

In the event Danny was at least half-right.

She rolled up two days later.

Maybe two days was long enough to forget her humiliation at John's hands, maybe she didn't care, but she wasn't looking for John anyway.

And in that event she was also lucky. Rab had just come in for lunch. He climbed down out of the tractor as the red Porsche came round the corner of the yard.

It was a bright sunny day, cold outside, but the sun through the glass had made the cab warm. He was pulling his sweatshirt back on, chilled by the change in temperature. She saw his armpits as he reached up to pull it over his head. She remembered Jimmy's description of his hair. It did look dyed, unnatural. He reminded her of those petulant, lean-hipped rock stars, heavy with mascara in ghost-white, night-life faces. What an odd exotic creature to work in such a place. He looked across at her directly, closing the tractor door. He was attractive, if somewhat predatory looking. He walked towards her. And vain with it, she decided.

His hair wasn't quite as white as Jimmy had described it. He probably had been bleaching it after all. He bent down to the car door. The window slid down with electronic ease. She saw his face quirk with amusement at that. She wasn't sure if she was going to like this man. "You must be the cousin," she said.

He half-smiled, disconcerting her, his face plainly saying, Yes? What do you want? She was annoyed to feel herself flushing, decided she didn't like him. And yet her brother seemed to have liked him best. She felt an irrational disappointment in him. He was just another vain little smart-alec.

"I'd like to talk to you."

Rab laughed and looked away from her. Like brother, like sister. They even used the same lines.

"What's so funny?" She glared at him, feeling her self-control slip.

"Nothing."

"Get in." She reached over to release the passenger door.

Rab stopped smiling. "Go fuck yourself."

She stared at him in a moment's surprise, then felt her face burn up with anger. "None of you have any manners, do you?"

"Yours don't exactly have high visibility either."

He saw perplexity fighting anger. She beat Henderson for arrogance anyway. "Nobody likes being told what to do on their own property," he elucidated.

"It isn't your property."

"Well, it sure as fuck isn't yours, so why don't you fuck off?"

Her eyes hardened just like her brother's would have done. They were brown, not that clear psychopathic blue of his, but the effect was just the same.

"Alright. Both your cousins seem to think they can afford to ignore me, you too, well we'll see." She revved the car up, looked behind her preparatory to reversing out, then abruptly stopped. Rab looked at her face then tried to peer through the car to see what she'd seen. He straightened up.

Danny had come out of the tractor shed. He was crossing the yard, head down, lost in thought. He looked up, saw the car. Rab saw his mouth set.

He moved purposely towards the house. He was going to ignore her. Rab grinned, bent back down to her. She was furious. "Looks like Danny doesn't like you either."

"I'm going to take it to the police." Her voice was low, intense. "I don't care who knows. You

had something to do with his death and I'm going there to tell them so, right now. God help the lot of you."

Rab stopped her quickly. "Wait."

She was fuelled up with her own indignation and he realised he had pushed her too far. He wasn't sure he could placate her now. "You wouldn't want me in your car, smell that."

She frowned then sniffed. She hadn't really noticed it but he was right, the place stank.

"I'm spreading muck. Believe me you wouldn't want it in there. I'll talk to you if you like, but not here."

She could see the tension in him. Now he was trying to be 'nice'. Did he think she was stupid? She felt an overpowering urge to tell him where to go, just the way he worded it, wipe the condescending smile off his face. "No," she said and had the pleasure of seeing his face slacken, pale slightly. "I think I want to see Danny."

Rab felt an urge to laugh. He could feel it tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"I want to see Danny tonight. You tell him that. And he can bring himself, I'm not running a bloody chauffeuring service. You tell him that too. Eight 'o' clock. Or he can go to hell. You can all go to hell."

She slammed the car into reverse and reversed out of the yard.

"I hope John isn't on his way in," Rab muttered, frowning, expecting to hear a crump.

But nothing happened. He saw Ian watching him from the shed doorway. When Rab moved towards the house Ian followed him.

Rab went in to give Danny the good news.

"What did she want?" Danny's face was angry.

Rab smiled, enjoying it. He didn't know why, didn't try to analyse it. "To see you, tonight, at eight."

"She can get fucked."

"I expect that's what she intends."

"I don't see anything funny in it."

"Don't you? She threatened to go to the police. How about that for amusement factor? Whatever you said to her you haven't made it any better. If you don't go to see her..." Ian came in, undoing his jacket and looking at them both. Rab turned back to Danny, shrugged. "...I'd say we're fucked."

Danny turned away. "Fucking cow."

Rab laughed and sat on the table. "You do like her, don't you?"

Danny was saved the bother of replying by John coming in the door. "What did she want?"

"Question of the day. Who knows the secret of the woman in the red Porsche?"

John frowned irritably. "What did she want?"

Rab took out his tin and extracted a cigarette. "She wants to see him," he used it to point at Danny, "tonight."

"Why?"

Rab shrugged and began patting his pockets.

Mrs Ostler came in, effectively silencing the conversation for the full ten minutes it took her to explain the lunch arrangements, the laundry, and half a dozen other things. Rab watched John's impatience grow. He smiled some more.

She went eventually.

"Someday I'll wring her fucking neck," John muttered when she'd barely closed the door.

Ian began serving up food like some well-paid butler. It was as good a way of blending as any, a lethal, silent eavesdropper.

John sat down with a thump, saying aggressively, "She threatened to go to the police."

Rab laughed. "How did you guess?"

"There wasn't anything else to threaten."

"And she knew she'd have to?"

John looked at Danny. The look was speculative. "I expect so."

Rab was surprised to see the spark of anger in Danny's eyes. John's face was bland. The two of them looked at each other the way they always did, precluding the rest of the world.

Rab felt a sudden urge to shake them up, drag them back into the real world. "Don't go."

John looked at him. "Don't talk stupid."

"Why not? Leave it, see what she does."

"You fucking mad or something? You know what she'll do."

Danny piped up. "So now you want me to go?"

"What I want doesn't enter into it. You have to go." John fixed his eyes on his face again.

Danny stared back at him. Rab looked at them both, suddenly confused by the animosity between them. What the fuck was going on?

Ian handed him a plate. He took it absently, burning his fingers. He watched John take his then push it away. He got the feeling he'd like to push it right off the table. He watched Danny take his and got the feeling he'd like to push it in John's face.

Rab began eating slowly, watching the by-play.

Danny began to eat, head down, ignoring everyone.

John sat and looked at him and did not make any attempt to eat. Rab realised he had lost even more weight. Perversely, it made him look bigger, showing his bones, paring him down.

Suddenly he attacked his food, wolfing it down in the time it took Rab to eat two or three forkfuls. Equally suddenly he pushed it away, cutlery on top. Finished. He had not cleared his plate.

No other reference was made to Henderson's sister. John drank three cups of tea in rapid succession then went out without speaking.

When Rab spoke to Danny he received a monosyllabic answer. He saw Ian studying him, smiling.

Suddenly Rab realised he was waiting for him to leave.

He got up, unsettled.

John wasn't that nuts.

He went out and climbed back into his tractor.

Was he?

Ian cleared the table, leaning against Danny's shoulder as he lifted his plate. Danny tugged away from him. Ian laid his hand on his hair, feeling the tangles with his fingers.

Danny squirmed from underneath him. "Don't do that." His temper was in shreds, his face white with it. He could feel his heart thumping.

Ian licked his lips. Danny's emotions had long associations. Hard and happy, they were tattooed into the palms of his hands. "Touchy," he said, picking the plates up again, aware of his own erection as he moved towards the sink. He put them in and filled up with hot water.

Danny watched his back, wondering how long it was going to take the greasy little bastard to make a move. He got up and put his jacket on.

"I'll be out in a minute," Ian said, smiling at him.

Danny zipped it violently. "You can stay here all fucking day for all I care."

Ian's smile broadened. He turned back to the sink.

The pans on the rack rattled as Danny slammed out the door.

John was waiting for him in the shed.

He hadn't expected that. He didn't even see him.

He was thrown against the tractor with a force that nearly broke his back.

John was dragging him back into an upright position only to bang him back against it again.

Danny made an ugly grunting sound as John dragged him up again. "Get up." He pulled Danny up, pinning him, panting, against the machine. "Now you listen to me."

Danny's face was turned away, scrunched up with pain. John spoke in his ear, teeth bared, lips bloodless.

Ian slid in noiselessly through the open door and moved silently into the dark. He could hear Danny's breathing, hoarse, rasping.

"I want to feel nothing in you Danny. When you come back you better be pristine. You hear me?"

Danny nodded.

John punched him back again. "I asked, did you hear me?"

Ian could see Danny's face now, white and sickly. Even his lips looked pale and pained. This was their ultimate intimacy, hidden from everyone. Ian squeezed himself through his pocket.

John pulled Danny's head back by the hair.

"Yes." Danny's voice was thick. "I hear you."

"I'll kill you Danny, that's a promise."

Ian saw Danny push himself upright, palms flat against the tractor, bracing himself. He dropped his head back exhaustedly. Ian watched him do it, could see it even from where he was, could feel it even though it wasn't directed at him. He squeezed himself tighter, enviously, offering his soul to anyone who would listen. But he stayed where he was, only a fixed point in their distant orbit.

"You bloody heartless little thug..." John's voice was low, pained.

Ian watched him hesitate, start to say something more, and then he bent forward, breathing the words into Danny's mouth.

The kiss changed, grew. There were surreptitious fumbblings which became feverish movements. John never stopped kissing him. It only lasted a couple of minutes. Danny made no noise, but Ian saw his hands clutch at nothing on the side of the tractor, saw the urgency of John's movements, then it was over. John pushed up off him. Ian waited in a pitch of excitement to see how he would finish it.

He didn't.

He stood back, watching Danny get dressed, obscuring Ian's view. Danny moved slowly, pulling his trousers up, picking his jacket up off the floor. He put it back on. John dried his hand on a tissue, scrunching it into a ball and throwing it onto the floor with a savage energy. It was as if he had only skimmed the surface of his temper off to leave the heart of the fire still raging below. "I meant what I said."

Danny just watched him, saying nothing.

"You come back here intact..." his voice changed, sounding just as violent as before, "or I'll slit your fucking throat."

"Alright." Danny's voice was hard, unexpected in that silence.

Ian saw John move forward to kiss him again and then slap him hard across the mouth. He heard Danny's head bang on the door of the tractor. "Just to fucking remind you." And he turned and went out.

Ian stood there a moment, aware of his own raging pulse. He watched Danny slide down the door and crumple on the step. He could see the flare of red on his face where John had slapped him. He took a breath and let it out slowly, then moved towards him out of the gloom.

Danny looked up. He was holding his ribs as if they ached.

"Been bad to you?" He wasn't smiling.

"Get lost."

"Why do you put up with it?"

"Why don't you mind your own business?"

"You're just a possession. Droit du seigneur."

"Leave me alone."

Ian came over to him, stood by his side. He began stroking his hair. Danny pulled away from him, but Ian simply followed. Danny lost the energy to struggle and lay still under his hand.

"I could love you." Ian's voice was rough with excitement. He felt his face burn.

"Leave me alone." Danny pulled his head free again.

Ian followed relentlessly, letting his fingertips delve slightly into the red silk of his hair, rubbing it between finger and thumb, feeling the soft illusory heat of him against his skin. "I've always taken care of you. What's he ever done?"

Ian felt the change in him, as if he was becoming unravelled. All his magnetism seemed to leave him. In that moment he became human, something vulnerable, weak.

Ian coaxed his head in against his leg. Danny lay there, cheek against his thigh, unresponsive. Ian wiped the warm tears with his hand. He could feel the fine stubble on Danny's skin, the bone of his cheek. He stroked Danny's hair, pressing him tight, encouraging him, murmuring to him.

Danny suddenly buried his face in his leg, wrapping his arms around it. Ian looked down at his head, held it gently in both hands, rubbed Danny's shoulders.

He could feel himself aching with it, but his hands remained gentle, his voice soft, consoling.

Danny clung to him like a man drowning, desperately alone.

Ian's hands soothed on.

The evening meal was strained.

It was obvious to Rab that Danny and John were not friendly.

Danny picked at his food a little and then left to get washed. John perversely ate everything in sight, even attempting two portions much as he had done in the old days, but Rab saw that he couldn't manage it any more. He pushed the second plateful away half-eaten.

Danny was ready promptly at twenty to eight. He obviously intended to arrive on the button.

"Take the Rover." John threw him the keys.

Their eyes met momentarily then Danny went out the door.

Danny stood outside, watching the clear peppermint moon above his head. November always seemed to be like this, still and bitterly cold for a week or two, and then the winter gales started.

The buzzer sounded. He pushed in and went up the stairs. He had to knock for admission when he got there.

She opened the door and looked at him. He looked back, his face hard and unfriendly.

He began to wonder if she was going to let him in at all when she suddenly stood back. He went in and stood there. The hall was in darkness. She closed the door. He felt her pass him and the hall became light. She was holding open the living room door. He went in.

The room was half-lit, very warm. The other sofa was still missing. She had moved the framed poster of the man and baby. The blinds were gone. Instead thick velvet curtains hung there. They were drawn, making the room even darker, redder. She had placed a long, low table in the centre of the room. There were bottles and glasses on it and what looked like an ice bucket.

She was wearing a red silk dress, very ostentatiously feminine. She looked like an advert for five star brandy. She came over for his jacket. He took it off and handed it to her.

She felt the residual heat of him as she took it out to the hall, the faint animal smell from it. He was wearing an old grey sweatshirt, jeans. Clean work clothes. She felt sure he'd done it

deliberately. She smiled dryly to herself. He was wasting his time. He was the male equivalent of Marilyn Monroe - he'd look good in a potato sack.

He watched her come back into the room and felt sure she wasn't wearing a bra. He looked away.

"What would you like to drink?"

"Nothing." He didn't look at her.

She stood there, trying not to be angry. "Be friendly," she said, keeping her voice level. This time he did look at her.

"Why?"

She forced a smile. "Because it's pointless being enemies."

"You blackmailed me into coming here, that isn't exactly friendly."

"Would you have come if I hadn't?"

He shook his head.

"Well then." She smiled again, a little warmer this time. "What would you like to drink?"

He looked at the table, saw the rum, looked up at her. "Rum."

His eyes had that same vindictive glint in them she'd seen before. She made up his drink, trying to ignore the feel of them on her. "Want anything in it?" she asked without looking up.

"No."

She shrugged and handed him the drink. She saw that he kept his hand well away from hers when he took it. She felt a spurt of irritation. "I'm not planning an assault, you know."

Infuriatingly, he stared at her, saying nothing. She poured herself a whisky and drank it. She poured herself another and felt the warmth hit her stomach. She sat down beside him, curling her legs beneath her and looking at his profile. He looked dead ahead, like a surly schoolboy waiting for the lecture.

"Why do you dislike me so much?"

"Why should I like you?"

That seemed unanswerable. She was silent a moment then tried again. "Look, we don't need to be friends, but you could try to be civil."

He turned and looked at her quite suddenly. He didn't speak. Instead he took a long drink of rum. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "What do you want?"

She felt as if he'd pushed half a grapefruit in her face. She opened her mouth but nothing came out. She looked at her glass.

Danny drank the rest of his drink. He had to get this over with. He put his glass down.

She watched his hands, long, white. She saw the fine red-gold hair on his arms.

"You're causing me a lot of grief. My brother doesn't like this." He could see her faint outrage at the words, and the faint interest, the sly, tell-me-more urge to hear all the dirty little details. "He doesn't like me being here."

She found her tongue quickly enough. "Are you saying he's jealous?"

He could hear all the petty morality in it, and the hot, itchy crotch. "I'm saying that he doesn't like me being here. Tell me what you want and I'll do it. Then I'll go. This has got to be the last time because..." Danny stopped, looking for the right way to phrase it and realised there wasn't a right way. He knew it wasn't going to work. She was used to getting everything her own way, just like he was. Nobody ever said no to them. She would no more understand than he had.

"I don't want anything." Her voice was frosty.

Danny wanted to slap her. He wanted to slap the lying, devious little bitch into next week. "You can't just say it, can you? Think your tongue will shrivel up? Think I give a fuck what you want or why?"

She was shocked to see he was raging angry. It seemed to have come out of nowhere. She felt panicked by it, fearing he would get up and stalk out like he did last time. She reached over, held his arm. "Please, don't go." She sat there holding him.

Danny looked at her, wondering how much it would take to keep her quiet. Abruptly he relaxed. She got up.

He watched her making up new drinks. If he walked out on her now she'd pester them to death. If he gave in she might do the same.

She sat down again, looked at him cautiously. He took some of his drink then surprised her by asking, "What do you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes, do... for a living."

"Oh," she said as if she had suddenly grasped an ornate problem. "I don't work." She looked at him and smiled. "Family money. Didn't Jimmy tell you?"

He shook his head.

"Jimmy liked being a policeman. He didn't need to do it."

"Did you find him?"

She looked at him, momentarily confused, then her face tightened. "Yes, why?"

"Must have been a shock."

"Yes," she said again and he noticed this time she had paled a little. He let it drop.

He looked at her long red nails. "Are you wearing red underwear as well?" He smiled at her.

She looked up, startled, then she smiled back. "As a matter of fact, yes."

"Just like your brother."

"What?"

"He liked his underwear to match as well." He couldn't keep the contempt out of his voice.

She looked at him and he knew what was coming. "You really don't look queer."

"You said the same about him."

She tilted her glass, looked into it as if she expected it to tell her something. "Yes..." she stopped, picking her words, "but in retrospect... the moustache, the job. And he was always very anti, overreacting if it came up in conversation. I don't see any of that in you..." she paused again, "or your brother." She didn't meet his eyes.

Danny looked at her. I'll bet, you dirty bitch.

She looked at him now. "Did you really have sex with your brother?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Danny smiled at her.

"I think Jimmy just wanted to believe it. It was his excuse for taking you away. I think he was justifying himself." She paused, went on, "You're not really queer at all, are you?"

Danny shrugged.

"Don't you care what people think?"

"You mean what you think."

"Alright then, doesn't it bother you if I think you're queer?"

"No."

"Not even if you aren't?"

"No."

She laughed without humour. "So I'm back to square one, none the wiser, and that's the way you intend to keep me."

Danny drank a bit more. "It makes no difference what I say to you. If I say yes you won't believe me. If I say no you can't really trust me, because the diary will always be there, at the back of your mind, calling me a liar. Either way you'll never know for sure." He lifted his sweatshirt and rubbed his belly with deliberation. "Will you?" He let it drop again.

He saw her eyes flick quickly over him. "Tell me anyway."

He smiled and tossed back the rest of his drink. He licked his lips and looked at her levelly.

"Yes, I am, and women don't interest me." He watched the words sink in, could feel her balancing them up.

"I don't believe you."

He handed her his empty glass. "See?"

She got up and refilled it and handed it back to him. He felt pleasantly drunkish. Just warm, happy, relaxed. She was amusing him. The whole thing was amusing him.

"I can't believe you."

"Why not? Why should I lie to you?"

"I don't know." She looked genuinely perplexed. She looked at him suddenly, her face lit by something almost like cunning. "Is your brother a homosexual too?"

Danny felt a fresh surge of anger, spoiling his mood. Oh very crafty Miss Muffet. Armed with prior knowledge, WPC Henderson makes a daring foray for information. "No." Eat your heart out, you devious bitch.

She looked disappointed. Danny wasn't sure if it was because she would have preferred the thrill of having seduced a homosexual or because her ploy had failed. He felt happy again, enjoying her discomfort. She was looking at him again.

"Have you ever had sex with a woman?"

"No."

Her face lit up, just as he had expected. "How can you be sure then?" Then in a lower tone, "You're a virgin."

"Technically."

"You are."

"I said yes."

"You can't be sure then."

"I am."

She shook her head.

He looked into her eyes, holding them. "Why is this so important to you?"

She didn't answer, tore her eyes away.

"Do you want me?"

"No," she said, looking up at him too quickly, pink as a picture.

"Why shouldn't you? I'm not that bad."

"You're gorgeous. As you damn well know."

"Thank you." Danny heard himself in surprise. Quite the polished performer Daniel. It had the desired effect.

"No seriously, you are. You must know that."

"Must I?"

"You must have been told before now."

Danny shrugged.

"You're beautiful, quite unreal. I've never met anyone so attractive." She was warming to her subject.

"I think you're embarrassing me."

She laughed. "I suppose it's too late now to admit that I do fancy you a bit."

"Go ahead, admit it." Danny's voice was doing it again. He could no more stop it than stop the dumb seduction lines.

"I think you're very sexy..." She stopped.

"And?"

"And I wouldn't mind making love to you." She laughed and drank some of her drink.

"I thought you didn't want me?"

"I lied." She looked at him, face suddenly intent.

He shook his head. "I couldn't do it."

"You could try."

"You've wanted this all along."

She didn't answer. She slid along to him and slid her hand inside his sweatshirt. He could

smell her perfume, strong as Henderson's aftershave. She kept her head down. Her hair was thick, jet black. She pressed against him. He felt her breasts, full and warm, against his arm. She lifted her head suddenly and pressed her lips to his mouth. He could feel the fervid excitement in them. Danny closed his eyes, but did not kiss her back. He had not yet decided.

He knew pleasing her would be a mistake, but he must be unsatisfying in a way that she would not want to try again. He simply did not know her well enough. He didn't know how to fail her. Maybe, God willing, he'd fail anyway out of sheer ignorance.

She was getting frustrated at his lack of response. She unbuttoned her dress. He looked. He was right, no bra. She had huge, dark red nipples. She had intended to lift his hands and put them on her breasts, but she did not need to. Danny took hold of them. His cock came up like there was no tomorrow. He let go, but she put them back, moving his hands over them, showing him how to rub the nipples.

He knew she was afraid to touch him, afraid he would be flaccid, unmoved by her. He was careful not to look at her face. He tried to slow his own breathing.

She pulled his sweatshirt off, rumpling his hair. She pushed her breasts in his face, straddling him, pulling her dress open.

He took a nipple in his mouth and clutched her backside, pulling her against him. What the fuck was he doing? He felt her excitement at his sudden interest. She held his head, clutching at his hair, feeling it in fascination like they all did.

She pulled her breast from his mouth and unexpectedly sat down on his lap.

He met her eyes, like Perseus and Medusa, not thinking, and saw her hunger for him.

She saw his face change and knew suddenly that somehow she had the upper hand.

She pressed her mouth onto his, felt him invade it. She reached down quickly, grabbing at him as if he might disappear. It was there, huge, beautiful, hard as iron. She kissed him feverishly and felt herself lose it. She felt him push her dress off, push her back on the couch.

He climbed onto her, pushing his hand inside her knickers. She felt his fingers in her, not trying to do anything, just exploring, curious.

She undid his trousers, pushed them down. He was exquisite, sculpted, smooth, just as Jimmy had described him, just as he'd looked in that brief moment in the kitchen. His cock was long, carved, beautiful in the deep red hair. And big. She felt herself surge at the thought. The second one in so many days, both brothers.

He was pushing between her legs. She looked back up at his face. His eyes seemed deeply, unnaturally, green "I want to fuck you."

His voice was incredible. So deep as to be... she stopped. What?

Supernatural.

He was, everything about him was. He was a fantasy. The corrupt angel, exquisite, vicious, irresistible.

She opened her legs wide. "Go on," she urged him. She helped him guide it in, yanking the leg of her knickers to one side to give him entry.

He pushed it up slowly, his face strained, intent, as if he was practising something difficult.

She pushed down on him, thrusting him up. He looked outrageously surprised. She laughed.

He looked down at her, then smiled too. He lay still. "I never guessed it would feel like this."

"How does it feel?" She wanted to hear him praise her.

"Like a vast blow-job, sucking me all over."

She laughed again. He looked down into her face and began to move, slowly, tentatively. She was smiling. Slowly he began to thrust into her. Her smile slid off her face. He was burying it deep, encouraging her to lift her hips. He watched her face. She knew what he was doing and wondered if he had lied to her. He was so knowing, so slow and strong.

"Will you come?" he asked, further disconcerting her.

"Not like this."

"Can I do it so you'll come?"

"Yes." She closed her eyes. She couldn't bear to see his face.

"Show me how."

She took him out and struggled onto her knees. Again she helped him in. "Gently," she warned and began fingering herself.

He was gentle. She didn't want him to be gentle. Suddenly she was up there. She pushed back against him. He pushed in harder. "More," she said.

He did it again, pulling her hips onto himself.

She pushed back, wriggling, feeling it hard against her insides as if it was pushing into her stomach. She thought she was going to wet herself.

He started to drag her onto it. She heard herself whimpering and couldn't stop it.

He groaned.

She felt him stiffen slightly, then he started to pump into her furiously, his "Jesus...." coming out long and grindingly.

She came, her fingers sliding off herself, soaking wet. He almost lifted her bodily onto himself. He threw his head back, arched into her.

She kept coming, every thrust a new wave. She felt her bladder let go a little and set herself off again. She said, "Please..." over and over again, begging him. She didn't know what for. He marvelled at the way she came. So long, so intense, so different. The smell pungent, so unfeminine, nothing delicate about it. Like an animal in a cage, strong, hot, feral.

He wanted to stay here forever, buried in her cunt, drowning in her smell, feeling her orgasm clutch at him. He reached forward and felt her breasts, lying on her back, spent. She moaned at the feel of his hands, squirmed on him.

"I love you," he said, feeling the incredible release of the words. "I love you."

John sat in the living room. He had the fire built up high, blazing in the darkness. He had been trying to read but had abandoned it. He put out the light and lay watching the firelight dance on the walls. He didn't know where the others were and cared less.

He felt the same way as he felt when he'd first seen Rab and Danny together. That same blind, head aching hatred. The thought of food made him sick. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't read. He couldn't even think.

The door opened and closed again. He felt a hand on his hair. He frowned, trying to look round.

"Is he fretting then?" Ian moved round in front of him. "Your hair looks just like Danny's in the firelight."

John stared at him, willing him to go away.

Ian toasted his backside at the fire, letting his eyes roam up and down John's body. "Very seductive." His voice was treacly, unpleasant, as if it might stick to your skin.

"Isn't it a bit late to take a crush on me?"

Ian shrugged. "You just look good."

"You spastic little queer."

"Couldn't agree more." Ian was smiling. He looked almost pleased by the insult.

John turned back to his meditation. "Go away."

"He wants to be alone."

John ignored him.

There was a long, warm silence. John had almost forgotten he was there when he spoke again. "Missing him?"

"I told you to go away."

"Hurting?"

John closed his eyes and re-crossed his ankles. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, put his arm back behind his head. For some reason he could see vividly the way Danny undid buttons; a strange little lift and push, always one-handed. He couldn't chase those buttons from his head.

"What are you thinking about?" Ian asked.

"The way Danny undoes buttons." John felt the dangerous build-up of it, a longing to confess, to unburden, in the darkness, over a phone, to a face you couldn't see. Ian wasn't the man for it but John couldn't raise himself. It was like being doped.

"What about it?"

"He has an odd quirk, one-handed."

Ian nodded. "He always watches you while he does it."

John thought about it. "Yes..."

"He's a natural performer, our Danny."

"He's a whore."

"Uh-huh," Ian agreed, satisfied with that, happy to hear John say it. He sat down on the fender.

John felt the anger run up behind the thought. He wanted to dirty-mouth him. He wanted to sit here and spew out his hate.

"He's a lying motherfucking little whore. He'd mount any stinking bitch that pushed her crack in his hand. He's a rabid stinking little goat, a festering degenerate little..." He ground to a halt, tripping over his own emotions. He could feel tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. His throat was a single convulsive lump. He couldn't swallow. He couldn't breathe. He opened his lips to suck in air as if he'd been crying.

Ian watched his face working, was stupefied to see the intensity of his emotion. Something more than anger. Loss? God, even grief? Ian hugged his knees quietly, saying nothing.

"He's been putting on the performance of his life, saying he doesn't want her, pretending he doesn't even want to see her. He's dreamt about this one for years. He's been biding his time and now the first bit of cunt he sees and I can..." He stopped, hearing himself almost voicing it.

And you can fuck off, Ian thought. Big bad John is scared shitless, like the elephant and the mouse. Ian laid his head on his knees and hugged his happiness into himself.

John lay there feeling the cold sweat on his skin, his guts churning. He put an arm over his eyes, blocking out the light, hiding himself.

Ian crawled over to him, put his arm across his chest. John pressed both arms tighter across his face, like a saint penitent under the extremes of guilt.

"He isn't worth it." Ian's hand soothed up and down his ribs like a woman easing a child's colic.

John let the words wash over him. They were telling him what he wanted to hear. He let the hand ease him, giving him what he wanted to feel; a little pity, a little love.

Ian luxuriated in the hard feel of him under the thin shirt. His body had the flavour of everything destructive about it. If death was a man with a scythe he looked just like John, no skinny skeleton, but big and powerful, destroying souls without either pleasure or pain, just soaking up numbers, ugly as sin and twice as enticing.

Ian could see his mouth under his arms like a fetish, like the lips in the credits of that spoof horror film, the only visible part of him, full, broad, the edges of his teeth showing, his breathing harsh.

He watched the lips, waited to see them speak. John's tongue moistened them. Ian felt his cock swell. He wanted to kiss him. If only there was a way. Without being punched in the mouth.

Time was fragile. Ian could feel it trickling through his hands as he kept one hand moving on John's chest, lulling him, easing his pain, knowing it would ease out of him entirely soon, be replaced by sleep or irritation before he could do it.

There must be a way.

"He doesn't love you." He heard himself murmur the words, so softly, saw John move his head, burying it deeper under his arms. "He isn't ever going to love you. He doesn't know how

to." Ian leaned over him, running both hands up over his chest.

John's hand came down suddenly, clutching Ian's, holding it.

He'd fucked it. Time had shat on his head.

John lifted his hand and pushed it down over his crotch. He held it there a moment, his face still hidden by that one arm, then he let go and covered his face again.

Ian was afraid to move. Did he actually want him to...? He wasn't erect, just a little warmed-up perhaps, vaguely desiring, nothing more. Ian squeezed him tentatively. John didn't move. He was still breathing through his mouth.

Ian knew that all he wanted was the sensation of it, the consolation, something to take his mind off the pain. He wasn't going to ask, and he wasn't going to allow any talk. Either Ian did it with his mouth shut or he wouldn't get to do it at all.

But John would owe him.

And John would know he owed him.

Ian unzipped him carefully, one eye on his face, waiting for any sign of displeasure. He undid the buckle of his belt, equally slowly. John did not move. He could see the rise and fall of his chest. He pulled his jeans open, saw the thick brown hair of his belly. He pulled his shorts down. He was coming up under Ian's gaze. He knew he was being looked at, knew he was going to be touched. Ian took the weight of it in his hand. He looked at it minutely, pulled the soft skin down, squeezed the head, feeling the way it stuck to his fingers.

Ian was so stiff it was hurting him.

He stroked it slowly, soothingly. He thought of everything he could do to give him pleasure. John stayed deep inside his arms, only the speed of his breathing giving away how he felt.

He grew massive. Ian marvelled at the sheer mind-boggling dimensions of it. The veins stood up in heavy relief. He seemed to be overfilled with blood. It looked almost painful.

Ian took longer, stiff strokes, squeezing the blood out, only to let it swell up again.

John began to push up into his hand and Ian knew he was near.

"Love me." John's voice was a whisper. Ian looked at him, wondering if that was what he'd said.

He said it again, clearer this time. "Love me."

He began to thrust up into Ian's hand. Ian's grip was so greedy he felt it come up from his balls, watched fascinated as the first spurt struggled out. He felt it, hot and glutinous, slide over his hand.

"Love me," John urged with each ejaculation, and Ian knew he wasn't talking to him, knew he wasn't even with him. He was seeing something else in the red darkness of his buried arms, seeing someone else, talking to someone else, urging someone else.

Ian didn't need to ask who because John told him.

His voice died on a whisper, "Danny..."

Ian put a hand firmly down over John's mouth, held it there like a hand pressing a pillow over his face, while John's body twitched under his suffocating hold.

Finally he went limp.

"Good boy," Ian murmured then pressed his mouth thirstily to his belly.

Danny went into the mirrored bathroom to wash. He washed without soap. He stood under the shower and let it wash away the perfume, the sweat, the smell of her.

He had locked the door. He didn't want her in with him. He felt trapped.

Intact...

He closed his eyes, washing his face under the water. He could smell her off his hands. He took the soap from the dish and scrubbed his hands twice. He rinsed them, ran them through his hair. He stood under the shower till he felt like a prune.

Eventually he got out. He wrapped himself in a towel. JH was here.
He went out.

She was waiting for him in the bedroom, standing opposite him when he looked up. The black satin was still there. She smiled at him. "I thought you'd drowned."

"You're hard to wash off."

She stopped smiling. She didn't say anything.

Danny went into the living room and found his clothes. She followed him through. He turned his back to her, not wanting her to see.

She looked at the long white lines of him. He was so beautiful it almost hurt to look at him. No wonder Jimmy had wanted him. "Are you going?"

"Yes." He didn't turn to her, but she knew he was aware of her, uncomfortable. He wasn't his brother, no ice-cold detachment here.

She crossed to him and put her arms around his waist. She kissed his shoulders. He was still damp from the shower, his hair dark with water, an outrageous burgundy red. "Why don't you stay?"

He stood still, tense under her kisses. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"I just can't." He took her hands and prised them off, stepping away from her to get his sweatshirt. He pulled it the right way out.

"Your brother, right?"

He didn't say anything.

"What's his problem?"

Danny pulled the sweatshirt on.

"I'm talking to you." She came round in front of him. "Why don't you answer me?"

Danny looked at her for the first time. "He doesn't like you."

She wanted to say, Oh no? Well he was fast enough getting into my knickers, but she knew she couldn't. How could she tell him she'd slept with his brother only two days before? How could she convince him it was him she wanted after that?

He sat down and began pulling on his socks and shoes.

"You really are going to trot off back home."

Danny tied his left shoe.

"Just because big brother says so."

Danny tied his right shoe.

"What's wrong with him? Is he afraid someone's getting what he isn't?"

He smiled suddenly, a little thing. It looked odd on that tense face. "You could say that."

She frowned, twice as irritated by that smile as she had been by his silence. What the hell did that mean?

He moved to get his jacket.

"Your hair's wet."

He froze. She said slowly, "You can't let him know, can you?"

Danny stood undecided, only half hearing her, wondering what the hell to do about his hair.

"You've been a dirty boy and now you've got to keep the awful truth away from him. Isn't the washing a bit much? Just a tiny bit paranoid?"

"Have you got a hair dryer?"

She nodded, tight-lipped.

"Well, could I use it then?"

"So you can leave."

Danny didn't answer. There was nothing he could say. "Can I or can't I?"

She went out of the room without answering him. He picked the towel up and rubbed his hair. She came back in and plugged a hairdryer into a socket beside the settee. "Come sit down."

He sat down. She started to dry his hair, running her hands through it.

"I can do it myself."

"God, do you never comb this?"

"There isn't any point." He was enjoying the soporific feel of her hands in his hair. "It just tangles up again."

She ran her fingertips through the soft corkscrew curls at the back of his neck. "You've got natural ringlets."

"So?"

"Most women would give their eye teeth for hair like yours."

"I'm not a woman."

"No, you're not." She pulled his head back against her stomach while she worked on the front. She felt him tense then saw him close his eyes. She looked at the lashes on his cheek, the smooth white skin. "Stay with me."

He opened his eyes. "No."

She pushed his head to one side. "Please."

"No, I can't."

"You could if you really wanted to. You needn't ever go back to him."

Danny pulled forward, tugging away from her. "Don't start that, you're as bad as he was."

"What?"

He was struggling up onto his feet. "Your fucking brother." He impersonated his voice, "Stay with me, you're so lovely." He turned on her. "He made me fucking sick to my stomach."

"And I do too, is that it?"

"Yes." Danny nodded. "That's exactly it."

"I see."

Danny turned suddenly and went out into the hall. He pulled his jacket off a peg then realised it was one of Henderson's. He almost dropped it. She put the light on. He hung the jacket back up with unnatural care and put on his own.

"When will I see you again?"

Never, Danny thought. "I don't know."

"I see." Her voice was hard. "What do I have to do, buy you each time?"

"Probably."

"And should I see your brother? Does he do the arrangements?"

Suddenly he was tired of it all. "Yes. There isn't any point in asking me because I don't have any say in the matter. You deal with him." He was yanking his jacket on. Now he turned to the door. "I wish you luck. You're going to need it." And he slammed it shut behind him.

John pushed his head off him. He kept his eyes covered, almost as if he were ashamed or couldn't stand the sight of him. "Get out."

Ian wiped his mouth, could taste the odd bitterness of him. "Don't I get anything?"

"I said, get out."

Ian got up slowly. John was still hugely swollen. Ian knew it hadn't satisfied him, only left him wanting more. It had been little more than solitary masturbation for him and now he was regretting it.

He stood there looking down at him. Let the great ugly bastard come out of there. Let him look him in the face. If he wanted him out he could get him out.

John's arm came down finally. His eyes blinked in the half-light. He looked at Ian's face but would not meet his eyes. He pulled his shorts up, not bothering to dry himself. Not that Ian had

left him much to dry. He pulled the zip up. Ian watched him still.

"Last time Ian, get the fucking hell out."

"Enjoy it John?" Ian was back in front of the fire, out of distance.

John looked at him this time. "You putrid little creep."

"Did you enjoy being wanked by a putrid little creep?"

John swung up, feet on the floor.

Ian got ready to move.

But John didn't stand up. "Out." Just the one word.

Ian went. Smiling all the way.

John sat there, unmoving, looking into the fire, remembering the feel of Ian's mouth on his stomach.

Like a leech.

He stood up to fasten his clothes. He sat down again.

He lit a cigarette and closed his eyes.

Danny looked at the house. It was in darkness. All in bed, unless they were sitting in the kitchen.

He drove the car up into the yard and switched off the engine. He sat for a moment, listening to it ticking, then got out. He locked the door. The yard light had been left on for him.

He went and closed the gate then went into the house. He felt for the kitchen light. The dog wuffed and got up to greet him. He scratched its head absently. He felt suddenly ravenous. He stuck his head in the fridge and found a piece of leftover pie. He took it out and ate it with his fingers, washing it down with a swig of milk from the bottle. He threw the last bit of crust to the dog and wiped his hands on his trousers. He put out the kitchen light and went into the hall.

The living room door was open and John was standing in the doorway. He was backlit by the dull red of the fire. "Come in."

Danny walked down the hall and into the room. John caught him to him and buried his face in his hair. He smelt of the night. Damp, cool. The night and cold leather. John kissed his hair, inhaling him, then pushed him into the room.

He closed the glass door.

Danny could hear the clock ticking, the sound loud in the stillness of the house.

John came over and slid his hands inside his jacket, buried his face in his neck. Danny knew what he was doing. Under the lips, the feel of his mouth, he knew what he was doing.

John came up for air and suddenly pushed him backwards. Danny sat down on the settee with a thump.

"Tell me everything you did, everything you said."

"What?"

"What did she say when you went in?"

"Christ, I don't know. Hello or something."

"And when you fucked her, how did that feel?"

Danny looked at his face. Zero to sixty in four seconds. He was livid.

"I..." But the denial dried up in Danny's mouth, evaporated under the heat in his eyes. It was as if the fire emanated from him instead of a source behind him.

"You what?" His voice was scraped across the floor like dogshit off a shoe.

Danny shook his head hopelessly.

"You know what I'm going to do to you Danny?"

Danny shook his head again.

"I'm going to kill you."

"John... listen...."

John didn't reply.

Danny sat there, looking at him, transfixed by despair. "John... don't."

"Don't what?"

"I didn't..." Danny stopped again.

"Don't fucking lie to me. One lousy look at her rabid little face and you'd have been out there like a poker." John came for him suddenly, grabbing his sweatshirt. "Out there like a fucking poker, aching to get it up her hole."

He dropped him again, pushing him back. "How did she do it then? She sit on you? I could see her, the pushy bitch. Not quite old enough to be your mother but old enough to teach a sweet virgin like you what it's all about. Daniel loses his cherry. Ha, bloody, ha."

Suddenly he sat down in the armchair. His voice changed. "Take your clothes off."

Danny looked at him, not sure what to do.

"Get them off."

Danny bent down and undid his shoes, pulled them off, his socks. He took off his jacket, stood up. His legs were shaking. He pulled off his sweatshirt.

"Stop." John looked at him, wearing nothing but his jeans, the firelight on his hair, his chest, turning him molten. "Go on. The rest."

Danny unfastened his trousers. He pulled them and his shorts down together, pulled them off. The room was warm, the fire hot on his skin, but he felt terribly, icy cold. John studied him intensely, as if he'd never seen him before, as if he was memorising him. The thought made Danny want to puke. Memorising him for what?

"Lie down. Full out."

Danny lay down on the sofa.

"Hands behind your head."

Danny did as he was told. He felt naked to his bones, like a man on the rack. He had never felt so vulnerable in his life.

"Right, now tell me what you did with her. I want it all. Don't skip a thing."

Danny told him. His own voice sounded alien to him, flat, dull. He sounded like someone reciting bad verse, uninterested, uninvolved. He heard the fire slide down once. He paused but John said, "Don't stop."

John wasn't interested in what he did. John was listening for how he did it, little pointers, the give-aways. John was reading him for signs of excitement.

Danny was careful. He did not tell John about his asking her how to make her come. He told him that he changed position, nothing more. Danny was afraid, so afraid his teeth felt as if they were glued together.

Eventually it ran out. There was a tensile silence then John said, "That it?"

Danny nodded.

"And you washed it all away, so that I wouldn't know."

Danny nodded.

"And she wants to see you again."

Danny said nothing.

"And you want to see her again."

"No, I don't." Danny heard the frantic note in his voice and tried to bite it down.

"Fucking liar."

"I don't."

"Get up."

Danny sat up, looked at him, couldn't see his eyes, only blackness.

"Come here."

Danny got up, crossed to him.

John didn't move. He jerked his head. "Kneel in front of the fire."

Danny knelt down.

"Closer."

Danny moved in closer.

John looked at the beauty of him, finely etched in the firelight, so perfect. No matter what you did to him, always so fucking perfect.

John pulled himself slowly upright and picked up the fire tongs. Danny watched him uneasily.

John put them into the heart of the fire and lifted out a small glowing coal.

Danny moved quickly, but not quick enough. John had his hair, pulling him forward. "Just sit right where you were."

Danny dragged against his hand, trying to twist away, but John held him until Danny felt as if his scalp was going to be torn off. "John don't... don't."

"Sit still."

Danny stopped struggling.

John tugged him back.

The coal had lost its glow. He threw it back in the fire. Danny watched him uneasily.

He reached into the fire again. "Open your legs."

"No!" Danny almost shouted it. He started to struggle again.

John dropped the tongs and back-handed him. Even sitting it came at him with force, breaking his lip against his teeth. "I said fucking sit still."

Danny started to cry with an inevitability that made him sick. He didn't want to cry and still he did, as if his body was crying without his permission.

"Now open your legs."

Danny closed his eyes and opened his legs. He knew that when it touched him he'd wet himself. He knew that he'd be lucky if that's all he did.

John took another coal from the fire, looked at Danny's face. He could see the tears dripping off it, two long tracks of silver down his face, his eyelashes sparkling with it. "Open your eyes Danny." His voice was a whisper.

Danny opened them. John held the coal inches from his cock. Danny could feel the heat of it. Its colour was dying but it was still very hot. "Please..." he begged, the word coming out in a desperate hiccup. "Please don't John."

John brought it closer. Danny tried not to move.

"I'm tired of sharing you." Suddenly John put the coal against his lower belly, just above the hairline.

Danny screamed, twisted. He could smell his own skin burning.

John pulled it off again, clamped his hand over Danny's mouth. Danny squirmed underneath his hand, whimpering in pain, almost ripping the sleeve off John's shirt.

"Shh...." John got down on the floor beside him, pulling his head against him. Danny was crying in earnest. The sobs went right through John. He began to feel sick. "Danny, Danny..." He rocked him, stroking his hair. "Don't cry."

But Danny went on crying, and Danny went on struggling against him. It was like trying to hold an unwilling cat.

The door opened. Rab saw the two of them sitting there: Danny naked, struggling fiercely, John glaring up at his interruption with that same mad dog look. "What the fuck goes on here? Who screamed?"

Danny gave a sudden convulsive lunge, breaking free and scrambling to his feet.

"Danny!" John roared.

But Danny was already out of the room.

John got quickly to his feet but Rab barred his way. "What's going on?"

"None of your fucking business."

John made to push past him but Rab caught his arm. "I'm getting tired of this." John looked down at Rab's hand on his arm, waiting for him to move it. Rab kept it where it was. "Even if he isn't, I am."

John's look was black and dirty. He enunciated every word clearly. "Take your fucking hands off me."

"I mean it."

John mimicked him. "I mean it." He pushed Rab's hand off and shoved past him.

Rab stood there seething, watching him disappear upstairs into the darkness. He followed him up but John didn't even stop outside the bathroom. He didn't try the handle or knock on the door. He went right past it and slammed into his room.

Rab stood in the hall a moment then tentatively tried the bathroom door. Danny hadn't even locked it.

Rab went in quickly and locked the door behind him.

Danny was the colour of oatmeal. Rab saw the mess on his stomach. "Jesus, how the fuck did he do that?"

"Coal... hot coal."

Rab realised he was in shock. He was shaking like a leaf, his eyes darting about.

"I don't know what to do," he said helplessly. Then he said, "It hurts." And his face fell apart.

Rab sat him on the chair and put two towels round his shoulders. "Sit there, I won't be a minute."

He went into the old man's room and clicked on the light. He saw himself electrified in the mirror, stripped to the waist, ghostly white. He opened the wardrobe. There were still half a dozen bottles in there, untouched. He took one and went back to the bathroom.

Danny was still sitting there. Rab twisted the top off and poured some in the tooth mug. "Here."

Danny held the glass in both hands, trying to stop it shaking. He drank it down, coughed. Rab heard John's door opening. He crossed the floor and locked the door quickly.

John tried the handle.

Danny's head shot up.

"Fuck off John, leave him alone."

There was a silence. Danny's eyes were huge. Rab said, "Drink up."

Danny drank it, but Rab saw him watching the door.

"Let me in Danny."

"You heard me the first time John, why don't you?"

The door buckled suddenly with the impact of John's shoulder. Danny's hand jumped, spilling the whisky. Rab looked at the tiny bolt. No way. He crossed the floor and unbolted it before John could hit it again. "No..." Danny said. But John was already in the room.

Rab hit him, with an intense and satisfying pleasure. John's eyes widened with surprise.

Rab hit him again, once more in the stomach. This one backed him out into the hall.

Rab kned him in the balls. John crumpled up, still managing to wheeze, "You fucking bastard."

Rab lifted his head by the hair and punched his face. He felt John's mouth spread under it, felt the hardness of his teeth, realised he'd grazed his knuckles. He could do this all night.

John was leaning against the wall, holding himself around the middle. His mouth was bleeding, his eyes were like coals. If he could breathe I'd be mincemeat right now, Rab thought. "Had enough John?"

John went on glaring, his breath coming in harsh gasps as if every one hurt him.

Danny was standing in the bathroom doorway looking at John. His face was unreadable. Rab spoke to him. "Want to sleep in your own room?"

Danny looked at John again. Rab wondered what was going through his mind.

Danny shook his head.

Rab felt as if he'd kicked him in the mouth.

Danny looked at him. "I'll be alright."

Rab shrugged, turned away from him. He felt suddenly superfluous, as if he'd interrupted a domestic quarrel. John was still staring at him. He could feel Danny behind him, waiting for him to go.

He crossed the hall and went into his room. He locked the door.

Fuck him.

He dragged off his jeans and climbed into bed.

Fuck the stupid little bastard.

He heard John's bedroom door close. He punched the pillow savagely, buried his face in it.

That's probably exactly what he is doing.

Fucking the little bastard.

Right now.

John covered Danny's legs and fetched a bottle from the cabinet above the bedroom sink. He poured some directly onto the burn, not handling it, not using cotton wool. It smelt like sour wine.

Danny felt a slight cooling, but the pain was so intense it didn't seem to matter. He had never felt pain like this.

"It'll help."

Danny wouldn't look at him. "It's going to mark me."

"This'll help."

"You've scarred me."

"I'm sorry."

Danny looked at him now. "No you're not."

"It's better than dying, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

John brushed the hair off his face.

Danny pulled away from him. "Don't touch me."

John got up and soaked some gauze in the same liquid. He taped it loosely over Danny's burn.

It made it hurt worse to be covered.

"You won't be able to sleep unless it's covered." John was looking down at him.

Danny pulled the blankets up and closed his eyes.

It raged. His whole body felt alive with it. He could feel muscles jumping in his legs. He kept an arm along his side, turning slightly to keep the blankets off himself.

John got in beside him, putting the light out.

They lay there in the dark, awake, knowing the other was awake, not speaking. Danny felt as if his whole body was made of pain.

John touched him. Danny flinched away from him.

John came over against his back, kissing his shoulders.

"Leave me alone John. For once just leave me alone."

"Let me ease your pain." John's hands ran over his hips. His mouth kissed his neck. Danny felt him hard against him. "Danny..." his voice was hopeless, "ease mine."

Danny felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck.

John was rubbing against him. "Ease mine Danny..."

He had one leg over Danny's. Danny was tense, afraid he would brush against the burn. John clung to him. Danny had never felt him so desperate. He felt the faint curl of his own excitement feeding off the hunger in John's voice. He tried to prise him off.

"Please Danny."

"Go to Rab." Danny felt pleasure just saying the words.

"He can't help me."

Danny hugged it to him. He can't help me.

John pushed against him. "Just lay your hand on me."

Danny pushed the blankets off, turned over.

John rolled onto his back, lay there waiting. "Jut put your hand on me," he whispered again.

Danny palmed his cock with his hand, knew he'd had sex, could smell it.

Danny was startled to feel his hand on his face. John's thumb moving over his lips. "You hate me, don't you?"

"No."

John's fingers traced his face in the dark. Danny lightly traced the outline of his cock. He could feel his own growing heavy against his thigh, his stomach on fire beside it. Pain and pleasure. All John ever gave, pain and pleasure.

"Love me Danny?"

Danny felt the veins, thick, painful under his fingers. "You've got a fucking cheek."

"Don't leave me." John's hand came round the back of his neck. He was tight as a spring.

Danny could feel him holding himself in check. "Don't ever leave me."

Danny lightened his touch. He felt a muscle jerk in John's arm.

"Danny?"

Danny squeezed him, peeled him back slowly. "What?" Skimmed him gently.

"When you were young..." John pulled in a sharp breath, stopped Danny's hand with his own.

They waited a beat or two. A board clicked on the floor. John lifted his hand, kneaded Danny's neck with his other. "We did some things..."

Danny didn't say anything.

"Do you remember?"

Still Danny said nothing.

"We shouldn't have..."

Danny began to masturbate him with a sudden determined strength, like some kind of frantic displacement activity.

"I didn't mean it to go so far, I swear."

Danny's movements became savage, constricting. He was hurting him now.

John moaned, took it without a word.

Suddenly Danny swung upright, guided John's cock up against his arse and impaled himself on it, all in a second.

John grunted a fierce negative, but he pulled Danny down hard onto himself.

Danny took his own barely-hard erection in his hand, felt it pull agonisingly tight on the burn, didn't care. He worked it determinedly, trying to encourage it beyond the ferocious pain. He thumped up and down on John's penis with no thought for his discomfort or injury, riding it wildly.

"I don't forgive you John." His voice scraped out of him, breathless and harsh. "You think all you've got to do is ask and I'll forgive you. Well I don't."

John pulled him down, trying to still those mad movements.

Danny pistoned his cock fiercely. "I hate you. Understand?"

"You're right..." John gasped "...hate me."

He seemed suddenly oblivious to the pounding Danny was giving his body. Out of nowhere he was using Danny, like an overgrown sex toy, something he could plunge into until he was delirious, something he could finish all on his own, with no help from Danny.

Danny jerked himself frantically, knowing John had somehow turned the tables on him, icily determined not to be cheated by him yet again, not sure he could make it through the pain. But John's erratic, jerking fervour, his sweating determined up-thrusts into Danny's worn-out body,

were doing things he couldn't have explained. When it came it came suddenly and he cried out with the strength of it.

John heard it through an odd disembodied shimmering of almost pain-like cramping. It wasn't an orgasm, it was his body telescoping, folding itself so small every last hair was buried in Danny's flesh. He wanted to die. He wanted to die right now and never have to explain himself again.

"I love you..." His hand was buried in Danny's hair, Danny who was bent over him, head down, trembling. "I've always loved you..." He pulled Danny's mouth down to his own. "Little brother..."

SAMPLE