

Hitchhiker

Ben Knighton exited the M5 at junction 27 doing one hundred and twenty, a manoeuvre which almost produced the required thrill of fear and excitement in himself, let alone the gorgeous young redhead reclining provocatively in the seat to his left. Judging the gap nicely between an Alfa Romeo and a Ford Transit, he pulled onto the roundabout at the top of the slip road with only the most necessary drop in speed, and immediately took the first exit heading towards the services. As he then decelerated rapidly and changed down from fifth to second for the ninety degree bend into the service area, he took the opportunity to “accidentally” brush the back of his hand against the girl’s three-quarters naked leg. As far as he could tell, there was no resistance to this.

He slid into the parking space, brakes fully locked, killing speed rapidly. He imagined he heard the girl gasp as the Ferrari’s nose came to a halt within inches of the car in front. Slipping the gear stick into neutral, he turned to her with a smile. “Coffee?” he enquired.

The girl smiled back, regaining her poise, and he lingered in his seat as she opened the door and got out. Her pleated skirt was barely long enough to cover the essentials even when she was standing, and in the act of doing so the view she gave him made his eyes narrow with pleasure. Joining her on the passenger side, he gave a negligent flick of the button on the key fob, locking the car, and together they turned and walked towards the waiting Little Chef.

The place was busy, and they were shown to the one remaining two-seater table over in the far corner by a smart, cheerful woman of about fifty. As they made their way towards it, Knighton could sense the attention his companion was attracting. Some of the men, the married ones, were surreptitiously glancing at her as she passed, trying to follow her progress as much as possible without their wives noticing. Others were gazing more openly – the two young men serving as male waitresses, in particular, were staring in obvious appreciation, and one leant over to whisper a crudity in the other one’s ear, setting them both smiling broadly. Seating Knighton and the girl opposite each other, the cheerful woman took their drinks order and departed towards the kitchen to carry out their wishes.

Over the coffee they made desultory small-talk, Knighton only half concentrating on the answers she was giving to his questions about herself. His mind was already racing ahead to later in the evening. Although, for him, it was merely a short dash along the A30 to her final destination of Redruth in Cornwall, he could plead police speed traps on the way to spin out the journey for longer. It was getting late, she was bound to be hungry in an hour or so – he knew an excellent hotel just outside Okehampton where they could find a sumptuous meal and a bottle or two of wine. And of course, once this was done with, he would suddenly realise – oh, how stupid, I’ve had far too much to drink to carry on driving tonight. And it is rather late. Surely it would be much better to lay up for the night and continue the journey in the morning...

He'd been extraordinarily lucky to find her. He'd stopped at the Sandbach services on the M6, driving home from business in the north. As he'd parked and got out of the car, he'd *thought* he'd seen a flame-red head looking in his direction with interest. A second glance and it was gone – so obviously he'd imagined it. Threading his way past other cars, RAC salesmen and a big sign warning "Car thieves operate in this area", he'd smiled to himself and patted his jacket pocket where the Ferrari's key fob lay, reassuringly solid. His baby was packed with all the latest anti-theft devices. No thief within a thousand miles, let alone this area, would be able to take her without the key.

As he'd driven out of the services, ready to integrate himself back into the traffic and roar away south, she'd suddenly been there, near the end of the slip road, thumb outstretched in the universal sign for begging a ride. Quickly assessing her figure, her face and the clothes she was wearing, he'd blessed his good fortune, decelerated to a halt right beside her, and opened the passenger door in one swift movement. As she climbed in (giving him that spectacular view for the first time), she had smiled appreciatively. "Nice," she'd said, and had smoothed her hand sensuously over the sleek leather upholstery. With a grin he'd accelerated away, and then (calculating speed and danger levels to a nicety), had proceeded to put the Ferrari through its paces. From that point on he'd made the journey down to Devon in record time even for him – all the while with one eye expertly trained on the road ahead, the other on the fantastic legs stretched out beside him.

And now, the coffee finished and the small talk over, they were on their way out again and the plan had become concrete in his mind. As he removed the key fob from his jacket pocket and opened the door to let her in (a nice gentlemanly touch, and it meant he could get a view from a different angle of the way her skirt rode up when she seated herself), she softly caressed the fiery red of the Ferrari's roof. "Nice," she said again.

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The hotel was everything he knew it to be, and the meal they ate was nothing but the best. Knighton had decided on champagne – Dom Perignon being his preferred choice – and plied her with it liberally. For his own part he drank very little. He wanted to be nicely relaxed – but he didn't want to be incapable.

Carrying out the second part of his plan – the realisation that he was unable to continue the journey that night – he went with the girl to the reception desk to enquire about the possibility of a couple of rooms for the night. He'd already bribed the night receptionist – a young man he knew well from his frequent visits there – to say that there was only one available. And: "Oh well," he said to her, "doesn't seem like much choice. Tell you what – you can have the bed, and I'll sleep in the bath."

The look the girl gave him was direct and full of meaning. He knew then that his luck was in.

The receptionist gave him a grin as he took the key. Already the anticipation of the night's pleasure to come was coursing through his body, but he forced himself to make the walk to the elevators as casual as he could. Once inside, he pressed the third floor button.

The room was this hotel's top of the range, and he cast a satisfied eye over it as he entered – and in particular at the enormous king-sized bed he'd made sure the room he was given would contain. The girl, obviously impressed, slipped quietly past him, and he saw her totter as she made her way towards the bed. He frowned – the champagne hadn't seemed to have affected her that much until now, and he suddenly hoped that he hadn't overdone it. His intention had been to break down any inhibitions she might just conceivably have, but it wouldn't do for her to flake out before he could indulge himself. Casting around rapidly for a solution, an idea presented itself in the form of the en-suite bathroom. "I think I'll have a shower," he told her, taking off his jacket and laying it neatly over the back of an upright chair nearby. Then, hoping she'd agree, and negate the effects of the alcohol quickly, he added, "Is that okay, or would you like one first?"

She was sitting on the bed now, smoothing her legs in a way he found very exciting, and she looked up at him and smiled. "No, that's okay," she answered, "I'll have one after you." As he turned to go into the en-suite, she added softly, "Don't be long, will you?"

Heart pounding with anticipation, he lingered a few minutes in the shower in the hope she would join him. She didn't, so after as long a wait as he dared, he stepped out and towelled himself down vigorously. Then, dressing in underpants and trousers only, to let her have the maximum effect of his bare torso, he went back into the main room.

The bed was empty. He glanced around the room, hoping fervently she hadn't collapsed from the drink he'd given her. The room was empty. Puzzled, he strode round to the far side of the bed to make sure she wasn't on the floor there. Nothing. He looked around again. And noticed something else. His jacket wasn't on the chair where he'd left it.

Suddenly, a gasp of horror shot out of him. Ignoring the fact that his top was bare, he ran out into the corridor, his head darting this way and that. She wasn't there either.

Panicking, he took the stairs two at a time. At the bottom, he crashed through the door into the reception area, pushed his way past a couple just coming in to the hotel, and threw himself out of the entrance into the car park.

His jacket, the girl and his car were gone.