

Short Story: Slippery [C1]

Nato con una straordinaria capacità di sfuggire a qualsiasi situazione, viene sorpreso da un uomo in un modo che non si sarebbe mai aspettato...

I have been a **slippery** character since the day I was born. Seconds after the **midwife** cut the umbilical cord, **I wriggled, slipped out** of her hands and fell to the floor. Fortunately I was born at home; I owe my life to the thick **carpet** in my parents' bedroom. My parents could never hug or **tickle** me. Throwing me into the air and catching me was completely out of the question. Their inability to show their affection in any tangible way worried them. They took me to a child psychologist, but by that time I'd invented an explanation for my behaviour, which convinced everyone. I was never involved in any physical altercations at school. I enjoyed provoking the **school bullies**, but while they tried to **beat me up** I always **slipped out** from their rugby-style **tackles** like a bar of soap. I had few friends and was equally unpopular with the staff. If the teachers tried to reprimand me for a **cheeky** comment or incomplete homework, they soon discovered that my tongue was as **slippery** as the rest of me. My **ready** excuses and explanations left them in **bewildered** silence. I didn't bother with university, but went straight from school to a job, several in fact, and I moved between my various roles — **bartender, courier**, circus escapologist and part-time thief — with the greatest of **ease**. I signed no contracts and paid no taxes. I gave a false name and address to each of my employers, so if ever I had to leave suddenly, they were unable **to get hold of** me. All that changed the day I saw Bernard. Sitting at a small table in the corner of the restaurant where I was working as a waiter, he was one of the few single **diners** not **peering** at a smartphone. A large man — not fat, but robust and imposing — Bernard looked neither **awkward** nor isolated. Although I wasn't his waiter that evening, I frequently noticed him watching me. If our eyes crossed, he smiled and looked away. At the end of the meal he **summoned** another waiter and **settled his bill**, but then passed close by me as he headed for the exit. I was so sure he was going to stop and say something, I raised my **eyebrows** and looked at him expectantly, but he walked past me and out onto the street. I felt **foolish** and **annoyed**. I thought about him all that evening and most of the next day.

Bernard came back three or four times and the same thing happened. Whenever I caught him looking, he would smile and look away. The worst thing was, I felt strangely drawn to him. I, who had spent a lifetime slipping away from people, felt an irresistible urge not only to approach him, but to get to know him. It was a fierce magnetism. Eventually I could stand it no longer. The last time he left, I hurried out of the restaurant just in time to see him disappearing down an alley. I ran after him, but when I got to the alley it was deserted. I was fast on my feet, but this large man had managed to outstrip me. I started jogging down the alley when suddenly a great hand grabbed me by the neck and lifted me off my feet. That's when Bernard introduced himself. I squirmed and kicked but he'd trapped some of my hair in his fist and I couldn't move without wrenching it at the roots. "I wouldn't waste too much effort trying to wriggle out of this one," he said in a voice that was deep and strangely calming. "There are some people who'd like to have a word with you." "Who?" I gasped. Bernard recited a long list of names: all people I'd robbed or swindled and then slipped away from. They'd reached out to each other on social media, sharing old photographs of me in various guises before hiring Bernard to track me down. Bernard forced me to his car. "You won't mind travelling in the back," he said softly as he opened the boot. I shook my head and he gagged and tied me up, then lifted me in with surprising gentleness. I wasn't worried — I'd escaped from similar situations several times in one of my circus jobs. Poor Bernard really thought that leaving me tied up in the boot of his car in a locked garage would be enough to control me until his clients arrived. I watched them from the roof of a neighbouring garage as they lined up, waiting expectantly. I felt truly sorry for Bernard as he opened the garage door, then flung the boot open, only to find it empty. But Bernard has me well and truly trapped. I moved away and found another job, but I still feel irresistibly drawn to the calm and mighty man who temporarily caught me. I've visited the garage several times, but Bernard hasn't been back. When he comes, I'll follow him home, then somehow I'll find a way to slip back into his life.

Glossary

- **tickled** = fare il solletico
- **awkward** = goffo
- **wrenching** = strattonare
- **gasped** = ansimare
- **mighty** = potente
- **beat me up** = picchiare
- **ease** = facilità, con disinvoltura
- **drawn** = attratta
- **lined up** = fare una fila
- **courier** = postina
- **settled his bill** = pagare il conto
- **foolish** = stupida
- **guises** = maschere
- **gagged** = soffocare
- **cheeky** = impertinente
- **ready** = rapide, pronte
- **peering** = guardare da vicino, scrutare
- **outstrip** = avanzare
- **trapped** = prendere
- **swindled** = truffare
- **I wriggled** = contorcersi
- **carpet** = tappeto
- **tackles** = placcaggi
- **eyebrows** = sopracciglia
- **hurried out** = uscire di fretta
- **alley** = strada
- **roots** = radici
- **reached out** = contattare
- **school bullies** = bulli, prepotenti
- **bewildered** = sbalordito, confuso
- **to get hold of** = prendere
- **diners** = commensali
- **annoyed** = infastidita

- **lifted me off my feet** = alzare da terra
- **boot open** = aprire di colpo
- **stand it no longer** = non potevo più sopportarli
- **boot** = bagagliaio
- **slippery** = sfuggente
- **midwife** = ostetrica
- **slipped out** = sfuggire
- **bartender** = barista
- **summoned** = chiamare
- **slipping away** = sfuggire