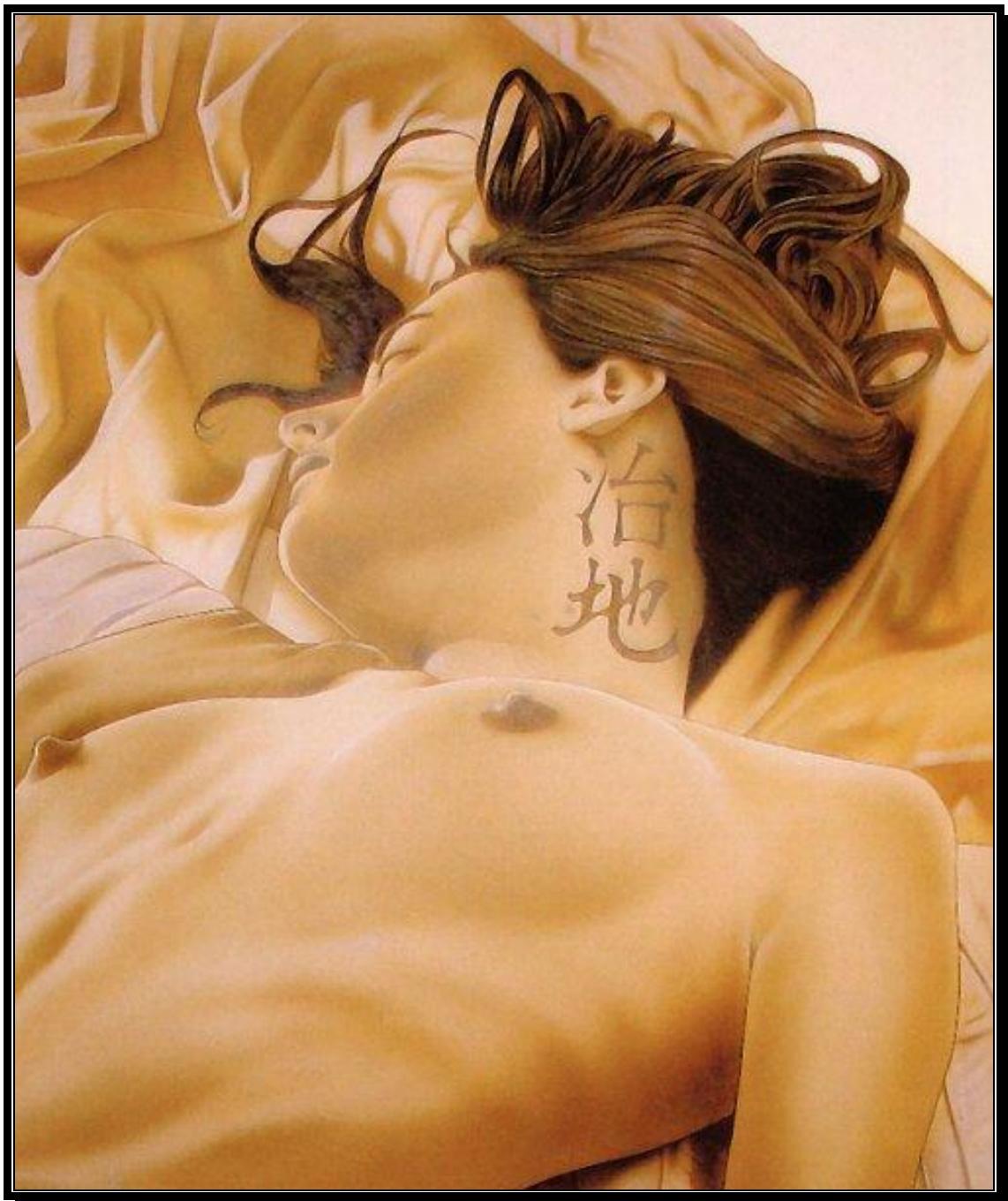


# Hung Over

Bradley Stoke



Clare rolled to one side and her bare nipples brushed briefly and sensuously against the hair of a naked man's chest. At first she thought nothing of it and almost rolled back, to face away as she normally did, but then she wondered.

Who was this man? And where was she?

She turned back with alarm and studied the figure sprawled next to her, one arm and one leg free of the sheet that covered him and a gently breathing mouth that faced towards her. His short hair was ruffled and he had a small ring through his nose.

Clare was still none the wiser.

She lay on her back and studied the ceiling and walls around her. This was definitely not *her* flat. No way would she have plastered it with so many pictures of semi-clad women featured on night club posters. Nor would she have dreamt of buying such a purely functional lampshade. And all those CDs cluttering up the surfaces of the utilitarian furniture!

This could only be a man's bedroom.

Clare squeezed her eyes tight. She was definitely feeling ragged. She'd mixed too many drinks with too many drugs. Although she didn't have that horrible nauseous feeling that often accompanied the morning after, she wasn't feeling at her best.

She remembered going to the night club. But she couldn't remember the name of it. Even though she had queued up for ages outside with Joanne, Phillipa and Louise. But once inside, with the DJ caning the funky techno and hard dance, it became one disconnected blur of recollections. Most of her time, she was sure, was spent on the dance floor, gyrating, swivelling, stomping and sweating under the strobes, the E kicking in and the speed driving her faster and more delirious. And

didn't they snort some charlie earlier in the evening?

That was cool!

And between the dancing, the four girls sat together by the bar, swigging a few coolers and puffing at their ciggies. And giggling and chortling and shouting and measuring up the talent. Some good looking boys. But, be honest, after enough E, let alone the alcopops, a boy had to be fucking ugly not to look half-way decent.

And back on the floor, the four girls going their separate ways. Phillipa with the shaven-headed guy with the weird Maori tattoos. Louise and Joanne in a huddle with some guys who insisted they'd met them once at the Zap Club in Brighton.

Which was possible.

And Clare herself with the guy with the little goatee, the funny beret and the cool tee-shirt he'd got at Glastonbury that time. He was a fucking good dancer. And, as she soon established, not a bad kisser either, as they manoeuvred towards a pillar and got into some strenuous tongue-play.

So, was the bloke she was with the same guy?

She turned her head back to look at him.

No fucking way!

So how had she managed to hitch up with him?

And then it came back to her, fragments of memory coalescing bit by bit into a coherent picture.

It was when Clare was leaving. She had no idea what had happened to her three friends. They'd been with her and some boys and some other girls they'd met when they collected their coats from the cloakroom. But somehow outside, it was *so*

confusing. Taxis everywhere. People sponging ciggies. Bouncers standing with their arms folded outside the club.

“You want this taxi?” asked a guy, as one drew up to the kerb.

And Clare looked him up and down. Fuck! He was better than nothing, she must have thought. If she’d thought much about anything at all. And anyway she was still out of it.

“Yeah! Why not?”

“Where’re you going?” he asked as they sat together on the back seat.

“Coffee on offer?” Clare slurred.

“Yeah, right!” he said, quite clearly as beyond clear thought as she was.

And then back, somehow, and here there was a total blank, to this flat somewhere in the city. Or not so complete a blank. She remembered his tongue in her mouth, his hands on her breasts and her hand on his trousers. Just making sure!

Then in his flat. No coffee, mind you. Just a frantic fumble as her clothes and his slid away and the two were on top of each other. There was sweat. There were some helpful poppers. There was a bit of tongue-play below as Clare toked on a joint he’d skinned up and he burrowed his head between her legs, his tongue twiddling on the little clit ring she’d bought in Ibiza.

And then, but thankfully not straight away, the inevitable fucking.

But was it good?

Probably.

And did she take precautions?

Well, the pill would handle the obvious worry, but she remembered guiltily,

and cursed herself, nothing to guard herself the other concerns. Shit! After that Chlamydia and that bout of gonorrhoea hadn't she learnt anything?

Obviously not!

Shit! Another month probing around with a mirror. Perhaps another visit to the clinic. Another month when she'd have to confess to Paul that she'd done what she shouldn't have done.

Clare sighed deeply.

"Wassup?" asked the guy beside her.

Clare smiled. Should she ask him whether he had caught anything? As if he'd tell her if he had!

"Fine," she replied.

And then she noticed that despite his hangover, which bleared his eyes and left his mouth drooping in a moronic way, like most men he was blessed with a morning stiffy.

She placed a hand on his erect penis and gently squeezed it between her forefinger and thumb.

"Fine," she repeated. "Bit hung over. But nothing that this can't cure!"

Fuck it! If she was going to the clinic again, she might as well make sure it was for something she could remember.