

Incognito

What luck, he thought. She's reading *Dark Ritual*...

Aloud, he said, "I see you're reading one of my thrillers."

The noise drowned out his voice so, even though he was sitting directly opposite, she gave no reply.

Undaunted, he tried again, raising his voice a notch. "I said: looks like you have one of my thrillers there." He leaned forward and tapped the back of the book she was reading. Now, even the passenger in the next seat, with his back to them, heard him and turned slightly. But they never really look at you, not in the Tube; he knew that. Everybody knows that.

Startled, the young woman peeked over the top of the book she held and said, "Uh? Wo ... wotcher wan', eh?"

He raised both eyebrows: "That's me name there," stabbing with his finger at the bottom of the book's cover, "and that's what I wrote."

She flipped to the cover, read the name, glanced at him, reread the cover and then looked at him squarely: "Garn -- *fuck* off..." and went back to her reading.

"No ... really, I *am* the author." He fumbled in his coat, pulled out his wallet. With a flourish, he found his license and thrust it out. "There, there," pointing with a stiffened finger now, "that's me name, and so is that," now pointing at the book again.

With a harrumph, she quickly pushed his hand away: "Just *sod* off, awright ... I'm tryin' t'read." Really! What some men will try, she thought.

Seemingly anxious now, he pointed to the small photograph on the rear cover. "Hey, c'mon, just ... just ... take a look, would you?"

He jabbed at the book again, until she finally turned the book over, and stared at the photo: a youngish man, perhaps thirty, black wavy hair, a tanned and cherubic face, wide set eyes and just the hint of a smile on sensuous, full lips – all

supported by a slightly overlong, but cute, neck. His skin looked very smooth and inviting. As the thoughts intruded, she ran her tongue around her teeth, read the name on the book again, glanced at the photo again and said, "Garn, lemme see that license again."

He handed her his wallet with the license showing through a clear plastic window, and she read 'Richard Stark', with an address somewhere in Cricklewood Lane. Isn't *that* a coincidence? she thought. Aloud, she said, "Fancy that now ... you living just down the road from me."

He raised his eyebrows again. "Oh?" Now the smile was wide.

Looks a bit better that way, she thought, not too bad. "'Sright. My flat's at Golders Green, been living there for years, y'know." That was a lie, but she didn't want to tell him she was new to London.

His smile broadened even more. "Well, yes, *fancy* that then ... we're practically neighbours, aren't we?"

The train rumbled into Hampstead and squealed to a bumpy stop. The last remaining passenger, in their carriage, got up and left without a backward glance. She watched him go and then said, "Garn – did you really write this?" She puckered up her brow slightly, as though the effort of asking was too much for her, and flipped the book over and over as she spoke. The train groaned up to speed again.

Still smiling, he said, "Yes indeed. That's me."

She was beginning to think he looked rather handsome. "Well, I never," she said, "fancy that, meeting the author of the very book I'm reading." Her voice had a mixture of amusement and awe. She started to giggle and went back to her reading, thinking again: Looks nice, but what's he *really* like?

He looked at her, sizing her up -- her lank, black hair, her eyes heavy with mascara, her deathly pale skin, her thin features. Her appearance was typical working-class Londoner, her accent Cockney. Her open topcoat showed a lot of cleavage and even more leg. One could almost say she was overly under-dressed, and he mentally chuckled at his clever play on words. Perfect.

Abruptly, he asked, "So ... what's *your* ... name?"

"Hmmm ... wotcher want that for ... um ... Richard?" She giggled again, now looking at him suggestively.

"Well, you know mine now ... it'd be nice to address you properly. Wouldn't it?" It'd be even nicer to *undress* you properly, he thought. Or, improperly. He made sure his voice had just the right touch of sincerity. Warm and inviting.

The train began to slow as it approached Golders Green. She put the book into her bag, and began to button up her coat, then paused. "'Ere, I thought you lived in Cricklewood ... wotcher getting' off at Golders Green for?" It would have been quicker to get off at Hampstead. She stood up as the train slowed.

He joined her, swaying slightly, and said, "Oh, I always get off here, and then catch a taxi back. Or a bus." He smiled, adding to the lie, "Sometimes I just walk back ... it's not far, is it?"

"Oh. Yeah." She looked a bit flustered. "Silly me...."

"So: what *is* your name?" The train squealed to a stop, and they stepped off together.

"Hmmm, Linda. Linda Blake." Now she smiled, a wide smile that showed large white teeth that looked too big for her mouth. Reminds me of a horse I knew, he thought, while she lifted her free hand, as though to cover her mouth, but continued the motion to brush back a wisp of hair hanging. He looked into her eyes and sensed anticipation.

Pretending not to notice, he matched her smile. "That's a nice name ... Linda." He glanced around. "Look, it's still a bit early," pointing to his watch, "would you like to have a pint before bed? There's a pub nearby, as you probably know." He raised his eyebrows once more, quizzical but inviting. She hesitated, he cajoled: "Oh, come on, just *one* drink, and then you'll be done with me." He laughed quietly and pleasantly, took her elbow with his left hand and began to walk her to the escalator. The last of the other passengers were ahead of them, none of them looking back, of course. Just as well, he thought, as they both stepped onto the escalator.

She giggled some more. Oh, why not ... might be fun, finding out about a real author -- I've never *had* one before. "Oh, awright then ... *Dick*." She emphasized the last word and deliberately brushed against him. "Let's go to my favorite, eh?"

Still smiling, he nodded, his right hand in his coat pocket, fingering the coil of piano wire and the hard handle of the flick-knife. Thrilled by its hardness – God, it's so *hard* -- he started

to sweat as his penis engorged and images of sticking both *in* made him feel giddy from his suppressed frenzy. With an effort, he gave her arm a reassuring squeeze, and began wondering how his new novel would turn out this time.

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