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Some moments seem to last a lifetime. It started with her hand pulling back the sheet. Hands that squeaked in white surgical gloves, snapped down over pale wrists. Then, without looking at me she said:

'Can you identify this as the body of Frank Tyler?'

I couldn't see her mouth behind the cotton mask but I knew from the way her voice cut the air that she hadn't smiled in years. And why would she? I didn't want to look at him just yet, so instead I kept my eyes on her. I wondered what her legs looked like under that rubber apron. Wondered what she'd look like in a dress. I didn't want to look down. Why did it have to be confirmed?

I didn't even know Frank Tyler. I knew Rooster, but I never knew what his real name was. Truth is, as I was starting to realise, I hardly knew him at all.

It was a rainy night when I first met him. The night was dark and cold and I remember seeing him standing on a milk crate outside the seven-eleven wearing some crazy pink sequined dress as if he had just walked out of Mardi Gras. It was a Friday I think, but it could have been Saturday. I don't keep track of the days. I mark out time by the coins that fall in my hat. And every time a gold one comes I put it straight in my pocket just in case.

We were mates because we looked out for each other. People thought we were brothers. But we were different, him and I. Rooster wore dresses and played the guitar. But you could tell he wasn't a poof because he sang and danced so bad. He had a shocking voice. I swear to God I have no idea how he did it. But nobody cared because he was a real crowd pleaser was Rooster. He used to make up songs on the spot as people walked by. He'd pick out something about them and start up. Some funny, some not. 'Nice pants idiot', he'd shout on a bad day. I reckon people gave him money because they were scared he'd sing something embarrassing about them, especially since he directed his wit at the collars who looked like they could spare the change. They didn't have the guts to walk on past without at least dropping something into his hat. But they never stopped for a chat, they had this way of dropping the coins and moving on without so much as a glance at him.

But there were some who stopped. The ones who

stopped were always the same people and they came often. Not to listen to his music but to talk with him in the shadows. There were certain things that you just couldn't sing about apparently. After the handshake they always walked away quicker than they had arrived. Rooster never seemed nervous about these deals in the dark though. I think he thought he was some kind of superhero and that pink sequins made him invincible.

That first night I met him, when I walked up he asked me for a smoke. Then he looked down at my bag of coloured chalks.

'You're new,' he said, leaning in to catch my light.

'Yeah.'

'Looking for a spot?'

'Maybe.'

'Do you see that parking sign? You can go between that and the green bin. But don't come any closer.'

We smoked for a bit in silence. I wasn't used to taking orders from a man in drag. But I didn't argue. I'd seen the handshakes in the shadows. And I'd seen his eyes, now.

'Thanks,' I said.

'Hey.'

'Yeah?'

'Do you do portraits?'

I looked down.

'I could try.'

'Can you do me?'

'You?'

'Yeah. In exchange for me looking out for you.'

'Deal.'

But in the end it was me that should have looked out for him. I glanced up too late from my Mona Lisa on the pavement and saw his green milk crate overturned. Saw them chase him up the street. I didn't hear any shots but when the cops came later, I knew it was me they'd ask.

She held the sheet back and I looked down. I saw a man with his eyes closed. I saw a man without sequins or music. I saw a man without a family. Frank Tyler, the one the newspapers called 'ringleader'. But I just knew him as Rooster.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucy Broome.