

OneDecadent Life

The Diaries of Angelique Demars

by Terence Sellers

Chapter One

DIARY OF ANGELIQUE DE MARS NOVEMBER 12, 1986 4 AM

Artists have always inspired worship, so I know I am not the first one to 'adore' him ... But hasn't this man, David Manfred, been sent to me by the demons? As already I am imagining myself his creature - how else explain this instant obsession?

This is the first real 'attack' I've had upon my celibacy.

We met for the first time today - David and I - seventeen floors above Central Park, in the studio of Paula Scott - as I was being photographed by the famous bitch herself. Andre, my worthless agent, had been trying to engineer our meeting for weeks - some idea for the cover of the book. He kept saying David and I had the same eccentricities in common - I didn't know exactly what he meant by that, but I now see: he possesses, along with other interesting faculties, the taint of the sadomasochist.

And he is thrillingly beautiful to gaze upon.

There is something in the very letters, David Manfred! that compels me - irrationally I repeat this name. In every syllable's a frisson of omen: David - David Manfred. How is it that this plain name inspires such joy? Some promised exaltation of Mind that is to be between us keeps me wide awake and enlivened at this hour.

I am actually, already, in love with a man I do not know.

I've looked up Byron's poem MANFRED to help me - for isn't

there some Fate in a Name? So Manfred wanders alone, in his remote castle:

**My slumbers - if I slumber - are not sleep,
But a continuance of enduring thought
Which I then can resist not : in my heart
There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
To look within: and yet I live, and bear
The aspect and the form of breathing men**

There is something in this very like the man; he does seem not of this world, but from another time ... And David did mention he had (like me) a chronic insomnia ...

**But grief should be the instructor of the wise
Sorrow is knowledge; those who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth.
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.**

Oh lovely 'fatal truth'! That all existence is meaningless, but for the contemplation of Beauty. And this man is beautiful, though his face looks worn ... he seems to be a true artist, a painter of some fame, though not much talked of lately. Does the indifference of the world make him suffer? If it does, I would hope it only fuels his original Will, impells him from the painful core to create again! Are his powers still potent? Or are they, like his namesake's, in decline? He does seem not the vigorous specimen.

Well, I must set down the day's events, record every detail, not to forget this day which I believe is one of the Momentous of Destiny!

Paula's studio was filled with the smoke from the several cigarettes of half-a-dozen babbling folk, all of whom had at that moment one important, historical task to fulfill: they were creating an artist!

I have always scorned these parasites; but nothing in this overcrowded world has much of a chance of being noticed without their 'hype'. Whether the work be sublime, or base is no longer of force - whatever can jockey slavishly to the front of the pack will get a chance to live. (And we know how the base are so much less inhibited about selling themselves than are We Sublime. They don't mind the degradations, actually love to sell it - as I guess We don't.)

I am under no illusion as to what sort of money a first novel such as mine will earn its publishers. But in printing my book, even at a loss, the company fans the illusion that it might still be a serious literary engine, as it was in former days of relatively higher literacy. So I might eat the publisher's cream, as we try to forget the money is actually being made by cookbooks, diet books, and other ephemeral pap.

So (I must reassure myself) these minions are not strictly creating me as an author, but only molding me for a type of minute gourmet consumption ... as I am already self-created as an artist, and will ever be so, with or without their machinations.

I try to appreciate Andre's function - agent and publicist - as a kind of royal temptation. His pleasure (which I cannot help experiencing as a sadistic need) is to drag the artist from the rough bed that spawned her ... mine her from the dull occluding rock (but that gave her her hardness and strength) ... polish her dark planes to a faceted brilliance, to set her gleaming under spotlights of acclaim - well - but gods upon gods - who could resist such a worthy occupation?

To market, to market ... pigs atop pigs.

I dressed for my Author's Portrait in a pure manifestation of Dandyism: black stock neck-binding, collar unfurled like a lily ... the long black leather cutaway coat (let me revive every style of pre-Revolutionary France!) ... skirt to the ground, with train ... Louis heels languidly bowed and buckled with Great-Grand-Mama's diamond lozenges. These diamonds were the first thing David, later in the evening, told me he noticed - as per the Adept, who well-comprehends the great responsibility the Diamond confers.

**We-Who-Would-Be-Served must not err - as once we did.
We in our Advancement were born to Rule others,
But this conferment shall be kept hidden, must be!
Lest we lose our heads again.**

David's appearance was announced by Paula hissing, "Get out - you're early - go, I'm not done with her yet." I turned to see him, and he with a slight, courtly incline of his head acknowledged me.

Already I had been rather charmed by the idea of him, but upon

this first sight, I, who rarely let myself go a-straying, did at that moment fall in love with him.

He was wearing an elegant suit of black silk, cut in that slouchy Italianate manner ... collarless black shirt buttoned to the neck. Over his arm was a plush camel coat, which he, as I watched, threw to the ground. The suit was crumpled and dusty-looking, as if he had slept in it. This insouciance, the deliberate hard, indifferent use of things fine - appeals to my aesthetic of the perverse. With trepidation I glanced at his hands (they make or break my interest in a person) and was oddly moved. They are not only of that 'cerebretonic' cast (indicating the excess of Mind over flesh) - that is, gratifyingly long and thin, but one was held at a strange, crooked angle to the wrist. They were, as well, too white, and slightly trembling - a strangely uncertain hand that perhaps cannot compel its full force.

I watched him take a cigarette from his lips - then I was looking directly into his eyes to note a somewhat sardonic gaze back . He raised his chin a couple of times like a mettled horse might, and I discerned in that prideful stir of the head the 'absolutism' of a congenital sadist ... so much so, that the sudden force of my attraction had too much logic. I instantly affected to fail to notice him at all (utterly impossible - I could not keep my attention away.)

Paula was whining at me to look into the camera. She continued the shoot with bad grace, slamming the frames into the box, barely watching what she did, chain-smoking, talking to the others. Obviously she wanted to get me over with, and out... and I realized her to be under some kind of an imperative in her relations with him. (If she is in love with him - if they are involved - I must know).

When we were at last done, David and I were formally introduced by Andre. Our words segued instantly into a strange recognition; I felt his attention rivetted upon me. Paula made a clumsy attempt to dismiss me, pointedly remarking that she had to go out, and she would walk me to a taxi. Andre winked at me, and loudly urged her on, "Go ahead, Paula - don't wait for us - I need to speak with Angelique about some bookings ..." In that he helped me to ignore her discourtesy. She ended by staying and doing her most to deflect David's attentions away from me. But it was no use ... and what his interest in me portends I love to imagine ...

More details of his person: black hair, worn longish, pulled back in a fine wavy mass from a high brow. A square jaw portends a strong will - or obstinacy, The nose, sensuously molded, is semitic in profile. I realized his lips have a naturally bemused curve ... his eyes are liquid, dark-brown and deeply shadowed. But it is in the stiff, haughty tilt of the head that my subjugation is complete. (As Byron

flaunted a satanic pride, so too he evoked a more exalted spirituality. Now this mystery compels me more than ever.)

By way of conversation, Paula complained that David would never sit for her anymore. Andre teased her, "Don't you have enough of him, by now?"

When she glanced at me nervously I felt certain she had to be in love with him!

David drawled, "If anyone takes just one more picture of me, I will cease to exist!"

Paula insisted he must, saying what she had of him was outdated.

"Do you really imagine I want to have other than the portraits of my splendid youth at large?" I ventured to remark that his youth must have indeed been 'splendid', and he gave a delightful groan of false anguish, "I'm positively ancient now - ancient!"

When I repaired to the kitchen, it seemed that he followed me ... we resumed conversing on a more personal level, somehow again instinctively intimate. We entered that place where words have double meanings ... as though we had spoken them all before. Where an old strain of intelligence sounds again ... where a certain glance cuts an indelible mark ...

I felt this - and he affected to feel nothing.

But that too is as it has ever been.

He regaled me with a sarcastic appreciation of the dinner-party where he was expected. This particular social foray he said would leave him richer, & and more well-knit into the art-world's volatile fabric... he made me laugh, upon a sudden burst of basest intention:

"Is there any reason anymore for us to go out, except to ravage these pigs for their cash? So we might soldier on another day, to slave on, still essentially unappreciated."

When I demurred, that he had to be, certainly, most highly appreciated, he disabused me, "Naive, still so naive, and no doubt idealistic too! You

don't know yet what a punishment it is, to have been born into this Age of Mediocrity. And Manhattan is the psychically destitute capital of our bankrupt civilisation!"

As he spoke I noted a strange, almost ecstatic shuddering going through his body, as he pressed upon certain words: idealistic... punishment... mediocrity bankrupt. He sensed my closer watching, and I caught in his eye a sharp, familiar hunger. That look reminded me, for an instant, of the eye of one of my 'slaves'. That terrible, fanatic need. He too then took in my whole person in one gaze, and gave forth with a sigh, bowing his head slightly and covering it self-consciously with his hand.

He began to prophesy, as if to 'entertain' me ... "One day I can see you'll be very rich - and famous!" Then, out of nowhere, "And you'll be able to quit that job of yours."

This took me aback... Was he yet another banal male, assuming that I am dying to give up being a Dominatrix? Why ever this eternal fantasy of 'Save-the-Whore'?... which, I might add, none of them ever even start to try to do.

I restrained myself from making my usual crude response - that if he was so concerned, I would be glad to receive a check for a year's expenses!

Paula came into the kitchen for the tenth useless time, and Davis snarled in her direction, "WHAT - IS - THAT - WOMAN - DOING?" glaring as though she were a bug. She stood quite still, coloring, unable to fight back. But she did leave, throwing me a look of real hate. I'll probably end up with the worst of the roll sent to the publishers - must warn

Andre about it. (Why can't I get used to it - the way I create enemies everywhere I go? I admit I wield the false social grease hypocritically - I can't help but feel that being 'friendly' is commonplace. So is their detestation but a function of my natural grandeur.)

David and I watched all the rest packing up to leave, managing to still maintain a conversation... this strange concentration of ours not going unnoticed. Paula was again lingering by the kitchen door as David was telling me how he had 'discovered' a metal. It seems he layers thin sheets of palladium over the oil of the canvas. He was describing how from silvery it turns to black under this Operation... whereupon I suggested it was only Black on its way towards Gold. He understood the alchemical reference at once, exclaiming with pleasure,

“You Know...”

“Of course.”

“But what if I told you - it is an evil metal?”

“Oh, brother! You guys are ridiculous,” Paula then exploded, “And David, just for once, could we ‘chill’ on your ‘evil’ bit?”

It appalled me that he allowed her to speak to him that way. Long ago I learned to totally reject anyone who would confound me so. Why should We of the Elect tolerate any depredations from the uninitiate?

But David just gave her a pat and snickered, “Now Paula - come come. We know how much Evil scares you!” then brought me again into the Gaze that said

Yes it frightens her - unlike yourself - for whom Evil is an Old Friend.

I wanted to rush to him then, somehow get hold of him. I heard Andre cracking wise through a mounting pressure in my head, my blood pounding in my ears along with Andre’s bellows,

“That’s our David - ‘s’made a career outa playin’ the Evil One - hey I’m starvin’ to death - so’s everyone goin’ Downtown?”

But once on the sidewalk David and I somehow rid ourselves of the others and walked East. He began complaining again about his dinner-party... lamely I urged him to go. We stopped at The Oyster Bar for a drink, though neither one of us drank and sat there behind glasses of mineral water, much to the waiter’s disgust.

At one point David began to rather archly laugh, and thanked me in an over-formal manner for ‘helping with Paula’. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant, or rather, it was too much for me to admit? that while he did not welcome her emotions, he might be open to mine. Or did I imagine this? We shall see.

Before we parted he let me know that he has no lover, and is alone. He seemed to approve when I told him I figured likewise. We made a date for dinner tomorrow - he told me he would call.

Chapter Two

The cab-driver disgustedly uncrumpled the moist twenty his fare had just tossed him. It just was not worth a lousy fiver tip, to be the chauffeur for these rich junkie scum. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his fingers, pushed the button to open the back windows and air out the compartment. That would be the very last time he'd take one of those swanky dirt-balls on a 'first stop Avenue C'.

You pick them up on Fifth Avenue, and they want to go to fucking hell. Then the creep couldn't even wait until he got home - right there in the backseat, sucking it up like a sweet through his nose. Peh! Real pretty picture, especially if the cops 'd got on their ass. With this 'aiding and abetting' crap they tried to hang on you, you could lose your vehicle. Wasn't worth it!

Working downtown Manhattan at night was a real drag these days. Every other fare after midnight needed you to be a goddamned sport, and wait? Just five minutes, just ten, just a fucking half-hour sometimes outside some god forsaken burnt-out hell-hole with every kind of psycho jigaboo jumping all over you, ready to cut your throat for a dime. Every kind of freaking degenerate swarming the sidewalks...

David slammed the door of the cab as hard as he could when the driver hadn't bothered to thank him for the tip. What was getting into people these days? Couldn't they provide even the tiniest service without hating your guts?

His hands were still shaking as he stood before his elevator. This dope - called 'Model' - was supposed to be the best. When the hell was it going to kick in? He could taste it, could tell it wasn't beat, but still it was taking too long. He slapped his hand against the UP button, the elevator taking its usual sweet time coming. David waited... waited... the car slid down the shaft, and came to a rest on the lobby-level. And as the door meditated on whether or not to open, and with a gentle squeal rolled shudderingly back, the drug hit David in a rush from his heart-veins to brain.

Into the little cubicle ...such a nice little elevator. He gazed happily at its brass control panel. Some time later, his arm floated up to press the button '5'. The machinery hesitated to respond - as usual - but David was no longer impatient.

Three, four, five, and David drifted along the hall, slid his key into the

lock - so gratifying! The way a key could turn so perfectly, and let him into his warm, quiet room, where no-one would come for days and days to bother him.

He shed his gorgeous suit onto a heap of other dusty clothes, flung his calfskin loafers dangerously near a murky fish-tank. He then achieved the end of all endeavour - bed - stretching his spidery frame across the rumpled surface. When he had attained a perfect stillness, his nose burrowed in a particularly friendly curve of the pillow, the golden warmth began to spread throughout his whole body. Each empty, hungry cell opened up, and was fed by the heroin.

The golden warmth he now perceived as a light, that broke through the boundary of his mere flesh, dissolved the aching body and steeped the weary soul in a serene, glowing and silent ecstasy. Again, he became royal -

WHY SUFFER, EVER? He loathed that silly ethic that in order to prosper, we must work and suffer, suffer and work. Why can't we just reach the pinnacle, and stay there? This dreadful constant effort - to have to go on 'growing'. What are we anyway, some kind of lettuce? Must a lettuce suffer in order to grow?

At this point in his development, hadn't he suffered enough - vegetably or otherwise? Didn't he deserve at last to feel this pleasure - hadn't he by now earned the privilege - couldn't he please at last feel nothing at all?

These and other seeming profound conundrums wrangled with the demon who sat so high enthroned in David's mind, as he curled into the fetal bliss, safe and warm and floaty.

Then David began to scratch. Every place his nails raked, a trail of thrilled nerves followed. His jaw dropped slightly as the stimuli overcame him. His mind swam. languidly elated, overclouded in fairest suspension of light, where in its thin, pale soup ricocheted the lineaments of his dream.

Grateful, his interior eyes opened to a denser brightness ... he was walking again that long corridor, which sloped ever slightly, sinisterly downward.

This path was cut into the ledge of a mountain-face, the edge of it barred with wide, plain, cloister-like columns. As the light shuddered through his imagining, bathing it in the rapture of his cells, thought ebbed away in a soft suspiration...and he was THERE.

To his right were the doors - the Doors Between the Two Worlds. On his

left was the infinite drop into mist-enshrouded emptiness. But there was someone behind him - it was that woman, Angelique! He snapped out of the vision with a start. Why was he dreaming of her? She was very beautiful, and oddly old for her age - rather like himself. For a moment the memory of the evening briefly shared with her flickered to mind - and in his 'sublime' state, her face and certain words she had spoken came to him with a cynical force.

“Bring the Gold out of the Black! Ha! “ Yes that could be done - according to the Books. Naive creature! Seemed to be a little bit in love with him. Well all the women went through that.

Her bearing was so eighteenth century, that outfit, her jeweled buckles...Did she use? Probably not. But you never knew. Idly he wondered what would they have gotten high on, in the eighteenth century.

Chapter Three

Angelique's Diary

13th of November, 8-ish

Could not be bothered to answer the Other Phone all day long. It rang and rang - I'm letting the slaves starve for a while. I've been too well-worshipped by another order of minion, the publishing maelstrom's pilot-fish and bottom-feeders. (I have such the plethora of superficial 'worship', where is my one true-hearted acolyte?)

Still, as far as doing any real Work today, I was ruined. Utter wastrel that I am, was too immersed in thinking upon David, David! I feel this awful inclination towards you, some subterranean striving... my thousand-and-one walls, gates and locks are not enough to hold the feeling back - that I am not to remain the celibate for long. He said he would call, oh dread! I am waiting - please call, my genius!

14th November, just after Midnight

... just talked to David for over three hours...my hand is almost useless, drained from holding up the receiver. But I am writing down everything, do not want to forget a word of it ...

He started by saying he did not feel up to dinner... some indisposition started last night, in the middle of the dinner party ... perhaps he had the flu. He sounded very depressed. I told him there was 'of course no urgency to meet that night', though of course I was devastated...

(I feel sick and dizzy ... from lingering too long upon the edge of this Abyss - between what I must now understand is his indifference to me as anything but a friend - friend! ... and my essential infatuation with him.

...but might an infatuation, by its nature, be an essential? Well ... yes.)

I have discovered more about our 'eccentricities in common'...as we began almost immediately discussing sex. I made light of my one year in the con-

finer of a celibate state; he expressed admiration for it, avowing a similar ambition: to be done, at last, with that strenuous nightmare of the intimate human conjunction.

As I regaled him as to the advantages to be gained, it amused me to realize how very rapidly I would give up every one of them: the privacy, the ability to concentrate exclusively upon Art, the refined pleasures of the ascetic disciplines... for him - in an instant.

So am I disturbed to learn that he is strictly homosexual.

Would anyone believe, after this, that I actually desire him the more? Just to know this man exists is transforming my consciousness in a fashion it is difficult to describe...

For I am now more avidly impelled than ever, towards the ultimate goal of my celibacy. To love him assures me of a deep, nay, ETERNAL well of aspiration, never to be requited in flesh, but which will spur me on towards the sublimative, creative point of Art. So I shall be well-stimulated by this Unknown Beloved!

It all sounds so very Ideal, does it not? Yet the real challenge is that I may allow myself to love him - but only as long as I may never have him - which ought to be forever.

I described for him the arcane pleasure to be derived from a taste for celibate restraint. One requires no touch of the flesh, nor exhausting orgasm, to achieve ecstasy. Such practices, based on a denial of sex, are paradoxically the most erotic. They require, first of all, a total mental reversal. The psychic effect is what is aimed for; and though cruelty is not an essential element, cruelty is one passageway to our nirvana.

Such pleasures may appall the average square, but may they remain in their slough with our fervent blessing. We agreed sado-masochism is an Initiate's Path, and its sudden gross popularity is but another symptom of our culture's inability to recognize the Sacred.

“There's nothing I hate more than the square on holiday, trying to find out what S&M is all about.”

The catch to all this is that to attain pleasure in celibacy one must know everything about sex, in order to really, profitably, then deny it - a point the prude always misses. Such practices have piquance indeed for such as we who have passed

through the long, seriously-studied libertinage of the 1960s and 70s ... wherein we were deeply, terribly made surfeit of flesh. (Ah yes my dear Manfred, the terrible 'Knowledge that is not Life' ?

I did ask David if he had ever made love to a woman. He became very quiet, then replied, "I have." I wish I might have seen his face at that moment, to know if it made him only nervous to have me ask. "But I am one of those rare 100% faggots," he quickly filled in the silence, discerning my interest no doubt despite my vaunted self-denial.

More eccentricities? Our unlovely, unloving childhoods ... yes, this was what kept us so very long on the phone. Once anyone gets started on such a subject, how does one ever stop? How that early starvation creates, in later life, a certain insatiability, which may drive one on to have as much sex as possible. But still one is never satisfied.

I recited my 'set piece' - how I did not need a slave, or even a martyr, but some kind of obsessive psychopath to love me as I require.

He in his turn paraphrased Byron, insisting that he preferred to be obeyed, rather than be loved. For, as he said, 'those who love you insist on a response - which I can no longer give'. I parried that no-one should be quite that jaded... but of course I have somewhat overdosed on that 'famous obedience' !

He admitted that his own overweening neediness has led him to appreciate cruelty as a kind of hygiene... to keep others from asking him for anything... while he permits himself to be absolutely demanding, makes a point of being violent, and never concerns himself with his partner's needs. "You would be surprised how many gay men there are just like me." he complained, "Though it may shock you, being the way I am assures me many more partners than otherwise!"

I confessed that while I had never been cold to my lovers, often I became simply absent. I have a sense that I only 'service' their sexuality... He responded that was perhaps why I found celibacy 'easy' - because I had a natural inclination to expect nothing from others.

I had to laugh, "Don't think it's easy for me just because I seem to want nothing. If anything, it's become much harder - as the bad memories fade, my heart hopefully resprings - and more fantastical than ever!"

He countered, "I ask my boys for everything ... I demand it all. They can't

deny me anything - they aren't allowed to deny me anything."

(As he said this, I wrote it down and traced it over and over again, embellishing the letters of it: they are not allowed to deny me anything! It put me in a veritable ecstasy ... and how I loved his voice as he said it ...how I wish... oh god, please, I must stop!)

He remarked how curious it was that masochism felt like love ... asked me if my clients ever fell in love with me.

"They might imagine they Love me...they do often mistake their session for a love-affair. Indeed such suffering DOES feel like Love!"

"Something else that 'feels like Love' is heroin," he strangely interjected.

I shuddered, knowing whereof he speaks. That treacherous Elysium where all messy life resolves into order, sense and beauty...but only for a few hours at a time. He described for me briefly his past struggles with the drug. (Andre had mentioned it, too, in passing.)

He said for over a year now he has been 'clean', but that many of his friends are still crushed by it. He gossiped that Paula was using... this completely shocking me - such an ambitious, strong, successful woman? Maybe that explains her strange negative behaviour. David said he was still trying to help her, though he hardly felt up to it.

Having passed through sex, and over drugs, we at last arrived at the field of Love - land of warfare and horrors - land of the past! He admitted to 'a near total destruction of the heart'. He intimated that someone in his past had committed suicide. We agreed on how shattering it is to realize that at our advanced age neither of us has been in a real love-affair...despite all my submissions, and all his triumphs.

We ended by concurring that the very idea of love makes us, by turns, bored and snappish. We agreed we no longer had the strength to suffer another one of those violent upheavals. Of course I was only pretending to such jadedness. The truth is I feel quite strong enough for even this masochistic undertaking...

"I can't stand it when they fall in love with me!" he snarled ...and while I agreed it was 'certainly a nuisance', I thrilled to the sound of his voice, to feel him confiding in me. I never tire of hearing him speak... I say just anything, to make the voice go on. Has some deep reflection gone into those suave tones, how they might

enrapture a soul, or is he just naturally mesmeric?

He received a call on his other line, decided to take it, and promised he would phone me tomorrow.

Chapter Four

The call that David took, that interrupted the important effusions of Angelique with her Beloved, was from another kind of Angel.

“David! How much cash have you got?”

“Rene? I’m on the other line ...”

“Well hang up! This is important! I just got out of the fucking clinic ...”

“My God! You must be in agony ... hold on.”

After he made his adieux to the lady, who, he had to remark, did not disguise her regret at his hasty departure, David was back on the phone with his old pal.

“You maniac! Where are you?”

“Not so far away - can I come up? But DO you have any cash?”

The infamous poet and debauchee Rene Lepine was somehow escaped from the punishing embrace of the latest swank clinic for addiction.

Now David lay immobile, in the last wash of the heroin leaving him, as he had for the last four hours. Dawn was breaking but he moved not, to douse the artificial lights. On the painted-brick wall above his head, his fellow-addict (known, with reason) as ‘Rene the Blessed’ had just inscribed in red oil-stick:

SPLEEN...SPLEEN... AND NEVER THE IDEAL!

Ever the tragedian, Rene had dusted the greasy letters with gold glitter. Did the mad thing, David wondered, keep ever the ready supply handy in his pockets?

For the last half-hour, David had been staring into the ‘I’ of Ideal... his fascination alternating between awe and stuporousness. A streak of white along this

'I' was revealed to be a scrap of cobweb. Did Rene even realize was a virtuoso stroke he revealed, in his handwriting.? And how had he gotten that cobweb just so? Why did that repetition of Spleen... SPLEEN ... make him want to cry ... then had ended by making him throw up?

One idle thought after another wandered through the gelatinous medium of his enfeebled attention... he giggled at the thought of Rene dancing round town with pockets full of glitter. Fairy dust! David yawned and stretched his stiffening limbs. He supposed he might try to fall asleep.

Somehow Rene was still a living, breathing poet - despite all his trials. Fresh from this latest tour in a rehabilitation ward, he had rushed over to David's in the hopes of a little free heroin. He looked only slightly better than the last time David 'd seen him still skeletal, and shrieking, hair gone totally white - and he was only one year older than himself! Shocking, awful - was that himself in a year?

Yet David had awaited Rene's return from Madame Anya's - where the finest grade of Southeast Asian dope could be had - with a perverse sense of triumph. There was no escaping it! No matter how much money was spent on elegant cures in the country... All of Branford Causewell's fine cash, from his successful show at Cosetti's, could not appease the demon that animated the complex genius that was beloved Rene.

Spleen, spleen - as long as they went on getting high their powers would remain in default. Rene had once had a thriving career as a fashionable art-critic.

and never the Ideal! Disillusionment, lost opportunity, dissatisfaction, disorderly conclusions, despair - all such decadent symptoms were hardening into a permanent condition.

David had tried not to sneer at Rene's hopefulness... his babble about a new start, his rant, rebottled, about the "Lives of the Artists", a thing that he hoped to write, 'after Vasari', about the art-world, for at least fifteen years... Even as he had palmed David's last hundred dollars in cash for their drugs -

"I really ought to call it 'The WIVES of the Artists', because they're alot more interesting, after all... they're the ones who know what to do with all that money!"

Rene's only legacy of his once thriving intellectual concern had been an enormous modern art collection - gifts from the grateful, whose careers he had, in

many cases, literally made, with the rigorous imperative of his visionary pen. This collection would have settled him nicely into retirement - had he not incinerated the lot.

The misplaced flame of a boyfriend's 'crack' pipe had set the tenement apartment afire. Acrylic and oil on canvas proved to make quite the hot blaze.

Not that there is ever a real retirement for an artist - or for a ravaging junkie. No rest for the wicked! One of Rene's set-pieces was to complain, "If only I'd been immolated with the rest of the precious objets!"

David turned uneasily on his couch. The thought of his friend kept arising to disturb him. Somehow Rene was still intact. It proved to David that it was a lot harder than he had imagined to kill oneself. Fresh reserves had arisen from somewhere within that burnt-out shell, The man was pitifully eager to re-enter the torturous foray that was the Manhattan art-world. Why did he still want to? Didn't he know he'd burnt down nearly every bridge?

To think of Rene and his possible renewals made him feel strangely aggravated. Perhaps 'the Blessed' would have a regenerate career - but his, David's world was in eclipse, and blackening by the day.

As his belief in the value of any further effort had nearly evanesced, David was, figuratively speaking, 'dead already'. His once-powerful construct of himself as an artist was taking on the aspect of a fantasy. And worse - it was that for others too.

David's essential nausea with himself had everything to do with the recognition that his talent could be destroyed. He did still know what Beauty was - he still remained her acolyte - and he believed, deep within himself, that he might create Her anew. He had done it before, and even among successful artists, how many could lay claim to that distinction?

But for years now David had been working a dangerous test upon himself. An Imp of the Perverse had taken the Right-Hand place at his table - capered by his side at every public appearance - had lain down next to him uneasy at night. Even in his prime It had feasted on his Flame, and now danced him cross a desert to the hideous ledge - where It dared him now -

**If you are a God Indeed
Throw your body over
for your Angels will save you**

But what Angel was there to save the soul of the Demon he had become?

The look on Rene's face as he'd come into the studio again harrassed him. He saw how his friend had tried to hide his disappointment at the derelict state of the studio. No canvas on the easel in progress, no interesting sketches scattered about - no enlivening scent of oils. He cynically recalled how their conversation had faltered and stopped, in the light of the only subject of any real importance, anymore, to either of them.

And he realized he was partly responsible for Rene's first back-sliding. "It's not his first - and it won't be his last," he muttered into the pillow. But the queasiness stayed with him. If Rene had been able to walk into a prospering studio, seen him working away in full form, would he have later found himself ringing Madame Anya's bell, to enter her depraved 'Salon', where all the old ghouls arose to embrace him? And drag him down again ...

The blankets on his couch were strangling him ... he thrashed and threw them to the ground. His Imp nagged at him: since these God-given talents could be destroyed - well wasn't it somehow proper that they should die? If they weren't strong enough to last a man's life through?

Isn't there some sort of 'survival of the fittest', even amongst visions?

Thus, we see, David's error in thinking... as sloth and disabused vanity overcame more delicate considerations. He was strangely satisfied to gaze with pity upon his fragile genius dying, hardly remembering it was by his own hand that it did. He readied himself to submit to the final carresses of the Imp - more humiliation, more degradation, and more sick pleasure in it, as he submitted,

But how could it be that there was little left of David, but this hateful exhausting struggle against just one thing, a vulgar drug? Could his Divine Will really agree to let him die, to end as a smear across a certain sidewalk of the Lower East Side? Is he just another junkie, just another slave -

SPLEEN, SPLEEN, AND NEVER THE IDEAL ?

Chapter Five

Angelique's Diary

14th November, high noon

Was most rudely awakened by the resounding 'poots' of that big whale, My Grand Poohbah Her Red-Pencilness, tooting into my answering machine. My especial naughtiness has come to the attention of the upper stratum of their Towering Maelstrom of Babble-Onian Paper...

Ugh! And first thing in the morning! The old sea-cow does not believe it, when I say I CAN rewrite the last two hundred pages of Salvatore in a month - that I would have it to her by Xmas. But of course she doesn't think anything's WRONG with the novel - a sign of the stubbornness of her Red-Pencil - so what do I care if 'this is the third time you've done this to me!', as she so charmingly bellowed.

And just who DO I think I am? Only the fucking Creator and Source of ALL, ye peon harridan!

And what difference does it make if the novel doesn't come out 'on time'? What 'TIME' is that, in the Grand Aeon of my Conception? The public has already waited their entire lives for it! My Genius-At-Work will submit to no bloody advertising schedule!

When I yelled back at her that 'I have my own imperatives', I believe I discerned the mumble-grumble of 'breach of contract'. Bah, Grand Poohbah. In three days at the Dungeon I could make her pathetic advance back with interest and tell her to ...

Well, aside from all vitriol, at bottom it is really quite depressing to know that they really don't want the best possible version. I just do not comprehend why my rampant creativity does not thrill them.

Still, seeing how my advance was so measily insulting ... I did mention I could finish in just two weeks if I had another small subsidy... say a thousand

dollars. This set her to hooting, foaming, and popping her blow-hole.... all just a bloody con, of course. "You've gotten enough!" she shrieked - as if she'd been asked to write a personal check...

Well, I could withdraw the manuscript... Have I slaved for three years, just to pay for their mob of middle-management minions, their squads of secretaries, all polishing their nails and filing their claws in those vast and overpriced office-chambers - in the hideous towers of the publishing conglomerates? Have I honed my verbs, cultivated the adjective, mined for a semi-colon, done the toil over a lilt-ing weight of phrase - just to gratify a board of bloody directors?

Mmm ... Fat Poohbah Red-Pencil-Stub so thinkest. Methought I heard her actually weeping as I went on plying her with mine arguments incontrovertible. That's a good sign - she should feel guilty.

Fuck her, anyway! Artists deserve the money! I'm tired of being a sacrificial lamb to their commercial imperative! It's just corporate egotism, nothing to do with Art! Who ELSE in this degraded excuse for a culture is paid so little, after years and years of constant, disciplined work?

Obviously for such as We, money is not the point! That is, not originally - but when faced with ham-fisted buyers, I feel it is Our Duty to make the most exorbitant demands!

Meanwhile, back to the typewriter, oh true bondage! (Where IS that typing slave?) It is so luxurious to scribble on in this journal, whatever I happen to be fussing about - to insult everyone, and enjoy myself -

.... well enough delirious babble, creature - submit again to strict syntax.

Chapter Six

In the urbane - or ought one say promiscuous milieu of hip downtown New York, circa 1975, the lady 'Angelique Demars' as if out of nowhere appeared on the scene. That is, as it ever is in New York, with pretty boys on her arm at fashionable night-clubs; expensively dressed on the banquettes of chic and noisy late-night restaurants, and sometimes seen at certain evenings hosted by a wealthy artist (and there were a plethora of such, then) who was from time to time nostalgically desirous of a dash of outre color from old Bohemia - Art's Vestibule - that 'dark and dirty Workshop where Ideals are made'.

Angelique gained entry and attention as a Beauty, a Personality, and a Scandal. Like many who surface in the Vestibule, she was a wholly self-created, nearly fictive entity. Indeed she had come out of nowhere - as do so many Stars - from out of the wastes of small-town America. But more - for that in itself is not enough to gain a splintery seat in the Vestibule - she did spring from an especially pungent seed-bed, an almost sordid milieu (come now, is there such a thing as 'almost' sordid?)

Well - we shall confess - the lady Angelique came from trash.

Born in the early 1950s, Angela Gloria Podrowicz was the eldest of a brood of fourteen. Buried in the rural fastnesses of Virginia, and being frequently required at home to serve at her mother's near-constant spawning, the girl was not often seen at school - this the source of the grown-up Angelique's strange insecurity about her truly unparalleled intellectual gifts.

This mother of hers resembled nothing more than a great, white slug-like Queen Bee, waited upon semi-faithfully by a slender, drone-like father. Dimitri Podrowicz was a strange man for a parent. Though he tried early on to support his family with his violin (and the songs of his native Czechoslovakia) his music was neither modern, nor terribly marketable... in those days, supremely erroneously, 'not American'. Though undeniably a virtuoso in his Art, he verged towards becoming one of the poetic unemployables.

But as his family burgeoned (his passion for his wife absorbing his creativity), he was forced to parlay his talent for the cornucopia into a flourishing grocery business. (Hence the origin of certain dismissive metaphors Angelique as

authoress at times overuses: 'spawn of dirty ditches', 'a pedigree in cabbages', 'soul of the grocer', et cetera.)

Upon flowering at the age of fifteen into a real uncommon Beauty, and eminently bored with high-school, Angela summarily rejected the sub-maternal role that had been her trial since age eight and ran away, somehow managing to scrabble her way up to the big city.

But the Fate that awaited her there was all too commonplace ...

In Manhattan she was quickly taken up - entrapped by - a man who was to have a specific, deleterious effect on her - but who thereby forced her to create herself only for herself. Self-created! From out of the useless innocence still clinging to her unprotected Beauty; very soon away from the banal degradations of a life of prostitution; and far, far from the role of a proper wife: away from all the Ways that others might define her by. So by the age of twenty-one she had already begun to be 'Angelique DeMars' - the strangely perfected droplet of her father's pure blood, to evolve in time to be yet another one of the Poetic Unemployables.

While Angela Podrowicz had not finished high-school, Angelique Demars was fond of reading. Though she was only self-taught in French and English literature, in time she might let it drop that she had degrees variously in Psychology, French, and even Criminology. Angelique told everyone her diamond shoe-buckles were part of her GreatGrand-Mama's inheritance; but 'Angie' had scored hers from an eccentric client who, much taken with her youth, had given her a number of other inappropriate gifts. While Miss Podrowicz had buried in Police Archives two adolescent arrests for 'loitering', Miss Demars had no such thing as 'a record'.

Indeed the Work that was now Miss Demars was all for the betterment of the social Zeitgeist. If Angela had had sex with over a thousand men and women by the time she turned twenty-five, Angelique could now affect a highly genteel celibacy. And she was completely caught up in her writing-work, so much so we must finally admit she was not without some talent for the sentence. Her desire to be a poetess had evolved her, thus, to a certain extent and without delusion.

The man who saved her from the life of a waitress had been variously known as Cabot Langley, scion of a wealthy Boston family (useful in credit-card scams); a/k/a Carlo Confetti, nightclub doorman; a/k/a Norman Smith, son of a bus-driver in Nutley, New Jersey; a/k/a Lawrence Melrose, 'Larry the Rose' - a pimp, with a record of robbery and assault. He took Angelique's virginity, and became her first love.

Imprinted thus early by his strangely romantic attentiveness and cruelty, he roused in her the fatal seedlings of sadomasochistic passion.

Sensing the devotee in the girl, the sociopath readily married her, more to overrule any charges of statutory rape than for love however. He planned thereby to assure himself of bed, of board of course before long, and of the adoring gaze (she did adore him). This last we think was a little too-long fixed upon his useless person.

So was the flower of her pure heart engaged, and thus it withered... as an ever-changing stream of 'old girl-friends' began, after a perfunctorily short time, to 'pay calls' on the newly-weds, at all hours of the day and night.

But Angelique did take poorly anyhow to the role of wife; and she rather admired these ladies who clothed and fed her. They seemed brave and powerful, and their beauty that of movie-stars.

From being forced to witness her mother's long, animalistic bondage, Angela was completely disgusted by the idea of pregnancy. Her own interesting condition was marred by a sudden spate of drinking - and, then, a fall.

At six months, mother and fetus were hurled down a flight of marble stairs, and miscarriage instantaneous. Secretly relieved, still for some months afterwards she obsessed over this Fate. She began, for the first time, to argue with her Beloved, and was further disabused of the idea of his 'love' by his refusal to admit:

"You pushed me!"

"I didn't push you - you were drunk, and you fell."

"You were the one who was drunk - you fell against me ..."

"You were bombed, and wouldn't take my arm ..."

"I felt your hand on my back!"

"You're sick - crazy - you would have made a lousy mother!"

Whatever softening effect her maternity might have had on her was

thereby dispelled by the stupidity of this degenerate 'husband' and their disorderly household .Their argument stalled in its one pathetic rut, ruined any further carresses from him. She became to him chattel; her womb cursed and primed to corrupt; she no longer excited him, but was bound to him; and was there not alot of money to be made from so young a woman? Within that year the marriage was dead, and Angelique had been discovered a trade.

She was only briefly a whore. Incapable of mouthing kind lies (as the profession requires), ill-constituted towards performing repeated sex-acts (she was slightly depressive, not so vital) she quickly discovered amongst the population of high-paying 'johns' a significant type of man: the submissive, or even masochistic client.

Before long they were flocking to her, enamoured of her natural coldness. In truth this emanated mostly from an austere physiognomy. Tartar blood gave her sharp cheekbones and slanty, cat-like eyes. She was taller than average, and built on a somewhat massive Grecian-caryatid scale. A very fine white complexion was surmounted by hair that could only have come from a recessive gene: apricot-white, thin and fluffy, and so much like a halo around the severe planes of her face that her name, 'Angelique', became a most evocative, most adorable sound to those subtle, sensitive admirers of feminine grandeur - the slaves.

Thus could she sell her Beauty without it ever being handled (but for the occasional passionate foot-fetishist). Such transactions were confusing for 'Larry the Rose' to deal with - based as they were on an exaggerated respect for women - but that was not long any point of contention. Angelique divorced him, with restraining order attached.

So she gained a whore's freedom, becoming self-sufficient and soon rich, whilst remaining single; and without the whore's curse, as she sold an essentially intellectual service. In embodying the role of the Dominatrix, she as well avoided another curse: to grow old in her branch of the profession was no liability, as the illusion of Authority of power, dignity, control and inaccessibility might only become more resonant as she aged.

Or so she rationalized her commitment.

But we know of Angelique's other ambition, that despite her lack of education and her paraiah-status, that was yet to be attained. For, we must repeat, she did possess artistic talent - and she needed to become a published author.

The generous sums she enjoyed from her clients she spent on literary indulgences. She had a large library, with some old, rare editions; she indulged in fancy pens and heavy-stock paper. She took periodic “writing vacations”, enjoying the solitude of a rented country house where there might be no interruptions to her avid scribbling.

Finally her efforts paid off. There appeared a vanity edition of certain ‘Dungeon Confessions’, which did create some excited stir amongst those in Art’s Vestibule. Thereby was she accepted into the Company of a small, lively literary-circle. Though these artists were not as exalted as those in the aery realms of the Paris Report, neither were they as lowly (as per Chamfort) as ‘kicking donkeys braying before the empty-hayrick’ in some obscure chap-book stable. Some were mediocre, but all were proud to be Artists. None of them planned to make much money, and in that they were surely virtuous.

Thus Angelique evolved, with her fervent, purist intent intact, from out of the slough of her early determinants. She could believe she held a special position in Downtown Society! But even this fey gang was to eventually reject her...

For though she had achieved some ascendancy over her spawning, she had not done so over her profession. We admit her lack of Judgement against herself was a kind of powerful Magick, but that this lack might reflect a constitutional amorality - which was a somewhat fair assumption - was another thing entirely.

So she held her happy, tenuous place in that artistic obscurity, in good faith, for a while. But the hard truth was: she was still involved in doing something shocking for her living; she inflicted pain and suffering for a price; actually, she was a criminal. But while she was still a Beauty she could brazen it out.

She enjoyed certain high-profile fashionable lovers - though everyone left her. Her function in the ‘Vestibule’ was as a kind of ‘More-Than-Human’ ikon - of what a person without ‘normal, human’ inhibitions might look like. Though she was not degraded, she was definitely a specimen of Sex-Superstardom; was even a ‘female Satan’, a necessary figure in every Underground. And so far it had only been rather glamorous - not yet anything overtly tragic had come to smudge her perfect make-up.

So had she arrived, by the age of thirty-five, at a point where a small, reputable publisher would hire a photographer and pay a publicist to help create a palatable image of her for public consumption. She was not encouraged, for example, to say that she still was in possession of a Dungeon. And it was hoped, by some

who cared for her, that her success would eventually inspire her to get out of the 'trade' of Domination.

The appearance of a novel, after a book of poetry, was close to being realized. With all this, one might think Angelique could staunchly look in her mirror and say, "My dear, you have arrived!"

Alas! Those most in need of the happiness and safety society can offer are those who are usually the most cruelly rejected. She could not 'arrive' - for there was no 'place' for a woman such as she was to go. And this was not because she was a degenerate, nor that her writing was not very good. But because the highest strata of the literary establishment are bourgeoisie institutions, and could never accept her into their ranks - as long as she was alive. For how ever could such a subject matter find its way into 'the canon'?

For the present, the person of Angelique De Mars could at most expect to rouse a dull hobnob with some spicy anecdote - she would be allowed to amuse, even titillate - but to be admitted into the Holy of Holies? (That is, to be excerpted in the 'Manhattan Tatler'?) How would the Gentlemen - what Rene Lepine loved to call 'the Ensconced Mediocrities' - explain such a Creature to their wives, or adolescent children?

Once Angelique was safely dead - that is, unable to enter amongst their candlesticks and tablecloths - her work might at last be rated objectively and fully appreciated.

But, for now, she was a freak - whose aspirations did serve to gratify, even preen the grandeur of the Poohbahs, alas alas! How could a mere whore ever be ranked in their Elysium?

We wonder why she might want to be.

Chapter Seven

Near the corner of D on Eleventh lurked David, our hero, trying to be inconspicuous. Even in his thousand-dollar silk suit, dark glasses, and white skin he was doing a good job. Not the drunk scumbling in the gutter-way, not the jaded fast-cruising-by coppers, not even the wild and misbehaving teenager girl, dancing blithely on the midnight sidewalk glanced at him a second time. Only another prowling junkie, mongrel of the lowest echelon saw the man's unnatural pallour, furtive shoulders and cigarette rattling in a claw-like hand. Even this marked him as a local - a regular one of the junkie-hybrids of the upper echelon - just another one of the cogs that kept the drug-trade moving,

Tere was taking a ridiculously long time to cop. He shouldn't have let her go up there by herself. It was just that he could not bear to see those people: Lola the dealer, her lesbian consort, and the clientele - the detritus of the art-world, music-world, and of literature. It was just too depressing.

"Tere, Tere, where are you?" The cigarette was burning his fingers, his teeth chattered aloud. Was she even now as he waited being ripped off, beaten-up? Could she be dead? "No, not dead yet ..." The three hundred dollars they'd pooled - was it stuffed in some laughing psychopath's grubby pockets?

The filth of it all!

"Goddamned greedy Queen!"

It was already an hour! Perhaps she was dead. Were the slime at that moment cavorting with her body, one last time? The bad smell was coming off him, his last fix mixing with the sweat of his angst, drenching his skin in its ammoniac toxin.

She had forgotten all about him - that was it. Nothing personal - just intent on her own needs - as usual. She had probably just fixed on the spot, and nodded right out. He knew exactly where she was, what kind of couch she had found for herself. He didn't want to have to go up to that den. He told himself he still had a shred of dignity left. Anyway, he could not risk anyone who knew him seeing him there.

The junkie's logic went no further - to realize that anyone he knew, at that hour, in that neighborhood had to be thereabouts for precisely the same reason as he. But then again, neither would they want to be seen by him. (Another peculiarity - everyone showed up at Lola's for some other reason ... Lola's my best pal ... was just returning this book to her ... going out to dinner, we are ... and oh isn't this flu going round a real drag? Sniffle, sniffle, red-eyed and exhausted terrible how I get every virus in vogue ... oh god I've got the worst allergy... in the dead of winter.)

David flinched away from a derelict hopefully murmuring, "Givva manna match?" His shredded jacket looked as if something had clawed him. David ignored him... having to make any movement set the nausea going.

He edged out of the doorway to gaze up despairingly the block . The street was empty. He swore - with rubber legs and head of lead he was going to have to go up there and get her.

Once again a Queen is proved to be more willful than any woman, and more irresponsible than any man!

A taxicab drifted up as if to his command ... he lurched at it, the sudden activity setting him wheezing.

"You been shot buddy?" cracked the cabbie watching David sprawl in the backseat, "Extra ten bucks for blood on the upholstery."

"Just ... take me to the corner"

"Aw You in bad shape buddy. Yeah. Bad scene. Down 'ere's a REAL bad scene"

"Please just shut up and drive."

This rudeness was ignored - nothing coming out of that backseat fazed the driver anymore.

David fumbled for a twenty, " Could you just please - wait here..."

"No way Buddy am I WAITING for no KIND of person, in this 'ere neighborhood at this time o' night!"

David marvelled, The man's some kind of incredible hick. He showed him the cash, "It's really quite important, you see, just for five minutes - my sister is sick ..."

"Yeah, yeah."

"I have to bring her downstairs to take her to the doctor ,..."

"Nah, NO WAY." The driver pushed to bill out of his face, "I know how your sister is sick, man. You keep your money - you gonna need it someday."

A group of black men in bright-colored jogging suits were clustered on the stoop of the building. Cans of beer held aloft, they greeted David, "Hey mon! Ay, yellow mon' ... Step raight dis way ... step raight up!" They mocked him, writhing with joy to see the white man's fall. "Eey, boy!"

"Aw - he be lookin' fo' dat yellor guhl. Ooo WEE, but she do be fine!" they howled at David's heels.

David's last shred of pride curdled under these knowledgeable eyes. Somehow it was more unbearable that these critics were all rather old. They weren't even nasty young punks he could dismiss.

He tried:

If these revolting PEONS knew who Tere really was ... if any one of them had any understanding as to who I am, what I have achieved

Don't kid yourself, they'd only laugh the harder.

So a very famous former mannequin of the House of Herve is who's nodding out, on good dope on the couch of a dealer... oh, how very glamorous. So the last of the Manfreds is creeping a pee-soaked stair, on his knees before some degenerate with a future in penology. Just so he could stop shaking and retching... how impressive is that.

At the top of six flights up was the door, sheathed in steel - guarded by a hostile, handsome Puerto Rican. He recognized David and called within. The door slid to, absorbed him... Within sat the dealer in a kitchen lit with candles, a muse out of another era.

"You look like you're about to tell a fortune."

"mmm, guess I already know yours."

David's skin was already itching with the loathesome familiarity, He consoled himself with thinking she looked dreadful. She was a white woman, thin and weathered like some pioneer dame. Except her skin, untouched by the sun, was a pasty yellow. Her eyes flickered as if she were half-crazy, half-moons of white rolling beneath the muddy brown iris. She was just as stoned as it was possible to be without dying ... she cocked her head in the direction of the bedroom.

"Thanks Lo'." He tried not to meet the eye of the still-somewhat-famous rock-and-roll star sitting at the table with her arm tied off.

In the back, as expected was lovely Tere on s greasy sofa, white-blonde hair fanned across the Face. Mauve lipstick was worn away from the center of her puffy lips, and a cigarette slowly burned into the floor beneath her relaxed hand.- David crushed it out and lifted her fingers, making sure the Alexandrite was still there.

That rarest of stones! It changed color radically under different atmospheric conditions, and David, being sensitive to Kabalistic codes, liked to observe these changes and interpret them. But he let the hand drop, not stopping now to reflect upon the poignant, lovely, pathetic vision of Tere high. The stone showed an insipid beige color ... probably reflective of the lowest of vitalities. Beauty amidst the Ruins, ho hum! Tere made everything anyway look like a photograph.

He was turning her handbag inside-out, churning up the make-up collection, ripping at the bundle of glassine bags ... he could feel it already, the relief. In his haste he spilt half a bag on the floor as he inhaled the other half in one famished snort. Then he got on his knees and snuffled up the spillage, right off the indescribable floor. He fell back against Tere as the warmth began to spread - though his stomach upset worsened - he just made it to an convenient air-shaft.

Then, shoving Tere's inert limbs aside, he settled down next to her on the sofa, taking no notice now of its foulness. He lit a cigarette, tasting it with the intense pleasure the relief gave to everything.

Tere sighed and murmured something about a Pepsi. As he gazed at her pretty profile, noticing that she needed a shave, she began to scratch one side of her face and neck... as she seemed to have been doing before.

She was really badly marking up The Face. David gazed in a dream at the delicate hand surmounted by the enormous, mystic jewel. It shone in lurid contrast to its owner's bedraggled. How she could pass out in this squalour, wearing a priceless gem and not lose it, was but another luxuriant aspect of the extravagance that was Tere Gaya.

David marvelled at the wealth of decadent contrasts... but as one long painted nail suddenly broke through the irritated skin, he cried out, "Tere!" Blood was welling up.

"Eh? Daddy ! I wanna getta Pepsi!"

A rush of paranoia supplanted David's euphoria. What if someone who knew Tere came in and saw her? If Tere was going to try to break back into modeling, she couldn't have bloody stripes on her neck.

How did I even think of nodding out here, in Lola's hell-hole?

He got Tere up and out with no little difficulty. All the way downstairs she kept stopping to dig through her bag, look around herself, sit down and start to put on make-up, or argue with David,

"You didn't go get me a Pepsi, Daddy!"

She was worse than a child. "I'll get you your goddamned Pepsi, baby, can we just get out of this fucking dump?"

Out on the stoop the same group of well-wishers lingered, as if they planned to for all eternity. They brayed their good-byes, enjoying Whitey's cringing scuttle. What a sight

"Swanky motherfuckin' uptown-fuckin' junkies!" ... staggering off through the high-piled garbage.

"Looking down der pointy-ass noses at dis'ere slum. Man I knows a slum when I sees one. At least I ain' got no slum INside my body. My slum's jus'tere, on de OUTside, baby -

"where yo' Daddy build it fo' us!"

Chapter Eight

Angelique's telephone rang again and again she let the machine pick up. She glanced at the indicator - ugh! Seventeen personal calls she had not listened to. She knew at least half of them had to be from Dickie #123. Why had she given the fool her private number? She was going to have to change it again.

Why he couldn't make an appointment and leave it at that - no, he had to start calling six weeks in advance, and then when there got to be two weeks left, he would call no less than three times a day. And when he called it was only to recite, like an incantation, the details of his session:

When I first walk in you will order me to my knees You will command me to strip naked You will steal my wallet take all the money throw it all over the floor and tell me how I am a worthless piece of human filth.

Yes, and then would follow three hours of heavy bondage. She knew his scene in her sleep. She'd been seeing him for six years now, hadn't she?

She thought she really ought to listen to all the messages. There could be some interesting money in it... But no - she was going to write. She had to make some sacrifices, just couldn't work and slave. There were more important things than money.

Besides, if she had to listen to all those little whimpers, whispers and pleas, she would just get irritated. Then she'd have to see a client!

Angelique went into the bathroom and closely examined her face. Bad, bad, bad - she'd fallen asleep with her makeup on. But she anyway without washing her face began to repair it, thinking that sometimes sleeping in it strangely improved it...

She had to have her 'writer's role' in order before she could begin working. It was a trick of dissociation she forced her imagination into. Believing she could not work well unless, through make-up and costume, she entered into the time period; and thus the time and place where lived the character she was writing about.

Assume the Maquillage; Assume the Persona.

But of course her main character, Marie Alexandra, being but thirteen years of age, would not even wear a spot of rouge. Except perhaps at some special Ball... or at the private supper she was tonight attending, in the private chambers of her confessor, Father Salvatore.

As Angelique drew her bath, it became the bath of the Princess, heavily scented with muguet de bois. Tonight she planned to rewrite Marie's seduction by the unholy priest. Thus she assumed the Princess, preparing for an interview with the man she loved ... a man whom it was forbidden to love.

She considered how her desire for David, another forbidden object, was comparably shocking ... if there had been anyone she could have taken into her confidence about it. But she wouldn't be thought a sinner, as much as a pathetic masochist.

Marie's degradation would be the loss of her virginity ... Angelique considered how the seduction of a virgin was no longer really much the stuff of drama.

Though, she thought, it is still one of the great traumas in a female's life.

She, the author, could make it again traumatic ... using her present obsession with David, eliding her own desire into that of Marie's. So that when the seduction was upon her, how great would be the degradation....

After the Prince Konrad Poniatowski had lost his wife in childbirth, he determined that he would honour their surviving daughter, Marie Alexandra, with the finest education a girl was then allowed. He would see that she was installed at the French Court of Louis XV at Versailles.

Though in St. Petersburg there were many great scholars, amongst them Russian Orthodox primates, who anyway jockeyed to train the royal child... so her very early years were much dominated by such priests, forming in her mind, most unfortunately, a fatal connexion between that of such 'Fathers' and a kindly care.

But the Prince considered, with most educated Russians, that the finishing touch to a Lady's refinement lay in the country of the Bourbons. Thus to the Court of Louis Quinze he brought his only beloved child, at the too-fragile age of eleven.

Naive man! Poorly advised, he ended by placing her in the care of one of the worst debauchees of the Court - the Duchesse Malincourt. Amedee to her many, many lovers, this 'Lady' would abuse the girl, but only by ignoring her.

So that the Italian wizard, Salvatore di Castiglione, would enjoy without the slightest hurdle, the innocence of a child who would only love him.

This Court thus became for Marie nothing less than maze of immorality.

... the bath-tub was running over. Where was that stupid maid? Angelique rushed from her desk to turn off the taps, muttering her annoyance. She disrobed, and sank beneath the water's warmth... then closed her eyes and began the ritual to incorporate the Persona of Marie Alexandra into her own consciousness.

What had actually happened in the past - for the story of the Princess was a true story - was made more accessible to Angelique the artist in this fashion:

One begins with the recitation of intention forty times, at least. In this instance, Angelique had a positive, declarative sentence:

I am the Princess Marie Alexandra, telling my own story.

One then imagines the corresponding etheric ray, refracted from the creamy-white substance of the astral, flowing steadily into the bath-water. For Marie Alexandra, this was a rose-pink beam of light, pouring through a point in the ceiling, infusing the warm water with a steady glow. Angelique smiled at the scent of the muguet... as a girl these had grown right outside her window - that is, outside Marie Alexandra's window, in the wild Russian countryside, a message from the past...

Je m'appelle la Princesse Marie Alexandra, c'est mon histoire

Imperceptibly to Angelique the incantation turned to French, a strangely-accented French-Russian, of course, that came forth in a higher-pitched voice - a girl's.

The priest was very handsome - but he was a priest. She was happy he was there to console her; for her thirteenth birthday had come and gone without a letter from her father. Marie was at that important age when a husband would be chosen for her. The Duchesse Amedee already had some ideas on that subject. Why had her father answered none of her letters? Even if he was travelling, he ought to have written!

Her father Confessor would console her tonight...

Unknown to the child, the priest was intercepting her father's letters - and for what purpose? To drive her to melancholy - to force her into greater dependence upon him - all it took was a regular bribe to the lackey who brought the mail - who did not know exactly what letters the priest took away.

As well, a very small diamond had been enough for him to gain access to Marie's actions ... so that her maid might report on her moods to him ... so he might then, 'magically', know what she was thinking ...

Marie dressed herself with care ... the pink robe suited her very well. She wondered if Father Salvatore would like it. That is an unworthy thought, she told herself ... but she did find herself thinking of him very often, too often his face was

David Morgan's

Angelique sat up in her bath, very distressed. David's face had emerged naturally within the reverie. She was displeased, however - what if he was a bad influence upon her Marie?

Well of course he would have to be. That was the point! He was wrong - even essentially destructive for her. Angelique more minutely considered certain aspects of David's personality ... for example, there was a especial quality, peculiarly exhausting, about his conversation. The way he made a passionate demand upon her, though quite within her own inclinations. He exacted from her everything she had in the way of intellect - and he had to, to maintain that higher level of discourse ..

She emerged from the water and dried herself ... but as if a maid was drying her... if the reader can imagine thus! She then went to her closet and took out the pink manteau, whose ermine trim was girlishly decadent. Her long hair hung loose with just a few brush-strokes, and she was ready to sit down at the typewriter.

Once ensconced she does not allow herself to quit that chair, until she produces the determined eleven pages of manuscript. (We here note in passing that eleven as a metaphysic corresponds to the Power of Divination; as well as to the Celestial 'Pendule' of the Tarot, who hangs upon a thread of detachment between the Past and the Future... and that Eleven evokes too the first of the four Truths of Buddhism - 'Sorrow's Cause'.)

The surface of Angelique's desk is always in perfect order, so she might have no reason to not begin at once. Angelique glided a page into the machine, and

surveyed her room. All the candles were lit... Father Salvatore was in his chambers when the girl arrived ... Angelique began to page through the old, original diary-manuscript, wherein was detailed the exact dream she had had. She squinted at her thin, sketchy handwriting, the fading green ink of seven years' previous:

The girl had been all day in bed with fever, had not been certain she could even arise to dress. But she had prayed for some celestial intercession to quell her sickness, and make her well for him. She understood however, being of a devout cast, that her sickness was Guilt-In-Sin. He was a Man of God, someone who was never to be impurely touched!

And he was her own Confessor - how could she confess her Love, as a crime, to her Beloved ? Especially when she hoped that he might even - return her love?

To a form of God that had the shape of the priest she prayed for some deliverance.

Then her maid had her up - she was being dressed. The girl had no idea how manipulated she was ...

She felt as if her body was about to crack in half... as her pearls were set upon her throat, she swore to the Virgin that if she would be allowed to Love this man, that she would Love him purely... and that she would sacrifice any carnal desire. And she would confess all, she promised the Virgin, she would find another spiritual advisor to confess her

...lust! Mother of God, that is what it was. The word made her go red-hot, and then icy in terror. No, never one grain of her impurity would she ever reveal... to the man for whom she had sacrificed her peace of mind.

Angelique felt vaguely oppressed as she read over these words written years ago. She had been a much better writer then; the style was antiquated, to be certain, but was somehow seamless, confident and strong. Again she deplored the current influences upon her - dictated this dreadful need, to have the point gotten to instantly, by the modern world's truncated attention span.

When she had been more alone, without any world's eyes upon her, her style had been more pure. Why did Life, as it went on, seem to become more degraded?

Marie Alexandra, accompanied by her treacherous maid, walked the long corridor in the topmost floor of Versailles. His chamber was in this least desirable wing of the Palace - Marie Alexandra had never yet been there - where also dwelt a few impoverished

nobles serving Louis in a reduced capacity... certain elevated species of lackey ... along with the occasional poet. There was barely enough light to go on by, and no servants attending the fulsome stink of the open toilets.

Her maid knocked for her - his door swung to - the priest himself gazed down upon her. She was disturbed by his mode of dress: a too-rich, voluminous robe of brocade. In black, of course, as became a cleric, but somehow like some wizard's, she thought.

Now she was alone with him... and he was close by her - very close.

"Lovely colour, that rose," he seemed to be in her ear, "Quite the elegant child you are." Marie's head spun with the sudden blasphemous desire to remove that dress. How could she be thinking that way, after all her promises to the Virgin?

The child was unaware of the machinations against her. For the priest had put a serious wrinkle in the astral to achieve his ends with the girl... for she did possess a collection of jewels of extraordinary value. Of an unparalleled rarity, in particular, were a collection of Alexandrites, found in only one mine in the Caucasus - a gem of unusual responsiveness to humidity, changing from green to deep garnet like a barometer... of a price well beyond diamonds.

His room was permeated with erotic suggestion ... so potent that the maid, who had caught a whiff at the door's opening, was at that moment forcing her attentions upon a poor half-wit emptying slops....

The infernal perfume was having its effect on Marie, who collapsed in a deep chair, "You must excuse me... I've had fever today ..."

"You've been ill? Yet you kept this rendez-vous?"

The triumph in his voice cut her heart ... he knew, he knew! She kept her eyes cast down ... but despite herself loosened her fichu ... the 'dragon's blood' incense was heating, riling her... she took a glass of wine from his hand -

"Don't spill it!" But that was his intent. A drop of Medoc stained her bosom. She looked up in alarm, automatically for the bell to ring her attendant -

"No need, my dear, I can take care of it -" and he moistened the stain with a damp cloth - damp from an unmentionable substance, need we add?

She felt the wet burning into her skin... then to her dismay heard herself quite

shamelessly say - "Don't you think me too grown up now, to wear such a shade of pink?"

Hypocritically the pleasant look on her Confessor's face faded, and he drew back, to coldly let her know how he viewed her coyness, "It does ill become a child of thirteen indeed ... to behave as one of the cocottes of the Court. Do you really think it is proper - to draw my attention to your garb?"

"You have no mother to guide you - and perhaps no longer any father - and you have just proved to me how much in need of my direction you are!"

He knew to induce shame would make her more submissive. The poor girl writhed, under this combined cruelty and hypocrisy.

"What do you mean - no father?"

He chose to ignore that question for the moment... as well, that would add to her insecurity. He said nothing, poured himself a glass of wine, and would not look at her. Infernal stage-manners, trifling with reality!

"Father - please forgive me. I don't know why I said that. Perhaps it is my fever ... I am not well. I should go ... As she rose to pull the bell, he grasped her hand.

"It is not for me to forgive you, my child, but God. Do not take my criticisms so violently. That too is pride." She was terrified by the touch of his hand. To her exacerbated imagination, his fingers felt like velvet snakes, entwining hers inextricably. She tried to pull away, was able to - and instantly wished to feel that hand again.

"There is something you must understand about the Court, my child," as he poured her more wine, "Most of the women are little better than whores - and the men much worse than dogs. I could count on one hand those of a truly virtuous nature. Do not be deceived by their courtesies, nor be swayed by a polished manner. You need a powerful protector against them, to insure your purity."

He watched her swallow deeply of the second glass of wine. He had considered drugging it, but at the last minute decided it would be a better challenge to see if she might fall to him without any extra persuasion. He observed with approbation the glittering eye of her, and her sudden deeper breathing.

She was aroused...

Without knowing how, she was standing before him, and he held both her

hands by the wrists His eye upon her was dreadful - she felt as if he could see into her very heart. So he knew she loved him! She wished she could faint... But he at that moment was merely gauging the effect his hands had upon her. He was pleased to note his proximity made her go pale, then flushed - in the muscles of her arms he felt not the slightest resistance.

He had spent all his bribes well.

She felt his hand fall heavy, clamp-like around the back of her neck. His face was beating down upon hers was he going to kiss her? He stopped just inches before her face Then all at once he let her go.

She picked up her wine-glass did not see his sneer: So the little trollop wanted more to drink, did she? Her glass was refilled, and he allowed himself to imbibe another glass...

He had all at once lost interest in seducing her, understanding how pliable she was. He liked a little resistance in his fucking! There was alot of satisfaction to be gained in just looking in her face... she was utterly transparent. A girl struggling with the first pleasures of sex...to want the act, yet have no words to ask for it. Her frustration was rather amusing to him... he read his domination there.

Angelique was completely aroused, almost crazy. This kiss - this lack of a kiss - caught at her as it had not before. God! Her head was hot, perspiring, she felt actually ill. Bizarre how she had written this all out, seven years ago, really without thinking.. except that it might be an interesting 'period' novel. But now it was too real, had become an intolerable kind of truth.

She rushed to the kitchen and downed two, three glasses of water. She had to calm down! She would do something mechanical, go to the newest version of the manuscript, start altering Marie from the publisher's requested age of sixteen, back to her original age - eleven! The magic eleven... when she died she would be only thirteen. When she, Angelique, should have died herself - before her sexuality had made her life into this elegant hell!

She went back to her desk but could barely sit up. The manuscript reper-cussed still further into her body ... she felt a terrible pain as if she were splitting in two, from vagina to throat... this pain making her cough uncontrollably. She drank more water, abjured herself to calm down, continue on. She paged on further, past the actual sex-act with the priest... that would be more, she thought, than she could at the moment bear.

“More than the enjoyment of any physical pleasure, the priest gratified her need to be of use - as all true lovers require. The Ideal will render up to the overly experienced mere ethereal sensation - subtle tremours, grave smiles. But this new, deep embrace, the priest’s inhabiting her body, resolved Maxie’s Ideal into a face and a body - into a man with a cruel need, and pain in his hands.

“Their supper had gone cold. He insisted she wait on him, pour his wine, cut his meat. She had never done such a thing for anyone before, and did it badly.

He laughed at her, “Well - you will have to do as maid - we certainly cannot ring for any servant. The thought that he perhaps ought to wait on her Angelique dared not express. Instead she wondered where her maid had gone.

“It’s very unlike her - to leave me.”

“Perhaps not tonight, however.”

Marie stared at her lover - appalled at this planning revealed.

“You were quite certain of yourself, sir,” she murmured.

“Quite certain of you, of course. And was I wrong?”

“You lack delicacy!”

He grasped her again, violently, “I think you do not fail to appreciate that lack!”

The telephone jangled and Angelique shrieked aloud, “Good God!” It had better not be that maniac Dickie #123! She glanced at the clock - after three - and got up to turn up the volume on the machine.

There was David’s mournful voice, calling her name, “Angelique? Angelique!”

“Yes - David?”

“Oh my dear - did I wake you?”

“Not at all - I was working.”

“Please - don’t let me disturb you.”

“Is there something wrong? Where are you?”

“I’m home - didn’t you get my messages?” His voice was very strange, low, constricted and nervous.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing - I just felt all evening... I wanted to talk to you. I had this dream about you - I was hoping you were all right. You see - sometimes my dreams are prophetic.”

“Did you have a bad dream?”

He sighed, seeming exhausted - “Yes Mommy - you should listen to your machine.”

“I will, then...”

He asked her again, “You are certain you’re alright?”

The transparency! Angelique was sinking back the trance-state of her writing-fugue. Perhaps he would not be cruel to her - this time!

“Yes - I am fine! Just a bit overstimulated at the moment - working hard...”

Her writing of Salvatore - her sexual excitement had evoked him. As she materialized the priest, so, she predicted, would David come closer to her.. This time, this time - (she fervently wished) he would love her, not just use her ...

“Let me call you tomorrow,” he concluded, “we’ll have dinner tomorrow - around eight - Raoul’s?”

Yes, the little private supper - the private, promised meeting! “Eight will be perfect - good-night,” she hung up,

“my dearest, my Beloved!”

Marie made her way alone, somehow - act the way back to her room. She met only one old woman, who observed her narrowly. To her experienced eye it appeared the girl was drunk... "Child like that don't belong in this place!" The old woman knew exactly where she had been... and her maid saw the bloodied under-slip...so before Marie had slept off her first 'debauchery', half the servants of Versailles knew of her fall.

But when Marie awoke, the first thing she saw were his eyes above her. The look in them enough resembled that of love... enough to soothe her conscience. God might punish her for her sin - but did she care? The eyes bore down on her, tearing into her. Father Salvatore was more than a man, her was terrible Spirit, perfected Sin, her own private Satan now made flesh.

Chapter Nine

An hour after confirming his dinner-date with Angelique, David sat smoking his last cigarette, his foot resting on his drawing-pad on the floor. He found himself staring into his last canvas... and started calculating when he had last touched it. Three months - four? Could that be possible?

He was appalled by the colors he had used. From what melee of his soul had that hideous burnt umber come? The entire right side of the canvas was a charred waste... how could it be that what he had painted meant nothing to him?

"Face it - the thing is dead!"

The vitriol in his tone startled him - but it felt good to hate it - at least that was passionate.

I should go back to the figure... these experiments in abstraction are definitely a failure... give it up, as the critics have suggested. But what they meant was that I should give it up altogether! How could a man work against such violence?

So was he supposed to get some kind of, of... a job? David shuddered.

He wasn't rich enough yet to quit!

Had he reached his peak, then - and passed over?

The Museum of Modern Art only had drawings and not one painting. He didn't have a gallery in New York... and two of his former venues, the one in Paris, the other in Cologne had neither given him the shows they'd promised him - whenever that was... god could it have been three years ago, the last time he was in Europe?

Where had the time gone?

He didn't even have a lover... and how would he attract anyone as a has-been?

Maybe he could make a few quick sales, get in the groove again ...he could work some gimmick, get some quick attention, there was a trend now wasn't there towards the representational?

These efforts of his degraded imagination filled him with self-loathing. He couldn't do it - lassitude replaced false ambition. It was all he could do to take the last cigarette-end to the ashtray.

His Imp of the Perverse stepped in to instruct him. This planning is worthless! You are finished as a painter - and there is nowhere, anymore to hide from the fact!

Around the central black pivot of his painted 'Abyss' the impasto, gold-leaf'd, glowered as if angry. His flamboyant, apparently 'heroic' gesture - the one that had gotten him noticed in the first place - was no longer in him. The thick, painstakingly worked-up abstraction of the paint actually made him feel nauseated.

He considered once again, whether he ought to go back to the figure. Why didn't he? Might it not ground him, prepare him for the esoteric flight of 'disrepresentation' once again?

No, you can't go back to the figure.

He moved irritatedly in his chair - "And why in hell not?"

It was because those three newly, fabulously successful Italians - 'The Three D's' they called them - Diamante, Dolfi, and Didirmana - had done it first. First - who were they kidding? They were only 'first' after the vaunted 'revolution' of Abstract Impressionism - which anyway was way out of fashion! If he went back to the figure it would look like he was jumping on the bandwagon . But then why not? What was he saving his 'purity' for?

I should just start painting portraits of little old Park Avenue beldames. If there was one thing he was good at (odd that Angelique had picked up on it) it was seducing the female sex. Except in his case he liked to get his hands on their fat little checkbooks.

No, he wouldn't go back to the figure, even if he did possess something of an actual genius for capturing a likeness.

Thus another modern artist, denying the tenets of classicism, wrote him-

self a page of doom in his creative life.

For the first time in a long time David thought about the mural at Basil's. Basil Caldwell, dead for a year now at the age of thirty-four from a drug overdose. Dear Basil! As a lover he had not been first-rate, but as a fellow-painter he had inspired David as had no-one else. Basil too had possessed the ability to re-create the human likeness, and together they had enjoyed a well-kept secret. On the wall of their studio, they had both worked on a mural:

The Waiting-Room To Hell.

He thought of Basil languishing on his couch, supine yet dominant, waving a hand and inspiring David to add some color, or change a shading. Basil had been a 'precipitator', able to bring out the best in others. If he had lived, he would have made an exceptional professor ...where would he, David ever find that friendly genius again? Not in his cynical milieu of the moment for certain.

He could work on the mural...he ought to go over to the studio, god how long had that been? As far as he knew the place could be trashed, it was only a squat, after all - but that was a real studio. David looked with distaste around his twenty-by-twenty space that he supposed he should be grateful for - that Rolfie, his last decent patron paid the rent...

But Basil had found their 'Villa of Mysteries' purely by chance. Walking one day up Fourteenth Street towards Sixth Avenue, David remembered their astonishment as they looked up from the street-level of foul cheap shops and discount 'chains', and seen - The Temple! Atop the narrow building, perched on the ninth and tenth floors, was a strange small Graeco-Roman villa indeed. It turned out (as it often did in Manhattan in the 1980s) that the entire building was uninhabited, but for a gaudy toy-store at ground level.

Basil had broken in that evening - gotten up the stairs and into the top floors. Apparently it was 'unrentable' as there was no elevator. He had the locks changed by a friendly disreputable locksmith ... and as far as David knew, he was still the only one to have a key.

It was their masterpiece, that Waiting Room To Hell! They knew they would never show it, and neither could it ever be sold, as they had perversely painted right over the crumbling layers of ancient, flaking paint. It had existed as their private exercise, rather in the tradition of 'Dorian Grey': to preserve the exceptional youth and beauty of their crazy, genius confreres. For he and Basil had 'innocently'

amused themselves with painting the portraits of their friends..

Now it was David's private torment to look upon it, as every person in the mural was dead. With one interesting exception - Tere, dear mad Tere Gaya. That child was still somehow amongst the living. There was a space, as well, for David's figure, which, to David's sorrow, Basil had never started..

What he needed was another one like Basil, someone to inspire him, direct him, make those hard decisions for him. Someone of sensibility, a Master! Someone he could ask - Shall I just scrape this bloody mess down to the gesso and start over? And they would say, You Must. Someone he could ask, What about this chrome blue? Or should I use olive? And they would have the concise answer.

By himself he couldn't think or focus, he didn't know what he was doing... the whole of his existence was a trial and torment and he wasn't sure he ought to live it anymore!

In the back of his mind he understood he ought to take a long - a very long break. His mother would pay for a room at Golden Hills Retreat. Detox!

Not yet, the Imp told him, you can't do that yet. David stared into his painting again... it was worse than anything he'd done as a student.

'The Abyss', well yes THAT part was anyway correct.

His Imp whispered, you are losing your ability to work the paint...you are actually regressing to amateur forms... you're NOT supposed to go on. If only you could just stop WANTING to paint...

...and at that thought, David knew he was in serious default.

Worse still he had a show lined up for next month - and did not have even one new painting for it. He could drag out old stuff, as Rolfie had suggested. His new gallerist was a 'dreadful Philistine', Crasley Crawford. Accompanied by 'gargoyle of a minion', the ill-natured Beauregarde, he could show up on David's doorstep any minute, demanding to see Work. Already a couple of importunate telephone calls had been fielded.. God how he loathed them, loathed the entire process of showing and selling!

But he had to show, and these monsters were the only ones who had lately offered him anything. What clients could that scum bring to him, David Manfred? They were depending on him, for the leftovers of his clientele, for their forty percent,

which they certainly did NOT deserve. Crasley couldn't even dress ... Katarina wouldn't have hired the man to dust. God - Katarina! How could he have let her drop him!

Was it only five years ago? Those few choice years of making the rounds of the fashionable restaurants, riding in her limosine, hobnobbing with the creme at the best openings... not just 'making the scene' but creating it - bringing the bitch his clients from the Caroline days, helping her earn the 'cutting-edge' image she enjoyed today... And after he had made her the success she now was, the Aloysius Gallery rode the crest of his sweat, and dumped him.

Now even Katarina's new artists were pulling in middle five-figures ... painters who could sleep with her, massage her big fat ego, whores who would make paintings to match carpetting ...

When exactly had it started ... when had he begun to have absolutely no will to please them anymore?

The control the critics had over his work and reputation made him hate to work! Made him wonder what difference it made, if he showed old work, or this total crap he was presently eking out.

The Imp sneered, they're planning to hate everything you do anyway! So why give the vampires your blood?

The problem was he did want to please, did want the adulation and fame. His contemporaries were passing him by, getting the reviews, the money and power. He did not know the reason why no-one looked seriously at his work anymore.

But the truth was he barely had a drop of blood to offer.

He glanced at the clock - almost six. Well he'd made it past 'the magic hour': 4:30 PM. He did not have to take heroin everyday. (So the Imp told him.)

Six-o-five. He'd lasted almost two whole hours past magic hour. So he could control it, he wasn't like other people, he didn't have to take it. He didn't have to take it -

At least not at the same time every day.

He could get through the evening without it. Angelique was not a user. He could have a civilized dinner, have conversation - and not have to do it.

David's thoughts drifted to his 'stash'. He looked at the clock again. Six fifteen. Better check the stash, he had to have a little something at least, just something on hand in case.

He kept his drugs in an old cash-register, a relic from the thread-and-bobbin factory once active in his loft. He hit the SALE button. The wooden drawer slid open and David felt in the back for the plastic bag. He pulled it out - empty! Goddamned Tere - she had wiped him out!

How could she do that to him. Christ on a cross - now he HAD to go out. He counted his cash - just enough for the cab and \$50. worth. But what about dinner? He'd cancel. He swore aloud at Tere's rapaciousness. The bitch knew he always had a little something extra on hand ... because he didn't have to do it ... but had to be certain... had to make sure he would never get sick.

With the loss of his back-up stash the need for the dope sparked to, broke him out from head to foot in the sticky sweat. The only torment of his existence at that moment was that he had to go cop.

He dialled Lola's number. No answer! That was odd. He looked up Madame Anya's number - now her phone just rang and rang. What was wrong with these fucking people - didn't they want to make their money?

Goddamned Tere! What was he going to do now?

He didn't really have to do the drug ... he should just get dressed, go to the dinner with Angelique. He could have some drinks...

He dialled both Lola's and Anya's again. No answer! He would not go out and cop on the street! His sweatiness disgusted him, that toxic ammonia stink in his nostrils. It really was like a kind of bloody flu, racking his body everytime he needed it. There - he said he needed it!

You are just a lousy junkie, just buy enough to kill yourself and get it over with!

The effort of dialling the phone had exhausted him. Again he was stationed before his failed painting. He smoked the butts in the ashtray down to their

filters. Through a sudden fit of shuddering he thought he saw a light - a golden flash through the dirt-streaked windows. Sunset was long past ... he looked again, blinked as the glow repeated itself, flashed and held, widened, hummed and grew brighter ...

A luxuriant golden veil was spreading itself over everything. David wondered if he was dying, as he no longer felt ill... the walls of his room were dissolving.

He was in the center of the vast plaza on his knees... he felt the sway of a heavy robe on his back, along his arms were long sleeves of black. A glow seemed to emanate from the stone of the ground, and a tropical warmth enveloped him, this warmth a part of the Light...

It was the primeval place of Atonement. On all four sides rose the great stairways, leading to the altar of the Sun. He stared into the deeply cut scrolling of the carving, reading the brain-like convolutions of the hieroglyphs. He understood as he began to read...

... the telephone rang. He gasped as the vision dissolved and swore - whatever imbecile chose to persecute him now, of course had to call at just that moment! Idiots, torturers! He waited in a fury to hear whom it might be - but the person hung up.

Seven-o-five! He had to get out of there... he would go see Angelique, have a drink, two, three drinks before dinner. As he reached for the phone it rang again. He tore it off the hook -

"WHAT IS IT?!"

Paula's voice mewed in his ear, "I knew you were there! Oh David, God David, I'm going to kill myself!"

"So what else is new. So am I! What's your excuse today?"

She was crying, whimpering, and whining all at once, and David hissed, "What's the matter, won't Darryl buy you another tennis bracelet?"

"Very funny, no! No he said that I have to start going to AA I mean NA meetings, otherwise he'll put me in the hospital! And if I don't do either of those things, the engagement will be off!"

Paula had well-hidden her addiction for over a year from her proper 'preppie' fiance.. who of course was doing the right thing by these conditions, but God how loathesome the right thing was.

"So you have to go with me!"

"WHAT?"

"Come on David - I can't go by myself - you have to go with me!"

"No way am I going to be seen at one of those meetings! I don't have the problem you do, anyway!"

"I know but if I don't go he's going to call my parents and tell them everything!"

"So he found your works?"

The woman was snivelling ... David wanted to slap her, "So now you're dragging me into this, so Darryl will know about me too?"

"He already knows. I told him everything."

"You ARE a fucking idiot!"

"David - there's a meeting at eight o'clock, right on St. Mark's Place."

"Oh. great, the most public possible place in the world - can't you find another one?"

"So you'll go with me?"

"Of course not - I'm just thinking of you - you don't want to be seen by half of downtown, now do you? Pick some place uptown, at least."

The perversity of his advice was lost on them both. In the end she convinced him to accompany her, though his contribution to sobriety that evening was only waiting a couple of extra hours before having his first cocktail with Angelique.

Chapter Ten

We now leave David and Paula behind in Art's Vestibule, to accompany another artist, Rene Lepine, who is on his way out of that stifling nowheresville. But can we - can anybody - in these degraded times follow a *fantasiste distingue* into the higher aery realms of Literature?

We know Rene had but recently been fished from the sewer that is addiction. Thanks to the timely intervention of friends he had escaped pulverization, and that final flush down the cultural drain.

A certain wife of a renowned painter - who had to admit he owed much of his success, ten years previous, to Rene's incisive reviews - had made it her calling to cultivate artists less fortunate than her now extremely wealthy husband. But Branford Causewell, writing yet another grandiose check for Rene's hospitalization, had this time not restrained himself from telling his wife that Rene should be finally relegated to the pile of Lost Causes. The ingrate had the nerve to sneer that Rene was "once a wannabe... and now a never-will-be."

But Marilyn Causewell could not agree. She believed implicitly in Rene's genius and that it could be saved.

Once Rene had been released from this last trial of detoxification, we saw how he did rush out immediately to get high. Yet after two days' indulgence, the thrill of it was done. The therapy had taken - he had been a junkie too long - suddenly, the drug bored him!

He came to on that third morning right on a brink, and made the phone-call that saved his life, again. His clinic had an annex in Manhattan, used mostly for those in their first days of kicking. Its doors were expectantly open to receive him.

Marilyn was not disturbed by his backsliding. She had known His Blessedness for twenty years, and understood he very well might get high for the rest of his life. What else of real value could she and Bran do with all their money? To help other artists was the best thing.

She knew Rene's two days' damage to himself would require at least another three-week stay. If only he could learn to really control himself, not go on binges...

The Lady didn't understand that wreckage was a bed for him, from which he might arise enlivened. In the meantime she devoted herself, kept him alive to write more immortal lines.

"The doctor says you can leave on Monday," so Marilyn related to The Blessed on a Thursday morning, "and just in time. You've been chosen to read - at the Fleabane Awards' ceremony - at the Maxfield Library this Tuesday night!"

"Oh GOD I CAN'T!" screamed Rene.

"You CAN and you WILL!"

"But how can I write something NEW in THREE DAYS?"

"Don't write anything new. Just read some of your old stuff!"

"Are you MAD? What a pathetic impression that would make. Fresh out of Detox without a thought in his head! Marilyn!" he whined, "You've got to get me out of it!"

"I'll do no such thing! And no-one has to know you were in hospital... "

"Oh, right! They ALL know! Well better that than - I guess! - they're thinking I'm just high!"

"You're going to be fine, my dearest. If you want to present something new, why don't you just write down that speech you're always giving - about the death of modern civilisation - you know the one - it's kind of anti-drug, too, isn't it..." She trailed off in the light of his glare.

"Oh, 'Just write it DOWN!' I love how you all think it's just so fucking rolling off my fingertips! 'The Death of Discipline'... just very fucking edifying. Ex-junkie gets up and proselytizes for 'Just Say No', 'Just Write it Down,' Just Fucking Slit My Wrists Why Don't I?"

"Stop it !"

"Why can't you understand Marilyn I can't be subjected not NOW to the gaze of the crowd! I can't I can't!" he was crying in frustration.

"You can and you will. This is an excellent opportunity for you to prove to your peers that you are not just a junkie!"

"My PEERS!? My PEERS?! God woman you are so NAIVE!, And don't you know by now that I'll always be a junkie, on junk or off of it! Which takes me safely out of retching distance of those ink-stained wretches, so-called PEERS of mine!"

"I don't know why you have to be so negative. Don't denigrate what you've accomplished! I know you'll 'always be a junkie'. That's what they say in NA and all, but now you don't have to be ONLY a junkie!"

"Darling, I do love you. You're the only friend I have!"

"Do it for me - do it for Bran!"

The husband had spent a breath-taking high-five-figures to restore his wreck of a body. Marilyn was right. He shouldn't be cranky with her. What had she saved him for anyway? Why him, and not a half-dozen lesser-addicted hard cases roaming Art's Vestibule? Because he was a true poet! And besides, why shouldn't he take the challenge to 'wow' those bloody poohbahs?

Rene put the clinic's nurses in a flurry, dashing out to get him the right pens and paper - everything to start him working immediately. A sense of purpose was a very good curative ... though he did regret cocaine. Now that would get him going in no time! No, no, no! he reasoned with himself. It would mostly get him doodling around the edges of the pad ... or regurgitating some tedious highfaluten dogma on the Art of Poesy. No, he had to write something beyond... beyond his best. He had to turn his bloody PEERS inside out with envy.

Revenge, the last motivator of the desperate.

Hmmm, 'The Death of Discipline'. Rene wrote the title at the top of the page. It had been his after-dinner set-piece for some years now. Marilyn was a genius. Why shouldn't he finally commit it to paper?

And so he called his Muse at least forty times over that weekend:

"This SUCKS! I will NEVER FORGIVE YOU! I just CANNOT believe that as part of my very DIFFICULT rehabilitation, and I hate that phrase, can you tell me what I'm being HABILITATED back into? - I have to perform at OPTIMAL CAPACITY for a bunch of IDIOTS who are already HATE MY GUTS and are only PLANNING my DISMEMBERMENT!"

"Marilyn, I've lived my crazy life all my life, there's no going straight for me, there's no 'normal' to return to anyway, as I was saying, to ADD to the STRESS and STRAIN of detox I have to BE A FUCKING PERFORMING MONKEY-GENIUS for a passel of ENSCONCED MEDIOCRITIES who do not deserve to lick my TOES!!!"

"So you can't face those who know you as an artist? Rene, how can you possibly be afraid you won't measure up? What a child you are! I can't believe you're so insecure!"

"Don't rag me bitch! It's not a matter of insecurity! it's a matter of nerves, nervous resources, when all I have are fucking debilitated NERVE-ENDS!"

"You're afraid of..."

"Listen you TWAT don't you dare say to me I'm AFRAID, I'M NOT AFRAID I just don't CARE, at this moment in time, do not CARE to be FORCED to be JUDGED by tedious establishmentarians in their tedious sanctuary!"

"Yes Yes Yes."

"To make this psychic trial even MORE stressful, you, my FRIEND, insist I throw myself before these old literary horrors. Beasts, who as we speak, are licking their faded chops, jockeying their knobby knees against one another's, to be FIRST to suck my BRAINS right out of their little old BRAIN-PAN!"

"Calm down!"

"Easy for you to say. I'm the one who's expected to go from The Slough to The Sublime, all in the space of seventy-two hours!"

"Are you working at all?"

"... well, yes."

"Good! Now darling, we were thinking", Marilyn tried to make her tone light, as it was so easy to offend him. "In these twenty years I've known you - and in the over thirty years you've been the poet you are - isn't it too bad you've only had one book done ...isn't it time - that we might try to do something about that?" Her gentle voice tried not to imply that there might be something - just a bit - to be embarrassed about.

But Rene had never been urgent about such things - not ashamed at all of his lack of production. He was not obsessed, as some are, with seeing his name in print. He lived the life of the *maudit* - was just as satisfied scrawling some perfect phrase in chalk on a sidewalk - or in the air before him at a crowded cocktail party - as he was with having his poems engraved in type. His 'one measly book', as he liked to deride it, with its thirty-odd poems would in time prove to be of more literary value than the dozens, and dozens, and dozens of eager mediocrities...

The 'Enshrined Mediocrity' is the most pernicious of literatum. Rene rightfully despised the 'careerist poet' who could churn it out regular. It is a modern, sick-making phenomenon, to see those mild and well-fed faces, looking out trustingly from their glossy book-jackets, atop their wretchedly proper resumes. Of course such as they COULD go on busily publishing publishing publishing. For they did not expend one drop of blood in their constructions. Rene had always loved that quote from the obscure novelist Fowler:

Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood appear on your forehead.

Wretches without a stain of ink upon you, vast and ugly publishing conglomerates - make your money since you can - but no one will remember one bland little, neat little line of those verses and novels, not one minute after reading them!

Marilyn had heard all Rene's arguments against publishing before. Still she had to push and keep on pushing him to produce. He really had so little egoistic need. Thus was he called 'The Blessed'. She was devoted to keeping the Genius alive - though at times only God knew why. It seemed the thankless task.

Three days later, Rene was climbing the stair of the great Maxfield Library - a white Temple on Madison Avenue dedicated to the Art of the Book, He felt positively crazed, even hallucinated, as if he were watching himself in a movie. But everything was more awfully REAL than it had been in a long, long time.

He thought, *I don't belong here.*

Yet he did, it was the only place he really did belong! He clutched his thick scribbled-over manuscript in his bare hands. He didn't even have a folder to carry it in.

He knew that Marilyn was right - he had to do this. But not for the reasons she insisted upon. Not because he had to prove anything to anybody. Not because he was concerned with repairing his reputation... but because he had to Know His Time, and Know Himself in his Time and Place. He had to hear everything they might deign to say about him - good and bad - and then soldier on beyond it.

The papers started sliding out of his jittery hands, he was on his knees in the vast marble hall of the glorious rotunda that wound up to the reading rooms. As he scabbled amidst the sheets, he started reading the whole thing over. After a few minutes he was writing addenda in the margins. The 'finished product' resembled a kind of cuneiform, highlighted with trampling.

And thus it would (unsuspected by The Blessed) one day repose in that very Library sanctuary, in its own lovely wooden drawer - catalogued by worshipful hands, sacredly buried in those very revered archives of the English language.

But now, of course, the first person he has to see is his most tedious enemy, Asmodeus Whipley - publisher of that effete and well-funded literary review known as HUMM.

"You here?" Whipley's astonishment was dramatic.

"Ahem. I see you haven't read your programme!"

"Didn't get one yet. How ARE you?"

Rene knew the man really did not care. Or rather, he was hoping to hear the worst.

"Well - very well." Rene could see Whipley was as displeased to be confronted with him, as he Rene was. Somehow this gave him strength to meet the next question:

"So - ah you're... out on parole, I hear?"

"Well I wasn't in JAIL, Azzy - if that's what you mean!"

Asmodeus curdled at the nickname Rene had coined and caused to be much bruited about - and even reduced to 'Azz'!

"Well I'd heard that they'd put you away ..."

In the man's smile was everything that had made Rene shriek at Marilyn, "I CAN'T!"

"Well I'm out now, and cured for good."

"Cured." Whibley looked him up and down. Well Rene didn't look too wretched. "So then - how ARE you?"

"How are YOU?" was Rene's only defense at that moment against the prying. The smile was malign, Cheshire-like, looming. The smile told Mr. Lepine that Mr. Whibley did NOT believe in CURES. That Mr. Whibley would therefore always be greater than Mr. Lepine, who must therefore always remain lower than, yes even BENEATH Mr. Whibley's superior hauteur. That it was all very well to have some sort of GENIUS, but to have genius alone was not enough, no not quite enough at all, at certain times, in certain grand milieux, where more than mere funky GENIUS would not admit even The Blessed into certain privileged drawing-rooms.

"Quite well - "

"In top form - "

Rene's slight vigor faltered under the scorching eye of his adversary, who, as far as he was concerned, had never seen Rene inhabiting anything even closely approximating 'top form'. It was evident - even now, despite 'the cure' - that the man was sick. Perhaps he even had - the Plague!

"And what's that you're massaging - may I?" Asmodeus knew quite well it was a manuscript; still he fairly snatched at it. Rene pulled back against the riposte, holding his work to his chest. *Such vulgar nerve!*

Despite his long affliction The Blessed was famous for having retained his brilliant vitriol of wit. But at that moment the large, pale, confident face of the Poohbah rendered him speechless. Terrorized by the sight of the pudgy hands grappling at his precious work, he mustered what little energy he had left and stalked away, to Poohbah's windy, "WELL!"

He called after Rene, "I do so look forward to being ENTERTAINED by you!" knowing full well Rene detested that distinction. 'Art means to edify and enlighten; monkeys there are to entertain you!' Thus the Blessed had writ.

"Now where is the John in this joint?"

Rene went down a corridor into an abandoned mezzanine. Everything was marble - white marble. In one corner seated on a bench, again of white marble, was a dour black man: an old man, dressed in a 'colonial' lackey's garb. They had even saddled him with a curled white wig - with queue! He pointed the way to the toilet for Rene, who goggled, then attempted to make some consideration.

The man did not respond. *How depressing, thought Rene, to actually force a man of color into that slavish drag! Is that what all this white marble is about? And of course a servant should not chat with the Master - ugh!*

All at once he loathed the Library for that horrid charade. And they claimed to be an advanced cultural institution! "Well I guess that would include SLAVERY, come to think of it!" muttered The Blessed, as he snorted a couple of hits of coke. Lovely stuff - nearly pure - in yellowish mica-like flakes. No jitters with this, and a nice let-down, especially with a drink or two atop.

When he made his way to the evening's Reading Room, he was more than ready for that drink or two... the audience was already filling up the seats. What - no cocktails would be served until after the goddamned bloody ceremonies?

"Key-ryst!"

A minion scurried over to inform Rene of when he would go on. He had thought he would be first, so they could get him over with. Or, that they'd put him last, so everyone could leave. For why else should they stay on - to actually listen to him?

He had hoped to be first, while the coke was still taking him... god he knew it - he was last.

He looked again at the programme - what was this - he was the ONLY reader? So they were giving out awards, making little slavish speeches to each other about how great they were - then they were going to be ... god, ENTERTAINED by the monkey! He shuddered.

And what was this? It said, 'Rene Lepine, Candidate for the Polliwog Fellowship'? Since when? And for \$30,000 - but who had put his name up, why had no-one told him about it? So - was this reading the 'interview'?

It was bad enough he'd have to sit through the interminable self-congratulatory humbug - but to know he was being featured as some kind of aspirant to their company! Too wretched! He was going to kill Marilyn!

Well, he wouldn't do it. He would just go, and NOW.

Too late - there she was, smiling and waving. Bitch! They were closing the venerable ten-foot oaken doors. Trapped! The minion reappeared and Rene let him know, with some violence, that he had to be given a private room in which to rehearse his piece. The minion could barely look into Rene's face, so terrified was he of the man's reputation. He led Rene to a small side study. Stationed outside his door was the unfortunate bewigged Negro.

Rene began by pacing up and down the room. He couldn't run out, he'd look like a coward. He was getting hysterical, and he knew he was getting hysterical, which made him feel completely insane. He ingested the rest of his coke without thinking. About six hits, enough to turn him into a gibbering idiot. Then he forced himself to sit in one place, and read the piece through once without addenda.

The drug was rushing through his system like hysteria. His writing was absolutely dreadful! He loathed it! He couldn't read it! He was just going to have to chuck it, do the piece as 'diatribe', exactly as he had at all the dinner parties.

Thus to an invisible audience he began, as he had a hundred times, to speak his piece aloud. And it was suddenly right - each detail that had tortured him a moment ago fell into rightful place under the clarion peal of his speaking voice.

Somehow between the cocaine and hysteria he had achieved Detachment.

Yet atop that 'security' he felt crazier than ever. He kept laughing to himself, which he knew disturbed his sentry. But he couldn't help it. He was about to start tearing slices out of the manuscript, with the idea of making a sort of collage, when the door swung open...

There seemed to be a tolling of a bell... from somewhere out in the Manhattan night. His moment of doom was come, perhaps - but it was just his genius 'dooming' him.

What did he care anyhow...his reverie was interrupted by the old man of color, 'his servant', standing by.

He'd been saying, "Sir, sir!" but Rene hadn't heard him at all. But of course Rene was very loud, alternating his diartibe with verses from the Santero hymn, 'Que Linda Es' -

***Que Linda Es
Oh mano mio
Que linda es
Quando la Practicando***

But now as Rene caught the black man's calm eye, the poet began to weep. The old man touched the younger, "Now now, don't take on, sir -"

Rene was only briefly pacified by the resonant tones of that voice. The man was probably a singer, another artist - reduced to this sort of a job!

"Quel horreur Monsieur," Rene shrieked, at the top of his lungs, "I beg you then, conduct me, sir - to my guillotine!"

"But might I further, beg you, sir -

"TAKE OFF THAT BLOODY WIG!!!"

We might let you know the reading was an abject 'failure', precisely as Genius had determined. But we must here leave The Blessed, and the recital of his 'Discipline', for a later delectation...

... and return to our tragic pig, the hero of this tale, poor David.

Chapter Eleven

David was walking up and down the length of his studio, not even pretending to work. It was 4:45, and Anya wasn't letting anyone over until after 5. He kept trying to call them anyhow but the line was busy, eternally. *Your dealer's line was always busy in hell, didn't you know.* His nerves were bad, very bad, when he heard screaming from the sidewalk, someone screaming his name in most vulgar fashion.

He peered out the crack in the metal gate that covered his window... saw Rolfie, with some dame, standing next to a WHITE stretch limo. David groaned, "HIDEOUS!" And they were early! *Bloody fucking more than an hour early!*

Why was he being persecuted? He could have been working - he could have been out! Either way, Rolfie and this rich bitch were robbing him! If he'd been working, they would have interrupted him, and if he'd gone out earlier to Anya's to cop, he would have missed a sale!

What was wrong with people today, why didn't anyone have any manners!

Did he dare have their driver take him over to Avenue C? If only he could be that brazen. He peered out again... *just the limo... Rolfie and that cunt on their way up, what in Christ-On-A-Cross am I gonna do??* He rushed to the phone and dialled Anya's again.

The line was free but Anya's languid minion informed him, "You better come now - by six we'll be out to dinner."

He heard Rolfie yodelling up the stairs, "Oh David, David dear!"

Yes, little David was just their toy, his studio their playground, and they could come over any goddamned time they felt like it - because of their lousy check-books! And of course The Artist had NOTHING to do but entertain their unbearable idiocy! He had no important work to complete, not one idea that required a dignified respect in its presence - no! All that was expected, was that he be ready to primp for their parade!

Before he was even in the door Rolfie was reciting the evening's programme:

"...the Klondike opening. I hate his work but Cobby and Moo-Moo'll be there. They want us to take them over to Nozzle's. After that jamboree, we'll get to Krankencroft's just in time. What's made him feature FEMALE nudes I'll never guess! No offense, Wanda!"

David stared down at the tiny woman who was the interesting escort of Rolfie. A bottle blonde, over-dieted, skin stretched tightly over her cheekbones. An elaborate, glittery eye make-up job did not disguise her shifty, venal look. She kept her gigantic black sable fur on over further draperies of ostentatious gold chain jewelry...

This was Wanda Galliano, the infamous 'Mafia Marquise': due to "tell all" in a scandalous new memoir, which had been sold for somewhere in the low-six-figures. Travesty! Rolfie had already gotten his mitts on a tidy few grand for his brokerage firm - and he, David was now lined up to pluck her fast - before the police pulled her out of the river.

But in a turn that appalled David, the woman was going seductive. She seemed to have gotten herself egad aroused... Rolfie giggled to see David blanch, as the woman went up to David and snaked one of her legs between his in a quick uncanny fashion. He felt her ankle hook and lock around his calf.

The woman sighed and heaved her chest against his, "I really LOVE artists!"

"He's the shy type Wanda, gotta go slow with him..."

"Rolfie?" David attempted to ease her off himself. It was impossible. A sense of being raped came over him...

"Come on, David, can't you show a little affection?"

Fucking Rolfie, such a whore, 'bisexual' and open to everything. So what if HE could lay her for the cash - what's the distinction in that - if some people are capable of anything?

"So you gonna show me whatcha got here?" She stank of vodka and hours-old cologne.

Further humiliation - was he supposed to pretend to be interested in her? He wished Holfie would stop smoking so much pot, as to forget to fill him in on the ever-changing subtexts.

"Wanda! Get over here - look at this!" Rolfie was bustling in a dusty corner of the studio, as if he owned the place. Which he rather did...

"Oh!" she shrieked by way of critique, "it is - exactly - the blue I painted the den!"

She pointed a fingernail studded with rhinestones, "You didn't use Pratt & Lambert 'Illusion' on that, didja?"

David turned an eye of condescension upon the two, "Beg pardon?"

Rolfie carefully avoided David's glare, "So baby, do you want that one?" He pointed at the very large canvas.

"Rolfie, you said if we got it today, we'd get a real good discount?"

To David's exacerbated nerves it seemed to him that the bitch meowed at him... he was definitely capable of ripping those diamonds-and-rubies off her ears and ramming them down her throat.

"Yes that's right darling, but you'd have to get it now - and half in cash, remember? Fresh out of the studio, forget the dealer - so that's an instant forty per cent off, right David?"

Through clenched teeth David hissed, "Of course, dear Rolfie. Anything for my friend Rolfie! | "

Rolf stopped his busyness and narrowed his eyes. He knew that tone - ungrateful. Wasn't he, Rolfie, David's current sole support? And hadn't he been so, ever since Katarina had dumped him?

And didn't he, Rolfie, personally own over fifty of David's paintings? That he could throw onto the market - and so in one day drive his prices down, and ruin their value for years to come?

David could afford to do his, Rolfie's, business associates a small favor

now and then! They might even become his friends and benefactors, too, if he would ever bother to get his clothes cleaned. The man was really going downhill! Rolfie remembered how sleek and pressed he used to be - he could at least have put something decent on for a first meeting!

And was it his imagination, or did the studio reek? Fortunately Wanda was so coked up she wouldn't remark it.

Wasn't he always as good as his word - hadn't he promised he'd bring over the Mafia Princess? Who aside from that disgustingly huge book contract, had a husband who unofficially owned the Bank of Bahamas?

What was wrong with David - where had his killer instinct gone?

"Wanda, leave David alone - come over here, come on - I have a little something special for you!"

"OooEE! Rolfie's always got the greatest stuff!"

From the pocket of his tidy vest Rolfie extracted a black laquered bottle, unscrewed the top and tapped out a pile of glistening white dust. Wanda pointedly rolled a hundred-dollar bill into a straw:

"Makes it taste better!"

David felt frantic - coke! When his nerves were already working their way out of his skin. He disappeared into his kitchen, searching for something to tide him over until he could get away and get over to Anya's. He had to think of an excuse! It was going on towards 5:30. Didn't he even have one drop of booze?

He heard them snorting and oohing and ahing and screamed, "NO THANK YOU". Amidst empty bottles of linseed oil he unearthed a half-pint of Chartreuse. He had once tried to paint with the green of it. He swallowed the contents down, about nine shots. Beastly sensation but better than sweating.

"What are you doing in here - wanking?"

Grandiose from the cocaine, Rolfie assumed his proprietorial role. He busily trotted the studio, dragging out old unfinished canvasses, waving his hands before them importantly. He then sat down, did more coke, and collected Wanda's cash for the blue painting before going on with his list of the evening's exciting

events.

"Better get moving... Nozzle's... Moo-Moo... have to be on time to Indochine or we'll lose the reservation, half the place's taken up for Francis Conroy's daughter's Bar Mitzvah or something... no she's turning sixteen. Whatever. Gotta get there uh, uh before... uhh. Yeah he's got an opening but let's skip it, We'll see all the people at the restaurant. I don't like his work, I don't care. Place'll be packed. He's overrated... blah blah blah". The inanity of his gossip made David feel like his brain was in a shredder.

"I hear Francis is very good-looking - and available," Wanda oozed.

"They're all available darling. Especially when they're married - "

"I'd like to go to HIS studio, Rolfie," throwing David a challenging look. Again David entertained a fantasy of wrecking her flesh in an unpleasant manner.

"I have somewhere I have to go - first - before we leave - it'll only take an hour - I'll meet you at Indochine."

"David! We came early to take you With Us - this is gonna be a great night, there's so much going on - David!" Rolfie whined. In seconds flat the twerp would careen from domineering to brown-nosed weasling.

"Come on David you should go out more, be seen, put all those rumors to rest," at this last Rolfie lowered his voice, falsely confidential.

"What rumors?" jumped Wanda, as she was supposed to.

"Shut up bloody asshole!" snapped David, out of control.

"Oh tootie don't get your tits in a tither! It's just that - people are saying you're Count Dracula!" Both shrieked into David's solemn distress.

Some Dracula, he thought, they're not the slightest bit intimidated by me.

Wanda went on shrieking with joy and gobbling up coke, as Rolfie capered to and fro along the studio floor. To David's hysteric nerves they seemed like demons dancing on his nerve-ends.

"So they say I'm a dope fiend?" He tried to make it a rhetorical question, but it came out flat, uncaring.

"Oh so what if you are - who isn't?" Wanda was reaching for him again, "I like you anyway!" Shakily he moved away from her, an inch from slapping her, making his excuses to escape. Besides he would be embarrassed to be seen in that garish car...

"Well, I'm going to, ah, meet a friend, then I've got to get home, shower, dress, you know, oh my god it's after seven!" he lied.

"Yes yes, no no," as they tried to tag along, insisted on driving him. He rushed downstairs, flagged down a cab... "St. Mark's Place, between First and A."

The driver, a fat black lady in a flowered house-dress, and congruously if eccentrically topped by a formal chauffeur's cap turned around, gave him the once-over, heaved a deep "Humn, hnn hnn, HUH!" and took off at sixty miles an hour.

As she ran a red light out of Soho, David relaxed - it was so wonderful the way a cabby could be psychic and do exactly what you needed! She raced cross town, swerved onto First from Houston. Beautiful! At the corner David unrolled a twenty and tossed it over the front seat, "There - number 101 - pull up - you can wait for me, can't you? Thanks. I'll just be a minute - um no more than five - okay?"

His driver gave vent to another "Hmm humph - HUH!" that subsided into a series of "Uhmp uhm, UHM! Waal shore thang hon, uhm, uhn UHNI No problema - I wait fer ye. Shore!"

As David entered the vestibule he heard the cab's engine rev and gun off. He bolted out onto the stoop and cursed, "Fuckin' bitch!"

A duo of young punks, of sex indeterminate, gazed up at David from out of their narcosis. The girl-seeming one, 'goth'd' in black from head to toe, draped as well in rusted chain, whispered from black-painted lips,

"Now tha' ain't nice... be nice... be nice now..." Her bleary eye was ready to cry. David could only snarl and thunder up the unlit stairs. When anarchist brats start telling me to behave myself, I must look really scoundrelly.

Standing, waiting, outside Anya's door was a girl he knew - yeah - and she knew him. But they did not say Hello or even acknowledge the other's existence.

Francis Conroy's wife's girlfriend's friend - yeah. Here for a big ol' bundle of doojie, pour la soiree ce soir. Oh yeah.

David let loose a rude, nervous snigger. Yeah and so who was he anyway to sneer? Look at him - sick, shaking and sweating while Frankie-boy had his own personal slave to do his buy!

So where was his chauffeur - where were his minions - where had gone the glory days?

