

*IN YOUR DREAMS*

Frank Lauder

**OLYMPIA PRESS**



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# Olympia Press



This book is dedicated to

**Guen de Zylva**



*IN YOUR DREAMS*

**OLYMPIA PRESS**





*Book 1*

**'FALCONS VIEW'**

*"The whore is man's fine Darling"*  
Lawrence Durrell



## *Chapter 1*

### **'Bout de souffle'**

It was a warm afternoon, the sort that dwell heavily in the mind, the humidity high because the sea winds were still that day, such that sweat pearled quickly on the brow.

At length Frank Mailer put down his note pad, rubbed his forehead, stopped the printer, clicked the switch on the screen to 'off' and sat with his head in his hands for a long, exhausted minute.

He was silent. The background hum of city traffic seemed to fade into a distant blur. The foreground pushed the background into unfocussed unknowingness.

A glimmer. There was that feeling in him that, though he was tired, could identify the quick sparkle of second breath. You see, he felt, though only with exhausted intuition, that for some unknown reason a really '*great*' idea was upon him and that now his second breath was almost there. Though this was exhausting, it was also incredibly positive; here in the ghetto of the city. There was something left to carry him through, *hope*.

What a pleasant surprise: he was not as burned out as he thought!

The facts were simple: it was possible for him to spend hours at the Screen, waiting for something to come into an otherwise empty head; yet, now...

All this time, he'd been collating the papers in front of him. Finally the wad was made, and the edges clipped down into a simple sheaf.

Luxury!

He got up, stretched his legs, untwisted his neck a few times experimentally, and then banged the manuscript of '*Nine Mens Carol*' down on the worn tabletop with a finally satisfying 'Thud!'.

What a moment: fabulous: the screenplay - finished at last, and what was more wonderful - he had another cast-iron plot in his head: the idea coming up in his mind now: a new idea, like a wellspring: with the roar, the animal pleasure, the power, of a gusher roaring up the pipe at you at some absurd speed.

Original, dynamic: *Dynamite!*

How was he to get it down fast?

A few lost torn shreds of some rough edges of the paper of 'Nine' still floated in the deep gold, afternoon air for a moment, the burred edges creating bright lit mobile sectors of yellow and white against the sunlight.

This was a moment of birth, not of loss. A moment of intense hope. The King is Dead, Long Live The King!

He took a long moment to take one luxuriously fleeting deep breath:

"Well, thank God I've finished that... I never want to see that script again as long as I live!"

This is the context in which all this was happening. One thing he knew, among too many.

Time is never friendly, you had to keep that in mind, and Frank Mailer had been sitting at the old computer for months, beavering away - and now, finally the umpteenth re-write of the bloody script was finished - and he could get back to normal life. *Normal Life?*

Normal life, of course, being, for him, among other things - the divorce. Can that word ever leave anyone alone? He felt suddenly grey.....very very.. *old*.

The room was old, the carpet was worn, and the computer console itself was for its time an antique: even his scuffed shoes were worn. Near worn out.

**He looked around him** - this place looked like a reject shop! Well, divorced people were a sort of reject, weren't they? A sort of unpleasant by-product?

A 'plane approaching Los Angeles International, wildly out of line and far too low, gave a flatulent gasp as it dipped out of the landing path over this suburb, and the tiles on his roof seemed to rattle.

Then, almost as if it were reading his thoughts, the battered 'phone gave a gasp, then rang.

He reacted, managing to knock the receiver to the floor. He found it and swivelled it round in one jittering hand, to speak.

"Sorry, I dropped the 'phone"

"Hi, Frank". Menace in the caramel- smooth tones of Susie's lawyer.

"Oh, Hi.. Allen!"

"It's about Susie", (Susie was his erstwhile wife.)

"I expected so." Flat, but not detected.

"We expect to have the paperwork finished on Thursday".

Allen was always droll. The point was that Allen was himself several times divorced, which gave the whole performance rather the veneer of the third repeat of a familiarly sneered-at soap opera. Courts are, after all, offices of one sort or another. Everyday.

So rather than give-in to the tail-end of the angst which had at one time threatened to tear him apart, Frank rose up against it. There was a lump in

his throat though, as he said, in a studied, disinterested sort of way:

"Right"

"I'm sorry to be giving you a headache.. I know what it's like myself." Understatement.

"Divorce is a continuing disease" Overstatement. Foley. Stereo, though. Digital, Dolby: crackling in the ears.

"Glad you're seeing the philosophical side of it - one positive thing .. she isn't asking for any money!" Logical.

"Well, just as well, or she could have half the overdraft!" Misfortune.

"Sorry, Frank!" Facetiousness. Polish.

"Oh, it's just one of those lousy things", a moment of introspection, a *beat* - "...well that's all I can say!" Rubbish. A car burped and backfired in the b/g.

"I'll be writing to you again, soon." Tension. Right in the guts.

"Right, OK." Relief, of a sort.

"Goodbye". The 'phone clicked off. End.

His heart was suddenly as heavy as lead. Clunk, thud.

Of course, she had left him because he was broke. Screenwriters in this town were two a penny - broke ones even more common. They should set up a separate charity stall solely for writers. What with? Pencils? Continuous micro-perforated paper bales?

Emptiness, sadness. Quickly, unexpectedly.

"Damn."

What did that bring him to?

One of the diseases of the literate society: overproduction. Literary. Overproduction.

*'Nine Mens Carol'*, was the last of a long line of scripts. B-Movie stuff. If this script didn't hit the target he was well and truly dead. Stone dead.

Dead whores are ten a penny in L.A.- and dead writers are even more commonplace. The two could even be juxtaposed: the screenplay writer is, after all, the Whore of the literary World. A fine sort of Darling.

"Huh!"

One thing though, one divergence from the norm though - for the first time that time with *'Nine'* - he hadn't thought about the script while he was writing it - finally he had simply put his tired head down and turned his brain off, ploughed through the endless colons and paragraphs and centred tabulations, watched the technical points and let the screenplay write itself: maybe that was caused by fatigue, boredom - or *angst*, that familiar and fashionable illness. Too bad when you felt it for real, as he was feeling it now, the fear of life totally alone, broke, being an horrific one. No fashion there.

Anyway, he'd poured all kinds of conflicts, *angsts*, paranoia, into it: everything that he wanted to

work-out about Susie (tactfully renamed Samantha) and his frustration: direct from the soul - via the Technicolor Blood of the celluloid arteries.

That was the problem with a writer's life: you spent your days alone, at times you could feel it emptying away into - nothing.

Like a black hole; experience welled up: beckoned you: then burned you up like a nasty tasteless cake; made you embittered and hard and hating everyone around you: and worst of all, made *them* hate you for your '*worn*' quality, your '*worn*' words and feelings; fashion is a fine, thin, thing.

One moment they'd be saying to you: 'You've got time, relax' - and the next - '...you're past it.. forget it!'

What is real, anyway ? The fantasy of playland - or the cold hard tarmac of the Santa Monica Freeway? Wasn't that an obscene extension of vanity: and wasn't that fantasy?

**And *that* was his problem** at the studios.

Script editor after script editor had had something witty and rye to say about his writing: all of it nasty.

And the worst thing - he lit a small cigar and coughed several times regretting the moment but set on finishing the thing.

If there were such thing as a worst thing - it was that if ever he got a screenplay on it was immediately sold to some obscure country: Azerbaijan or Cambodia; where it would sink into history like a stuck pig, a stinking, sinking ship.

Yes, if you were a screenwriter and weren't among the choice cohort who wrote pieces like *'Dangerous Liaisons'* or *'9 Weeks'*, then you could empty your life away like an old can of some tasteless fizzy drink: see it bubble away into the mud of a new field, new day, new idea: new gimmick, then get paid in Movie Money: *'This note has no value anywhere!'*

That was his fear: to be forever taken for a gimmick: that would be the end of all his creative work: the scars of a lifetime - over in a few lousy seconds. Squelch.

Oh well, at least it would be almost painless: almost quick, almost without thoughts: unlike the break with Susie.

Now Susie. Oh ho! An entire subject, edged with pretty Belladonna!

**This is how it went;** while he was away, slaving on all this garbage for distant street markets, *for peanuts* (which is the way she always derided him) - Susie was free as a little bird.

And twitter around she certainly did.

**While** he was alone; locked up with some intractable piece: some impossible re-drafting for some nutty director on an obscure lot in Taiwan.

Alone, always, alone, alone except for those nights when she chose to be around, rolled-over on her stomach so that he could have her with the minimum of fuss. Well, it paid her bills, alright!.

Alone - so that your wife would have the chance to: no - *could* - fuck a songwriter and have affairs behind your back whilst you were working hard to make ends meet. Susie worked as a waitress, if she ever worked: using her arse more than her brain, which anyway had never been any great shakes.

Had the songwriter serenaded her as they lay together one cold, dark, sad night? Frank often wondered. Sad for him, that was. Sad. And the worse, *not fiction - fact*.

And, as for those fabled ends: no they never ever did actually meet: maybe in her limited way Susie could see that he was going nowhere.. see nothing there for *her*, Susie. She said it one day, perhaps a slip of the tongue – ‘but what’s in it for me?’ with a rye stupid smile like a flamethrower.

Fact was, though - those ends never ever did meet. Never ever. Never, never. And especially not now. Never any more, actually. Not for Susie, perhaps, and, now that he was alone in the boat, perhaps not for him either. Never.

**He made a cup of coffee** and stared out of the kitchen window, stealing another moment of solitary despair.

He needed something to dream about, after all: he desperately needed a dream to circumscribe all this garbage that he lived among: people like shit on your shoes - so that you spent hours having to free yourself of the tack.

He took a deep breath and leaned against the sill for a moment. Warm air.

Air blew, fresh as clean linen, into the window, which moved open to accommodate it.

The kitchen window of the apartment, built, as it was, with a rotten passageway of garden as slim as could be achieved with a builders broad back, itself looked directly into the living room of the put-me-up next door, across that thin ribbon of muddy scumble, and he, now at the table, looked with unseeing eyes into that room.

He was dreaming for those few minutes.

And then, as his eyes gradually cleared, he noticed an inverted naked leg, then two feet, one of them wearing a high heeled shoe, moving rhythmically, next door.

"Uh huh!", the couple next door screwing in the middle of the floor, the visible segments of their bodies prettily illuminated by the out-of-kilter colours of the television.

He was at the sink, washing a smeared plate clear, and achieving nothing. There was no soap in the washing liquid bottle. For a few moments he found himself fascinated, their movements, as you could expect, becoming ever more frantic, automatic.

Now he, invisible next door, hollered, and she next door, groaned, almost shrieked, no what was the word: '*keened*', a noise that haunted him, a standard sound that women make; that sound of...

The time left him behind as it itself moved forward.

Then, back in the sitting-room next door, as one would also expect in time, the inevitable tuneful chorus of sighs.

Then silence, suddenly, laboured panting.

Finally, only deep groans of content.

He stepped back from the window space into the body of the kitchen, suddenly anonymous, like a voyeur, so that they could not see him.

'Now', he thought, 'She - that girl next door - around twenty-five perhaps - is a fine looking woman; my type really - too bad that she's screwing that moronic motorcycle freak. I could show her a trick or two!'

The arrogance of youth, missing more than it could imagine in its wildest imaginings. 'How does *the arrogance of age*, grab you? He thought. 'Huh!'

**But, to return to the girl next door:** he, Frank Mailer, wasn't getting *her* tricks, the Hell's Angel was, though. *Sour grapes!* Too true.

Truth to tell, he hadn't done it for months anyway.

This was a long fact of history; which went something like this: the nature of the split between him and Susie was such that sex became a necessarily remote memory: a matter of anxiety, not pleasure: sickened him. Now, whenever he thought about it, about her lips sucking that songwriters cock, about her lover coming into her mouth, he nearly gagged.

She could fuck whoever she wished, after all that was at least the one thing she was good at - she was good at opening her legs - which was all she had ever really done with him, gone thorough the motions. Even those very first, heady days, were mired with something particularly peculiar: more her possessiveness than anything else. But he only ever could see this clearly, now - *too late*.

**Whereas for him,** the emotion was of critical importance; what was for Susie really important? Was it this - or was it the deceit, the risk of discovery - or her ego, *her hidden agenda?*

To illustrate this he would often use a simple illustration; for example - he had often noticed that even when she was moist she would wet her pussy with spit and pull the lips apart to help him enter, and

then ride, ride, ride, enjoying the gust of wind, the sensation of flight that sex gave her. Was this a mix of duty and enjoyment - or pleasure, or need - or perhaps loneliness? The cut-off was so perfect now that no-one would ever know.

And then, to perfectly, symbolically, paraphrase the woman, his sperm would leak out of her - a knowing moment of nature's making: the conquest always followed by it's aftermath.

But quixotically, painfully in his memory but proudly in her bovinity, that became a badge of pride: Susie always said:

"Something tells me we've been making love!", with a little laugh, shifting her seat an inch or so to avoid the wet patch; or, "Whatever goes up, must come down!", with a little secret smile of Cheshire-cat contentment.

And at the time he had seen that for her it was almost involuntary: so long as she had her cunt full most days, she was happy, like a cow chewing cud. But he'd put this aside, ignored his own observations: knowing somewhere in himself that some day the nightmare could well return to haunt him. There aren't any rules about this sort of thing, dammit.

No, for him, in the last aeon, sex had become nearly impossible; the impulse had died. Perhaps one day he would be able to make love again - but he had no idea when. The need had lost not only it's magic,

but also it's secret logic, the split paring his sexuality down, making of it a necessity, only the essence of survival; not the enjoyment of one's greatest creative will.

And there are steps in life.

For then came the sleeping pills. When first the split occurred the doctor had given him sleeping pills. Now, to someone who fell asleep normally as soon as his head met the pillow, sleeping pills were anathema. Not only that, but they destroyed any will he had to write, think, sometimes even to speak.

For a while: an age, he lived in a darkling world of lost chances: he moved, visited, walked, ran, incessantly, cried himself to sleep.

The end result was that he ran up an enormous overdraft: after all he had stopped working altogether.

But things change, sometimes mercifully sometimes not. Later, today, not yesterday, he thought himself at the tail end of all that debt: but like a nightmare reprise, each month now it crept up again more steeply.

You see, sleep was impossible for any amount of reasons.

He was better without her: but where would he go without her, now?

All at once, in the shadows at the edge of the kitchen he was engulfed in helpless, crippled, bitter, tears.

**Once again he sat in front of the screen.**

'Flick, Flick!'

His back troubled him, the 'phone bill had just arrived, the weather was bad.

Frank figured that nothing much else could go wrong.

By mid-morning he'd made out a few introductory letters for '*Nine Mens Carol*', and found odd, unused stamps in the bottom of the writing desk drawer to send them with. One less expense to burden him.

The desk itself was old and worn: as old and worn, he surmised, as his chair, the antique, slow computer, and his ideas: older and more worn with every day that he sat here '*Pretending*' as Susie had said as her last parting shot '*..to be a writer.*'

The door was still chipped from that time she'd slammed it.

About writing: he'd had the lot, from;

"You don't *seem* to work hard enough to justify it!" to:

"You make it look as if you're labouring the fact that you create things - don't go *on* so much!"

Well, they couldn't have it both ways, and perhaps it was better if they didn't have it at all. That was all. He was fed up with the chorus of voices: doubtless, one happy day when he was making money

- if that unlikely event ever dawned - they'd all magically be his friends once more.

He got the copies to the mail box around three in the afternoon - they'd get the 6'o'clock mail, and be in the studios within thirty-six hours: well, now his fate was really and truly in the melting pot.

He walked to the corner shop and bought himself a celebratory cigar; one of the long ones that he couldn't afford. He needed a break, a holiday. *A Woman.*

### **He rose early the following morning.**

Survival cut in. The first thing was to get started on the next project: there was no time to loose: as soon as he sat on his laurels on one project, that project had ground to a halt: after all, the only benefit he'd had from saying goodbye to Susie was that he'd rushed through the final draft of '*Nine Mens Carol*' .

That of course was really as a result of all the pain he'd had from the break-up: that had sustained him. Like the scream you scream inside when the dentist's drill gets you.

Rocket Fuel!

It was simple - as long as he didn't think about it he could keep going: the keys prettily clicking their showers of words, he hardly knowing just what he'd written: and that was it. Who gave a fuck, after all.

Production was all, was flight, was the Horizon, the Horizon for ever and ever.

He placed a thumb drive in the usb drive, and started the thing up: for the next twenty minutes he spent a confidently secure, mindless time just creating headings and endings, writing detritus into a directory from a fresh file that he always started at times like these, and from which he later would rob ideas.

He'd developed this idea from Balzac (was it Balzac?) - that Frenchman - who'd stuck any piece of paper with any idea he had had written on it into a sack.

At moments of blankness,( many, in Frank Mailer's life) he would draw one out, more or less at random, and start developing ideas around that point.

Frank Mailer called the file 'Sack.1'.

He finished playing with 'Sack', and borrowed a file in order to start a new file: he called it up afresh, empty, onto the screen.

Now his mind went blank: starting anything was often frightening - starting anything new always gave him a frisson of fear. It was, after all, like looking directly into a black hole.

The file had some scraps of words on it, forgotten words: it went like this:

**EXT: DAY:**

We are in Paris (France):

**2nd Unit: (Stock)**

**Voice Over**

A moment of freedom. A break before a new posting.

*(A Beat)*

Clichy or the Villa Pamphilli

Plain trees, creaking slightly as summer breezes stirred them.

**SHARON**

*She is looking over a landscape of great tall trees: reminding her of the plane trees she knew so well from Africa - we see her reactions-*

Great tall trees they were; and down on the coast enormous thick trees seven metres in diameter and sixty metres high, nature made towers, whole cities, galaxies of tightly balanced lives, one against the other.....

**CUT TO:**

**PARIS EXT: DAY:**

**2nd Unit:**

**SHARON (Cont.)**

*Paris, leaving, taking the Metro to Invalides. (Stock Shots)*

...walking in St., Germain.. the scent of Paris. Sudden death in the Place de Gaulle one hot summer Sunday afternoon.

**CUT TO:**

**SICILY: PIAZZA DEL CAVALCANTI:**

**EXT: DAY:**

**SHARON** (Cont.)

*She falters, to try and avoid the traffic flow; seeing cyclists beginning to wobble and cars beginning to drift:* Noticing that everybody else was walking, ignoring the dance of death. Palm trees danced in the summer heat. I must get out of here: I must get back to my work

**FX: Sound overlay:**

**V.O:**

Such a beautiful day.

**He hated the narrative:** thought the voice-over trite: disliked the central theme.

But here was a skeleton to start with; some ideas to inject into a script: why not a story here, a bit of product placement maybe, in Venice Beach or spick land, South LA or Hollywood..or San Diego: why not Highland Heights, Sunset Boulevard, La Salinas - Birdcage Circle! Or somewhere snazzy like Palm

Springs, one hundred and twenty miles north, away from the muck of the city. He smiled: *Where did he get that from- Birdcage?*: that would be crazy: but he could site it here and change everything to sweet anonymity later on, using the wordsearch and change function on the computer.

Yes, why not give it the veneer of reality and then play around with the elements to hype it up later? That would give it potential, authenticity and maybe the vital colour, zizz, punch, that it would require to really hit the market hard !

"The Gloss of L.A. Huh! What damn gloss?"

But it could make cash.

(Let's face it; he needed cash.)

And it was the beginnings of a great idea: to write about '*Real Life*' for a change: he could abstract it using the life that he was about to live: the one that had evaded him so far. He knew it in his bones for some reason - he just knew it!

Yes, why not! Later, he could scrap most of this and re-site it: it still had parts that could be used: for the time being it would do to start the new script: at least that was a couple of minutes ready-bespoked. He put the document back into 'Sack'.

Lets face it. the problem when starting is to get anything down - so that he could get his teeth into a new idea, any idea. He would change all this later, but it was important to first pretend that the first page, the

title page, would be the gateway to something unlikely. It would represent an unlikely situation... a good story... something dual, something slightly nasty, tinged with all sorts of colours. Sex, of course - perhaps a tasty murder, a tricky situation or two: a bit of duplicity, a risk, fright, fear, lust, paranoia, madness, stupidity, need, want, sensuality, eroticism.

A ragbag of all the emotions of life brought together '*For Your Pleasure*' One hundred and twenty minutes or so of it in less than six hundred and fifty slates. Economy is important in the 'B' Movie business: at twenty slates a day six hundred and fifty will take around seven weeks, give or take. At fifteen thousand dollars set and crew costs per day, that worked out at a raw cost of seven hundred thousand dollars: add a million for actors and a quarter of a million for filmstock and that makes around two million dollars. Forget the writer, he goes down for twenty thousand if he's called Frank Mailer, one percent of the cost.

There would be changes made.

Not only that but he'd have to change *his* lifestyle - make the big break - leave this closeted existence, strike out and start to inject some sort of vitality into his scripts.

That would be the final veneer: hard, like the lustre on Jennifer Warner's lips.

**He called the new screenplay,** the big one: *'In Your Dreams'*

Under it in tiny subscript the legend: 'Working Title'- and then an indiscipherable scribble, his afterthought - we could call it *'Deceiver'*.

Huh! Deceiver! He was the expert on that one.

## *Chapter 2*

### **Invitations**

A sudden, new, depression always settled in on Frank Mailer, when he'd finished a new piece.

Always. A new depression because it needed new food to stop it: new ideas, new fears, new horrors, new passions, ne consumptions. That is the bane of a screenwriter's life.

The creation of any new idea needs a prompt - any prompt can be used, any prompt at all, the obsession that one needs to pursue a new idea to it's end has to be motivated by something.

What's your favourite colour? The woman at the bookshop always asked the same question when he

went there for a new set of passe-partout covers for his latest piece.

He had no idea anymore: he'd lost count of the colours: the bets, the jokes, the lines the surprises, the ironies the subtleties.

None of this worked sufficiently to make him any but the slimmest living - the prompt was not there, you see.

Dammit!

Frank Mailer sat there in his worn seat by the battered worktable, for all like Buster Keaton's straight man, all in Pan-Stick, waiting for the third assistant director to call him onto the shooting stage.

But there was no-more time for rehearsals now: the time for play acting was well and truly over.

Dammit! *Think of something dramatic: something like:*

**HOLLYWOOD HILLS: DAY: INT:**

**FX: A GREY VEIL SEEMS TO SLIDE OVER THE FACE OF OUR CHARACTER AS HE:**

**He scrapped the line,** not even consigning it to '*Sack*' his computer mailbox.

Now that the screenplay for '*Nine Mens Carol*' was finished and gone, he had decided that he would press ahead with the new '*In Your Dreams*' with as much speed as possible.

(There was nothing else to do anyway.)

Fate loomed ahead of him like the Santa Monica Freeway. All twelve lanes of it. He coughed.

He sat for hours, looking out of the window, hearing the neighbours rowing, and then the bed creaking as they made up. Dammit, no woman to work it out on! *'I could use a fuck!'* Where did that come from?

Days went by. Time flows slowly when there's nothing happening.

And then, quite by chance one lonely morning, he had a conversation with someone from Warner's: that made some sort of breakthrough: well, that was how it felt, though it could be just a flash in the pan, another damn Chimera. It was a scrambled conversation, serving just to give him a modicum of hope. A straw to a drowning man. A scrambled conversation, something about *'Nine Mens Carol'* being cleared for a producer to look at.

"No promises, though!"

Then silence. Well, that was normal.

Life continued in this vein: that's how it always had been, anyway. Kind of slow.

**One other morning**, he decided to make a definitive start on the plot of the new screenplay *'In Your Dreams'*: he found the thumbdrive, called the icon up on the screen, examined the various parts: all

shattered and bearing little resemblance to any recognisable story.

He scanned the display of fragments on the screen, yellow files with unlikely names like: DEC1 and SIN000.

There was no order in it, yet.

N.B: One thing. *The Mix*. Any screenplay has to contain, in varying percentages: sex, a relationship, some sort of crime, murder being useful as a crowd-puller; some sort of sympathy gradient, for example an unborn child; and finally, something that John Doe could get hold of - vengeance, jealousy, amusement, children's viewpoints, passion, sex.

Sex. He'd written that twice.

Well, that was very much the plot of '*Nine Mens Carol*'- and that script was getting some interest!

What the hell, it paid for you to eat, whatever that meant.

He was getting cynical: didn't have any great hopes for '*Nine*'. How could he? In the interim after all he'd lost his innocence: now in more ways than one, perhaps he was becoming dangerously sober, immovable, even stable.

Stodgy?

God!, No! He got up and stretched himself.

And the challenge for a screenwriter *is* the zing, the sharp ice edge of reality, fantasy. *Excitement*.

How do you generate *excitement* on a sheet of copier paper? Particularly when you're happy, stodgy, content? *Happy? Stodgy? Content?* Frank Mailer? No! - was this was the wrong file out of 'Sack'? Unlikely!

But what a luxury, to be thickening around the middle and to happy about it, to be confident, loved, loving, happy, supported, settled, fucked whenever you wanted it. He wished he were.

But, back to the nub of it; just to push it past straight mundane reality any good piece needs, whatever pretences it has, whatever it is to be, some other, some *lateral* interest: some new vein of tension: another layer of story.

Screenplay writing is, ultimately, the art of making Dagwood Sandwiches. Sandwiches so delicious that you're impelled to come back for another helping: another skein in the plot: a repeat ticket, another screen. More money.

He could use more money. *Shit!*, back to that!

About the only dynamic thing in his life was his overdraft. And unfortunately it was not the only thing that frightened him

The phone rang while he was lost in his musing. Dreaming. Drowsing in the window, inventing shapes where there were no shapes, thinking of the girl on the carpet next door.

**He gave a violent start,** almost knocked the receiver handpiece off the rest; struggled with it for a moment.

"Hey Franko !"

He slowed right down: stood up to clear his chest. Sat down back with his legs up on the stool.

This was an unexpectedly friendly voice! For a moment he sat in deep suspicion, head slowly clearing.

He held the 'phone away from him for a minute, trying to visualize the caller.

"Hey, Frank!" Like a tape loop or something.

"Hello?" Out of focus, pull back to:

"David Sargent...remember Warner's?"

"Yeah"

"From a million years ago?"

"Uh huh!"

"Well, when I was there last week I saw one of your latest pieces - it was with the producer, Zac Greenwald... and they're crazy about it... I think it's your latest eh?...'*Nine Mens Carol*'?"

"Right!" He'd suddenly snapped awake: a sudden 'Swoosh!' of cold water. *What?*

"Anyway, they're up in the air about it: already doing a pre-shoot recce for locations!"

"Are *they* ?" Frank Mailer became even more suspicious; on the knife-edge between insane happiness and paranoid despair.

What was this all about, anyway?

"One thing, Franko, boy?"

"Yes?"

"We should have lunch together.. when are you free.. make it soon!"

"Just one thing David.."

"Yes, Frank"

"I *was* your client... you *were* my agent.. you fired me.... and that was a long time ago."

Six months, no, more, a year. That's why Frank was sending out his own scripts now: at the bottom of the pile, on 'spec'.

This was absurd though: there was no stopping the effulgence of the voice, like a bubble trying to burst:

"Frank... Frank, boy.. really, I can explain everything: I had problems over my divorce.. you were having problems over yours..we never could see eye to eye over anything.. Frank, *the point is...*" his ex-agent struggled with an indigestible mouthful of words: obviously desperate to think of something: "*..the point is, Frank.. all the nightmares are over and you and I can get down to some great work.. really great work.. together.. some really great work together!*"

*Bastard!*

"Well! this is a change of tack for you."

There was a gobbling noise on the other end of the line, as if a Turkey from the backwoods had

suddenly entered David Sargent's office, a muttered imprecation, too.

**A beat. then:** "Life's like that, Frank, take it from me.. I'm older than you, I should know after all - best friends sometimes become enemies for short periods - but don't let it affect you: our relationship went through ups and downs, but it's built to last - I knew that as soon as we shook hands for the first time, believe me! I..I.. never expected that our separation would last; I'm surprised you never called me... but marriage is here to stay, Frank, believe me, they won't be annulling this one!"

Had David Sargent known more about his marriage, even been interested more in his marriage (End Of), there wouldn't have been so much jollity in his voice.

Anyway - there was little clouding Frank's mind on this point: after all hadn't Warner's dumped a script of his before?

And yes, there was some talk of his new script going up to them: but not through David Sargent's agency.

He left the conversation at that: no need to go any further because he was sure something would happen now that David Sargent was chasing him for his percentage.

"Listen David - look, thanks for the call, I promise I'll get back to you.. OK?"

"Well,, sure, just remember that we have a good understanding between us, Frankie boy"

"Sure, David"

"Sure, Franko?"

Now, *why had David Sargent called?* There must be money in it, and agents have a star system just like writers, or anyone else in the movie business.

**He found out later what had happened.** It was simple, not at all what he would have thought.

Now this is pre-history, and it goes like this: no, the screenplay had been referred internally, probably accidentally, across companies: some excuse he heard on a bad 'phone line from a rude script editor, seven weeks after he'd sent the screenplay of *'Nine Mens Carol'* in.

As far as he knew the first thing that happened was that he'd received a reject slip - but no script arrived: so he 'phoned and heard the script editor/general gofer talking:

.."..No interest from us here...not dealing in that sort of thing..anyway", the script editor (at UA) said, with rare indulgence: "...Look, I'll do you a favour and hand it across to Warner's on the internal - but I'll tell you my expert opinion: it's crap and won't turn over a

plugged nickel: but I'll do it anyway." An air of worn patience.

Charity, eh?

Now they were giving him charity. Mind you, he needed it. Dammit. Anything that involved dollars, and his bank account.

**And to return to David Sargent:** why should he cut him in on this one, anyway?

"I'll give you a call back David, I promise."

"Righto, Franko, boy. Righto."

There was a deal of tension working itself out on the line.

David Sargent cut it.

For a moment there was the blare of background sound, Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'- as the switchboard came back on the line, and then that cut out too.

**So Warners had seen the script!** - obviously passed to them by UA having traversed MGM on it's journey. Now how had that come about? Because that was how it was. He wasn't sure whether the sensation was pleasant or unpleasant; it just gave him a tingle in his feet.

He 'phoned back, fearing the usual rejection.

It took him a little while to cut through the bureaucracy, to zigzag the extensions and find the

relevant script editor at Warner's: by this time he had quite a sore throat -

"Have you dealt with a script by Frank Mailer?"

"Who?". They were not overly gifted with either wit or humour at Warners.

*"Frank Mailer?"*

"Never heard of it"

"Him!"

"Who?"

"Frank Mailer is the writer!"

"You his agent or something?"

"No I'm.."

Because if you send in unsolicited stuff we chuck it on one side and probably read it in two years time!"

"No, it's a script... the name of a script:

"Run that one by me Buddy, I've only chucked five today so far!"

*"Nine Mens Carol"*

"Oh, .. wait!" The voice clicked off the line.

A million years of waiting. He was sweating for some reason: he drank a sip of the cold coffee to quench a rising thirst.

The line clicked on again.

*"Nine Mens.!"* he started, his voice hoarse by this time, almost a whisper of despair..

"Hello? ", said an almost polite voice "Who am I speaking to?"

"Frank Mailer..!*Nine Mens-*"

"Ah! Mr Mailer, what an unexpected pleasure!"

For a moment he was absolutely shocked: he had never been treated like this by anyone in any company so far: they were usually short tempered and rude, normally both things at the same time. Filmic, normal. What's the expression? - Polite But Firm.

"I-", he said, and halted suddenly short of breath... *was this real?*

"Oh, Hullo Mr Mailer.. my extension is two-five-four, and I am Miss Leaming: L-e-A-m-i-n-g , excuse me spelling it to you but it's for future reference....all your scripts will in future be retained at this office: in all future connexions please always ask for me, or the extension... and additionally, for reasons of total security, in future all your scripts will be handled by our appointed courier service, so there'll be no problem with material being lost in the post..."

She coughed and Frank Mailer seized the opportunity to take a long draught of the coffee to clear a terminally blocked throat.

"...just phone them on extension 21552 - I will tell them so today, and they will come round and pick-up; whatever you wish to send!... page by page is always a very secure way of doing it: just address it to me. The service is unlimited and twenty-four hours a day, by the way."

"Well, by all means!", he said, breathless.. he cupped the phone and coughed-up the phlegm that threatened to overwhelm him. "..What does..?" he stopped because she had continued almost without drawing breath.

"And.. Mr Mailer, may I *Personally* congratulate you on a *perfect* script: I haven't enjoyed anything so much in years!"

"You may.. eh..I.."

This had taken the wind completely out of his sails.

If he hadn't been sitting down, he would have had to sit. He had a pain in his chest now. God! As it was, he had already taken his feet off the table in some hiatus of surprise. His feet were shaking, independantly. Pins and needles too.

"And I expect you'll want to be put through to Mr Pelling: unfortunately he isn't in this afternoon, you probably know he's shooting '*Red Duster*' (that's it's running title anyway) - but I could get him to call you when he has a break for editing at the week-end."

"I.. well..of course: I'm at 555 4237: you might know that from the flyleaf of the script.."

"Yes I can see that right here.." Miss Leaming was obviously leafing through the script at that moment: "I have you on the autodialler now, so that's OK - no trouble: and remember, if you have any problems at all, just 'phone me and I'll be right on to it,

after all the production of '*Nine mens Carol*' (that is its running title isn't it?) mustn't be spoiled in any way at all! It'll be a smash, I'm sure of it"

"Thank you for your help Miss Leaming!"

"Not at all, Mr Mailer".

He sat back to try to muzzle his mad head.

He went into the dank, slowly decaying bathroom and had a cool shower. A double bourbon. Suddenly he brightened.

Despite his generally downcast condition it had suddenly occurred to him that he had some sort of a hit on his hands.

**EXT: DAY:**

**TOM**

*(Who is trying to straighten-out the plastic bag and get the  
corpse into it)*

Dammit all, Ulla, this is no way to fix this thing... we'll never get it straightened out if we get ourselves in such a mess: after all the cops'll see what we've done immediately.. the evidence is all there..

**ULLA**

Not if you just do what I said: there's no reason to panic: they're not looking for this creep, so they'll never find him-anyway, the world is better-off without an arsehole like that..

## **TOM**

I just hope you know what you're doing honey,  
I just hope it.. that's all

**WE FREEZE ON THAT:**

**CUT TO:**

**INT: SOUTH HOLLYWOOD: DAY**

He played around with the idea, juxtaposed it, cut it, hiked it over the page, split-screened it - and despaired of it.

Finally, for the hundredth time he put the paper down.

One more page: and the plot was meandering all over the map!

He put the spellcheck on and let the machine run over the numerous misspellings. Then he ran the style check, which told him that he had too many broken vowels and used the word EXT and INT too much.

Hopeless thing, that pretentious stylechecker: he'd dump it just as soon as the piece was finished.

When, despairing, he went into the kitchen to make another cup of instant coffee, he noticed a dense square yellow vellum envelope on the tiles just inside the front door. He opened it and saw that it contained a heavy gold-rimmed ivory-card

*'Zac Greenwald requests the pleasure of the company of Frank  
Mailer at a dinner party at 276 Ellington Place,  
Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles,  
California  
..... R.S.V.P'*

An invitation from Zac Greenwald, the  
producer-to-be of *'Nine Mens Carol'*, to his place on  
Sunset Boulevard.

*"Interesting."*

## *Chapter 3*

### **Money, Money, Money**

Everything in the film business either takes a lifetime, or else is all over and forgotten in the wink of an eye. That's another thing among all the other things that you have to learn about screenwriting: after all fame is merely a Chimera, isn't it?

He hadn't had a word from Warners for several days: then one cold morning, as he shivered at the screen, a long crisp envelope slid through the front door which doubled as his study door and living room door as well, and clicked onto the quarry-tiled entry.

He was standing drinking yet another coffee, and he stooped to pick it's crisp edge up, and felt it.

The texture took his attention: it had a particular crispness to it that he knew was good, banknote like, in fact as if there were a paper thin wodge of bank notes stacked inside, all ready to tumble out and - *make him happy*.

He made a fresh cup of coffee, relishing this moment, crossed the room with the mug in his hand slopping coffee over the stained carpet, and then sat in front of the envelope, not daring to open it. As if he knew it would speak to him, now.

**As he did this the** 'phone at his elbow rang, and he twitched, hot coffee splatting on his new trousers.

"Yes?"

"Frank Mailer please"

"Speaking, who's there?"

"Hello, Mr Mailer, Austin Dobbs at Warners..."

"Hello, I don't know you, though?"

"Sorry, Mr Mailer.. I'm the controller for script purchasing and suchlike: I'm the man who signs the cheques: John Pelling told me to send you your retainer for '*Nine Mens Carol*': I'm sorry for any delay - we have to contact the Internal Revenue with any new individual - and they made us excise a certain amount for taxation: at any rate I hope you got the cheque, it should have been with you yesterday, but the burocracy here is sometimes...."

Austin Dobbs halted, he didn't want to expose himself too much as he didn't know whom he was dealing with, yet...

"Does it have any distinguishing marks?"

"Yes, indeed, the envelope has the letters AD on the top left hand corner"

He turned the letter over: on the face it had the letters AD on the top left hand quadrant.

"Well, when it arrives I'll know it." He actually was locked in unbelief.

"I'm so sorry it hasn't arrived" the voice may at one time been concerned, but it was certainly not repentant.

Frank felt distinctly drunk, the voice continued:.

"As to the contract: Mrs Williams must have contacted you with that already - I hope the the basic meets with your attorney's approval - I'm just saying that so that we can get on with the process of moving on to your next film."

Aah! Motive!

"Sure" Casual.

"Well, of course you must have heard about that from Mr Pelling, or his producer"

"Oh, Yes." More unbelief. Was this actually happening to *him*?

Frank's voice was suddenly a register higher, then quickly lower.

"And once the retainer is banked then we can negotiate the final details of that contract."

"Well, that's very kind of you Mr.."

"Dobbs"

"Dobbs.. yes the contract is being examined this very minute, I should imagine."

He could hardly believe that this was happening: and they wanted his next script up as soon as possible! And where was the contract?: another cock-up by *who?* Mrs. Wilson?

He opened the envelope carefully: on the front of the expensive rippled paper was the Logotype in gold, with a clump of palm trees and a little patch of golden sand. Very nice. Very, very nice.

The cheque came out with it's face away from him.

Avoiding the pool of cold coffee, he slid the cheque on its face to the edge of the scuffed writing desk and pulled it over by the narrow tabbed end which held, in computer generated typescript, the legend: *MAILER, Frank*

*Retainer*

'N-M's-C'

followed by the message, in tiny type: '*rip this tab off and keep it for your records: no further receipts will be issued.*'

Then he looked at the flat, drab cheque: and went totally blank.

For an hour he sat there: at length he got up, walked round the room, steadied his eyes for one last moment and, for the umpteenth, and last time, he examined the cheque:

*'OneHundredandFourtyOneThousandTwoHundredandEightyEightDollarsNineteenCentsOnly'.*

Staggering!

With shaking hands he sat at the battered writing desk and drew out his bank statements and cheque books.

It took him a little under another hour to realize that his total indebtedness was a little over seven thousand dollars: which left -.

"Whew!"

More than he had ever dreamed.

**He took the bus to the bank:** well, until today it had been a question; run a car - or pay the gas bill?

Simple as that. The cold had beat him into it, and out of the car.

No longer, though. Not any longer.

Along the way, as the bus chugged along belching oily exhaust, he looked out of the window and saw a motor showroom; one of those open air ones, the cars gleaming in the light of a dying sun.

He'd often prized the cars lined up there, gleaming chrome and wonderful colours, promising the world, as the bus putted along the strip. On an

impulse he rushed off the bus, and ran across the strip: managing somehow to avoid death on the six traffic lanes.

Now, for the first time in his life, he had the luxury of trying as many cars as he wanted: playing with the seat adjusters, clicking the radios on, trying the cassette players and the CD's, adjusting the mirrors. Like a schoolboy. He spent an hour playing this wonderful game.

Finally: he set his heart on the metallic speckled Red Pontiac. He paid a deposit with his newly refurbished cheque book, promising to come back with the rest the day after tomorrow.

That would make a perfect car for his transition from unknown hack to respected writer: like Joe Zawinyl, the writer of '*Raging Waves*', he would zoom from obscurity to wealth, fortune.

Pretty soon he, too, would command six-figure tasters. Just for a *treatment* !

This was wonderful!

For the first time for a long time he flagged a taxi down, not at all worried by the cost.

This sudden spurt of stardom, coupled with his divorce, had made him a free man!

He paid the driver off with a bill, not caring what it was worth. The taxi driver's jaw sagged as he saw the amount ;

"Keep the change"-*and he meant it.*

He left the cab as if he were walking on air, entered the bank, deposited the cheque: even the teller looked surprised.

He smiled at her: she was, after all, the 'Finance Expert' he normally dealt with who had seen him through the worst crises in his financial times.

"Deposit?", she said, looking surprised.

"First one of my new contract!", he said brightly. He felt like inviting her out, to celebrate.

Suddenly she looked bright, her eyes sparkled, she looked cheerful, too. She smiled, like a ray of sun on a dark day. Mouth red, welcoming - welcoming his money at the very least. But anyway, he would look after that mouth, later. No reason not to - he found her very attractive, and she wore no wedding ring. Why ever not: after all, he *was* free, now. Almost, really, free.

*Wow !* Oxygen. He took a new, deep, breath.

She looked at him and dimpled, slightly, *or was that his imagination?*

On the basis of the cheque he withdrew ten thousand dollars in cash, nine in thousands, for the car, the rest in fifties, tens, and fives.

Once outside the bank, he laughed uncontrollably, passers-by backing-up in mid stride as if he were crazy.

Well, perhaps he was! Obviously it paid to be crazy!

He stuck the wodge of notes into his pocket and sauntered along the strip.

What next?

**First, he indulged himself.**

A small, private indulgence.

He wouldn't tell his sole friend Pablo a thing: just let it out to him slowly: but then he'd make him one happy Mexican.

There was not much a Wetback could be happy about in this part of California: poor Pablo.

Perhaps one day he'd make it up to him.

Yes, he would! Yes he really would.

After all Pablo had had a hard deal from life: even now he was only semi-legal: he worked in East LA, for a drugs company: a '*Technical Assistant*', they called it: actually a humper for chemicals that legals wouldn't touch.

Well, things were coming right for him, and he'd straighten Pablo out on this one.

He'd walked out of the bank a changed man: life was coming right, the money was in the bank, nothing could change that, and only bad luck could stop him now.

## *Chapter 4*

### **Falcons View**

He followed the Real Estate Agents map painstakingly. Mind you, that proved only partly worthwhile.

He drove, as directed, along Sunset Boulevard, then further, to the south, taking the left fork after highway 52, and then the first right after that, arriving on Highland Heights correctly, but then suddenly unable to find the turning, *Birdcage Circle*.

The dust swirled in the jet of the exhausts, peppering the red speckle of the Pontiac with tiny muddy impact craters. he stopped the car, and watched the long fine gossamer trail of dust wander over the road and finally lose itself in the air, moving east, into the desert.

There was no one there in the midst of such a hot afternoon either, nobody he could ask. Dust attached itself to the perspiration on his brow and he became begrimed.

And then, by chance, perspiring and in a pretty evil mood by this time, he found the Street sign: *Birdcage Circ.* The plate was broken off directly after the second letter C.

And it took him still more time to find the block.

It was a block that stood well back from the road, rather sandy, as was everything else here near the road. About three hundred yards from the broken street signboard. Very private. Almost silent - if he listened very intently he could hear a faint hum: the thrumm of the city, like a vapid heart, ranging through the empty spaces of these apartments.

12452, the address said: and then magically, he had arrived at 12452, Birdcage Circle.

The apartment itself was part of a star-shaped block, itself divided into five separate sections, conjoined in the centre by the outer irregularities of the environs of the original plot, the centre of the plot itself being a garden set around a semi-circular swimming pool.

Something like his dream, only slightly more irregular.

Wonderful!

He could write here... he hadn't seen anyone around at all; perfect! Quiet, no fornicating neighbours, no traffic rumble or lost cargo planes overhead: just quiet. Wonderful!

He looked more closely at the eccentric structure.

Each arm of the ragged star so formed subsumed a variation on the theme: a large apartment: a long lounge room, a large, almost square bedroom, a kitchen of roughly the same dimensions, a garage and the usual other offices. The one he'd ben directed to was actually one of the smaller arms, the others containing one or two more rooms.

The whole plot was set in typically arid, sandy soil, and at the end of the garden was a broken wilderness of rocks, cactus and dribbling water from an underground outfall, or perhaps a stream.

Anyway, he had had the feeling, and yes, he was right, for he liked it before he even opened the front door. Not charming exactly: something more like character-full, perhaps.

The dust from the street had formed a sealing strip against the unused base of the door, and a rivulet of sand smoothed it's way in as he entered.

**He stood** in the shade of the interior for a minute: savouring the dry, cool air.

This at least was not a jerry-built piece of squalid speculation. He shook himself like a lost dog.

At last, he could leave his dreadful room and live in comfort and space: even a little luxury - *at long last*.

The paintwork was a little tattered, and in the *office* (for so he immediately called it) the paint had yellowed. That, combined with the wooden Venetian blinds on both wide windows gave it a rather dated look. Quite stylish, something out of a forties film-noir, perhaps.

And the *mellowed* paint in the bedroom was a slightly lighter shade, which, together with the pull-down blinds could make it a very.. well, spacey, sort of room to wake up in. Pleasant.

The kitchen also looked a little tired. No matter, he would take on a cleaner to look after that.

Eventually. *Eventually!* Everything eventually, a castle eventually.

The shower room was special though: nicely appointed, with a quadrilateral, crazy, glass cabinet to contain the spray. Ouch!

Very nice for a steamy scene. He could imagine it now. With body-doubles, naturally!

This apartment was offering him something he could not refuse: he laughed light-heartedly: maybe he would use it in the next script. He could start it: *'Camera finds the nameboard: 'FALCON'S VIEW'... it pans to..'*

One thing; the silence. He sought the 'phone connection and found that it had been roughly twisted out of the plaster; that must be fixed: communication was essential: nothing worse than being cut-off.

He explored further, startled at his opportunity, perhaps even more startled at the sudden opportunity this income gave him - for the first time, for the first time ever in his life.

For example.

There was even an extension of the garden to the front and along the side , which he took to immediately.

He could have a little awning, perhaps in candy-stripe along over the kitchen window and by the kitchen door, which would give a nice offset to the other awning (already there) which looked out to the swimming pool. The Cost? Forget it!

After all, this was just as he had asked for, and now he'd found it: it was perfect. Just what he wanted.

He got back into the Red Pontiac and accelerated back across the sandy drive, back into Birdcage Circle and across onto the highway.

As soon as he got back into town he re-visited the Real-Estate office and told them he'd take it: a little higher in price than he'd expected, but good enough to last him until the money came rolling in from his next script. He gave them a cheque, and they handed him the keys.

In the next few days he gave notice on his pokey apartment in Hollywood Heights, got the 'phone transferred, faxed all his friends with the new address and information, and bought himself a new computer with an upgraded memory and all the usual add ons. Riches!

Everything was perfect, and for once he was content, no, happy, when he moved into 12452 Birdcage Circle.

**On day one**, he celebrated with Pablo; they went downtown to a bar, he paid, and they serenaded the barman until he threw them out.

On day two, he wrote another page on the new computer, still smelling distantly and luxuriantly of new silicon and plastic:

### **SCENE 111**

**EAST L.A.: EXT: NIGHT**

**(or Day-for-Night Throughout):**

**C/U TOM:**

**Pull back to:**

**TOM:**

He is frantically looking for **ULLA** and driving the **RED PONTIAC**: The street is dark, and he drives wildly along it, hitting a couple of trash bins and

swerving to avoid a shadow, which turns out to be just that.

## **SCENE112**

**L/S: EXT: ELDER AVENUE: NIGHT:**

**Camera finds:**

**TOM:**

He reaches the end, by Elder Avenue, and drives along to the right, he is looking for **COLUMBUS GROVE**. There it is! The **PONTIAC** jiggles precariously on the gravel of the unmade road. Up **COLUMBUS GROVE**, raising invisible clouds of thick dust, now that camera is out of the streetlights: and onto a knoll.

## **SCENE 113**

**EXT: ULLA'S APARTMENT: (CRANE)**

**TOMS P.O.V:** He cuts the lights and the engine just before he rolls down the knoll: there is no change in the juxtaposition of lights in the block, darkened as it is save for the lights in **ULLA'S** downstairs **BEDROOM**. No-one has detected his presence.

**EXT:TRACKING SHOT or STEADICAM: W/A: NIGHT: (cont.) TOM:** walks across the lawn, and approaches her door.

**HIS P.O.V:(F.X:) NIGHT:EXT/INT: INCUT:** he can see her clearly now in the lights of the bedroom: wearing only a brassiere and knickers (panties).

**F.X:** Confronting her is a burly, pink, bearded man  
**IVAN:** we have not seen him before (See Page 28).  
**IVAN** is shouting.

### **The phone rang.**

Frank Mailer was sitting back mentally wringing-out his creative juices. It was a dry day, and anyway, he was not in the tension building mood: He cut the power and the computer dwindled.

"Yeah?"

"Hi, Franko!" It was David Sargent's theatrical voice, again.

"Hi, David" Better be diplomatic about all this, after all there could be something in it for him, too.

"Well?.. have you thought at all.."

Still scribbling, still thinking, David.. you'll have to give me some time" That gave him some satisfaction, quiet satisfaction: David Sargent would have to eat humble pie for as long as he wished it: and when it occurred to him to take him on as *his* agent (if that day ever came!), he would knock his agents percentage, down to nothing, make him work for the kudos, not for Frank Mailer's cash!

### **His reverie was interrupted.**

"I heard a rumour somewhere that Zac Greenwald was putting up a new production called '*Running Title*'...you heard anything?"

"In Your Dreams... *In Your Dreams?*", he hoped that he'd managed to distil a certain unbelief into the word.. "*In Your Dreams?*"

"Yes.. In Your Dreams, Frank.. I heard you're scribbling it"

"Could be... but '*In Your Dreams*'.. fact is.. I never thought about such a title, David.. but it sounds pretty good to me... yes, could get my creative juices going on that one!" Feeling drunk with puny power now, in the face of this asshole.

"So, you mean to tell me..?"

"No idea David... look I'm tied up - I'll call; back or something - OK? sorry about the rush.. hear from you later"

"See you soon Franko boy!" David Sargent wasn't enjoying this one little bit.

He dropped the receiver to its rest from a great height.

**Dammit!** How did David Sargent know that his latest project was called '*In Your Dreams*? And who the hell had told him anyway?



*Book 2*

**THE SEASONAL BLUES**



## *Chapter 5*

### **Springtime**

#### *'Part One: Exterior: Day.'*

He wrote the line and then stopped; thinking.

There was one thing that had been missing from his life, he conjectured, one simple basic thing that had begun to flood back into him like a river of new found energy, without warning, like a river after the rains: suddenly Frank Mailer had begun to be sexual again.

This was to some extent a shock, a new, rather pleasant shock - as opposite as possible in sensation to the unpleasantness originally, when his sex drive had begun to deteriorate: like any ordinary person he hadn't imagined that his sexual appetite could degenerate and then having dwindled, just as suddenly

regenerate from dormancy after only a few months. The deterioration of course, caused by shock. Mind you that was logical, life after all being dynamic, is prone to constant logical change.

The main problem, now that the inevitable (he supposed) mental block was past, was the changed manner of his life: almost that of a hermit. No, it was the isolation, months at a time spent clicking away on a dirty computer keyboard.

And now, in his new personal spring time, things had begun to change: in fact change, itself, had begun to accelerate. Faster and faster now. He could feel it.

He sat at the new desk behind the screen of the new computer in his new apartment, the Pontiac all shiny, new, and Red, on the sandy parking space, and wondered what he should do next. Not go back, not down that well travelled road, back into oblivion!

He shivered, shaking himself like a cat.

*One thing.*

**The screenplay** was beginning to flow nicely: by now he'd sketched out the action in a series of basic scenes on the computer: but the action seemed to him flat, he would have to inject real interest into it.

This was to some extent a normal, basic, everyday problem, but life-flow and work-flow are intimately related, and - to take it from the top - when

he was writing, problems stacked up in a certain order, on a repeating day-to-day basis.

Problem number one was mid-afternoons.

In the morning he'd start working, often as early as six-thirty, usually around eight; keen as mustard, all the ideas crowding each other out: and then in mid-morning he'd take a break around eleven, occasionally do a bit of shopping or something: then later write until around three in the afternoon. That was the rhythm of the day consolidated - thus, he aimed at five per-cent of the basic per day.

Well, that was the theory, anyway.

But - now that the demand had started in on him he would have to keep that up: a basic script written and edited down tight in three to six months from a standing start.

To get back to the problem: in the early afternoon the ideas would flag with his initial, midday, loss of energy.

Usually, he would take a break: doing something useful, healthy, busy. For example: he'd have a dip in the pool, sometimes a ride down to the strip to enervate smoked-out lungs.

If he managed to get through that he could work until mid-evening, happy as a sand-boy. Productive.

The problem for him was inactivity: at the moment he was simply a closeted writer: mind you,

this is the occupational drawback for anyone who is a writer - from day to day you sit behind the screen, and do nothing with your life, save experience other peoples fictitious lives from the safety of your seat. In reality, you become lulled and do nothing in the active sense. How then is anyone able to come up with bright, sparkling ideas - when he has a boring, repetitive existence?

The word came up in his mind, *exotic*.

That's what a good script needed, a touch of the exotic, for interest; the erotic, for the punters; and the dynamic, for the pedants. Oh, and the critical '*Je ne sais quois*' for the production company or in his case, the Studio.

## ***PART TWO: DAY FOR NIGHT:***

Besides; he was getting very *randy*. Time for a change. Things really were set to change. Spring time. It was Spring, at last.

He closed the front door and looked around him like a felon escaping from San Quentin.

The circle (why did they call it circle, it was undulating, sinuous, but no circle?) - empty at hot arid midday.

He was suddenly bored, and simultaneously fired with the need to react.

He took the Red Pontiac from the sandy trap out front and drove north. After a while, the network of roads being such, inevitably making his way back along the freeway, towards the coastal strip. He didn't know this area so well.

In no time at all he had filled-up, checked the essentials. Now he was at the cross where the roads to the strip split east, to the LA/Santa Monica freeway, and west, to Sunset strip.

He stopped the car and parked just off the main drag, beside a Latin bar that he knew well. He gave a little boy a buck to watch the car, and walked.

Here, at this end of the strip, the various establishments were mainly Spanish, the language a constant swop between the occasional broad Nicaraguanese, sometimes Chilean but more often Mex.

He stopped at a window: the shop sign read '*Wetback*' advertising its lineage. Inside a scatter of pornographic magazines, second-hand TV sets and clothes in hideous colours.

He started back along the strip, keeping well clear of any groups of individuals which might even remotely, seem threatening.

Los Angeles and its environment breeds indiscriminate violence. It's the loneliness of the motorist in the tin and glass cocoon, the leaking, chugging, smelling cinema on four wheels called an

automobile. He walked for hours: *of course!* ..the reason that he didn't attract any aggravation was that he was almost as dishevelled as the people along the strip.

He dropped into '*Cecil Gee*' along some street somewhere: by this time he had really sore feet: in a bus, or for that matter in the Pontiac, this immense street seemed a good deal shorter: and he was not yet half way along it.

He paid cash: the assistant inspected the notes with great distrust, alarm even (what's this?). Frank Mailer must remember to sign up for plastic!

**Frank Mailer put his old self**, life, clothes, computer, in a collection of plastic bags, lifted the hatch and drove a couple miles, then ceremoniously dumped them in a bin, only to see a shapeless tramp snatch them the moment he drove away.

That was another of the multiplicity of the faces of the strip. He parked the Pontiac and decided to walk. After a couple of miles he was reaching it's upper reaches. Now he felt unwontedly thirsty: famished actually: he hadn't walked so far for months.

He drank a milk shake, and then a beer.

The mixture created an uncomfortable rumble in his guts.

He walked a few yards further and a hand caught his arm:

"Hey, Mister", said a high woman's voice, "You looking for trade?"

He almost recoiled in horror, then steadied himself. He walked for a while longer and was getting into the plusher suburbs of Hollywood, at the Lakeshore End.

Now, again, he stopped at a bar, and this time had a more leisurely drink.

Again, a hand on his elbow, more subtle this time:

"Buy me a drink will you?"

Conversational.

"Sure"

She ordered something from the barman, relaxed, as if she'd known him for ever.

They looked at each other over their glasses.

She was around twenty-five, rather thin, well spoken. She wore a thin dress, (it was warm that afternoon) buttoned up almost to the neck. Her hair was dark.

"What's your name?" he said.

She looked at him quizzically:

"Are you looking for a fuck?"

"A fuck?"

"You said it!"

"Well, maybe" He looked at her body secretly, not wanting to give anything away. Was this how you did it?

"It's a hundred-fifty dollars - unlimited time, within reason."

"Hundred"

"OK - a hundred"

She smiled at him as if imparting a tender secret, confident in their friendship, lifetime long.

"Where"

"I have a place, back of the strip"

"Sure".

He paid the bill and they left the bar, using her car, parked around the side.

It only took a minute to get to her apartment, around the back of the next block or two.

"You're new to this, aren't you?", she said.

"Yes, I am - how'd you know".

"No experienced john would use a place he didn't know."

He gave her the money.

She undressed, without a moments thought: actually she was naked under the dress, hence it's being fastened to the neck - and stood looking at him.

In complete contrast with her polished presentation, her body was poor, sad, haggard, it showed bruises and what looked like burn marks: it had sags and bags on it: her breasts were rather shapeless, saggin, with all the evidence of no attention, care or for that matter support; rather pendulous , and

the purple nipples sagged sadly downwards; something he didn't like.

"Is there anything special you'd like to do?"

"No, not specially".

He'd already gone off the idea: felt a distant sickness rising in his throat; but to a poor man, one hundred dollars is a lot of money; he'd have to go through with it.

"What's your favourite colour?"

He'd seen this routine at the movies: it all sounded from then on like some awful, corny, Screenplay: ran on, remorseless -

"Green"

"Green?" she rummaged in her bag:

"I've got this one here, kind of yellow"

Martini - or Champagne?

*Hard Cut to:*

**"It'll do!"**

Sex as cold as this, swept the rug from under him. He couldn't make head or tail of what he was doing.. why was he doing it anyway? Loneliness?

"Well, I'll just lie down then..", she took a container of vaseline hand cream and lubricated her sex, the pale cream showing absolute contrast against her black shaped bush of pubic hair: lying with her legs

parted, smiling hollowly, as if to say 'These are the wares I'm offering you'.

Vacantly, staring at him, naked.

"Whenever you want".

They did it. Empty, disinterested. Even bored. He did it so as not to upset her; like Sandra.

Still, there was some small release in it for him, too. With Sandra there had always been a background angst, gnawing at his guts. With her, it felt nothing, cold and not even comfortable. The bed felt like a board. He felt glad when the whole thing was over. But there was no angst, only the bubble of a growing panic, no, unease. A tear in his eye, that was all, for what they had both lost.

**One thing though;** that first time made the big break with the past.

From that moment on he had changed: somehow for the worse, for it made him tougher, harder and faster, more duplicitous and more savage, and he figured, better able to survive because it made him egoistic, jealous, nasty, envious and greedy, a liar.

The whole catalogue, without a chink or a break, the whole bang shoot.

And with all the new, decaying, perspective he calculated that he could blame it all back on his 'wife' Sandra - now; *the whore*.

**After that Wednesday** he began to visit the Strip more and more: avoiding the lower, poorer part, and only parking on the corner of Vine Boulevard.

The unpleasantness of it all had begun to be like some sort of drug, each time leaving you more hungry than when you'd started, more strung up, tense, lonely, isolated - but more addicted to the set of sensations, to the juxtaposition of the sounds and scents and sensations.

From Vine Boulevard it was an easy walk to the shops, and a few bars which he began to frequent, like a ghost, the blue movie houses where he went for an occasional change of pace: and the whores, of course, the whores.

It had become that break he had long wished: something to do in the dog-day tired afternoons in-between the midday lull and the late energy bubble of early evening. Problem one was almost solved. But the habit had crept up on him in such a way that he had been taken by surprise: no matter, if there wasn't something to buy, then he could help himself to something equally tasty.

Most of the tarts on the strip though, left a great deal to be desired. Imitation women with imitation emotions: *where were those feelings?* - and how did they feel? They were certainly never available to tell you. To face the facts - to any punter, john, trick, these

women were plastic, manufactured in bulk: sad. They lived a sort of filmic reality; and you can turn a movie off, just by pressing a button.

**And in that same reality:** as he came to know it pretty swiftly; the Strip whores were burnt out, passionless; machines, not women.

Worse still, some of them were diseased, dying.

On several occasions he halted the proceedings prematurely when he noticed the tracks on the insides of their legs. Now, sometimes he paid them ten dollars to inspect the insides of their thighs: pretending he was some kind of scent freak: to save himself grief.

Grief!

Those whores, the junkies, would do sex unprotected for nothing extra; they knew they were going to die: who cared if they took a few dozen punters with them. Anyway, they needed the money: everyone knew that they needed the money: if not for themselves, then for their boyfriends, lovers, husbands, *pimps*, pushers.

*Lovers?*

**Love** had nothing to do with it.

**Day by day he moved along the strip,** unknowingly Northwards, into South L.A. That was the intelligent thing to do. Had he known it, and if there were any intelligence to be exercised.

One day on Hollywood Boulevard, quite by chance, he found a little office door, with a glass screen indented with sculpted capitals: *The Lang Agency*

By chance he'd seen a few whores go in and out, on several occasions over a couple of weeks: he often had a beer at the bar opposite. You got to know whores: it became instinctive.

He climbed the stairs one sunny Thursday, around two in the afternoon.

The Lang Agency was an agency, all right: over a couple of weeks he spent five hundred dollars there on 'introductions'. Still, one thing they made clear to him was that the girls were 'Certified' free of any sexually transmitted disease.

An odd thing for an introduction agency to assure him of?

He began to further develop his plan: all confused and fuzzy, because he had hardly thought this out in any rational sense: but this would be the final stage of his dynamic afternoon scenario - get a bit of *Zizz!* into the script.

He laughed to himself.

You see, his plan had become increasingly clear - clarified itself really - it was that he would check two or three of them out, so that he could use whichever one he needed, when he needed her: she would be on the end of a 'phone whenever he required it: it would prevent any unwanted thoughts from seeping back

into his life like acid and destroying whatever equilibrium he had. Instant gratification: what a master plan!

On the end of a phone - he would call them and then they would visit him at his place on Birdcage Circle.

It took him a month.

At length he had narrowed his choice to three women; one from the 'Lang Agency', and two he had met at the Hollywood Boulevard end of the Strip.

### **To start with then, the last tryouts.**

The tall one. 'Lindsey' on the following Tuesday afternoon, the blonde one 'Mori', when she was free that week, the black haired 'Maggie', one lunchtime, probably Thursday, maybe Monday. Well, that was the plan.

The buzz was beginning to come back into his life. He felt it in his bones. He felt the sensation of living, somehow dangerously.

This new set of random dynamics could make it all happen, especially when it came to the latest script: life as a fruit machine, destiny as a pinball wizard - *In Your Dreams* was beginning to gather fat, burgeon: one day soon it would be finished: full of the zip! of success.

### **Thursday dawned grey.**

By mid-morning he felt he'd done the best work of the day. Of course! That black-haired *contact* Maggie would be here any minute: she'd just 'phoned to say that she'd be there.

He had just boiled the water for instant coffee when the door chime sounded. He opened the door, and was pleasantly surprised when she entered.

She was slimmer than he'd remembered her, svelte, even. Shoulder bag, Macintosh, a real one. Expensive.

"Shall I sit down?", she said, as if this were some important business meeting.

She clutched the Macintosh tight around her neck. *Professional Equipment.*

"Are you cold, Maggie?"

"No"

"Would you like a drink"

"Sure"

He turned to get her a whisky, and when he turned to face her again:

"Do you want to do it now - shall we get down to it?", she said.

"Pressed for time?"

"There's no time limit on this one". she said: "... you know that!...I just figured.."

"Fine?"

She still clutched the Mac. to her throat.

However, when she held the whisky in her hand the coat fell open.

"Do you like me?", she said. He could see her body.

"How could I not"

She rose from the couch, dropped the Macintosh, stretched like a lioness, naked, lithe.

"Do you want to do anything to me?"

"Like?"

"You can fuck me: bugger me; shave me, whip me... anything"

"As long as I pay"

"Well, yes". Of Course! *Very Professional.*

"Just stand there, like a statue." Her body froze. "Now turn around" She turned. She had an almost perfect body. She smiled as if she knew she was perfect.

"You're beautiful... you shouldn't be doing this: you should be straight - sleeping in one man's bed every night, servicing just one man."

Suddenly, keenly, with sadness he remembered Sandra's body - and the bodies of his earlier lovers; *how little you know when you hold a jewel in your hands!*

"Hey, don't preach at me!"

"I'm sorry - I'm trying to tell you the truth"

"I know the fucking truth...now tell me what you want, fuck you!"

He screwed her in the middle of the carpet, and she left a little curled pearl-shaped stain of juice or come behind her, as her personal epitaph, her mark in history.

### **Monday.**

He'd made an early start, walking up the hill on one side and down the gully on the other, meeting a man with an almost square, unsheathed, chrome plated Smith & Wesson .357 magnum and a huge personality problem, along the gully.

That gave him an idea: He got down to some work then, introducing the Smith & Wesson as an element of a sort into the script, which had begun to take off by then: the story doing what it should do, leading him now, beginning at last to create it's own reality, a magical moment. Then, almost without thinking, he changed the gun to a silver Colt 45 Auto. More audience familiarity, more streamlined and menacing - not so vulgar or aggressive. And somewhere, somehow, in the back of his mind he had a reason which he couldn't quite rationalise. A bit like *Deja Vu*..

**He'd made an arrangement for Lindsey to** 'phone him, but instead she arrived, unannounced.

The door was open, and she entered.

"Hullo", she said awkwardly. "Am I late?"

There was a certain tension about her, a slight accent to the way she spoke, even her body was wound right up: her hands seemed to shiver slightly; perhaps she was cold.

"Hullo".

"What do I do now?"

"Whatever comes naturally"

"Shall I undress?"

"Sure."

She shivered, awkwardly.

"Go-on".

She undressed awkwardly too, secretly biting her lip, the clothes peeling off as if she were scared, or sweating, which she was not. Or perhaps she was.

"Are you scared?"

"No... why?"

"Well?"

"Shall I.. how shall we do it?"

He leaned her across a chair.

She screwed awkwardly, inhibitedly, made little gurgling noises as he came into her. Tensed right up, he could feel her sphincter pulling in.

She was almost relaxed afterwards, when he made her a cup of coffee.

"I like this apartment"

"You live downtown?"

"Yeah."

"What do you do when you're...?"

"I'm a student at the University"

"Not much experience at this sort of thing!"

"No, I guess it'll come."

"You reckon so?"

"I don't know."

"Can I see you when I want?"

"Whenever I'm free, of course."

It was like making a date, but paying dearly for it. He felt faintly disgusted. But the excitement of exploring her was powerful.

He was going to say:

"Shall we go out - like on a date," but held back - she wanted the money - there was nothing in it for her, besides, to her he was old. What a silly word. Instead he said:

"I'll give you a call", as he gave her the money, and her cab-fare back.

**Later that week**, he saw Mori.

She was unexpectedly sweet, gentle, not particularly yielding, and he felt that he had a real rapport with her.

Of all the whores he'd met she was the only one he actually had taken to. His disappointment at such a list of women being unsatisfactory for him was merely the naivety of the john; though he was not in a position to know this.

Mori was the one he wanted.

Odd.

As the weeks went by, Mori was the one he thought of more and more.

But, in his guts he knew that Mori was a real professional.

Frank Mailer knew, that for her, out of sight was truly out of mind: once she had dressed, picked up the money and left she'd forgotten him, automatically.

Even his face; as if she ever looked at it, noticed it: no, he was just another john, like all the rest.

Mori always threw the used rubbers in the toilet, where they floated there like coloured balloons, for hours.

It was like a curtain sliding back: a shutter cutting the light.

Sweet Mori soon became what she had always been in fact, only a lost, forlorn dream. That would come.

You see, Eternity is really very small.

## *Chapter 6*

### **Eating**

The traffic was stacked-up clear into central L.A. that night, and the flow on the freeways was immense.

After exploring the ill-lit bye-ways and the concrete backstreets of the east side of town he found an empty highway, then changed further along to a freeway with only eight lanes. By this time the engine was overheating slightly, and the smell of hot metal aggravated his worries.

But then, finally, the environment changing gradually to sweeping parkland and dense shrubberies, he was there.

He pulled the Red Pontiac up outside a wide sweeping park-like set of grounds, each large front garden walled off from its neighbours to ensure total privacy and bounded by it's own high white wall, partly hidden by foliage and densely overgrown greenery.

Twin security cameras winked dully, and regarded him with magisterial indifference, hardly moving to traverse along their rails as the bonnet of the Red Pontiac lined itself up with the driveway.

**He waited a moment** before a huge black security guard, of mien, pugilistic, poked his face into the car:

"Invite?" But this was no request, rather an examination.

Frank proffered his invitation card.

He was ushered in, and the car taken by a waiting attendant, on a patch of unused front lawn with the others, not many of them, around a dozen. The attendant took a torch and a mirror on a stalk and checked under the car for he knew not what.

"Hiya, Frank - sorry about the security; we've always got problems at this end of *Sunset*" It was Zac Greenwald's pallid secretary, acting as gofer.

"Yeah, I can see that."

He walked through a large marble atrium and then through a richly carved, antique arched way before being ushered into a long low room, with

subdued, concealed lighting, lined with deep long luxurious settees and a variety of low tables.

Around the sides of the room the decorations were composed of an exquisite and eclectic variety of different artworks, from Warhol through to a marble bust of a balding, entonsured Roman, with the added gaudiness of an irrelevant gilded semi-circle of oak leaves upon the marbled, bald pate, denoting, he thought prestige. Whose prestige?

One long wall was filled with the emptiness of a modern painting, consisting of dribbles of Red and Chrome Yellow, and crossed by a line in a shade of vague Cerulean, changing swiftly to a chorus of shades of Prussian Blue.

Along the last two thirds of the opposite wall ran a line of glass doors, which were folded back to reveal an equally long patio, flanked by lights, which entered the gardens at one landscaped level, before reaching down to the garden proper.

The swimming pool, the obligatory shape of a kidney or suchlike, was pulled in at an easy remove from one end of the patio, almost contacting the long table itself. Then was a succession of gilded chairs, dressed with perfect napery and lit by a line of candelabra.

The effect was glittering and Cinemascopically perfect, especially as the sky was now beginning to darken and the cicadas to slow their song.

Time can be a luxury, but there was not time sufficiently to appreciate this.

The guests assembled seemed to be gathered mainly by the open glass doors. He only recognized one of them, he'd seen his photo before; Zac Greenwald, the producer of the big box-office hit of the last year '*The Flames*'. Yesterday turns rapidly into history, in Hollywood.

"Frank ! It's wonderful to see you!", said Zac, with Technicolor effusiveness, proffering a tanned and manicured hand.

"Nice to see you Zac", he proffered his hand and it touched Greenwald's for a second.

"We hardly know each other", said Greenwald, ignoring the fact that they were total strangers.

"Let me introduce you to some of my friends!...what are you drinking?"

"A Martini Bianco with ice".

A lackey hovered.

He got a glass of champagne. Well, it was lightish yellow, too.

"Well, I'll have to live with it!", he said to himself.

A chorus of faces were introduced, and forgotten immediately.

"Gathering material for your latest '*Ouvre*' Frank?", said a voice, attaching to a face which he did

not know. He smiled; this was something like celebrity.

"Sure am!"

"Hey Frank!" someone else he did not know obviously knew him very well, well, for tonight at least. Obviously his fame was spreading faster than he'd thought possible.

The conversations meandered on, lubricated by martinis or coke, or whatever took the lackey's fancy.

After a time he found himself sitting in one of those deep sofas somewhere in the living area away from the patio and the table and the pool, flanked by another producer, Anthony de Winter, and de Winter's wife, Geraldine.

"It's a good way to spend time", he said, a little dazzled.

"It certainly is fun", said Geraldine, looking charming, if slightly blasé.

"A perfect way to make business!", said de Winter "Zac is always so accommodating when it comes to dinner parties, though his spread is just a little small."

"Well, at least he has a nice pool... we had a pleasant afternoon here last week didn't we, Darling", said his wife, turning to him.

"Oh, the script conference.. that new story"

Frank's ears perked up.

"You married?" Enquired Geraldine - "I was, until yesterday". He looked at his watch to check the time: past midnight. "Yes. Today it's *was*." Iron, in the Soul.

"So this is by way of a tardy celebration!", said Geraldine, cheerful, polished.

"I suppose you could say that."

"And you've just become the flavour of the month, too!" Maybe she meant it - through the gloss, he couldn't tell.

The point was that that was the first he'd heard of his sudden celebrity, but he dare not ask further so he waited his opportunity.

On the basis of that, he took another glass at random from a passing vassal, this time of some sort of white wine.

Then Zac suddenly stood on the other side of the table:

"Come here, Frank, don't sit there - here, let me introduce you to someone you ought to know." There was a certain brusque rudeness in the speech, what was the subtext, then?

He rose with suddenly leaden, unexpected alcoholic effort from the depths of the upholstery.

"Here, Frank, meet Greg Dyke: Greg, this is the writer I discussed with you yesterday: the guy who wrote *'Nine Mens Carol'* Frank Mailer"

"Great to meet you, Frank", said the short fat man with the cigar, making it sound as if it really was, ".. I was looking at your script last week and I was.. well, favourably impressed, let's put it that way - I particularly enjoyed the way the storyline turned on the idea of the wife's dishonesty.... nice writing - very nice... I'd like to talk further (of course this is absolutely the wrong place), but look..", he patted him on the shoulder, and sought in his pocket for a card;"...give me a call on my private line in the next day or two, and we'll talk further."

"Sure, that sounds interesting."

"Interesting is hardly the word, Frank", said the fat man; "..hardly the word".

Now Frank realized that this fat man, Greg Dyke, was with a tall, beautiful, shapely, willowy blond, with an extraordinarily pure, elegant face, and that she was pulling Greg Dyke away by his other arm. She gave Frank an disinterested look, looked down her nose in his general direction. Unconcerned.

"Excuse me. Frank".

They moved away across the room, playing the same game, though not exactly together - perhaps merely for that night.

He glanced at the card: it bore only a phone number. He put it away somewhere safe.

A silver bell tinkled; some kind of warning.

A black suited butler appeared, bearing a silver salver: upon it a set of name-cards: he offered the salver to the assembled guests: when it came to Franks turn he took the little card: 'Frank Mailer' and in tiny letters underneath: '*writer - Nine Mens Carol.*'

"Hiya, Frank", said an unknown face: "...I'm John's cameraman - I guess we'll be working together soon." The face dissappeared as if he had merely imagined it. Who?

They were ushered out to the main table, where the butler was still pouring out the last of the champagne into the glasses at the table settings.

The party sat down. In front of each setting there was a little silver fork-shaped stand for their name cards.

There were around twenty guests at table: the cards made it easy: now he could see who he was surrounded by.

Zac Greenwald had arranged it so that each woman sat next to a man: one thing was, he noticed, that most of the people present were single: even the de Winter's were involved in conversations with people who were not their partners.

Not particularly unusual. So Far.

But before he could collect his thoughts enough to become a *camera* as was his habit, he became aware that his dinner companion on the left hand side was

someone he hadn't seen previously: a blond woman of around thirty - an angular face.

**For a moment** his senses swayed menacingly: the scent of Chanel No.5 combined with the strong fragrance of her armpits was almost overpoweringly sexual. An unexpected sensation.

"Someone told me you were a writer".

Her voice was soft and confident.

"That's right"

"What have you written apart from '*Nine Mens Carol*'?"

"Oh, too many to care about !", he said with a laugh. (the champagne was making him absurdly light-headed.)

"Widescreen", he said.

"What was that?"

"Oh, just thinking about work.. I shouldn't really"

"Not this evening you shouldn't - after all we're here to have fun, aren't we!" A famous Technicolor smile.

"Sorry"

"Oh, don't worry.. everyone here's got business to mull-over."

"Naturally". She smiled at him again, slowing everything down for a minute, like a video reeling as

the capstan slows down. Then she turned away quite quickly to talk to someone on her other side.

**They started** on the first course: Gazpacho: not imaginative, but delicious.

He found himself thinking about this group: here they were on the edge of the Hollywood hills, some way along a wooded canyon. Right there in the distance he could see a set of twinkling lights, and in the far distance the occasional beacons of a light aircraft making it's final approach to Burbank Airport with a soft modulated drone, almost noiseless.

The sky like a huge friendly dome overhead.

"What are you thinking,?" said the blonde on his left:

"Who's the blond with Greg Dyke?"

"Oh her..!" the voice wavered on the edge of a controlled laugh for a moment, and unexpectedly hardened slightly, gaining a quick edge: "...she's called Carol van Camp..sort of an actress, works for my agency sometimes... well, used to, anyway!"

"Sort of?"

"On her back"

"Oh - I get it" She laughed, only it was not quite a laugh. He hadn't fully understood that speech.

They ate on for moments, the heavy cutlery clicking deliciously against the porcelain crockery.

"What are you thinking, now?"

"About the beauty of the sky, that's all."

"Oh, a romantic!"

"Definitely not a banker"

"Oh, I dunno"

"You can believe me there!"

"Well, we can drink to that" she said, raising her glass.

"Sure can!", he said.

A voice broke in from across the table:

"Oh, Frank: I've no manners: let me introduce you!"- It was Zac Greenwald. "You're next to Fiona Rydell, Fifi, on your left, and Tony Vincent on your right."

Tony Vincent was dark haired, insecure: she said:

"Nice to meet you." And almost bobbed. With the maddening reflex of the voyeur, he noticed that her fingernails were chipped and uneven.

Zac Greenwald was effusive, though controlled:

"Girls, this is our latest find: Frank Mailer ... writer *extraordinaire!*"

**Tony Vincent** dropped her spoon and Frank Mailer automatically began to wipe her dress clear with his napkin.: it took a moment before he realized what he was doing.

"Oh, sorry... I'm so used.."

"Oh, thank you anyway... it's real nice meeting a *real* Gentleman!"

He had become so used to this sort of informal intimacy during his years of marriage that he hadn't realized that by doing that he would be touching a *stranger's* breasts, or her belly. *A stranger's breasts?*

Apart from that the remark seemed oddly out of keeping. But he continued anyway.

"There"

"Thank you, *Frank*".

"Are you in the film business too?"

"Sort of - friend of Zac's", said Tony.

"Oh, yeah". He said.

"What do you do?" She said.

"Writer"

"Oh, really!" *What's a writer doing here?*

"What do you do?"

"Oh, act around, like. Bodies. You know."

"Oh, yeah." He had no idea what she meant, sitting behind a screen all day zapped the imagination.

Now the Gazpacho was finished, and the butler dispensed freezing dry white wine from a napkin-draped bottle into one of the battery of glasses in front of each of them.

Fiona, on his left, had lit a *Gitane*.

"You don't mind if I smoke between courses, do you?"

"Well, of course not". Nobody had ever asked him that question before. In fact the thought had never crossed his mind. "Why do you ask?"

"I figured that it would be just good manners"

"Well, perhaps", he said. "But don't worry about me."

"Righto", she said, with the beginnings of a rye smile on her celluloid lips.

Conversations rolled on around the table, and the second course was served, ushered in with a delicate Claret.

"I like Bordeaux wines". It was Fiona. Fifi Rydell.

"Delicate sort of aroma"

"By the way..." the next course was arriving on heavy silver dishes and the hired vassals whipped the domed covers off with huge, filmic, relish. The food was delicious anyway.

"Yes...?"

"By the way...*(oh isn't that wonderful)*..I just know you from somewhere.."

"Oh, I doubt it..writers don't get much air"

"Well,it's one of those feelings that you get... *know what I mean...* I just know that I've met or seen you somewhere before"

"Really?"

"Yes, for sure -certain"

"Well, after this course, I promise to think about it."

A very long moment, the cutlery clinking against the crockery amidst the gorgeous napery shaped by the candlelight over the spread, conversation tinkling prettily among the crystal glasses.

"Writers are pretty dry, aren't they!"

"Hey, take it easy"

Fiona laughed and wrinkled her nostrils a little.

"That, was a wind-up!"

The alcohol had loosened his control; despite himself, the nightmare that had happened to him so recently and that he had spent so much time forgetting had come to visit him again.

Dammit!

That caught him: below the belt - uncomfortably, quickly, his consciousness seeming to zoom: now he remembered those precious little intimacies with Sandra, with any other lover he had had: these little things that are so quickly forgotten, so bitterly missed: the crease of a breast against the sculptured, elegant, marble, hollowness of a shaven armpit. He'd forgotten them all, quietly. In order to survive.

Time. Little, loving details.

He'd blanked them out: now they came back at him in a mob, like a Tiger Shark in a fast current, dangerous, prescient, predatory, allowing him no time.

No time for that now; reaction time gives you Survival, and survive, you must.

**Caramel. Laughter.**

"How long have you known Zac?"

Fiona Rydell was gently probing: somehow not content; creating a reaction;

"Not long: through my latest script, actually... apparently he wants me to write the next one for him." He had to stop thinking, the alcohol was getting to him.

"Well, that's good money"

"Money is what this business is about"

"It's what all our businesses are about!"

Now he in his turn, was seized by curiosity:

"What is your business - anyway?"

"Oh, I'm an agent - for low budget stuff... not one of the Mega one's", she laughed, as if this was all irrelevant.

"But there's work"

"Always work, in my neck of the woods."

He suddely began to understand the nature of this exchange, the subtext.

"Well, good"

"Sure". Fiona wrinkled that pretty, aggressive nose up again in some semblance of a smile.

"So, you mean... that you're not here entirely for fun"

"Well, I wouldn't say that exactly... but my business is finding the right faces.. and bodies.. for the right people .."

"Right movies"

"That too ... I guess so". Fiona took a draught from her glass. "Anyway, we shouldn't talk so much shop!"

"I'm sorry, of course".

"No problem."

That was the cutoff.

**"Brandy...?"** Zac was flourishing a huge decanter of brown liquid around the table.

The diners sat back, now replete.

On Frank Mailer's right, Tony giggled with alcoholic glee of some sort.

The cigars passed along the row.

"Smuggled in", said a voice.

"Real Havanaonce s!"

"So you smoke, too", said Fiona on his left.

"Sure" He turned the cigar admiringly in his fingers, as if it were a work of art. "This here is a work of Art."

"I thought smoking was dying out among writers and screen people?"

"Obviously not very fast."

"Actors dare not touch the stuff!"

"That's about the only set of problems they have - clean living"

"That and coke...you could say that!" Fiona said this with some irony, and a little laugh.

"Really?" said Frank: not knowing where this conversation was going, but anyway uncomfortable about the outcome.

"Well, you should know that... listen I don't want to be boring but I've begun to work out where it was that I saw you - somewhere down the strip perhaps?"

"It's possible: I go there sometimes, doesn't everyone?"

"Not everyone"

Perhaps she knew more than he'd reckoned for - mind you, the people here were far from angels themselves - and that meant that the voice and the idea were becoming uncomfortably close: almost united.

"I guess I scout around for Ideas: my latest screenplay, it's called *'In Your Dreams'*, is about life hereabouts"

"Gosh, that's interesting." Frank found it hard to believe that remark or the fact that, despite the alcohol and the lateness of the hour Fifi Rydell seemed genuinely interested.

"You find that interesting?"

"Really!"

"Well, good"

"Why?"

"Well, nobody ever seems remotely interested in what I spend all day grinding away at." That was the truth.

"It's pretty hard, isn't it?"

A few moments to ponder on the relevance, or not, of that.

And then she returned the unexpected:

"Oh, no, I've always been interested: more in the process than anything... how do you get all those words out, for a start?"

He was going to say, 'Desperation, Hunger, Fear' but instead made up a little story: this came easily to hand after all:

"Oh, I guess it's a thing to think about life, think about situations - sort them out - deal with them: you know what I mean!"

"A sort of therapeutic process?"

"That could be it."

She smiled.

Anthony de Winter came around the table, whispered something in her ear and she excused herself and vanished with him.

**Frank Mailer** sat in silence, enjoying the cigar, the brandy, the background tittle-tattle, the stars, the cicadas, the hum of a Beechcraft approaching Burbank, and the lapping of the water round the pool.

And the darkness of the night. From time to time he could see the stars wink at him. The immensity of the sky.

It wasn't for a while that he realised that he and Fiona Rydell had monopolised each other for most of the evening. He looked at his watch: it was pushing two already.



## *Chapter 7*

### **Day for Night**

He opened an experimental eye:

Soft yellow dawn light had crept into the enclosure of 'Falcon's View', over the once verdant Hollywood Hills, and piercing rays were entering his room.

Piercing, red rays, full of the colours of dust and sand. He rubbed his eyes.

Mornings were never a particular problem : his worst time of the day was the evening, when, if your mind had nothing to fasten onto, it could spend an uncomfortably long time dwelling on all the things that were incomplete in your life, struggling with the catalogue, failing.

He sat up with a start.

He had forgotten, well, almost forgotten, about the night. Not so much forgotten, it was more a sweet hallucination.

Which night was that?

In a screenwriter's mind, fact and fiction are as if *day-for-night*, or *dry-for-wet* ... sometimes less real than the celluloid realities.

Though life is oftentimes cold, celluloid rarely.

The thing hinged upon last night... or something?

That last night, he'd had the sort of dreams of reality that he often had had, in the past - broken dreams. 'We are the stuff of broken dreams'- perhaps he'd put that somewhere in a script. Where'd he get that from anyway?

Was it Monday, Tuesday...*Saturday*?

Suddenly full of some gaseous energy, threatening to burst him, he sat down a scribbled a page, transferring it to '*Sack*' afterwards. Really fast, one for the back pocket, starting the piece perhaps; part of '*Falcon's View*' (Running title)

***EXT: DAY: HOLLYWOOD HILLS:***

A car comes bumping along a road: throwing-up clouds of fine sand. It skews to a halt. The front doors open:

It is TOM followed by **ULLA**

**TOM**

How the fuck we get in this situation: stuck in this damn dry country: just no-where to go!

**ULLA**

Hey, Darling, it's not as bad as all that- You know that... at least we're together

**TOM**

I'm gonna kill that bastard, just as soon as I get my hands on him... for defiling you -for screwing-up my life... for..

**ULLA**

Hey Darling - this is no time for thinking about vengeance now.. we've got to straighten out the mess..

**TOM**

God! (he buries his face)- what'll we do about the corpse.. its's all over blood!

**INCUT: TOM'S POV:**

**ULLA**

(she's the sensible one)

Look, we'll find somewhere... the body can't stay in the trunk for long: let me think-just let me think!

**THE CAMERA:** Hikes Up: (CRANE):

We see the two of them and the dusty Red Pontiac in **FULL SHOT** with the Hollywood Hills behind them: **TOM** distraut, **ULLA** strong, determined, courageous. **THE CAMERA** Pulls Down (crane) & we see a distorted

**C/U:** of the car's trunk bearing the corpse of **FRANK**. (Perhaps a tell-tale here)?

**FADE TO: LONGSHOT: SLOW FADE:**

**He finished the pages** and filed them in 'Sack'.

Quite good: another minute: giving a good tension: he would change the particulars: Hollywood Hills, Red Pontiac: nice touch that.

Maybe he would site the piece here: call it *'Falcon's View'*: use characters from his present. Life in Northridge, Danfield, Palm Springs, The Hollywood Hills - was often more surreal than you could imagine. All those secrets in back rooms.

He could after all change everything later: that's no problem with the Find/Exchange program.

That meant he could scramble words, character, people, later: disguise them. Create monsters, but no more awful than the ones in real life, here in modern times.

Why not?

Well, why not indeed?

This had occurred to him before, but he'd never used the idea fearing that the same sort of juvenile garbage he'd written as a novice would start spouting up again.

That's a writers joke: juvenilia. More potential scribblers were put off by the thought of washing their dirty linen in public than he could imagine. Thank goodness, the business was too crowded already, mostly with Readers Digest trash. Or badly written pretend porn.

On contemplation though.

Maybe he would do that. Concrete reality is more easy to write about it has a solidity which its background gives a feeling of being solid, all the way through. Like real wood, as against Hollywood chipboard and paint, however pretty it is.

The Advantage?

That's the advantage: for his purposes he could check it out by driving down to the spot, or watching it from his roof: that's what gave it such potential, that's where the cutting edge came from; allied to a touch of the right fantasy it could become a potent brew.

Sharp. Really sharp.

The morning wore on. That was the way it went, the way it always went. just how long is a piece of string, anyway?

Midday passed, he became bored, he needed to relax. He thought of swimming, but the water in the pool outside for some suspicious reason looked tepid, and besides the pump had gone on the blink and decided to seize from time to time: as he looked the water looked milky, pellucid, suspicious.

Aggressive, bored.

He rifled through his address book, over a can of tasteless baked beans, dumped the can of beans in the garbage and decided to phone the three *women of his choice*; but not a single call was answered.

"Darn it!"

Irritated: he gave up: his afternoon relaxation was missing that day. Besides, he had nothing in his mind besides sex. That unexploded bomb.

So, bored, and without an idea to work with, he decided to go down to the strip.

### **He walked for about a mile.**

He parked the Red Pontiac at the junction of Hollywood and Vine, on a broken parking meter with the word 'PIG' scrawled across the empty cell of the indicator, at the corner where the garage is, and across the road from the shop which is forever 'To Rent'; *the usual place*.

It had been overcast most of the day and finally now, began to spit and then finally, to rain.

So in order to avoid a potential soaking, he ducked in at that coffee-shop he knew a bit further down, for a bite and a coffee.

He had entered by the door, and as he walked along the rows of plastic-topped tables he ran into someone he should have expected: Mori. Perhaps also sheltering from the storm. She was quiet, her mouth full of food.

"Hullo" He rubbed his hands, unaccustomed to the cold. She looked up at him.

"Yeah". Her demeanour was ice cold.

"May I sit here?"

"If you want". She took another mouthful and stared dead ahead of her as she chewed.

"Thanks"

"Uh"

Not a movement.

Silence, expressionless silence. Chewing.

"Are you busy?"

"With lunch." Chewing.

He drank some coffee, chewed a Danish..

"Nice to see you".

"Is it?"

She looked blankly though him. The inference had become unavoidable, embarrassing even.

The time passed in tortuous silence. At length:

"You could describe this as the end of our affair, then!"

"Yeah.. if you want!"

Suddenly he was bitter: not for the rejection - which he could have expected - but because the only warmth she gave him was the warmth he paid for, at a hundred dollars a throw.

And finally: worst of all: for his lost innocence.

"You know, Mori", he said, conversational, to that blank face, "..not only does your cunt look, and feel, bigger than your head, but your blowjob is like getting sex from a burned-out toothless hag."

She looked through him, gathered her things, and left, leaving the plate, cup, saucer, and cutlery all over the table, like at a children's tea party.

The trouble was that what he'd said was in her mind at least true.

**He'd managed to upset himself sufficiently** that he drove for an hour. Cursing, and trying to laugh his battered dreams away. But a feeling of great loneliness was with him, isolation: but unlike the case of Robinson Crusoe, for Frank Mailer the future looked remote: he had no tools and no materials that would spring up from the soil and give him hope, and tackling it was a frightening thought, all alone.

Through Beverley, out the back of the city into the hills, to dispel his fury, upset..

There, he pulled off the freeway and stopped down a little road, seeing the twinkling metal mirrors

of greater L.A., in the distance, omnipresent, and cursed himself dry.

Then he composed himself, and drove back to *'Falcon's View'*.

As he closed the door, thinking about a cheese sandwich, the 'phone began to ring and he rushed to turn the answering machine off, and fought with the slick, serpentine texture of the handset.

"Hullo." The voice was flat and deep, and he recognized it at once.

"Oh, Hullo."

"I called before, this afternoon, maybe the message is on your tape.

"Ah! Maybe it is!"

The indicator on the answering machine said: '4'

"Well, just in case you thought that was a menacing voice... it was me!"

"I haven't checked it yet.. I will"

"Do you remember my name? I guess you know the voice..."

"Fiona Ryd-"

"That's really very good.. yes, Fiona Rydell..well, I wish I could remember names like that..I have to write them all down..!"

Fifi Rydell was fishing for gaps: playing for time.

"No, I remember you very well"

"By the way, most of my friends call me Fifi"

"Right, Fifi".

There was a silence.

"Um", Fiona Rydell was still fishing;

"Remember I said I'd seen you?"

"Yes?"

"Was it somewhere towards Santa Monica? a bit uptown perhaps?"

"Could be... look, why don't we have a drink or a bite and compare notes"

"With such a memory I've lost already!"

Well, then you can buy the drinks"

"I'll probably forget to!"

"Would you forget '*Lampton's Hideaway*', you know, off Hollywood Boulevard at the Bourne Street end, sort of a bit southwards?"

"Yes I know it".

"Well, what about.. tomorrow evening"

"Just a minute", she rifled her diary in the background; "Yes, tomorrow I'm free after eight"

"Right.. eight-thirty at Lampton's, then"

"I'll be in the window, if I can find a chair"

"So will I"

"See you"

"Bye!".

the phone clicked off, and for a change Frank Mailer sat back and felt content. *How strange the change from major to minor.*

He forgot about the cheese sandwich: instead he took a dip in the pool, the pump had decided to work again.

### **Sunday.**

He told himself he should be in church.

He bleared his eyes through the blinds, and seeing the blinding sunlight decided to take a swim later in the pool, it was good for him, after all. He listened for a moment: he could hear splashing: maybe it was time to be 'Neighbourly'.

Somewhere down one of the valleys which mouthed-out in the direction of Birdcage Circle, he heard the sound of a bell tolling the midday faithful in.

It was a long time since he'd heard that sound.

But there was an even more unusual one coming in on the south wind later: later he heard a deeper, more discordant bell, and knew it was the Lamasserie way south of there.

He played around with a few lines of copy: and consigned them to darkness in 'Sack'. It was Sunday, after all.

He went out to the pool.

The air was enticing warm, and he was in pretty poor shape; he'd panted around the pool yesterday; he must keep himself in better shape in future.

He swam around in the pool for some time - slowly - he told himself that it was better for the muscles - stretched them, prevented damage.

The material of the two or three empty deckchairs flapped in the occasional gust like slow flags, but there was no particular wind that afternoon.

Then two people from one of the other apartments walked down to the pool and sat down; they began to argue, louder and louder, as time went by.

A few minutes later two women came out of another block and lay on the side of the pool, next the water. One was very tanned, the other rather pale. The pale one immediately fell asleep.

"Lunch?" he said cheerily, as he swam past.

"Too much of it", said the tanned one.

The pale one woke up and belched:

"My guts!"

"My friend has no manners!" The brown one sniggered.

"Oh, don't worry, neither do I, most of the time." Frank replied.

The tanned girl speedily fell asleep.

After a while he left the pool and lay on the concrete: it was wonderfully warm.

"Toasty", said another resident, passing him.

"That was an unusual accent?"

The man smiled:

"Scottish".

"Really?" He'd never heard it before.

After a while he got up and sat down on a rock.

The suntanned girl suddenly woke up, and coming in his direction, sat on an empty candy-striped deckchair.

"Are you the new resident?"

"Yah".

"Oh!"

"Why?"

"Nothing".

"What do you do?"

"Oh - just work in the City."

"Uh, Huh!"

"What do you do?"

"Writer."

"Really? Writer?"

"No body ever believes you if you say that."

"I don't."

"Yah - why?"

"I never met a writer before."

"Uh, huh".

"Make lots of money?"

"That's strictly fiction!"

"Uh, yeah. Gussed it was!"

"What's your friend do?"

"Works around... you know.. a bit of modelling, that sort of thing."

"Uh, huh!"

"Why?"

"Just curious."

"My names Dusty.. that's what they call me, anyway.. she's George.."

"I'm Frank"

"Hi"

"Hi"

She laughed.

"Just curious."

Then 'George' woke up and stretched. They went back into their apartment.

The sun was beginning to fall, creating long shadows.

**The lights glittered** as he drove along the Santa Monica Freeway, and then hardened as he came closer, finally smudging themselves in plastic, rambling, dyslexic, neon and crumpled dirty floodlights along the strip.

He parked on Vine Street as usual, and walked the final couple of hundred yards to *Lampton's Hideaway'*.

He'd had trouble selecting what he should wear. Somehow the stuff from Cecil Gee's looked too effete, maybe it was him, perhaps it had been her, Susie: he'd almost forgotten what the purpose of dressing was.

Even the Tuxedo looked a little tired, he would have to renew that one pretty soon - his wardrobe was sadly depleted after years of Susie.

He settled on jeans and a T-shirt: his figure wasn't after all, too bad: he had jogged and exercised at irregular intervals for years, and rarely smoked - though now he was beginning to acquire the pattern of an undesirable habit. (Stress, perhaps.)

Finally he added his favourite leather jacket, the A-2, it could be cold, nights.

It was a leisurely drive. For some half-felt reason he felt unaccountably happy, fizzy, like champagne. Now was the end of it all, maybe for ever.

The long glass of the window on Hollywood Boulevard was like a mirror as the darkness came down.

Alternately it was blood-red, bright-pink, and then inky black: at which point the eyes recovered, began to see the people behind the windows: and then once again was blinded by the murky radiance of the neons.

He was walking rather carefully, watching for the terrors of the night, when he saw her eyes from fifty yards away. Cats eyes perhaps, for it was odd, but he recognised them for some unknown reason, even though he hardly knew her.

Odd, how such a brief meeting could register so strongly in his mind.

Despite the veils that we draw across them - despite our struggles to master them - words have their own, solitary logic. As unchanging as the rocks or the Sea. The Sea. He often walked along the shore north of Malibu, imagining that one day he'd have a house there on the surf: somewhere to dream from. The sea had always inspired him, that was the thing about it, that inspiration of a blue horizon giving way eventually to another one of just a subtly *different* shade of blue. The quality of dreams there somewhere. He needed to dream, desperately to dream.

He smiled at her from yards away, as he walked between the chairs through the restaurant; even before she saw him: he was so pleased to be with someone that he hadn't had to buy, someone who he didn't have to humiliate, or who didn't humiliate him, that he smiled inwardly, as well as at her.

"Well, well!"

She was different from the woman he remembered at the dinner-party: a year or two older perhaps: rather taller.

She wore a light blue shirt, and plain blue blazer with white Levi's and loafers. The effect was to make her look lightly, delicately, tan.

"Well, well, yourself!" She laughed, and dimpled at him. Her eyes seemed to glitter.

"Watching the world go bye?"

"And thinking about the party the other night."

"Yes, I have too", he lied - in reality he still hadn't got round to it , "... I was just thinking about the Gazpacho"

"That's something I adore"

"Great." A beat.

"Shall we have a coffee.. or a beer or something?"

The neons mutated, changed header, moved and smeared. the night grew imperceptibly darker. The air became humid, and the bodies of the automobiles on the strip became damp, with the ones that had fresh wax on them becoming patterned all over with delicate shifting filigrees of pearled water.

**An hour later they were still talking:** swopping gossip, laughing at each others failings: comparing experiences.

"I was married... a long time ago" she said.

"I had the same problem!"

"Well, well"

"That's becoming your signature tune"

"It probably is already!"

At midnight he looked at his watch.

The neons were being turned off: this end of the strip was preparing to slumber.

"Shall I see you home?"

"Only if.."

"Promise."

"OK, then."

**When they arrived at her home** he looked into her eyes and found a reflection of the moon there.

At the door they kissed:

"This has been a very traditional date - I couldn't have written a more classic one!".

"Yes - except I left my car on the strip and I'll have to get a taxi in the morning!"

"Can I see you?"

"Yes".

"Very Soon?"

"Yes."

## *Chapter 8*

### **The Bottom Line**

The next few days slipped by in a way that he could not remember them doing, literally for years. In a new way, inexpressibly filled with hope.

One thing was that the script had started to develop: he told himself that this was some sort of balanced happiness; when one has something to look forward to, things seem to get better.

That was bullshit: the fact was that the new life he was living was giving spur to his creative juices. For whatever reason: because he was living dangerously, or perhaps because he was increasingly beginning to take chances in his life of the sort he never would have taken in his joint life with Sandra.

It was air in his life, that was it. Space. Light.

**SANTA MONICA FREEWAY: EXT: NIGHT**  
(DAY FOR NIGHT?)

WE SEE **TOM** approaching in the  
**RED PONTIAC**. He is driving way over the limit,  
rhythmically sliding the car from side to side.

**HIS P.O.V:**

We see the tail end of a slower traffic flow: the  
**RED PONTIAC** slews as he begins to brake, then  
changes direction and slides across the bank (Jcn:11)

**ULLA**

Tom, are you crazy..?!

**TOM**

Baby, I've got to make it, I've just got to make it..

**ULLA**

Tom.. just make sure we arrive in one piece

**C/U: SPEEDCOP'S EYES:**

**HIS P.O.V:**

**THE RED PONTIAC** manoeuvring:

**F.X:** The

**SPEED COP'S SIREN** starts to whine as he pulls  
away, faster, faster.

**TOM**

That's blown it baby...

**C/U: HIS P.O.V: GLOVE BOX:**

He opens the Glovebox: out tumbles a:

**C/U: COLT 45 AUTO. (SILVER)**

**ULLA**

no baby... don't!

**They** start to struggle: **TOM** has the **COLT: ULLA** has **TOM**, the **RED PONTIAC** is all over the freeway.

**C/U: SPEED-COP: HIS P.O.V:**

**He's riding up beside the car, faster, faster: he sees ULLA** struggling with **TOM**

**B.C.U.: SPEED COP's EYES:**

We see the

**COLTS** muzzle comes up, all shiny around the black of the barrel interior:

**C/U: THE COLT:** we see smoke start from the muzzle:

**QUICK CUT TO: F.X:** the **SHELL** exits the slide:

We hear nothing but see the

**SPEED COP'S HARLEY: SLIDES AWAY: FASTER** and faster.

**Thursday** was their next meeting: the day was dusty, and inexplicably cold. He put it down to the sea wind that had been blowing all day long, bringing that cool damp air with it.

Originally he had arranged to meet her in the city: but around seven o'clock, just when he was beginning to think about dressing, the phone rang:

"I'm sorry to throw your clock out: but I'm expecting an important call - could we meet at my place? it's at Benedict Canyon- I've got some food, we can eat there."

He bought a two bottles of *Freixenet*, and drove slowly through the falling traffic flow in the Santa Monica suburbs.

He reached the house on the knoll around nine - it was unusual in those plush parts, a semi-detached: some sort of crazy, now forgotten thought; you can get anything built in California, even your craziest fantasy. He drove along the canyon-like driveway and parked.

The lights were on all over the house: through the blinds he could dimly see a shadow move in Fiona's half.

When he rang the bell, before she opened the door, he sensed a brief flurry of activity of some sort.

Fiona was a little flushed as she stepped back behind the door, her manner the assured one he

associated with her, that velvety voice, that overall subtle confidence.

There's something about people whose manner is assured that makes them immediately attractive.

As the door clicked shut he heard the sound of an engine spluttering into life on the parking space in the sandy grass. That meant nothing.

The sky was unusually clear and bright -

"It's the wet air, keeps the traffic smog right down".

She wore a short twin-strap black dress. Barefoot. Bare legs too. Monochrome. He thought *Dior?* ..her breasts packed nicely into the straight-edge of the bust-line, the squeeze of which emphasised their fullness and shape.

They looked each other full in the face: remembering.

"How *nice* it is to meet you!"

"I'm so thirsty - I've got to have some *Freixenet*"  
He brandished a bottle.

"So have I"

"Well, we have instant agreement, here."

"God! You don't know how thirsty I am... I've spent the whole day thinking about a cool fizzy drink!"

He gave her a big squeeze.

"I need to be squeez..oof"

"Hey, pour your guest a drink!"

"Hey, put that in the fridge!"

"I have a bunch here already"

"Never mind!"

"Liar!"

He kicked his loafers off.

"Hate shoes."

"Love shoe shops, though."

"How'd you know?"

"About liars?"

"I just know... writers.. they can make it up as they go along: they're experts at twisting words"

"I suppose that could be true."

*"Could be?"*

"I'd be fired from the Screenwriter's Guild if I told you that one."

**The cork popped**, and disappeared into the shadows.

The living room itself was long, perhaps twenty-five feet long, twenty feet wide; slightly oblong, low.

The two lamps which lit it were set centrally, equidistant from the back wall, so that they created two separate pools of light, and at the same time gave the room shape and depth, which the almost square space otherwise belied.

The main seat was against the centre of the longest wall, and looked directly out through the long window in the opposite wall. The door from the

kitchen was on the corner of one of the shorter walls. There were pictures on the wall, but he could not identify them, the dusk was too intense.

The bedroom was the room which faced out back, onto the area of grass overlooked by the knoll itself.

It was wonderfully quiet, away from the hum of the city:

"It's the effect of the knoll, it goes over your head."

The fizz in the glasses dispelled any sort of anxiety which he might have had: when the second bottle was due to be opened, Fiona disappeared into the archway at the end of the room for a moment returning with a blanket, but made no move to use it.

"I'm a bit cold". She made no move to unfold it, just left it there, rather neatly. For himself, he was perfectly comfortable: the air temperature being almost at the limit of comfort - no more than that, though.

**The fizz** had by this time gone to his head.

He could not remember the last time that he had felt so light-hearted.

He felt as if he could laugh for hours.

"But I know you from somewhere...I know I do." She said.

"You'll find out eventually."

"Never!"

"Film set?"

"Maybe"

"UA?"

"No"

"Warner's?"

"Nuh-huh!"

The glass clinked against her teeth.

"You have a certain way of laughing...." he said.

"So do you"

"Do I?"

"A very special way..!"

"That's my line"

"Oh?"

More *Freixenet*.

"Space!"

He lay on his back and laughed a little: "*Bloody, space!*"

"Is that what you needed?"

"It's what I haven't had - for all my life!"

"It's everyone's problem"

"I guess it is."

Darkness.

"Down on the strip near Hollywood and Vine?"

They kissed. Her mouth was wet, yet strong; demanding, yet relaxed; exciting yet delicate; a whole catalogue of pleasures.

"Hooker territory.. deep hooker land..!"

"Oh, you know that.. eh?"

"Doesn't everyone know where you can get a cheap jump?"

"Why, do you believe in expensive ones?"

"Only if you can't get one for free!"

They were embracing for long enough for the shadows to deepen. They were clothed all over in darkness.

"We kiss in a shadow."

"Don't be corny...!" She pushed away from him:

"I'm not corny... I'm not a writer.... *that's* your problem.."

"Ha-ha!"

"Let me have another" she scrabbled for her glass. "A refresher."

The glass clinked against the bottle, a long moment.

"I've been thinking"

He smoothed his hand against her side; her body was warm - like a racehorse which has just been for an early morning run: ready for activity: relaxed yet a little tired; expectant. Balanced. Excited.

"By the way... what do you do in the business..?"

"I told you - I'm an Agent."

"Oh, yes.. but I've never heard of you... is that the wrong thing to say?"

"Wrong neck of the woods."

"Oh yeah?"

"Sure"

"What neck of the woods is that, then?"

"Blue Movies."

"Seriously?"

"Sure -seriously"

"Never thought about it"

Glass tinkled prettily against glass as he struggled to sit up. A 'plane flew low in on it's finals to Santa Monica Field.

They stopped for a moment while it cleared the high ground, waiting for something. Nothing. Before he could move again she said:

"Serious cash in skin flicks"

"So that girl.. eh, Tony Vin-"

"Tony's in them alright. Player."

"Gosh!" . He was beginning to see an awkward end to this - Greenwald, the de Winters, the cameraman..*what was his name?* - and a bunch of porno players and people - Well, what the hell!

"Well, it's cash I guess."

"Pays for the dresses!"

"I advise you to pay by the yard - it'd be cheaper!"

"Not at a thousand bucks a trick it ain't."

She leaned over him and her breasts were wide-screen, filling his eyeline: wonderful. He all at once brushed one and gave it a friendly sort of caress with the back of his hand.

"That was nice."

They rolled over on the floor.

"Can I put my hand up your skirt?"

"Not just yet"

"Go on!"

"Wait a little!"

They both laughed a great deal, it was funny, all over again, light. Very light.

They lay on their backs, looking at the ceiling:

"Tell me one thing?"

"Yes?"

"Do they write scripts for those numbers, I mean..?"

Curiosity.

"There's a lot of ad-libbing!"

"Yes, I figured that!"

"And the extra's - the extra's are where the big cash is!"

"You run 'em too - tarts"

"When they want me to - you could say it's a part of the business - only business, know what I mean?"

He laughed for ages. She did too. It *was* funny.

The 'phone rang while they were kissing and she crawled over to where it was..

**What a sensation!** For again, for another first time for a long time, he was really moved by this, really

filled with a new spacey feeling, not one of the dead feelings he had hauled around about Susie - it was such an unexpected set of sensations that at first he was unable to analyse his feelings about it.

Context; it was simple really. Throughout the long endgame with Susie he'd forgotten such feelings - everything had become dried up, distorted, overloaded. And now, much later, any feeling he had was beginning to be wonderful again, natural, unthought of - no anxieties, no memories or fears.

Fiona spoke on the 'phone for several minutes. At some point, almost unconsciously, he began to caress her back, and then automatically to play with the fine zip on the dress.

When he slid it open he expected to find something under it, some other garment of some feminine kind, a brassiere, panties.... She wore nothing.

She put the 'phone on the rest, sat back a moment, apparently thinking: began to unbutton his jeans.

Suddenly, automatically *with the music* he was unhitching the straps of the dress.

"How delicious you are." Not reality, rather, truth.

She stood up and allowed the dress to slide away to the floor, brushing it aside with a careful hand. A well written line, such capacity, such unexpected grace.

"You are beautiful, you really are."

Her body was good enough to eat.

He ran his mouth over her breasts, her thighs, between her legs over the tight shaven hair.

**In the darkness** the green dots on his watch face were cold neon close to his nose, when he opened his eyes.

The air was cool, and the background sound of the distant metropolis merely a gentle hum.

Near dawn in the sky. That moment when the temperature seems to drop before it begins to rise to make the day.

Fifi Rydell lay akimbo, her knees open and frozen in the midst of a movement.

Now he snuggled down in the luxury of the warmth between her legs.

This was a fragrant moment of his, only his, with the scent of her. That special scent, something which he had almost forgotten to enjoy, something that he forgotten he would ever again have the right to know.

He broke off thinking for a moment as she moved, and moaned a little something in her sleep.

'...*I have to know*, my greed is to know, and I must know in order to survive.'

"What?" She'd woken suddenly, sharply.

"Nothing"

"Oh, I thought you said.."

Dawn was come. The room was full of the light tips of blue and yellow that began to filter in with the change of dark to light.

"Oh" she sat up in bed and her breasts showed ovals as she moved, the nipples hard and pink.

"You're hard", she said, fixing his cock with a seeking glance, moving around and crouching by him, stroking it with her fingers as if it were some mysterious pet.

She moved over him and he could feel her hand and her mouth begin the rhythm around his cock. She certainly knew how to do what she was doing.

She was crouched over him, her legs splayed to allow him whatever access he required. He opened his eyes and his sight was filled by her crotch; pink inner lips and swollen outer lips nestled between her thighs, and the shaven shadow-edges of hair framed her vagina with a symmetry that had its own elegant, functional beauty.

Now he looked along her and saw the crown of his cock distending her cheek as if she were sucking some heavenly toffee-apple.

Her eyes were closed and she had bent her head slightly as if this were all an immense sacrament of pleasure. Then she sat back on him and he tasted the clear water of her lips and clitoris with his tongue.

He ran his fingers along the shaven pubis and sucked gently at her, as she began to move in ancient rhythm with him.

She broke off and watched his caressing of her with some mystery: only for a moment:

"Where did you learn that?"

"Oww!"

Now, elegantly, almost somnambulantly as if extending her dream - lazily, slowly, she arched her belly as if stretching luxuriantly, and then the orgasm rippled from her, engulfing his nose as the lips ripened and softened.

"I'm sorry if I'm drowning you"

The knowing hand on his cock increased its rhythm.

"Oh God, I'm so tired," she said suddenly, moving crookedly and mechanically, sliding her crotch to one side.

Without thinking, in one movement she turned and sat on his stomach and her breasts scooped towards him then, so that he seized them and pulled the nipples in towards one another.

"Mmm..." she said, with deep contentment; as the ocean held her in its thrall, and she had to say it finally: "I'm coming.... Ooh"

She sagged her chest towards him and her eyes appealed for mercy. He was tired too, so early in the morning, besides, his cock was slipping out of her.

He stopped the motion.

"I have no manners", she said, and curled up all of a sudden and slept, fragrant and warm, just like that.

**Such moments**, they say, are rare.

They lay back on the blanket, a long moment.

"You knew that would happen, didn't you?"

"Actually, I hoped that - I didn't know it."

Her eyes reflected the distant lights of L.A.

"All we need now is a blazing log fire"

She gave a little delighted, in-drawn, 'Yes'.

**He left early: around seven.**

Fifi had to get to work, catch a 'plane., anyway: he arrived home at Falcon's View at around seven forty-five, having skipped the early morning jams on the freeway.

That was kind of lucky.

**When he 'phoned her** on the Friday evening, she said she was sorry; business.

On Saturday he failed to get her in, all day.

On Sunday, he took a long walk down the Coast, south, at Venice Beach. He watched the musclemen and the wax-perfect women strut their stuff. There was some kind of do going-on. He phoned Pablo, they had a beer on the beach; it was a nice way to kill an afternoon.

**Then Sunday evening** the two of them, Frank and Pablo had a meal together just off Sunset Boulevard, at Park Street.

Halfway through the *enchilada's* he saw Fiona, and that girl, Tony Vincent, the porno player.

The fork froze, on it's way to his mouth. His guts turned to concrete.

"What?", said Pablo.

"Shh!" He motioned quiet and put the fork down, the better to concentrate..

In the background some mindless rock and roll rumbled through a damaged speaker.

Fiona Rydell had emerged from an apartment building across the street with Tony Vincent, and a shortish blonde man.

She smoothed her dress, over her crotch, and he, the man, patted her arse with casual, comfortable, intimacy.

To Frank Mailer's mind that only meant one thing.

"Double tricks?"

"Hey *Muchacho*, that don't mean a thing!"

"I'm a writer, I watch people I *know*... that was a contented pussy!"

"It don't mean a goddam thing, Franko, boy"

"It does, Pablo, I'm sure it does..dammit!"

**That spoiled his evening;** he was unable to contact her, see her, and she had walked out of an apartment smoothing her crotch - My God!

He went home, dropping Pablo en-route (... 'I'm sorry', he said) and *drank*. He drank until there was no alcohol left in the cupboard. Furious.

**The next morning was worse.** The hangover was appalling.

"My head!"

He sat there for what seemed an age: his head aching with frustration. And paranoia.

He was more jealous than he could have imagined, why? - well that was another question.

There were a thousand questions to be answered here: what was driving him, his paranoia about loss.... or his terror about being isolated, left alone?

Anyway, he had no rights in this; (... '*you meet a woman and fuck her: that doesn't mean that she belongs to you..!*)

Dammit all!

She phoned him that day: unexpectedly.

There was only one thing to do: brazen it out;

"Well, well!"

"You too, sailor."

"Tried to reach you over the weekend.. couldn't get anything but your answering machine!"

I had business problems". He could swear that she was lying.

"Business problems?"

"Oh, someone visiting from New York."

Money"

"Uh, huh"

"Uh, huh"

"Do anything last night"

"Went down town a bit with my friend Pablo"

"Pablo?"

"Yes, known him for a few years; a good friend."

"Oh, ho"