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White Rage

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Extract

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She hadn't planned on letting things go this far. She'd been ambushed by a variety of influences, the effect of wine and grass, the slow-burning jazz. His persistence was also a factor, probably the major one.

He wanted her with a passion that was an anger.

Fine. It suited her to have him off-balance. She lay beneath him on the rug and looked at the ceiling and listened to him whimper. He uttered words that made no sense, long vowels, sawn-off consonants punctuated by tiny grunts and plosives. The weird language of a man about to explode. Brutespeak.

He groaned, then roared, and she thought of a zoo creature filling the night with anguished noise. She saw his mouth open, and the shadow at the back of his throat. His roar died suddenly. He let his face drop into her shoulder and whimpered. Then he sighed as if he'd run a marathon and was approaching meltdown, a coroner's slab.

She made a tiny sound that was intended to be one of appreciation or gratitude, designed to reaffirm his 'manhood', or whatever he called that quality he needed to prove. He was of slight build, thin-shouldered. He slid out of her and rolled away, reached for his cigarettes, lay on his back and flicked his lighter. It was a smoothly cinematic motion. She saw it as if she were a camera. She often looked at the world like this, tight shots, close-ups: it gave her a sense of control over her perceptions.

'Are you satisfied?' she asked.

'Spent,' he said. He laid a hand on the back of her neck. 'I hope I didn't hurt you. I get carried away –'

'If there was any pain, it was sweet,' she said. Mr Bigcock, she thought. Major Dick. And I'm just cunt, poontang, beaver. I'm just something to poke on the floor of his flash flat among the empty wine bottles. A pick-up in a club, a shag. The things you have to do.

'You want a drink?' he asked.

'I'd prefer some air,' she said.

'You mean you want to go *out* somewhere?'

'Just the balcony,' she said.

She got up, found her panties, pulled them on. She stepped into her jeans. She put on her white silk blouse.

He reached for her ankle and held it. 'Don't leave me,' he said. 'You'll break my heart.'

'Then join me.'

'In a minute. I'm a bit stoned.'

'Bring some wine. We'll drink it outside.'

'Anything for you.'

She slipped her feet into her shoes. Jeans, blouse, shoes: what else had she brought with her? An overcoat. A bag. That was all. She didn't want to leave anything behind.

Come and go, no trace.

She slid the balcony door open. The night was dense with the aroma of wet trees and rain on stone. Sparse traffic moved along Great Western Road towards Anniesland Cross. Up here, on the sixth floor of Kelvin Court, she had a good view of the northern reaches of the city: the high-rises of Drumchapel, the dense tenements and streetlamps of Maryhill. Further north, Glasgow gave way to the mysterious dark of the Campsie Fells. She'd camped up there once as a little kid in the days before her father had walked out and she remembered the smells of canvas and Calor gas and baked beans burning in a saucepan. The memory caused her a flicker of sadness. Baggage she didn't need.

He came out onto the balcony in a thick black robe. Looking pleased with himself, she thought. Freshly laid. Ashes newly hauled. He carried two glasses of red wine. He swayed, almost slipped.

'Just set it down for me,' she said.

He put the glass on the balcony ledge. 'You're a skinny little thing,' he said.

'With tiny tits,' she said.

'I'm not a breast man, personally.'

'I eat like a horse, and I can't gain a pound.'

'You work out, I bet,' he said. 'You're hard. Muscular.'

'I do some press-ups. I jog.'

'You dance nice,' he said.

'I'm flattered.' They'd met in the Corinthian, once a bank, now a club and bar refurbished like a vast flamboyant wedding cake. After some desultory conversation, they'd danced. She remembered the music, the thunder of the bass, the staccato drumming.

'You really move. Eye-catching.' He smiled, opened his mouth as if he meant to say something, but a drugged synapse must have collapsed. He drank his wine in silence. She didn't touch hers. She felt a pain between her legs. She was tender inside. She despised him for the hurtful way he'd used her body. She hated his skin and the idea of allowing him to fuck her.

He said, 'Christ, it's chilly. You had enough air now?'

'I like night. I like the air.'

'I just realized I don't know your name.'

'I thought it was uncool to exchange names on one-nighters.'

'Who said it was a one-nighter?' He touched her shoulder. 'I'd like to see you again.'

'You never know,' she said.

'Tell me your name. Come on.'

'Pass me my wine and I might.'

He laughed. He was giddy, but full of himself and

his prowess. He'd fucked her into ecstasy. She'd come back for more. Bound to. He stooped with mock courtesy. 'At your service,' he said.

He reached for her wine.

She pushed hard against his back, forcing all her considerable strength into her hands and arms. His glass went spinning from his fingertips and out into space and he said, 'Hey, what's this game?' And she pushed again even before he had time to turn his face round, bringing her hands up from a lower angle than before, shoving him just under the hips and causing him to tilt forward.

It was easy. He was wasted. He wasn't expecting it. He weighed as much as a shadow. He went over the edge and fell into the same downward path as the wine glass. She heard him shout. He struck the ground, the hard crack of his body smacking stone. Then immediate silence.

She didn't wait. She didn't look down to see how he'd landed. She emptied her wine glass, hurried inside the flat, put on her coat and stuck the glass into a pocket. She picked up her bag from the coffee table. She looked round a couple of times, then she let herself out.

She walked quickly from Fifth Avenue to Great Western Road, where she found a black taxi trawling for custom. She climbed inside and told the driver to drop her at an address in Govan, south side of the city.

'Nippy for the time of year,' the driver said.

She hated idle talk. She settled back and watched

the city go past in a series of streetlamps and shuttered shopfronts, gaunt tenements and closed pubs.

A dead city, heart of night.