

# *Cool, Sexy and Dead*

*Clifford Thurlow*

She liked the way the boy's face grew tense when someone was speaking to him. His attention as he leaned forward was an embrace drawing the speaker into his world. He claimed them and they, in turn, were captivated by him. He was alert, watchful, spontaneous, his features softened by the oblique light around the amber lampshades. Before he had grown aware of her eyes upon him she was picturing them posing together for an erotic photograph with Dominic peeping through the aperture of his camera.

Dominic!

She shook her head, shaking away the image, and glanced at her mobile phone. She was perched on a stool in the bar where she often found herself in the early evening. It was the time when Dominic would be finishing work at the studio and she would drink a glass of champagne while she waited for his instructions.

They would meet, or she would go home to change, or take a taxi to his loft in Putney. He had given her a key and that key turned in circles on the ring with her own, as her key turned in circles on a ring with his, all this key cosiness vaguely oppressive. Dominic would cook. Or they would go to the theatre. Or the movies. Or the opera. Or to dinner with friends. His friends. She could never remember what was in the diary and required Dominic's call or Dominic's text to remind her.

Sometimes the call came and she contrived to be late. And sometimes, it felt as if the ring that held his key with her key was a tether around her throat and in an act of defiance she didn't go at all.

When they next  
frozen in his Tiff  
photograph and t  
an Andy Warhol print. .

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her reflection  
then take her  
criminals, like

She had looked away and now looked back again at the boy. He was listening to a girl his own age, an actress or a student, slender and unformed with long silky legs in red shoes. They were with two other boys who sat slumped back in the banquettes talking animatedly in the shadows.

She remembered that. Talking a lot. Being young. She was twenty-eight now. She knew that wasn't old, but passions dim, fervour fades. Each year it was that much harder to reach that mmm-whoosh feeling you get when your body becomes one with the universe and you evaporate into pure essence. An orgasm. There's nothing like it. And they didn't happen any more. They just didn't.

A sigh ran through her, draining her of energy. People were pushing into the bar relieved after spending long days doing things they would rather not have been doing, men buttressed in suits, girls from the film and advertising offices, slices of flesh exposed for the summer, their eyes like fairy lights as they coasted from one knot of men to another.

As she sat watching the pageant from her high stool in pastel pink plumage, she felt the weariness of a migrating bird after a long flight. She carried under her wing the weight of experience, the burden of possession, of being possessed, of that narcissistic condition she had read described as the *égoïsme à deux*. Me & Dom. Dom & I...anno domini.

She stifled a yawn.

The girl with silky legs and red shoes took her red bag and crossed the bar. The talking boys talked on, saving the planet, and the restless boy leaned forward like a mariner at the prow of his ship. As their eyes met she realised she had been staring and a blush coloured her cheeks. She felt