

## Class Act

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# **Class Act**

by [JJJunky](#).

Summary

True breeding shines through.

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By JJJunky

Cowley straightened his tie and brushed raindrops off his shoulders. The late afternoon shower had caught him unprepared. Despite a reputation for independence, he wanted to make a good impression. It was his first meeting with John Powers, the minister recently placed in charge of his department, and while CI5's existence wasn't dependent upon his superior's good will, the size of its budget could be.

"The Minister will see you now, Mr. Cowley," the secretary, a plump but pretty young woman with strawberry blond hair, interrupted his contemplation.

There was no hesitation in his step as Cowley opened the door and entered the large, lavishly decorated office. One could often learn a great deal about a person by the style in which he adorned his surroundings. The view that greeted the CI5 comptroller made his spirits drop, though, of course, his feelings never became visible on his face.

The marble top desk was large enough to pass as a conference table. The leather of the overstuffed chair behind it perfectly matched the two chairs placed in front of it. At least three of the paintings on the walls were Goya's, and they didn't look like reprints.

"Mr. Cowley, it's a pleasure to finally meet you."

The man rising to his feet and holding out his hand was tall, at least six inches taller than his visitor. His dark hair was thick, with a distinguished gray streaking the temples and nape. The smile on the lightly-wrinkled face was as false as the handshake was weak.

"Please take a seat." Reclaiming his own chair, Powers continued, "I haven't much time. I have another meeting in fifteen minutes."

Cowley raised his head and threw back his shoulders. It wasn't the words, it was the tone of the deep voice that put him on the defensive. This wasn't the first minister he had encountered who disapproved of CI5 and its methods, and unfortunately, it probably wouldn't be the last.

Opening the thick folder laying on the desk in front of him, Powers began, "Reading your record it's clear that while your methods are rather unorthodox, they are effective. There is, however, room for improvement. In the next few weeks, I plan to review your brief. Your unpopularity with the press is only one area I hope to remedy."

To anyone who knew him, Cowley's anger was apparent by the thickening brogue of his native Scotland. "The press rarely knows all the facts of a case, thus, their analysis is obviously going to be flawed."

"That's a misunderstanding I believe we can rectify. No agency can defend its existence without favorable press these days."

Containing his outrage with difficulty, Cowley pointed out, "Our existence needs no defense. There is nothing I, or my agents, would like better than to see the need for this type of department eliminated. But, the way things are right now, I don't see that happening soon."

"I'm glad you reminded me." Flipping through the papers in the folder, he stopped when he found the one he wanted. "Personnel is an area you can begin to reorganize immediately."

Puzzled, Cowley asked, "In what aspect are you referring?"

"While many of your agents are recruited from the police force or the military services, I see a few come from less respectable professions." Turning a few more pages, Powers selected one. Studying it, he disgustedly shook his head, "This Bodie fellow is a good example."

"Bodie was in the Para's and the SAS," Cowley hastily reminded his superior.

"Yes, but before all that, he was a mercenary." Powers returned the report to the file. "Hardly the type of profession that encourages trust."

"I trust him," Cowley unhesitatingly stated. "Bodie has risked his life countless times for Queen, country and Joe Public."

"Very commendable, but hardly relevant."

Rising to his feet, Cowley could no longer hide his anger. "It's completely relevant. How many men are willing to make themselves a target for every madman and terrorist who thinks he has a grievance? That's what Bodie does every day. He doesn't do it for money or posh desks or glory. He does it because he cares. Can you say the same, Minister?"

Color fading from the sharply hewn features, Powers balled his hands into fists. Barely contained rage was plainly visible. "I expect, Mr. Cowley, to have my orders obeyed. Mr. Bodie and another agent, Raymond Doyle, who was recently implicated in the murder of a Mr. Paul Coogan, are a disgrace to this government. If they aren't off the payroll by tomorrow morning, you will be."

"You have no authority to dismiss me."

"My position gives me the only authorization I need," Powers contradicted. "You're under my jurisdiction now, and you'll play by my rules or you won't play at all."

"The Prime Minister . . . "

Tilting his head back, Powers stuck his chin out. "The Prime Minister is in the States. My orders are an answer to a directive she herself issued. When she returns in ten days, she'll see some positive action from this department. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Cowley?"

His self control all but destroyed, Cowley simply nodded. This wasn't the first officious minister he had encountered; however, it was the first to threaten him. The Prime Minister had appointed Cowley to the position he now held. Between them, they had written CI5's brief. Thus, it was generally believed only the Prime Minister herself could replace him and/or abolish CI5. No other minister in the history of the organization had ever attempted to

challenge Cowley's authority. Picking up the gauntlet, he forced a smile to quivering lips, "Everything is perfectly clear, Minister."

As Cowley turned to leave, Powers rose to his feet. "Just remember Mr. Cowley, I don't make idle threats."

Crossing to the door, Cowley softly returned, "Apparently we do have something in common after all."

\* \* \* \*

"He's crazy," muttered Doyle, "I'm partnered with a crazy man."

Sunlight danced in puddles, the only reminder of the storm that had hit the city the day before. To expend some of his frustration, Doyle tapped his foot and drummed his fingers against the steering wheel as he waited for his partner to emerge from the Leiceister Square Underground station. Only Bodie would ride the tube five miles out of his way in the morning rush hour to chat up a bird.

"Excuse me, sir." A young bobby knocked on the driver's side window. "You're in a no-parking zone. If you don't move immediately, I'll have to fine you."

In no mood to deal with bureaucracy or a patrolman who was still wet behind the ears, Doyle pulled out his CI5 ID. Flipping the folder open, he stuck it against the window - not caring in the least that it was upside down.

His face flushed red, the officer backed away. "I'm awfully sorry, sir. I hope I didn't break your cover."

Too annoyed to utter soothing reassurances, Doyle stared straight ahead at the multitudes thronging the sidewalks. With an air of confidence, that made those who observed him jealous, Bodie pressed forward through the crowd. Putting his ID back in his billfold, Doyle squeezed up close to the wheel to put it in his back pocket. Starting the engine, his right hand tapped out his anger on the dashboard.

As he approached the vehicle, Bodie's narrowed eyes and suddenly solemn face indicated that he had instantly assessed the situation. "Sorry, mate, I lost the bugger."

"You were tailing a suspect?" the young officer eagerly inquired.

The picture of innocence, Bodie demanded, "Would I be riding the Underground at rush hour for any other reason?"

"No sir." The young bobby almost bowed, he was so obviously overwhelmed by the chance encounter. "I suppose not, sir."

Sickened, as much by the PC's fawning as by his partner's obvious enjoyment, Doyle snapped, "Get in, Bodie, we're already late."

Smiling cheerfully at his admirer, Bodie casually opened the passenger door. His feet had barely left the pavement when the car jumped forward. He hastily slammed the door, barely in time to avoid a couple of pedestrians. "Watch it, Sunshine. The Tourist Board wouldn't be too happy if you take out a couple of Americans who are trying to leave some of their riches in the old country."

"Those rich Americans don't have to drive through Trafalger Square at rush hour," Doyle rejoined, dismissing his partner's concern.

His friend's ill humor making his smile broader, Bodie reasoned, "It'll build your character."

"My character is just fine, thank you very much." Taking his eyes off the road and fixing them on his partner, Doyle observed, "Unlike other people I could mention."

Glancing forward, Bodie shouted, "Watch it!"

Doyle slammed on the brakes only inches away from a black limousine. He was shaking slightly as he quickly downshifted before easing the Escort onto the square.

"Your character might be fine," Bodie slyly conceded, "but driving lessons wouldn't come amiss."

"If you don't want to walk the rest of the way, I suggest you shut up." There was no banter in Doyle's tone. Every word was spoken with complete sincerity.

Realizing it was at least three miles to CI5 headquarters, Bodie settled back in his seat with a broad smile - much to his companion's annoyance.

\* \* \* \*

Tired after an almost sleepless night, Cowley found he couldn't concentrate on the papers laying on the desk in front of him. Pressing the button connecting him with his secretary, he asked, "Betty, has 3.7 or 4.5 arrived yet?"

"No, sir." The young woman's reply was as succinct as possible, one of her attributes Cowley most appreciated.

"Let me know as soon as they do."

Though it was obvious the young woman had heard the anger and frustration in her boss' voice, her own remained calm. "Yes, sir."

Ending the connection, Cowley rose to his feet and paced slowly in the small area behind his desk. He had spent most of the night discussing his options with Winston Harris, a former minister. The two had become friends during Harris' short tenure as CI5's overseer. His ex-superior's advice is what had kept Cowley awake the remainder of the night. Introducing the adversaries seemed like a risky proposition. Granted, Bodie could look quite dapper, but would his attire be enough to show the jungle was no longer in the lad's blood? Then there was Doyle. Would Powers look past the T-shirt and jeans 4.5 was sure to be sporting and see the intelligence and compassion in the too sensitive heart?

The intercom buzzed, pulling the agitated man back to his desk. "What is it, Betty?"

"3.7 and 4.5 have arrived, sir."

Cowley quickly sat in his chair before ordering, "Send them in."

His eyes flashing over the faded jeans, T-shirt, and leather jacket Doyle was wearing, Cowley let his eyes rest on Bodie. A pale, pink shirt accentuated the gray three-piece suit. A tie of pink, gray, and white nicely accented the ensemble.

Praying he wouldn't come to regret his decision, Cowley rose to his feet, "You two come with me."

\* \* \* \*

A cool breeze blew through the broken glass and caressed his neck, making him shiver. His hand rose to encounter soft, pink flesh instead of the coarse strands of hair that had once hung below his shoulders. Crossing to a cracked mirror, he inspected the stranger gazing back at him. Red hair sprinkled with gray had been cut to lay even with the lobe of his ears. A dark blue suit covered a tall, lanky body. Leather shoes painfully entrapped swollen toes and rubbed against his heels. A blister had already formed on his right foot.

A door slammed open heralding a young woman's entrance. "We're ready, Nathan."

The older man took one last glance in the mirror. The time was spent marshalling his thoughts. Taking a deep breath, he followed his companion out into the larger room. The old, abandoned warehouse had served as their living quarters, office, and hospital since the group's inception.

Taking his place beside Jill on the small platform at the front of the room, Nathan turned to address his disciples. No longer scruffy and disheveled, they now sported suits more in keeping with a boardroom than a crumbling, desolate edifice. Smiling encouragement, he joked, "Who are you people?"

Nervous laughter echoed through the cavernous room. When the noise died down, Nathan continued, "You all know what you have to do today. Remember, the whole country is counting on us."

"No one's gonna get hurt, right, Nathan?" a high voice from the back of the crowd inquired. "The guns are just to make them listen."

Moving so he could lock eyes with the hesitant young man, Nathan shook his head. "This is a war, Bryan. Death is synonymous with war. It's unavoidable. All I can promise is we won't be the ones to hurt the hostages. Many of us may have to die to achieve our goal. But you already know that. Two hundred years ago, the Americans threw us off their continent. Now, it's our turn. They and their nuclear weapons are no longer welcome on this island."

\* \* \* \*

For the second time in two days, Cowley paced impatiently in the anteroom of John Powers' office. Several times during the long wait, Doyle's or Bodie's puzzled gaze had rested on their superior. Despite their obvious curiosity, Cowley resolutely kept his own counsel. How could he tell the lads their performance had come into question? After the Coogan affair, Doyle, in particular, already questioned his abilities.

The telephone next to the secretary's plump elbow jingled. Lifting the receiver, she nodded an acknowledgement before replacing it. "The minister will see you now, Mr. Cowley."

Mentally, Cowley prepared himself for the battle that was about to be engaged. It was a fight he had not wanted, but it needed to be fought. Doyle and Bodie's skills had already saved uncounted lives. If he lost this war, innocent people would pay. With his agents following closely on his heels, Cowley entered the elegant surroundings. Ignoring the fury clearly apparent on Powers' face, he presented his subordinates, "Minister, I'd like you to meet Raymond Doyle and William Andrew Philip Bodie."

"What's the meaning of this Cowley?" Powers demanded, rudely brushing aside the introduction.

Cowley could feel the anger boiling just below the surface of his seething agents. Putting a hand on an arm of each of them, he explained, "I thought if you could talk to Doyle and Bodie, you might reconsider your decision. I'm hoping we can resolve our differences without the Prime Minister becoming involved. She has more important crises to settle than a difference of opinion between a minister and one of his associates."

"There is nothing to resolve," snapped Powers. "I told you if these men weren't off the payroll by this morning, you would be. There's something you should know about me, Mr. Cowley, I'm a man of my word."

"Sacked?" Doyle's gaze rested on each of the combatants as he attempted to clarify the proceedings. "What's going on, sir?"

Mistakenly believing he was the authority Doyle was appealing to, Powers replied, "Your recent confrontation with Paul Coogan and his subsequent death has made your further employment as a government agent untenable. Mr. Bodie, on the other hand, should never have been recruited in the first place. As an ex-mercenary, his loyalties will always come into question."

"Not by me or any of my men," Cowley hastily contradicted.

Pain clearly visible on his face and in his voice, Doyle defended, "What happened with Coogan was an unforeseeable accident."

"That doesn't change your actions, nor their outcome," Powers pointed out. "What you did cost a human life."

Like a wild animal that populated the untamed jungle he had once been a part of, Bodie quickly came to his partner's defense, "Ray didn't know John Coogan was using his brother as a punching bag. The interrogation was conducted under normal circumstances."



"Normal for savages, Mr. Bodie," Powers disdainfully replied. "Not for representatives of her Majesty's service."

"Then you might as well hand the country over to the drug dealers, murderers, and terrorists," Cowley calmly proclaimed. "If we start playing by the rules, we're going to lose the war."

Lowering his large frame into the chair behind his desk, Powers asserted, "That's one opinion. It doesn't happen to be mine. I told you what would happen if my orders weren't obeyed."

Doyle reached into his back pocket and pulled out his CI5 ID. Throwing it on the desk, he said, "Stuff the threats, Powers. You have my resignation."

A careful inspection of the wallet was conducted over Bodie's shocked protest. Flipping the folder closed, Powers snarled, "I'll have the gun, too."

"Right," Doyle reluctantly agreed. Taking off his jacket, he struggled out of the shoulder harness. Wrapping the supple leather around the pistol, he spurned the outstretched hand and placed it on the desk. Without looking at this partner, he inquired, "Sunshine?"

Bodie's gaze fell on his superior as he reached for his ID.

Cowley put a hand on his agent's arm. "Don't give him the satisfaction, Bodie," he urged, nodding his head at Powers.

Indecision flashed across the handsome features as Bodie's glance rested first on Cowley, then Doyle, before flashing on Powers. "I can't Ray. I can't let him win so easily."

"Suit yourself, Mate." A catch in his voice, Doyle forced a smile to quivering lips. "I'll see you around."

The door closed behind Doyle with a finality that made Cowley's heart ache. He couldn't show his pain, not to Bodie and certainly not to Powers. He still had a battle to fight - and win.

\* \* \* \*

Buying a paper from a local news agent, Nathan found a quiet corner on the busy sidewalk. Though it was late in the season, tourists still swarmed the city, particularly here along the Mall connecting Trafalgar Square with Buckingham Palace. In front of him, though less crowded, Whitehall had its share of sightseers as they strolled past the old buildings lining the street leading to Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

Opening the newspaper, Nathan's head tilted slightly as though he were engrossed in a story. Anyone who looked into the cold, blue eyes could see his interest was directed elsewhere. Men and women dressed in traditional tourist garb - including large photography bags - advanced on the guarded entrances of one of the nondescript, unassuming structures. Nathan smiled.

He had trained his people well. Despite the humiliation he had suffered, the few months he had spent in Her Majesty's service had come in handy after all. Soon he would have his revenge. Even though he knew he would savor the emotion for only a short time, it was worth the price. He had no fear of death. It would afford him an escape from a life that had only been filled with pain.

\* \* \* \*

The bitter taste of the bile he had purged lingered around his taste buds, making his stomach churn. Pushing away from the toilet, Doyle stumbled to the sink. Turning on the faucet marked with a C, he slurped water into his mouth. Swishing it around, he spit it out before repeating the action.

Finally refreshed, he pulled a paper towel from the dispenser. Wetting it, he wiped his face and neck. Just down the hall from Powers' office, the consequences of his action made him rush to the nearest restroom. He had barely had time to notice it was empty before his stomach cramped, spewing the breakfast he had consumed a few short hours ago.

A wan face met beseeching eyes in the tiny, rimose mirror. He felt lightheaded. His emotions were in a state of turmoil. He'd always had a love/hate relationship with his job. Recently, it seemed as though the latter occurred more frequently than the former. Though he sometimes had doubts being a CI5 agent was the right place for him, he never doubted the need for the agency's existence. Though a few innocent lives had been lost, far more had been saved.

Maybe he should have stayed with Bodie and fought Powers? Had he deserted his partner? Or had his partner deserted him? In the long run, it didn't make much difference. Coogan's death, the accusations and the subsequent trial had drained him. He had no strength to fight. Particularly, when it was for something he wasn't sure he wanted.

Tossing the paper towel in the dustbin, Doyle crossed to the door. Unwilling - or unable - to face his former partner and superior, he cautiously pulled the door ajar and peeked out into the corridor. What he saw made him draw back from the opening. At the far end of the hallway two men and a woman, each clutching Israeli made Uzi's, were slowly making their way toward him.

Fearful of attracting their attention, Doyle slowly let the spring loaded tension of the door draw it close. By pressing his ear to the narrow crack that ran along its length, the low whispers of the terrorists could be heard.

"Jill, there's someone in that room down the hall."

"We'll worry about it later, Cameron," the young woman decided. "Nathan said our main objective is Powers."

"What if whoever's down there has a gun?" Cameron protested.

Metal lightly clanged against metal. "They won't live long enough to use it."

"I think I should take a look," insisted the suspicious man.

"Then go ahead!" The exasperation in Jill's voice was clearly detectable - even through a closed door. "But, if Nathan asks where you are, I won't lie for you."

Regretting the ease with which he had relinquished his gun, Doyle glanced around the small room looking for a weapon - anything he could use to protect himself. Fighting frustration, he realized the only defense he had was the natural skills the CI5 trainers had honed in countless simulated attacks.

Footsteps drew closer as Doyle entered the last stall. The smell of urine and rancid flesh mixed to make his sensitive stomach churn. Breathing through his mouth to avoid the almost overwhelming stench, he pushed the door partially closed, but left it unlocked. If Cameron didn't see anything out of the ordinary, he might leave without making a thorough search. Climbing up onto the stool, Doyle squatted. Putting most of his weight on his left leg, he gently swung the right to loosen it up. It would be his only defensive weapon.

The outside door crashed against the wall announcing Cameron's presence. With his sense of sight impaired, Doyle relied on his sense of sound to tell him where his adversary was. The man was obviously not a professional, nor had he been trained very well - he made far too much noise.

The wall separating Doyle from the adjoining stall shook as Cameron threw the door open. Doyle braced himself and counted. Just as his adversary lifted a leg to kick his door in, Doyle rose from his crouch and kicked it first. Knocked off balance by the unexpected action, Cameron fell backwards, his head connecting solidly with a corner of the porcelain sink.

Doyle hopped to the floor, wincing as his right foot told him Cameron's head wasn't the only thing broken in the encounter. Ignoring the pain, he limped over to the Uzi. Retrieving it, he cautiously made his way over to the apparently unconscious man. Keeping the gun carefully out of reach, he felt for the carotid artery flowing through the massive neck. A soft throbbing greeted his seeking fingers. Grateful he had retained one tool from his former profession, Doyle unhooked a set of handcuffs from his belt. Snapping one ring around a limp wrist, he dragged the body under the sink. Threading the chain over a water pipe, he wrapped the remaining cuff around the loose wrist. Sighing with relief once this chore was accomplished, he took a perverse delight in completing the task of immobilizing his assailant. Pulling out sheets of toilet paper, he rolled the waxy substance into a ball before stuffing it into the open mouth.

Numb with pain, he climbed to his feet. This time when he glanced out into the corridor, it was empty. Cursing the injury that slowed him down, he made his way back to Powers' office, seeking the terrorists quarry.

The secretary's office was in a shambles, papers strewn everywhere. Her chair was overturned as though she had left it in a hurry.

Ready for anything, Doyle threw open the door that would give him access to Powers' domain - only to find himself face to face with his own gun. Pulling the Uzi up away from his target, Doyle shook with reaction. He had come within a hair's breath of shooting the man confronting him - George Cowley.

"Doyle!" Cowley's hand trembled as he dropped his arm. "I thought you were long gone."

"I stopped to go to the loo," Doyle vaguely explained. His eyes professionally swept the room, noting Powers' presence and the still immaculate appearance of the office. However, there was no sign of his partner. In a voice that barely concealed his fear and anguish, he demanded, "Where's Bodie?"

Gently massaging his temple, Cowley closed his eyes. "They took him. While we hid behind the desk, Bodie pretended to be Powers."

"What're they going to do to him when they find out he isn't?" Doyle brokenly whispered.

\* \* \* \*

Following his captor's directives, Bodie kept a supportive hand on Miss Dugan's elbow as he guided the secretary to the top floor of the old building. Though she had done remarkably well not revealing his identity, he could feel her fear. The plump flesh quivered beneath his hand making him wish there was something he could do or say to dispel her apprehension.

From the beginning, Bodie had realized he wasn't dealing with professional terrorists. With a professional, there would have been no warning, no time to conceal Cowley and Powers behind the desk and take Powers' place. In his late twenties, Bodie was far too young for a ministerial position - a fact his captors obviously hadn't taken into account. Another clue to their amateur standing was the fact not only hadn't they searched the office, they hadn't searched their prisoners. Bodie's Browning still lay nestled against his left shoulder. While its presence gave him comfort, it was little defense against Uzi's.

"Go in the room on your left," Jill ordered.

Opening the door, Bodie courteously allowed Miss Dugan to enter first. There could be no more danger inside the room than outside. Besides, it gave him time to make a quick study of the surroundings before his presence was noticed.

The room was obviously used for conferences. A long table ran its length, with plush chairs surrounding it. Inferior, more utilitarian style, seats lined the walls opposite the floor to ceiling windows.

"We've got Powers, Nathan," Jill announced, following her captives inside.

Pulling away from the window where he had been studying the activity below, Nathan eagerly approached his second-in-command. "Where is he?"

"Right here," Jill proudly proclaimed, poking Bodie in the back with the barrel of her weapon.

Color suffused the older terrorist's face turning it a bright red. Though he didn't raise his voice, it was powerful enough to strike fear into the hearts of the room's occupants, terrorist and hostage alike. "That isn't John Powers."

"He was in Powers' office," Jill protested, her voice quivering.

"Get back up there and find him," Nathan growled. As the intimidated terrorists started to turn away, he gripped Jill's elbow with a bruising strength. "Where's Cameron? He knew Powers by sight?"

"He thought he saw someone in a room down the hall and went to investigate."

"My orders were to apprehend Powers; anyone else was negligible."

Jill inclined her head. "I told Cameron that, but he insisted on checking it out."

Speaking loudly enough so the other occupants of the room could hear him, Nathan announced, "Disobedience will not be tolerated, from anyone. Do I make myself clear?"

Her elbow free, Jill gently rubbed it. As blood started flowing once more through the injured area the light of hope slowly extinguished in the young woman's eyes. Fear and doubt replaced it.

Once his emissaries had returned to their quest, Nathan focused his attention on Bodie. Smiling ingratiatingly, he derided, "I know you're not Powers, so who are you?"

Turning his body so it would block the terrorist's view of the frightened secretary, Bodie faced his captor. There was nothing else he could do to protect Cowley and Powers. Now his concern had to be for himself and the other hostages. Armed with Uzis, three men and a woman stood guard over the frightened pawns seated around the conference table. So far, there were seven women, ranging in age from their late teens to retirement. Apparently, the other ministers had left for their meeting on time. At least Bodie could be grateful for that.

A fist slammed into his face knocking him backward into Miss Dugan. Shaking off her supporting hands, he defiantly faced his attacker, the salty taste of blood filling his mouth.

"I asked you a question," Nathan growled, his left hand massaging the knuckles on his right. "I expect an answer."

"I'm the Easter Bunny," Bodie insolently declared.

Another fist slammed into Bodie's stomach doubling him over. His fingers itched to pull his gun and end the attack, but he knew he couldn't neutralize all the terrorists before they got him. Some of the hostages could be hurt in the cross-fire, or punished for his actions. It was too soon with too many unanswered questions to jeopardize their safety.

Waving his gun at an associate, Nathan ordered, "Michael, search Mr. Funny Man. You," the terrorist continued, motioning to the quaking secretary, "join your colleagues at the conference table."

A bruising search started at Bodie's shoulders and ended at the bulge under his arm. To the agent's regret, Michael located not only his gun, but also his ID.

Fear twisted the terrorist's face as he pulled the Browning from its holster. "He's armed, Nathan."

Inspecting the ID, Nathan nodded. "That's what you'd expect from a CI5 agent."

"CI5 knows we're here?" Each word rose in volume as Michael's eyes turned to the window.

"If they don't know now, they will shortly," Nathan calmly said. "You knew before we went into this it would be dangerous, Michael."

"I knew we'd grab the attention of the press," Michael conceded. "But, CI5 is different. They don't always play by the rules."

"Who says we're going to, either?" Taking Bodie's gun, Nathan pushed it into the waistband of his trousers. "Tie him up; I don't want him to be able to move so much as a finger."

\* \* \* \*

For once, Doyle understood how Cowley must feel as red-hot fire shot up his leg from his broken foot. His respect for the older man increased as he realized this was the kind of pain Cowley endured daily.

Breath wheezing from lungs unaccustomed to such activity, Powers complained, "Is it much further?"

"How should we know?" Doyle snapped, unwilling to find even a touch of compassion in his heart for the man he blamed for Bodie's plight. "You see any road signs?"

"Time for a rest, 4.5," the CI5 comptroller ordered, obviously feeling more sympathetic than his former agent. Leaning against a wall, his fingers raked at the cobwebs that had turned his faded, red hair a filthy white.

Their journey to the bowels of the old building had not been without incident. Twice, they had almost been discovered by search parties, the name of Powers on their lips. Bodie's ruse had bought them valuable time. Whether it would be enough to allow them to escape was still in question. Every minute they remained free, their chances increased.

Taking extreme caution, they had made their way to the basement. Here, Cowley found the tunnel that had been built beneath Whitehall during WWII, connecting the government buildings. Though in poor repair, it was still passable - so far. It had the invaluable advantage of anonymity. There weren't too many officials left who even remembered its existence. The possibility the terrorists would know about it was almost nil.

As his eyes rested on the panting minister he had been forced to protect, Doyle felt his anger and hatred grow. "Why did he do it, sir? Why did Bodie risk his life for him?"

"Because it's his job. Because he's dedicated," Cowley explained, before quietly adding, "And because he was scared."

"Bodie scared?" Doyle scuffed, regarding his superior with a skeptical expression.

Gently massaging his aching thigh, Cowley clarified, "When Powers sacked you, he gave you what you most wanted. Ever since Paul Coogan's death, you've been trying to decide whether

or not to stay with CI5. Powers made your decision for you."

Relief washed over Doyle as he recognized the truth in Cowley's interpretation. He also realized it was just the opposite of what his partner wanted. "Bodie's afraid to leave CI5."

"Where else would he go?" Cowley rhetorically replied. "There's no other job that suits him quite so well, or that he could do so competently."

"And still be legal," Doyle finished, smiling sadly.

Cowley nodded. "There are worse fates than death for a man like Bodie."

\* \* \* \*

The door swung open. Each time it did, Bodie would turn to look, fearful the person who entered would be Cowley or Powers. Though two men preceded Jill and Bryan into the conference room, they were strangers. Clerks, found hiding in one of the file rooms.

"If Powers was in the building," Jill reluctantly announced, "he's not any more."

Nathan crossed to the young woman and slapped her across the face. "I told you if this was going to work, we'd need Powers."

"We still have eleven hostages," Jill defiantly argued, holding a hand to her stinging cheek. "It can still work."

"No one will negotiate for secretaries and clerks," Nathan sneered.

The telephone rang, drawing everyone's attention. Crossing the room, Nathan lifted the receiver. The one-sided conversation ended with the shrill entreaty, "You give me John Powers; I'll give you the hostages."

Bodie studied the older man as the echo of the receiver being slammed into its cradle reverberated around the room. Earlier, when they had found Cameron handcuffed to a sink, Nathan had been calm, almost indifferent. He was anything but calm now. What made Powers so important to this complex individual?

The anger that had burned in Jill's eyes since she had been slapped was clearly audible in her voice. "Why didn't you give them our demands?"

"We don't have Powers."

"Maybe we don't need Powers," insisted Jill, defiantly addressing her leader. "Next time, tell them that two hundred years ago the Yanks threw us off their continent. Now we want them and their nuclear weapons off our island."

Appearing not to hear the young woman's impassioned plea, Nathan muttered, "We need to show them we're serious."

"They know you're serious," Bodie hastily reassured, a foreboding washing over him.

"No, no, they don't." Grabbing Powers' secretary by the back of the neck, Nathan pulled her to her feet and dragged her over to one of the windows. "But they will."

"Stop him!" Bodie appealed, fighting the ropes that bound him to the chair. "He's going to kill her."

"Nathan promised we wouldn't kill the hostages," Michael contradicted the agent.

Blood smearing the ropes circling his wrists and ankles, Bodie cried, "Can't you see, he's going to break that promise?"

Ignoring the crying woman in his arms, Nathan rationalized, "She defied us when she let Jill and Bryan believe you were Powers, Mr. Bodie. For that, she deserves to die."

Bodie flung himself, chair and all, at the terrorist. But he fell far short of his goal. As his head and shoulder slammed into the hardwood floor, he heard the familiar retort of his own gun. Before his horrified eyes, the lifeless body of the young secretary was flung out the window.

\* \* \* \*

The bright sun stabbed Doyle's eyes, making him blink. Though in disrepair, the tunnel had still been serviceable, allowing the three men to make their escape. Down the street, Doyle could see a cluster of police and SAS vehicles. Having no desire to be shot as a suspected terrorist, he held the Uzi high in the air with the barrel pointing down and cautiously approached the nearest officer.

"Hold it right there."

A gun pressing into his back made Doyle stand still. Before he could proclaim his innocence, a familiar voice reassured the alert copper, "It's all right, Constable, he's CI5 and so am I."

"Mr. Cowley!" The gasped reply showed the young officer already knew the older man's identity. "We thought you were one of the hostages."

"I very nearly was," Cowley sighed. "Now, who's in charge here?"

"Major Hendley of the SAS, sir." The constable pointed to a nondescript, gray van. "He's in there."

"Very good, Constable." As he started to walk away, Cowley turned. "By the way, what's your name?"

"PC Gerald Hall, sir."

"I'll remember."

"He will, too," Doyle warned the potential new recruit, as he limped after his superior.

Cowley paused on the steps of the van to address his injured agent, "Find yourself a ride to the hospital, 4.5, and get that foot taken care of."



"Later, sir."

"That wasn't a request, Doyle. It was an order."

Smiling, Doyle shrugged, "You're no longer my supervisor, remember? I was sacked this morning."

Before Cowley could argue the merits of the termination, an SAS major appeared in the opening of the van. "Is that you, George? We thought you were a hostage. When we contacted your office, your secretary said you had a meeting with Minister Powers."

"I did," Cowley confirmed, climbing into the van. "Quick thinking by one of my agents kept me and the minister from falling into the hands of the terrorists."

Stepping aside to allow the older man access to the operations base, Hendley observed, "Sounds to me like that man deserves a raise."

"Right now, I think he'd settle for keeping his job," Doyle muttered, glaring balefully at the silent minister who, despite their escape, was staying close on Cowley's heels.

"What's the situation, Bob?" Cowley requested, ignoring his insubordinate agent.

"Near as we can tell, there are fifteen to twenty terrorists," Hendley detailed. Indicating a map of the building, he pointed to the positions occupied by their opponents. Tapping the large room on the top floor, he continued, "They're keeping the hostages here. Luckily, all the ministers had left for a meeting in Parliament. However, there were still somewhere between ten and fifteen secretaries and clerks doing their jobs."

"And a CI5 agent," Doyle softly added.

Cowley's eyes studied the layout as he asked, "What are their demands?"

"That's what doesn't make sense," Hendley sighed, shaking his head. "I just had a conversation with a man named Nathan Reynolds. All he wants is Mr. Powers."

"Powers?" Cowley's eyes strayed to the minister. The formidable man who had greeted him the day before was nowhere in evidence. Haunted eyes roved the van in fear. Dirt powered the uncombed hair and streaked the pale face. The four hundred pound suit was torn and smudged. Who could want this man so badly they would risk their lives?

His own gaze resting on the disheveled man, Hendley continued, "Nathan says he's willing to exchange the hostages for Powers."

"You can't agree." For the first time in an hour, Powers found his voice. Putting up his hands, as if to hold off an attack, he cried, "You can't make me go."

An SAS lieutenant appeared at the van door. Breathlessly, he suggested, "You better come, Major. One of the hostages was just pushed out a window."

\* \* \* \*

Pain washed over Bodie like a wave crashing against the rocks. His left shoulder had taken the brunt of the fall and was either broken or dislocated. The glancing blow he had taken on the temple made him dizzy and disoriented. The nausea, he would like to attribute to the agony of his injuries, but if he did, he would be lying. The queasiness was linked to Miss Dugan's senseless death. It had been his job to protect her - and he had failed.

"Why did you do that, Nathan?" Jill demanded, looking as green as Bodie felt.

"To make them listen to me," said Nathan, pounding the table with a clenched fist.

His shyness disappearing in the wake of his anger and despair, Bryan pointed out, "We agreed to do this only after you promised none of the hostages would be hurt."

"Circumstances have changed." Slipping Bodie's gun back under his waistband, Nathan retrieved his Uzi, brandishing it with an insolence no one would challenge.

No one, except Bodie. His eyes no less piercing from his recumbent position, he asked, "Why?"

"I told you why," Nathan screamed, avoiding the condemning gaze.

"I don't want the answer to why you killed Miss Dugan. There isn't one." Groaning as Bryan lifted the chair and its reluctant occupant to an upright position, Bodie gasped, "I want to know what makes Powers so important?"

"You'd never understand."

"Try me."

Looking out the window at the fluffy white clouds playing tag in the bright blue sky, Nathan went to a place that lived only in his mind - and his heart. "My parents worked for Powers' father. When we were kids, we played together all the time. He said I was his best friend. Then, when we were ten, I found out what kind of a best friend he was. He had a big birthday party, everyone was invited except me. I wasn't good enough for his rich friends."

"You killed a woman because you weren't invited to a birthday party?" Bodie incredulously protested.

"Someone like you wouldn't understand," Nathan snapped, moving to stand in front of the agent. "I wasn't invited because my father was a gardener and my mother a maid."

Dropping his eyes, Bodie shook his head. "You're wrong. We all know what it's like to be ostracized. We all grew up being taught to keep our place." Raising his head, Bodie disdainfully glared at the emotionally crippled man. "But we don't kill an innocent woman to alleviate our pain."

"She wasn't innocent. She helped you let Powers escape." Nathan moved back to the window and studied the activity below.

Pain pounded in his head and drove stabbing shafts of steel into his shoulder. Ignoring it, Bodie studied Jill and Bryan, the only terrorists in his limited field of vision. The disgust he saw written on their faces gave him hope. Determined to end the situation before more lives were lost, he pressed, "What happens now, Nathan?"

"That's up to them," the older man asserted, pointing to the scurrying figures below.

"What if they won't give you Powers?"

"Then they'll be sorry. And so will you."

His soul in as much pain as his body, Bodie demanded, "Why didn't you kill me first? Why did you chose Miss Dugan?"

"I wanted you to know what it is to suffer," Nathan sneered. "Waiting and wondering when your own death will come."

Remembering the efficient, quiet, young woman he had tried to protect, Bodie whispered, "I'm suffering, but not for the reason you think."

Jill's gun hand fell limply at her side. A sob caught in her throat. "You used us. All you're after is personal revenge. You probably don't even care about the American invasion or their nuclear weapons."

"Why should I?" The benevolent mask slipped away as Nathan let his disgust and dislike surface. "Nothing you do will close those bases or turn this government against her American allies."

Jill shook her head in disbelief. "You said we could. You said if we took some hostages they would listen to us."

"Now they're listening to me," Nathan snapped, pointing a finger at his chest.

Putting her Uzi on the table, Jill backed away. "I won't help you anymore. We're letting the hostages go."

"Like hell you are!"

With disbelieving eyes, Bodie saw Nathan raise his weapon and point it at the slim, young girl. With all his strength, he threw himself and the chair at the target of Nathan's wrath. Overwhelming pain threatened to swamp him as his body impacted with hers. Barely conscious, Bodie heard - and felt - the bullets whipping through the air around him.

\* \* \* \*

Doyle tried to block out the pain of his injured foot as he hobbled out of the van behind his superior. The ache in his heart was too enveloping to ignore. What would he find on the pavement below the open window? Bodie's broken and abused body?

A sergeant rose to his feet and saluted as he reported, "It looks like she was shot in the head before they threw out her body."

His ragged breathing evened out as Doyle fastened on the pronoun - her. The victim couldn't possibly be Bodie. Above the roar of the city, Doyle could swear he heard Cowley sigh with relief.

"Do we know who she is?" Hendley demanded, his eyes resting on each of his men.

"I know," Cowley whispered. His gaze fixed on Powers, he said, "It's Miss Dugan. She was Mr. Powers' secretary."

Putting a consoling hand on the taller man's shoulder, Hendley offered, "I'm sorry, Minister."

Fear for his partner growing, Doyle turned away from the broken body. Would Bodie be the next target? His eyes fell in disgust on the cause of his friend's entrapment. This man wasn't worth Bodie's life.

Shaking off the SAS major's hand, Powers backed away. "You can't make me go."

"Go where?" asked Hendley in honest puzzlement.

"Up there," Powers impatiently replied, pointing to the top floor of the building. A man stood silhouetted in the sunlight looking down at them. "If I go up there, they'll kill me."

Hendley lowered his voice to a soothing cadence, "No one is going to make you go anywhere, Minister."

While Doyle wanted to contradict the Major's statement, he knew Cowley wouldn't appreciate his taunt. Instead, he said, "It's against the tenants of Her Majesty's Government to give in to terrorists demands."

"That's as it should be," a relieved Powers noted, tugging at this dirty, torn suit with a renewed confidence.

His anger and disgust blurring his vision, Doyle demanded, "Would you feel the same if you were up there now instead of Bodie?"

Powers disdainfully regarded the agent, "He's doing the job he was hired to do."

"The job you sacked him from," Doyle snapped. "He wasn't good enough to serve with you, but he's good enough to die for you."

Before Powers could defend himself, the unmistakable sound of gunfire rent the air. His broken foot didn't prevent Doyle from rushing to the nearest source of protection behind a police car. He wasn't surprised to find Powers already ensconced in its shelter. Wishing he hadn't relinquished the Uzi so easily, Doyle cautiously peered around the bumper toward the source of the gunfire. Would Bodie be the next body sent hurtling out the window?

As if in answer to his speculation, an object flew through space, shattering into pieces when it impacted the pavement - not far from the still body that had preceded it. Even in flight, Doyle recognized the shape. It was an Uzi.

"We give up." From the still-open window, a deep voice called, "We're laying down our weapons."

His eyes shifting to the entrance, Doyle saw the promise was accurate. Guns at their feet, two men stood with their hands in the air. Ignoring them, he rushed to follow the SAS men into the building. An arm reached out to stop him.

"Let Hendley's men secure the premises first, 4.5," Cowley ordered.

"I can't wait," Doyle growled, shaking his head. "I have to know what's happened to Bodie."

"Let them do their job first."

"Let me do mine," the CI5 agent cried. "You made us a team. You made us partners. We're supposed to take care of each other. Don't expect me to quit on him now."

"According to what you've been saying this morning, Powers sacked," Cowley shrewdly intervened. "As an ex-CI5 agent, Bodie is no longer your responsibility."

"Then I'll go in as his friend, not his partner."

"I can't allow a civilian in a potentially dangerous situation."

A slight smile curved Doyle's lips, the only visible sign of his defeat. "Then I guess I was wrong. Powers never sacked me. We had a difference of opinion. As far as I'm concerned, I'm still a CI5 agent."

"That's better," Cowley agreed, releasing his grip.

Free at last, Doyle pushed his way into the building. Though he had no ID to pin to his coat, no one tried to stop him. Reaching the stairs, he leaned heavily on the banister, using it in place of his damaged limb. Even so, pain shot up his leg like fire eating a dead tree. Shaky and dizzy, he defied his weakness, and relentlessly continued the climb.

Escorted by a contingent of SAS soldiers, the terrorists, hands cuffed behind their backs, were led past him. Their heads were bowed in what appeared to be shame. Following in their wake were the hostages. Shock had rendered them speechless.

Just outside the conference room, Doyle stopped and leaned against the wall, gasping. What would he find inside? Taking a deep breath, he prepared himself for the worst. The tableau that greeted him made him pause. Before him, lay the body of a man. The head had been blown apart making it almost unrecognizable. But, Doyle didn't need to see the face to know it wasn't Bodie.

Noticing Hendley's men had congregated at the other end of the long table, Doyle limped over to join them. A sergeant, who had been kneeling, rose and stepped away. At his feet lay

a young woman. There wasn't a mark on the pretty face. Bright blue eyes stared up at him, lifelessly. Bullets had stitched a path across her abdomen, nearly cutting her in half. At her feet, Bodie lay in the ruins of a wooden chair. Doyle could tell by the slight rise and fall of the powerful chest, that his friend was still alive. Blood-spattered clothes told of unseen injuries.

Grateful to get off his aching foot, Doyle eased himself down to the floor. Carefully, he rested his hand on Bodie's shoulder. "Sunshine?"

A groan was the only response. In another time or place, Doyle would have felt distress at causing his friend pain, but right now, he was so happy to find Bodie alive, he didn't let himself dwell on what condition the younger man was in.

Easing his grip, Doyle took a deep breath. For the first time since he had learned of Bodie's fate, his lungs filled with life-giving air. As he released the breath, the numbing fear for his partner diminished, allowing an almost paralyzing physical pain to take its place. A brief smile graced his tired face. Only a sadist - or a partner - would welcome the transition.

\* \* \* \*

Doyle rose from the hard chair, desperately needing the healing peace he would find in pacing. A dark glare from the desk sister made him return to his seat. The cast encasing his foot wasn't nearly as heavy as the fear enveloping his heart. According to the doctor, his failure to receive immediate medical attention could have severely damaged the muscles and tendons in his limb. He could be left with a permanent limp. His mind told him he should be afraid. But he knew his future lay injured in the emergency room down the hall - not with his foot.

The familiarity of the uneven steps drew his attention to the hallway. Exhaustion marking his wrinkled face, Cowley limped into the waiting room. Behind the mask his superior generally wore, Doyle could see a private pain that was probably visible to no one else. Though neither man would admit it to himself, nor to the other, Bodie held the key to their destiny.

"Any news?" Cowley asked, taking a seat across from his agent.

"I don't know the extent of his injuries," Doyle admitted, "but they have condescended to tell me he'll live."

Leaning his head against the wall behind him, Cowley sighed, "Always be grateful for small favors, 4.5."

His white coat spattered with blood, a doctor appeared in the entrance to the waiting room. "We're taking Mr. Bodie to a room now. As soon as he's settled, you'll be able to see him. May I suggest you make it a short visit? He needs his rest."

"How badly was he hurt, Doctor?" Cowley asked, rising to his feet.

"The bullet wound was superficial. It nicked his left side, causing a lot of bleeding but little damage. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for his left collarbone. It's broken in two

places. We've scheduled him for surgery tomorrow to repair it."

Biting his lip, Doyle reluctantly requested, "How's he doing mentally?"

"He appears a bit despondent," the doctor conceded, "but that could be attributed to a slight concussion. Right now, I'm more worried about his physical injuries."

A nurse appeared at the physician's side. "Mr. Bodie is in room 518, Doctor."

"Thank you, Sister." Returning his attention to the two men, the doctor cautioned, "Remember, keep it short."

Doyle was standing in front of the lift when he suddenly realized that Cowley hadn't followed him. Grimacing slightly, he limped back to the waiting room. His head bowed, his superior stood leaning against the wall. "Are you all right, sir?"

"Fine," Cowley snapped, pushing away from the wall.

Doyle studied the pale face in puzzlement. His superior was acting like a man guilty of a great wrong. "Are you coming?"

"I haven't got time right now," Cowley brusquely replied, walking slowly down the hall away from the lifts. "Tell Bodie the Prime Minister has asked Powers to resign his position."

"That should help his recovery," said Doyle, smiling for the first time in what seemed like days.

As he watched the older man walk down the hall, shoulders slumped against the weight resting on them, Doyle could only shake his head. Making his way back to the lift, he took it to the fifth floor. Quietly opening the door to room 518, he slowly entered. Bodie's eyes were closed, but Doyle knew his friend wasn't asleep. "How ya feeling, Mate?"

Though slightly daunted when he received no response, Doyle didn't let it deter him. Pulling a chair up close to the bed, he said, "I know you're awake, Bodie, so you might as well talk to me."

"I deserved to be sacked." Opening his eyes, Bodie's tortured gaze rested on his partner. "Powers was right. I have no business being in CI5."

"How can you say that?" Doyle demanded, his throat tightening as he observed his friend's obvious pain. "You did a good job."

"Did I?"

"Powers would be dead if it weren't for you."

"But Miss Dugan would still be alive." Closing his eyes, Bodie allowed a rare tear to escape his eyelashes. "I played God, deciding who would live and who would die."

Doyle watched the tear roll down the pale cheek in wonder. He had never seen his partner so vulnerable. While he felt proud that Bodie had granted him the privilege of witnessing his pain, Doyle experienced the impotence of knowing there was nothing he could say or do to heal to the mental wound.

"Can you honestly say Powers was worth saving?" Bodie demanded, roughly wiping away the tear with the back of his hand.

"No," the other man admitted. "You couldn't know things would turn out the way they did. Let it go, Bodie."

"Like you've let go of Paul Coogan?" Bodie innocently appraised.

"Touché." Doyle licked his index finger, before stroking in through the air.

His eyes shifting to Doyle's face, Bodie quietly suggested, "In the future, try to follow your own advice, Sunshine. At least once in a while."

"I'll try," Doyle ruefully agreed. "Those bastards out there make it hard sometimes."

"The lawbreakers?"

"No, our superiors . . . they can be more dangerous than any drug dealer or gun runner I've ever encountered."



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