

Under the Influence

Humming along to the radio, I was flying toward home. It had been a good good night, and the song confirmed it. I was enjoying the calm, clear night, driving and tapping out a rhythm on the steering wheel. My bobble-head elephant on the dashboard wasn't just nodding along because he's agreeable, he was doing a little soft-shoe dance. I giggled at the sight the magic fumes were having on Elmer the Elephant.

It took a few moments for me to realise that the rise-and-fall whine I could hear was not a feature of some new radio mix of the song, but the siren of the police car behind me. *Oh crap.* I pulled over to the side of the empty country road, tires kicking up a lazy puff of dust from the shoulder. Elmer was still tap-dancing across the dash, even after I switched the radio off. "You'd better stop now." The elephant looked disappointed, and slumped back to his stand, his bobble head nodding in reproach at me. I reached into my purse on the passenger seat, riffling for the lollipops I usually kept in there – beer-flavoured ones covered the smell of magic better than any mint or gum. I kept getting handfuls of scratchy netting and taffeta but no lollipops. Panic building, I pulled out an acid yellow tutu and flung it into the backseat, followed by a neon green tutu. Still nothing.

I glanced into the rearview mirror, checking for the cop. At least he seemed to be taking his sweet time, still logging details from my licence plates.

I ducked over to the side and popped open the glove compartment. Digging through papers and receipts and – *a fucking brick? How the hell did that get in there?* – I finally found a bouquet of beer-flavoured lollipops tucked in the far corner. I unwrapped one and jammed it in my mouth, leaping a foot when the officer tapped on my window.

I rolled the window down, sucking on the lollipop with a suggestive eyelash flutter, then extracted it slowly from my puckered lips. In my huskiest voice, I asked, "How can I

help you this evening,” I glanced at his name tag, “Officer Blunkett?” I looked deep into his eyes, adding as much seductive intonation into his lurching name as I could.

He cocked an eyebrow at me, and his lip sneered at an echoing angle. He nudged the brim of his hat back and cleared his throat. “Have you been doing magic this evening?” He was struggling to keep focused, I could tell, but his disapproval was evident.

“Why, no, Officer Blunkett. What makes you say that?” I rolled the tip of my tongue around the circumference of the lollipop, keeping eye contact.

His eyes widened – *in horror*, a traitorous part of my brain insisted – and cleared his throat again. “You were flying.”

I giggled a little. “Oh, officer, I know I was going a little fast, but –”

He held up a hand to stop me. “Your car was hovering a foot or so from the ground. I have it on video. Please step out of the car.” He opened the door, standing back to keep it between us. “I will be conducting a breathalyzer test.”

I struggled out of the car, tottering on my high heels, and grabbed at the car to steady myself, looking down as I did.

That’s when I realised that – somehow – I had been magicked into a man.

I ducked down to look in the wing mirror, and was horrified by the reflection gaping back. A thicker, more jowly version of my own face, complete with a five o’clock shadow, and mascara half-way down my cheeks, my lipstick a smear of red. *Well, no wonder the cop flinched!*

I chucked the lollipop back into the car, and straightened up, tugging my purple tutu further down in a vain effort to cover my hairy legs. There was no hiding the effects of the magic, but I hoped to be able to deflect the culpability onto someone else. *It must have been Ashley. She’s always hated me.*

I squared my shoulders, cleared my throat and prepared to speak man-to-man with the officer. “Officer, there’s been a mistake. I have not been doing magic, though it is more than obvious that I have been in the company of those who were.” I waved a hand at my masculine body. “My name is Anna Black and I’m usually a woman!”

With his forehead furrowed, he asked for my license and registration, and took the papers back to his car. While I waited for Officer Blunkett to verify my identity, I slipped off my shoes and threw them into the car, because I was going to need to stand firm in a few minutes.

“Well, *Miss Black*,” he said, “everything is in order. It appears that you are the victim of a terrible crime. You could come to the station with me and press charges.” Any kind of sympathy disappeared from Blunkett’s face, as his expression turned unforgiving. He held up the breathalyser, and said, “Or you could come clean and admit that you’ve done this to yourself to avoid being charged with driving under the influence of magic.”

I gawped at him, goggle-eyed, and he thrust the black box into my hands.

“Take a deep breath, and blow into this tube. Begin.” Blunkett’s attention was on his watch.

I took a deep breath and blew as hard as I could. But not into the breathalyser. Blunkett’s hat flew off into the night, and his hair whipped hard in the gale force, but he remained on his feet. His face rippled under the sheer G-force of the wind, and kept rippling even after I ran out of breath.

I glanced at Elmer, perched on his hind legs as he watched the proceedings. “What do you think, Elmer? Another elephant friend for you? Or something different?”