

the shadow of your hand

by

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Dramatis Personae

Steve – an advertising executive in his forties

Maria – a homeless eighteen year old

SCENE ONE

A studio apartment. STEVE shows MARIA around.

Steve: So, like I say, this is the pad. What do you think..?

Maria: It's posh.

Steve: This is the main room. There's a great view of the city up here. Completely shut off. I'm not saying everyone who lives here is a scumbag. Obviously, you're not a scumbag... I'm Steve by the way. Don't think I said my name. Anyway, like I say, it was funny bumping into you tonight. Well, maybe not funny, but you know what I mean. You're... You're alright aren't you? I can take you to the hospital?

Maria: I'm fine.

Steve: Right, ok then... It actually looks quite serious. I'd be happy to run you to A and E.

Maria: That's not... I'd rather you didn't. Thanks.

Steve: The thing is with head wounds – best to get them checked out.

Maria: It's cold in here.

Steve: I'm the hot blooded type. It's set at a constant of twenty four degrees. I can override that if you like. Would you like that?

Maria: Yes.

Steve: (*Adjusting the thermostat*) how about twenty six degrees?

She doesn't answer. He finishes adjusting the thermostat.

So, like I say, I'm Steve.

He offers his hand. She is looking round the room and doesn't take it.

He waits for her to offer her name. She doesn't. She picks up a delicate vase and turns it over.

Right, well, we can do all the formalities later.

He takes the vase off her.

Better have that. You've no idea what it's worth.

He puts it back very carefully, adjusting it so that it is exactly where it was.

Have you eaten? No, course not, I kind of interrupted you there. Sorry about that. How can you do that? I mean, it's wrong. You do know that don't you? I don't want to get on my high horse or anything, but if you lose sight of, I mean... Well, anyway, I can cook you something. Would you like that? I'm a good cook. I watch all the programmes. Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsey.

Maria examines another vase. Steve hovers around her nervously.

Anyway, like I say, bit of a coincidence. I mean, I don't normally go out at night. I go out. I've got friends. Of course I have. But I don't go out, out...

He waits for his chance then takes the vase off her and returns it to its precise spot.

I just felt like a drive. Got a bit lost. You've got to be careful haven't you. *You* must have to be really careful. Especially. I would have thought. Anyway, sit down, make yourself at home. I'll make us a cup of tea, or would you prefer wine. I've got a bottle in the fridge.

Maria: Whatever.

Steve: I've been getting into the Italians recently. Or would you prefer a cup of tea? Or I've got coffee. You can have a coffee if you like. Would you like a coffee?

Maria: What are you having?

Steve: Oh sod it. Let's crack open a bottle shall we.

Maria: Do you live on your own?

Steve: Er... Yes.

Maria: You're not married then?

Steve: No.

Maria: Or seeing anyone?

Steve: Er... No... Ok, wine it is then... Take your coat off. Make yourself cosy.

He goes. She walks over to the window and stares out.

He comes back.

Good view or what? I wanted to be high up, you know, for the views. During the day it's different. It's light for a starter (*laughing*) obviously. But at night, it could be anywhere... Oh, here you go.

He hands her the wine. She drinks from the glass.

What do you think?

Maria: It's nice.

Steve: Quite light but plenty of body. Lots of fruit. Can you taste apricot?

Maria: Is that what it is?

Steve: And orange blossom.

Maria: Right.

Steve: There was a bit of controversy about the aroma. Some tasters thought it was big and ripe, but others described it as a bit thin. I'm with the big and ripe camp... Please, take off your coat.

She doesn't.

Are you still cold? I can turn the heating up again.

Maria: I'm fine.

Steve: Let me take your coat then.

She takes off her coat. He takes it.

Now that's better. Isn't it..? I'll hang it up.

He puts his wine down. Takes the coat. Leaves and comes back without the coat.

There, that's much better. Now let's sit down. The cushions are really comfy. Or there's the chair if you prefer.

He indicates a wicker egg chair which is attached to the ceiling by a chain.

Which do you prefer..? I remember as a kid. There was one on this programme called Vegas. Long before your time. I think he was a private investigator. He was called Dan Tanner. He had a chair just like that, and this open fire in the middle of the room. And a circular sofa. I've got the sofa on order. Size of a boat.

He laughs but she doesn't seem impressed. He goes out. She looks around the room. He comes back into the room carrying a recipe book.

Now then, there's a recipe in here for sea bass. I could do us sea bass stuffed with herbs. With a mushroom potato and a salsa verde? It's what Jamie cooked for Tony Blair at that summit a few years ago. Imagine that, cooking for Tony Blair.

Maria: I've never had sea bass.

Steve: There you go then. First time for everything.

Maria: I'm very grateful.

Steve: What for?

Maria: For what you did tonight.

Steve: Well. It was nothing really. I could see why he was angry, but he was completely out of order. It needed someone with authority to stand up to him. That's all it was.

Maria: Still.

Steve: Anyway, sea bass... Or how about a bit of baked trout?

Maria: I've never had trout either.

Steve: Really. You've never lived in that case. I think we better play it safe. Go for the sea bass. If it's good enough for Tony, it's good enough for us.

Maria: How long you been here?

Steve: Oh, let me think. Getting on for ten years.

Maria: Alone?

Steve: You like to cut to the chase don't you. We can chat later. Let's eat. It'll take me about half an hour. Just give us a shout if you want anything. Why don't you watch some telly. The dibber's on the table.

Maria: Without a sofa.

Steve: Eh?

Maria: You've lived here ten years. Alone. Without a sofa.

Steve: Three hundred channels, so you should find something you like. Right, I'll get cracking. Don't go away.