciously, unable to complete the unlocking due to the position he was in.

With Doyle snuggled up against his hip with his left arm, Bodie snatched the keys and unlocked the front door. “Wondered what?” Bodie asked, sure he was floating a few inches above the floor.

Doyle towed him into the flat with the goofiest grin Bodie had ever seen on that beloved, imperfect face. “Wondered when,” Doyle said, his eyes crinkled shut with delight. “If.”

“Yeah.” Bodie pushed him to the ghastly gold flocked wall paper to look at him, see the man he’d been expecting to see. Doyle’s skin glistened, speckled with raindrops. Bodie touched a fingertip to his late evening whiskery cheek, running it lightly up to the misshapen lump below the right eye. “Had to make sure.” Happiness warred with leftover confusion under his breast bone.

This was real. This was the two of them. Kissing.

Maybe they were both dreaming?

Doyle’s smile softened, his eyes going tender. “What’s happened?” His body seemed to fit exactly with Bodie’s.

There was no way Bodie could explain the prophetic, disconcerting dream. It *had* been a dream, right? Not some recycled script from an old Doctor Who episode? “Waited for you at the pub,” he said instead.

“Got caught up in last minute paperwork,” Doyle explained, unwinding the soggy scarf from around his neck. “The Lyric case. Cowley wanted the financials and phone records before he met with the head of Companies House tomorrow.”

“I was drinking. Saw a bloke going past the window and ran out,” Bodie started. Or had he? Had the entire thing been a dream or was that one single man—the Not-Doyle—real? “Like you. Curls...” He twined his fingers around a wet lock of hair. “Slender build but with shoulders...” Such a broad expanse of chest under the rain-splattered green t-shirt. “Called out your name.” He’d felt like a berk when the lad turned around. Probably sixteen, if he was a day. Barely shaving. How could Bodie have made such a mistake?

“Bodie, it was dark, raining. You—” Doyle smiled, leaning his cheek against Bodie’s wrist. “We’ve all done the same.”

Ray understood. “As long as I haven’t gone round the bend.”

“Wouldn’t go that far,” Doyle scoffed and nipped at Bodie’s lips, soothing the self-recriminations. “I see you, even when you’re not there. Because I wish you were.”

Bodie nodded, the sensation of Ray’s mouth on his a narcotic he never wanted to withdraw from. The kiss turned passionate as Bodie slid his palm under Ray’s shirt to the flat of his abdomen.

“Bloody hell!” Doyle roared, shoving him away. “Your hands are like ice and we’re both all wet.”

Bodie chuckled. Nothing could discourage him now. He had Ray. Really had him—as Ray had him. “Want to dry off?” he asked, shucking his dripping leather jacket. “Or fancy a hot shower?”

“Since we’re already wet,” Doyle shrugged with an enticingly naughty chuckle. “Hot, with room for two.”

He dashed off, removing clothes as he went.

Bodie’d recognise that round arse anywhere.

Comments may be sent to the author at dawnebeth@comcast.net

One of a Kind Original Art

by
kat-byrd



Comments may be sent to the artist at chakbalam@gmail.com

Fallen Phrase Puzzles Answers

by
Cyanne

Puzzle #1 Answer

Looks like you're guarding the tank on your own, angelfish.
Bodie in *The Ojuka Situation*.

	L	O	O	K	S		L	I	K	E	
			Y	O	U	'	R	E			
G	U	A	R	D	I	N	G		T	H	E
T	A	N	K		O	N		Y	O	U	R
			O	W	N	.					
	A	N	G	E	L	F	I	S	H	.	

W

Y E S

L N G K O N L Y K

U O O O I N R S H E

G A A K O U F I I T H R

T A N R D L N G E O U E

Puzzle #2 Answer

That's fantastic. Can you do a German accent?
Doyle in *The Purging of CI5*.

		T	H	A	T	'	S		
F	A	N	T	A	S	T	I	C	.
C	A	N		Y	O	U		D	O
	A		G	E	R	M	A	N	
	A	C	C	E	N	T	?		

E S

A T H A O U

A N G A N T I C

C A N C Y T T S D

F A C T E R M A N O

Puzzle #3 Answer

You'll be paired off and from then on you're The Bisto Kids.
 Cowley in *Old Dog with New Tricks*.

		Y	O	U	'	L	L		B	E				
P	A	I	R	E	D			O	F	F		A	N	D
		F	R	O	M			T	H	E	N		O	N
		Y	O	U	'	R	E			T	H	E		
		B	I	S	T	O			K	I	D	S	.	

R O U E F
 I O M K D
 F I S T L O E B H A
 A Y R E O T H F N E O N
 P B Y O U D R L I T S E N D

Puzzle #4 Answer

Bodie, you half-Irish son of a bitch. What'd you wanna go and do that for?
 Doyle in *Klansmen*

		B	O	D	I	E	.		Y	O	U				
H	A	L	F	-	I	R	I	S	H		S	O	N	O	F
	A		B	I	T	C	H	.		W	H	A	T	'	D
Y	O	U		W	A	N	N	A		G	O		A	N	D
		D	O		T	H	A	T		F	O	R	?		

T N N O
 B I I E Y O R
 A L O I T H A A G S A T D
 H O U F O D R I T W O U N D
 Y A D B W A C H S H F H O A N O F

Puzzle #5 Answer

I was born tall, dark and beautiful and engagingly modest, of course.
 Bodie in *Mixed Doubles*.

I		W	A	S		B	O	R	N		T	A	L	L	.
				D	A	R	K		A	N	D				
	B	E	A	U	T	I	F	U	L		A	N	D		
			E	N	G	A	G	I	N	G	L	Y			
			M	O	D	E	S	T	.		O	F			
				C	O	U	R	S	E	.					

D I K
 N T R R S N O
 A C D U F I E L N
 M S O A S R A A Y
 E E O G E G T L G D A L
 I B W A U A B O U N N T F D L

Comments may be sent to the creator at cyanne@southroad.com

Damaged Goods

by
ci5mates

Doyle lay on the narrow mattress in their second-rate hotel room contemplating the Bodie-shaped lump in the bed opposite. How was it that the sod could drop off so easily after the crap they'd dealt with today? Didn't anything touch him anymore? Maybe it never had. Doyle sighed and scrubbed his face, no, that wasn't true, Bodie cared, he just didn't dwell on the painful things.

He checked his watch for the second time in as many minutes, it was going to be a long night. Sick and tired of staring at the smoke stained ceiling, he rolled onto his side and punched the pillow into shape but as soon as his eyes closed, she was back, invading his thoughts. He wrinkled his nose at the memory of the bloated body being pulled from the river and tugged the blanket higher.

She'd been an attractive girl, judging by the family photo on her mother's mantle but the bacteria in the water had done its job and now dental records were their only hope for a positive ID.

Gutless bastards.

His thoughts drifted from the injustice and futility of it all to anger and grief for a victim he'd never met but eventually, mercifully, he managed to shift his attention to more mundane imaginings. His last conscious thought as sleep tugged at him, was the sight of Bodie in his quirky flannel pyjama bottoms and wondering why the tough, ex-merc had chosen sheep patterned ones.

He jolted awake suddenly, confused and disorientated with a baffling sense of foreboding in the pit of his stomach. He lay still, listening to the silence and resisting the urge to reach for his weapon, unsure what it was that had disturbed him. Had he been dreaming?

"Get off, leave him alone!"

Bodie's shout shattered the peace in their tiny room.

Doyle sat bolt upright having armed himself in seconds. He scanned the room in the available light but nothing was moving except Bodie who was shifting restlessly beneath his blanket and mumbling angry incoherent words in his sleep.

He hoped his partner would settle quickly for the sake of everyone else in this fine establishment but unfortunately the contrary sod didn't seem to be attuned to his thoughts. Resigned to not getting any sleep unless he put a stop to it, he got wearily out of bed.

"Raaaay!"

Christ, what was going on in that head of his?

Standing alongside Bodie's bed with a pounding heart, he questioned the safety of waking someone in the throes of a nightmare.

Bodie stilled unexpectedly, Doyle froze.

“No, no...I’m begging you...” Bodie’s voice trailed off, “please...no don’t...”

Doyle couldn’t take anymore and selfishly decided to wake the bastard anyway. He lowered himself onto the edge of Bodie’s bed and was shocked by the sight of tears streaming down his face.

He’d never seen this man so helpless and hurting and his gut response was to wrap his arms around the daft bugger to comfort him but he hesitated, how would Bodie react? Embarrassed, angry or maybe both? But it was the hitch in Bodie’s sobs that finally broke him.

“Bodie mate, wake up, it’s just a nightmare, it’s not real,” he said gently reaching out and squeezing the closest shoulder but without warning he was struck hard by a lightning quick back-hander.

Doyle found his voice before he found his feet. “Bodie, wake up!” he shouted firmly, convinced that by now the entire hotel would be awake. Impulsively he took a flying leap across Bodie’s body, pinning his arms and chest to the bed.

Bodie stilled under his weight.

“It’s me mate, you awake now?”

“Ray?” Bodie croaked.

“I’m here Bodie, I’m here, everyone’s okay, I’m okay, you’re okay, we’re okay.”

Bodie nodded in the half-light and wriggled his arms free, wrapping them solidly around the two of them, binding them together.

Bodie’s walls were completely down.

“Want to talk?” Doyle asked quietly.

“No.”

Doyle made a move to rise but Bodie’s grip tightened.

“Don’t go.” There was a vulnerability in Bodie’s voice that both shocked and warmed him; he wasn’t really as hard-hearted as he pretended to be.

They stayed locked together until Bodie’s grip grew lax and his breathing evened out.

Doyle thought about returning to his own bed now that the crisis had passed but he felt no urge to move.

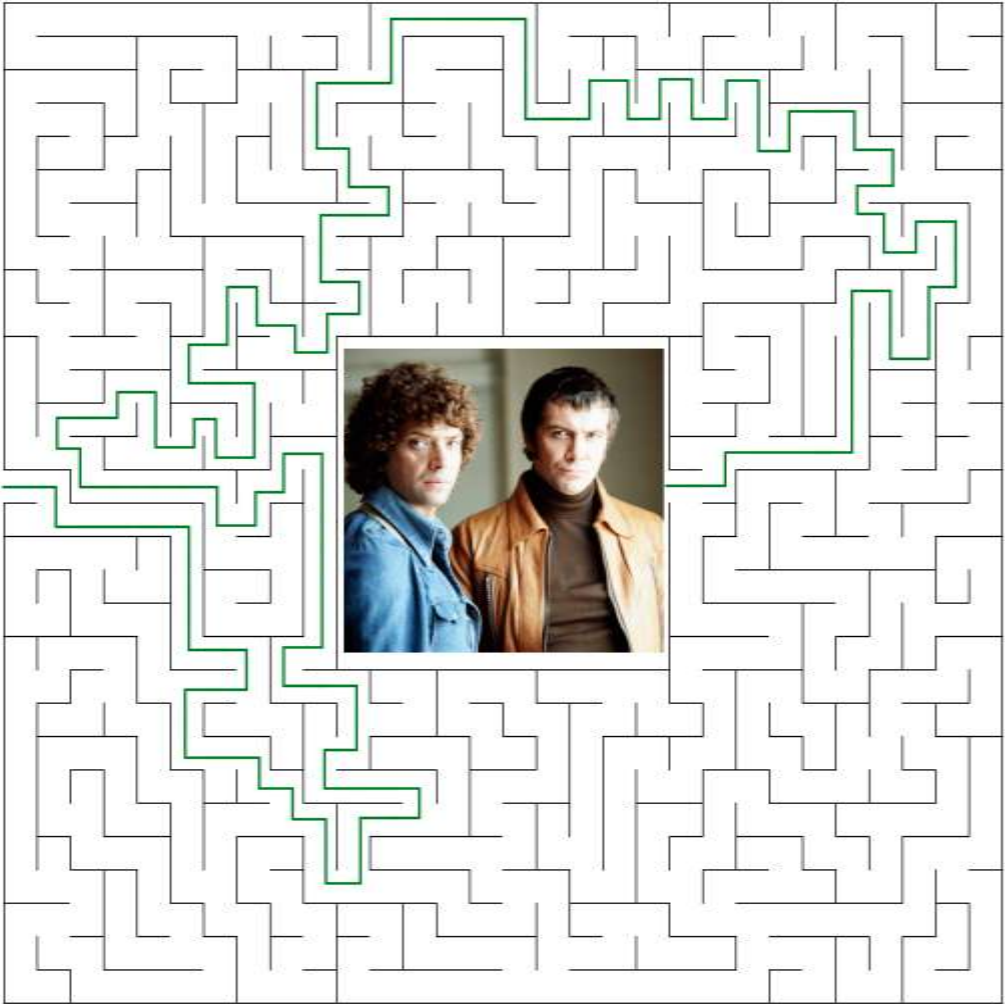
He closed his eyes and relaxed, grateful for their unique bond.

There’d be no more nightmares tonight.

Comments may be sent to the author at cismates@gmail.com

Maze Solution

by
Cyanne



Comments may be sent to the creator at cyanne@southroad.com

Alas, Poor Yorick

by
P.R. Zed

Doyle was neither loitering in the rest room, nor idling at the pub around the corner from HQ. He wasn't brooding at his flat. He wasn't even moping in the dingy caff near his home. Bodie finally found him by following the route they'd been running since Doyle's last move had taken him to Peckham. There he was, in Nunhead cemetery, slouching on the corner of an overgrown Victorian grave, hands in pockets, lean legs stretched in front of him, frown firmly directed at the ground.

He looked almost respectable, his hair shorn close for the assignment that had taken him away from Bodie for the past three weeks, his neat trousers worlds away from his usual patched jeans. Respectable, but not himself. Bodie could still remember the way his fingers had tangled in Doyle's lost curls the night before his partner had gone off to do Cowley's bidding at Greenham Common.

"I wonder what poor bastard's inside this one," Bodie said, half-heartedly kicking the grave with one toe. He looked at the headless angel topping the headstone and the worn name on it that might have been Robert, or possibly Richard. "Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Raymondo. A fellow of infinite jest."

"No jokes today, Bodie." Doyle didn't even look up. After what Murphy had told him, Bodie had been expecting sparks, a flash of anger, but Doyle only sounded tired. "I'm not in the mood."

"That was Shakespeare, my dear boy." Bodie pulled out his best upper class twit of the year accent. "I shall have to improve my delivery if you thought it was a joke." He sat beside Doyle without waiting for an invitation, leaning against him so he could feel the heat of Doyle's body.

"I'll tell you one thing about your delivery," Doyle said, leaning back against him. "Olivier ain't gonna be threatened by it."

"You wound me." Bodie clutched his chest.

"Berk." Doyle elbowed him in the ribs.

"Pillock." Bodie nudged him in return. And as easily as that, the mood between them was lightened. Which meant Bodie was free to darken it again.

"You all right?"

Doyle shrugged. "Ruth and Susan got worse than me. I just had to pretend to be an arsehole copper. They had real arsehole coppers knocking them about every day."

"They're tough."

"All the women in the camp were tough." Doyle paused and swallowed. "Wasn't much fun, harassing a bunch of women and kids."

“Enemies of the State, Doyle.” Upper class twit of the year was back, and that finally lit a flare of anger in Doyle.

“Not enemies of *my* state,” Doyle snapped. “I don't want Yank nuclear missiles in my country either.”

“Next thing I know you'll be putting on a dress and joining those Greenham Common birds.”

Doyle sharply pushed him away. “Don't be such a bastard.”

“Then don't you be so soft.” Bodie pushed back. “You were doing your job.”

“My fucking job.” And there was the bitterness Bodie had known was bubbling inside Doyle. “Looking for counter-insurgents among a bunch of women who only want a better world for their kids. And do you know what we found, Bodie?” Doyle jabbed him in the arm hard enough that Bodie knew he'd be sporting a bruise tomorrow. “The only counter-insurgents—besides us, that is—were a squad of women coppers who'd been sent in to cause trouble so the whole camp could be cleared away.

“I take it you didn't leave them to it?”

“Course we didn't. Susan gave one of them a black eye. Ruth warned the others off. And I may have taken a poke at a couple of their fellow officers.”

“I don't imagine that's quite the result Her Majesty's government had in mind when they sent CI5 into Greenham Common.”

“Probably not. When the Cow came to pull us out, he gave us a bollocking in front of their gov'nor.” Doyle gave a weak smile. “But then he bought us all drinks in the next town over.”

“Well, George Cowley doesn't like bullies.”

“No, he doesn't.” Doyle's smile settled into a look of tired satisfaction. Which was exactly how Bodie wanted him: bitterness gone, guilt lanced, ready for his partner to look after him.

“C'mon, you.” Bodie wrapped an arm around Doyle's neck and leaned in, letting his lips brush lightly against what was left of Doyle's curls. He was usually more careful than this in public, but there was no one in sight, and the three weeks Doyle had been away had left him feeling reckless. “If you're good, I'll take you home and put you to bed.”

“What'll you do if I'm bad?” Doyle raised an eyebrow, and there was his spark back. Not a spark of anger, but of the best sort of wickedness. Bodie felt a flare of pleasure in his own belly at the thought of Doyle naked and willing and laid out before him.

Bodie stood, took Doyle's hand, and pulled him off the grave. “Why don't we go back to your place and find out?”

And that's exactly what they did.

Comments may be sent to the author at paulinezed@gmail.com

Birds of a Feather

by
PFL

Anson lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. He held the smoke in his lungs for a moment, then let it slowly out towards the ceiling of the rest room. Thank God and Cowley it was over. They'd all come out of it alive, if not unscathed. None of the children had been injured. All the bombs had been safely detonated or disabled. Anarchist gang members were all captured or dead. Jax and Lake were in hospital, but they were out of danger. In every way the op had been a success. He should be celebrating at the Lion but all he wanted to do was sit here and be grateful for the silence of an empty rest room.

Everyone had been out in the field. They had had three additional bombs to find, several of Taylor's group members to track down, and the fear that they'd missed something that would prove catastrophic. Cowley had been coordinating the teams, Taylor's interrogation, and intel from the house where Mathieson and King had discovered him. "Anson," Cowley had said, "Get over to Croydon. Doyle and Bodie think they've cornered the bomb-maker—Burton." At the time, he'd wondered at Pennington's "Good luck, mate," as he'd passed him on the way to his car. Bodie and Doyle were new to the squad but they were good. If they said they had the bomb-maker, then they did. In fact, he'd been eager for real action, since he'd been stuck on driving duty with Cowley.

Ah, silence. Blissful, uncharged quiet.

He heard the door open and closed his eyes for a moment before he looked to see who was intruding. McConnell. Fuck. Anson closed his eyes again.

"Anson. Spare a fag?"

Double fuck. Anson dug out his cigarette pack, tossed it onto the table, then dug out his lighter as well.

"Thanks." McConnell lit the cigarette, breathed in, then let out a stream of smoke through his moustache. "Haven't had a fag in months. I do miss it."

Anson restrained himself from replying. It would only encourage McConnell. Hell, either be a smoker or not—none of this 'I can take it or leave it' bollocks.

"You were with Bodie at that school, weren't you? Got those kids and teacher out, captured Burton. Daring manoeuvre."

"We were lucky."

"Who dares wins', right?"

Anson eyed McConnell. "It was Doyle's plan. I only came in at the end."

McConnell raised his eyebrows. "Bodie's the one who got into the optimal position, wasn't he?"

Anson snorted, then took a drag on his cigarette. "If by that you mean Bodie had got himself captured, then, yes."

"Inside man."

"We were able to take advantage of it. That wasn't, however, the plan."

McConnell smirked a little. "So I just heard."

Anson looked at him, then sighed. "At it tooth and nail, are they?"

"And then some. They've gone quiet now, but I heard them down the hallway."

"As have we all." Well, at least they weren't silent any longer. He'd thought nothing would be worse than listening to Bodie and Doyle argue every little point, but it turned out listening to them not arguing was worse.

"It was a mistake to team them. Cowley's just too stubborn to admit it." McConnell drew in smoke, eyes narrowed.

"Let me know when you're planning on telling him that so I can be elsewhere. They have been successful."

"Sometimes. Not always. How much more successful would they be if they weren't spending all their energy arguing with one another?"

"Cowley wants his teams to be balanced, you know that. We learn from each other." It also kept cliques from forming, or insular groups like Wakeman's.

"We can learn while still operating on specialised teams. Take today's operation. How much more smoothly would it have gone if you had been there from the start, instead of Doyle?"

"You mean if you had been there." Anson was amused at McConnell's struggle to control his expression. Did the man think they were all as unobservant as he was? It had been clear to Anson for months that McConnell wanted to partner with ex-SAS Sergeant Bodie. "You underestimate Doyle."

"Do I? Two men on a team with the same training and background. No hesitation about what to do. No arguing."

"Ah. Now you're underestimating Bodie." Anson heard the door opening and looked round to see Doyle entering the room.

Doyle nodded at them, walked to the tea pot, raised it, then put it down. "No tea?" He sent a look Anson's way.

"Nicotine's better" Anson gestured with his cigarette. He was a little disappointed when Doyle just turned back to the counter and opened the PG Tips box. Well, there were other ways to get a rise out of Doyle. "So, on a scale of one to ten, Doyle, how would you rate Bodie's disposition

towards argument?"

"On a bolshie scale? Fifteen." Doyle sounded preoccupied. He put a tea bag into a mug, then reached for the kettle.

"I rest my case, Anson," McConnell said. "Like should be paired with like. Experience with experience. Otherwise, it's all miscommunication. No amount of training here is going to equal SAS experience. No offence, Doyle."

Doyle waved a dismissive hand towards McConnell, his attention on the kettle he was filling.

"Oi." It was Bodie's voice by the door. Because Anson's eyes were on Doyle, he saw the sudden tension in his back. "No offending Doyle unless I'm—er—" Bodie stopped, coughed. "Included," he managed finally to say.

Doyle's shoulders twitched and he hunched a bit over the kettle. Anson looked at Bodie. His face was slightly flushed from the coughing, and his eyes were fixed on Doyle. Anson tilted his head. "McConnell was just saying teams would be more effective if they were more alike."

"Alike?" Bodie looked at McConnell.

"Military agents partnered with military, police with police. No arguing, shared understanding, better...ops..." McConnell appeared to falter under Bodie's stare.

"You're a fool."

"Don't give me that. I heard you earlier—"

"What, arguing? Of course we argue! I've got a bloody, stropky partner. And thank God—or Cowley—for that because otherwise I'd be dead. Him too."

"Doyle? Or Cowley?" Anson asked. He glanced at Doyle to share the joke, and found him completely focused on Bodie, kettle still held in one hand. McConnell's voice brought Anson's attention back to him.

"Bodie! We've talked about—"

"Yeah, well, I was wrong." Bodie threw a quick glance Doyle's way, then he glowered at McConnell.

"Oh, so you know he wants you," Anson heard Doyle murmur. He looked quickly at Bodie, but he appeared to have not heard.

"Or frustrated, more like," Bodie continued. "Try the patience of a saint—"

"Don't I know it," Doyle said. "See, McConnell, there's more than one way to be alike. You just need to filter through the codswallop Bodie likes to indulge in."

Bodie's raised his chin, eyes on Doyle. "Do as I do, not as I say, perhaps?"

A slow smile crossed Doyle's face. "Yeah, something like that."

Anson wondered if they'd forgotten they weren't alone.

"Oi, Butch. Want some?" Doyle gestured with the kettle. "Tea, I mean."

Anson looked at Bodie in time to see him turn away, hand at his mouth. "Uh, no time. We've been summoned."

"What for?" Doyle set the kettle down.

"Cowley wants us in on the interrogation."

Doyle and Bodie looked at each other. "He's pleased with us," Doyle said.

Bodie nodded.

"And you couldn't have mentioned that when you first came in?"

Bodie shook his head.

"Berk. Let's go." Doyle headed for the door.

"After you, sunshine." Bodie followed him out the door.

"What...the hell was that?" McConnell said, as soon as the door closed.

'The start of a beautiful friendship'? Anson almost said, but he just shrugged and stubbed out his cigarette. "Doyle did say Bodie was a fifteen on the bolshie scale. Doyle, of course, is a twenty."

"Fuck."

Just outside Cowley's office door, Doyle stopped Bodie with a touch on his arm. "If you're having me on..." His voice was soft but fierce.

"You'll rip out my guts and feed them to me. Yeah, I know. Look, the ki—" Bodie cut off his words, and looked around as he swallowed. "It might have started as a way to shut you up back there," he said, even more softly than Doyle had spoken. "Half joke, half dig—"

"Half desire?"

Bodie stood his ground, gaze steady. "Certainly ended that way. Once I realised I wasn't alone in it." He took in a breath. "But—you left."

"Made my decision in the rest room." Doyle held Bodie's eyes with his own. "More alike than they know, eh?"

"Try the patience—"

"We're never saints." Doyle knocked on Cowley's office door. "But I reckon we might end as

Cowley's best team."

"Come in!" They heard Cowley shout.

"As long as we keep arguing," Bodie murmured into Doyle's ear.

Comments may be sent to the author at msmoat@gmail.com