

Contained

by Peter Wood

'You're listening to Smooth FM, taking you from the darkest hours to the start of a brand new day... Here's The Hollies.'

A pause, music starts.

The man in the car has jet black hair, a slight fringe and messily trimmed at the back. His fingers, a slight residue of crud beneath his fingernails tap in time to the song on the steering wheel.

He chews a Nicorette gum then once the mint taste's infused his tongue prods it to his cheek where it'll do its job. Doesn't stop the tremor. Doesn't remove the need. Deep, inside.

At this time of day, the streets are quiet. He catches street-lamps winking tentatively in the rear-view. He breathes out — almost a sigh — deep down he wonders if he's alright. Is he alright? Then puts a CD on.

The man with black hair scratches his arm absently. He's wearing a long black button-down type. Beneath this is a muscular, toned in make-shift gyms arm. Not Adonis but not shoddy neither. If you ignore the lacerations.

He feels the fingernails over the cotton of the shirt. He feels the balm of scratching.

He knows when to stop. But...

He doesn't. He feels the slow building wetness, unseen but already pooling. Contained beneath the shirt.

He grunts a 'fuck.'

Single handed, he turns the car onto the pavement, rolls to a stop.

Unplugging the seat-belt he swears again, rolls up the sleeve. Tiny rivulets of red drip. He takes a hanky from his pocket, presses it hard to stem the flow.

Labyrinths of cut-marks mix with make-do-it-yourself cheap-ass tattoos. Nothing distinguishable except memories of foolish messed-up nights with the boys.

'The trouble with you...' the roar in his head announces, 'you couldn't say no. Always yes... the more messed up the better.'

As the black haired man holds the hanky firm, his mobile squawks into life. He glances at the number on screen, shoves it into the glove compartment til the caller gives up.

Blood stemmed, the black haired man re-plugs the seatbelt, pulls out an address scribbled on a piece of paper tucked inside his wallet. He only glances at it — the amount of time he's looked at it, it's etched into his brain like a scar.

The car starts up, he pulls onto the road again, switches to talk-radio.

'So, tell me what's on your mind this fine morning.' the radio announcer calls out.

'Where d'you want to start?' black haired man asks to himself.

He rolls down the window, spits out a gob of spit and the Nicorette. It bounces on the tarmac.

The car picks up speed.

