

# Traveller's tales

## Volume 4



**TRAVELLER'S TALES**  
Volume 4

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**F A K E**

"I have loved women  
even to madness, but  
I have always loved  
Liberty more"  
*Casanova*

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

## **Bang.**

*There are some moments that never fail in memory. Moments of total fear and complete alienation.*

*Moments when after the explosion, you hit the ground, knowing suddenly that these could be the last moments of your conscious life, shrapnel snapping against any vertical structure, and the explosion that you never heard, throwing-up clouds of dust, invisible in the darkness, lead flying by and away from you, buzzing in the air stream as fragments and rubble glance along the stone and sand into sudden silence.*

*Silence now.*

*Then, life fails to flash before you, you go totally blank, the only thing that you do know for sure is that you are dead.*

*You don't see anything much, just a blur and a fractured, textured, grey, flashing darkness. That's how being dead is.*

*But the fact that you're thinking means you don't know if you're dead-not for sure, because there are many elements of existence which still prickle. But things are never so simple-if you're not dead you are right on the knife edge of it, balancing between awareness and that other state that you'll not return to report. Not in this world, anyway.*

*You could be 'gone', now.*

*Then follows a long, long, time; maybe a minute, or a month, a week: how long does it take to die?*

You're completely alone now, feeling the blood trickling away from you, you're completely isolated, no form of defence or power.

There follows a distant, flickering sensation. Maybe, just perhaps I'm alive.

If I'm dead now, they'll just find my corpse stiff and frozen, if they ever find it.

Blank, dark. Just the sound of a whisper of air.

Maybe my crazy obsessive game of life-roulette has by-passed me this time, maybe I've 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, distantly, all broken.

There was a time before this day-night dream when I was clear of all this, 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 steel embrace of fear is a huge instinctive, addictive buzz, forever attracting you to return; which often kills. But no-one ever comes back to tell you that.

Now I move a finger, feel the dust on my mouth.

Its three o'clock in the morning and the shooting has stopped. Shrapnel lies thick, peppered against the wall like yesterdays house-dust.

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

I pull my body slowly through the dust, to the wall, then rest against it, checking my limbs to detect breaks or injuries. Mercifully, my eyes are undamaged.

Now the silence is palpable, stereo, perfect, as I move. I hear the crunch of sand, and feel the cold wind meandering over me.

I move one hand, one elbow.

Yes, I can move my arm.

*There's a pain from somewhere in my body,  
somewhere I can't isolate. My back is wrecked, my  
side is painful, my face is scratched and bloody.*

*It's so dark. No moon. This must be the  
darkest moment of them all.*

## Chapter 1

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

*And then he awoke.*

*The things he'd seen, the sights, the gorgeous sunsets and the marvellous dawns, the tropical forest, their treetops like broccoli gently steaming in the early heat as the sun comes up, the Valley of the Zambezi early in the day, everyday, beyond that the generous threatened savannahs and the 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, meantime, on the wide horizon, isolated villages, hamlets, partnered with nameless, un-mapped densely-packed conglomerations.*

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

*Sights to die for...*

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 opened 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 and here, now in the cool grass, your lust was becoming palpable, and I was part of it. How good that seemed.

Later we would dance together naked in your room 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, honestly, simply lost to life and to time. Really imaginary.

**Fake.**

'I'm walking through an empty but very verdant area. There's nobody there, and 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 link.

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

"What are you doing with the computer?"

## Chapter 2

There was at first just a suggestion, an idea, and then the beam of energy itself broadened out and became a beam of light, then the light moved and he realised that I'd opened his eyes.

Outside, traffic moved. The wind moved the windows slightly, unevenly, uneasily, rattled the panes as if to shake them free of their bonds.

The cord bounced against the smeared glass. Outside the dust raised itself in September spirals, semi invisible.

Another hot September afternoon, late, the Sun beginning to fall behind the palm trees , In the distant scheme of things , if you had super hearing you would hear the sea.

Some mornings I'd walk out into the street, and there, nestled between various structures, I would see that blue vee of sea.

But now, this September afternoon, I'd woken for some reason from a kind of slumber.

There was a rap on the glass. It wasn't simply the cord making a noise, perhaps it was a coin?

I opened his eyes once again and swivelled his feet from the top of the desk down onto the floor. He reached forward, and his hand found the back of the 'phone. He clicked the 'phone on:

"Yes"

"Is that Francisco Villa?"

"It is"

"Mr. Villa, do you remember me - Frederick Black?"

The sharp accent cut-in against the background noises - distinctly foreign, perhaps Scottish?

I wasn't so good with accents, at least, not today.

"That's right, it's Francisco Villa"

"I've got something that might interest you"

"Yes, eh, Frederick, I do remember you"

"We were talking about mutual friends - people we knew, together"

"People we knew?"

"People we knew together?"

"Well, that was at Teba's Bar wasn't it?"

"No, it was at Manolo's, remember?"

"I always confuse bars"

"So do I."

"We were eating Tapas, do you remember?"

"Oh yes, I remember it"

I remembered nothing.

"Ehm, how are you anyway"

"I'm doing fine"

That was a lie.

"Good to hear you're busy - do you think you could handle something more?"

"I could try - for a friend, in fact I'll lower the fee slightly, though of course expenses..."

"Well, I understand, expenses can't be lowered"

"Absolutely"

"Fine, then"

I leafed through my imaginary agenda.

"When can we meet, when can we discuss this?"

"Uhhh" I leafed once more through the non-existent agenda.. "I'm free most of the remaining days this week, lucky that."

"We could meet any day you want"

"What about late tomorrow afternoon? I have a lunch meet, and then I'm basically free"

"That sounds fine - may I bring my friend who needs help?"

"Of course - could you just tell me bit about your friend?"

"She'll want to speak to you"

"Sounds very charming"

"This things are rarely charming, Francisco"

"You are right, Frederick, business sometimes is not quite businesslike"

I heard laughter at the other end of the line. The sharpness of verbal focus distorted in such a way that I wasn't sure whether or not Frederick was meaning straight satire, or else that he was taking the time to think.

"Yes, Frederick..."

"Fred, if you prefer--"

"Yes, five-ish--"

"Teba's Bar?"

"It's at that place they call Crouch End, isn't it?"

"That's what the smart folks call it!"

"At the bar"

"It's small enough that you can't get lost!"

It was a warm and blustery early autumn evening, and the starlings squabbled noisily in the trees bordering the squares off the Calle St. Miguel. People walked relaxedly along the narrower concourses where the bars and the restaurants grouped together, and talked about this and that or nothing much, for that matter, as they expounded the times of their lives.

Teba's Bar was set slightly back from one of the busier concourses, down a side alley between a decrepit whorehouse and a shop selling flamenco dresses for transvestites and a hairdresser's shop, somehow lost in the wilderness of the bars and boutiques and broken-down businesses, backed by a pizza parlour, also suffering from the generally run-down look of business in the area.

Yes, you could say that business was not prospering in this part of the world, though they'd never tell you, and, who knows, you might be right.

I ordered a *Mahou* and reacted to the cold glass as it breached his lips. Still, the liquid itself was satisfying.

"Hola! Francisco!"

The voice was almost at my elbow, and I started from his dream. I gathered my thoughts, for beside me was the man I distantly recollected from Manolo's bar, accompanied by a tall dark gipsy of a woman, whose bright black eyes and dark skin informed me that she was *gitano* through and through.

"Hey, hola!"

"This is my *Amiga*, Colorada"

Colorada did nothing, giving no gesture, simply flashed her eyes at me.

Frederick gestured at a table and we sat around it after an interval.

"What was that?"

"Nothing" The woman spoke with the unpunctuated drawl of the Deep South.

There was something between them - that Francisco Villa found little interest in, as yet.

They exchanged glances.

"Look", said Frederick to the woman "I shall have to leave you with Francisco here... I'll do something around town and I'll meet you in that coffee-shop, you know, 'La Tahona' later.

The woman remained silent, perhaps sealed into this by some agency that I could not comprehend, the small movements of her face betrayed powerful emotions which as yet remained un-codified.

She waited several minutes, toying with her glass of *tinto* before obviously deciding to begin telling Francisco Villa her story.

He'd sat there for several minutes while she gathered her thoughts: then:

"It was not my idea to come today"

"I realise..."

"Frederick is a good friend..." she said this with a sort of irritation, as if the words themselves were not her friends, "but sometimes friends cannot help each other... so we came to you."

She called him 'C', though he was unlikely to be known as that, someone who had reached a certain point in his dealings down the coast such that a series of untoward things resulted. First, his family became uneasy about the fact that his wealth had become so noticeable; then that he had become close with many dubious types along the coast, and finally that he gambled frequently at casinos in what was called as the Golden Mile (indeed for an important member of a well-known family this was almost a scandalous state of affairs).

Now, added to all this, he was sleeping with a *putana*, a *gitana* of considerable public profile, not someone he just paid for by the hour at *Selecta*, the largest whorehouse at this end of the coast, no, someone he saw every day, for no cost except to his reputation and status.

### Chapter 3

#### *Francoise*

"But tell me... Why were you there ... No... How were you there?" Suspicion throbbed in his temples.

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

"You're much too delicate for this."

They look at one another for a moment.

"Gentle, perhaps."

"Okay."

"I know." She has that twang in her voice - perhaps Manchester, though she tells him she's French, Francoise is her name. He isn't too good on accents. Maybe he's wrong. He often is. She is talking about something else.

This weird new life of mine had begun to realign itself with a fateful direction and at an unaccustomed speed that normally I would have thought impossible. Why, up to now life had been little more than a long trudge.

*'And this was weird, a wonderfully particular moment, a special day coming at me in an unexpected way, 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.'*

Later.

I opened some door in my brain, and suddenly life came at me in an unexpected way, a melange of things - there was the voice of Madeline Peyroux, (or had I mistaken it for that of Billie Holliday?); there was the background noise of

traffic on a turnpike somewhere; near here there were planes landing and deep voices talking: activity going on, and I couldn't understand because at the same time the sky was busy with things I couldn't control.

I was losing control of the things which I could control - which were all part of my life - somewhere my life was snowballing out of proportion, but in a very unpleasant way, corkscrewing, losing height and gaining speed at a rate that was difficult to calculate.

Now, from out of circulation 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'*.

That moment was this because I was in my slumber, in a state beyond control.

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

I was offshore now, drifting and coursing on the sandbanks, a temporary respite, because between me and the deep ocean lay a small strip of insecure substance, rocks, sand, the remains of the coastal strip. And there, to my right was the now rapidly increasingly distant beach opposed by, on my left, deep water.

Have you ever noticed how the ocean 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 you die).

On this 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, at the other side of the world, for example).

But life of its nature being continuous, until it suddenly stops one day by something larger than life, which catches and strangles it, well, it's going to be indefinite.

Yet I still have Billie Holliday or Mademoiselle Peyroux zooming between the distant backgrounds and the trashy foreground of my mind, some insane procession of phenomena which clicks away my life to nothing.

Imagine, all my love, you, Françoise, I see you 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 in your Fuck-Me pumps.

And now, like some crazy fiddler I'm caught in the centre of it all. I'm getting wilder, and the world is just gaily getting on with it while everything else follows some sylvan track, while it tracks around me, because you can never get off once you've managed to struggle onto this tram to nowhere, while all those other people just go home to their lives. Simple.

Life, I mean. But anyway, far enough away to create some response in you that you don't understand about what you haven't yet done.

It's all a crazy conglomeration, but can it be true?

Of course it can, we sit and think and then you tell me you don't like players (again) and I realise that women's motives are always more concealed than men's are.

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. I can hear the sea in the background,

very distant, the sky is black. 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 low lights set into those walls.

In this part of the world there are no streetlights.

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 other, 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.

Yes, this is a different world, a different way of getting old, you could say, a different way of realising one's mortality.

Mortality: mortality will come at us unexpectedly Françoise, in a rush, and you know that you can never hang on, one day you're bound to lose your balance, bound to be sliding on a tilted iced surface.

There is no balance. Any balance that you think you've got is just a fantasy, and any balance that you think you've got just makes things worse until something bizarre occurs. After all, your jeans are too tight tonight and you 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, a wood hidden by trees, outside the metro at Roche-Barbés in-between two rather 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. For 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 have to one of the *hetarii* and just 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, more noble 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 language 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, and that includes, after the inevitable start with some sort of cod-philosophy to start the twirl, in any establishment: throughout the streets and cafes around Odeon, the café frontages along the Grandes boulevards such as the Boulevard St. Germaine, outside (Café) Lipp, La Coupol, or if you want to be aggressive, Les Deux Magots, where one can sit, for merely the price of a wild start at the races, where Camus, Sartre, Picasso, Matisse, Chopin, Tchaikovsky placed their asses whilst bathing in *their* lost moments of forgetfulness-whilst forgetting one's own.

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 (Arianne) 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 unknown American Lee Miller seduced the already famous Man-Ray and became famous herself 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 the alcohol succeeded in being successful on her 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 everything else in the phenomenal world out 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, lost.

Often, after we'd made 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 smell her musk everywhere. Sable. It's about time someone invented a perfume called just that.

Arianne had a secret number she could use to phone her parents, free-of-charge.

She had a sweep of thick, elegant, heavy, boyish Provençale nutbrown hair, a masculine sweep to her strong blond-haired arms, strong shoulders, and a shapely, muscular back. She was an athlete, wild.

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, 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 Arianne'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 labia.

Disease!

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

Arianne 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 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 were, 'You see I don't like ballers, *'ballers do nothin' for yer''*

I'll bet she's wiser now, but richer and still wild, still willing to ball for the right price.

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?

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, after all, forgetting Man-Ray forever, she'd found his weakness, the fact that he was human after all.

Nature cycles -

We

Compose a

Minute part

Of that.

There's no time. 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 bye, things are now really distant.

And there I was, at Roche-Barbés, 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.

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 Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians in this quarter of Paris speak a 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; I can see the Sacré Coeur in the middle distance, up above me.

Who was I waiting for, after all?

Then, here she is: it's as if spring has sprung all over again: It as if permanent Spring, only September: I think September, the Sun breaking through the marvellous green trees and the branches almost imperceptibly swaying, making the treeshadows 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 the excuse to pull me by my lapels too 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 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, preconceiving the glorious, grainy moments ahead of us, our lives, 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 coruscating 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 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 could see clearly through the slick glass doors, across the 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 clear day I could maybe dream of the glaziers so many centuries before who crafted glass at the side of the church and created 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 had only just heard that there would be work for them 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. Now that's a huge word.

Because what happens later is my life and her life.

Those musical hours we spent together have massive meaning still, 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 compulsive chemistry set which, naively, we call *our Universe*.

And now, what shall I say - you see, they've gone, all gone, that splendour in the grass, by La Coupole or outside the *Sélect Bar*, the dark cold nights as we turned our steps towards Place du General Bèurét, taking time to make love, leaving all those unseen, thought, spoken, splendours behind us at the crowded snobbish bar of the *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 table, stirred the pair of chairs, waiting for us like lovers meeting again, again - and the wind in it's turn nuzzled 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, enthralled by my new pleasure, by my new discovery-this new undiscovered undisclosed 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-for it is not forever.

You once told me, with your *Canadienne* accent, 'Yu can 'av anythang you waant, anythang'.

I didn't understand for a moment, yet still I made you as mine as I wished to be yours - we became confederates, lovers, but sadly never friends. It had the stamp of time on it.

Those days and nights are as fresh as this morning's paint to me now, addictive; I can smell its sharp powerful muscle, its odour, and touch its sticky sheen of fat new colour, like a painted room of my life.

And now I'm stuck with later, for that's where we all are.

Can we take our finds with us?

Those 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, while nothing is new in time, because everything is ancient and firstborn all at the same fugitive second.

We were on those steps, we were between Roche-Barbés, hell, the future and all the ghosts, plus ours yet to come, as well as those clamorous banshees which whistled in my ears and made me deaf.

Coco-Bongo was our place later that day's evening. The time belonged to us in a way impossible to incise merely into any time, our time.

We danced to Frank Sinatra like the true strangers as 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 would 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 mind, even at that moment when death finally cheats us of what we never thought we might have had.

We're forever, that's all. Forever. Don't regret, regret means to never let go, and life will take care of that anyway, one day.

## **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, 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 never existed).

She spoke nervously, hardly judging her commentary, 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!)

She 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.

Reality 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:

Now I knew it. I'd seen her I was sure, striking as she was, but never spoken to her - maybe this was happening in reverse, to her, too...

I scrabbled for some sort of understanding, remembrance. I hit upon a name, some shadow passed through my mind.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Life Two**

#### **Monday**

Rue du Dragon

Monday, life, vital, real, temporary, dynamic, bursting out from every face, 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 we begin to explore the prisons of our lives, most of which will become our caskets, if not our graves.

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

Out, in the cool wind of freedom, it's only too easy to forget the delicate fragility of our carefully constructed freedoms, too easy to imagine that they are difficult, if not impossible, to breach when in fact they are easily attacked, and which, without continuous attention, like some sick individual, they suddenly expire and threaten to drown us as if we were a decorative hulk, which, overloaded, unexpectedly begins to founder as it leaves the smooth harbour for the choppy waters of the sound.

It's a paradox, then, that the ocean never ceases to beckon us on, greedy for our embraces,

never informing us of the profundity and danger which starts when the mirror-bright surface is broken and we taste the salty reality of the deeps.

Just as the ocean has claimed 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 perspective which they contain - and ourselves reflected in it.

Which brings me to where we are now, sitting in a side street, listening to accents which do not understand. Contemplating a late, gentle, Monday afternoon.

It was 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...*

**Chapter 7**  
**Life Three**  
**Tuesday**

Boulevard St.Michel

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

*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 which 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 item; something more for the archive.*

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

*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, dream to dream.*

*But you never were aware that our dreams it is which describe us, who we are, they are us, and are our lovers too.*

*That is the most important factor about the love I still find for you; we are the stuff of our dreams - not the sick pretences of others.*

*Yes, I know it was lost on us, and that there's no chance of ever reclaiming our innocence.*

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

*You see, I'd managed to forget you, and except for a train of coincidences which underlined my need more keenly, perhaps I would have done so.*

*I'd lost the pain, staunched the bleeding - or so I thought - but then you ripped open the stitches and the blood leapt out and doubled the pain.*

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

*For that reason I'm going to return whatever you gave me: as for our things, they were for you and me, not for anyone else Destroy them.*

**Chapter 8**  
**Life four**  
**Wednesday Girl**  
Via Del Corso

Women look into the mirror 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.

Too crude for you? Cavalli evening wear and matching luggage your thing? That's the problem about being a designer. The commitment, you see.

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 doin'?  
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?"

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

"Do you think I can do it?"

"You win- you do as you please."

"About you?"

"Of course!"

"You're just a fantasy anyway"

"Maybe you aren't"

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

"Later, we're in a bar, its almost empty, this being either a shaded late afternoon, or else much, much later. She's behind the bar wearing a short tight dress as usual, the hard 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 show onto the shelf, then clicks it back:

"Drink?"

"Well, that depends upon..."

"What?"

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

"Unh, I'm coming back..." She skeeters to the other end of the bar where a hopeless drunk asks for another brain killing scotch on the rocks, then returns 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), which puts me off the whole idea:

"Come on-finish it!"

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

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

"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?"

"Strike me, then"

"What?"

"I love you"

"Are you crazy"

"I adore you"

"You want a fuck then?"

"I'll do as I'm told!"

"You're not.."

"I'm not Izabel, no"

"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. I'm thinking of places to hide the alcohol. She's drumming the top of an empty glass, terumppty trump. There's no-one else in the bar now. She walks to the door and throws the bolt, closes the shutters. Now we're alone amidst the alcoholic odours and the scent of spoilt smoke in the air like cirrus.

"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. 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.

She's looking into my eyes and licking her lips to tell me how ready she is.

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

Her hands straighten her hips.

"Do you have five minutes?"

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

## **Chapter 9**

### **Life Five**

#### **Thursday**

Calle de Danza Invisible

This is how the story began, one late winter night.

Once upon a time there was a place in a valley bordered by succeeding discoloured and relentlessly patched strips of tarmacadam. Criss-crossing this small place were the great routes of the world; Moscow, Tokyo, Havana were directly linked to this place, as were Rome, Naples, Sperlonga and Fregene.

Florian's was open that night, and Frank wandered through the doors searching for his soulmate. This might take time.

There by the bar sat Hans, nursing a deeply primally damaged soul. Frank and Hans fell to talking about the world and its wants. Particularly theirs. Frank ate olives to neutralise the taste of cheap wine.

Little known to them, Theresa and her husband were at that moment entering another long argument.

Geographically speaking, they were located four hundred metres due south of Florian's, as the crow flies. There was one crow actually resident in Torremolinos, but it could not fly in a straight line.

Theresa? Theresa had not yet surfaced in either Franks or Hans' imaginings.

Simultaneously, somewhere close, Sue was contemplating intercourse. She sat by the window of the apartment she shared with her lover of seven years and contemplated sex with someone else. Not furtively exactly. What would you call it?

She saw a face on the street below and leaned forward a moment for a voyeuristic look as that sweet something between her legs seemed to awaken for a brief second, perhaps as it had never done before: or was that just another function of the imagination?

He would be none of the people I have mentioned, for he was yet a figment of her psyche. After all she needed love in her life, and love it was that seemed to have gone.

Or was that also her imagination? She felt stirred, confused.

"I feel confused", she said, an inexplicable bubble rising in her throat.

"What?" said a voice from a man in black trousers and white polo shirt, currently nursing their cat in his arms.

"Because the centre of a woman's life is her love" she said, turning towards him.

"What does that code mean?", he enquired.

"Nothing".

Indeed, what was it that she could tell him?

That moment, far away in Crouch End, amid the jumble of decaying houses and almost within psychological spitting distance, two lovers turned themselves away from each other, their heated bodies each ignoring the other for a long telltale second.

"My God, I'm hot!"

The woman rose and walked naked to the 'fridge in the kitchen corner. He watched the shape of her sex, enhanced by her swollen lips, as the light enticed its way between her legs.

"Want some orange juice?"

She felt nettled. After all she knew that Jeff that had known she hadn't wanted him to finish just then, she knew that he knew she was still hot and not yet satisfied, all swollen. She walked through the kitchen like a cowgirl who'd spent a long fitfull day at he rodeo. Besides, recently he had often been brutal, and this, tonight, seemed to her to be almost too much. Well, enough, anyway.

'Maybe I've had enough of him; after all he's trusting me too much, that frisson of excitement that used to happen between us those first exciting days has gone - maybe I should just start to look around!'

'God, how sweet she is- and look at her body, how I'm getting to really need her.'

She sat on the edge of the bed, wanting more, wanting him to take her and to use her sex, her body, explore her and make her inwardly smile, a smile engraved into stone with that secret Cheshire cat smile that she wanted so well, forever.

Of course though, he was tired; in fact he had fallen into a sort of half-slumber, he just lay there, pretty much limp all over.

She moved into the shower room and masturbated herself with cream, , furiously as the warm water cascaded down her body, bringing the flesh to a new hated awareness.

But it was no good, all spoiled, she had only made herself sore. Now she was sore all ways.

Two years. They said that women thought of two years as being the limit of passion between two people.

Perhaps *they* had reached the limit.

She pulled the towel from between her legs and draped herself in it. He had begun to softly snore.

How obscene. He ate, fucked her, and snored - she had only the most menial part in it that was all, she offered him her tender feelings and then he'd abuse her flesh. She was sore all over, and God, how she held that against him!

## **Chapter 10**

### **Friday**

#### **Life Seven**

Boulevard Palma de Majorca

*I'm sitting by the road near Malaga, looking at the cut-out edges of the mountains in the near distance through the early morning haze, and in the warm humid heat of a year which is beginning to wane before I was aware that it had even waxed, I dream the words I remember..*

*Softly blow the evening breezes  
Softly fall the dews of night  
Yonder walks the Moor Alcanzor  
Shunning every glare of light...*

*This is all to do with the end of one thing and the unseen birth of another.*

*The moments I exist in are as compartmented from each other as are our lives, lived at places separated from each other by great distances: the end of my last life was impossible to relate with the beginning of this new one. You couldn't call it brand new, because it was born worn and dented and... well, used.*

**Chapter 11**  
**Life Eight**  
**Saturday**  
Ostergade

That Danish girl danced for me. She always danced for me, usually in the process of getting naked.

She would dance on the bed and then sort of snucker down onto my chest, bringing all the scents of Araby to my nostrils.

Soon after our first meeting, but before we screwed, one afternoon she opened her door and then showed me a tousled mess of a creature, a dog after all, and then she looked up at me anxiously:

"This is my Muff"

"I like it"

"Well, I'm pleased you do because we're.. like-"

"I understand, all of a piece"

"Yeah"

"Anyway, I'd like to ask you a few things"

"You mean because we've.. met-?"

"Yeah"

"What sort of things?"

Her glance told me more than simple words ever could: it said, *'in two hours ago you'll be inside me and I'm frightened that you'll give me so much pleasure, to the point that I'll cry out and weep and won't tell you what I'm thinking, and now.. and now it's like interrogation!'*

"It is!"

"What?"

"Nothing"

There was a long silence while we re-considered all the garbage we'd got through in our lives, just to reach this damaged place.

"When you were married-did you ever.. see.. another man?"

"No, I'd never do that!"

## **Chapter 12**

### **Life Nine**

#### **France the Whore**

Calle Bachiller de Palma

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"

"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 Calle 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, even if it was part of the uniform.

She turned to me, the light glaring spring-like behind her head, almost a halo, 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"

"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, she was wearing tight leggings which accentuated the fact that she was a whore, but I had always had a soft spot for whores, though this was only in my mind. It was the greater fact that she had that kind of soiled, battered beauty that some whores have that 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".

Now she opened her legs and gave me a peek at the goods.

"Yes"

"I could say that..."

"What"

"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"

"People do that sort of thing".

Now she was sitting in just a tiny home made silken g-string, right in the centre of my imagination, her legs canted to one side so that I could see the goods outlined against the grain of the material. She was wet, and that was nice

## Chapter 13

Ostiense

As I entered the room, more a sort of cabin really, where your voice rang damp round the walls, the phone was ringing, I lunged for it.

Luc was at the other end.

"When'll you be here?"

"After I've found her"

"When's that?"

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

"She ran off?"

"Like a wild thing!"

"Into the jungle?"

"It's all jungle round here"

"It's easy to find her"

"Oh, yeah"

"Sticks out like a Russian whore on Calle St. Miguel"

"Narrows it down to ten thousand, then."

## Chapter 14

Saturday

Osterbro

*'Where is that bitch Ulla?' Jimmie, the photographer asked no-one in particular. Nobody seemed in a hurry to answer him. The room was empty, just me, you see.*

*'I'll phone her apartment, 'I said.*

*But instead of phoning, I hurried down to the street, where my ZYX was parked. Ulla Thompson's apartment was only a few blocks away, so within a couple of minutes I was standing outside her door with my elbow on her bell.*

*She opened the door. The apartment had the feel about it of being someone else's home, borrowed for a hurried weekend, untidy, smelling familiar, rancid perhaps, strange.*

*'Of course I didn't forget the bloody session - I'm a professional!' she said, irritated.*

*Ulla was wearing a dressing-gown which she held together with her left hand at the throat. I could see that she had been crying.*

*'It's just that I was just about to have a shower when He phoned up and said it was all over between us.' (That was Frank, Frank was her boyfriend, actually, her ex-boyfriend, now: why are there so many good/bad Franks in the world?)*

*'Just like that. No explanation. No -' Ulla gulped and wiped her eyes, allowing her dressing-gown to swing open.*

*I pretended not to notice.*

*'I mean, no explanation ..... Hell!'*

I was being sympathetic. Well, that's the way it was supposed to sound.

Ulla was standing next to a mirror on which a message was scrawled in her favourite lipstick. She caught sight of herself as she turned.

'God, I look a mess.'

She clutched at the lapels of her dressing-gown again.

'Put some coffee on while I get dressed.'

I went into the kitchen. It took me a little time and I'd just located the coffee when I heard a strange, wet, animal noise from across the hall.

It was the sound of Ulla sobbing. The noise became louder. Treading softly I went to her door. She was lying face down on her rumpled bed, her beautiful, fine, shoulders heaving.

'Ulla.'

She gave no answer. I sat cautiously on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her upper arm. After a few moments she stopped crying and rolled over on to her back. She lay there, staring up at me, blank. In the striped light from the window blinds her face was the colour of jade, like a piece of sculpture. Danish Sculpture, naturally.

'Why?' she asked suddenly, blank.

Her dark-fringed eyes, flecked with blue and gold like Covent Garden marmalade, were brimming with tears. I leaned forward self-consciously to kiss them away.

The next thing I knew was that she had her tongue through my teeth and was pulling me down on top of her. She no longer seemed concerned with holding together the front of her dressing-gown, under it she had on only a caché-sexe, Ulla was awfully well-muscled for someone so slender.

'I don't want to take advantage,'

'What's this then?' Ulla asked fondly, tweaking the increasingly prominent peak at the front of my jeans '..it's because of me, isn't it? Isn't it?'

'Eh?'

'Actually, it's bigger than Frank's, that asshole,' Ulla said maliciously. 'I mean it's.. large.. got much more.. calibre!

She'd ben looking at my jeans but now she said:

'He's an asshole you know, so far up himself there's... Oh, forget it. And I used to think his was like a, well, like a cucumber. Do you know - no, how could you? - fuck, damn - I've never done it with an uncircumcised man before. It'd have served Frank right if I'd been fucking with someone else when he rang to tell me'.

'Put it away now.' Suddenly she seemed oddly calm.

Easier said than done.

'Here, let me help you,' she said. She put her hand around my cock, squeezing deliciously, then suddenly we were kissing tongue to tongue, but this time she didn't have her arms around my neck because her busy hands were reaching down to her hips, loosening the caché-sexe.

It took a moment, perhaps a year and now she was making a sharp intake of breath as I slotted into her.

It was a good fit. At first only the mouth of her vagina seemed wet - a dryness and tightness higher up impeded me for a moment, then ripened and melted, letting me in all the way, like a tight, luxurious beckoning warm glove.

The bed creaked and the mattress whispered hoarsely as our bodies adjusted to each other's rhythm.

From outside came the baritone rattle of freight cars passing a block away. After they had gone, all I could hear was the bed and Ulla, her eyes closed in a frown of taut concentration.

There were still tears on her lashes - and the noises she was making seemed too relate to something she was doing to herself rather than what I was doing to her, but yet her hot flesh seemed to rise and curve and fill my hands wherever I grabbed her, and when I tugged at her dressing-gown she rose, shucked it off with a single practised movement and bounced back almost

under me expertly, interrupting her self-addressed sex noises to remark, with her ordinary suburban intonation;

"Want some too, Buster?"

"Name's not Buster!"

She glanced down at herself with a mixture of complacency and nervousness, as if checking that her limbs were in place.

'You dope,' she said at length to no-one in particular.

She stretched ostentatiously and reached down as if searching for something, 'I haven't shaved this week,' she confided.

'I like you with fuzzy-legs,'

Actually I wasn't sure if that was true. She had the most marvellous legs to photograph but now that I'd got my hands on them I found the muscles too large and coarse and slack for my taste. I preferred the sleeker, tighter muscling of her upper arms, even though they had that female thing of seeming stuck on to her body not quite correctly. She crooked her elbow and made a fist so that I could feel her bicep.

'Like a little boy's,' I said.

'God, I hope you're not queer,' she said, extricating herself, laughing and reaching across my shoulder to check something.

'There's no point in going to the studio,' she next said. 'Jimmie will have gone off home by now. My agent's going to be furious when he finds out I was here, fucking instead of being photographed. Not that I'll tell him what I was doing of course.'

She poked me suddenly, painfully.

'God, I'll murder you if you tell anyone at the agency that you've been with me. If you do, I'll never speak to you again. Ever,' she said, staring at me with eyes the colour of cocaine dawn.

'I couldn't resist you'

'Honest?'

'What's honest got to do with it?'

'Your hair was the same... it was a sequence of events all jinxed around; besides I was lying down'

I wasn't sure what to say-

'Well, I suppose I'd better have a shower.'

'Was that it? Wham, bang, kapow, and... Oh! I'll never speak to you again, ever, if you tell anyone?'

'No, hang on,' I said, and tried to kiss her.

Her legs opened. She gave a quick appreciative squeeze with her left hand to test my erection: a moment later there came that sharp intake of breath I'd begun to know.

'I like it slow to begin with,' she said in an exaggerated voice, trying if anything to sound extra-casual, as if she didn't want me to think she hadn't yet figured out the correct male and female roles in sex. 'Not too deep, but getting faster and deeper. That's right, you're learning fast..... faster and deeper ..... That's good ..... Wow!

She had her eyes shut - not because kissing with one's eyes closed was a sign of true love, as one pretended when one was thirteen, simply that she didn't need or want to look.

When I kissed her she suddenly sucked back at me with an aggressiveness that said only that my mouth was not my mouth, but merely a convenient pair of lips.

'I've never seen you looking so beautiful.'

Suddenly her enigmatic smile broadened, became almost seraphic.

'Do you always talk so much? I thought this was meant to be nonverbal communication.'

She had said only a few minutes earlier, 'I'll murder you if you tell anyone at the studio that you've been with me!' and suddenly, even as I rammed again and again between her legs, I was filled with resentment and despair: now, inspired by a kind of demon of mischief and revenge, I glued my mouth to that beautiful throat of hers.

Then - she was there, we were both there. Together. Bucking like broncos.

We lay side by side for about as long as it takes to count one hundred in a game of hide-and-seek.

'You know,' Ulla said, 'For a moment it felt exactly as if you were giving me a love bite.'

She sat up, fumbled around in the halflight and found a titanium-mounted hand-mirror, something she'd gleaned from a shoot for Cartier.

'Gaard! Don't touch me! -' She burst suddenly into a flood of tears, throwing herself face down on her pillow, her slender, fine, exercised shoulders heaving.

Gingerly I turned her over, began kissing the tears from her eyes and cheeks, till I noticed how each kiss caused her to give a little quiver, and her sobs to become more like a catching of breath, and lower down, her knees begin to spread and rise. Again.

Outside it was a lovely day. The windows of Ulla's bedroom, tinted against rays harmful to her beauty, emphasized the mauve of the clouds and the orange of the sky.

'Come on, you bastard,' she said.

I wished this wasn't really happening. I wished that I was on another planet.

I opened my eyes and lay back upon the ungentle surface of the divan.

'Next one along's eternity!'

'Come on, you bastard,' Ulla said again.''

## Chapter 15

Z E N  
w I t h  
Z A Z A

I look like shit when I look at myself in the reflections along the road, that's what I feel like I've to say.

It might have been that I was not awake, that I slept through my ordeal only to waken after that peculiar passage of events, or that I was mute, I'd lost my voice and so, perversely, my right of protest.

Earlier, I'd given in to my primal sensation, some ancient picture of myself, that, and the alternative one - that of wanting her so much that whenever we'd passed a doorway and the light had been right, I'd pushed her into it and flattened her yielding body against the musty wood, or the shiny pungent new paint, so that she gave a little gasp of pleasure and saved-up desire as I felt her heat radiate into my body, felt her clammy warm moist skin want to integrate with mine, felt her beginning to awaken.

But that would be too easy a de-coding of the situation we were in; me wanting just her silence and her lips, she wanting my presence and the temporary grasp on power that having me inside her would give her. Just enough maybe to lever a breath of misunderstood longing from her, make her sensitive and totally aware that she must give me as little as she could so that there would be something left over, for levers, for later, for some sort of handle on the insecurity of tomorrow's questions. For robbery, for losing that which she'd given me in a mismanaged moment.

Mismanaged? Just as I was lusting for her, so she must have wanted me. Could that qualify as mismanaged? Why must a real moment in our lives be predicated with control, with having and controlling and not with giving? Now, that is the point after all, the point at which all the sophisticated artifices begin to wallow deep, rudderless. The Interface between real and politicised, between imaginary and desired, a political set of blind lines, drawn with the ruler of expediency.

But that was it after all - my understanding - that I would have to move fast to have her, combined in infinite space with her intuition that speed and sheer brutal moment would mean insecurity and, well, emotional darkness.

*(Is that why she'd always spoken about 'security' about 'risk' about making sure that things were 'right'? I hadn't known her that long, but it seemed just right, anyway.)*

This dynamic then, this wired message from a lost, helpless continent, communications all scrambled, made me more passionate, made her more desiring, loving - perhaps controlling, fearful.

So we continued at length along various byeways, tipping the velvet of the Grandes Boulevards, then entering Avenue Maine, following the profile of the streets in some vain recapitulation of their original central theme, ultimately rounding through the scatter of streets which contains those Moroccan and Tunisian restaurants, streets winding towards the Seine, lost in night and blanked with the Morse-Code of flickering distorted lights and neon.

And the central theme of all this? The subtext, the agenda, the target code? - Why, how much can I give you - how much will you take!

Or is it perhaps - how much can I get away with? The sum of the English disease: what is the very least he'd take, that I could give - could we make a bargain do you think?

How come so much of life is a deal? One way or the other, everything we do seems to be mediated by 'The Deal'. Who wrote the book - Donald Trump? Now tell me what next happened to that scheme of things, then. A series of deals, winding away to the final triumph - which one, then?

Call me human, but the way I saw it was that the art of the deal right now was how much she wanted me. Her hands, in an unguarded moment, told me much which I needed to know.

I'd changed my mind, changed the agenda in my mind. It was dynamic, after all. Now I began to push her more willingly, towards her smart apartment at Rue du Dragon, just across from the Hotel where under the lights we'd made our first tryst, where she let my seeking fingers find their goal.

Such is the fact of this life, when strangers find those fragments of existence which fate has disallowed them with other strangers, strange altogether - strange bedrooms, on hard linen sheets, losing skin from their palms and knees in the pursuit of their lust.

Did she, this stranger who I've now forgotten, think I'd bring her luck? Certainly we laboured at it, she had ways of using those secret muscles in her pelvis only dreamed of by the overweight youthful matrons of 'Cool Britannia', which kept me sufficiently oiled-up to want her more every time we met, kept her in constant orgasmic mode sufficient that she was often uncomfortable with that, though the sheer heat of rehearsing our prestidigitations, our perambulations, oscillations and delightful fractures, our polyglot ambulation, our coruscating exercises together, her little cries and my subterranean groans(of pleasure)never died.

Unless, that is to say, until, one day I was unfaithful.

And then it was all dead.

It was me, it was my blood had done it.

I'd met her by chance in the 'King's Head' on Upper Street, one warm July (or August) night, long, long, ago. I'd been with some friends, one of whom wanted to sleep with me (which was tiresome, as every time I fell asleep I awoke to find her sleeping on my breast). Then, they went away for a moment on some pretext, giving me time. Thus, as I scanned the bar, I saw again, this dark, quite small, sensuous girl looking at me for the n-th time.

This meant that I had just enough time, just enough to make my way round the bar on some pretext, and then to start some sort of exchange with her.

"Your friend wouldn't like it"

"She's just a friend, that's all".

She gave me her number, I made my excuses, and soon after I left the bar.

The next day we met; yes, at the King's Head again, on Upper Street, staying only for a polite moment. We had other thoughts in prospect.

After some niceties, and a drink or two, I walked with her back to her flat, one she shared with her child, and a homosexual friend of hers. There were holes in the walls, and, were it not Summer, one would have felt very troubled when one was naked.

Which is how we were, not very much later.

Whether in London, Paris, Heidelberg, Copenhagen or Gothenburg, one thing was secure: I'd discovered what the 'Secret' is - *there is no secret!* - and that that fact is secretly accepted without a word by everybody who knows, always older, more experienced people, - and as it is, this is the way that it de-codes to me now, this very moment.

Why had she come - did she want me to help her win?

Because then the second sensation that I had was of cold air rushing past my face. You know, that the feeling that the air you're surrounded by is also drowning you, deliciously.

The next sensation was one of languor, repose, the sensation of losing my grasp of time, letting it slip rough as hemp rope, through my fingers. Yes, it burned. Yes, it was burning me so that I wanted to scream - 'It's burning me.. ahhh!'

*You see, every time we passed a doorway I wanted simply to push her in to it: if necessary taking her there by force.*

## Chapter 16

Sounds **behave**  
**As fugitively**  
**As our memories**  
**distilling,**  
**Then forgetting.**

Days, no, painful, victorious, decades of touch later I found myself, one glass afternoon, staring at the wall and asking myself where I was. I was, as usual, alone. You see, I had lost that grip which we all subconsciously share, which you might well call our grasp of real things, the passing filaments of worlds which have just been born and are at the same moment not yet created. Our consciousnesses live there, in those interstices between breakfast and death, at all times prescient in our lives.

There I was then, staring at the wall and panicking at the ice-crystal reality of an unexpected and unknown day. To further confuse things, it was also in an unknown place, and more or less at an unknown time; the coldness of the light though told me that it must be quite early, while the fresh swell of the air informed me that this was no tropical zone; that was all.

*You see, I knew how to fix it for her. Someone I knew, someone's father, had told me the trick.*

Besides, it took me quite a while to recognize simple things. It always has, I could say, but this fact was not exactly that I had forgotten them, rather that the way they were constructed in our culture presupposed that that logic (whichever bias it followed) was set to be the pre-eminent logic of the time. But this time

was not that time (whichever time that was) and here I was, sitting in the cold, glass crystal embrace of an abandoned time, in a forgotten place, facing the... ocean?

Odd, how facts suddenly grip you in a real way, not positioning themselves to be what they aren't, just being the fact of what they are.

*As if this were a gambling table: I could see that someone, my imaginary 'Mr C' was counting, I could see it in his eyes, reflections of the lights and the cards, glossy and reflected as if in some hidden lens, and so I dared not cheat - just then.*

So, sitting by the ocean, facing half on to the beach, I was lost in a nightmare reverie.

Sounds filtered through, for I was up in the air, on the fourth or fifth floor of a block, overlooking a forgotten beach in a distant place, far, far from...here.

It was as if I had never been with you, never savoured the scent of faded perfume which I always associated with you, never followed the logic of that to the slightly high, dry smell that copied itself from between your legs all over your body, and then combined itself with your perfume: no wonder they use the line *"I'm wearing nothing but..."* in the perfume ads, not surprising at all, because they are actually selling you your scent, mimicking the fragrance copied-over by nature as part of your hard wiring.

And you weren't wearing that expensive ring any more - had you sold it to pay your dues? Had you gambled away everything, as Casanova had, in the cause of sensuality and sexual longing, something firm between the legs?

I'm going to come clean, I'm going to call the fabled Mr C 'Jacques'. I'm going to call him Jacques!

He's Jacques and he's Jake. Is it possible to evaluate such a perfunctory double life?



## Chapter 17

*Dreaming,  
Le Vieux Mas, Vence.*

So they say, nothing would stand in Casanova's way when he wanted a woman: he would sometimes even use a form of loving violence to have what he most desired from his lovers. It is thought, that were he alive today he'd be behind bars, accused of rape, assault, domestic violence, fraud and even incest.

Every time  
I am  
reminded of  
What we did (and didn't)  
Yesterday, (as if I  
Needed a  
Reminder)

Hi ...hope  
All goes well... I  
Would have  
Wished you luck  
If you needed it.  
Don't get lost in  
The mountains. I  
Am going for my  
Run on the beach  
Now- Z

Hi... how  
Are things? I  
Sense you like it  
In the

Mountains.  
Anyway if u don't  
Get this txt let  
Me know. Zzzz.

I am not at home  
Sunday,  
Naturally, but i  
Am on my  
Mobile. Not  
Literally. Z.

Wrap up today.  
It feels we are  
Straight back to winter. Z.

Hi Mr Lucky,  
Your words are  
Dripping with  
Honey. Wrap up  
The beach and  
Bring it back...  
Feel free to  
Surprise me... Z

More about us. 4 You  
+1 Me = 5 our composite  
number  
Freedom  
Adventure  
Dependence  
Independence  
*Discipline...*  
That's us.

I feel impelled - have to record those things  
I know - from the inside. For one thing, I often  
spend time watching faces: when they're gambling,  
for example, people lose day after day, night  
after night. I always watch their expressions.  
One thing I know now is that gambling is about

not facing reality.. Though the odds are real: maybe the only real dream for that special moment.

It's all about numbers: can you create a puzzle out of a number plate; can you decode the puzzle that is I a number plate? Do you juggle your birthday together with someone else's and find a closer relationship with someone, something else, some cloud of vapour, some dream?

Those are rare Moments, moments when one becomes intensely aware of factors which have an overbearing significance in one's life, moments when the controls we seek simply do not concur with the reality of the moment, when all these things lose their significance, which is when the reality of the way and the orientation of the way that one lives becomes clear.

It is as if the underlying structure of what we take for granted, the real nature of what we are, suddenly decides to come clean with us, to stop pretending to be what it isn't and faces us finally with a sort of awkward *fait accompli* of what it really is.

Moments like this are rare because they are full of peril.

But they have the effect of bringing us face to face with the facetious and disposable nature of what we are dealing with.

Our versions of normality and reality are a set of impressions based upon our notions of what our ideal logic bases are. At any moment this actually delicate, paper-thin acceptance by us that whatever reality we live in is the real one, is buttressed by the reflections we see from others, by what others say they expect of us, by the way that the organizations we relate to relate to us, and most of all, what happens when the expectations we have of things and situations transpire into fact.

Underlying this thin fiction is the reality of our world. That is to say, the true mechanics of our *version* of the world. What is it that has happened, when one day we awake from a dream to find ourselves in an unexpected and thus

frightening orientation, juxtaposed with a version of reality which we do not choose, and which is vital with the thoughts and deeds of other minds?

The next sensation that I had was of water rushing past my face. You know, that the feeling that the air you're surrounded by is also drowning you, deliciously.

Followed by a sensation of languor, repose, the sensation of losing my grasp of time, letting it slip rough as hemp rope, through my fingers.

Yes, it burned. Yes, it was burning me so that I wanted to scream 'It's burning me... Ahhh!' But I was not tempted.

## Chapter 18

I look like shit when I look at myself in the reflections along the road

It might have been that I was not awake, that I slept through my ordeal only to waken after that peculiar passage of events, or that I was mute, I'd lost my voice and so, perversely, my right of protest.

Mismanaged? Just as I was lusting for her, so she must have wanted me. Could that qualify as mismanaged? Why must a real moment in our lives be predicated with control, with having and controlling and not with giving? Now, that was the point after all, the point at which all the sophisticated artifices begin to wallow deep, rudderless. The Interface between real and politicised, between imaginary and desired, a political set of blind lines, drawn with the ruler of expediency.

But that was it after all - my understanding - that I would have to move fast to have her, combined in infinite space with her intuition that speed and sheer brutal moment would mean insecurity and, well, emotional darkness.

(Is that why she'd always spoken about 'security' about 'risk' about making sure that things were 'right'?)

This dynamic then, this wired message from a lost, helpless continent, communications all scrambled, made me more passionate, made her more desiring, loving - perhaps controlling, fearful.

So we continued at length along Avenue Maine, following the profile of the streets in their vain recapitulation of their original central theme, ultimately rounding through the scatter of streets which has those Moroccan and Tunisian restaurants, streets winding towards the Seine, lost in night and blanked with neon.

And the central theme of all this? How much can I give you - how much will you take. Or is it - how much can I get away with? The sum of the English disease: what is the very least he'd take, that I could give - could we make a bargain do you think?

How come so much of life is a deal? One way or the other, everything we do seems to be mediated by 'The Deal'. Who wrote the book - Donald Trump? Now tell me what next happened to that scheme of things, then. A series of deals, winding away to the final triumph - which one, then?

The way I saw it was that the art of the deal now was how much she wanted me. Her hands, in an unguarded moment, told me much which I needed to know.

I'd changed my mind, changed the agenda in my mind. It was dynamic, after all. Now I began to push her more willingly, towards her apartment at the Rue du Dragon, just across from the Hotel where under the lights we'd made our last tryst, and where she let my seeking fingers find their goal.

Such is the fact of this life, when strangers find those fragments of existence which fate has disallowed them, in a strange bedroom, on hard linen sheets, losing skin from their palms and knees in the pursuit of their lust.

Did she think I'd bring her luck?

I'd discovered what the secret was - *there is no secret* - and that that fact is secretly accepted without a word by everybody who knows, always older, more experienced people, - and as it is, this is the way that it de-codes to me now, this very moment.

Why had she come - did she want me to help her win?

You see, every time we passed a doorway I wanted simply to push her in to it: if necessary taking her there by force.

Days, no decades of touch later, I found myself one glass afternoon staring at the wall and asking myself where I was. You see, I had lost that grip which we all subconsciously share, which you might well call our grasp of real things, the passing filaments of worlds which have just been born and are at the same moment not yet created. Our consciousnesses live there, in those interstices between breakfast and death, at all times prescient in our lives.

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It was as if I had never been with you, never savoured the scent of faded perfume which I always associated with you, never followed the logic of that to the slightly high, dry smell that copied itself from between your legs all over your body, and then .....

.....  
mastering the red line, the unexpected yet hidden balance which binds them. The double negative made positive.

Yes, it's all a fantasy, a dream, as if one's life really could touch the sublime, as if you really could fly. It's all in the sequence, the Euclidian solipsism's, the accidental conjunctions which we all experience from time to time in some part of our lives.

What is a Fake?

It's all things to all men, you know, a copy made for the unwary billionaire, so wrapped up in her vanity that she'll buy anything to make her feel less meaningless, even forged stained glass and the Emperor's desk, upon which was crafted this volume, but unable to make a real contribution herself, apart from endless legal arguments over a meaningless but beautiful gilt casting, and it's ultimate value. Soon she'll be dust, unforgotten, but let me not elaborate, it wouldn't be worth it.

Or something that looks real but isn't. Whatever that entails.

Aren't we all. Well, don't let me spoil it for you, it'll get to you sometime, won't it?

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