

The Dark/Light

By Tom Ray

The Fox and the Hare

I fear the light. I fear it as much as a child fears the dark, hiding under the sweaty duvet cover, hoping for sleep to come. I fear being seen. Light singles me out from the crowd, when all I wish for is to be absorbed into the mob. I wish I were a shrimp, suspended in brine, with a trillion brothers and sisters for protection.

I'm at a gig and the bright stage lights penetrate an audience masked in darkness. I can be seen, can the band see me?

Perhaps they know what I do? What I've done? They can't know. Maybe I should stop? But then does the drinker stop boozing until their liver swells with poison? Does the smoker just stop smoking the sticks of death and coughing up black sticky tar? No!

I go over to the bar; she looks nice... blonde, blue eyes, slim, good hips, perfect Aryan. This is going to be tricky. I always keep talk to a minimum – I feel less guilty that way. Perhaps if I pretend she's a Nazi I'll feel even less guilty, although I'm being ridiculous. I'll be caught eventually, I'll trip up and make a mistake and they'll find me, but I can't stop now. Is an addiction ever a question of sanity?

I lean over and whisper in her ear, she giggles at my joke, but this only distracts her from what I'm really doing. I set things in motion.

It sinks into the alcohol and fizzes, the bubbles bombard it like depth charges exploding, throwing it off course. It breaks up like so many ships at sea and falls; the tiny pockets of air, like the suffocating breath of sailors. The amber coloured liquid shrouds its descent, she won't see it, they never do.

I take her hand with my sweaty palm and grip, she blushes with intensity. Though, I can never tell if the blush is because they are flattered, or simply the drug taking effect. By now it should be flowing through her arteries, like an unstoppable wave, a chain reaction taking place, flooding her brain and loins with desire. The effects are always the same.

I pull her from the bar, and her body is hot with reaction. I hold her up and lead her to the door, the bouncers give me a knowing nod, it's almost as if they suspect; but most likely not. They see me leave this place, The Utopian, every few weeks with a different girl on my arm, and the nod satisfies them, that she has left with a person that will take good care of her. As long as they're paid for their night of work, they're happy enough I guess.

It's early morning, but the dawn chorus is dampened by the noise of the crowds, all trying to find their way home. The pavements littered with people, some yobs, some just meeting for the first time, or standing in groups huddled together like penguins with goosebumps. The noise from the city of Birmingham drowns my guilty conscience; it's too loud to think or worry. I hail a cab with an arm, whilst she embraces me, her arms around my neck; if only she knew what I'm about to do, she'd close her grip around me until I went blue and fell to the ground.

The taxi stops, a small Asian man looks me in the eye, and I push this girl with no name onto the stained seats of the car. The smell is overpowering, like a musty wardrobe, full of clothes that belonged to a dead grandmother. The smell of age and

use. I close the door and tell the taxi driver to take us to the nearest hotel, a place that I've been before.

The neon lights of the city flash through the cab windows, showing the yellow of her hair. She leans her head on mine, half sleeping, and I look down at the black short skirt that barely covers her pale white legs. Her legs are well formed, almost athletic, and agile, like that of a hare, powerful but then again delicate. Her top half is barely covered, a low cut pink top that shows the tops of her white breasts, her chest like a platter she would serve up to any man who bought her the right drink. The guilt comes back in the quiet hum of the car engine, but perhaps her clothes show who she really is? Maybe she deserves what is about to happen? Maybe, she just teases men with her curves, and then laughs at their frustration.

I take another tablet; I'll need the energy to lift her from the car. I started taking them three years ago and they've changed my life, that's for sure; they make me feel strong, powerful, something I've always wanted to be.

My bathroom cupboard is like a miniature pharmacy, pills for every eventuality, but I always carry my tablets in my coat pocket just in case I'm unable to get back for any reason. We arrive at the hotel with a jolt from the car, I don't know what time it is but dawn has already set in.

The hotel is called the Winchester, a place that aspires to be greater than it is by having polished brass at every turn and uniforms that look almost theatrical.

I pay the taxi driver with a twenty pound note, but don't tip. I never tip someone for doing their job, I don't believe in rewarding the mediocre. The driver passes over my change awkwardly, and I walk away with my blonde date without looking back.

We stumble through the doors of the hotel and her shoes tap the marble floor rhythmically. I pay for a room for the night, the steward smiles as I pay him, I don't return the smile, and his smile ends abruptly. He hands over the key, he knows me from other times, and I can feel his eyes burning into the back of my head, like two red hot poker piercing through my skin and skull and searing the grey jelly inside, destroying my very being. I don't think he suspects though, I've been careful. I drag my girl into the lift and press the button for the seventh floor. She slouches against the mirrored wall, almost collapsing if not for the hand rail holding her up by her elbows. I kiss her neck and caress the under side of her breast with my back of my palm. She doesn't react, the effect won't wear off till the morning.

We exit the lift into a carpeted corridor with pictures of landscapes, dried flowers hanging from baskets on the walls, and white doors with golden numbers, like gateways to heaven, lining up on each side.

We enter a room numbered 112; I switch on the light and lay her on the bed before shutting the door. She isn't awake. It's like a white out, overwhelming, the body protecting itself from damage. She's on her back, I check her purse, I like to know who I'm with. I pull out a pink plastic ID card that reflects the ornate lights on the ceiling and look at the photo, her hair used to be curly. Her name is Olivia, much different from the others, more refined, higher in class even. By now her body is unanimated and paler than before, almost a lifeless shell. I check her pulse, she's still alive, it's just an instinct. Like when an elderly relative comes over on birthdays and Christmas, and falls asleep on the sofa, you need to make sure they're still breathing.

I pull her skirt down, and take off her top. Her white bra and knickers smoulder from the dark blue sheets of the bed. I go into the bathroom, a black tiled

room with chrome fittings and look in the mirror, my eyes are black underneath, I'm so tired. The bathroom light turns off with a loud clink, and the string recoils striking the tiles violently. I turn to her and tell her 'I'll be gentle' and walk over towards the door pressing the switch. Lights out.

The Morning After The Night Before

As I walk down the heavenly corridor with the bright lights of morning passing through the windows of the hotel, I feel contented. My body feels whole, but all is not right, there is something wrong with this perfect scene, something out of place, and then it hits me. I can hear screaming, a muffled screaming coming from room 112. I begin to run for the golden lift at the end of the corridor, and press the button to summon my escape. It doesn't come fast enough and the button with its red hue seems to mock me in its stubbornness, I press it harder but still nothing.

The stairwell! That's the best way out, but I'll have to be quick. The rooms on floor seven begin to open, the light spilling into the corridor like a flood on a sinking ship, and a panic in the air with the noise that has woken the guests from their slumber. The bemused individuals emerge looking up and down the way, still dressed in pyjamas and dressing gowns; the screaming continues. I push the door and enter the stair way, and am hit by a wave of air that instantly cools my blushing face. The stairs are dark but lit by dim lights, and I start my descent. I run down as fast as my legs can carry me, until my muscles ache with acid that burns in my calves and my head pulses. The vein on my temple sings in time with my heart, a chorus that I can't control and one that could give me away; I need time to compose myself. At the bottom of the stairs I wait under the first floor flight, lurking, waiting for my chance to walk through the lobby, hoping to leave undetected. I take a handkerchief from my pocket and wipe my head and face and fold it neatly back into the inner pocket of my jacket.

I look through the small glass window of the door that leads to the lobby, there's no way out, there are men on the door, someone must have called security. My mind is flushed with adrenaline, and I have descended from the heaven of the 7th floor to my own private hell. Maybe this was meant to be, but I won't leave without a fight. I open the door and walk briskly towards the exit. A large security guard looks me up and down, and walks towards me, the other is talking on a walkie-talkie. He takes me by the arm and asks me not to leave until they can figure out what has gone on in the hotel, 'police orders'. I try to struggle free, but it's no good, he's too strong, I should have taken another tablet before I tried to run. He grabs me by the back of my neck and I'm pinned to the floor, the top half of my face on cold marble and the bottom kissing carpet with a metal divider pushing into the bridge of my nose. I can't move and he knows I've done something; I shouldn't have tried to run. This is not a good start to the day.

I'm dragged into a small room behind the reception area, a secure room for such things as luggage or storage of supplies on dusty tin grey shelves. The burly guard looks at me with disgust; how can he judge me when his job is to be menacing, to hurt people. I don't say a word, just keep quiet until the Police get here, it won't be long now.

I take a deep breath and contemplate my fate, should I just come clean? Or perhaps Olivia won't even remember me, the girls before didn't seem to have any idea of what I'd done, maybe she's different though.

I wait under guard for about fifteen minutes and a man with slick hair comes in, he whispers to the oaf of a security man and he leaves, bumping his shoulders on each side of the door frame. This tall black haired man introduces himself as Detective Peter Kaiser of the Birmingham Police; he talks slowly and is nonchalant, he's a man who has done this a thousand times before. He's the sort of person you'd expect in a generic Hollywood cop film, who would casually light a cigarette and speak with a husky voice, before slamming your head on the table to get the right answer. He escorts me out of the hotel with the staring staff and guests watching, their eyes wide with fear; to a nearby Police car and reads me my rights on the street. I still say nothing. I sit in the car with the Detective in the back with me, I reach in to my pocket for my tablets, he grabs them and looks at the bottle, it's unmarked, I made sure it was plain so no one would ask any questions. He looks at me cautiously and puts them in his pocket carefully and looks back at me 'Now why would you have a bottle of these?' he asks, in his ironically gruff voice, he thinks they're the rape drugs.

We arrive at the station quickly and I look through the glass of the car window at the station, this fortress of justice. They can't prove anything surely, can they? Why do I keep doing this? Maybe I am addicted to the thrill more than anything. Fourteen times and never been caught, it's just too good, the Police are useless. I outwitted them for a long time and I doubt they can even keep me here for long; Olivia won't remember.

The Inquisition

'Interview with drug rape and GBH suspect in room 4B; Detective Peter Kaiser interviewing, the time is approximately 11.33AM.'

I shuffle on my chair to get comfortable. 'What did you do to this girl?' asked Kaiser. I don't respond. 'We know you started to run when the guard tried to stop you. Those aren't the actions of an innocent man, are they now?' I stutter an answer, 'I needed to get home, and changed for work; you haven't got any proof that I've done anything.'

Kaiser leans back in his chair, and exhales. 'No, not yet' he replies, 'but we're doing tests on her now, she claims she was drugged and then woke up in unfamiliar surroundings with no clothes on. That isn't exactly a normal situation, and we've got your signature on the bill for the room, you might as well save yourself the trouble and admit to what you've done'.

There's a rattle on the thick metal door, and a Policewoman comes in, she whispers to Kaiser and he nods his head. The woman leaves and the door shuts behind her, but it only stays that way momentarily, my beautiful Olivia walks through the door followed by the Policewoman. She looks different from last night, her hair is greasy and face bruised. The mascara that was applied so elegantly stains her cheeks, and her skin is shiny, maybe I lost control at the hotel. Her eyes strike mine, wide and fear-filled like an animal that was beaten by its owner. 'That's the guy from last night' she exclaimed, 'he was talking to me at the bar.' She breaks down into tears and looks at my face, I don't feel sorrow, she knew what was going to happen. 'That's all we needed, thank you' replied the Policewoman. She guides Olivia out of the room with a gentle embrace of her shoulders and the door slams behind her.

My heart sinks, I really am in trouble. Kaiser looks at me with blazing eyes, and a bead of sweat breaks from his forehead, he looks like he could kill me right now; but only the thought of going to prison stops him. I sit calmly, indifferent. I'm careful to control the muscles in my face, not to move them, not to give anything

away. Kaiser speaks after his short silence. 'You will be taken to a cell and searched for drugs.' I feel dread, how humiliating, but I must keep myself composed. 'There will be a Doctor present and you will be able to contact a solicitor after we have done the examination.' Kaiser sighs 'Do you know what makes me sick about people like you?' I stare into his eyes. 'You don't even feel regret for what you've done, you people are animals!' I don't say anything; he doesn't understand what it is to be me. I differ from the norm.

He drags me to the cell, into a gathering of people, a Doctor waiting inside and a guard by the door; Kaiser is present through my degradation. They tell me to take off all my clothes and I disrobe slowly, perhaps repeating the suffering that I put all these girls through. They see the scars on my chest as I unbutton my shirt, the Doctor looks with intrigue, I pull down my trousers, and take off my socks. Then I take the final plunge, I take off my underwear. Kaiser gives a confused snort, he's not sure what he's seeing, I can tell by his eyes. He is perplexed, now he knows the truth, now they all know. Kaiser wants to look away but he can't, him and the Doctor are hypnotised by me, my shell. The guard outside, unnerved by the silence, enters, and looks me up and down, his mouth opens. 'He's... he's a goddamned tranny, he's a fucking woman... holy shit.' Kaiser looks around at the guard with a decisive glance 'Shut your mouth Officer, and not a word of this to anyone, get back to your post'.

I stand in my humiliation, wishing for acceptance in a world that is not ready. My name is Kate. I was a woman but now, I believe myself to be a man, a feeling that I've had for a long time, and a thing I changed three years ago. I look at Kaiser in my nudity, my shame and ask. 'Can I have my tablets please? I haven't had my dose for today.' He nods with reassurance. I am Ms Jekyll, I am Mr Hyde.