

Players
&
Thieves

Frank Réage

O L Y M P I A P R E S S

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Players & Thieves

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Players & Thieves

Book 1

Players & Thieves

*'It's hard to be free when
you're being bought and sold'*

Jack Nicholson

Players & Thieves

Real.

Remember this, for there are some moments that never fail in memory, moments of total fear, complete alienation, moments only yours, when you are finally alone, insulated and isolated, moments never to be known by anyone else alive.

Moments like those directly after the explosion, I fly like a ragged shattered bird, then hit the ground, knowing acceleratedly and blankly that these could be the last moments of my conscious life, shrapnel

snapping perilously close to my ears against any vertical structure and the explosion that I never heard throwing up clouds of dust, invisible in the darkness; lead and razors flying by my ears and away from me, a dangerous buzzing in the savage airstream as torrents of fragments and rubble glance along the stone and sand, dance for a moment, then resolve into sudden silence.

Silence now.

Then, the lights of life fail to flash before me, I'm totally blank, the only thing that I do know for sure is that I am dead.

I can't see anything much, just a blur and a fractured, textured, grey, flashing darkness. I'm blind.

That's how being dead is, isn't it?

But the fact that you seem to be thinking, even after an

unmeasured interval, must mean that you don't know anything: even if you're dead - not for sure, because there must be some redundant elements of existence, corrupted, hanging there by slender tags of stuff, elements which tick, prickle in your mind, echoing as if you were indeed alive.

But anyway, I find now that I'm motionless, all systems corrupted, unmoving and still, aware only that I must be right and that this must be death come looking for me.

Things are never so simple - for if I'm thinking, I must surely be right on the knife edge of life, balancing between awareness and that other state that I'll not return to report about, not in this world anyway. Blank dark. Just the sound of a whisper in the air, the slightest of breaths.

Then follows a long, long passage of time; maybe a minute, a life or a month, a week. How long does it take to die? Silence, darkness, stillness.

You're absolutely alone now, feeling the blood trickling away from you, in a cold clammy sweat. Is all of it blood? Completely isolated, no form of defence - or the energy of power. There follows a distant, flickering sensation.

'**Maybe** - just perhaps I'm still alive? - if I'm dead now, they'll just find my corpse stiff and frozen - if they ever find it.'

Blank, dark. Grey like the basis of forever; just the sound of a whisper of air, the slightest breath again.

'Maybe my crazy obsessive game of life-roulette has by-passed me this time, maybe I've not got away with it this time!

What is it that makes me want to play this vertiginous game? Maybe there is no way back, I'm hurting, mysteriously and distantly- I'm all broken.'

You know, there was a time before this day/night dream when I was clear of all this. It was at a time when fear did not motivate me.

That's the trick of it, you may just have got away with it and, like any terror that you survive, the iron taste of fear in your mouth becomes like honey to a bee, a hugely instinctive, addictive magnet, forever attracting you to return; a smart blank steel embrace which everyone knows; which very often kills. But no-one ever comes back to tell you that, do they.

Now I move a ghost finger
and feel the dust in my mouth.

Its three o'clock in the morning and the shooting has

stopped. Shrapnel and stones lie thick, peppered against the wall like yesterdays razor-edged house-dust.

I am alive!

Can that be so? It's almost a surprise.

I pull my body ever so slowly through the dust under cover of whatever is there, to a wall, then rest against it checking my limbs to detect breaks or injuries. Mercifully, my sight is undamaged.

Now the silence is palpable, close and without reverb, stereo perfect, as I move away at an angle. I hear the crunch of sand and feel rivulets of cool wind meandering over me. Actually such sounds could be here - or way over there; it could be the acoustics aided by the sandy base and the empty towering sky - but I've dislocated the equipment in me that can make distinctions as fine as that.

I move one hand, one elbow.

Yes I can move my arm, but there's also a sudden staccato cacophony of dark, sharp sensations, pain.

And there's another pain among the chorus of pains - from somewhere in my body, somewhere I can't isolate from the bruises along my side. My back is wrecked, my side is painful, and my face grimed with sand, feels scratched and sticky with oil, or blood.

It's so dark now, black dark, no moon: now I know for sure that I'm going to die, - and I don't care - for this must be the darkest moment of them all, the most velvet and the most elegant and forgiving - followed by the most bizarre of soft bright dawns...

Players & Thieves

Chapter 1

Frank

The day dawned blue, with an icy edge to it which belied the warmth of the upcoming sun, edging the lower wisps with yellow and orange as the backdrop of dense rich greens morphed to the characteristic sandy khaki and broken beige of savannah, the distance dropping away and nearly as invisible as a precious stone falling into lucid, crystalline water, limpid and as sensitive to the touch as

silk, untouchable, unreachable.
Then gone.

He was falling - at first falling without weight, falling like an ice-drop between planets, without remorse, or hope or emotion, just falling without direction or orientation, dangled on a skein of pure helpless physics like the *Challenger*: followed by a moment of superheated panic and remorse.

Then he awoke amidst the harsh calls of the pelicans, the jet swoop of the cockatoos and the distant rumble of timber moving in the burgeoning tropical air.

The things he'd seen, the sights, the gorgeous sunsets and the marvellous dawns, the tropical forest, the treetops like broccoli tops gently steaming in the early kitchen heat as the Sun came up, the Valley of the Zambezi early in

the day, every day - beyond that the delicate generous threatened savannahs and their endless rivers and in the truck-stop towns the sordid side streets between plywood and cardboard houses attended by gaily lighted circuses bars and cat houses; and meantime on the wide horizon, isolated villages, hamlets partnered with nameless, futureless un-mapped densely-packed conglomerations.

Sights only living on in his memory, living still at that time when he would be dead; real things become ancient like old photographs, thumbed discoloured precious.

Through the diaphragm of silk. Thoughts and sights to die for, to conjure with...

I remember you once. It was a warm late summer afternoon and we sat in the grass, you duck-like despite your slim athleticism.

All part of it.

You parted your legs and held me between them and despite your dress and the layers of textile, it was like making love, actually having sex.

We'd met the night before, at an unruly party where we'd suddenly caught each other's eye and fuelled our unspoken lusts here. And now in the cool grass your lust had become palpable, and I was part of it. How good that seemed.

Later we would dance together naked in your apartment and then complete our tryst in our own invisible, unknowable, time.

It would be good, it would be great; something to remember, even if that was with a hint of sadness.

It was real, honest, simply lost to life and to time, like you and me. Really, imaginary.

I'm called Viz, and I'm walking through an empty but very verdant area. There's nobody there, it's quiet, and then I find myself walking towards a large house which stands by itself.

After a while I'm inside the house.

The room where I'm standing is one of a large suite of rooms, each one leading to another like an architectural puzzle. There's a corridor connected to them in some way which involves itself in this structure, which means that they are all set in a circle.

It's Saturday, I need to switch the computer on because I need to use the internet. For some reason I also find the need to check the kitchen, which is empty and clear and clean (unusual) and then suddenly I leave the house and there's the Sea, nearby, just over the hill,

which could turn out to be a golf-links.

Now suddenly as I walk towards the beach, in the surf I see a woman, someone who looks familiar, even from this distance. The two people who I now see frolicking in the Sea are still hardly more than dots, but yet I can see - now clearly, that one of them is you.

You are frolicking in the Sea, and you are flirting, and being hugged, embraced, by this waitress that we once met in a restaurant in Rome.

Meanwhile I'm walking diagonally across this wide area of beach, which is just assorted scrub and sand as most beaches are - now I see a gaggle of people: Hey, Presto! One of them is your father, of all people: I say to him

"Where is Frank?" He replies:

"Oh, don't worry, somewhere hereabouts!" and then returns to

his involved conversation with the gaggle of people standing in a loose group on the beach half facing the surf (which is very low, perhaps we're in the Mediterranean), all of whom I recognize, though quite how I don't know.

None of them seems in the least bit surprised or put out, they are all perfectly relaxed and hardly give me a thought, just continuing talking about something which is at the same time mysterious, involving, frivolous and interesting.

Now, I'm back in the house and as I'm beginning to turn the computer on once again, I find that it's obstructed by some sort of wooden structures. It takes a while because I have to clear stuff away, but just as I'm getting it to work, suddenly you arrive and are standing next to me. So I say:

"Did you enjoy yourself?"
And you say to me-

"Yes, of course!"

You're normally dressed, and you're angry, I don't know why.

I say something, then, without waiting, you say to me:

"What are you doing with the computer?"

It's your love and your possessiveness talking: but I have yet to know how much you love me, so I don't understand a word.

Chapter 2

Playing the Numbers

Calle Casablanca

"How do you do."

"Remember me?"

"Thank you for inviting me"

"It's a pleasure!"

"I was a little ill"

"A little?"

"Yes"

Blank. Äitize.

Then:

"I've come to see Äitize"

"I've no idea where she is"

"Or Zaza"

Eyes blank.

"Haven't seen either of them."

You haunt me. Somewhere, in a cloud of exotic essences, sensuous and melancholy, there's you, in an upper room (which makes the house here sound much larger than it really is)

Later. I've been searching, covertly.

"Such a nice day!"

"Well, it's too bad. By the way, I don't know where they've got to, either of them"

"Neither of them?"

"What can I say to you?"

"Her coat - is that it?"

"Sometimes she plays the piano."

I sit there transfixed - I've always loved the piano. Damn. You see I had a new mistress then, Odette, but I still couldn't let her, you,

Zaza out of my sight, out of my mind.

Life with Odette was a series of speeches: almost a theatrical moment.

"Be nice to me!"

"I am."

"Don't say that!"

"Can we get one thing straight?"

"It's you who aren't being nice!"

"I said, can we get one thing straight?"

"No, I want that the way it was!"

"I'll do anything you want then."

"No, that's no good!"

"What do you mean?"

"What?"

"What can I do then?"

"Why?"

"Because you said..."

Beg her too much and she'll leave you, beg her too little and she'll say; 'I'll leave you,

if you do ... that.' It's all in the degree of begging (as Proust said).

"Vizma?"

"She's just gone out."

I'm having another bad afternoon.

Later.

"She's with someone else?"

"I saw her"

"You saw her too?"

"I saw her with a fat man"

"Saw her?"

"You're imagining the whole darn thing!"

"What lovely flowers - I'll put them in water."

"This thing is still unexplained!"

"What, the fat man?"

"All of it!"

I'm walking, looking for either of them: there's one, there's a target!

It's my damn silly neurotic imagination, the jeans are tight and he has small shoulders - it isn't a woman, it's a man, and he's not fat like she said - no it can only be a woman's rump, round, with that small hollow over the cleft which always appears to be about to float off, thus leaving a ripple effect.

Perception is like that, like Gothic carvings high over a cathedral, clerestories or water channels, detailed within themselves but inaccessible and without meaning when you have no intimacy with them, unless you have the knowledge to see, to know and to seek.

You'd need permission to walk up there on the heights, walk about in the bluster of wind, with nothing between you and the earth except nothing.

"We live in the health and Safety State, don't you know - there'll come a time when you'll

need permission to breathe in,
in case you choke."

"Eh?"

"The government need your
taxes, they need your spending,
your fuel surcharges and your
parking fines and your debts to
run their crooked scams - they
just can't let you die that
easily, you're an earner!"

"You have a life without me,
you are happy to live without me
- that's the first time I saw
that!"

Now there's a woman I don't
recognize at all, she wears a
beret; she wears skin-tight
Levis and she's beautiful

Joelle.

*'How beautiful that body of
yours is!*

*Your smile spreads
over your face like
a butterfly, your
laugh is like
a sharp rose
spike unearthed,*

crashing white water'

"Lovely weather! This stuff about perpetual Summer or global warming or something is pure bull!"

"Oh?"

"Yes. It's either boiling hot or else freezing, nowadays!"

"Ah-hah!"

"Where's Albertine?"

"Who?"

"Aren't you bored?"

"No."

"You're not like me then - don't you ever go dancing?"

"Oh?"

"Will you buy me a hot chocolate, I'm broke?"

"Sure." *God, I lust after this pair of legs, this amazingly shaped arse poured into those jeans. Perhaps after a couple of chocolates she'll... I'll...*

(Who knows, maybe I've scored!)

I order the hot chocolate from a rude waitress, who takes an instant dislike to her. Or maybe it's me; well, as long as she doesn't handbag me I'll be easy. As it is this is all the cash I've got. I'll have to spend what's left very wisely. I shiver in expectation of something... well, impossible, do you think?

We select a café table and suddenly Joelle finds that she needs to fix her cowboy boot. Her perfectly formed rump looks unsullied and unlined from beneath as she bends forward, giving me time to run my eyes over its small suggestive humps and the almost invisible delicate parting she sits upon without her noticing, the delicate delicious masses moving towards and away from my ever confused eyes - but maybe this is just another way of turning the screw on me. I mean I can't

just figure out how you get all that stuff into...

"How philosophical, turning the screw, eh!"

I think to myself; *'I could write a book about your flesh, its tenderness, how you look in those jeans - and how we'd explore the world together, just you, me and that iPhone.'*

Oh, and I like the boots, too, look, I don't mind paying for a separate seat for them in their box.

"You know that lot, they're perfectly charming on the surface-"

"Oh?"

"But they're a pain in the arse most of the time, they'll spread nasty rumours about you and witter away behind your back as soon as you turn the corner - blacken your name and all!"

"Oh."

"This is a pain!"

"Oh?"

How many times has this sequence occurred in the history of other people's sunny summer's afternoons?

There's something in her jeans pocket.

Something weird protruding, suggesting-

"Wanna look?"

"Am I being nosy?"

"No"

"Well"

She squeezes the jeans such that I imagine her vulva protesting, it's packed in that tight and it's that close to the lump, to all the partings and delicately formed humps the lucky girl sits upon. Why, I've photographed her downside and now its part of my upside. I love my imagination, sometimes, when it hasn't got me by the throat.

"Pop!" Something fell out.

"It's only my Phone"

Thank God for that! I say:

"Oh!" I'm relieved you see.
She's not dreadfully deformed,
then. Hope lives eternal.

"I'm going now!"

"What?"

"Going!"

"What about the hot
chocolate?"

I bite my tongue, I was
going to tell her how broke I
was, how it has almost cost me
my cash, my dignity... but no!

Fuck it all, I thought that
I'd scored! Still, now I've got
a picture of your unused vulva
in my mind, superimposed with
that friggin' iPhone.

Orgasm, death, *Le Petite
Morte*. Well, you could say they
were related after all: who
cooks up all these foreign
dreams?

*I like it when
You're silent
For now I can
Hear you breathe.'*

Sometime later. Yeah, I reckon I've almost wangled it.

"Man, that took me some time."

"I've got a cold."

God! She looks frustrated, all red and swollen and discoloured; okay, maybe it's the cold - only I don't think so.

"That's only trivial!"

I long for her touch.

Which is unfortunately fated to be merely a private thought.

My heart is noisy in my ears, this could be the moment, *the great moment*, like those two in the movie on the beach, running at each other as if the whole Earth has halted just for them, to finally kiss; like me arriving in the middle of a cold winter's night to the hot arms of my lover after a freezing, vicarious, dangerous, awful journey through real hell and storms and massive waves, through hurricanes, freezing

snow-deserted motorways, through high sleeted-up ice-swept wildernesses and streaming sky, sodden streets, black, scarred, cruel tarmac before dawn on vast savage arctic nights - through literally numberless hazards - death, injury, the tearing of my flesh and the breaking of my bones - to her home, to her arms, and the delicacy and warmth of her breasts, that lost wonderful land between her hips - the last Olympian hike to find her hot female *foutre*, so impatiently waiting to be used, set in those perfect moist lips.

But.

'*Un Homme et une Femme*'. Simple and loving and finally spoiled, a fairy tale, Hilary, you, the impossible and then you again after all that. Yes, really.

Maybe I'll go back to religion.

Back?

But - Oh, God... you've forsaken me one more damn time - I fling away the symbols, burn all the friggin' *Holy Books* make a pyre of my jalabah, turn the cross into a ploughshare - because:

"Take your hands off me!"

"Ouch!"

"Stop it! Stop it!"

"Ouch"

"Blast!"

"What is this?"

"Maybe I'll forgive you - in time."

"Listen you're a friend, let's do it as friends - you'll like it"

"I'm not that sort of friend"

"Oh fuck it, fuck it then!"

"Listen we'll talk about it later"

"Don't scream like that"

"Pack your kit and just fuckin' leave, fuck-buddy! To think I've (ouch) spent all this time here and now you want..."

Zippy, Zippo!

"How'd I get into this, fuckin' organized religion?"

*'After all, it was only I
Who knew that her vulva
Was a swollen brown
Question mark between her
Legs, prepared solely
for me.'*

Sometime very much later.

A different pair of would-be lovers:

"Right now I hear the Sea."

"The Sea encapsulates many of my dreams."

"It does mine, too."

"I have the illusion of the waves. Then it's all gone."

It's a pack of lies of course, he's a fake - once he's been into her pants he'll start to dream other dreams; and she's worse, dreaming of power and security without question, even if as she knows, she'll have to

pay the first few instalments on her knees.

Life is a game played long, over time.

Once she's had him inside her she can start to make him small in her mind, once she's swallowed his sperm or digested it through which ever place he left it she'll feel perfectly justified in objectifying him, reducing him simply to another prospect in her private secret thoughts; even if it never actually gets said. She'll have that public, secret smile to show possession, a badge of doubt, not hope.

She needs the money, you see, however she gets it.

One day they'll part and she'll dream that she can sleep with his best friend, Ross.

Who knows what happens after all that? Whatever it gets to be it'll be nasty and crooked and... forgettable, tarnished with knowledge and doubt and

someone else's sadness. Maybe that's why she's so halting; the weight of all that guilt can crush you, make you twisted.

It took a while, having renounced God and Holy Books and that, but as I entered the room, more a sort of cabin really, where her voice seemed to ring, damp, round the walls even when she wasn't there, the phone was ringing, I lunged for it.

I could swear I've been here before, you know.

I got to the phone just before whomever it was had decided to put the receiver down, then it rang again finding my hand still upon it:

"When'll you be here?"

It was Luc at the other end, in a foul temper, after all in business time is money.

"After I've found her, the bitch!"

Gasp.

"When's that?"

"When the fuckin' sea freezes over!"

"Be serious!"

Sniff, sniff. It was the coke talking; I could hear his brain grinding the white powder finer and finer. A pregnant moment:

"They're searching the forest with dogs this very minute"

"She ran off?"

"She's a wild (sniff) thing!"

"Into the bush, the woods, the cañada, the jungle?"

"It's all jungle round here, round her too, wherever she goes, (sniff) chop chop!"

"It's those beautiful thighs... get her into trouble"

"She's fucking money to me, she cost me money!"

"Don't be crazy""Hear what I say - she's fucking money to me, she cost me money!"

"I'm only being logical!"

"Fuck your logic"

"She's Okay!"

"She fucks like a bunny, she likes it!"

"Yeah?"

"That's we're in business for, fuck it!" Sniff, sniff.

"Well, I..."

"People go crazy for tight jeans and beautiful thighs, I've seen it. With those Eastern Euro girls, not a detail left to the imagination..."

Why, I could tell that...

"Okay, Okay. Enough! Listen, is it my imagination, or have I been here before?"

"What - where, this green, slightly mouldy room?"

"Déjà vu?"

"Where's that?"

They don't call it 'Green Lanes' for nothing. No, not at all - not green. Though it's all jungle alright, concrete, wood and unclean flesh, now serviced by East European whores like

Vizma, standing out on the road getting some air until the mobiles in their hands buzz to indicate that another prospect needs servicing, or another blue movie is in the offing.

Well, it's one more way of making a fast buck! And then a message...

*I am not at home
Sunday, Naturally,
But I am on my mobile.
Not literally.
ZaZa.*

Comes in on the wires and makes me hurt, and so I turn away.

After all I'm a lonely male, a hunter with thick red blood in my veins and to forget you is - just painful. I re-orientate myself, tell myself that I haven't scored for... hours... suddenly I'm in Euston road and the British Library's full of shapely female rumps who are

more into books than bangs, and then I find that there's this 'phone box.

History?

History's all around us, only mine's not written down, yet -

'Madame Whip' intriguing, it's a start, anyway.

'Young Model: Will Try Anything.' Might be promising too.

I take a quick glance outside the call-box to see if anyone is waiting. Wouldn't do for me to be seen reading these cards after reading Nietzsche and all.

I allow the phone to ring two more times, then hang up. Chicken.

Fuck! Oops! **'Beautiful Teenager** - Sixth Form Maitresse.' There's an indistinct picture of a young maiden almost dressed in leather, beckoning me on. It

strikes me that it's astonishing how these women have the nerve to claim they're schoolgirls when most of them are probably double or treble divorcees. It's just a kind of weird convention: phone-up a whore advertising herself as a schoolgirl and you'll get her grandmother: could they be in cahoots? Maybe it's that female thing about being powerless, then powerful, empowered, then powerless again. Floods of tears...

However, one little detail thing is that the card promising '**Sixth Form Maitresse**' isn't crudely, cheaply, professionally printed like the rest, but in fact produced in just the over-elaborated, flowery and downright bondage-pink DTP style a teenage girl might favour.

Who knew?

Fuck Nietzsche!

I dial the number on the card. (After all, you never know, it might be that I will be

able to work out who this creature is (life state and all that) from her voice.)

I think of a woman I've lusted after at a bus stop.

"Yes," says a breathless, youthful voice in the receiver, cutting in on my rhapsody. Oops.

"Is that the Sixth Form Maitresse?"

"Yes, it is."

"And you're panting because you've just rushed back from school?"

"That's right. How'd you guess?"

The voice is light, female in a sort of girlish way, yet responds seriously and literally. Altogether that sounds about right.

A frisson down my spine.

"Anyway, I've seen your card, and I was wondering...?"

"Certainly. What did you have in mind? I offer a range of services" she draws breath, then starts the spiel: "simple

discipline is twenty-five, and I've a graduated scale of charges from there upwards."

The words unaccountably speed up as if she's reading from a script -

"No credit cards but I'll take any currency especially Argentine bing-bongs and play any old tricksy thing you're into, actually. Oh," (a pause) "penetration's extra, of course." (Gosh!)

"Penetration's extra?"

Christ! That sounds quite a menu.

"Eight o'clock tonight?" She seems in something of a hurry; business must be good.

"Eh." This is coming-on all apace.

"What about eight o'clock tonight then?"

"Well..." I drop my precious antique Biro and it breaks into several pieces, spring, button, top bit, barrel, insert. From a valuable antique directly to a

few shattered fragments, in just a moment. Just for a paid fuck, too.

Worthless. Rags to Riches. You know.

"Let me consult my Blackberry" - a long, long theatrical moment... "Ah! Yes, eight would be convenient."

"Shall I put you down for forty minutes or should I keep the nine o'clock slot open for you too?"

I cover the handset and breath in.

Hack, hack! Fuck!

I find a chewed, scholarly pencil to scratch down the address.

"...As you wish," says the young, slim voice quickly, wickedly prim, reading my mind, "In fact, your wish is my command - though I expect you'd prefer it the other way round." The voice laughs, without excessive conviction.

"Okay, at eight, then."

It arrives as a picture: There's me coming into focus, ashen faced, staggering along a forgotten, icy, slimy walkway, I feel the coldness of frozen tarmac rimed with old cooking-oil beneath my feet, the slimy redundancy of the earth.

Why? Because now the end of all worlds beckons me on and needs to consume me and this world has got me, one way or the other - I'm going to nose dive into it in a tragically short time: added to which I can hardly raise an ounce of energy any more in order to sustain this vertical position, to resist this dying for one more stupid moment.

Anyway, who cares, who seriously is going to be diverted from their fat-free Danish pastry and fucking skimmed-milk watery cappuccino long enough to place my death on

the Ouija board of their unknowing?

Words, like time, flick in and out of my desiccated cognition, for at this portal words and time and all the pointless minutiae of the bourgeoisies' classes' dross, their obsession with paper articles, panty liners, Teddy Bears, Sainsbury's pretend French Cuisine, manners and pointless mandatory masturbatory breeding, become a blur, for no one can hold me prisoner now, no one can manipulate me any longer because...'

Because I've got lead poisoning, that's it! Moreso, a nine, a .38 slug in my guts, and I'm dying!

Yes really, I'm dying and what's more I'm leaving you all behind to rot, fuck you, and I can't speak because my brain has suddenly lost its lead umbilical, and soon all its

other umbilicals will fail, be cut, cancelled like unpaid-for 'phone lines, with no chance of ever being reinstated.

Yes, this then is...

This grey visage, this faded ghostly, ghastly eminence, striving to move, to express...

But what? Because now I'm...

*An angel might have a skin
Like yours
But would she have such
Alarmed eyes?*

Blank, blank, blank, blank,
blank, blank, blank, blank,
blank, blank, blank, blank,
blank, blank, blank, Joe B - a
version of reality which you do
not recognise, loaded with the
mistakes of a zillion other
punters?

Fuck!

Or is it the cocaine?

Two shaved armpits
Twin tweezered thighs
Luxurious inflated lips-
Each day I would have left
sonnets
By your pillow
But I knew you preferred
cinquante-Euro notes.

What surprises will I bring you?

What surprises excite me but
leave you cold? What is all this
about excitement?

Zaza, you wrote in your
scattered French, misreported
here by me:

'...et dans la lumiere de tes
yeux
moirés j'ai commencé à voyager
la réalité ensemble.
...et tu ni enumieneras caballo
moreno
et je t' enumerai zebra blanca
et mois vious danser galloper
sauvageonnet

*dans des forêts imaginaires
profondes
d'éternité...'*

So, ZaZa, here I am, wrapped only in my dreams... of you and of all those thoughts, those reserved places which we so nearly shared.

And now I'm flying. I can't help it, you see. I'm escaping the thought of escape.

The wind on the tough hide of the aircraft keeps up a manifold rough, ragged, *thrum* which peels me away from any real longing about you, because I'm crazy again, I'm doing what comes unnaturally and I haven't told anyone, especially my mother - I'm flying into another war zone, maybe I'll never come back this time. I must be fucking mad!

If, in the next few moments this military transport explodes, showering us over some

picturesque settlement as a falling trail of savage red rain, then all these desires will be banished in a voracious moment, dissolve into the airstreams as if they had never happened. Perhaps this is another counterfeit moment of stolen angst, mourning, loss, lies, sadness and cold-hearted self-interest.

Fuck, what a fake I am!

Another normal moment of disintegration then. What's that? *Post-Modern*? Who's that hero when he's not at school?

There are questions there. For example, did what we have ever actually happen? Such cold nights, rent by hunger and desire, so much so that I imagined myself a dog driven by the scent of a bitch - not seeing her, wanting, requiring only the briefest moments of joining in order to slake my thirst.

The painful trick is that the most important moments in one's life are those that are most likely to be conclusively personal, to be lost. Time holds no hostages and the most special, most private moments of our lives will go unrecorded, of their natures.

This means that all we have is our memories; we are a construct of our regrets. Lose those and you lose everything, because no one else will record them for you...

Lust and passion are close cousins, which is what makes them so similar in their outcomes, rigorous in their requirements, destructive in the end.

Oh, and they forget, above all they forget. Those tender glories and powerful moments are as soon forgotten as that last frosty night in December.

Are our longings, our pains and losses, ever capable of explanation?

The pains that we experience, those pains that we usually forget rather than live through and discard, are the product of a sense of loss more than they are a celebration of achievement.

So, intuitively we canalise our struggles, characterising all these phenomena as various types of achievements, making from the inescapable forgetfulness of time something which could be described as a library of closely won quasi engagements which (pointlessly) encapsulate things about those already forgotten moments which will anyway rapidly fail us.

The essence of this? An old hero perhaps? Such realities are beyond our brief capacities to understand, they can only be experienced from afar and at length, which makes the original

experience pointless in any but an impersonal sense. We don't live long. It's over often before it's decently begun.

Well then, as a product of this record of despair, modern urban marketing strategists have created the concept of fame; something/somebody which will stay young and alive just a little longer - forever is good, and forever in an electronic universe is just the merest glimmer of a spark - and when you're dead you won't remember anyway - for example, who was the sixth man to fly? I'll bet that at the time he was almost as famous as Orville and Wilbur Wright (who were the second, not the first). Does it matter?

The cult of the 'celeb' is the latest development in the early throes of the corrupt end of a dying society; vacuous individuals, who have almost nothing to offer anyone (except

their none-too-rare bodies) seek some sort of instant immortality by being unusual in an (almost) acceptable way.

If they push the envelope more than is acceptable they become unmentionable, invisible: though these shows proliferate in every society nowadays, the people who take part in them actually disappear as persons or individuals, thus achieving nothing, even by the standards of their own savagely forgetful milieu: but what could they otherwise achieve; nothing happens instantly (apart from death), all societies demand at the very least a high level of attainment before an individual becomes remarkable, memorable.

Celebrity has never been enough in itself for memory to be cemented, people get forgotten every day, and that's another fact.

This is just about how far modern icons will fly,

metaphorically or literally. Not very far at all, not far enough to be remembered. To give one example: 'The House' a pretentious tattered concrete edifice, given empty fame as a 'work' of sculpture by reason of its very mediocrity and insignificance, is more famous than its author (whose name I have already forgotten, for reasons of the sheer poverty of her talent.)

To return to the subject in hand -that brief availability, the capacity to vanquish time, is what motivates more people in more ways than ever to become immortal, though (mortal) immortality today will always be followed by personal mortality itself, as night follows day.

That's the imponderable theorem,
the fate of all my moments of
glory with you Zaza, those
unremembered struggles in
private darkness, that brief

real forever in the tall grass on Hampstead hill, our nights at the Hotel du Grand Citroen at metro Stalingrad, where the heating pipes ticked away our love on crisp, hostile nights with the cold, halting, mechanical forgetfulness of an out-of-time clock.

Which time? You could say, whose time, certainly not for you, that time, perhaps more for me. Which time then?

And now I know that that clock was wrong, for you and I are about to be written down and become just memories right now, and all those myriad clocks will be forever wrong, chasing the futility of a perfection that will never be recognized as anything but a forgotten dropped participle in the timed histories of countless other performers, all competing for their lost yesterdays, the

forgotten tomorrows of their dreams.

Black, deliciously broad and capacious darkness, welcoming me to rest at last, something moves:

"Hey it's you, fuck you - it's Joe B!"

Chapter 3

Françoise

"**But tell me...** Why were you there ... No... How were you there?"

Suspicion throbbed in her temples.

"Oh, just waiting for... you?"

"You're much too delicate for this."

They look at one another for a moment. Her delicate

nostrils move, as if she is scenting the very air.

"Too gentle, perhaps."

"Okay."

"I know." She has that twang in her voice - perhaps Manchester, though she tells him she's French, Françoise is her name. He isn't too good on accents, and his name is Franck, in itself an accent of sorts. Maybe he's wrong, anyway. Maybe he's lying. He often is.

She's tired of the subject and now she's thinking about something else.

'Why, up to now my life had been little more than a long trudge, the occasional special day coming at me in an unexpected way, and then proving less than special; then I fucked-up properly: one lusty night I met this creep, I thought it was romance, but it ended up a one night stand, I guess I did too much 'E' and

ended up in this, getting caned. He was gone, leaving me fucked-up about it, oh, and pregnant.'

Later.

She'd opened some door in her brain and suddenly life came at her in that old, nasty unexpected way, a melange of things - there was the voice of Madeline Peyroux, (or had she mistaken Billie Holliday for her?) There was the background noise of traffic on a turnpike somewhere; nearby there were planes landing and deep voices talking: activity going on and she failed to understand that as well, because at the same time the sky was busy with things she couldn't control. That's how it goes: buses never arrive singly, and confusion is either total, or else not at all.

One thing seemed clear: she had lost control of the things which she could control - which were all part of her life -

somewhere her life was snowballing out of proportion, corkscrewing, both losing height and gaining speed at a rate difficult to calculate.

'Now, from out of some sort of order, I was finding that like the ticking of a clock 'tick tock, tick tock', moment-by-moment a crazy pastiche, a porridge of situations, all simultaneous all real, all 'At This Moment', were happening to me.

That moment was this because I was in my own sort of slumber, a state beyond control; I was both deeply shocked and frightened.

I found myself gasping as if drowning, at a depth of existence greater than my height that came in suffocating waves.

I was offshore now, alternately drifting and then coursing on the sandbanks, a temporary respite, because between me and the yawning

sandwich of deep welcoming ocean swells and safety, lay a small strip of insecure substance, rocks, sand, the remains of the coastal strip. And there, to my right was the now increasingly distant beach, opposed by on my left, ever deeper water.'

She was looking out to sea; she'd left Lennon's Bar in the Calle Brasil and walked down the concrete stairs towards the shore:

"Have you ever noticed how the ocean here lies in layers? From a dark, dark, blue, fringed by a light, almost white, neon stripe decorated subtly with a stain in the sky, a smear of brown, which suggests the reflected sands of Africa, through many varying ribbons of opalescent and iridescent colour, greens and blues, even greys - to black, until you reach the foam - the distant foam - or die, of course."

I saw, but I couldn't be there. Why? Just think.

On this precise day then, the shore was a brilliant light blue, like a silken ribbon, a beautiful range of colour, and I was sitting in it all with the trains and the planes and the people and all these things going on around me like a multi-track video recording, all of it jumbled, but real: chaotic, but in the mathematical scheme of things, ordered.

Despite everything, when you close your eyes, you discover that there really are people living as intensely as you could in fact live - at this exact moment, but somewhere completely different (that is to say, on the other side of the street, somewhere across the world, for example).

But life of its nature being continuous, until it suddenly stops one day by reason of

something larger than life cutting the umbilical which catches and strangles it; well, it's scheduled to be indefinite.

Yet I still have Billie Holliday or that wonderful Mademoiselle Peyroux zooming between the distant madness of these backgrounds and the glass-trashy foreground of my mind, some insane procession of phenomena which means that my life ticks away. To nothing. Zero.

Bang!

Imagine all my love, you, Franck, imagine how I see you, coursing like a PT boat through the Java Straits, cutting through the storm. (*And though you told me you don't like players, it's a goddam player who'll save what's left of your life.*) I'm thinking about you and wearing my Fuck-Me pumps.

Because now, like a crazy fiddler - or for that matter a

PT boat, I'm caught in the vacuum, the centre of it all. The Japanese fleet's thataway, the Java Strait's over there, and doom is dead ahead, spinning like a crazy ballerina on coke.

I'm getting wilder, all askew, hair flying, bow thrumming while the world gets on with it all around me, and everything else is following some subtly concealed sylvan track.

Track? Things evolve around me, because now I'm beginning to realise that you can never get off once you've managed to struggle on to this tram to nowhere; while all those other simple, blind, ghostly, unknowing people on auto pilot, just go home to their unremarkably unmarked graves.

It's simple.

Life, I mean. And you'd say *simple*?

Franck!

But anyway, you're too far away from me now for me to find some response in you: you've never reacted - maybe it's that you don't understand what you haven't yet done.

It's all a crazy conglomeration, and can it be true? You'd say, in that *macho* way you have of looking questioning, leaning forward to steal one sweet glimpse of my breasts rimmed by the tight lycra *décolletage*, not meaning it for a moment.

"You think, my Sweet?"

Parisian, that's you Franck.

Of course it can be. And I am *Me* too, struggling, perishing, maybe disappearing in the swell, alternately waving, not yet drowning.

We're civilised after all, around, beneath our skins, aren't we!

Why, then we sit and think and then - I tell me I don't

like players (again) and I realise that women's motives are always more concealed than men's are and most of the time they don't know that either, they're working on their instinct, that perilous, unreliable, disastrous mistress. *Why, let them eat cake!*

What do I do? Maybe the stupid end of something is near - perhaps now we're all doomed.

And yet, now I'm waiting for the Sun to arrive. Stupid, isn't it? I can hear the sea in the background, very distant; the sky remains almost blue but really black.

It's later of course.

The little village where I'm living at the moment, with its cockleshell roofs and its dull blank walls is quite still, apart from the shadows of flitting cats and geckos cast by the low power lights set into

those walls. In this part of the world there are no streetlights.

It's mad, we walk together for hours, and then once our hands knock together and you discover by chance that I've changed the side my bag's on to the other side away from you; psychically we're linked up again; now our fingers intertwine with practice born of what once upon a time was love and regard and is now merely ancient habit and experience; and there's pain amidst the pleasure, like salt grains amongst the sugar, which lead my heart to beat a little faster.

Next.

Next is later still. Next we're sat on a hill. At the top of the hill, about a kilometre away, are what you could call the 'mountains', the sierra, low mountains which rise to about three thousand feet.

At the bottom of the long series of hills lies the ocean.

It's always possible to access it in just twenty minutes, you walk down the hill and suddenly - there it is, a blue cravat between some structure or another, two enfolding shoulders.

And the sky, the sky is blue - most times; and the Sun - always there, a button of varying intensity.

One thing: when the moon comes out I find it on its back: something you just don't seem to find, further north.

Once upon a day this was our dream, which has died with little bits of you and I now integrated, sharp as hot shrapnel, tasting of metal and smeared with our bloods, but as all things, forgotten, regretted. Only the sour, bitter taste remains.

That time had it's time, and now all we'll have anymore is the regret, the memory, the unlocated sadness of loss like a

lost city; only the traces of something once much grander remaining, like a lost horizon, Ozymandias: the iron in the throat, the need to forget, remembered.

Yes, this is a different world today, as it was not yesterday, a different way of getting old, you could say, a different way of realising one's mortality.

Mortality? Our mortality will fail us unexpectedly darling, in a rush, and you'll know in those falling seconds that you could never have hung on, why, it was just a conceit that one day you'd be bound to loose: first your balance, then more - bound to find yourself in a living nightmare, sliding on a tilted, unfair, iced surface called *real*.

Forget about equity or fairness.

Know why?

Because in real life there is no balance; not a balance that physics and chemistry has not created for itself as part of a reaction which has been interrupted somewhere else.

Get it? Any balance that you think you've got is just a fatal fantasy; any balance that you think you've got just makes things more indefensible until something unlikely or unexpected or even more bizarre occurs.

That's about the sense of it.

So tonight, thank God that it's simple, that after all, my jeans are too tight and I can't sit down right (*just as well it's Ladies night!*)....

Chapter 4

Francesco.

Coco Bongo.

That was the name of the place! It took me quite a while to find it, sitting like a duck on a lake, a wood hidden by trees, outside the metro at Barbés-Rochechouart in-between two run-down cafés, themselves fronting onto half a dozen scrappy market stalls.

I figured that this could not be considered the most fashionable place in town.

Living in Paris there are certain things as a foreigner that you know to be of huge importance.

I'll give you an example.

You know how it is with the French, any mis-alignment of vowels, any slip, is taken to be treason, and foreigners commit high treason every day by misconstruing the sacred tongue in a variety of ways. I, for example, confused an obscenity with the word 'when'. This was such a painful experience that I can't repeat it, even here; you'll just have to be one of the *hetarii* and know it - or just trust me!

Anyway, in the first and only analysis, this made me unmentionable in just a fraction of a second. Instant death was the sentence, nobler if immediately preceded by Hara-Kiri, but as I was clutching my *Gauloises Doux* in one hand, an unsharp *Batard* in the other

hand, and the fact that it was a wonderful September day, made the whole exchange highly impractical.

So you see, I survived, and my French usage became better, if somewhat more *Parisian* in dialect; after all an English accent works well transposed upon Parisian slang, *mec* sounds a bit like *Mac*, and has the girls tittering, which means that you can start with the computer jokes forthwith which that includes, after the inevitable collision with some twirl in any establishment.

Throughout the streets and cafés around Odeon, the café frontages along the Grandes Boulevards such as the Boulevard St. Germaine, outside Brasserie Lipp, La Coupole, Café de Flor or if you want to be aggressive, Les Deux Magots, where one can sit whilst forgetting one's own lost moments of forgetfulness for merely the price of a wild

start at the races, where Camus, Sartre, Picasso, Matisse, Ambler, Réage, Girodias, Miller, Durrell, Joyce, Miró, Lauder, Leduc, Chaplin, Gabin, Dufy, Genét, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky placed their asses whilst bathing in *theirs*.

Oh, and the girls of course. How could I forget that?

I would find myself ensconced, a dozen times a month or more, with someone pretty with sweeping dark hair (Elianne) or windblown nut-brown blonde (Evelyne) or black hair and sparkling eyes which promised the inferno (Hilary, ZaZa). Sometimes I forgot to do any work that day, and if things deteriorated in the hoped-for direction, that night either.

There, where the American Lee Miller seduced the already famous Man-Ray by informing him that she was his next model (meaning much more than that, for she knew how to use her body

to good effect as became clearer later if indeed it was not even then), I sat and pondered the meaning of what little universe I was aware of, whilst savouring the charms, the sights the sounds and the vibrations of these beauties.

ZaZa, it was, who caught my imagination as Lee Miller had caught Man-Ray's, though the promises flowed solely from her eyes for that short time during our first dance, for she hardly spoke (and anyway didn't have to). I don't have to say this, but I will anyway - the alcohol succeeded in being successful on our behalf.

ZaZa it was who seduced me with an idea on a hillside in early Autumn, who threw her clothes and reservations to the wind, who danced naked for me, so that when the orgasms rippled through our disjointed bodies they literally wiped-out everything else in the

phenomenal world for æons, for silent forever's, for everyone's everytime. She changed me forever, one sunny, slightly chilly Sunday afternoon around four. You cannot say that it was right or wrong, that our relationship (not yet eighteen hours old at the time) was fated, crazy, dangerous, already lost.

Often, after we'd make love I found her bible black hairs everywhere in my apartment (I had a small apartment at the hotel, given me in honour of the hole worn in the central carpet and the fact that the room was so threadbare).

Sable - even in the shower stall. I could scent her musk everywhere, Sable. It's about time someone invented a perfume called just that.

Elianne had a secret number she could use to phone her parents,

free-of-charge from wherever she was in the Universe.

She had a handsome sweep of thick, elegant, heavy, boyish Provençal nut brown hair, a masculine sweep to her strong blond-haired arms, strong shoulders, and a shapely, muscular back. She was an athlete, wild. Oh, and another sort of wild in my bed.

I used to laugh, for the moment she became tired, or for that matter randy, she would begin to walk like a cowboy who has ridden a long way that day. She even had that aggressive sweep of the arm which would mean that she dismissed all this - whatever that was - *fégafe!* - together with a sexual flash in her rich, wild light-brown eyes which showed all at once an abstruse passion, which would then just as suddenly retreat, to tease you.

And then she gave me a present. Something personal,

nestled between Elianne's hips, offered to me like a secret flower, as usual in the dark. Something which only we should know about. The merest scent from her always moist lips.

Disease!

You see, after all, it came as hardly a shock; ours was not such an exclusive relationship.

Elianne would have said, in her defence

"*That mec is broke - he's not for me*", had she had an audience to play to. But as it was now, she was fashionably out of anywhere to rest her head (until she'd been treated). Remember she was wild; a few nights in the park wouldn't do anything but buoy-up her amazing id, for she was a typical super-egoist, to boot.

Then, unaccountably, she became embarrassed, tired with fashion, retreated to her father's 'phone empire back at

Marseille; I never saw her again.

Her last words to me might as well have been Chinese for all I understood, but she spoke in French: 'You see I don't like ballers, 'ballers do nothin' for yer'' And then she fled, fragrant as a pig on heat, across the Gare du Nord.

I'll bet she's wiser now, but richer and still wild, still willing to *ball* for the right price. I should have told her that her gift was better than simply a one-night stand, where she demonstrated her talents, never to fulfil her vaunted promises.

And just you remember what happened when Lee Miller got bored with Man-Ray and left him, apparently then becoming a model for Salvador Dali- Elianne told me:

"There's a man called Morgan or something-I knew him when they were holding us in those

white rooms... in that pale palace..."

I left alive, and almost whole.

Love was never on the cards, you see. What is love, anyway?

Oh, and Lee Miller got to bath in Der Fuhrer's bath with Robert Capa, anyway. Forgetting Man-Ray forever because she'd found his weakness - the fact that he was human, not a God after all.

*Nature cycles -
We
Compose a
Minute part
Of that.*

There's no time left now. There never is. There never was. I know, I'm an expert on how to lose more of your life in a stupid decision than you can ever afford.

My excuse is that it's because life comes at you as if

you're looking down the wrong end of a telescope. And by the time you get to look the right way; the race has passed you by, things are now really distant.

Now there I was, at Barbés-Rochechouart, stood outside the entrance walkway, the metro now on my left, the glass of the walkway smeared, the concrete dry but chilled, the background of Paris rather light greyish-yellow, a pleasant colour for a city to be.

There's a cold gust of wind, straight from the steppes, or the Baltic, or my imagination.

I open my eyes a little wider.

There!

I'm faced by the still-lighted chrome and glass edifice, secreted between two other sandwiches of concrete and stone and brick, the 'Coco

Bongo', puzzling to myself just how I got there.

A group of Arabs pass me by. They speak with the high guttural tones of desert dwellers, as distinct from the more mellifluous sound of coastal Berbers.

These people speak a correct, slightly antique yet perfect mannered sort of French. Rather like the Indians, who speak a species of English almost too old and perfect for the ears of the twenty-first century. The arab Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians in this *quartier* of Paris speak their own musical, clipped sort of French.

The sights and sounds of the *Quartier Arabe* well all around me and I'm drowning in the scent and the texture of it all.

I'm confused about all this; you see, I can see the Sacré Coeur

in the middle distance, up above me.

Who was I waiting for, after all? It's a mystery.

Then, here she is: it's as if spring has sprung all over again: It's like permanent Spring, only in September: I think September, the Sun breaking through the marvellous green trees and the branches almost imperceptibly swaying, making the tree shadows sway too, why, we're in each other's minds almost immediately. We walk hand-in-hand to the hill of Montmartre and climb the shallow steps which scale the hill.

I can just imagine Picasso scaling the heights, hand-in-hand with his Spanish lover - (*what was her name?*) - and afterwards making love in that great barn of a building which overlooks part of the steps, about three quarters of the way up the hill, you know the one, once upon a time it was a vast

tumbling hive of a place for the creatively randy.

It can hardly have been as romantic as this, though: because the dizzy freeze of the wind suddenly rises and wraps her face in her scarf, and as I go to unwind it, she takes that as an excuse to pull me by my lapels to her and we kiss, all tongues and crazy air, as if we're falling off the hill with pleasure.

How marvellous unexpected things can be!

To say too
Much means
To never say
Enough.

The artists in that city were making a different version of life then: upside down in that ultimate but colourless *Fin-de-Siècle* Nineteen-Hundred, their sighs and moans were just a sample of what was happening all

around them all the time, and yet - and yet they turned out to command time in a way no-one could ever have expected.

Why, they're on your wall, cupping your bodies, right now!

I'm lost, quite lost, all wrapped up and not knowing where my head or my heels are. Maybe she is too, all excited for me, sweaty, because I suddenly feel her hot heart pattering away as I stroke her breast with the covert back of my hand.

We're quite alone on the steps: I want to tell the world about my love, my lust: and I want to tell her too, but she already knows, for her knuckles accidentally brush my crotch a few times as if to reassure her that I'm really as aroused as she must be and think I feel.

So then I cup her pubis with one covetous hand and she half thinks to brush it away, and then laughs with glee, wanting

me to smooth her into nirvana or forgetfulness...

Now, whatever it is that lies ahead makes us both gulp, and think to wheeze in the sparse, precious, cool air.

You know how it is, you cannot wait for the almost inevitable to happen, you're bubbling with shared conceit - thus we're preconceiving the glorious, grainy moments ahead of us, our lives, oh, and that *petite morte* that we all struggle so hard to achieve.

How marvellous unexpected things can be! All in colour, edged with monochrome.

And *who* is she?

With a spring in my step I find that we are almost running together - this way, will we find out?

Running together, not to anywhere particular, but in order to maintain this dizzy

corruscating feeling, this mad shared lovely moment.

Must it ever end?

Later.

The garrets, carved finials and the ancient clerestories are mostly gone from Paris now, bringing with that change a correspondent spate of glass, metal and roof lights of various modernistic types.

From her small, sparse, student-y apartment, decorated with the usual feminine knick-knacks, I can clearly see through the slick glass doors, across that teetering windy patio perched in the sky, across as far as maybe the roofs of Chartres, certainly clear to the green kale-tops of the Bois de Boulogne.

On a clearer day I would maybe have dreamt of the mysterious glaziers who so many centuries before crafted glass

at the side of the cathedral at Chartres from local sand and wood, thus creating the windows there - and in so many of the churches sitting below me, when Paris was just another village amidst the fragrant water meadows of the Seine and the stonemasons and glass-men had only just heard word that there would be work for them soon on the hill above the *Marché aux Montmartre* in a newly thought about castle-like church, which was to be called 'The Sacred Heart'.

Later still.

Now that's a huge thought.

Because what happens later is an impossible sandwich which will contain both our lives in its many elements.

Those musical hours we spent together still have massive meaning to me, to us, because they describe the pyramid of our lives as they were then, have

become now, are - that *gestalt* can never be changed, because past shapes are forever, part of the continuing sharp-edged glass-hard complexity of the mosaic of the fatal chemistry set which naïvely, we call *our Universe*.

And now, what shall I say - you see, they've gone, all gone, that splendour in the grass, our forgotten sunlit hours at La Coupole or discussions inside the Sélect Bar, the dark cold nights as we turned our steps towards Place du General Bèurét, taking each other's time to make love, leaving all those unseen, un-thought, unspoken, splendours behind us at the crowded, snobbish bar of the self-selected, interbred 'Bar Sélect' in Montparnasse.

That is history, and yet history is what we are, what we two were, *us*, histories happening between *us*, *our* bodies creating

history as we puzzled and coaxed and trapezed and tussled with each other, whilst the draught nudged the chrome-framed door onto the patio just open, pushed against the *broderie* which dressed the small tables, stirred our pair of chairs, waiting for us snug, like lovers waiting in time to meet again, again - and the wind in it's turn nuzzling the net of the curtain as if to say 'I dare you!'

Such days, such times, are rare.

I don't remember how warm it was. You, she, enjoyed being naked, prancing around that little studio as if to say 'Look at me... I can be yours!' And of course, what else could I do, I, a captive audience of one, enwalled and enthralled by my new pleasure, by my new discovery - this brand new undiscovered undisclosed female continent called *you*; after all

you were fond of your body, it was a thing of straight animal delight, and besides, every body has a date to it, it must be used carefully - for it is not for forever.

You told me, with your *Canadienne* accent, using rare English - 'Yu can 'av anythang you waant, anythang'.

I didn't understand ever, yet still I made you as mine as I wished to be yours in that time - we became confederates, lovers, but sadly never friends. It had the stamp of all our times upon it.

Those days and nights are as fresh as this morning's paint to me now, addictive; I can smell its sharp powerful tactile muscle, its odour, and touch its sticky sheen of fat new colour, like a newly painted room in my life. But now I'm stuck (forever) with *later*, for that's

where we all are - forever,
later.

Can we take our finds with
us?

Those ancient frozen steps
had the drift of shapes on them,
as if all the ghosts of time had
come back to haunt me with my
new beginnings; and while
nothing is new in time, because
everything is ancient and
firstborn - all at the same
fugitive second, yet...

We were on those steps, we
were stepped between Barbés-
Rochechouart, hell, loneliness,
the future and all the other
ghosts, plus ours, waiting to be
made and carry us away - yet to
come; as well as those clamorous
banshees which whistled in my
ears and made me deaf to what I
was listening for.

Coco-Bongo was our place later
that day's evening. Just for us.
Time that day belonged to us in
a way impossible to

scribe, engrave merely into any monument, any metal, any stone; time, our time - as if you could merely incise symbols into time to demonstrate our immortality.

Later, that word.

We danced to the music of Frank Sinatra like the true strangers we were that night, and then dallied in the moonlight up the hill in the tropics of our imaginings, those rich lush gardens of the imagination, those dark warm shaded palm groves of the mind.

And some days later, when you lied to your mother on the phone as we lay in your bed (*'suis tout-sol mamant!*) I kissed the line of your shoulder, sure that we would die together.

But death will not be for you or for me: us: why, we will always be svelte and slim, hip and cool, desirable, unlined and uncharted in each other's minds, even at that moment when death

finally cheats us of what we
never thought we might have had.

The aspic of dreams.

We're forever, that's all.

Absolute as the stone of those
steps. One day together,
forever.

Don't look back, never
regret, because regret means to
never let go, and the restless
tide of life will take care of
all your regrets anyway,
whatever you think or regret or
surmise, one day.

Players & Thieves

Book 2

Nine Lives

*'The distinction between
past, present and future
is only an illusion'*

Albert Einstein

Players & Thieves

Chapter 5

Life One. Sunday.

Baker Street.

It began like this.

I was sitting in a café, deciding what I should do that morning, with just the trace of an idea in view, and perhaps just the crease of a smile on my mouth - and then, who should come along in a very special car, but someone whom I was convinced that I'd met... well,

just a few, a very few, weeks ago.

It was a impulse - but she was an attractive woman and my hormones felt just right - so I just gave a kind of brief, curtailed wave, hoping for nothing and more interested in reading the article I'd just found in *'The Business'* when all of a sudden, with bizarre timing, she stopped the car, reversed up the bus lane and lowered the window, clearly beckoning and smiling.

I wasn't aware that we had ever had much conversation in this life, so of course I was taken aback a bit, approached the car and then dropped into the passenger's seat.

I figured that I remembered her, but didn't know where from. Perhaps from one of those parties held by my friends of the Hampstead Group.

Now, this stranger opened the conversation:

"That was a nice party, wasn't it?"

All my reflexes refused to believe this, but:

"What time did you leave?"

"Oh late, about two-thirty."

Now we were rolling along near Baker Street, slowing to enter the usual traffic nightmare carefully designed by some blind planner, with the Regent's Park on the left and a bollard ahead of us which was apparently some sort of quaintly botched attempt at canalisation of the traffic. She shot the car to the right of the bollard and probably broke several traffic laws as the car slid quickly into upper Baker Street, past the gaggle of competing shops with counterfeit numbers pretending to be the last known address of Sherlock Holmes (who all of us know never existed).

She spoke nervously, hardly judging her commentary between interstices of mirror-signal-manoeuve manoeuvres, but, enticing me further by not yet allowing me to discover who she was (how could I tell her that this was all an absurd mistake, that she would be better talking to someone who knew and understood her!)

Besides, she'd used the wrong name, called me *Max...* and I'd never existed either, not as Max, not as Jacques either, but rather as Jack, which was my fathers nickname when he was a sailor, which through the mist of time brought him closer to me, closer perhaps in death than he had ever been in life, but with the pervasion of some species of sadness, the realization that I would never really know him this side of my grave, though I had dearly wanted to love him. And anyway, my friends had somehow decided

to call me Pancho, a sort of nickname. Confused? I'll bet you are; and I was too.

Ah yes, life! Life clicked in, with that febrile tick that brings us all to sudden sweating awareness those nights when we are alone and crying inside ourselves.

But not now because:

'You're more than a friend - looking for romance, you end up with a one night stand'.

She was suddenly unexpectedly sharp, bright:

"Where was it, then?"

"Uh?"

"You don't know me from Eve... and me, you from Adam!" I scrabbled for some sort of understanding, remembrance. I hit upon a name, some shadow passed through my mind.

Now I knew it. I'd seen her I was sure, striking as she was, it would be hard to forget her that quickly: but I'd never

spoken to her - this was happening in reverse, to her, too, I was sure...

She pointed a finger, accusatory: then suddenly smiled-

"Zurich, Sunday, meet stranger with my friend Marti, drove up to the BP Tankstelle at 23 Mont Maigre, later at Dorf in that lovely house, later near the falls at Rheinfall, photographs, us hugging, strangers yet, then later..."

"Later!"

"I knew that I knew you!"
The car slewed, she'd hit the brakes.

"I remember that we made love..."

How could forgetfulness be so total?

"You're the psychiatrist!"

"God, yes!"

"We were lovers!"

"But somehow we never met."

"Different damn countries and different damn languages"

"But you're Pancho" the mist in her eyes had begun to clear.

"Yes, and you're" I scrabbled for the word: that pretty straw-blonde in the dark blue coat that I met at *Rheinfall* that Saturday: we made love that night, because we'd drunk too much and forgotten our manners.

"Cynthia"

"Yes!"

"How crazy"

"How nice!"

"And here I am, trying to make ends meet in good old London town!"

"Me too!"

"Oh!" There was a moment of almost real regret.

Just a moment, now I remembered that she had been a cold cardboard mistress in bed, and that she'd killed all the romance with just a few gestures. I remembered it all clearly now. That was why I'd forgotten, because I'd had to.

'I couldn't resist her, her hair was just like yours, flaxen like a folksinger's, and besides, it was dark and I was lying down...'

Chapter 6

Life Two. Monday.

Rue du Dragon.

Monday, life, vital, real, temporary, dynamic. Bursting out from every face and even from the marble walls of these decorative prisons that we call our apartments. Life in the air and on the ground, life in the expressions and language of the South: life in the Sun and the suddenly delightful shade.

So now, or at sometime, we begin to explore the prisons of our lives, most of which will become our caskets if not actually our graves.

Those of us who have the courage or desperation to make the break, have truly escaped, somewhere, anywhere else but those ugly, controlling, places which at one time we considered to be our homes, sold by us if we were sufficiently courageous and vagrant to make the ultimate error of forgetting how 'important' those people, these places, were.

Out, in the cool wind and the vast spaces of freedom, it's only too easy to forget the delicate fragility of those artfully constructed 'freedoms'-too easy to imagine that they are difficult, if not impossible to breach, when in fact they are easily attacked and worse, which without continuous attention - like some sick individual they

suddenly expire and threaten to drown us as if we were all at once become a decorative Dandy, The Mary Rose, which overloaded, unexpectedly while turning began to founder as she left the smooth harbour for the choppy waters of the sound. You know why? Because most of the sailors tween-decks didn't have a word of English between them!

It's a paradox, then, that the ocean never ceases to beckon us on; greedy for our inchoate embraces yet carefully never informing us of the profundity and danger which proceeds only when the mirror-bright surface is broken and we taste the frosty, salty reality of the deeps.

Just as the ocean still claims many an unassuming soul, so does the minefield, the quicksand of our social constraints.

Sunlight changes all that. Within a few days of exposure to the Sun, we begin to see the continuing nature of our lives.

With only that smallest extension of that time, and the natural addition of some time to think, we begin to examine the things we've left behind, evaluate their genuineness, see the perspectives which they contain - and ourselves reflected in them.

It's the change of focus that achieves it, the realization that real life has nothing to do with the obscene imaginary world of the TV.

How does this bring me to where we are now, sitting in a side street, listening to accents which we do not understand, contemplating a late, gentle, Monday afternoon in winter?

They were times like that:
letters I'd written and then
forgotten and then once again
found:

*My history is painful and so
is yours. Sometimes in the fog
of the pain it all goes wrong
for us. Now those two damaged
histories are yesterday. Perhaps
they always were for now we have
a richness we can share a love
which we are shocked, surprised
to discover.*

*Explorers are shocked and
surprised when discovery means
that unacceptable things have
been uncovered. Discovery means
problems, but also offers huge
opportunities.*

*We've come out of our pain
to discover a blue sky, a green
sea and out of the shadows
enabling me to find that person
who is live forever in your
eyes.*

*The you who is a part of that
rich tapestry that we make*

together when we weave our
bodies, then our minds,
together.

Yes it hurt, yes it was
worth it. Yes, we've found love.

Love is all that anyone ever
needs to make their life whole,
a dream that people are prepared
to die for.

We have made our love, this
experience that we share like
the pain of deepest pleasure.
Which means... I love you more
now than I can say...

What the hell was that
about?

This was me, after all:

'I pretended she was you.
Why are you so upset? You
weren't there, and anyway I
was thinking of you as I
came...'

Chapter 7

Life Three . Tuesday .

Boule . Mich .

When something breaks, something new is being made. I'm glad that this has happened. Because this morning, though all these symptoms are still in my body, they seem to be dying back - perhaps as the infection dies, so does my affection. For you.

I woke up just now no longer hurting, and dreamt that we had become lovers once again.

The reason for all that? Yes, I was sad, very sad. It was a kind of perfect innocence that I had thought I had found again, something stolen from me when some punters cock invaded **your** body. What was worse was that he obviously took you as some carefully stalked bargain-sale item; something more for the archive, the shopping trolley.

Men are quite capable of scoring women like that. It's just another way of fucking-up and blowing someone else's ego whilst fucking.

But I've put it into perspective now. I have to say that you never were the finest item in my showcase, and that I stayed with you by default: as I'm sure he will too, that is to say, if you'll ever forgive him with infecting you with someone else's disease.

However, then I managed to locate the little girl in you, who, every time I saw her,

somehow linked with my own innocence.

I fell in love with her - last week we were lovers, innocent-to-innocent, child-to-child and dream-to-dream.

But you never were aware that our dreams it is which describe us, who we are; they are we and are our liars and our lovers too. Stay close to your enemies.

That is the most important factor about the love I still find for you; each of us is the product of our dreams - not the slick pretences of others. Lies and dreams are parallel in that they describe things that nearly could be, but which finally fail - things which aren't. Yes, I know that our love, our true love fell outside these parameters, it was lost on us, and that there's no chance of ever reclaiming that lonely innocence again.

Well, maybe if we by chance meet again all these dreams may come alive. Perhaps then all the nightmares too will come true, perhaps then for the only time ever.

You see, I'd managed to forget you, and except for a train of coincidences that underlined my need more keenly, perhaps I would have done so. I'd lost the pain, I'd staunched the bleeding - or so I thought - but then you ripped open the stitches and the blood leapt out and that doubled the pain.

I know that sometimes you've bled too: you told me. But now that the wounds are beginning to heal the skin has taken to itching and I don't care any more - I don't even care for you.

Chapter 8

Life Four.

Wednesday Girl.

Via Del Corso.

**Who is it that said that women
look into their mirrors
constantly because:**

- 1.they might not exist any
more
- 2.they may have changed
- 3.they may have become ugly

4. at all events they will have to adapt to keep up with the game
5. the game itself may no longer exist, so they have to check who they're playing it with, and if they know the rules, if they can change them at their whim, and if the game has the rules it once had, in which case they will endeavour to subvert those rules to their own present advantage.
6. they might decide to tear up the rules and invent new ones to cover their own interests, because life is short and we're not here for long enough, only long enough that is to regret screwing-up. So what the fuck's a rule, anyway?

Too crude for you? Cavalli evening wear and matching luggage your thing? That's the problem about being a

designer. The commitment, you see.

We're in the studio and the junior designers (mostly women) are squabbling:

"He's just a player!"

"I've got this box that will slow-down reality"

"After all he's a player, isn't he, he's just a player!"

"The stupid sucker's just a player!"

"What's he *doin'* over there?"

"What's he's doing, what's he doing?"

"It's a drawing or somethin' just a drawing"

"He's drawin' this mock-Tudor house or somethin'"

"I don't ever remember someone doing something like this; I'd expect a castle at least - after all if you've got to do a drawing, draw something substantial"

"Why's she holding her thighs?"

The big old chair behind the desk revolved slowly. There was a man sitting in it, he said:

"Let's get on with something--"

"What is the meaning of this?"

"You're in my home - is this the way you repay me for my hospitality - seducing my daughter?"

"I..."

"What do you think you're here for anyway?"

"I..."

"Did you think you could do it?"

"She..."

"You win - you do as you please."

That was a *soft* victory!

Later: *and I'm talking to the daughter in question:*

"About you?"

"Of course!"

"You're just a fantasy anyway"

"Maybe you aren't?"

"I'll count to three. One, two--"

"Fuck You!"

Then still later, perhaps in Trastevere, we're in a bar, it's almost empty, this being either a shady late Winter afternoon, or else much, much later. She's behind the bar wearing a short tight dress, the hard, resilient, gentle tops of her breasts bobbing as if to say 'Peek-a-boo, what are you going to do about it?'

Without any apparent effort she balances a glass on two long fingers and transports it with some sort of out-of-kilter balance thing onto the shelf, then clinks it back:

"Drink?"

"Well, that depends upon..."

"What?"

"Well, that depends on the short reign of Queen Kelly!"

"Kelly?"

"You know!"

"Unh, I'm coming back..." Not understanding at all, she skitters to the other end of the bar where a hopeless drunk asks for another brain-killing scotch on the rocks and then she returns to my plastic smile, fixed, grinning:

"Ah yes... I've got you just where I want you!"

She looks at my drink, almost untouched; meantime I'm looking at the drunk (funny how a word covers them all and their affectations) which of course puts me off the whole idea: the booze looks like yucky piss to me now;

"Come on-finish it!"

"Oh no, I can't... really!"

I begin to feel sick - right in my stomach.

"So I've got you right where it hurts?"

What can you say?

"What can I say?"

"Say it *all*, big boy!"

"Yes - and No."

"Ha! Ha!"

I'm laughing; she's smiling at me.

"What does that mean?"

"Give me something to straighten-out my digestion"

"Okay." She sorts out some thick grey cum-like slime behind the bar. It tastes like medicine, it probably is medicine.

She's back, like a terrier, the light of distant, vicious, erotic victories in her narrowing eyes.

"Strike me, then"

That's just what I was thinking: *funny!*

"Where?"

"Where do you fancy?" She's flushed with energy and danger

and I reckon a bit of a slap turns her on, too...

"Hard, on your most sensitive... *rump?*"

Unconsciously she gestures at her arse with half a backward-cupped hand just above the bulge and shimmies slightly in excited, secret appreciation. She's bound to be getting moist about now.

"What?"

"I love you!"

"Are you crazy?"

"How crazy?"

"Insanely crazy"

"You love me?"

"Only if you do as you're told"

I lean forward and activate the site of the threat of pleasure by scratching gently with the nail of my little finger.

"What?"

"I adore you!"

"You want a *fuck* then?"

"You look nicely primed" I see it, it's not a figment of my imagination.

"Where's your cock?"

"Okay".

She fixes me with that look that says 'Hey, look at my stomach, its all flat and empty inside, waiting for you to create a savage agony of excited rivulets as you invade me.'

"I asked you already - are you crazy?"

"Okay. Then, how crazy?"

"Insanely - Ha! Ha!"

She's moved her palm and it's hovering, covering my equipment now. Maybe it's a threat.

"Only if you do as you're told!" She's moving slightly, sort of backwards as if that constitutes some sort of threat. Know what I mean?

"Well, working behind a bar exercises the imagination but not the..."

"Say it!"

"My butt, my brain, my North-South Divide."

"Are you crazy?"

"Insane, like you know already!"

"I'll do it only, only if you do as you're told, really!"

"Honest?"

She looks at my bulge, expectant.

"That's asking a lot, cowboy!"

"You're not..."

"I'm hot"

"Izabel?"

"I'm not Izabel! No, who the fuck is Izabel anyhow?"

"Just a blast from the past. She looks just like you only... only not so... good." My God! How I've learnt to lie, now that I'm hungry!

"Good?"

"You're making it very difficult for me!"

Slumped against the pillar.

"Oh yeah?"

She's sort of squatting there on a hard topped stool. She says:

"I'm hot, I have to take these off" gesturing at her crotch. I can imagine the reverse hump of her hump shape itself in abstract space above the padded seat of the stool. Lucky stool. Lucky reverse space. Warm, warm, warm.

Simultaneously, as I'm thinking of places to hide the alcohol in my hand, she's drumming the top of an empty glass with her perfectly formed fingers, painted and crowned as they are with wonderfully bright, polished, painted nails. *Terumppty tumpetty, trump!*

There's no-one else in the bar now. My mind must've gone blank! The drunk staggered out ages ago.

"God! It's later than I thought!"

Thank God she's forgotten whoever Izabel was. Who was Izabel, anyway?

"Absolutely!"

She walks to the door and throws the bolts, closes the shutters tight. Now we're alone amidst the ageing alcoholic odours and the scent of spoilt smoke in the air, like coughing cirrus. She pulls up her dress and slips down her tights, ("I'm so hot!") looks at them a beat and throws them somewhere where only the dray man will find them in another century.

"Now nobody's listening!"

The glass slips through her fingers and gives a sharp-pitched crack as it becomes thousands of shards, small as

atoms. It was crystal, you see. Symbolic, you see.

Anyone, nobody is watching, and neither am I because meantime she's looking into my eyes as if into a dark pool that holds the blackness of forever: maybe she knows. She's looking into my eyes again and licking her lips to tell me how ready and lubricated she is, for me.

"What do you think I'm here for?"

Her hands straighten her hips in case they're not under control, like adjusting the position of a Hot-Rod on the Raceway. I can see the tight right-hand line of her G-string starting just below her belly and disappearing at one swift remove into the flat shape of her crotch. It's the way the dress and the light is, from this angle.

"Do you have five minutes?"

"Here?"

She makes a quick mental check of all the ingresses and egresses that day.

"Yep!"

She laughs with her throat, and begins to loosen her bodice and at the same time gesture to undo my flies, as if to say *'Watch your balls, Sailor!'*

Primal, dangerous, the first sign of madness, or surrender. I'm itching down there. My ear is itching too, I have to pull and scratch it a little, just like Bogart.

Well, you know how love is blind - that's the way I heard it, anyway.

Chapter 9

Life Five, Thursday.

Calle de la Danza Invisible.

I had this scribbled number in typically over-decorated script upon a card. One morning I phoned, and twenty minutes later I heard a car (though perhaps it wasn't hers) but as I poked my nose through the curtains she was advancing towards the house, checking the numbers as she came.

"Hey, France" I was acting casual, but somehow enervated, breathing shallowly.

"Hola!"

She came up the stairs looking very slightly nervous, yet busy. I clacked the aluminium door too. She felt more confident now, she was smiling.

"So you think the arrangement can work"

"So long.. You know" She eased through the room door, checking on her way through the window that the street behind her was empty of prying eyes.

"I hardly know you"

"That's the nature of this arrangement"

"She'd dropped her jacket, and the skirt followed swiftly. Typically of women, she left it there crumpled upon the floor, even if it was part of her uniform.

She turned to me, the light glaring spring-like behind her

head, almost a halo, the Saint-of-the-Day, as she threw most of the rest of her clothes onto one of the chairs.

"If I knew you I'd say that you'd surprised me."

"I've been around."

"Do you always say that?"

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

Snap.

"Do you want to fuck here?"

Her eyes were restless, she'd snapped into being a professional now.

"I'm not used to this."

"Don't worry, after all I'm experienced. Don't you like the way I undress?"

"Oh yes"

I was scanning my memory now: the first time I'd spoken to her was as she locked her car in the street: at that time she was wearing fine highlighted lycra tights under a short tight linen skirt, accentuating the fact (possibly unconsciously),

that she was a whore, but I had always had a soft spot for whores, though this ancient forgotten geography was only in my mind's GPS.

No, it was the greater fact that she had that kind of soiled, battered beauty some whores have that had attracted me enough to speak. Which I then did, as she cocked her head at me. Ergo, our *arrangement*.

"You like that *indecent*...?"

"What a way to say it!"

"When I'm at work, yes".

She had omitted the tights or anything at all, actually, that bright morning. Now she opened her legs and gave me a peek at the goods. Brisk. Lets-get-down-to-business, like...

Then she closed them.

"Yes?"

"I could say that..."

"What?"

"To kick things off, to make you hard..."

"Go on?"

"I could say, 'Why are you like that Baby, I was there and I was thinkin' of you as I came!'"

"Sounds good."

"Got it from a song from a record named after you."

"You have a way with you!"

We both smiled.

Then we looked at each other as if circling, though we weren't. Well, not just then.

She'd sat herself in one of my indoor garden chairs and settled against the mahogany and the pink cushion.

"You like?"

She smiled, warily then opened her legs.

Now she moistened her fingers with her tongue and found and began a soft circling of her clitoris beneath the material of her cache-sexe, the better to warm up.

"What..."

"Do you like?"

"Mmmm"

"People do that sort of thing".

"Drink?"

I dropped some brandy into two glasses and clanked in a piece of ice on a soft ring of lemon, for her as well. I separated the glasses and put one down close to her chair.

Meanwhile she'd been preparing herself and me too. Now she was sitting, that mouth pink, and all shades to red, unfringed by anything but skin because she was shaven, in just a tiny home-made silken G-string right in the centre of the frame of my imagination, her legs canted to one side so that I could see the warm, ready, compacted bundle of goods outlined in finely textured textile stereo against the grain of the material.

Her fingers with their white square-cut nails had succeeded, she was wet, the material had taken on a deeper hue, which was

obviously just nice, because then as she picked up the crystal glass she turned to face the light, eased herself up with one strong arm, flexing the multiplex of muscles in her graceful back and presenting me with a ready made picture; because she wanted to be my star.

Then she said:

"You know, the whole of this life is just a dream"

"You have to show me how you know that"

"I'm a model, only I model for sex!"

"Does that make you a dream?"

"Sure!"

"And for me."

"For sex with you because you told me you were a photographer in... Past life"

"Ancient history, really"

"But that's a real camera in your study"

"Uh, huh"

"So we could make pictures"

"Yes"

"We could *elaborate*" she laboured the unfamiliar word, "Our dream." Silence, while the sound of her fingers against her flesh continued.

"You know, when you're watching an old repeat of a game show?"

"Si."

..... that was a sample of the work, you'll have to buy it to read on.....

I said once:

"You've a gift for romance, how come you always end-up with a one-night stand?" In some sort of ragged riposte I'd found her notes;

*I have bad and good news:
I'll have to have my teeth
crowned.*

*I don't have money
I don't feel happy with you
I feel angry,
frustrated,
humiliated,
pissed-off,
patronised,
depressed,
controlled,
disrespected,
ignored, and silenced.
I need time off.*

Good News.

*I am going back to Riga for the
moment*

*I am not leaving just yet
From now I prefer to communicate
in writing*

And then, another scribble:

*We'll make love; we'll eat (he
won't need food after large
lunch)
We'll discuss, you and me*

I'll tell him how I feel about us: this will give him CHOICE

Me - to you.

How else could I put it? It could have been your hair, your precise yet twirling accent or your fascinatingly inept taste: it could have been my memory of the way your body worked and how you looked as posed for me naked, how the weave of your clothes worked together - your bag and your shoes so particular and fine in their very casualness.

Once upon a time I knew that I knew you more completely, more absolutely than any other being. It was of course during one of those moments we were in bed together, a glorious few shreds of your moist pubic hair and just the briefest trace of your swollen lips, those moments

that live secretly in my memory as if engraved there.

Maybe they stay there into infinity, or maybe we lose all this, they, it, become pointlessly lost in the shower of small change which life ladles upon us, lost in the glittering nothingness of the instantly important, critically forgotten.

Thus also it could have been almost coincidental because I had the psyche of a designer, an *imagiste*, a photographer, so that I saw you and all that so clearly: these things lock together somewhere deep in the vacuous, forever immature, young, trained sections of your mind, mysterious in the scheme of things; yet manage at some defined yet urgent point in your personal history to become critical defining spaces: moments like rescued jigsaw pieces suddenly redefining the logic of the lost.

That brings me to nowhere, and then that infinite space between then and now; the unforgotten scent of that time, a mixture of coffee, cigarette smoke, Tweed and slightly musty hair, and of course the outlandish texture, scent and visual touch of powder: How is it that powder has that subtle essential *flavour*, which means that both the senses of touch and of time are awakened and become beacons of something which we can no longer task ourselves with because they are tantalizingly beyond our reach?

Have you recognized that smell itself defines time in a way that defies logic, by being prescient yet unchanging, even years after the moment when it was first experienced? Our noses are ancient confluences of sense, logic, instinct and memory.

It is time that has moved all that carefully composed geometry away from our understanding: like a gigantic, reversed exploding puzzle, it flew together at that *time* but then puzzlingly carried on reversing until it had disappeared into another, unexpected, un-described dimension. For now, all we have are its symbols, its landmarks, its signatures, its memories, peculiar and particular only to each of us.

And what happens to the memories and thoughts of those who we follow?

These mixtures of things and of memories then, are what make our mortal experience the wallpaper of our innermost world, something that we are fated to carry with us for all of our lives.

Like newborn kittens, everything we learn in this

empty schema called our mind, becomes a stamp, a cultural scar which most of us repeat for ever, for all our 'evers', until we just assume a place in some faded memory, which is the state of things, the lost memory of all of us.

And meanwhile, today my sweet, we are not yet become memories; we are still vital, though I haven't seen you since, I'm sure you're just as lusty as you were, not a blondish hair out of place, chestnut skinned, as are all the girls from Mont de Marsan (you told me), just as tasty, even if someone else has savoured your embraces many more times than I.

Will you remember me my Honey? Or am I just a fragment of your secret life, your unspoken guilt? I wonder how that fits into your scheme of things.

Now I face a new challenge: to replicate my fragmented life so that I can retrace those peaks I once knew. That is even if, having climbed many other lifetime peaks, these few are relevant to the tasks of my life.

What does that mean? The confused mess of syntax which life offers art is what that all means, whether despite your poverty or riches you manage to cross the next few roads and survive, and having done that you manage to make something which may add some weight to your epitaph.

Survival, one way or another is what it's all about.

And, to return to the written page, I'd rather write it all down in pencil, but pencils have long attained the status of the semi-obsolete.

Or perhaps then in ball pen, the ball pen's ink gradually blurring as you pass your arm

over the page for the umpteenth time.

Chapter 20

The Thief.

*Describing wide
Sweeps of air
To describe your
Enchained
Freedoms is the
Privilege of the
Swift.*

Forth? Now the forth bit was
all about murder and greed and

debauchery and everything dear to our hearts.

"So... *Make my day!*" Was all that I'd heard them say.

There is after all little difference between doing nothing and knowing nothing, except that they exist in competing, mutually exclusive empty sectors of one's life. Decay is their form, despair is their game, they leave you only thoughts with which to climb.

Wednesday

This includes Miss Wednesday. You've heard of an actress called *Tuesday*, well now this was my own entirely unoriginal take on things in my life. Miss this-or-that. The Miss Jones of the song, the Miss Take of Friday before last.

It's all history, isn't it?

Life is so unoriginal, when you think about it. It just goes on and on. Almost forever.

Wednesday was a windy, inconstant day. And such was Miss Wednesday herself. Here and there, bustling one minute, at rest the next.

The swirling dust which seemed to surround the house, at intervals puckered into small whirlwinds which then failed as they entered the doorways and entrances and deposited their debris on the spick timber laminated floor before disappearing.

'That's how it goes' she thought as she packed her valise and made ready to leave, for maybe the last time.

Things could be worse, indeed things had been worse before in this personal history of hers, whilst breaking the uplands and the lowlands too.

Then, there was a woman she'd once known in Santa Barbara, up in the rocky arid slopes of the Sierra Nevada. This was already a world of thoughts away, but such was the prescience of the motor which governed her, that this time ran on and on - from one sort of time to some other sort of time without a break, like an alarm clock, reminding her of all the mistakes she had ever made when she least needed to know, all the turns that she could have made and all the innocence that she had lost.

The skyline was craggy, by turns dusty and windswept, and then in the more wintry months, damp and hard etched. The horizon was always there, almost a threat to her consciousness and with always the question upon its mouth:

She was sitting there, her thoughts wandering, the very stuff of the gases.

'I needed a new start, a new breath of air: to cut my way out of all that stale air and be able to breath-in without any kind of fear, without any negative limit.'

So now, bounding along the sidewalk with a new way of regarding things she felt that cool cleanness that you normally only feel when you're near the seashore, when you're cool and some way detached, artificially inflated with the balloon newness of it all.

It's clean to be cool, cool to stride out and to enjoy your life. Now she was striding out and enjoying things in a way she hadn't for a very long time. Each encapsulated gem riding out the typhoon of her senses like a salmon finding its way to the welcoming, rolling, calling sea.

Nature, intuition, the operation of instinct. These things bring you by their logic alone to the plexus of an idea

that can sustain you for longer than you may ever imagine.

Here was the unexpected freedom to move, unencumbered by thoughts or feelings or debt, to move with the natural fluidity of motion that birds or fishes have, using only the logic of moment and mass to achieve the ultimate that you can.

Times like these define themselves such that when your life changes tracks forever the chemistry changes, despite the fact that once there was a before and an after, now suddenly there is only a blinding, uncomfortable new beginning. Not only that, but at that moment you know in your bones that this new time is dynamic, with a consistency and prescience that means that existence will never be the same again, and this time was just such a time.

Chapter 21

The Poet.

Waves crash on
The shore,
Fresh
As if the sky
Itself were new.

Wind brings fresh
Tears to our eyes
as
It blows us still

Closer.

Each day
brings a new
bright hunger
into our
one mind.

Every time
The Sun
skirts
This place we
draw closer.

The spaces
Between raindrops
Contain more
Than can be
Described.

Then, the
Impossible
Fell like
A stone into
Quiet water.

2 minds,

Empty of sorrow
Or regret,
Dreaming
Of their future.

How is it that
Chance has me
Struggling
With thoughts
Of Joy?

Whilst I was
Watching the
Flight of birds
My dream
Became true.

Hurrah! Celebrate!
Like a fast
Closing door
The past has
Taken flight.

For two thoughts
To meet
as ours once

Did is
impossible!

Sometimes
Time and light
Brings us all
We will ever
Need.

One moment of
light has
Meant that
The future
For us is now.

Have no fear.
The spaces
Between clouds
Exist only
In our minds.

**Moments are our most scarce
resource,** a resource that
dwindles, runs through your
fingers, rain or shine, cold or
warm, sad or happy, suffering or

glad, at a deadly, measured speed.

Did you ever think that each moment runs away from you like blood in water, at ever increasing speed: see that all those wonderful moments become other people's wasted time?

We are victims of our own need for immortality locked into a machine which one day will use all of us up, a machine called *our* World, the smallest feasible speck in the ruthless power-driven deepfreeze Sahara of our cosmos, at one outer obscure quarter of an obscure unobserved galaxy that mankind imagines is the *Milky Way*.

Players & Thieves

Chapter 22

The Liar.

The door opened almost as soon as I rang the bell. Just like a photo, and me huffing and puffing, all the way to *where?!*

The slim tall woman behind it as it swung back wore dark glasses and looked not unlike some faded pop star's mistress. At that moment I could not see her distinctly, a product of the

jagged halo of the bare hallway light just behind her. She seemed lithe, and - even more encouraging - the light kimono she was wearing was translucent so that one could see the curves of her thighs, those blunt protruding nipples, silhouetted against the light.

"It's you!" she exclaimed "You're here! I thought you'd never make the trip!"

"I couldn't resist the thought!"

The floor of the flat was of old, uneven marble and I could dimly see that there was a kitchen at the far end of the passage, but that all the other doors except the nearest were firmly closed. This nearest room as we entered was the bedroom, containing a double bed, a table on which lay a selection of canes, riding switches and leather belts, and a large untidy French wardrobe.

"Nobody wears actual knickers any more these days," said she, reading my mind as she took off her dark glasses, keeping her face averted "... they're into those *string* things now. Besides, I was at a school which didn't have a proper uniform."

Inadvertently I dropped my hat and stooped to pick it up.

It was then that I recognized her. It hit me all at once; a curious physical sensation that came at me in succeeding waves. One bit of me - my heart or my stomach - or perhaps the whole assemblage from throat southward - seemed to drop like a badly regulated elevator.

Clunk!

It was Ciszka. My putative Maitresse was Ciszka the flamboyant model from the Art School!

Of all the nipples which, it was to be assumed, Jacques had faced during his tutelage of art classes, Ciszka's were high on the list of those he would have most wanted to encounter in private, and the fact that those concerned weren't those of his favourite, Clarissa, a girl that it would have been simply too good to be true if she had been there now, standing before him in open kimono, uplift bra, and absolutely nothing else - *well who gave a damn!* He took a newly toasted deep breath.

"Well!" She looked not at all surprised: **"I thought I recognized your voice when you phoned!"** - joked Ciszka the bouncing Czech, with hardly a metallic syllable to betray her unreal blondness.

"God, this is so embarrassing."

"Is it?" She made to cover her nipples with two pairs of

forefingers, then changed and covered her luscious clitoris with two inadequately slim digits instead.

"I like the idea - that's me, that pair of eyes!"

"I've been left Home by my friends in this flat with hardly any money", she continued, attempting to wring the situation of any pathos she could without so much as a mental skid. "And a couple of weeks to waste, so I decided to make some pocket money for myself. I'm thinking of travelling, you see." She moved awkwardly, around those almost stationary fingers.

"Well..." Jacques floundered "I mean..."

"Oh, I couldn't. No, no, no, no, no! Anyway, the whole point of putting up cards in call-boxes and arranging things over the phone is so that you don't know your customers personally."

"But I've always, uh, liked you," Jacques said.

"Yes, but don't you see, you probably would've got it free from me in the end, anyway!"

She suddenly stopped and looked around her, her eyes wild with a sort of intrigue. She started all over again, tripping over all the excuses in her brain. Then:

"..Can't you see that that's part of the problem! I mean quite like you too - anyway come to think of it, I always had the idea in class that you were, well, a randy bastard. I was *evidently right!* But still, I never thought you were the kind of man who - anyway, the point is we're not supposed to like each other. This is business. *Business* - pure and simple. I'm trying to be professional."

"All right then, be professional! Let's handle this purely as a purely business transaction."

Ciszka was starting to weaken. It might have been the money - or *his* good looks.

"Just strip" (he couldn't resist the word) "...and then lie down, just imagine..."

"What?"

"Imagine I'm looking all over you, get the thrill you feel when people are enjoying every small crevice, every detail of your body with their eyes!"

She thought for a minute. I could see the currency notes, like those symbols in fruit machines, flashing up and down her eyes.

Bingo!

"Well...All right then. We could do more if you paid for it. What did you actually have in mind?"

"Look, twenty-five more, then!"

Jacques remembered that she had spoken of "Simple Discipline" on

the phone. For a moment he wondered if it would not be more consistent with his dignity as an art tutor to pretend that he was only interested in straight sex, but then he decided he might as well get what he came for.

"Well, how about this ..."
She was listening with a sort of frozen smile on her mouth.

"I kneel down in front of you, pressing my lips to your, uh, clitoris, while you beat me across the shoulders from above with one of those canes I see over there; after a bit I might get to take off your bra."

"Sounds wonderful," said Ciszka, suddenly unfreezing. "Mind you, I always say that, of course. Actually, if you really want to know my opinion...well, never mind. Oh, and it's a fiver extra to take my bra off. That's payable in advance. Cheap, mind you."

"Is a fuck included in the price?" asked Jacques hopefully.

"No, of course it isn't. It would be extra for uh... *penetration* - I told you you would be better to wait until you got it as a freebie - missionary position that is. Doggie style's more, in case you slip in somewhere else, at which point the price peaks."

"Oh, really? Well-okay," said our hero, suspecting that she was hiking her charges but relishing the experience anyway. "Here it is, then."

Players & Thieves

Book 5

He's a Player

Players & Thieves

Chapter 23

The Whores.

"Mmm!" Said the girl,
licking the blunt end of the
roller

*Lie is in believe
Hell is in hello ...*

Anna warmed her hands on the
bare skin of her thighs and

smiled busily as she began to work the roller on Jacques' back. Some kind of sophisticated torture at a sky-high price.

Despite the cool extravagance of a 'Sauna Club' as exclusive as Selecta, Jacques still couldn't psych himself in to it.

"How long have--"

"Oh, not long."

"Like Marbella?"

"It's quite nice."

Her mother was dead. Her father was back home in Poland; a scaffolder, she said. There was no work there unless you liked walking along steel beams three hundred metres in the sky.

Jacques was about to suggest that if the Poles bred less, then there'd be more room for people to have jobs and decent lives. But he canned it.

"What it means to be fully human is to live by ideas and ideals" she said, abstractedly,

rollering away in a sort of trance.

"Oh, really", Jacques said, this sounded, ironic, much too ironic even if fucking El Pinillo was an okay place to shack-up in, even if...

Then this whore, Anna started to laugh, and as she laughed she threw her head back and shook her red hair out as it vibrated down her naked, straight back. It was a warning of some kind, he'd seen it somewhere before.

The mushroom and agaves scent of her moist sex, the promise of her naked body, began to work on him: suddenly he wanted to make her laugh:

"No," he said seriously, "I can see it now; you hit the road when you were twelve, and you made it to Marbella a few years later!"

She laughed again, shimmied her hair, shifted the wicked grip of the thong on her peak

with a bent little finger without comprehending exactly, looked at him, maybe not comprehending again, laughed again, perhaps ironically this time, maybe not.

"I was a teacher back home," she said "in Warsaw... the university... Modern History"

"Oh"

"I am a Doctor of Letters"

"Well!"

"And now... I whore"

"I..."

"Money - I get more money in a couple hours here than in month back home."

Were you Anna you could measure your life by those past lost moments of integrity.

There comes a time in life when memory becomes part of your dreams. In order to exist, desire must have its objects perpetually absent, you see.

Jacques was under Anna's hands, and her desires were no

closer to fulfilment than his were.

Or something like:

*'Hi Mr Lucky
Your words are
Dripping with honey
Wrap up some beach
And bring it back!'*

Then, brisk, back to work at the Art School: Jacques seemed to have established a kind of working relationship with Ciszka the telephone model, who for reasons best known to herself posed there increasingly often. Accordingly he hoped that she would not repeat any of her crazy casual tricks at the next class.

All to no avail, she did her best to behave worse than before, which fact was telegraphed to him as soon as he walked into the assembling class in the studio and saw Ciszka, despite her elegant nudity,

pointing a rather fancy-looking camera at him. For a moment he thought she meant to take his picture but instead she announced:

"You've got still-life drawing after lunch and I'm going to take some *tasty* pics in the ...err...pottery studio - like this!"

The class started with the usual five-minute poses.

For the first couple of poses the lesson pursued a more-or-less normal course until Jacques happened to pause in instructing something or other; when while he was demonstrating to a student Ciszka interjected 'Ooh la la!'

All of a sudden, alarmingly, Jacques found that for some reason he could see all the girls in the studio as if they were naked. It was some kind of neurotic reaction.

"This is boring," Ciszka said. "I could be standing on my head with my tusche in the air and we could be illustrating the sex lives of the French. You know, l'Amour and all that..!"

"I don't think that's the deal Ciszka dear, besides which you're half Argentinean, aren't you?" stammered Jacques, pretending to be amused.

Now too, for some reason, more paranoia, really, he could feel her heat, her nakedness, he could *smell* her even if he did not look at her. It must be some sort of fatal attraction that was working on him, part of the neurosis. Or *vaquero* pheromones, perhaps.

Then, at the five minute mark, without prompting, she changed pose and began to touch her toes provocatively, those projected, pouting, protruding, delicate, shaven lips subtly tight and inflated, pouting silken pink in the caressing

morning light between the elegant reversed columns of her thighs.

But listen - this session was rapidly turning into another version of hell, he could feel it in his bones. His head ached because his eyes were almost out of focus; too much sensation, like. Now every time he turned his eyes in her direction he found that she smiled knowingly at him. He began to sweat even more than usual.

What was that thing?

"There is no God, but God"

"Self evident, bullshit"

"How"

"Prove anything about God"

"Basic logic, these claptrap, blinkered religious messages fly in the face of logic, which is how they find their targets: it's called Cognitive Dissonance!"

"Why should I prove anything, it pays me to go along with the religious dogma"

"Do I believe you? I ask myself"

"Think of the money, think of some 'Holy' mullah, some oaf proselytising about 'God'- your God, my God, as if God is their damn possession - think about the cash it's worth, oh, and the money giving you power over your simple brainwashed followers - it's as simple as that."

Maybe he was cracking up?

At the coffee break the class trooped out, leaving him confronted with the formal absurdity of a naked woman facing him across an empty room.

She smiled and re-crossed her legs, like in that movie.

"Like what you see?"

"God?"

"There is no God! Do you know the story of God?"

"Uh?"

"It had low ratings, they pulled it during the advertising break - I never saw the end!"

"Uh?"

He pushed a crooked finger around his neck, between skin and collar. The denim was sticking to him, uncomfortably soaked in sweat.

And who would imagine that as she sat there now, with her hands in her lap, she looking demure and attentive and a little bored like any other of his models, that he could also see her with a quite different expression, eyes bright, cheeks flushed, lips puffed, inflated, in that toothy growling grimace of sexual arousal.

"God *naked!* God!"

"Yes, he's a she, like me and she's *shaved!*"

'You know,
*Naked, you really are
simple,
like your hands,
complex like your thoughts
smooth, extra-terrestrial,*

*neat with hidden
moon lines,
secret ways.*

*Naked, you are as
spare as bare oiled wheat,
blue like a Moscow night
Naked, you are like
gilded Ukranian sunlight...*

*Your smile was like
a wave crashing on
a beach of the Baltic Sea
way, way down East facing
the fires along the
beaches in August
and beyond them
the acoustical
emptiness of
the Polar Night'*

He sat quiet for a moment,
abandoned by his sense of lost
love, his eyes filled with
hidden tears: it was an ancient
wish, a real dream which had
dissolved into tailor-made
nightmare reality. It took a
minute, then the sensation fell

away to just a numb cold icy blank.

Click.

Then:

"Did you have a girlfriend in Sweden?"

"Well, maybe"

"Go on," said Ciszka hardly moving, her nipples hard as wood as she sat straight backed and somehow ready for him again, "...you can't have lived in Sweden and not had a Swedish girlfriend."

"She was called Anna-Joelle," he invented wildly, "Oh, she was terribly beautiful - especially in the lace shawl she always used to wear to Mass -and later, in bed, of course. Nothing but that, you see."

"I bet you had fantasies about her," said Ciszka.

"She never wore knickers - those fragrant peasants never do, you know." (*An imaginary*

frisson of delight from the absent students.)

"Then again, perhaps I didn't once upon a time. This was all a long time ago." She said.

As it happened Ciszka stayed behind after the class, of her own accord. She slipped on some clothes, then-

"Must rush," she said, aiming her new camera suggestively. "Today's my big chance to photograph Clarissa in the nude; she's modelling in the sculpture studio today. But I wanted to ask you something first."

"What?"

"Well," she said in a loud whisper"- you see, one of my eh-clients hasn't been able to keep an appointment so I'm a bit short. You couldn't sub me a ten could you?"

"In advance like?"

"Well, I don't know... well, what about tonight then? I'm going out with friends - well, I've got to keep some sort of normal social life going, haven't I?" She looked odd, maybe depressed, suddenly.

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Oh, okay."

He liked the twang of it, though it felt very odd - by a girl who was arranging to fuck you, for money.

He gave her twenty.

"Thanks", she tweeted, brightening up and peeking at him playfully through the viewfinder of the camera, "...on account then... See you tomorrow!"

She was about to run out of the room, perfect legs flashing when -

"That reminds me," said Jacques hopefully. She stopped, clutching the obligatory backpack.

"Uh?"

"I..."

"...You know, I have to make, kind of... make a bit of extra money for clothes and make-up and things. And so here we are." She said, meaningfully.

"Eh?"

Jacques leaned forward to kiss her, but she moved her mouth at the last minute so that his kiss was planted on the side of her throat.

"But you keep telling me that you don't like the sex thing," Jacques said.

"Oh, that's just good business sense. If you knew how randy I felt sometimes fantasizing about it all, you'd end up asking me to pay you."

"Do you feel randy now?"

"Randy - and sore. I mean you're surprisingly well armed."

"Uh, huh."

She brightened and suddenly quoted:

"Ma Miller's Sioux City Sluts were always well warmed up

for it when Judge Miller put his Black Cap on!"

"Where was that from?"

"Oh, a little book called '*Spokane Blues*' I read some time - gives me a hot wet feeling - knowing how temporary life is."

"Well, I can at least try trying you up then, and not using the eh... *cosh!*"

"All right, ha-ha, later, tomorrow evening then, I'll move things around for you. Actually, come to think of it I'd enjoy that but first I want to ask you something. Promise not to scream, I've got a really important favour to ask you."

'*Here it comes*', thought Jacques, '*...the little bitch is probably going to ask me for more money.*'

But no, she'd changed her mind, so she suddenly changed her tune. Ciszka had begun to climb into character, like a method actress.

"Oh, actually nothing"

"What is it?"

"No!"

"Oh?"

"Doesn't matter, its easy money letting old men stick it in me anyway." She laughed in an experienced sort of way.

"Eh?"

"Oh, not you; it was just a passing thought!" she said, then ran off, laughing.

Players & Thieves

Chapter 24

The Piano Player.

I needed a change of air once more and I figured that I both had a reason, and somewhere to go... to ask Paco, a piano player in a Tango Bar in Buenos Aires - Who himself had many names and was a friend of Ciszka's where she roomed in BA. It seemed logical at the time, anyway. Of course, when she'd casually given me his name and

number I'd obligingly lost it. Until a couple of days before I'd decided to take that new direction and leave for Argentina on the 787, due to some previously unknown conjunction in space and time, I discovered it again, still freshly creased within its fold of paper.

Someone who knew her told me:

"Ciszka, as you know lives by her wits and what she can steal, and though this can mean objects, it most often means thoughts, and worse, emotions and feelings, intent, love and affection, caring and sharing and all the little things that make partnerships worthwhile."

Yeah, Ciszka was an emotional leech.

Besides, she'd spent years doing unnamed things in darkest Argentina (with thirty-five

passports, all apparently legal and genuine, and a suitcase full of credit cards) so, when she left, she surprised everyone by telling them that she'd decided never to return. That was what she told me, anyway. Was that fakery? Ask a fake - or anyone you know, they'll not know either. Neither will they tell you, unless you give them some money.

The main thing about Ciszka was what a good liar she was/is. Most liars simply lie to cover-up the real; in her case, Ciszka lived the unreal- and that makes things really unreal, don't you think!

With one exception: in bed she was always true, both to herself and to whoever was mating with her at that moment, man or woman. Only at that specific moment, mind. You see, moments change and women change in them.

And no less so Ciszka. Like all women, she was a creature of change; and if that meant that she didn't fit the stereotype of a good faithful woman - well - *fuck you*. Survival is the key, even if you have to lie cheat and fake your way through to achieve it.

Not a total scoundrel, then, but fairly close. And thieves and people like Ciszka the world over have still not discovered how to be true to themselves in any way at all: why it's almost a convention for a thief to be *proud* of their cheating and stealing - but not real about it at the same time.

That's where the word fake and it's distant relative - real - come into play.

So when is fake fake, and real, real? You could say that fake is unreal reality: then again, America didn't exist in real minds until Christopher Columbus (his fake name) known

then as Cristoforo Colon (his real name) had an idea to get there. In the end the West Indies for example, was actually not India at all, but a good fake for those who would never go there. Ergo the *West Indies*.

So when you fake an orgasm girls, and your partner thinks it's real: well is it? Maybe you pre-empted the organic fact of it all, through what is coyly known as female intuition. We're talking lying here, lying down lying, lying on your belly lying, fakery with an assumed purpose - real people have their lives damaged by it. Be it Fake or Real. That's all.

Saturday evening. Buenos Aires was warm, quite a contrast with his last landfall: but then the first taxi driver whose taxi he hailed, ignored everything he had to say and took him to a spiky hotel - where he was apparently supposed to savour

the local *Senoritas*: so far, not good: it took a while, but after much wrangling and waving of his now tattered address note he managed to find Paco the Piano Player, more by luck than by judgement; and hey-Presto! Ciszka, in her Spanish shoes and fashionable cut-away Mantilla.

Gorgeous. *How unexpected!*

"Hello BA!"

"I thought you'd never come back!"

"I didn't, it not me you see here, it just a fantasy!" She laughed gaily.

Thus they drank and listened to Paco and the Tango faking it, until Jake had forgotten just where he was, who he was too: finally, or was that, in the meantime, to switch back, or maybe forward: Ciszka and Frank or maybe Jacques had managed to make it back to her apartment in a creaking stolen Fiat taxi maintained with unreal copied parts; where after the passage

of a few hours they were faking it once more for each other. Sex, you know, orgasm.

Enjoying it, mind you, though Ciszka thought it was just she who was faking it; enjoying faking it in case it didn't happen; moaning, licking her lips to simulate arousal, and yes, now unexpectedly, actually enjoying it, now going at it harder and hotter and more throbbing, with her cunt gripping tighter and more welcoming than she could ever remember. The pain of intense cramping pleasure lit up her vulva like an infra-red night-sight would the dark.

Where does faking it end? Maybe Francisco thought she was the best fuck he had ever had in his whole life.

He pushed his inches into her again and again until she wailed with something primeval; joy, want. It was pleasure, pain, *tight*.

"Now I've stopped faking it at all!" She thought in-between sighs, for the briefest moment...

In fact, bizarrely she was really enjoying it; at any rate the wet patch beneath her belly on the sheet seemed organically cold, transparent enough to be 'real' (or a very good fake).

"Money, will...?" She was going to say something blurred - and at that precise moment, the doorbell rang.

"Oh, God, who can that be?" she said, thrusting her arse against him once more urgently as if afraid of losing his length - and with it the moment.

"Do you think I... answer it?"

"No, not!"

Jack began rebuilding their fragile rhythm against her inflated, tensioned cushion of lips, ramming himself into her again and again until nirvana...

"Ooh, nice."

"You sure?"

Ring, ring! (The doorbell)
Then, Clack! Clack! on the wood
of the door.

Ciszka stiffened, the sensitized lips of her cunt grasping his *machine* fiercely at that moment like another hand. *Halt!* The scent of fresh sweat, juice, *foutre*, everywhere. Nice.

"All right, you'd better answer! Shout out that you're coming."

"You're not?" she said, meaning that it would be nice together, wouldn't it?

"I meant...!"

She could almost feel his frantic anticipation as he eased her clear of his *machine*, its roseate tip straining at its generous foreskin leash, her cunt all at once luxuriantly generous, roomy, liquid, squelching, sipping, squeezing, unconsciously, needy, busy, covetous, greedy, noisy, at him as he slipped out of her.

She stepped out of bed, wiping her cunt quickly and then fainting inadequately at the wettest patch, for reasons he didn't understand, yet.

"Damn, blast!"

This was a bad moment: as she made towards the door she heard him scurrying around behind her doing something or other, heard the cupboard doors give a sudden, staccato 'Clack!' shut, thought that he was maybe just crazy, gathering himself to burst out of the wardrobe, cock bouncing in counterpoint, hard and purpled, large of course, roseate, decorated and marbled by its livid running-gear of veins and yelling when she returned, still hot and ready. "Banzai! No survivors!"

There was moment of relative silence in the room; then he heard voices, some sort of shrill conversation; maybe his presumption had been correct,

there seemed to be two women's voices broken by a plangent, pungent, pregnant, almost silent moment. Then, from his position Joe pulled back when he heard the visitor's voice, alarmingly close in the fragrant room.

Ciszka had let in whoever it was into the darned flat, and the other light voice was somehow familiar, but for the moment he couldn't place it. Crouching in the dark, he pressed his ear to the wardrobe door.

Voice 1:

"...Must have recognized me from the swimming pool. Would you believe that bastard actually phoned my mother... well, they're big buddies, you know - same Freemason's lodge and all that.... Now my mum thinks there's a whole load of pickies of me posing starkers, passing from hand to hand, already on sale at street

corners and going up outside clip-joints all over Soho!"

Clarissa!

Voice 2:

"You idiot" said Ciszka, "Didn't you tell him there was only one?"

Voice 1: (Clarissa?)

"I tried. But you know what they are like - especially Victorians. He didn't believe me. Probably because I don't exactly believe it either. I want to see the rest of those pics by the way - Oh, and the negatives."

"All the way to fuckin' BA!"

"Mummy was worried about what them next door would say if... well... anyway she bought it on Daddy's card: it's a new thing - a cheap off-peak weekend return!" *Such a delightful faux-accent, everyone knew that Clarissa harked from deepest Deptford.*

"Well, you're not going to believe this, but---"

"Come on! It may be your bloody camera, but it's my body, even if you once had a few licks!"

"Look, calm down--"

"Give them to me, you-!"

"Oww...!"

Meantime, a fine flicker, a flash of light against a sharpened wooden spur which flickered inside the wardrobe, had mis-directed Jacques's attention to a spot of light piercing the darkness in the small cupboard.

Manoeuvring his bulk as delicately as possible amongst the over-packed clothes, he applied his eye to the keyhole. All Pancho could see was Ciszka's throat and the roundest part of one tasty naked breast, her dressing gown pulled back against her shoulders in order to reveal that she was naked - and she was standing there apparently immobile.

Habit! Models are like that. All casual about wandering about naked.

Then:

"I'm not going to let go till you give me those photos!" Clarissa's impassioned voice was already beginning to peak.

Jacques tried to vary the angle between his eye and the keyhole in the hope of seeing a bit more - and thus, balancing on the dense, unstable veneers of old credit cards, very suddenly sheared his footing.

Crash! Smash!

"Oh, heck!"

"Aoww!"

"Dammit!"

Jake raised himself from the wreckage on his hands and knees - and looked Clarissa directly in the eye.

"Um, happy endings are stories which haven't finished yet," he said blandly, philosophically, looking blank. He busied himself collating the

scattered, obsolete plastics as if they were playing cards (which in a sort of way they were).

This was no time to be intimidated by a sexual woman, no matter how well made. Ouch!

There was the silence of shock.

After a moment:

"Um... well yes, Ciszka," he opened by way of conversation "...welcome to Buenos Aires...! When are we going to have the pleasure of seeing those photos? Well?"

As it was, Pancho could not recall having seen Clarissa looking more beautiful, even as he gathered himself to realize that she too was here in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with her dark Sun-browned Latinate cheeks and nostrils flaring in anger and some unnameable emotion, likely bemused disbelief, in her eyes. Must be the Latin blood. Could

be jet-lag. Must remember to mention Melatonin.

"I didn't know you two were seeing each other!" she said, suddenly discovering a new topic of rumour-to-be, eleven-thousand kilometres away.

"We're not ...I mean, not exactly," said Ciszka, stooping in an odd sort of way to rummage amongst some folders stacked under the bed, and thus showing her shapely naked business-end and pear shaped vulva to the World as the gown slipped silkily to free her butt.

"The photos are here somewhere..."

"Don't try and run; you'll always be running!"

Clarissa looked blank.

"What?"

"No, I mean - it's a mistake!"

"What"

"What I mean is I know you don't like Players..."

"And Players... Is he a Player?" A vague flourish of bourgeois horror.

"Why, are you surprised?"

"Well, that's what you said"

"Oh, fuck, Clarissa!"

"What's this?"

Ciszka, in her zeal, was touching her toes and baring her arse in order to peer under the bed, thus giving her a perfect view of Clarissa's feet.

"You standing there in your white fuck-me pumps!"

"No need to get nasty - and shove your pussy in his face!"

"Who's protesting!" He said rather weakly, naked as he was and cold as the draught from the open balcony window had become.

A conflict, as yet unnamed, was brewing. Quickly, Franco wrestled together some ideas:

"Listen, people just go home to their lives..."

"Perverts?"

"Look, leave us out of this!"

"Yes, we're free... perverts!"

Clarissa's expression changed from lachrymose to positively jubilant. Not only was she going to get the photos she had come for, but she had discovered the true amazing mind-boggling secret that Ciszka was screwing Jacques the Art Tutor, (or someone very like him.)

She looked Jacques over with an excited, appreciative - experienced - eye. Her fingers sweatd for a camera which she could use to tell the world with.

"Women's agendas are always more hidden than mere men's!"

"Is this a knowledge download?"

"Is it?"

At length Ciszka turned round with the garish, battered envelope of photographs and

noticed immediately how the other two were now eyeballing each other. Her expression darkened.

"*Fuck!*"

"Haven't you ever seen a naked man before?"

"No, not such a well-hung specimen," said Clarissa, trying the idea again, "...after all he's quite *L-A-R-G-E* so you shouldn't keep him all to yourself Ciszka darling, there must be plenty to go eh... around."

She suddenly smiled, offering only the most dangerous, the most vertiginous, of options.

Clarissa was dressed differently that day, having changed from her normal street clothes (sensibly thick *vaqueros* and cowboy boots) into ripped crotch shifting Hampstead-oise jeans that showed off the sleek lines of hump, hips and thighs, with just a stylish v-shaped

taste of her latest G-string peeking over the rear of the waistline, and of course a tight green T-shirt from which her elegant, magnetic, classic, superb, real nipples and tactile chest seemed permanently on the brink of escape.

She, Clarissa was anyway well aware of Jacques's admiration - had been, secretly, for some time - and Ciszka's apparent jealousy merely added to her enjoyment.

Pancho went to stand beside her as she looked at the photos. He caught the intimate sidelong smile as she took the envelope from Ciszka's hand.

"You know, I always enjoy standing there absolutely shaven and naked and having people inspecting my... everywhere... with their eyes and measuring the distance from nipple to clitoris with their pencils... I, eh..."

I found them, the photographs.

The pictures were finally disappointing. Imagine pictures of Madonna, taken in a very hot sauna with a camera lens all smeared with shaving cream. (But of course, like Madonna she might have been shaving all her baby hair, which would be much more fun.)

'Wait till I get back *there*' thought nasty Clarissa... 'Guess what I'll tell 'em!'

"I'm a rotten photographer," said Ciszka having altogether differently creative thoughts, yet apparently confiding. "The one I was showing at work, where you can actually see her arm, was the best one."

Paco looked sympathetic for a millisecond. Blip!

"After all that!" said Clarissa with intense, jet-lagged feeling - "Bloody fucking hopeless!"

"After all that?" said Jacques in imperfect unison. The two of them were suddenly aware that now, when they looked at each other there seemed suddenly the most intimate rapport between the two of them. Something was happening, though only God, and Clarissa, knew what.

There was a silence, time advanced. At length:

"What are we going to do with *her*?" said Clarissa impatiently, indicating that Ciszka who stood on the other side of her, quite naked and quite close, should be totally excluded from their sudden, magnetic, *real* togetherness. '*Cherchez le Femme.*'

"Perhaps we ought to punish her," said Jake, a shared, psychic, idea seeming to flit through his mind. Clarissa smiled, a slow, dangerous, risky sort of smile. Clarissa was the psychic one.

Haha!

"Good idea - but how?"

"When you arrived I had her tied up in the kitchen so that I could beat her" he lied conversationally as Ciszka's draw dropped. "... She has quite a good selection of canes as you can see!" He lied again. Ciszka was literally dumbstruck. Or something.

"*Mmm!*" A meandering moment of madness. Then:

"Oh no you don't!" shouted Ciszka, and made a dive for the door. Too late!

That was her mistake.

"I like it when you struggle," said Frank as they pulled Ciszka into the kitchen. "It makes your breasts gyrate." (He found that fascinating. Right, oh right. Up, down. Left. Left, left.)

"She's enjoying it!" said Clarissa, who had, incidentally, noticed a certain appreciative gleam in Ciszka's eye and

consequently was not entirely convinced by her struggles and protestations.

They spread-eagled her over the kitchen cabinet rather easily and while Jacques held her, Ciszka fastened her wrists and elbows with straps that just happened to be there.

Ciszka's La Perlas, still dangling from the light shade, came in handy to secure the bundled M&S knickers that Paco had shoved between her teeth as a gag.

"Now we've fastened her wrists, how do we get her dressing gown off?" said Clarissa.

"Easy," said Jacques, wielding an ancient Argentinean machete as he peeled it away. Rip, rip.

Zippetty doo-dah!

Soon a rhythmic sound could be heard floating from the windows of the apartment (music

to the initiated) in 3/4 time too:

**'Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!,
Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!'**

At the end of the first bar line they stepped back to inspect their handiwork - Ciszka's delicate skin was criss-crossed with angry wheals as if they had been using a red felt-tipped pen to play noughts and crosses across her body.

Cane in hand, Franco - ever-polite - was just about to ask Clarissa,

"Would you like another turn?" when she rammed her mouth to his, reaching down at the same time to grip his hugely swollen *machine*.

He remembered the quote as if from an age ago: '*Sioux City Sluts get hot slits when the chips're down*' or something. You check, it's back there, somewhere.

The sensations?

The sensations, were they able to report them were...

Anyway, the next thing he knew, Clarissa was fronted up against a cupboard, her jeans down around one ankle, while he pushed the small of her back down savagely which had the effect of almost doubling her over like a doll, the firm resilient rubber of her athletic arse pushing against Jakes' hands, her large overdressed kohl-laden eyelashes almost at ankle level fluttering in perfect time to the relentless thrusts of his cock as it probed, stretched and filled the swollen sweet pinkish swiftly ballooning angry lips of her liquescent quim.

Then, with a sudden, dreamy, wonderfully fast, choreographed movement, she undid the catch of her brassiere and not stopping his tangoing rhythmic thrusts, ripped off her T-shirt revealing-

At last!

What could Joe gasp at such perfection?!

He tore his eyes from her superb mobile woman's breasts, simultaneously twisting around with their very own weird female symmetrical rhythm, to focus on Ciszka's equally enticing pair, their cork-shaped, erect, angry unreal nipples tasting the avenging Argentinean sky, her sweat-streaked body pubescent and anguished yet, with ecstasy, stretched tight over the table like female sexual shrink-wrap.

Yes, there was something crazy, demented you could say - even aphrodisiac in the expression on her upside-down face as she watched Joe and Clarissa humping wildly and loudly while she struggled helplessly against her bonds.

'I might make it up to her later' Joe thought. And then he cancelled his thought. There would be no 'later', not where

they were bound for; 'later' was forever.

The pain and the pleasure overwhelmed, like waves of gas.

Then, his *thang* swollen and painful with excitement, he turned back to Clarissa, first kissing the side of her perfect mouth, then cupping her perfect left breast in his perfection-seeking right hand, as he again plunged in and out between those now perfectly arced, engineered, hydraulically shaped superbly lubricated pale thighs, stoking the depths of her deliciously tight, pinkish-brown, picture-perfect, yet almost luxuriantly pneumatic, fluid vagina which now began to splutter and sing in her own turn a simple gasping song of deep pleasure in ecstatic reply.

Joe said in his turn, rhythmically, in-between strokes in the music and the mad melody of the spheres:

"Hey, look at me, look at my hands, a mass of lines! My name's Jacques, Franck, Frank, Jo-Jo, Jake, Francisco, Pancho, Paco, Francis, Joe; but looky here, you know me don'tcha? I come in all shapes and sizes at all times! Hey, just call me Joe, here, it's your last chance, don't'cha know? Meet Joe B!"

Meantime behind her sopping, transparent, expensive knicker gag, Ciszka screamed long and hard. Somehow amidst all the pleasure something had come clear to her, despite her mute struggles, finally she'd understood - a ripple of music about life and death and forever - while still the other parallel yet separate live notes of an ancient mangled piano seemed to be springing from nothing to here, exploding orgasmically, perfectly and simultaneously bringing glory from her over-

swollen vulva, as if some marauding, consuming passionate opera singer, at the same time plangent, gentle and just as orgasmic, was singing their final notes. And it was indeed then that Ciszka peaked, came, bucked savagely and without warning - except that her eyes became suddenly blank, fixed with what she at last understood, from her clitoris to her ears, rubbery button and skin taut with something Joe couldn't name - so much so that as she looked at - recognized Joe, upside down yet sharp as through a darkened, gleaming new lens - her inverted, blanked, frazzled eyes and aggressive open grimace now seemed to say:

"I recognize you now - fuck you all - now, its eternity isn't it!"

It was that at least; in fact anything you might choose to think - but definitely not what you've been thinking up to

now: she and he had after all been overtaken by a speeding set, a newly ragged series of unassailable wild realities and those, all at the same moment - a veritable traffic-jam of the incontrovertible.

Who knows, maybe she'd thought to say, "*I know what it is, I know... I've always wanted to Meet Joe B!*" But there was no time remaining for that now; they were both choking, on *angst*, laughter and tears, the music of the spheres and of course the future - but past melodies and symphonies of thoughts un-noted, indicating helter-skelter - new life and old *petité morte*, and then finally closeness, excitement - for too at last find peace - like drowning in ancient pleasure, would be wonderful.

And d'you know why?

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