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*A Short Story by Thelma Wheatley*

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I keep the key to myself – 406D – in the back pocket of some old corduroys that are hidden in a brown paper bag and locked in a metal locker at the station, in an old part of the city, in the dark. A houndstooth jacket with patched elbows and frayed cuffs, a shirt and tie. The tie is definably male, darkish, heavy tweed, that Clive thinks he long discarded. Such clothes bear the scent of danger and in them, in this fetid little washroom at the foot of the city, I seem to expand, find myself exciting, dynamic. I can do anything I want waves through me. I actually strut in the mirror over the basin, the man in the mirror a fatal attraction: but I would never really confront anyone, taste the effect, that would be fatal. Getting caught. In clothes like this. Clive would never understand. Besides being deeply shocked he would feel threatened, and in his own tie! 'Research!' I would quickly cut in in panic to the police should it happen, in a round-up, say, in the dark. 'That is why I am dressed like this.' Breasts under a shirt and tie! It's for a sociological treatise – 'Changing Male Roles In Urban Society' – I wanted to get my knowledge first-hand sir. "What her!" I can already hear Clive later at a police station. "The longest thing she's ever written is the shopping list."

Pat my moustache into place. Remove any excess glue. The moustache is a fine convincing shade of brown with a thread of red running through. – Young men's moustaches, like their pubic hair, can often be lighter or darker than the natural head of hair. It's little things like this . . . Check the mirror: a pale young man, the student type, an intellectual a little to the Left. I'm still not used to buttons and zips the wrong way round. Almost ready. I flush the toilet just in case anyone is lingering outside, some wino sozzled against the wall, breathing heavily beside the door. The only communal washroom I could find, this half-forgotten crypt under the altar and crucifix of an all-night church. You can't very well walk into a Ladies a woman and come out a man. The divisions between us start with toilet training: girls have to stoop while boys stand and you have it right there. It's what you notice most at first in the men's urinals, a sort of casual presumption about genitals totally lacking in Ladies, not that I stare, though it's been the most personally challenging thing so far: dodging through the underground of the Men's and sliding unobtrusively past that line of zips into a private cubicle where – fortunately – I'm presumed to be doing something else. It takes some nerve, though I'm not sure why, or what would really happen if they found me out – probably laugh. They wouldn't react as women would. Women always have to be on the defense, the first thing you have to unlearn in cords and a moustache.

The last thing to do, the final rite: push my other clothes into the brown paper bag that is to be deposited in 406D, the clothes of the woman Clive watches in the mirror . . . I pat her face with finest powder. This woman is a mother, a housewife, some-time lover. She is in their bedroom. She is wearing a soft brown suede dress with a silk scarf knotted at the throat, high suede Cossack boots

mid-thigh, feline. She runs a damp finger over an eye-brow to shape it and touches the short smooth deceptively boyish hair. This is her night out, her weekly little fling with the liberating arts, *Women's Changing Roles in Urban Society*. 'Don't they ever read anything but Germaine Greer?' said Clive.

But if I can get away with it . . . (There aren't many places a woman can go alone after dark, and if a moustache means more . . .) It's not as if I'm doing anything wrong or reprehensible, not like Myrna Leroy and her psychiatrist boy friend down at Lakeshore on 'macramé' nights. It's not as if I really exist. I can switch back any time, that's the advantage of a face like this. I used to hate it. "Strong for a girl." And all that frizz. I was always hunching around trying to hide myself yet in a way that used to scream, "Look at me! Not at my personality!" Doris Day, Raquel Welch, Audrey Hepburn, this was the image, wasn't it ridiculous! What was there really to being Audrey but waiting around for Fred Astaire – Clive? – to happen along and notice my bone structure. All the same, a houndstooth sports jacket!

Union station: another vault. There is a vast boom, a shudder in this structure of another order as I cross the floor to the metal boxes, one of them mine; deposit myself, turn the lock of 406D. People pass, no one notices; I pass smartly between them, another man.

Once I forgot. Wasn't thinking and made straight for the Ladies. There was just a blonde in there by the washbasin, fresh and tight under her sweater, but she was screaming. 'It's OK,' I said swiftly, keeping it cool. 'I'm dressed like this cause I'm in a play, I'm George Sand.' 'Christ!' she said, her body spilling into the mirror. 'Do you ever look the real thing!'

Clive would have a fit. My mother too. I get scared myself sometimes until I remember. Straddle, strut, stride: three new movements, and it must always come from the shoulders.

Somewhere above me the city booms. I cross the pavement out onto Front Street, hands thrust into the old corduroys: flauntingly. The city is dark, it is glittering, it is evil. I turn down a street; a mean street, a seedy street. Wouldn't walk down a street like this dressed in anything else. Every woman's nightmare, long, dim, badly-lit; towering concrete cutting off any retreat. I quicken my pace . . . can't help tightening. A car is approaching, a car full of guys . . . It slows down right by me and I think Get out your Pipe! Slowly, reassuringly strike a match. Someone rolls down a window . . . spits. The car spurts on and treads air rounding the corner. Of course, I'm just another guy to them alone at night, walking the streets, why can't I remember that? I pull my cap down lower all the same, just in case, as I cross the park into the rain, thin and grey and sprinkled with age. Trees drip in the thickening dark, thin trees only a woman would know are spectres, their huge leaves fluttering spreading like wings into the night that pulses, pulses. Sometimes there's the odd murder under the trees, a knifing – once someone was shot through the head. No point taking chances, not that I'm in any real danger,

not in houndstooth! ALWAYS REMEMBER A MAN TAKES EVERYTHING FOR GRANTED. Even himself. No need to get nervy, it's only a body, men's bodies moving softly through the dark, in & out, in & out, if Clive only knew! What it is to be Clive! Just the flare of a match, I remember to light my own first, the butt between my finger and thumb, no one suspects, it's gesture more than any thing, just holding back with a shrug an answer, drawing in the breath slowly, sensuously, aaah. Somebody's lungs burst into a staccato laugh, like gunfire, ash shooting all over the grass, glowing embers, don't look back . . .

Someone, a woman who could be me in a soft brown suede dress and feline boots, a scarf at the throat, is crossing the park . . . teetering in our midst . . . I shuffle warningly with the others, who is she? who does she think she is, here like this? doesn't she know? Skirting the monument by the trees, the rows of dead, Ypres, Flanders . . . 'They Served Us Well', clicking little heels, wavering, electric, asking for it . . . 'Well, what sort of a woman

anyway . . . ' – I smile grimly in the shadow of my moustache, trying to slide out of focus, but out of darkness she grasps my lapels, purple nails and hot little tongue, 'Forty bucks a throw,' she rasps, hot sour breath over mine. Try to push her off, straighten my tie, hunch right down – this is a mistake! – well, what else did I expect? Remember that's what they're there for (unclench those fists) – she would be fourteen, fifteen! – Whistle if you want it. If you want it, or if you don't, as you will. If you feel like it.

Still trembling, back in the crypt, the underground. It's one A.M. A train rumbles in a subterranean passage far below, another level . . .

Turn the key, 406D, in the lock. Take our *her* clothes, release her now, my other self – put myself in reverse –

Dusting of powder . . . touch of blush, it doesn't take long. Peel off the moustache – that thin strip of bright lipstick another death –

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## HITCHHIKERS ARE TROUBLE

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*A Short Story by Rosamond Bailey*

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When I see a strange female drive up to the pumps in Holton Curtey's truck, I know right away there's something wrong. Holton spends most of his time chasing girls in that truck, but even if any of them was fool enough to get in, he wouldn't let them touch the wheel. She climbs down and I see she's only young, sixteen maybe, in tight jeans like they all wear nowadays and a T-shirt without anything under it – asking for trouble, I call it. She grabs hold of the cab door to keep from falling down, and I think right away she must be drunk or on drugs. So I run out to head her off. "What are you doing with Holton's truck?" I say, real loud.

She just stares at me, so I ask her again. She shakes the hair out of her eyes and tugs at her shirt, which is tore at the neck. "Can I use your phone?" she mumbles.

"Who do you want to phone?"

"The police," she says.

For a minute I don't know what to do. What has Holton got himself mixed up in now, I wonder. I always feel kind of responsible for the Curtey boys – after all, they are my own cousins.

By this time Addie's half way across our yard. She must of heard me yelling, or maybe it's just that she seen me talking to a female she doesn't know. Not that Addie's jealous, just curious. She gets kind of lonely out here so far from town.

Anyway, the girl seems to forget about calling the police. She heads right for Addie and starts to cry. The next thing Addie has an arm around her and is helping her back to the house. I'd of thought Addie would be nervous of a scruffy-looking kid like that – she's always afraid I'm going to be held up by some teenager. You can't never tell what women are going to do next.

I make sure everything's locked up, including the truck. That

girl just left the keys in it. At least she hasn't done no damage to it, far as I can see. I hope she's by herself, without a boy friend hiding somewhere nearby. I don't like those kind of characters hanging around my garage. Or my home. I can't understand what's got into Addie.

When I get to the house, I see the girl is making herself at home, laying on the kitchen couch with a blanket over her. Addie's making tea. Women always seem to make tea when there's some kind of trouble.

I get myself a beer.

Addie mutters something about the girl being in shock. Well, Addie used to be a nurse, maybe she knows. She chases me out of my kitchen and I turn on the news – always the same, killings and drugs and riots. I keep wishing the Curteys had a phone so I could find out what's going on.

About ten minutes later I go out and find the two of them sitting at the table. The girl has a plate of doughnuts in front of her but she isn't eating, just turning her cup around in the saucer. At least she's combed her hair and washed her face, and she's wearing one of Addie's old sweaters over her T-shirt. I pull up a chair and reach for a doughnut. Addie frowns at me but I don't pay no attention. The time has come for this girl to do some talking.

So she tells her story. Her name is Karen, and she's on her way to the city to get work. She claims she got off the bus for a coffee and the bus left without her. So she tried to get a lift.

And she flagged down Holton. Of course he stopped – he'd stop for anything female. The girls in town think he's a big joke – they won't go for a ride with him, no matter how much he tries to fix up that old truck of his. I feel kind of sorry for him. There isn't no real harm in Holton, I've always said.