



OLYMPIA

Pierrot *le* Fou

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Frank Lauder

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Chapter 1

Early one perfect morning

It was very early one perfect morning, somehow not real, crystalline, dripping with the tears of the night which had followed the traces of his tears, when they were herded onto the prison transport.

For an interminable time the tyres roiled against the concrete then all at once seemed to find purchase on vagrant stones then finally the crumbling strands of the earth of broken unmade roadway; on the narrow bench, they each had had to brace against the flexing, jolting bodies of each other, and it was at that moment that the truck suddenly lost power that he heard a link seem to break somewhere in the engine as the prison transport unexpectedly and yet gently rolled onto a region of something softer, perhaps sand, and slewed slightly

sideways on the change, throwing its human cargo like the body of a whale, to the other side.

He registered this in abstract as if it were some kind of a dream; he, they most of them, half asleep, dozing, as he was at that time due to the constant whining of the tyres and the contrast of the heat in the back of the van after the freezing dank cold of the cells. It continued, the convicts automatically rolling against the gravity of the truck as it slewed, the man next to him rolling back his weight against him and then finding his balance, in a sudden incomplete flash of light through the gap at the top of the interior, finding a baseball cap hiding a set of man-made scars on his face, a cut ear, a slashed lip, indistinct in the mottled dark.

So then the link or whatever it was suddenly *binged*, sounding clear and yet displaced, not unlike the disembodied *ping* of a crystal tumbler breaking, or the first fine note of a church bell's chime, frozen and isolated in the echoless transept of memory.

And then, almost in sequence, the engine gave out a high, choked, mangled whine, an ear-piercing *bang!* as the prison transport meandered without motive force back onto the broken roadway, slightly out of straight, then once a more a sudden sequence of zig-zags, this time headlong into the drainage ditch by its side. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* Then shocked darkness, silence.

Silence - for a long moment. Then as he straightened up and brought the focus of his eyes up from his feet, he detected something on the floor of the transport, tilted skewed and un-straight as it was, the cabin canted up on one side, the convicts beginning to slide upon it but still held in place by their manacled feet. Something within his grasp - a textured bunched, flattened, roll of paper - and with the reflex of the destitute he leaned forward to claim it and push it into a back pocket. He could use it, whatever it was.

The damned, now bunched up on one side of the slimy floor of the transport, fought for their balance - and then in the next moment he saw, rather than heard, a row of vibrating ragged tears appear near the join of the roof and the metal panel walls, while suddenly sharp spikes of light gave form to this quadrilateral space - then the sounds of an industrial machine, *Punch, Punch, Punch!*

Sound came up hard against all their ears as spent, hot metal fragments spat and echoed through the greyness like banshees, around them.

Then in the half-dark someone was banging-at and freeing the master lock of the chains securing their ankles. Curses and tugs at their feet, as the bands opened up obediently and the slick fashioned stainless steel of the security chain see-sawed its way around the seated cons as they fought to balance on the treacherous sheer steel surface, free their shackles and at the same time shelter themselves with raised elbows, only their arms to

protect them, as all at once everything became bedlam. Smoke, sparks, and then there was a steel blast of frozen air, the door clanged open and bounced against its hinges to slam again; they were almost free!

The tribe of them flung themselves against the door until somehow it burst it open once more with their desperate weight and energy, like a savagely loaded spring.

Out into the freezing air, sharp shards of yellow and red fire sparkling around them. A few of them left behind, at least one falling as he ran, killed by ricocheting shot.

No time to think, none to surmise, only to run. Amid the spikes and punches of sound they struggled out into an unearthly early morning, the water still moist on the trees and the savannah grasses after a cold night in autumn.

He found that he was covered with some sort of rime, a glutinous mix of sweat, fear and grease, hydrated by the air of the transport, slippery like fat and yet suddenly freezing. Yet he must run, he must escape.

He stopped for a moment, with no-where to go. He could see the Sun coming up in an endless blue-grey dawn as streams of elegantly tinted metallic chrome yellow and white sparks flew up against the background of the distant mountains. He could hear the body of the van being peppered with impacts from whatever it was

was being used against it. Technicolor against the shuttered, monochromed descants of the real.

Hot rain struck his skin as the metal of the cabin began to melt and become a spray of red rain. Red rain, and his blood. He was peppered suddenly with little smarting shards, wounds which released fine painful nodules of blood onto his arms and back wherever they touched, as the transport burned.

Then they were gone, like the spray from a blow torch as it cuts steel; he'd seen that at first hand, yes he had.

He was still shocked, sleep-walking, staggering in a jagged circle which flattened into a long zigzag as one of the other convicts-to-be grabbed him and dragged him over the broken stones and mud of this godforsaken road towards the distant hills, as if inviting him to leap there in a few giant strides.

He staggered on, rolling in his gait, aimless, blind, with the crystal scalpel of the rising light the only thing to guide him.

Now they were into the mud of a field, juddering endless minutes, lurching up to their thighs, mud, freezing water and then more mud, and then another band of freezing clear water with a base of sharp pebbles and then a sudden band of hard banking which grew upward at an impossible set of angles until there were small elements of grasses and bushes and sharp small stones...

His chest was bursting with the lack of exercise after the months spent in a crowded cell with his lice-ridden brothers from the street, but he had to run, for another thousand paces and then another.

He stopped to throw-up, but there was nothing in his stomach so only water came, and anyway his new friend was pulling at his torn shirt and gesturing onward towards the ever playful, dancing mountains.

The sound of an explosion ripped, savage, through the wind and he half-turned to see the now distant transport in the black-and-white dawn landscape, shot through with an unstable, shimmering sheet of flickering blood-red lamée flame and gorgeous hues of brilliant chrome yellow, white and deepest orange, a body suddenly disjointedly hovering in the air, suspended momentarily on a pinnacle of energy like a crooked leaden, broken, bird.

The air of the plain around him had all at once become lens-like, crystalline, playful, magnifying, distorting and shrinking its victims in a second as the mountains danced away playfully in their theatre. And now the two of them were a long way from the road and the hoisted smell and the infected smudge of smoke from the burning fuel.

He hadn't done it, the thing he had denied all through the trial, so it seemed pointless to run - and yet he knew that the moment had come when it would mean that it was not one of them but all of them who would die or be

captured or spend years more in hell if he didn't, so having looked he turned and chased the ragged group, ran on through the jagged, crooked lens of it all, zigzagging, tripping, falling, torn and exhausted - and still alive.

It would never end. He ran on for another lifetime, unthinking, scared to die on a morning like this one, the Sun still high in the sky; stopping for long moments as his left leg suddenly began quivering as if from incurable ague.

He was coughing as if he were suffering some awful disease, precious minutes spent doubled over in a dusty furrow, shrieking from pain or fear or some kind of torment.

"Come on, run, no matter - lean on me!" His friend urged him on.

And finally after a thousand disjointed years, he amid the strange tribe of them straggled into a wide grove of trees, heavy, rich, fat red-gold *Kakis*, Persimmons, drooping from their boughs, half of them out of reach like all his vain spoiled promises, all his lost golden kisses.

It was obviously an orchard of some kind. The remains of them sat there in that renaissance earthly paradise for some minutes, shaking and out of focus in themselves, cursing, tearing at the fruit and wolfing the gently astringent attic flesh without so much as tasting its delicate honey firmness, in just the same way that they had their lost lives.

Then under the ordered, fractal geometry of the trees. The remainder of the group began to separate urgently - fragment, for their pursuers could not be far behind them - some seeming to know that they should go to the right, some directing themselves to the left, wherever that led, the melodic wand of the cordillera magicking them within its distance with all its powers of sinuous, silent, hypnotic, mysterious elemental muscle.

There were flurries of muttered urgent orders, some of the groups reacting and others taking some sort of command, some following, some deciding and some lost in confusion.

No greetings, no goodbyes - goodbye is for when you maybe know the outcome.

Then there were a few minutes more of exhausted panting, clouds of breath in the icy air, silence, tired men sitting on whatever offered itself for a few stolen moments of some sort of rest.

There was no turning towards him, this stranger, no reacting to someone who anyway was locked in the same corner of hate: and under his growth of beard it would be difficult to recognize that he was a foreigner, even if they knew or cared that there was one there - nobody said a wasted word, most communication being by some sort of ragged sign language.

But his new friend, the man who had willed him through the mud and across the stony ground knew him, kept him always in his eye line, as if he somehow lacked

either wit - or perhaps trust - sufficient to survive by himself.

Time to go.

The small phalanx split, stumbled apart, disappeared in its parts as the huge outside of the broken meadows which carpeted this rising land took over, dwarfed them.

Then for him, endless empty time.

More walking into a void, walking until all his joints were aching with imagined damage, freezing then insensitive and then alternately scratched and boiling, sweat running into his eyes, all muscles strained, across roads watching for vehicles, ducking into groves of stunted trees, crouching behind ancient stone walls with their joins so fine that after a thousand years you could not enter a thickness of paper between them.

All day they trekked, falling, tripping, helping and hauling each other over the rocks. The dust, the scattered detritus of ancient ground, savannah, stones, the broken dry beds of empty watercourses, fields of cactuses spreading into the distance across patches of arid desert.

Finally, sleeping like the dead, like the exhausted, huddling together for warmth in the harsh darkness of a freezing Andean night: and then discovering the hard, beautiful, imperious life-giving Sun, as it swooped out

from between the peaks at Dawn - as if it were itself a Condor, surveying all before it, owning them and the harsh high land.

Then, another night. His arms and legs so tired and shot with pain and weakness that he staggered from side to side as if possessed of some dreadful disease, his head swimming in freezing air, then water refreshing his face as a freezing shower hit them.

Later, some sort of rest, in the lee of a high wall - followed by another burning day and then another frozen night huddled together for warmth - and at dawn another orchard where they heard voices and ran and hurdled over the wall and down another dried stream bed, across a broken plateau, hungry now, meandering, half blind with the cold and the heat and starvation. He lost count of the days, felt only heat and cold and hunger.

And one translucent morning they found themselves confronting a rocky plateau across abutments of limestone and granite and ironstone.

They were in those Valkyrie-like mountains they'd first seen and then dreamt about at last, and after a few more hours they were filling-up their mouths with pure freezing innocent mountain water and bloating their exhaustion with sunlight, hiking in their ragged clothes to one peak and then walking some miles along an unknown ancient narrow unmade broken-up stony road with a drop on one side of a couple thousand into a

river valley of assorted sharp savannah and the up-thrusts of groups of trees and tall clumped spiny cactuses that you wouldn't want to fall into. They saw another series of rugged granite inclines ahead of them across broken ravines.

"We have to go there," said his friend, and they felt their hearts fall as they saw yet another precipitous climb ahead of them. They climbed into the Sun.

The Sun became their symbol in his mind, the only absolute in their world, unreachable in this life, as they continued to stagger and lope and sometimes run in their broken way, ever towards it.

One starving day later, up came a rattling rusty truck with the back busted and broken wood freeboard and they hitched a ride and finally they were riding into in a no-name town on the back of the truck, the town only a pueblo with an ancient church and a sprinkle of battered adobes around a straggling centre, with the campesinos looking at him because he was a head taller than any of them and straight-backed, walked with a certain straightness that they somehow lacked.

That was when he knew he wasn't called Pierrot *Le Fou*, for nothing: no, he'd earned it, the idiot, the story was an old one and he refused any change to it, because despite everything he still insisted that he hadn't done it – hadn't wanted to start the whole hateful cycle, hadn't wanted to be a convict, hadn't wanted involvement with

those people; which turned him in the end into a runaway, which then gave chance the let to turn an innocent into a fugitive. Damn it, there was nothing for it now, the time for proof was past, all his dreams were garbage, nobody wanted to listen to the ragged ravings of a runaway con.

He looked at his erstwhile partner, learnt his name, Pinchot, and saw that for his part of the story so far Pinchot's eyes were blank and exhausted - as exhausted as his must have been - and that Pinchot like he seemed to live in that same past, waiting for the knock on the door, the bad dream, and the manacles round his ankles... that was all. He said:

“We walk?”

The other nodded.

What more was there to say?

There was nothing left behind them now. They went on, ragged and humbled and torn. Forever.

And as you know, years later that knowledge brought him close to Estrella, for she was a child of the stars and the firmament, and unknown even to herself a student of the fast moving stillness of forgetfulness. And she was living close to the stars, to God even, high in the wastes and crystal clear cold skies of the cordillera.

.....

Chapter 15

The Poet of the Dead

Quiet days, at least for now. He had never been in Cordoba, the second city of Argentina before. It is a quiet, dusty place in autumn, though the winters there are pretty much warm too, the basin in which Cordoba sits acting like a shield against the extremes and vagaries of the surrounding climactic wind and storms.

Afternoons and evenings there became dusty as the summer's heat began to fall back and the restless aimless scatters of ragged high wind from the sierras brought in fine brownish fall-out from the intervening pampas and blew little noisy balletic pas-de-deux flurries of paper and ephemera along the streets and pavements beneath the apartment.

That early fall the hot airless streets in late afternoon were almost deserted. He watched women wearing the customary hats of *Bolivianas* tip-toeing along the streets near him, and later tall Argentinian women, obviously fit and lithe like dancers, stepping

along as if they had just come down from the autumn gathering of steers up on the savannah. Perhaps they had! Such was his reverie.

Then Pinchot broke the spell.

“I’ll teach you a few tricks” said Pinchot one afternoon, witty and bemusing, equally now Argentinean though only last month a *Boliviano*, thus for all the world, today suddenly a native of Cordoba, Argentina.

“Tricks?”

“Tricks!” said Pinchot, looking at him at an angle as if to gauge his response: “You’re not going to last long in this wicked city without knowing a few things.”

Pinchot seemed to have known all along, but he hadn’t been minded to tell anyone much until this prescient moment. There must be something in the air here.

For Pierrot this was part of a new and unwonted education, the sort of education he would gladly never revisit; Pinchot’s lessons started then and continued at spare intervals for the next few days:

“You’ll be getting around the city soon and we are not yet citizens of anywhere; so when you’re going somewhere for a meeting or something, never walk direct to a place -” said Pinchot, “...remember who you are, where we came from, eh? I mean, they have the mug shots still, don’t they!”

Pinchot smiled suddenly. No, it was more a grimace, some distant remembered pain; then:

“Remember to always double back, cross roads, take a bus, some transport. Any thing you can hop onto without them realizing you’re about to. Look casual, don’t let them know that you know (if there is someone tailing you, I mean). Just be casual, relaxed.”

“That way you can watch behind you without looking: use shop windows, car mirrors, look across the street using window reflections, watch shadows, listen for footfalls, watch if one follower is replaced by another, if they move fast when you do, if they are watching your body language, change your actions to confuse them as to what you will do next...”

“Simple! Oh, and if someone really is malevolent.” He cradled the word affectionately, as if he suddenly desired to taste it: “don’t go anywhere important, like here – go find a gallery or speak to a pretty woman or just get lost in a park or somewhere, until they’re gone...”

The matter of the billfold.

He had to let Pinchot in, on at least a minor part of his secret, so some days later he told Pinchot that he’d found some money somewhere, that it was untraceable. Quite a lot of money. As for its origin - he had it, was all - he made no explanatory gesture; that was the way it would remain.

Pinchot, as usual, looked unsurprised.

Pierrot told Pinchot;

“No numbers, no nothing, no questions, please.”

It was their security, though that wasn't much and Pinchot knew that anyway. So Pierrot said that and didn't elaborate, it would be too risky, he knew that what was secret should remain so. For his part Pinchot, as you know, had never reacted; didn't even look in the least curious: did not seem to be even surprised – maybe at his time in life and after ten years spent in *carcel*, he was past it now.

Why? - Pinchot just smiled that secret smile, knowing, Sphinx-like, without comment, as if he'd anyway expected a gift from God somewhere down the way - why, after all their travail it was about time that they had had just plain good God-sent luck, wasn't it?

You have to remember, Pinchot was a *professional* and that meant that he knew that despite the competing winds of chance, sometimes would be just good times for you if they went your way. Get it?

And on another level of course, Pinchot knew that it would come clear in the end; Pierrot decided that there must be a con's logic working in there somewhere, whatever, it was superior to his, anyway.

He left it at that. But the next day he came back to the subject in his own head; he had to move, perhaps it was because he was a Sagittarian, they always move, they lose their lives because they move, nothing for them is ever certain, they grow old moving; who knew, perhaps he would live long enough to grow old. He was neurotic, was what it was.

“Anyway. We could use some I-D to get out of here, Pinchot.” Pinchot looked at him somehow expectant, watching for something, an outcome perhaps - Pierrot, the billfold sweating in his pocket where it lived. Then Pinchot looked old and shrivelled and wise all of a sudden, then blank for a moment, in another country in his mind, then smiled abstractedly.

Pierrot continued:

“We need real I-D, that stuff from Bolivia meant we could get here but it wasn’t serious and we could have got lifted – so we got lucky! The problem is we don’t have lives in some sort of I-D, we don’t *exist*, only God knows how lucky we were to get over the border on that night with those stolen I-D’s!”

“Of course. We were saved by the storm.”

God doing his thing? Pinchot had expected Pierrot to do something, why, there was a twitch in his damn cheek.

Pierrot had to continue:

“Was it that inevitable? I mean, was it like, sent from God?!” He didn’t want to be serious, except that this was serious.

“You know what I mean.”

Pierrot recalled images, graphics, newsreel, suddenly, clearly:

“And the border cop *in the local whorehouse!*”

“Maybe that too.”

Pierrot *le Fou*

He had to laugh, but it sounded as if he were a drain, thick with muddy water.

Silence. Pinchot smiled again. Then:

“I-D?”

“We could use the money I got.”

“The money?” Blank

“I told you, the money I got!”

“Aha!”

“To get out of here, move, go somewhere, somewhere they won’t....”

He left the statement to perish in the air. Actually, he’d run out of whatever it was he’d meant to say, he wouldn’t let himself despair, not now.

“My English is bad.” It was a statement of fact, Pinchot was no linguist. What had that to do with it?

“My Spanish isn’t good, but I make it work for me! What I mean is - if we have the right I-D there’re no questions; we need to get some... I mean we don’t have I-D, *Dio Mio!*” How many times would he have to say this?

“I have only the money I saved back in the pueblo”

“I know, but I have more here – hey - I’m sharing, right?”

“Enough?”

“Enough - maybe.”

Suddenly there was movement, Pinchot showed a spark of something, maybe relief.

“Maybe, let’s try.” Suddenly:

“True”. Pinchot shrivelled up his handsome black eyes and obviously had worked something out, decided something. “I’ll make some enquiries with some friends. How much it will cost - you know.”

“Right.” Pierrot sniffed as if he were about to sneeze and leaned forward to turn the television on.

Time passed slowly in Cordoba, Fall was coming on.

Gradually the nights had become colder as the wind swept in from the mountains, accelerating over the rooftops and sometimes creating little vicious eddies which froze you to the bone.

Down south it would maybe be snowing.

The icy blast of wind swept over the micro-climate where they were every night, so the gradient of temperature was minimized. The apartment was silent, sealed-in in its own blanket of shade.

Argentina has its own rather lachrymose forms of music, merry and at the same time sad, reflecting the schizophrenia of its loss as a culture to the cruel reality of its twentieth-century past - and implying all its future hopes and dreams, imaginings and real things.

Occasionally brief stanzas of music, generated by all kinds of things, radio, hi-fi, television, would sneak-in

to the apartment like flags torn by the wind, would flutter around the block and along the streets, Tango, Décimo, Samba, Valseito, sang and played by people such as Anibal Troilo, Mercedes Sosa, Fito Páez: once heard, these beautiful sad flowers dwell in the mind forever, like the disappeared, of which they are part.

And Tango it was that attracted him to its obsessively vertiginous play on emotion, the sort of imaginative passion it generated in the fact of its poetic unbalance, the dangerous reality of the poverty and hardship in its very own byways and the way it was played by its players, the dancers, using death, rage and life itself, as the dynamic factor with their energy.

Pierrot spent many evenings watching the wild players of this game, brandy gave him balance and passion as it did them; he was seen by them as some sort of anomaly, his appearance being somehow both alien and yet Argentinian at the same time. Argentina is a country of impossible absolutes made possible through the impossible, the central antithetical thesis of Tango.

And Pierrot? He rested, without sleep, amidst the mock-merry confetti of cut-price present moments.

Often Pierrot had nightmares. Bad dreams where his door was rattled, then attacked with fists; where people called him by his real name, then screamed as if

angry - no mad - or furious. Where in crowded places, there were people hunting him down, close to him in a forest of cars in a concrete ziggurat - and then auto-buses which belched black smoke on torn highways where poverty was everywhere, where beggars tried to sell you anything you would buy, themselves, if necessary; women like Estrella floated by the dark window of his car, a crack at the top between the frame and the window letting the acrid smoke and worse, fear, in.

Yes, Estrella was there, lifting her skirt to him and smiling, selling herself to him - as if she ever would need to, in her gentle, lost, primitive way.

Then the nightmares changed again.

One night he heard a bang on the door - suddenly he was a caged rabbit, waiting for the *Federales* to get him, corner him in the room. He must get out. He sat up gibbering to himself, muttering like a maniac, but the dreams became more real each time: everything was moving away, everyone was running out into a freezing dawn. It would never end.

The nightmares themselves it was that never seemed to end. Sometimes he would wake before dawn with numberless fears racing through his mind, scraps of conversations, situations, his dead parent's faces, his lost innocence, his fear of falling forever into darkness.

At times like those he had to get out into the air, breathe deeply over the balcony in the freezing darkness and wind, sucking great gouts of oxygen in, until he felt as if he would throw up. And now he knew how

insignificant he was, how little he meant to anyone in this world, now he knew that he was just one pinhead in all the embroidery of the continent, all this was to teach him that he was no-one, he was a blur, unimportant, lost and without anything to secure him anywhere, he had to know that he must learn to forget, learn to never think again about all his horrors and his lost dreams and the nightmares of his past...

Ten days later Pinchot left the apartment early without a word to him, and returned without a change in his demeanour in the early afternoon, entering as Pierrot was watching the end of *Casablanca* on T.V., the scene which had had several different endings originally and featured a cardboard aeroplane in b/g.

The ads cut-in as the camera started to pan.

Just as well; Pinchot entered the room chewing some gum and then the ads flicked off and Ingrid Bergman and Paul Muni walked away from Bogart and Claude Rains into the fog, out of shot and into history. This was a slice of life that was not quite real anymore.

“I think I found our man!”

“*The usual suspects.*” A statement of fantasy

Run end music. Run credits.

The logic broke up as Pierrot witnessed the schizophrenia of the twin scenes unfold. He was abstracted by the changes on the screen and not

focussing on the relevance of Pinchot's movements, being still resident in the fantasy on the screen.

"What?"

"The I-D you asked for - I found the man through my friends."

Now the scene in the room was no longer fantasy.

"Oh, good." He found himself sweating.

"It's expensive." Pierrot straightened up.

"How much is it?"

The picture on the screen dissolved.

"Depends – something like, he does new passports at four-fifty, foreign passports at five hundred, official identity cards straight out of the Interior Ministry at two-fifty - and I know that they're good, my friends told me so. I've known him for a couple years myself – is the money enough?"

Pinchot had never asked him just how much he actually had.

That kind of money was within his reach. A miracle that he had found the money - that he had enough! He thought for a few seconds.

Pinchot was waiting, looking at him. For a moment he stopped moving, his first sign of tension in all that time. His jaw stopped. Silence.

"Of course - organise it then."

Pinchot relaxed, and the stop-motion of him chewing gum started again.

“Get photos for your passport.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ve got a couple somewhere.” Pinchot was broke just like Pierrot was supposed to be, only Pierrot wasn’t, so that meant bucks they weren’t supposed to have had. Until now, that was. Pinchot remained unmoved, professional.

“Here”. Pierrot went into his room, removed one hundred bucks from the bill fold as if he had them somewhere in the room, replaced the fold in his pocket and came out and gave Pinchot the hundred-dollar bill.

Unsurprised, Pinchot raised an eyebrow and gave a little smile. Then silence, mostly in his mind, they would have to wait, he would have to wait. It was only time and words that he had, now.

Despite the new dark hope, the nightmares unaccountably worsened.

He grew haggard, his hair had suddenly begun to turn grey. He told himself it was the stress, after all this time he was wrecked, his mind was blown, but that gave a space for him to begin to recover from all this, though he would have to get through the next patch in one piece, and this was the nub of it, the last of maybe the worst moments of his life.

Pierrot lived in more of this nirvana, a kind of nightmare, for a few days. Then, hope. First, photographs in one of those Quick-Photo booths, this one looking like

a blockhouse and right opposite the armoured *Comisaria de Policia*, a soap opera on its own, complete with pretty policewomen that nobody would believe, with fake dyed-blond hair, being chatted-up by handsome tough playboy policemen inside the police offices which opened directly above and onto calle Casablanca.

A weird irony in some way, he thought, the juxtaposition of fake and real, deadly, fictional, imagined, romantic and poisonous. And he knew that they would like to talk to him downstairs in the cell block, his hands shackled, but they didn't know that. Not yet.

A couple of days later: Pinchot was ready in his own mind at least, for during Pierrot's breakfast he entered the room, smoothed back his thick, black hair and said:

"This is the address" - he read from a piece of mangled paper, covered with his illiterate scrawl which always seemed like some sort of graffiti - "Entre Rios, number one hundred-forty-three - he squinted -- up the cement stairway to floor three, on the right, apartment thirty-three, brown door, little horsehead knocker - two knocks followed by three. That is the signal. Remember to use my lessons on this one - and don't write anything down, destroy all possible evidence, oh, and be neither early nor late. Wednesday. Oh, twelve-fifteen."

If Pierrot could have danced he might have danced that one, to the music of '*Flying Down To Rio*', but

this was the life of the fugitive elevated to some kind of forgotten razors-edge balanced art, a kind of crooked ballet danced in perfect lost time, and he had to remind himself that to survive at the refined edge of this climate of fear he would at least have to begin to understand the geometry of the choreography, the better to master it.

Eleven o'clock on Wednesday morning. He remembered Pinchot's lesson, it was critical to get it right at a time like this, they were so close after all.

He checked the address on the creased paper again and dropped the torn pieces into an open broken drain. First he walked to within a few metres of the end of Entre Rios and then took a bus further along Avenida Constitución for a half-kilometre, then dismounted and walked back until he was level with Avenida San Jerónimo; at the busy corner of calle Solares, where he used the windows of a sports shop as a mirror. No-one.

Then along Solares, East against the sun, crossing the now empty street at the point at which it intersected with Entre Rios.

Still forty-five minutes early. Too early. Damn. He was nervous, was all, it was lack of sleep, he hadn't slept well at all, last night the *Federales* were pursuing him through Chelsea, along Kings Road to the Café Picasso, then through Lagos by the causeway where the water lapped along the feet of the filthy decaying concrete wharves, then through Monte-Carlo by the casino, backed by concrete and glass and women you had to pay dearly for

- and then they disappeared and his door was open for some unknown reason and Pinchot was out - so he'd been exhausted, when he'd awoken at ten.

He drank a coffee in a café he found on the street with an eyeline up Entre Rios called '*Le Troubadour*', visited the *Tabaco* counter, took a comfortable corner seat in the shade as the sun became suddenly burning hot, and relaxed, read something, smoked a cheroot, ordered a pincha, fiddled with his lighter, dropped it to further help him scan what he hadn't seen around him as he retrieved it.

Took more time, used his eyes over the top of the paper looking around, waiting. Nothing. Nobody. It seemed clear.

Time left to kill. His time. No time.

He read more of the paper, walked around the block and then walked back up San Geronimo like a wandering tourist, as if they existed in this neck of town.

Then he walked to his left and left again as if he were lost, disorientated, and found Entre Rios, number One Hundred and Forty-three on a concrete area beyond a couple of small groves of struggling trees. From the opposite side of the street the building was cream, block-like, made to age, commonplace.

Time right.

Now!

Turning straight-in casually, maybe seeming to all the world as if he lived there; halt on the damp, echoing,

cement-scented stairway to listen, watching for shadows. Then finally up the stairway to *'apartment thirty-three, brown door, little horsehead knocker, two knocks followed by three, Gustavo.'*

"Yes?" He heard the voice through the small grille to one side of the heavy steel-laminated door which took him by surprise for a moment.

"Gustavo? Pierrot, Pinchot's friend!"

"Ah, yes, the Gringo."

The door opened suddenly and he was facing what he hadn't expected, a short pale man with receding hair and a careworn expression. What does a master forger look like?

Next, he was ushered inside the apartment, through the hallway into a typically crowded Spanish style living room with a work space of some kind over in the corner and a desk-lamp over on the other shaded side, the noise of the street outside, wind swishing a plaid blanket thrown over a wickerwork chair on the open patio balcony, the music of the rush of buses in the middle distance combined with a couple of distant road drills and then the drone of a lost cargo plane just visible through an angle of the balcony set against the block spanning Entre Rios, in the far distance in the blue bright sky, circling as if to find its home.

And of course, a couple of bookshelves with collections of identical pretend series' of books in pretend leather bindings. He could see *'All the classics of Spanish American Writing'* on the cover spine of one mint

set of volumes, a pair of miniature leather *chaperagos* as if a miniature tourist gaucho would suddenly emerge to wear them swinging from a lost hook: a shrivelled football with '*Brasil*' inscribed upon it, hanging from another.

Reality cut in, metallic.

"Ah, Pierrot!" He had been expected, of course.

His name echoed mysteriously empty, against the bare concrete sides of the interior passageway. It seemed lost here, and he was about to lose it anyway, in fact. Dislocated fragments of sounds pinged back at him at different speeds thus fragmenting themselves: elucidating some forgotten precious language, like shattered glass, or losing your hearing all of a sudden. Shock, perhaps? Anyway -

"Pinchot said..."

"I know someone called Pinchot... what did he say?" A delicately lisped set of words controlling the facts.

"It was about I-D, he said you knew about it."

"Ah!" said the man, examining him with his eyes as if that were some sort of revelation. "Ah! A nice young man, not really a typical Gringo - and what is your name again?" He flapped one hand as if swatting a fly.

"You know."

"Well?"

"He told you."

Pierrot *le Fou*

“I’ve forgotten”

“Pierrot.”

“Play the game! *Play the game!*”

The man was smiling, distantly, almost as if he were trying to locate a lost flight recorder with his name in it from the ocean off the long strand called Ipanema...

‘. When she walks, it’s like a Samba..’

Music in his mind and a space in time. Mouldering in sweat in his hand, contained by the jacket pocket, he held his four new pictures and Pinchot’s stained old ones, they pricked his fingers.

Would they be alright?

“Pictures?”

He handed him the photographs. Gustavo cast a critical eye over them, shrivelled his nose and grimaced. There was a crooked logic working here somewhere Pierrot knew, but do what he might, he couldn’t find it.

A critical minute more whilst Gustavo peered at the pictures through a magnifying glass on a long expanding metal arm, like a mechanical lizard, in a theatrical manner.

“Enough!” A touch of irony, perhaps, Gustavo was a touch theatrical, enjoyed his life-changing, deadly skills enough to make theatre of them...

“Well?”

To business.

Gustavo cleared his throat, then started:

“You seek documents of the finest quality?”

“Of course.”

“You have eight-hundred U.S. dollars?”

The billfold in his pocket seemed to twitch, ready to unfold its goodies in a moment.

He was almost over-eager. He sought the hump of the billfold with his hand as if it might suddenly escape were he not to control it, nodded.

“You must recognize that you are asking a favour from the families of the deceased, and so we must help them too.”

“Yes.”

“Another two hundred should assuage their fears and sentiments.”

“Oh, yes.” The *Disappeared*, perhaps? How much of this had been rehearsed, how much stolen, how much was meant, how much repeated - how much was left to his imagination?

Gustavo smiled a flitting, uneasy smile and ushered him out of the room onto the balcony where he was forced to sit for some time watching the nearly empty street, while Gustavo shuffled things in the back of the room somewhere, boxes opening and closing, drawers in the serried cabinets being opened and shut.

He rifled through the roll of bills and found the amount: he stripped off a few hundreds and then a large five hundred, and waited.

Then Gustavo was suddenly standing in the French window, querulous, perhaps.

“You pay half now, then I contact you on a mobile and you pay the rest when you pick it up. We don’t ever see one another again. Clear?”

He nodded. Whatever else could he do? He practised giving him the money in his mind, gave him four of the hundreds, faltered, and then added two fifties. Gustavo was watching his flickering eyes. “One thing ...” He’d thought something.

“Well...?”

This was a very critical, very delicate moment.

“The visas?”

“Yes?”

“I mentioned them... to our friend.”

“Yes?”

“Is it possible that...”

Gustavo was reading his mind.

“Your friend Pinchot, who is also a friend of mine from way back, told me: that way I have two very nice Chilean passports, excellent specimens, which are to be fitted with entry visas for a European destination...”

“Very good, just what I thought, no, even better.”
He was suddenly nervous, like an alcoholic licking his lips for a taste of the bottle. *Thirsty*.

“Difficult to get, but finally...”

“Well?”

“Quite expensive, but very... *kosher*” Ha ha!
Gustavo laughed at his Jewish joke. “You Jewish?”

“Me? No.”

“I always try to amuse my... friends!”

“Aha.” He could hear a snatch of music, not at all Argentinean, no, a German musician, from Berlin, Baumgartner was it? Perhaps, somewhere between Lounge and Garage, he didn’t know. The bar down the street was playing it loud; they’ll do anything in Cordoba to maintain their profitability. Especially old school, garage and lounge, even Buddha Bar.

“Next.”

“Next?” He was all over nerves, couldn’t focus properly now he was half-way through the... *pain*.

“What?”

“Oh. This?”

“That?”

Next, Gustavo fumbled in a pocket and produced something, handed him a sim card in an envelope, he could feel the shape of it through the paper.

“It’s a sim card; don’t bother to open the envelope yet. Put the sim which is inside, in your phone

next Tuesday morning - after you use it you destroy it. Right away. Clear?"

"Right." His fingers insisted on playing the game of finding the clipped end of the sim. His thumbnail located the uneven edge.

Money.

Now Pierrot breathed more evenly suddenly, pulled out the billfold and counted out five one-hundred-dollar bills onto Gustavo's table.

"Ah! They're real!" Laughter.

"Of course they're real!"

"Tuesday you'll have the new passports for you and your friend. There are biographies with them; learn your new names, read and remember the biographical details and addresses, destroy the papers as soon as you have done, remember both these people are dead - and now are dead no longer."

He laughed unexpectedly. "Did you ever see '*Death and the Maiden*', one of Polanski's finest?"

"Polanski?"

"Pure sad poetry... not kosher in Chile and Argentina!"

"Ah yes, I recall... very poetic."

"Poetry? It's my 'Fave Rave' as they say somewhere or other... Yes, we've lost our sense of the poetic in Argentina, too busy killing those who disagree."

Never mind. It's just the dead and their, uh, memory, whatever that means. You're in Argentina, remember!"

"Oh!"

"We are forced to remember the dead; we have to live with them."

"Oh." He felt insensitive, but could not understand the meaning and the gravity of death here, though it is part of that culture's cruel past.

"Indeed, *oh!* Gringo!"

He gestured towards the door, no goodbye.

The door creaked slightly, like the new leather on a saddle, as it opened to allow his leaving - and gave an all-forgiving, releasing sigh as it clicked shut on the Poet of the Dead.

The space outside was empty and the smell of cement was somehow almost overpowering as he found the stairs, their shapes twisted into wild anti-geometrical shapes against the dark shadows, by the camouflage of bright sunlight; then he began to descend.

It would take Pinchot a few more days to organize their route out, was what Pinchot said. A few days – what did that mean in a place moving as slowly as this one?

Well, that is what Pinchot had said, but privately Pierrot for his part believed that Pinchot didn't believe a thing about *real*, about anything, wouldn't believe a thing until he had it in his hand, and as everything up to now

had been either a grimy reality or a peyotl dream, on those rare occasions when they could drink or chew coca or peyotl without risk, he could understand his disbelief. The passport would have to be in his hand *first* was the fact.

But it would happen now. Actually, it had to, you see, here there would be no more time, the winter would creep in, the apartment would be required for something else, for someone or other, someone on the run perhaps; their moments of license would be over, their time run out, they would have to shift, the world would change, they would have run out of.. Everything. Yes, it had to.

The days until that Tuesday drew longer and the time more treacherous by the second, until he was gasping for new life to be given him, just as the old life was being spent and forgotten. Their lives had to be full of the impossible made flesh and reality, not the mess he was inured to, that was how they would survive.

Survival is something we all have to share. Thus his life for the moment rotated around the moment when he would receive the call on the new sim card.

Tuesday morning he was on tenterhooks, put the sim in early and it played a little welcoming tune as he played with the number pad and entered bullshit for its attention. Then it was ready, he sweated, until then in mid-morning the phone buzzed in its holder, and when he pressed the little battered green telephone Gustavo's voice said:

“Your stuff is waiting for you at the café where you had a coffee and a cheroot and killed time last week; you know it, get there tomorrow after midday and before six; the name of the barista is Martin... ask him his name, but first tell him you’re Juan Rojas, come to pay the bill; he has the documents in an envelope. Oh and give him the rest that we talked about first, in an envelope or bag or something, he’ll check it. Bon Voyage!”

The line went down clinical and sharp, almost as if the electricity had somehow grown cold.

How had Gustavo known about his wait at ‘Le Troubadour’? He discovered that he was suddenly trembling - whether in delight or fear or expectation he could not know – actually, shaking, his hands fluttering like butterflies in spring.

The next day. Another perfect day in the central lowlands framed by gorgeous distant mountains, a day made for this excitement, the sky deep blue, Larks or Swifts far overhead, swooping, living for speed, escape, existence, capture of the infinite, in their small bodies; but above everything both in altitude and real life, free. He left the house with his heart a little lighter, a little freer, dropped the sim card into sewer grates downtown after breaking it in several pieces and reached ‘Le Troubadour’ walking slowly, late in the afternoon.

Pierrot *le* Fou

particularly when the fact of it comes down to cold hard cash raining down from the sky into your hands.....

That afternoon Pierrot found himself once more in the hills back of Nice, in a place he was familiar with from years ago, a place where he had sought peace of mind, solitude from raucous bad electronic music and lonely people a million years before, a valley that was green, forested, rocky and empty, except for him. He could spend time alone there, with the powerful scrubbed scents of the pinewoods and the rough earth and the little creatures which lived there around him.

That is one way of describing a version of perfect; though the recipe is never correct in fact, it changes from time to time.

He used the money from the package wisely, rented a *Gite* in the hills near Antibes, paying several years rent upfront, putting the remainder, heavily

wrapped and locked, under very heavy stones in his garden where it would live, perhaps forever.

It took several days for the initial unexplained reports about the bomb, or whatever it was, to filter away on the local news channels - and for the explosion to be gradually explained, as it was relayed through the usual channels (Nice-Matin, Le Monde, Radio Monte Carlo, the BBC World Service and RT Television, The Daily Mail, The New York Times, Metro London, The Evening Standard).

Apparently it appeared that the man with the scars that Pierrot had recognized, was in fact 'The Mad Dog of Medellin' known also as plain 'The Mad Dog' and finally indicated somewhat tardily as wanted by the (embarrassed) police in Colombia, for his trail of violence and many, many murders; an escaped convict, escaped most notably from a prison transport which had been attacked somewhere in Bolivia leaving many of the convicts and all the guards dead.

He was also known around his town as a locally respected, indeed locally famous, even loved, family man, a protector of the oppressed, progenitor of many charities, father of many children as a result of being so loved - sadly all dependent upon him. He would be mourned - as long as the money lasted.

The subtext being that he, in the end, was just another drug dealer, only more violent, more bloody, than any other, so that of course his death would be less regretted by the police internationally. Well, that was

what they reported, perhaps more would come clear later. There was a subtext, and the authorities knew it well.

At all events, not only was it unclear at that point what his exact nationality had been, he having probably faked it anyway, but what the hell - to Pierrot he looked like a native God of the high Andes come down to Earth to exact some retribution.

Maybe he was one of those unexplained Mayan deities that stared at you, and which spoke a lost language that no one had yet deciphered or could ever understand from the evidence of its marks on a worn rock in an isolated cordilleran settlement, here once more to curse the people of the present for what they'd done to the people of the past. And then conveniently forgotten: you could imagine that.

The 'Mad Dog' was also reportedly wanted in Mexico under the name 'El Senor', and by the United States Drugs Enforcement Administration, Interpol and various organizations including the Bolivian Police, for various escapades including a breakout as he was escaping prison some time before, which had killed several prison guards. They hadn't yet clarified his identity either, for want of DNA evidence, but 'El Senor' could well be the same person as 'The Mad Dog'. Passports are easy to come by when you've that much cash, which makes it a little tricky. The demise of both of them, 'El Senor' as well, were also duly noted.

Unofficially of course, the authorities, the United States DEA, INTERPOL and other agencies would really have liked to have known: 1) who really did it and: 2) who they were regulated by. The killers, that is. To the authorities this was probably just the start of another internecine struggle, and those surrounding 'The Mad Dog of Medellin', A.K.A. 'El Senor' and all his erstwhile friends would be very likely at some extension, to be implicated. But time would tell.

And the other man? Julio César Tzissano, known as 'The Guardian Angel' to the United States DEA, and Gabriél to Pierrot *le Fou*, wanted by the Venezuelan authorities for the usual: robbery, drug smuggling and running prostitutes - oh, and bank fraud all over the place - known to the World as plain Gabriél Fuentes, previously a successful businessman, resident in London. Fact was there weren't a lot of pieces of Julio César Tzissano left to put together after the explosion, the bomb having rendered most things in its ambit to tiny, messy pieces - the bomb or whatever it was, incidentally described as 'pretty nasty' having been made from, the DEA later said, a powerful new and refined version of the explosive 'C4'.

Gabriél? Well, Gabriél was the Guardian Angel, wasn't he? Sometimes things come full-circle, but mysteriously still remain out of shape. Bang!

So, actually Gabriél, Julio César Tzissano, 'The Guardian Angel', will never be found, having been vaporized - except perhaps as a ghost which still haunts the edge of the sea at Monte Carlo, peering into the

windows of the rebuilt section of the hotel on stormy nights and windy days and frightening the call-girls and their clients from their labours. But that would become mere hearsay.

As there was not enough of him or his 'associate' left to identify anything much, the police in Monaco went on the evidence of the passport they found at the concierge's *acceuille*, and the various scraps of stuff they had discovered that were still in readable pieces and that had survived the intense heat of the explosion - including items found up to four hundred metres away in the town - items which had been caught by chance by a powerful gust of sea wind, blown right up to the power of a small powerful whirlwind at an odd moment of changing weather patterns - perhaps a tornado - and spread over a wide area in the next few moments.

And why did that explosion happen?

The police thought they knew, and Pierrot thought he knew, even the United States DEA thought they knew – but they were still looking anyway.

One thing for sure among this fragmentation of facts was that nobody knew that the only entity invisible in this puzzle was Pierrot *le Fou*, changing places as fast as just that, always paranoid, watching his back but covering it up as he went, and for all that, crazy enough to have expunged all the traces as he left each scene of 'crime', a sort of knee-jerk reaction learned over a long time of

suffering and the interminable internal dis-correlation aused by his dyslexia, which ultimately proved valuable because, also ultimately, no-one could find or trace him now, the signs left being so inconsequential. No DNA that could be pinned down, no finger prints, a few clean T-shirts which proved not to be his, his favourite Levi 501's with a *Peter Jones* label, still unworn. Pierrot was not so much *Fou* as good - at whatever he turned his skill-set to.

Pierrot le *Phantome*, the Ghost.

Except to Pinchot, who'd known him in a personal, once-upon-a-time friendly sense, and how, nobody knew. Pinchot would stay silent, silent because there was still a certain sort of blood between them. Pinchot had saved Pierrot from God knows what, and Pierrot had brought Pinchot out of nowhere to somewhere - even if he'd done it without understanding the outcome.

That was a powerful bond which could never be broken, even if Pierrot had never realized that Pinchot had known about the stash of cash all along because Pinchot had seen the bounce on the floor of the transport, eyeballed the person who'd scooped it up, eyeballed the 'The Mad Dog of Medellin' and decided to stay silent because in the end it could only be good for him (and ultimately for them, both). Which is one of the reasons he stuck by him, the others being that he thought looked good, and the fact that he spoke languages, something which Pinchot had always failed to fathom.

Ah! There was blood there, good blood, much blood. And well, of course Pinchot had many other reasons, one or two of them female, good smelling and well performing. And in fact more so for a whole library of other reasons, including the fact that he'd cleaned-out the safe in the Holland Park house the moment he'd heard of the Monaco bombing on Sky Television News from the screen in Gabriél's office while he was sat there, minding the shop while Gabriél was away and playing with his toys, dressed now in slinky nurses uniforms.

Pinchot of course had at that time, been 'holding the fort' as he had been assigned to do. So then he'd taken a couple of Luis Vuitton or Herschel Parcel or Briggs and Riley suitcases he'd found around the place along with Gabriél's now redundant Rolex GMT master, filled the luggage with the assorted cash in the safe, and a box of other watches and assorted jewellery, got a new passport and identity from another friend in Islington, filled the car with everything else expensive he found in the next hour or so, *Tout-Suite*, checked into an hotel near Kings Cross, staying there until he'd time to buy an apartment among the Regency Terraces surrounding Regent's Park at a discount for cash, of millions of pounds - for one of the suitcase loads actually - together with the wink of an eye and a blind shake of hands, a few days later. He'd had his eye on it for months. Pinchot could give lessons in this, was what Pierrot would say, if he but knew.

Thus Pinchot disappeared 'next door', with his new identity and his expensive property, stashing the

remainder, many millions of pounds, dollars and other assorted currencies under, so to speak, his bed.

Silence from the British Police - and Pinchot. In the absence of anything he could hang something on to, Pierrot asked himself - where was Pinchot after all this?

Anyway. Nobody had yet explained to Pierrot's satisfaction why one of the two of those hoods would want to blow both of them out of this world. Federal Authorities aside, there was still the matter of the hoodlums who had raided the warehouse that Sunday months before; big dealers - there must be a link - how could anybody forget that? But as Gabriél had now returned to merely atoms, who was to tell?

Fact was that the mob, that other mob from London, could be the problem though nobody knew actually who they possibly could be. They were on the ascendant anyway, whoever they were, waiting their chance in the mob battles that would start now. The people who mattered would get to know soon, was the fact.

A month or so later a businessman from Europe bought the tiles and the lease at the warehouse as a redundant job lot. That was all, the rest would one day become history.

Remember, Pierrot was not involved; Pierrot was after all, *never* in the records such as existed at that

time, he was just a name which most people hardly could recall, and that name was not he.

He was, you might say, the Man who Never Was, because in his mind Pierrot was somebody else somewhere else, which meant that neither they nor he would ever find the fractured link, mostly anyway because he had other things to get on with, though one thing he knew from watching his back was that it was likely now that his personal coast must be clear because well, he, Pierrot, no longer existed. Pierrot'd made sure of that: a new passport, new I-D, a new person, someone not called Pierrot, Pierre – or anything that people knew.

Ah! He was good, covering his tracks all that time. Painless, really. He'd spent so much of his otherwise wasted time sweeping the pieces of his I-D from the records, the forms, the registers that it had become an obsession, a fixation with him. Changed everything, shredded the rest, and disappeared, though not in the Argentinean or Chilean sense. Goodbye.

Pierrot thus concluded that everyone had lost his traces because he'd taken time to expunge them; point was that even Pinchot, and the mob of course – had never considered him a name, a serious player; as far as they knew he'd known nothing, had never been involved or implicated, excited or enthused by anything, he'd never been a boss, Pierrot had always been sidelined.

The fragmentation of everything which at one time had seemed almost infinite to him, his old universe, was almost complete, and the re-fragmentation of a new

order of things had started again. That was the way it had gone, nobody was on to him, this side of the World.

Oh, and he'd discovered a new favourite place to burn his precious time, in Earl's Court, a place once frequented by movie stars, Maud Adams, Bob Dylan, South American refugees, pretty women, artists, musicians like Caetano Veloso, rumoured to have been used in movies as well as by writers, photographers and their models.

Well, enough!

Le Troubadour, the namesake of that place in Cordoba but with antiques, strange objects on the ceiling and strange ideas to discuss, in the air. He'd sit there for hours nowadays, flirting with French, Italian, German women. Life was so different, and he was becoming a poet, a lyricist, a *romancier*, a philosopher.

It was the influence of the stars, the sensation of lost love flowing back into his veins, of romance, even. Now everything seemed possible, he yearned for the sensation of making love to someone he truly lusted after; in prison, in the hard world of the cordillera, there was no room or time for softness - and now he'd found the reference to it in the most unlikely of places. He would search it down, become the poet inside himself that needed discovery, and re-discover the softness that gave life value.....

Pierrot *le* Fou

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