

ANONYMOUS BROWN PAPER TITLE

Chaos theory filled its lungs then coughed its guts up over London. For the third summer in a row small lonely packages had brought the city grinding to its knees, courtesy of yet another foreign terrorist organisation. Cars growled and people growled back through the pedestrian peppered gridlock; the air above slowly curdling into a lead-lined consommé of addled fumes and crammed frustration. Flack jacketed officers scurried up and down empty escalators shouting five minute promises while stranded commuters wandered aimlessly around outside with their mobiles like single antennaed ants. To a Londoner these days being blown to smithereens ranked as a mere inconvenience compared to the havoc a frozen transport system caused to their white-rabbit existences.

London hit back and hit the bars. Alcohol the universal antidote would soon course their veins, banal workstation stories would be forgotten and a few more people would get laid because of it. Post-industrial terrorism has benefits.

My moby played my latest download. It was a message from Art.

... the Seven degrees at seven be there you'll like it...

Perfect I had an hour to kill and the most effective way to put time out of its misery was with a couple of shots of Peppered Vodka at the Soviet café on Frith.

Art was a close friend but not my best friend. I don't have a best friend, I find friendship a complex thing and have never really understood how anyone could be capable of being 'best' at it. I think you realise you've finally grown up when you drop such titular irrelevancies. But if I was huddled round the back of the bike sheds having an illicit cigarette and swapping fictional condom usage stories, he'd be my bestest best mate. He'd been christened Art after he'd been conceived during a student sit-in where the only thing to keep the protesters company through the five-day ordeal was 'Bridge over troubled waters'. Like me he's a photographer, not as good but more successful. We had both been assistants to the same photographer in the early eighties; some Fashion fag named Scott whose line in open cuffed shirts were more impressive than his

work and had since left for lucrative ventures in Asia. After that we started out together sharing studio space somewhere off Brick lane, when rent was affordable and your neighbours weren't heavily into futures. Then I decided I wanted to become a journalistic photographer and he decided to sit it out, although at the time he admitted he wished he'd had the nerve to do the same; I bet he's glad he didn't now. Personally I can't abide that studio crap, I find it too claustrophobic; give me a subject in some god-forsaken armpit of the world and I'm happy. I decided to play the purist, a martyr to my craft and do work that sings, struggle to find the elusive gritty truth that is everywhere

Now things are different, Art has more equipment you can shake a stick at and penthouse that's all glass overlooking the very same patch we started out in. I have no studio as such apart from a dark room stuffed away at the back of a store cupboard. I have seen a lot of the world and a lot of things in hindsight I wish I hadn't. Photographically I was at my Zenith, although there were times when I was sitting in a sink-hole of a bar in the middle of nowhere, the lure of doing a catalogue shoot would rise up out of the fumes of my drink and writhe around in front of me like a paralytic lap dancer.

My phone let out a parasitic beep letting me know it needed juicing up, I don't know why I care I hate using the thing anyway and knowing Art we'd likely to be spending most of the evening under the ground any way. He knows how to enjoy himself and where to find the action, and it's usually the kind of action that involves women, clubs, sofas with deep comforting cushions and a bar menu that features no food.

I settled down in my seat and took out my Minnox, set it at 5.6 opened up the lens and waited; this was my favourite P/O spot, a good shot was bound to come along. Sure enough I saw the girl down the street long slender sex on a stick variety skipping her way up along the edge of the pavement. Opposite me a couple of couriers squatted taking a break. The girl glided by and the boys performed beautifully... heads down, eyes over the their shades with looks that not only undressed her but took on her two week holiday to the Bahamas with sex on the hour every hour the whole way... Bang in the can. It's the little things

in shots that turn me on though, the true story that lies there in the grain. Her smile with the slight curve to the edge of her lips said it all. There was such power in that tiny but confident expression, all the other details of the picture seemed to orbit around it. She knew what she was and how others saw her; I envy her because I feel I don't know who I am, no self-recognition anymore maybe that's why I like to stay on this side of the camera.

I finished my Voddy as the noise in the bar pitched up a decibel and the evening slipped down a gear. The edge of anticipation had just hitched up her skirt.

Out on the streets the mayhem had subsided the bars having vacuumed up most of the stragglers. It was my favourite time of night when the orange glow of the street lights are ringed in black against the strong deep blue of the sky. I decided to take my time and effect a 'busy schedule late entry'. I wondered around taking in the atmosphere and fired off a few shots while I was at it:

Slow shutter shot of Poland Street.

Girls whispering.

Tattered man with sleeping bag.

Reflection in a window.

A foot treading on a slick of a spilt beer.

Waitress at Little Italy cocks a smile.

Reading paper in paper stand.

Shadows collection No.6.

It was Quarter past that was busy enough.

The Seven bar was tucked up a side alley off Regents Street. Cerebus the Maori bouncer nodded a blank hello to me and let me enter. Deep inside the womb of the establishment I found Art languishing with a Pina Colada in one hand and a girl in something tight and short in the other.

"Talk of the Devil. Natasha... Walker. Another talented photographer like my good self." The girl's eyes sparked at the mention of the 'photographer' word her hands edging closer to Art's groin. "As you can see Natasha is a really talented actress." She grinned as if posing for a passport photo in a booth, her

petal pink nails tapping the outline of his balls. She was young obviously from the southern counties and here with Daddies money to get a portfolio together, if only Daddy knew what 'removing the lens cap' meant in Art's phrase book.

He's always been good at getting away with stuff like that, he opens his mouth and the girls fall for it. People call Art 'The Maestro' and when they do his head wobbles very slightly and he plays with his right cuff; perhaps he was an operatic tenor in a previous lifetime. He seems to get through these girls at such a rate that there must be enough now to merit setting up a help-line so they can chat and compare notes. The main reason is that they never come back for more; apart from one and she was French. I guess she found his dulcet Halifax tones a turn on. I've heard that French women find English attempting French very horny. The thought of Art labouring through the throaty Gallic rasps for "Can I have you over the back of that sofa?" and "Oh is that your mother, will she join in too?" always brings a smile to my face. He tries hard though, when he's with a woman he focuses on her as if there is nothing else in the world apart from her and it pays off. I don't and consequently my pay cheques are few and far between. He also exudes sexual self-confidence from every pore. He has an instinct for survival that's lodged deep in the helix of his DNA that ensures he will be successful with the opposite sex even if it kills him. What else could explain the fact that he sleeps with some of the most beautiful women I've met, when his sweaty alabaster slab of a face should only be capable of pulling a train? But confidence is a narcissistic beast that attracts like and when together they're too busy staring at their own reflections.

Note: Who gives a fuck. Get copy of human gene map and look up the sexual confidence bit- then reconstruct it out of alphabetti spagetti and stuff my bloody face full of it.

"So what you been up to? Good stuff? Natasha this is the man... he de man he's done stuff you know, been there got the hand prints..." she leant forward exposing her cleavage, her chin dropping a little and eyes widening with practised charm "...yes...um... he de man... man aren't you man?" he continued his fingers drumming lightly on the back of the sofa. Either Art was trying out his

version of a Jamaican drug voodoo yardy Baron Samdee mega mix lingo or all the saliva that was welling up in his tunnel like gob was drowning his words.

“So you’re the hostage then?” asked Natasha.

“It was a long time ago.” I replied “What do you want to drink... Natasha?”

“Rusty nail please,” she said through her smile.

“Impressed. Rusty nails and it’s only half seven.”

“She’s got balls” replied Art his eyes burrowing down the inviting shade between her breasts.

“Balls... tits both round I suppose. You got a tab?” Art flicked out a numbered card.

The bar was packed mostly by people seated at the bar while those trying to order a drink squashed in sideways with hunched shoulders waving polite flags of twenty quid notes in the hope the bar man will forget whose next and pick them. I waited my turn. I looked round to see Art disappearing in to the toilets for a quick line, while the girl looked around the bar in the hope she’d recognise someone. Our eyes met, suddenly she looked vulnerable, lonely and in way over her head. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders a little and started to play with her hair. Poor kid its tough getting started and you soon discover you have no friends only people who want to take advantage of you.

I barked my order into the bar man’s tilted ear and when I looked round Natasha was standing behind me, her shoulders had dropped and the sexual dance faded from the sequins on her tight top.

“Need a hand?” she asked with one of those innocent sideways glances.

“No I’m fine... listen are you looking to get started?”

“Pardon?” She leant a little closer. She smelt good and I got a flash of what Art has been eyeing up all evening.

“Do you want to get some photos done?”

“Oh I see yes.” She put her hand on my arm to steady herself as someone barged past. “Yes I’m with Mod-elles and they recommended Art. He’s very good you know.”

I'd heard of the agency even though I have never had any use for them personally. It doesn't what kind of a photographer you are you still get all of the promotional shit through your letter box. Art once told me they took girls on like her then paraded them around town using them to open doors and wallets for their more expensive signings.

"Got a pen?"

"A what?"

"A pen, photographers never carry them."

"Oh yes...somewhere." From her purse on a string she produced a pen and note pad branded emphatically Modelles.

"Listen forget him, they always send young pups to him. Here is the number of Stephanie, she's great, just say I sent you. She's better and your knickers aren't part of the development fee. Listen to her she knows who and where and how. Now go quick before he gets back."

She stopped and looked down at the paper. "I've forgotten your name."

"Walker"

"Is that your first or second name?"

"First"

"What's the rest?"

"Look get going... If the agency ask why Art didn't come up with the goods just scratch your nose and sniff a bit. They'll get the picture."

"But..."

"I'd go or you'll get stuck with sticky fingers."

Art made a timely appearance and luckily bumped into someone he knew. Natasha recognising her chance blew a kiss and slipped off into the crowd and I stood there watching her youthful sway slink through the crowd wondering why I didn't give her my number too.

Nota Bene: Always. Always give stunning young models your number because you never know. Don't let that patriarchal sense of fair play and protectiveness get the better of you.

A tap on my shoulder told me my drinks had arrived. So had Art.

“Where the fuck did she go?” The dark of his pupils seemed stare into my soul.

“I dunno she must have got wind of something else.”

“Typical” he shrugged. “She give you her number?”

“No”

“Shit.” Art’s characteristic butterfly concentration kicked in. “Hey there’s a party down at Hank’s, Model night, lets go now.”

“What about these?”

“Down ‘em. There’s someone there I want you to meet. Don’t worry it’s a good thing. You’ll see.”

A good thing? My guard was up. Art, coughed, slugged back his drink and prepared to flitter off towards the next flower. I followed him out of the bar wishing I had got Natasha’s number.

Outside the air had cooled, but Art’s blood hadn’t. He couldn’t walk a straight line; his head turning this way then that as his eyes cast about the pool of talent that paraded the pavements.

“I wish you would keep telling people about the...”

“Listen you’ve been a hostage. How many people ever get the chance to meet a hostage? They love it. Lap it up pal.”

“Well”

“Well nothing.”

“It makes me feel...Type cast, false...”

“Ah don’t give me that coy bollocks” his head started to swivel round following a couple of Indian girls walking down the pavement giggling to themselves. The subject matter flitted with them. “God women don’t you love ‘em... I reckon I’ve got that disease.”

“What Syphilis?”

“No that sex disease when you want it all the time. Like that actor, you know what’s his name?”

“Yea... um thingy... he was in that Boat film.”

“Yea...he needed treatment.”

“ Treatment?”

“He went to some clinic for two months and literally shagged nurses until it was out of his system. 24 hours a day anytime he'd ring the bell and bingo.” Art's groin starting to pump the air while his hands gripped a pair of imaginary hips. “Can you imagine? Bing! Bong! Hello! Bang! 24 hour totty.”

“Somehow I don't think it was quite like that.”

“Straight up.”

“I bet it was.” I laughed.

“Are you sure she didn't give you her number, Young firm and she was up for it man...”

“No she wasn't. And if you want to fuck the world then spend some money and get whored up, don't tamper with nice young things like that. Do yourself and the rest of us a favour and stick your dick where it belongs.”

“Ooooh listen to Mister Nice Guy. You liked her.”

“What if I did? She's pretty, sexy... and not interested.”

“Not interested how do you know?”

“I could tell.”

“How?”

“I dunno. I'm old, she's Young I suppose.”

“Suppose. You're always supposing instead of imposing.”

“She was too... sort of fragile.”

“Fragile? Let me tell you those kids are tough, tougher than we ever were. Those girls are equipped, they got the flow, they're fly, flip and with it in a way we wouldn't understand.”

“We were like that once.” I replied.

“Yes, but that was then. Then is gone and now is here. It's their turn, it's evolution. They're going to chew us up and spit you out. Pussy power is here boy and they're going to eat us alive.”

“Not me they seem to steering clear of me at the moment. That’s my problem. I could really do with being eaten alive at the moment. You know the carnal stuff. The more I want it the more it seems to desert me.”

“Things like that should never be a problem. It’s just like when we used to be teenagers, sex comes to you when you least want it.”

“It’s fine for you they drop their knickers at the drop of a hat. Me. Well... they’re not interested in what I have to offer.”

“Only in your mind. If they sleep with me they’ll sure as hell sleep with you. It’s all about confidence. Look. It’s all about confidence. Girls like confidence, because confident men obviously have something to be confident about, and that intrigues them. It’s the same with women. We find confident women interesting, alluring...attractive. Right?”

“Depends on what kind of confidence your talking about.”

“I’m not talking about the hands on the hip, head wobbling and sucking of teeth nonsense you see on the talk shows. I mean the kind of confidence that glows. The look. The smile. The...”

“Yea... I love that.”

“Right well they love that in us too. It’s as if the world around you doesn’t affect you, because you absorb power from the world and don’t let the world take it from you. You know?”

“Yea `I know, been there.”

“Well that says just one thing, that you’re in charge and the girls like a man in charge.”

I knew what he meant I have a DJ friend in New York who gets laid every night he performs. He’s in charge, setting the mood, creating the sound, pulling the rhythmic strings all night from behind his little electronic altar. The girls love him; they can’t get enough of him, the skinny, little runt of a thing who wears a hat all the time because he’s going bald. He always said that the girls liked him because he was in charge and they felt compelled to conquer him.

“They’re programmed to go for the top dog, it’s a genetic thing. You know the best sperm, the best genes. Theoretically the man in charge has these

things. He more than likely has just the same as everyone else, but during that moment, in that isolated space he is the one with the qualifications. If man has made it to the top of something, or is charge of something then may be he has what it takes for the other stuff. It's a gamble but it's a short cut way of getting a result."

"What ever happened to plain old good looking and guys with a sense of humour?"

"Good looking is a sign of healthy genes. A sense of humour well, laughter is the best sexual laxative known to man. It opens her up prepares her for letting the man close to her. When you laugh she opens her mouth wide... you see, and I guess I you've got to talk about something while you're staring at all those healthy genes might as well be funny, plus it also shows that you can socially manipulate your surroundings another good quality. But the man in charge still does it for me. He'll win out against all those characteristics in the end. A women gets a man in charge she can show him off it says something about her to other women."

"So what you're saying is that you've got to be the man in charge to get laid these days."

"Of course not, it's not all like that in day to day everybody you meet on the street reality. We all compromise in one way or another and then there are our own insecurities that have a lot to do with the way things are. I'm talking principles here, guiding principles."

"Thank God I'm in safe hands."

"This is not about love or sex it's about power and protection. Put a bunch of people on a desert island the women will always go for the man in charge. It's nature baby. Whether he's the head of a corporation, a film director, or a man standing up on stage holding court for half an hour. Anybody anywhere. It goes with the territory."

"I remember these guys out in Thailand; sweaty, corpulent white guys that ran the bars on the islands. Back home they couldn't get their own grandmothers

to look at them, but there they were surrounded by the most stunning Thai chicks you can imagine.”

“Precisely. Those guys were the top dogs in that particular microcosm and those girls did what was natural; they went for the top of the food chain. And you want to know why? Because women are more promiscuous than men.”

“They were with these fat guys because they were promiscuous?”

“They go for the best partner, evolution dictates. Scientists have proven that women have sex with several different men to increase their chances of a healthy child. So when something better comes along nine times out of ten they reach out and swing.” Images of Mary packing her bags and leaving the flat flashed through my mind. I waited until she was out of the door.

“So we’re just walking sperm donors.”

“No. Not yet anyway.”

“Oh come on what about all that stuff when girls were the hard done by ones, and men were all bastards. Society. Look at society. Men are still in charge, get paid more.”

“Not for long.”

“I hope so. It’s about time women took over the running of this planet. Then maybe we’ll survive as a species.”

Art stopped to admire two girls passing by then continued “You just want women to become the social initiators.

“They already are.”

“They always have been. Why do you think the female fashion and cosmetics industries are so much bigger than men’s are? Listen Across the animal kingdom there many examples of the female of the species being promiscuous in order to ensure the health of the species.”

“So it’s ultimately for the good of the whole.”

“Yes. Having the right gene code doesn’t necessarily mean you’re the best provider. Moving around means women get the best of both.”

“So where did all this male promiscuity come from?”

“Easy. We know about it. Deep down inside we’re also programmed to realise our role. Look at birds, the feathered sort, it’s the males who’ve got all the colours.”

“Black pimps too.”

“You see there you go proof. All we’ve been doing is responding to that drive in women, making ourselves available moving around providing that spectrum that the ladies require. After all it takes two to Tango.”

“So in this world of yours everyone sleeps with everyone else, but women more than anyone?”

“There are probably as many unfaithful women as there are men. Both aware that one or both are being unfaithful to someone else, but it still doesn’t stop them from going ahead and shaking their booty. Sisterhood, like brotherhood goes out of the window. It’s fair game. Refusals, if the real truth be known, are more about the offer not being as good as it is about any moral compunction.”

“So what you’re saying is that when two people in relationships get it on at lets say an office party it’s all about finding another partner and not just about... going for it. What the fuck kind of stuff?”

“If you probe deep enough you’d find that more often or not there was some kind of dissatisfaction with their present relationships. I’m telling you, everyone looks around just in case there’s something better. Women can’t help it and neither can we. Looking around is what we do as a species, it’s why we are so fucking successful at populating this planet.”

“This either a profound bit of anthropological reasoning or a load of old bollocks.”

“Bollocks. Yes. Science has proved that promiscuity in the female of the species can be linked to size of the male testicles.”

“Our balls are barometers?”

“Yea in chimps the female is very promiscuous, and so the males ball are massive so they can produce the sperm to flood out the competition.”

“I got no problems there then.”

“If you say so. The female gorilla is very loyal so the male has got small balls. Man is in the middle. So our women are somewhere in the middle too.”

“ If I were a female Gorilla I’d be very loyal too, you seen the size of those Silver backs?” We paused while we crossed the road. “So do you think that’s why Mary left me? To get better sperm?” I continued.

“No she left you because you were too nice. They like nice but they don’t want to shag nice.” I’ve always hated that word and Art knows it.

We walked on a bit in silence each wrapped up in our own thoughts. We stopped outside a Japanese boutique and looked at the window display. In the centre was a mask of a grimacing demon with dark pitted eyes and horns from the Japanese theatre of No.

“That’s Hannya the She-demon.” I said. I know a thing or two about masks; I’ve been collecting them over the years while on my travels. At present they all inhabit boxes in my attic as I have been in a permanent state of redecorating and can never decide where to put them up.

“You and your masks” said Art as he squinted at the label.

“This is one of the more well-known masks of the theatre of No, called Hannya. Very good. A jealous and vengeful demon who was once a woman.”

“The high eyebrows and suggestion of delicate features are the only remaining clue as to her original identity.” I concluded.

“Women you see, they all turn into monsters eventually.”

We continued on our way. It was about Nine and the streets were starting to fill with herds of revellers as they migrated to their next bar, the last of the evening. The word ‘nice’ was still sitting at an annoying close distance in the back of my head, refusing to budge while picking its nose.

“Do you really think that Mary left me because I was too nice?”

His face said it all. I hate ‘nice’ with a passion almost as much as ‘Can’t we be friends?’ because between the two they plagued my entire youth. ‘Nice’ reminded me of my grandmother’s halitosis as she ruffled my hair and Sarah Brook’s lumpy smile as I was unceremoniously chucked in front of all of my friends at the British Legion summer dance when I was fourteen.

'Can't we be friends' took on the torch and continued to hound me through all of those parties that litter my teenage years like the gravestones on Boot hill. Small suburban houses, with loud music strained through inadequate speakers in rattling empty lounges, while everyone was packed into the kitchen surrounded by excessively punctured part sevens, slabs of decaying pate and French bread nubs that would make adequate sling shot. 'Can't we be friends' is all I ever ending up groping in the dark recesses of the bedroom filled with coats. While the rest of my mates were swopping saliva I'd be back in the garden talking about stars to some drunk guy called Malcolm, who couldn't pull because of unprecedented outbreak of acne that was eventually diagnosed as an allergic reaction to alcohol. By the time I was Eighteen I had not made it past the first page of the Karma Sutra and Malcolm had taken his rash off to be a researcher at Joderall bank.

Then I went to Art College and met Annie; she was small dark and had a thing about perfume bottles. I'd never met anyone like her; she sat on the bus that took a different route to the rest of us. One night after a party I ended staying at her digs in a spare room at the top of the house. She spent an hour showing me her sketches for her tapestry project during which she progressively moved closer and closer until she was in my lap with her arm around my neck. My Dick was firmly wedged in amongst tight M&S cotton and so was not going to interrupt proceedings but this only encouraged her to wiggle and brush her perfumed hair in my face even more. Finally she tilted her head near to mine and chewed lightly on my ear lobe. From deep inside Krakatoa erupted and my Dick escaped making his presence felt much to Anne's relief. She pushed back on the bed and during a heated exchange that went on until about six in the morning I was introduced to the first three chapters of the Sutra in one go. Including my very first blow job while being tied to her bed posts with her bra stuffed in my mouth. A few nights later she showed what she liked to do with her vast array of perfume bottles. As far as I was concerned Girl power had arrived a long time ago and it has been here ever since. I too love women, but there is nothing more stimulating than being with them on their terms. After all its women who choose

who they sleep with, men just go along with it. Since then I've gone along with it and although I've seen a few bedroom ceilings since, nothing has come anywhere near that first night with Annie. Maybe the first time is the best.

We had arrived outside of Hanks. Art was in negotiation with the doorman who flicked his way through his clipboard and then ushered us into the small compression chamber of the lobby. We waded into the cocktail of perfume, smoke, sweat and alcohol topped with unmistakable odour of dry ice. Through the cacophony of conversation I heard Art claim he'd pay. Monitors mounted on the wall showed that the dance floors and bars were all jammed and jamming. We skipped the coatroom cues, years as a bare shirted lad in Nottingham had taught me never to bother. I always feel like that starched and confident seventeen-year old as I plunge through the doors of a club and into the wall of sound, my heart racing with anticipation as it picked up on the incessant percussive thump of the bass in my chest. The only difference now is that its Carl Cox instead of Earth Wind and Fire, one bald black man and a turn table has replaced a huge black band with a brass section and Afros; evolution is ever stripping us down. Art ducked straight into the toilets, I followed and we walked the white line together.

Model nights amuse me because there are never any models there. Occasionally the rumour of some super model having made an appearance the week before fuels the queues, but to Art if it's a model night then models there shall be even if the only thing they'd ever posed for was a passport photo. I let him go off on the hunt while I took up my regular position on the edge of the bar. I get my Minnox out and get to work. I have a portfolio to work up.

Silhouettes on fire.

Bar huggers in profile.

Dancing queen.

Feet through glass.

Girl with eye on boy.

Chat up.

Gotta light?

Distortions on a dance floor.

Going through the motions.

Bog traffic.

Scratch and sniff.

Art soon returned with a man in a safari suit in tow. This was Trix Bailey the man he had wanted me to meet. His frame seemed to inflate then deflate against the flashing of the lights; he shook my hand with a firm grip that made my hand so white it picked up the UV light.

“So you’re Walker I’ve heard all about you.” It was hard to tell over the noise but I could detect a hint of a southern states accent in there somewhere.

“He de man Trix, he de man.” Art said as he bobbed to Bob and flicked his fingers in an ineffectual white mankind of way.

“That a Minnox?” he asks pointing at the camera in my hand.

“Yea usually carry it around with me.”

“Listen I’ve got a job that may interest you.” He said as he handed my camera back.

“Great, what?”

“A calendar of sorts.”

“I don’t do calendars, that’s Art’s speciality.” I looked at Art who had now drifted out onto the dance floor to gyrate with a couple of Swedish girls.

“Well I want something different and you’re background might bring that difference to the project. I’ve seen some of your work, you’ve got the experience and what I’ve seen is what I’m looking for. Listen this is not the best place to discuss business.” He hands me his card “Call me tomorrow and come over and we’ll discuss it further. Nice to meet you. Gotta go.”

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a stunning woman dressed in tight black leather come and stand a few feet behind Trix. She was like one of those super heroes you get in the comics with the perfect over emphasised physiques; she was Catwoman personified.

Nota bene: When you type Catwoman into the computer it comes up as Cattleman in the spell corrector.

Trix bled my hand again and left with his other hand on the perfected roundness of Catwoman's arse.

"A calendar of what?" I shouted after him.

"My girls of course."

Art had been on the floor watching what was going on all the time. He had his arms around two Swedes and one of those smiles on his face that he has when a well-tuned plan is coming into shape. One of the girls came over and pulled me onto the floor. Art was up to something, don't get me wrong I appreciate it when he helps me out like this. God only knows I need it. But he's a trickster there's always some ulterior motive behind what he's doing. Like the time he told me about a weird religious sect that was holding a secret ceremony at the mouth of West Kennet barrow; which turned out to be a pagan friend of his who was getting married. So while I thought I was a mission to capture some great eyewitness shots he'd arranged the wedding photographer. Admittedly it worked I got some great shots and after I'd cooled down the couple ended up with sheets of shots that captured the real essence of the event.

Now the prospect of doing a girlie calendar seems appealing especially if they are like Catwoman. If so why wasn't such a sexually diseased animal like Art wasn't doing it himself. I tried not to think about it and focus on the Swede in front of me, but she danced a little like Captain Scarlet on acid and my throat was dry. So I quit for the bar and Art followed.

"Well what do think?"

" She can't dance."

"Not them. Trix. The calendar?"

"I owe you one."

"Good opportunity."

"How come you aren't doing it yourself?"

"Trix and I go way back. You remember that spell I did over in Belgium... well that was with Trix. He knows me and wouldn't dare let me loose with twelve of his girls. I wouldn't get past March."

"At least not photographically anyway." I added with a smile

“Precisely. Anyway I’ve a meet in Rome around then anyway. Speaking of which when in Rome get it on with the Swedes. But first lets pop a couple of happies.”

“They just turn you into hippies.”

“Yea happy Hippies though. At least it’ll put a smile on your face and maybe then you’ll get laid.” He pressed a crumpled bit of paper into my hand.

“Am I that fucking miserable, is this what its all about? You’re trying to get me fucking laid aren’t you?”

“Look I’m always after it and ever since Mary you’ve always avoiding it. Either you’re whacking off on a regular basis or your balls are trussed so they don’t drag around on the ground. Come on you bail out of it every time.”

“That’s not true, what about that time...”

“Yea go on when... name it.”

“That time we went to that warehouse place...”

“That doesn’t count she was a friend of your sisters.”

“Well...” I dried up I had to admit he was right. Then it occurred to me “That girl earlier...”

“ ...was there for your benefit.”

“And there I was trying to save her.”

“Seems like you did... saved her from terminal boredom. Now come on lets pop and bop eh?”

Why Art was so obsessed about my sex life was beyond me, and I wasn’t about to start enquiring about such matters in the middle of a club with two Swedes bearing down on us. If I know Art it is nothing more than his eagerness to share. He may be an asshole at times but he has always been open and communal with his experiences. Personally I think it’s driven by a dark subcutaneous phobia of waking up and discovering he’s truly alone. What’s wrong with that, our fear of being alone is natural. It has to be.

I faced this frightening reality a long time ago, and I realised it didn’t matter because basically we’re all alone, that’s what brings people together in the first place, the communal fear of being alone. At those parties outside in the dark

of the garden, I was just as alone as the rest of my saliva swapping friends. I knew that I wasn't the only person in the whole world sat staring at the stars feeling sorry for myself but it didn't stop me from enjoying a kind of morbid self-pitying comfort in my solitude. I still do, it stops me from feeling lonely.

The happy pills were having their desired effect, and as the Kaleidoscope of shadows on the wall started to groove, grind and blur I decided I was going to do my utmost to prove Art wrong this time. It was time to buck the trend or fuck it... whatever.

There is nothing more comforting than the sight of my own bedroom ceiling; I know every mark, bump and line of shade. I find that after a night out it grounds me telling me I'm home, safe from the blur of the outside world. As I scanned the bumps and ridges of the plaster I heard a soft moan. My eyes followed the folds in the cloth as the quilt rose up to define woman. The quilt moved and the familiar visage of one of the Swedes appeared. She focused on my face then smiled and leant over to plant a dogged kiss on my cheek. As she did so the smell of consenting and exchanged juices wafted up from underneath the quilt.

Nota Bene: Trend bucking could be a good pass time. Please put others up for review as soon as possible.

I stared at her trying to remember her name.

"Ingrid" she said.

"What... er pardon?"

"My name is Ingrid... you have one of those little lost boy looks on your face. My name is Ingrid and I am from Stockholm. We met last night at a club called Hanks. I was with my friend Inga who went home with your friend... "

"Art"

"Yes that was it. We were all up for a foursome but you were a little drunk. You kept on saying that it's not about sharing its about experiencing or something like that."

"I'm sorry."

“There is nothing to be sorry about.”

“Good.”

Without any discreet shuffling of the quilt or shy groping for her clothes she sprang out of bed, stretched and searched around for her bag. I pushed myself up on the pillow a bit so I could watch her roam around the room. Her pale flesh seemed to almost glow in the low light and flashes of familiarity came back to me as I took in her figure. Everything bobbed and swayed with natural allure as she delicately picked her way through the mayhem on the floor. There was something innocent almost comforting about her, she reminded me of a blonde Rubanesque Hepburn in one of those quaint naturist home movies out Winkle picking in rock pools at the seaside. She found her bag and bent over revealing all and it occurred to me that Swedes were definitely born with the ‘Shy Gene’ missing.

She came back to the bed with what looked like a make-up bag and tossed it on the bed. She then pulled the quilt back and straddled me. In the cold light of the morning the sight of our two pubic tufts meeting seemed a little embarrassing for some strange reason. She pushed herself back and sat on my thighs and started to tickle my dick very lightly with her nails.

“Come on mister todger come out to play.”

“Seem to be a bit slow this morning.”

“Well who can blame you, you was very busy last night.”

“Really?”

I could feel my blood responding as a hot sensation started to flood my groin. Somewhere inside me Captain Capillary was shouting ‘Surface! Surface! Periscope up!’ while his crew of blood cells dashed to their stations.

By now she was massaging my erect Dick she bent down and slipped her mouth slowly over the head sinking down to the base of the shaft, the grain of her tongue rasping against the underside. God it felt good. This was some girl; a blow job first thing in the morning after a night of hot sweat sodden, sticky sex- and no shower. In my mind I started to reach up to shelf and pull out the Sutra.

“Oh that’s fantastic” I murmured in the sexiest tone I could muster.

“Mmmmm” she withdrew. “It usually is... I’m good.”

“Was I?” No sooner had the words left my mouth I knew I was going to regret it.

“Well... you’re okay. Personally your dick isn’t big enough. But don’t take it personally I have a large Vagina and need a big dick... so Inga says.”

I was gob-smacked, all of a sudden her quaint innocent comforting skin had been shed to reveal a truth vomiting vixen and to make matters worse she continued to play with my dick. Captain Capillary started shouting ‘Dive! Dive! Dive! While I tried to play along and show that I was man enough to take it.

“Well it’s genetic. I can’t help it. Anything else?” I was a glutton for punishment, being told you’re Inadequate in the dick department has this effect on you.

“Way too much spunk...that’s a real turn off for women. You should masturbate more often and keep the quantity to a minimum.” Suddenly she stopped, opened up her make up bag and produced a Polaroid camera and fired off a shot of my Dick. She then took another of my face and while my vision filled with white blotches she pulled out a tape and measured my dick writing it down in a little notebook.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“A sex survey. Inga and I are students at Stockholm University and we are doing a study of measuring the size of a man’s penis in relation to their occupation. Now do you have a name?” she asked as my manhood hung on in there.

“Er... Walker.”

“No not you, your...”

“Um. What? I dunno. Dick I suppose. Why what do you call yours? Muffin the mule?”

Ignoring me she continued “Now is it just dick, any others like todger, plonker, beef bayonet you know?”

“No. What has that got to do with it anyway?”

“Inga believes there is some correlation... for instance our top guy so far was Steve a plumber and he called it his ‘Monkey wrench’. You see?”

“That’s bollocks... Top guy? What did you mean by top guy?”

“How do you say he was hung like a horse.” She held up her forearm with a clenched fist “It was 12 inches long and as thick as my wrist. There have been longer but he had the girth. And girth is what is what really counts, that’s the real measurement.”

“Oh fucking great were in the Premiership league now are we.”

She arched an eyebrow at my receding member “When we sold the rights to FHM...”

“FH fucking bloody M!”

“Well how else were we going to be able afford to stay in London?”

“Okay that’s enough. Get off. Get out now.”

She dismounted and started to get her things together I pulled the quilt over me and focused on the window. She was dressed in no time and stood looking at me while chewing on her bottom lip. She then threw the photos on the bed.

“Listen you’re nice... please don’t take anything personally”

“Jeez, not nice please.”

“And you’re good with your tongue.” She shrugged her shoulders as she ran out of compliments.

“I’ll put it next to my Crackerjack pencil along side the rest of my consolation prizes. Goodbye.”

After the front door closed I could hear the whole flat breathe a sigh of relief.

Nota bene: (1) Insert Swedish girls doing sex surveys in my list of phobias between hairy spiders with long legs and sacks of young and being ship wrecked in the middle of the Saragossa sea. (2) Devise really intriguing and funny name for my dick. ‘Zoom lens’ is not an option.

I stared at the photos on the edge of the bed not knowing whether to be relieved because she had left them, or offended because they didn't stack up and were surplus to requirement.

"Women...fuck! Art!" I lunged for the phone and hit speed dial. As the phone rang I followed the rings in head down his hallway across the sunbathed lounge and into his 'Love pit'. I could already hear the tight little Inga screaming the wallpaper off the walls and relegating Steve and his monkey wrench to the bottom of the Gm conference.

"Yes!" Art answered out of breath.

"Mate."

"Hey howzit hanging?" he replied.

"Low... so how did you measure up then?"

"Eh?"

"You know Inga?"

"Oh her, you know came back and we shagged a couple of times. Woke up this morning and she was gone."

I could hear him scratching his head so I knew he was lying.

"Come on the truth." There was a pause.

"The truth? Nadda. Can't remember a thing. Totally blank." He finally admitted.

"But she did go back with you, you two got a cab."

"Don't remember, although I did find a glass with lipstick on it and she shower has been used this morning so I guess you're right."

"Any photos?"

"Photos? No why?"

"Oh nothing." I decided to leave it at that for obvious reasons.

I put the phone down and lay back; I felt I needed to put a few hours sleep between events and myself. So that I could wake up feeling refreshed and detached from the emotional ruffling of Ingrid and her survey.

I dosed.

I woke my head felt muffled and dull, which meant I had slept for a while. Light reflecting off a car windscreen arced its way across my ceiling indicating that it was past twelve. I lay in bed waiting for my head to focus and tried to decide which of the blur of voices in my head I should listen to. I settled for the one suggesting re-affirming masturbation, but after failing to settle on which of my many fantasy settings to accompany this self-bonding activity I decided to listen the voice screaming for breakfast.

I live in a large one bedroom flat overlooking Fitzabbot's square that lies somewhere on the boundaries between Clapham and Streatham. They call it the Fitzabbot's village, mainly due to the arcade of shops on one side of the square. This comprises of a newsagents, laundrette, Curry house, Estate agents (the one's who coined Fitzabbot's village) and last but not least the 'Pleasant Sandwich bar' which also serves all-day breakfasts.

I've had the flat for nearly twelve years and lived in it for about ten on and off. It's probably tripled in value during that time but who cares its all relative. During that time its seen a number of different looks, at present metamorphosing from the off white with rush matting look, to a Lambda of Latino colours with stripped and laboriously polished floor boards. By the time I can afford to finish I'll be bored of it all and move on like everything else in my life. Mary always said I could never settle, perhaps she was right.

I noticed something new the other day. There are no pictures. Tell a lie there is one underneath a penguin fridge magnet on the Smeg. It's of Mary. I can't bring myself to take it down, so I just moved the magnet over her face instead. I used to have my work plastered all over the place, but after my brief spell as a hostage, I took them all down, I didn't see the point anymore. They're around somewhere, Fran has most of them stashed at her place. I took them down years ago. I must get into the habit of doing that again, someday soon.

I could sell up and go and buy some tea rooms in Devon or a ten-bedroom castle with 40 acres of forest in Scotland; but I'd only end up missing London. This large chunk of urban sprawl and I have a strange affair, it's one of mutual

tolerance. As soon as I step across its boundaries I miss the comfort of its ways, its rules. It doesn't take long before I find myself drawn back to the metropolitan bosom to suck on the nipple of its cappuccino bars.

The square is a little ramshackle in places, but the sunlight it looks good. Outside one of the worse offending houses someone had added the letter 'i' to the 'TO LET'. It's a place of opposites, a haven for the weird and wonderful, straight lacers, commuters and cast offs from the now 'chic' and dubiously expensive Notting hill and environs. Among the more colourful occupants of the area we have a large pink tank with two polystyrene pigs wearing police helmets poking out of the top sitting in the driveway of what once was an old garage. I've never met the guy who owns it but evidently he takes it out for a spin every now and again, just to piss off the 'Pip-junky swine herders' as he refers to the policing elite. A couple of streets over lives a man called Rabbi hutzba Bindi Kashma, who is head of a religious Judeo-hindu cult. The fact that he is the sole member doesn't seem to dampen his fervour, or his eye for colour. The outside of his Victorian terraced house is painted like Hindu temple while inside his lounge wall is stacked from floor to ceiling with Televisions that are on 24 hours a day monitoring the air waves. I'm not entirely sure how the two aspects of his core beliefs sit together but the writing plastered over his G-reg. Peugeot estate detailed the need for universal Karma-bond. It sounds like some thing the building trade could put to good use if you ask me.

With a copy of the Guardian tucked under my arm I head down the sun stroked pavement to order breakfast. Jimmy the owner has recently expanded his operation by adding a few tables outside giving that continental touch.

I skim the headlines and opening paragraphs until my artery clogging full service fry up arrives. Plastered across the front page is a description of how the bomb squad had successfully diffused an eighty-year old woman's weekly shopping causing three-hour delays at Canary Wharf.

Images of Ingrid started to interrupt, my eyes glide across the page absorbing nothing while I stated to look inwards. She had really pissed me off. Bitch.

More Nonebrities litter the gossip columns. There seems to be an enormous amount of these non-celebrities who become famous for just appearing on television these days. At last television is becoming a product of the masses.

Girls are now achieving more top A level grades than boys for the first time ever, one of the prime contributing causes to this new trend appears to be 'laddish culture'. In twenty years time it wouldn't surprise me if most white collar jobs will be held by women while men become the manual work species, like worker ants, with a few breeders selected for their geno-tributes, echoes of ancient fertility rites come to mind.

Super bitch. So what's new?

"Irish troubles due to Bacteria " Now that's new. The madness of witch-hunts of Salem was attributed to the argot fungus in wheat, it now seems sectarian violence in Ireland has now been put down to some strange bacterial presence in the water. Drink more Guinness. They should do a survey on... the size of a woman's fanny in relation to how much they talk. Super fucking bitch.

"Vandals in drive-by paintball attack on speed cameras!" This is more like it, the kind of reverse justice that appeals to my - Mr. I'm fucking pissed off with the crap that is slowly slipped under our noses without us noticing – side of my personality. It seems a group of individuals had taken to using the speed cameras as target practice for their paint guns. They had fun while doing everyone a favour by rendering the thing inoperable. These small grey boxes deserve it and its long over due; they sit there day in day out raping the public of their freedom providing the government with yet another way of fleecing the masses while turning the police into nothing more than penny pinching tax collectors. After all the majority of the money goes into the government coffers, with the so called understanding that it goes back into repairing the roads. However we all know it just gets drainpiped into some mad scheme like the Dome or importing rare trees to provide shade for politicians when they're not in session. Super fucking cow bitch.

Out of all the papers I reckon the Independent and the Guardian print the best pictures they seem to be concerned more about how it fits on the page, the impact of the shot is often half the story. Bob Torney pulls yet another corker out of what would at first appear to be very dull subject matter. Now he's good if anyone can pull an award winner on a story about GM tomatoes then he can. I need drama and action to aid my talent, and the problem is that this leads me by the lens to dangerous places that I don't wish to return to. I'm afraid. I can't cut it any more I haven't got the guts to risk my life anymore. Sometimes I wonder if I ever had what it takes in the first place and I threw myself out into these far-flung and dangerous lands to hide the fact that I hadn't any talent in the first place. Perhaps my whole career has been one big sham. Super fucking cow bitch vixen whore. I wasn't feeling any better.

My breakfast arrives. There it sits in all its Englishness packed and brimming with enough grease to make the Californians reach for their alfalfa sprouts and their coronary containment legislation.

It should be our national dish. Whenever you stay in hotels around the world, of which I've stayed in a few, breakfast is either 'Continental' or 'English'. Okay the Americans have stepped in as usual to ruin and confuse the taste buds by adding hash browns and maple syrup, but the basic is still English and always will be. Before George went off to fight the dragon he sat down and fatted up on an English fry up, and Alfred burnt bacon not cakes. So raise your forks high after all you don't hear of English Sunday roast or English fish and chips anymore.

Cunt. That was better. I like the word, its crisp succinct form conveys a vomit of rage and vindictive face expressions in just four letters; like one of those express shits where you evacuate-eradicate-move on, without even thinking about it. It feels great. I hear Ingrid scream as she swirls around the bowl and is sucked down the U-bend.

I had choice of either developing some prints or some plastering. I didn't feel emotional stable enough to cope with the demands of plastering. It requires patience while at the same time it needs to be approached with confident vigour.

The two disciplines do not sit well together, I guess that's why it's so difficult. You can't pussy foot around when plastering, like skating it requires speed and a certain devil may care bravado. Printing seemed to be the better choice.

Usually I'd work on one picture, experimenting with different papers and exposures changing the composition and burning in various details. Often my mind would lock into automatic pilot and shuffle through any trouble spots in my life. There are only two other places I can do this, driving alone at three o'clock in the morning and in the freezer section in supermarkets. Today however my mind wasn't interested in doing anything automatic, it wanted to talk.

Ingrid had resurfaced.

My ex girlfriend Mary had always insisted that the size of a man's dick didn't matter and that the only people that concern themselves about the size of a penis are men. She always said that women believe that things like love, emotion, humour, compatibility were more important, but if that was the case how come the first question her mother asked when I started going out with Mary was about the proportions of my dick? Next came salary, house, car, health plan and pets. Okay I may be exaggerating a little, it may not be the very first question but I bet it's generally asked in the first exchange or phone call. So it's a primal.

Primal goes back to prehistoric, before the advent of personalities, perfumes, bank balances and Long Island Ice teas when what we were all we had in the attraction stakes. Back then when Homo sapiens numbered no more than a few thousand it must have been touch and go for a while. They must have been nail-biting times, one bad winter and we as a species were finished. Sex, or rutting in those days, was the prime directive; and as far as entertainment goes it was about the only thing available on the menu. It was the numero uno subject around the camp fire at night, the second being the lighting of the fire itself which may explain why men seem to naturally huddle round BBQ's and discuss lighting techniques.

So with all these deeply encoded Primals swimming around in our genes its no wonder over the years the erect phallus and the swollen breast became symbols of divine inspiration and fecundity. As our brains expanded so did our

porn collections (perhaps Ingrid should include that in her correlation study). They're a constant reminder as we crash headlong up the evolutionary ladder that we're still human and should always fight to remain intimately involved with the cycle of nature around us. Deep down inside us we know that as soon as we think we're better than nature we're finished. Hence our obsession with dicks and tits; we can't help it, they're our talismans for survival. The only difference now being that these powerful icons litter top shelves and late night viewing schedules instead of pagan groves and holy temples. The place of worship and interpretation of meaning might have changed but the fundamental effect and viewing figures are still the same.

Having said that on one of the more cryptic satellite channels called 'Today', I watched two women discussing the male penis.

And the spunk thing... well I've always been a big producer; Mary used to call me 'Ten pints' as opposed to "10 cc" which evidently according to the group is man's average ejaculatory measure. I may not have a big dick but I've got balls. In fact while I was at college I used to make a good living down at the sperm bank; but then they introduced cross-referencing and gene quality mapping and I found that my bum like student qualities weren't attractive enough. They weren't interested in quantity anymore they wanted quality wankers instead.

The print wasn't working out but I was pleased with my brain's reasoning. All of a sudden it didn't matter, I felt I could face all the Ingrids of this world and stand there with my dick in hand and just laugh. Ingrid like the rest of us was just being human, and being human means it isn't about me, it's about the whole Goddam lot of us and somehow that's easier to deal with.

The phone rang; I let it go to the answering machine.

...Come on honey stop screening its me- pick up I want to chat... It was Fran my agent.

"Yo Fran!"

"Oh you're a bit chipper this morning. Get laid last night?"

"You bet." I knew she had talked to Art as she's his agent too.

“Good” she smoothed.

“You get laid?”

“Oh come on sweetie, you know I’ve been married for twenty years and we don’t participate in such frippery. We had dinner with a rather nice Riojha followed by Derek’s favourite- Banoffee pie, that’s about as near as we come to getting laid these days. Now...” That was her ‘don’t deviate from the planned course of conversation- Now’ which meant I was to fall in line go silent and listen. “...There’s an AFAP gathering next week which I think you should attend.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes darling. It’s important, if you’re going to break into something a little more commercial then you have to be seen. They’ll be plenty of Art buyers there and you should get in there and use some of that charm you use for getting laid on them and get noticed. You can’t expect your work to do it all for you. Photography is as much about people as it is about pictures.”

“Most great pictures are about people one way or another.”

“Of course dear. Now ...you will come won’t you?”

“Yes”

“Good. Bye for now.”

You can’t help but love Fran (actually her real name is Bronwen Dalia Fairbrother which was shortened over the years out sheer embarrassment); she always tries to make you feel good about yourself. Art has charm. I don’t and she knows it. I have as much social sophistication as a plate of blue spaghetti; but put me in the middle of nowhere with a bunch hairy arsed guerrillas to negotiate safe passage with and we’re as good as there. That’s what I’m good at, the cross-cultural stuff; give me Kalishnikovs not cocktail parties.

I haven’t always had an agent I used to and get all the stuff myself, but Art persuaded me to go onto her books and see if I could make it in advertising and design. He seems to have a lot of faith in me, I wish I did. Personally I think the whole photo-realism gig has passed its sell-by. Its hard to make your mark in that arena, a few editorial journalistic photographers like Salgado and McCullum have crossed over into advertising successfully, but there aren’t many.

Advertising magpies everything around it, both the established and new, pecking it up and abusing it for its own ends, then it just shakes its feathers and flits off to the next shiny object. It's not really interested in the content only the look; it's lame excuse being that the public aren't interested so they have to give them what they want. I know this much as Mary is an advertising art director; she was the one who introduced me to Art in the first place. Advertising and me have been like two dogs in the park one sniff of each other's bums and off we go in our separate directions. I did something for Mary once, but her creative director had little interest in nepotism and ordered that it should be re-shot at the agency's expense with another photographer, in fact I think it was Art I seem to remember. I don't think I'll tell Fran about the job... the job! I'd forgotten about that.

I fished out Trix Bailey's card from my wallet then put it down and stared at it. Do I want to do a shoot with twelve women? Twelve fucking opinionated chicks with egos the size of downtown Manhattan and make-up bags to match. No doubt it will be somewhere exotic, they usually are... shit what the fuck I need a holiday.

I reach for the phone and it rings. It's Stephanie.

"Walker"

I'd recognise that hoarse cigarette strained voice anywhere "Steph. How you doin'?"

"You know same old... can't stop babe just wanted to let you know that I heard from... the Natasha chic. Where do they get their names from?"

"She's probably a Jill or something and decided to go for the eastern touch."

"No it's hers... rich parents, land, house you know with nothing better to do than thumb through naming dictionaries for nine months would be more like the scene... anyway she's coming round tomorrow."

"You cool? Art was about to get his sticky mitts on her tits, thought you might be able to help."

"I heard. No problem."

“You know just do her a few shots... bit of advice, blah blah. All that stuff you’re good at. She’s sweet...”

“She’s sweet on you.” Steph butts in.

“Sweet? That sounds like sticky sweet?”

“No ... sweet... you know it’s an American thing, she likes you.”

“American thing?”

“Yes...she fancies you. She finds you interesting in a kind of injured romantic kind of way.”

“Injured romantic?”

“Well it’s not everyday a girl from the soft counties gets to meet a battle scarred warrior like yourself. She wants to touch you where it hurts to find more out about you.”

“And she told you all this in one phone call did she?”

“No I’m a woman, It’s a female thing, not a boys thing. I think God used those particular parts of the brain to make your dicks.”

“Are you saying I’m insensitive?”

“No...It’s an empathy thing.”

“Things are a big thing with you aren’t they? She can’t be more than eighteen.”

‘So? Didn’t stop Art. She’ll do you good, so expect a call. Got to go...bye.’

The line went dead. I’m sure I could hear the residual trill of a Stephanie like laugh echoing down the wire. I checked my reflection to see if I had ‘sad fuck’ tattooed across my forehead because that had to be the only explanation as to why my friends were trying to sort my sex life out for me. Sure things have been a little sporadic since I’d split with Mary but not that bad. Had it? I mean is it?

Nota Bene: When you’re using the past tense in reference to your life while you’re still tramping the earth take it as an indication that somewhere in the recesses of your brain the masses are gathering in one of your cerebral piazzas and the mood is ugly.

The card was white and anonymous, with his name printed in the middle. No frills, no coloured bands, no wavy or scratchy graphics just plain white with

type. The only clue lay in the typeface. It wasn't your run of the mill serif but a Modern Celto-Gothic face that reminded me of stain glass windows. Underneath his name was the simple title of 'Promoter'. The kind of title that tells you everything without revealing anything about what pies his little piggies are stuck in, but then again aren't most job titles really about what you don't do anyway?

This was going to be the last call of the day as I was beginning to feel phone dependent. No one answered for ages finally a cool confident Polish sounding woman interrupted the rhythmic bleat.

"Hello Core promotions can I help you?"

"Oh I was looking for Trix Bailey"

"You've found him, hold on please while I connect you." Her voice sounded just like the woman in the tight leather looked, full lipped, full breasted and full of groin straining promise; and if the voice and the leather co-habited then I was definitely in love.

"Walker. That you?" Trix Bailey's voice cut in. "Come on over and take a look around, none of the girls here at the moment but if you come over about five and maybe a few will be back by then and if they're not too lagged we'll drag them out for a few drinks. Cool?"

"Cool"

"Ciao"

Although Richmond was an out of the way location for a model agency, drinks, babes and a smooth connected boss picking up the tab were reason enough for me; this was one juicy cocktail I was definitely going to suck on.

Yet another of those little packages had closed down Clapham Junction, but they were still letting trains through, so I took the tube to Waterloo and waited along with the rest of the departure board congregation for my train. Nothing. Time.

Expressions of open-mouthed hope.

Man and Case.

Atishoo-puccino.

Dog straining at lead.

Spilt orange juice.

Old lady studying timetable.

Child pointing at puke.

The simultaneous flicker of several newly announced departures, along with my train, brought the crowd back from the dead. I fought my way through the ensuing chaos like a salmon up stream, found my train and a window seat only to sit and wonder whether I was on the right train. Inevitably the 'I've left the iron on' syndrome kicked in and I had to relinquish my seat in order to check. When I finally slumped down into a seat all I could hear was the sound of my own breath and the sweat breaking out on my forehead.

The train shuddered into life and slipped out of the mouth of the station like a child's drool of saliva towards the bib of the 'burbs. My eyes stared wide out of the window hypnotised by the shifting perspectives as they uncoiled out into the late afternoon.

Time slipped out of gear as my body relaxed, my mind kicked off its shoes and tiptoed down the stairs to where reality slowly melts into a shapeless miasma of patches of light and dream trailers. You meet some strange people here, dream folk I call them. I never recognise them as the person I'm supposed to be dreaming about. They're like the old Hollywood 'B' movie actors, cut in the form of their 'A' counterparts playing the same roles, in the same sets with the same studios. They look and sound like the real thing but they're not. I have a theory that when you die you become actors in other people's dreams. It's like being an angel except you're in people's heads instead. Wouldn't that be a thing...? Perhaps I'll sit down and write a book about it one day.

One dream I'd like to act in would include purring polish with Catwoman while performing several riotous sexual acts... now there's a good wank fantasy... I'll nip back up the stairs and into wank fantasies and add it to the already bulging file of favourites. Sod dreams I'd want spend eternity acting in girls wank fantasies ...now that would be heaven...no that would be...

"Tickets please."

“...Hell.”

“Pardon?”

“Uh...oh yea I didn't have time I was in a rush. What with the bombs and all...” I glanced at my watch fifteen minutes had passed already.

Nota Bene: Do scientific experiments to find out if time travels at a different speed on trains. Come to think of it has to- and the timetables are proof .

Now would be a good time to talk.

I should explain about the hostage part of my life. Now would be a good time it needs quiet, calm... it needs honesty. I don't want you to thinking I'm the person Natasha seems to think I am.

I'm not, believe it or not. Sure I've covered war in Yugoslavia, troubles in the Balkans. I've seen white race meeting in the states, even illegal tree felling operations in Indonesia. I've followed drug ops in Thailand and risked a few weeks in Columbia doing a story about coffee. I've seen a lot and got a box full of T-shirts, faced death a couple of times and seen the rotten teeth of humanity grin menacingly at me. Even the sight of a decapitated head in the middle of a Rwandan road didn't seem to affect me. Then one day my life took a sharp left turn. I was on a simple seek and photo mission for potential drugs running along the Indus north of Sringar in Kashmir when I fell into the river and floated down through some rapids saved from drowning by the air in my rucksack. I was saved by a nomadic religious group living in the isolated hills surrounding the Indus. They fed me strange food that made feel relaxed and calm while I recovered from the experience. In this semi-hypnotic state I soon communed with the stark environment around me losing all sense of time and presence.

Eventually I lost interest and decided it was time to go home. I hitched to Armritsar and caught the train to Delhi, where I met a group of Journalists that I knew at the station, who welcomed me exuberantly. All I wanted to do was escape and go and sit in a hot bath for a week, but they wouldn't leave me alone and kept on slapping me on the shoulder and offering top buy me gin and tonics. Apparently demands for my ransom had only just come through to the British

Embassy. I had been held hostage by a small religious cult that tried to use me to get financial aid to finance the building of a temple. However their demands went unnoticed as the Indian and British governments were distracted by the decapitating fate of a bunch of backpackers who had been kidnapped by a group of separatist guerrillas after both governments had refused to give into their demands. Luckily for me my captors had eventually come to the conclusion that a temple didn't suit their nomadic principles and so were quite happy to let me go.

I had been an unwitting hostage, more to the point an unwitting hostage that had unwittingly escaped. Just what an embarrassed government needed to deflect international embarrassment over the other less fortunate headless hostages. The Embassy pampered and politely pummelled me for information, but I had none. The more I tried to convince them of the reality of my so called imprisonment, the more they nodded their heads and threw knowing glances at each other. In their politically distorted view things had obviously been so bad I was unable to put them into words. I was hero that had escaped a group of ruthless terrorists. I was hero that was going to play directly into their hands.

They flew me back on a military plain which was infinitely more uncomfortable than a lot of the camps I had spent time in during my imprisonment. News of the fate of the other backpackers had just hit the headlines so when a kidnap survivor turned up on the Britain's media's shores they had field day, and I was one of their 'Own'. Journalists like any other profession love to celebrate their actions because it makes them feel what they do is worthwhile, and having a medium that plugs straight into the cortex of society at their finger tips, doesn't help either. At first I tried play down any hint of heroism down for fear that truth would eventually emerge and I would be revealed as a charlatan. Sadly it got the better of my good intentions as I started to enjoy the attention. I soon started embellish a few details making them sound more dangerous than they were. Even the fact I was unable to explain their cause made them seem mysterious and more threatening. The press weren't

interested in causes, they wanted action and the more movie like the better; after all its what sells these days.

For the first time in my life I was someone, people knew who I was, and it had a remarkable side effect. I could recognise myself; I was able see myself in the same way others see me. I wasn't the stranger I had come to recognise in other people's photos and home videos. I was someone... I was 'me'. At what cost though? I was slowly turning myself into a fraud. I could have been in the other valley and ended up a headless corpse too, but I was lucky and luck doth not a hero make.

Then about three weeks later it stopped. The genie was sucked back into the bottle and my three wishes were over. At first I was glad; relieved of my guilt I was able to get a grasp of my normal life again. Then one morning as I sat watching the news, I realised I didn't want that normal life again. I grown out of it, I wanted to be bigger than I was, I wanted to make my quarter of an hour last a quarter of a lifetime. As Images of strife around the world flashed across my screen a conflict raged within. I couldn't go out there again. However if I wanted fame I had to, that was what I was famous for, risking my life. The phrase 'wrong guys in the wrong valley' churned through my guts, and the frightening reality hit me full in the face. I wouldn't be a hero any more, instead I'd be someone who pushed they're luck just a little too far; like all those ice entombed climbers in the Himalayas that couldn't face reality off the face of the mountain. There has to be a name for this affliction; the word 'Humanity' thrust its hand up in the air from the back of the class and I tried to ignore it.

So here I am, stuck somewhere between Kalishnikovs and cocktails. I edge nervously around the barbed wire edges of my existence like a war veteran who can't find home, unable to see through imprint of war burned on his retina, or pick up a rifle again for fear of finding that the images might be real.

Where next?

Richmond.

I came out of the station and bought an Evening standard, while a scruffy bloke wearing new trainers shouted “Big Shoe”, it may be the edge of the ‘burbs but it’s still London.

I cut down Water lane to the pub down by the river for a pint. I used to come here when I first arrived in London. I’d escape the broil of city life and sit on the bank and watch the packed party boats drift by with their lively loads. I always felt I was sitting on the edge looking in on life here; the beer seemed to taste better too. Now the area has been transformed into some architecturally manicured watering hole, with its tidy cobbles, neatly clipped grass and theme pubs. I made it a short pint.

The address lead me up Richmond Hill to one of the large terraced Georgian houses that enjoy a rare unencumbered view over the Thames. Below the sun was reflecting off the arc of the water as it coursed its way down towards Eel Pie Island. Directly on the other side of the road is a terrace that over looks are grass and meadow flowers, I’ve often wondered how many developers have tried to claim that piece of dirt, it must be worth millions. Someone is holding out thankfully, it would be one view I’d hate to see blighted by greed.

I stepped up to the house; a brass button with a small discreet plaque that read ‘Core Promotions’ informed me that I’ve arrived. I pushed the button, to which silence replied; this always worries me because you never know whether it is working or not. I waited a while and as I was about to try again the door clicked open.

Inside there was a large white corridor with high ceilings. On one wall six Ketchi masks confronted the passer by with alarmed expressions and crudely crammed dentistry. Underneath another brass plaque quoted a man called Octavio Paz:

“While we are alive, we cannot escape from masks. We are inseparable from our fictions - our features.”

“How true is that.” I muttered to myself. I’d seen masks like this before; they were from Belize and depicted the Devil, his father, Mother, Wife and two minor devils that spread lust and drunkenness.

‘Ugly aren’t they?’ said a familiar voice.

“Wicked I’d say”

“That’d be right.” A small head had appeared through a seemingly invisible doorway. This was the owner of the voice on the phone, she wasn’t Catwoman but as she swept the door aside she revealed a figure that was every bit as beautiful, her body moving with a confident sway at one with the clean sophisticated clothes that she was wearing. Trix Bailey surrounded himself with etched class when it came to women, if this is what his staff are like the ‘his girls’ were starting to look promising.

“Hi I’m Mishka, T’s personal assistant.”

“Walker. Photographer.”

“I know. You’re not related to the other Walker photographer?”

“Walker Evans...No. I Wish. Then may be a bit of his genius might have brushed off on me.” She ushered me into a white pristine office, there was an air of clean professionalism to the way the place had been decorated and the furniture reeked of opulent good taste.

“Oh I’m sure you are in no short supply of it yourself. T wouldn’t have you here otherwise. He likes to be surrounded by the best.” As she sat down at her desk her cleavage confirmed that claim. “He’ll be with you in a short moment. Make yourself comfortable and take a seat. Would you like some coffee?”

She disappeared and returned with my coffee. “I hate those masks they give me the spooks.”

“They’re supposed to their demons.”

“Are you an expert?”

“A bit. I’ve collected a few.”

“I don’t like masks, you never know what’s behind them, the real person you know?” She gave a little shudder with had desirable repercussions with her breasts.

“They’re only man’s attempt to put a face on the unseen powers around him. By personifying them it helped man understand the weird stuff that they

couldn't explain. Place them in their Cosmos. You know mythological stories, the theatre."

"Means nothing today though"

"That's the shame of it .They're slowly losing their identity to the universal village."

"I like the universal village personally. You know where you are."

I stood up and approached the desk. "One day you'll find one that catches your eye. It'll draw you in and you won't know why. It'll connect with you, you'll find meaning in its expression."

"I suppose so. Personally I think it says a lot about a person by what they put on show."

"It's a projection from inside that's all." My eyes slowly slid down to her full breasts, as projections go they were yelling their heads off.

She caught my glance and smiled. I looked away quickly. "Don't worry you get a lot of that around here. It goes with the territory. You may go in now." There was a polite click and another door opened. As I walked off she added without looking up from her computer screen "And just in case you were wondering these projections are real. 100% freshly squeezed real."

It was a little more information than was necessary, but the aftermath imagery ricocheting around in my head was pleasant enough and prepared me for what was to come.

I entered a large, sparsely decorated room. There on a large screen directly in front of me was a blonde woman perched on a penis was having an orgasm. It was loud and effusive. The film then cut to her on all fours, her fit form arched and sweaty as two large penises probed both ends. Trix Bailey sat in a large leather armchair his finger tips together as if in prayer. At the desk next to him was a small balding man putting some papers away into a brief case. The film then went into a series of slow motion close ups: lips, tits, labia's, hips, fanny jobs, blow jobs, hand jobs, tit jobs. You name it; it was up there in slow grinding honesty being jobbed. This was a anatomical resume, stripped of everything, laid open bare to the fixed stare of Trix Bailey.

Trix looked up at me and smiled. “Beautiful isn’t she? She’s my latest.”

“Latest?” was about all I could muster. She was now on her back with her legs elegantly tucked behind her head while a bunch of guys fucked the living daylights out of any available orifice. The film ended abruptly, leaving my senses tingling with embarrassment. The words ‘1000% freshly squeezed real’ echoed through my head.

“Mike she’s great. I love the Russians they sound real dirty when they get going. Those tits hers?” Mike nodded appreciatively as if he’d grown them himself. Trix then shook the unassuming bald man’s hand. “I’d love to get her on board as soon as possible. I’ve got a calendar I’d love to include her involved with. In fact here’s the man himself. Meet Walker our photographer, good eye, and a lot of experience.”

“Hi” was the second and only word I could summon. My entire vocabulary having been stunned into extinction.

Trix sensing my vexation cut in. “Well Mike here has to catch a plane so you two can catch up later.” He whisked Mike out of the room leaving me alone with a mind full of edited porn highlights.

His girls were porn stars. Not models that do lingerie and catwalks, but girls that fuck and suck for the buck. Art, had set me up beautifully. Mishka walked in with a pot of coffee and a smile and politely pushed my slack jaw closed as she walked out.