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## Double Cross

### Patrick Woodrow

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The mirror saved his life.

Ed Strachan never meant to look, but it was at the bottom of the stairs and he had to pass it to reach the bar. Dinner was going well. They'd almost finished their second bottle of wine so maybe that was what prompted it. No movement of the head. No break of the stride. Just a flick of the eyes to check himself out.

He was tanned and freckled after six days in the Curaçao sun. Although he'd taken a shower his hair was stiff with salt from the day's last dive. Stubble speckled his cheeks and chin, and his shirt hung from his shoulders like new. He wasn't vain but his mouth tightened in the faintest of smiles. He had to admit it: he looked pretty good.

He was halfway up the stairs when he realised what else he'd seen.

It was too late for a second glance but his mind had taken the shot. He took the steps two at a time as he processed the image. It was a side-on view of the table. There in the background, deep in the mirror's reflection: Christine Molyneux spiking his drink.

She was leaning forward in her chair, squirting something into his wine with a pipette. She'd attempted to hide the glass behind a menu and if it hadn't been for the mirror he'd never have known. Alarm surged in his stomach. What the hell was she doing? Drugging him?

He reached the bar and bought a packet of Camels. He lit one and drew on it, hard. Drugging him. Yes, that was exactly what she was doing. She'd told him about her penchant for Ecstasy over the aperitif. After the starter, her foot was in his lap, and she suggested that he should try some of the stuff. Her theory was simple: sex was better on E because it heightened and prolonged the pleasure.

Strachan didn't take drugs, so he'd laughed her off. Irritation had flashed in Christine's face, and he'd excused himself to go and buy cigarettes. Now he was amazed at her audacity. She was someone who couldn't take no for an answer.

He was heading back to London the next day with the films for the underwater calendar that he'd been shooting for National Geographic, and he'd been hoping to see her again when she returned from her holiday later that week. After catching the reflection, he wasn't so sure. Her stunt with the Ecstasy pissed him off. It was already obvious why they were here: at



twenty-nine he was plenty old enough to know that when a pretty woman caressed his groin with her foot it wasn't to improve his circulation.

He took another hit on the Camel. The decision to switch glasses was made in a heartbeat. If she wanted to get high that was fine; she could do it on her own. He paid for the cigarettes and headed back down. Somewhere in the distance a band played calypso.

The Lobster Pot was the best restaurant in Willemstad. It was built from wood and wicker, and sat right on the waterfront. Their table was towards the rear. On his way back Strachan spotted a shoal of yellowtails, flashing like glass shards as they patrolled the water for scraps. The raffia blinds were up and a gust of wind caused the candle flames to shiver.

Christine had pulled her cardigan over her shoulders. She was exquisite. Her teeth were white and straight so that when she smiled she radiated health. She was fit and strong with cover-girl looks. The way the skin at the corners of her eyes wrinkled into crow's-feet reminded him of someone, but whoever it was the link was too distant to matter now. The waiter had cleared their plates and the drug in Strachan's glass had mixed without trace. He sat down and stubbed out the cigarette.

'Isn't that a bit stupid for someone who spends all his time diving?' Her accent: unmistakably East End London.

'I guess.' She favoured the athletic look so there was no lipstick on her glass, and both were filled to the same level. They wouldn't stay that way for long, though.

Strachan pulled a breadstick from the basket and broke it into four pieces. He tossed the bread over her head, and the yellowtails were on it in seconds. Christine turned to watch the frenzy unfurl in the water. Strachan shot out his hands and switched their glasses. Fast and steady. It only took a second. He had his new glass raised by the time it was over.

'To the fish,' he said, chinking his glass against hers. He rolled the wine round his mouth like a connoisseur before knocking it back in a single gulp. He would have preferred a beer.

'To the fish,' Christine echoed. If he overplayed the part, she didn't notice. She drained her glass, so that Sancerre and Ecstasy slipped down together. There was no gagging or clutching of the throat. Just a shimmer of those brilliant blue eyes, and a smile that said Let's go.

Dinner was over. Urgency consumed them. Strachan offered to make a contribution to the bill, knowing that he couldn't afford it, but she told him to stop being a fool: this was her treat, and did he want to go back to his place or hers? They'd already discussed their respective accommodation. He was camping; she had a room at the San Marco hotel. It was a rhetorical question.

She settled the bill and they ran from the restaurant hand in hand.

Christine's room was small and had kitsch Caribbean decor. The stool by the desk and the armchair in the corner were bamboo. The prints on the wall were of skiffs, palm trees, and tropical fruit. A pair of jeans lay crumpled on the floor. A pink bikini dried on the windowsill. Strachan inspected the prints disapprovingly while she fetched him a beer from the minibar.

Christine giggled. She slurred her words as she ordered him out of his clothes. She was breathless as she disappeared into the bathroom, promising to return in something more comfortable. Something more comfortable turned out to be nothing at all, and when the door opened again he was waiting for her in a similar state on the bed.

'I said completely naked.' Christine shook her black hair loose so that it fell on her shoulders.

'I am completely naked.' Strachan's heart pounded inside his chest like a golf ball on a short length of elastic.

'Uh-uh. Take the cuff link off too.' She pointed to his neck, where he wore a solid silver cuff link on a chain like a pendant. The words tumbled out, heavy and awkward.

For the first time Strachan felt uneasy. Had she taken something herself before spiking his drink? If so, she might be in danger of an overdose. 'The cuff link stays on.' His voice wavered: the beginnings of doubt. The cuff link was a family heirloom. The only times he'd removed it in the last eleven years had been to pass through airport metal detectors. It had originally been one of a pair made by his grandfather, but the other had been stolen the night his parents died.

Christine's forehead creased as though she was searching for the answer to a puzzle. She said 'Never mind', and began crawling up the bed towards him.

'Chrissie, there's something I need to tell you.'

But she wasn't listening. She stiffened her fingers like claws, scrunching the sheets with every move forward. Strachan saw the tan mark of her G-string like a paper dart. He flinched as her breasts brushed against him. Her eyes were glazed now; earlier they'd burned. She was woozier with every movement. He tried to sit up, telling her that he'd changed his mind, but she continued crawling. She settled on his sternum, pinning him down.

'Chrissie, let's do this another time. You're not well. I switched our glasses.' Something was wrong. She was struggling for breath. 'Chrissie?'

There was a flash of comprehension in her eyes. It was the last thing Strachan noticed before Christine convulsed, clutched her hand to her chest, and fell to the floor with a thump.