

HOT POTATO, COLD FEET

(After viewing Edward Hopper's 'Hotel by a Railroad')

The girl sat in the only chair in the shabbily furnished room, turning over the pages, while he stood, silently smoking and looking out of the open window.

She finished reading, and sat blinking: 'Gor. Ennarf steamy, what I can make out.'

She looked up at him, 'Wouldn't do them fings for you, Ron.'

'Can't pay what he'll be paying.'

She gave him a mischievous glance, 'Mebbe I ought to charge you. Oo is this geezer, any roads?'

He replied in his best dignified manner, 'Oh, he matters. Comes in regular, sometimes with a Junior Minister friend. Keeps a lookout for talent.' He added knowingly, 'Of all kinds.'

'Ow'd you get it, Ron?'

'He'd been scribbling away over his coffee, and just left it on his seat. Found it when I was clearing away.'

'So what'll you do? He'll probly give a good tip to get it back.'

'Doubt that, Cath. Knowing him, more chance he'd say I stole it. You see, I didn't hand it in straight away.'

'So what'll you do?' she repeated. Then surprised, 'You wouldn't flog it?'

He drew on his cigarette. 'Question is, who to?'

'You know some reporter blokes, don't yer.'

He gave a big sigh: 'Trouble is, it'd go to the editor. He *might* keep it. But more like he'd hand it back – friendly gesture, you see. Then they'd have him screwed down; he'd never know if they'd kept a copy.'

'But you'd have the money.'

'And he'd have a fair idea where he'd lost it. I been thinking, you don't mess with his type. He's got some *ugly* friends too.'

'So you can't do nuffin?', she suggested.

He took another drag. 'Pretty pointless taking it,' he admitted, 'Probably best get rid of it.' They were silent for a while.

An idea struck her, 'There's that insinuator down in the basement. Could stick it in there.'

He stubbed his cigarette out on the window-sill and threw the butt into the yard. He looked at her for a moment, then nodded reluctantly, and held out his hand to take it from her.

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