

MAGDALENE'S PASSION

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Sure, I see her now and then. Just the other day, in a little French restaurant I go to down on Nassau Street, around the corner from Ground Zero, I noticed her hand crawling up an old man's thigh. Right there at the next table. How could you miss it? That hideously large hand, those fat veins running down the wrist. The kind of veins men get from riding jackhammers. But, of course, her hand also has the long, tapered fingers you find in a Dürer study. I know every knuckle and nail. And always the ambiguity: male and female coming down to the wire. By the way, it's the right hand that's the dreamer; her left hand's a gypsy fraud. But either one could uncoil a trouser snake. Margaret always knew how to handle poisonous, unpredictable things.

The hand lay partly hidden under a white tablecloth, moving slowly like a tarantula. And here was this old gentleman, bubbling up in a dark, pin-stripe suit. He didn't seem to mind. During dessert, he even reached down and stroked the thing. The man had thin white hair, wire rim glasses, and the gray, chapped lips of a dead man. For a minute I thought it was Father Lloyd in civvies — Maggie's favorite old goat. He ran a tweedy little parish up in Westchester. She was always in love with the cloth. There was the bishop of Pittsburgh, a rabbi in Great Neck and of course, Le Maitre.

The resemblance to old Lloyd was so strong I couldn't resist jostling the man. We sat along a banquette. I brushed him with an elbow. He turned. I said, "I'm so sorry." He had watery blue eyes and a self-indulgent smile.

"George... Yes?" the man said.

"No. I'm sorry. You've mistaken me."

"You look like someone," he said and turned away.

It wasn't Lloyd. Actually, it was a casualty broker I knew years ago. A chill of a man; I was surprised he was still alive. When I knew him he was down on Water Street, drinking 5 Beefeater doubles at lunch. Still, I felt sorry for him. You better watch that

hand, I wanted to say. Don't think you're going to wake up next to her with all your marbles.

I leaned forward to see around him. His companion was blonde. Not burgundy, nor the sharp cheekbones, the slender figure, not the woman forever just turning forty. Not my mother at all. Certainly, not those dark gray eyes. The doppelgänger hand was right on, but this woman was all eye shadow and cleavage, and no doubt a succuba tattooed across her lower back. She was not someone who'd ever worn a check-pleated skirt and gone to Miss Chapin's.

The woman glanced at me, threw back her head, and looked the other way. Then she tore off a large chunk of French bread and slapped the butter on like it was whitewash. My mother would have smiled at that. She took such pride in breaking bread into ever-smaller pieces. And then at the last moment, bread rising, with dramatic precision she would add a stroke of *beurre*.

That was Maggie, Maggs, the captivating Mrs. Farmer, as warm as she was cold, as down to earth as she was pretentious, those Dürer fingertips forever beating out Lester Lanin rhythms on a lover's thigh, Lately, it comes right back, like rabbits out of a hat, that year we took our infamous trip to the Holy Land — 40 years ago — my mother and I on the loose in the Levant. And then that last afternoon in East Jerusalem, standing on the balcony of the American Colony Hotel. She wore her black cocktail dress with the zipper undone down to the small of her back, Mary Magdalene in full bloom, caressing a long-stemmed martini glass, telling all. "Do me up," she said, looking off into that limestone yellow light. "Time to go out."



Going off was Lloyd's idea, Fr. GodFella as I call him, the high priest of black underwear. I suspect he was a little overbooked just then. He insisted the Holy Land would be just the right spiritual sedative for Maggie, who was at wits' end after her divorce from my father, a recluse and reckless, from Boston blue collars, who finally did himself in. He was the stockbroker whose final stops were the bar car and the Tappan Zee bridge. The truth is, he was happiest at 22, at the Pratt Institute, drawing nudes. And he was damn good. But he was better at multiplying other people's money — and better still at losing what he made, which was Maggie's torture, because she had a bone-deep dread of destitution.

Before the end, Lloyd persuaded her that to survive, she should bail out of the city and go to Jerusalem for Christmas. She took the advice, as well as a little money toward the airfare. "What

a dear man," mother insisted as we buckled into our seats. "A saint, really."

But the saint was also a tenacious social climber, always on his way to an upper story room in the St. Regis. His rooms in Bloomsbury. That's where he took his lady-flock from the suburbs, for a little "'Take, eat, this is my body, given for you and for many.' For the remission of sins, my love, and now can I unbutton this beautiful chemise?"

I don't think she realized it then, probably she never did, but my mother was one of several women to whom he offered succor in Bloomsbury. It would have crushed her to be thought of that way, as one in a series. And it would have taken Chief Justice Earl Warren to convince her that Fr. GodFella was the hazel-eyed philanderer of St. Andrews' parish.

In the suburbs, he paraded about in his tight white Episcopalian collar starched to a colonel's perfection. But when he came into the city, on leave from the colonies, he wore a herringbone suit, Gucci pumps with the bridle bit, and his Williams College bow tie. "The preppy air of a lecherous old prick," was how my sister put it. She saw him more than once in the St. Regis bar. He always pretended not to know her, much less acknowledge that he'd led her to confirmation, with a little grope here and there while reading *Imitation of Christ*.

In the bar, Fr. Godfella ran his ministry out of a corner table. One on one, "*entre nous, tu sais.*"

"But what do you think of Paul Tillich?" he might begin, to humble them a little. (My mother could spend hours talking about theologians, but I can't imagine any of the others could.) "Oh, you don't know who that is? Well well, have I got a treat for you ..." And then, to continue the unzipping, he might look puzzled. "But did you read Hugh Hefner's interview with Eric Fromm?" As though these women had ever read *Playboy*, much less Erich Fromm. But the Godfella always liked to be the shocking progressive, as well as the button-down cleric. He knew he was safe, and he knew how important it was for them to appear à la mode, and so he encouraged them to play along, to say, with a sly smile, "You know, this month's issue hasn't arrived yet, but I can't wait to read it."

These were widows and divorcées and, from time to time, late-model wives running up the miles. All the distraughta of Mt. Kisco and Bedford Hills, in their box hats and limo-sized, tinted glasses, Jackie-Os looking magnificently wounded. And with each revelation, Father Lloyd leaned forward through the cigarette smoke — he was a chain smoker — and threw up his hands. "How could you bear it? The scent of those other perfumes. The endless absences. And telling you he was going off to see a Rangers game

in August! Poor Felicia. How were you to know the hockey season ends in May?"

"It's an American tragedy," Fr. GodFella reassured them, adding a lover's tone to a priest's conviction, and then to the waiter, he would flash an inverted victory sign over two dead Manhattans.

So when we returned from the Holy Land, with all that had happened, naturally mother went straight to him. But Floyd wasn't prepared for a woman in real distress and certainly not Maggie Farmer with her dramas. So he begged off, claiming he'd long ago ticketed a pilgrimage to St. Bridget's Well in Liscannor.

Mother wept for days. This was her particular luck, God's grace never coming round when she needed it. And with each turn of the screw, a teary drama or sometimes, a more violent drama. My ex-wife was always saying, after one of our fights, "How you love dramas. Just like your mother. I know you wish I had more of that." And then she would wait two beats and add in a raspy, whiney voice, like Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* "Anything for a little mystery, right Georgie?"



It's tricky to describe the closeness between my mother and me during those years, and then during the trip — tricky to describe so that enough is implied, but not too much. My first wife always suspected I must have slept with my mother, but that's nonsense. That's a reflection of her own guilt-gilded, Catholic condition. She was a true bad girl; my mother was not. For Maggie, there was no line between good and bad, order and chaos. She moved through all dialectics in her Piscean way. And all the while reflecting such a mixture of epochs and attitudes that's it's difficult to describe her properly. She was both an old school defender of the establishment and a naturally gifted bomb thrower. She couldn't help but disrupt wherever she went. On the one hand, she was vaguely intellectual, and she was well read, certainly in the classics. She was smart and she could find the heart of an argument or an idea. On the other hand, she was a house of emotion, not intellect. She was hysteric, manic, without anchor, had no interest in the facts of any matter, and would knock you dead with her superficiality.

I don't think she ever liked a person whom she didn't find physically attractive, and the more attractive, the quicker she was to forgive their sins. "So attractive," she was always saying about the latest person she'd fallen in love with or adopted. Once, within earshot of my wife, she said of someone she barely knew, "Now

there's an attractive woman; that's the woman you should have married."

As for this Oedipal business, it was the appearance of sexual intimacy, nothing more. And yet ... As she would say, "And yet," in that melodramatic, utterly self-aware way that was her trademark. And yet, I was at that cuspy moment of adolescence, and when she would draw me into her wrought iron bed for a morning cuddle, I felt both unease and attraction.

The ambiguities thickened after we moved into the city, into a Midtown walk-up. Sometimes, when I got home from school, the door was locked and it was a long wait until it opened, and when it did I would see, at the end of the hallway, a youngish dark-haired man who sat calmly on the sofa with his tie pulled down and a tumbler of Johnny Walker Red Label. He wasn't the only one. One of her lovers, an older Jewish businessman from the Long Island, left \$50 bills and long yellow checks in bathroom towels and, more appropriately, in the medicine cabinet.

This was not an unusual situation. I knew several boys in the same circumstance, young beards accompanying their divorced mothers. I knew one boy who did sleep with his mother and then stabbed her to death. He eventually committed suicide.

You could always recognize these boys, with their mock sophistication. At 12 and 13, they appeared as hand-woven replicas of their mother's fantasies, the perfect blend of innocence and danger to come. They wore suits, not blazers; overcoats, not parkas. I didn't, but some boys carried chrome cigarette cases and embossed lighters. They were always on the lookout for an unlit cigarette, or else they might start one themselves and hand it to their mother. Some carried flasks with "emergency gin" and even ordered the wine in restaurants. They sat along banquettes or at corner tables where they could observe. They were "cool" and trained to be wry or acerbic. They sat in a slouch, one arm resting on the table, thumb tapping the loose ash of a cigarette; the other arm extended, the hand gesturing dramatically, as though it had something to say.

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, at 6 p.m. sharp, you'd find these boys at the Colony Club in Mrs. DeRam's Dancing School. At the end of every class, Mrs. DeRam, always accompanied by her tall Argentine partner, would take a boy with particular talent, and, while the rest of the class stood aside, dance with him. She held you tight, rubbing you into her oils and cleavage, and there was nothing subtle about the way she did it. Meanwhile, mothers and nannies — never fathers — peered over the mezzanine. But Maggie never came to Mrs. DeRam's. She only enrolled me because it was expected, because she thought the

knowledge of how to foxtrot was practical, and because, as time went on, she knew she needed to undo our attachment.

As self-assured as these boys seemed in the dim light of restaurants and theaters, out of the context of their mothers, if you met them on their own, they had no self-confidence at all. They were chatty and desperate and had a femme quality. They went to Carnegie Hall and could talk a blue streak about Leonard Bernstein's famous rendition of *Peter and the Wolf*, but they had no idea where the Polo Grounds were, and tittie and Tittle were all the same to them.



Once, my mother and I went to dinner with an old friend of hers, an actress visiting from London with her son. He was a little older, about 17. The four of us went to a quiet, one-room restaurant in Midtown. After about 10 minutes, for no apparent reason, this woman turned on her son. She so humiliated and demeaned him, his table manners, his poor grades, his affection for his father, that as the waiter arrived with soup, the boy stood up, threw down his napkin and slathered her with derision. "You sorry bitch," he said and ran out. On the way home Maggie and I shook our heads in sympathy with the boy. No wonder, we said. It was as though that was never anything that happened to us.

The problem was, you had to wear several hats at once: companion hat, servant hat, faux lover's hat, the son hat; and you never knew when you'd have to take off one and put on another. So you might go out to dinner, have drinks, simulate a man in his 50s, trade some personal story, then run over to Third Avenue and see one of the new art films. Often, they were about marital problems in Europe's middle class. *Juliet of the Spirits*, for example, or *Red Desert*. Or *Phaedra* was another, which was an especially difficult film for even a sophisticated boy to see with his mother. Then on the way home, in the cab, you'd discuss the film and suddenly a wrong word, or simply the night itself, the devils of juniper, and you'd be scrambling to find the right hat. But you couldn't. "Have you brushed your teeth today, because it sure doesn't look like it," she would say, breaking the spell, wrecking all the illusions we'd established.

Or what about the time we were driving back to the city after visiting the Godfella? Late one Sunday in July, I was 15 or 16. It was raining. She was driving. We were just getting on the Saw Mill River Parkway, and suddenly a nuance detonated. She hit me with the back of that hideous right hand, the jackhammer hand with the emerald band on the ring finger. Without thinking, I hit right back. A left fist into her jaw. We'd never gone that far before

but it had been a long, long time coming. My nose was bleeding; she was looking at me out of this wild animal eye. She hit me again. I hit her again, and then I turned to finish her off because this was it. She hit the brakes. The car skidded, grazed the overpass railing, spun 360 degrees, the passenger-side door swung open. For an instant the car was barely moving, I tried to get out but she accelerated, swerved, the door slammed shut. "You," she was screaming. "You bastard."

She sped on to the parkway and we never said another word to each other all that summer. Or really for years afterward.

That was also the summer the alimony never came. Margaret was too proud to make use of her connections and eventually took a job in the shoe section of Bendal's Department Store. One day, down on her knees, she looked up to see a matron from Katonah, someone she'd known socially. "What are you doing down there?" asked the woman. A few weeks later mother left retail and found a job as an executive secretary in a foundation. Meanwhile, I worked as a stock boy in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, in a dye factory. It was the summer Williamsburg burned. It was my penance. Then September came; I went away to school. And that was the end of things. A year later, she moved to Paris and found a job as an office manager in an American company. That didn't last and then, in 1973, she disappeared.



I haven't seen her in almost 25 years, except in pieces. I assume she's still alive, I assume I'd be told otherwise. She lives outside of Nice, in a spiritual "center" known as "Le Jardin Ideal." It used to be a fashionable cult, but now, I understand, it's fallen on hard times. The place is down to two dozen residents, mostly French, some English, a few Americans. Margaret translates books written in French into English. The books have titles like *Secret Principles of the Spiritual Life* and *Sex and The Meaning of Existence*.

I stopped by one August. I was on my way back from Jeddah. Those were the good old days in Saudi; you could still make a buck in the casualty business. We sat in plastic chairs outside her bungalow. She had a cot with a mosquito net; a wood stove, bottled water, postcards, and some pictures of my children when they were still children. And naturally a picture of the guru, her beloved Maitre.

I met Le Maitre just once. In London. He was holding court in the Chelsea flat of wealthy benefactors. I was given an audience in a dark room. Out stepped this paunchy Bulgarian with long white hair, a Mark Twain character, the professional theosophist and

karma daddy. He wore a white suit and sandals. In photographs he's always got a jolly expression under a fedora. On the afternoon I met him, he had red food stains on his lapel.

We spoke French, although I could barely understand him. But at one point he said very clearly, "Perhaps, you can see our needs and all that we're trying to accomplish." I shrugged my shoulders. I can tell you, I am one underwriter Hank Greenberg did not make a multi-millionaire. But Le Maitre wanted me to be rich, so I was rich. I gave him a small check. He didn't thank me.

He was another high-maintenance Godfella, running a little Club Gospel of his own, all his expenses paid, granting prosperous incarnations, with booze in the bardo for the wealthy, and more chancy crossings to those that hadn't paid up. If my father were still alive, he would describe Le Maitre as an old roué. "Probably doesn't wear underwear. He's got a line of some fat old broads with fat asses and fat checkbooks – but mostly fast asses – who never had anything to do except play canasta and complain about their husbands."

So, on that August afternoon we sat outside her room, in blistering heat. She had a little fan the Maitre had given her. She also had a growth on her neck and covered it with a scarf. No questions allowed. She had a lot to say and no patience for a conversation. And suddenly she was telling the story of her life, but no life I'd heard of. In fact, I'd never known much about her until that moment. Our relationship was all about the present. In a way it never occurred to me she had a past. I knew she'd grown up in New York, gone to private schools and college, married my father and lived unhappily ever after. I knew about a half brother, who'd come to a bad end in the cuckoo wing at Bellevue Hospital. I knew bits and pieces my sister had told me. But none of what she was telling me now. Certainly nothing about her stepfather, a colonel who served in Belleau Wood in WWI; who got home from the war, and, not happy to be a stockbroker, sexually abused her. She was 11, 12. Her mother knew, said nothing, not wanting to undermine the financial security that seemed to be the family goal as long as anyone could remember.

I hadn't heard this story before, only hints from my father. And how she told it. A summer hydrant. And that wasn't all. She told one other story, about her real father, a Madison Avenue haberdasher. She described him as someone forever in financial disarray, but a matinee idol for the wives of his customers. She had only the barest details, but apparently it all became too much for him, success was not enough, he was involved with too many women at once, and so in the back of the store, in among suits waiting to be tailored, he shot himself in the mouth.

She finished the story and covered her mouth with the back of her hand. "Not a pretty picture," she said, legs crossed, top leg swinging away like a golf club before a putt.

"I was a monster, wasn't I?"

"Not at all."

"No?" she said after a moment, with just the faintest smile and suddenly her eyes were dry as desert. I haven't seen her since.



We arrived in East Jerusalem in December, 1963 and stayed for three weeks. We knelt on the stone floor of St. Anne's, where the virgin was born. We sat in the pews of St. James, where Herod Agrippa was beheaded. We wandered beneath the pines surrounding the Russian Cathedral of St. Mary Magdalene. We went to Christmas Eve in Shepherd's Field. We stood in the garden of Gethsemane. At the Church of Ascension we examined the print left by Christ as He stepped into heaven. Later, in the cocktail hour, Maggie re-imagined the scene, placing her foot in His print and saying, "I'm off now, Good luck. Anybody want to come with me?" Then she collapsed on the floor in laughter.

"You'd be a good Magdalene," I said.

"I am Magdalene," she replied. "Want to see?" She got to her feet, gathered the hem of her dress and brought it up her leg and then went into a can-can routine.

The city was divided then, but looking back, it seems innocent, like Europe before World War I. It would be nearly 20 years before the Al Dawaa party sent off the first suicide mission, in Beirut; almost thirty years before the intifadas got started and the killing began in earnest. When we arrived, it was all quiet. Mrs. Vester was still the grand dame of the city. We had tea with her one day, and there on the mantelpiece was a picture of her with T.E. Lawrence and General Allenby.

We stayed at the American Colony Hotel because mother had heard that John Steinbeck and Irwin Shaw stayed there. Then later she became fascinated by the hotel's proximity to the wall dividing Jerusalem into an Arab and Jewish sector. We could see the Israeli convoys driving through Arab Jerusalem to relieve a settlement on nearby Mt. Scopus. Occasionally, there was an incident. In the fig orchards around Mt. Scopus, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian farmers often exchanged insults and sometimes bullets.

One day at lunch, a waiter ran into the dining room to say that sure enough some fighting was going on. Without thinking, we shuffled out through the kitchen into the hotel garden to see. We couldn't see anything, but we could hear bullets hitting the pine

branches above our heads. One of the other guests urged everyone to get inside, and most did, but my mother refused.

"It's war," she said.

Just then I heard a bullet passing. It was close enough that I could actually hear it.

"That was a bullet," I said.

"Really?" There was something exuberant in her tone. She waited a long moment. Now we could hear the crackle of small arms fire clearly.

"We should go in," I said.

"Wait," she said and lingered for a moment. Finally she turned, but insisted on walking, not hurrying, the 10 yards to the kitchen door. She was not going to be seen to be afraid, even if it cost her life, and even if there wasn't much of an audience.

As we reached the back door of the kitchen, the waiter pointed to a hole about the size of a half-dollar in the wall. Mother stopped to look. "Nothing is written," she said, quoting Peter O'Toole's famous line from *Lawrence of Arabia*, which she'd just seen a few weeks earlier. She said it quite seriously, having forgotten the proper context — that in fact, some things *are* written. But no matter; she was intoxicated with the moment. The waiter shook his head and we returned to lunch. The dining room was all abuzz and Margaret suddenly assumed the pose of a war hero.

She had no idea of Arab-Israeli politics when we arrived, but after the episode in the garden, in which she assumed the bullets zinging through the branches were fired by Israelis not Palestinians, she was now a comrade in arms as well as the consummate Arabist. But there was more to it. Her animosity toward Israel was partly a reflection of her own mother-driven, anti-Jewish sentiments and encouraged by several Palestinian taxi drivers we met. Also, she suffered from Stockholm syndrome. She had adopted the views of her captors, the city itself. It was also a chance to take sides, to be political, which was always her nature. She accepted it all like esoteric knowledge, which in turn gave her what she most desired: definition and status. But the result was that she became more unstable, more unpredictable.



"Do me up," she said, just before that disastrous last supper, as we stood on the hotel balcony overlooking the Mandelbaum Gate. She held up her hair in that particularly erotic way she had, with an appearance of vulnerability, as though to say, "Do with me what you will." I held the top of her dress with one hand, pulled up the zipper with the other, past her black bra,

past the freckles on the back of her neck. I caught the eye with the hook and let my hands slide down her arms.

She moved away to make another drink. There was no scotch, only gin, an emerald green bottle of Burnett's on a brass tray with tonic, a lemon slice, and a small bowl with a few fast-melting cubes of ice. "They don't believe in ice here, do they?" she said, and, while rubbing the rim of her glass with the lemon, threw out a reminiscence of a birthday party she had once.

"At the St. Regis Hotel. My God, when was that?"

I was only half listening, watching for soldiers in the street and hoping there might be more fighting, until she explained that this party marked the end of her affair with a man she'd been seeing for some time. My ears pricked up. A much older man, she said. She didn't mention a name, but from everything she described, and the way she told the story, I've always assumed it was the Godfella, Fr. Lloyd.

That afternoon she was in one of her juniper moods, when she saw the great span of her life and wanted to describe it. This was the madness of gin for her, a Wallace Beery's drunken sentimentality. Until now, she'd never described her love life in detail. She described the dinner, how the waiter picked up the warmers one after another, revealing all her favorites. Dom Perignon in a bucket. And how her lover took her on some intellectual journey over dinner and afterwards gave her a box from Tiffany's, with gold earrings. And how it was all "to die for." Then she paused, perhaps considering whether to stop right there. She looked at me and went on. "I let him undress me, because he liked to do that. I had to help him; he was brittle as a twig."

She glided over the next part, how by the bathroom light she could see his wide forehead and the outline of his face, the suggestion of a smile; how she could feel his breath on her cheek and the flutter of his hips. How for a moment, lying under him, she felt the weightlessness of an old man's mortality. How that unnerved her, made her want to flee, but she put fear aside and because he wanted this so much, she coaxed him along, and, well before he would have liked, and herself only just begun, he had a little spill.

The next morning she awoke and went to the window, standing between the window and the sheers — in the nude. This room was high above a side street. Across the way, three young men in yellow hard hats stood on a scaffold cleaning windows. Eventually, they noticed her. Although she couldn't hear them behind the glass and above the noise of the air-conditioner, she could see them clearly, calling, laughing, making rude gestures. She didn't move. She stayed right there and let them take her in.

"They had cigarette packs rolled up in their shirt sleeves," she said, looking off, circling the rim of her glass with her middle finger. "You know how construction workers do. They waved; I waved. It was all in fun and ... But at the same time I wanted them to know that I wanted them, you know, I just did.

"When I finally turned, because after a while it was enough, even for me, when I turned, *he* was standing there. He'd been watching the whole time ... Can you imagine? My God, what do you say? 'I'm so sorry?' 'It's not what you think?' But of course, it's exactly what you think."

She stopped there, as always leaving the story without a denouement, or a reflection. "I'm starved, aren't you? But wait, shall we have one more?" She poured herself a shot's worth, neat, and drank it like a cowboy. "Alright, are we ready? ... Don't you think?"

I still imagine her there, behind the sheers, enjoying inspection by muscled men, taunting them to cross thin air and take her one by one and all together. And behind her, Fr. Lloyd, smiling his saintly smile, tears running down inside his scrawny chicken neck, landing like bacon grease on that old, grey heart. And then her telling me this story, one of her many librettos, at sunset on the balcony, with her zipper undone, her skin cooling to the touch.



A week later, on our last night, we went downstairs to dinner. I told her about a girl I was in love with and about how once I had undressed her. "Very important to go slowly when you do that," she said. "Let a woman get used to what you're doing but leave the impression that you might stop at any moment." That may have been our most intimate conversation. For that instant I had become very close to what I had been trained to imitate, an impersonation at least, and she was accepting it all, drawing me out. This was her gift and so we sat in the corner and drank champagne and danced.

But then suddenly the wind changed, the exoticism of it all must have been too much: along with the city, itself, the trip, her divorce, having to go back to America and all the uncertainty. On the way upstairs she went into a rage. "Loathsome," she said. "What woman would ever find you interesting?"

She turned the lock, we went in the room and she became a blur. She stuffed my clothes in my suitcase, but didn't zip it, then opened the door and threw everything out, me with it, under a shower of underpants, socks, pants, and blazer. Then she locked the door and I spent the night right there on the doorstep. The

next morning, I heard the sound of her slip rustling as she stepped over me and went off down the stairs.

“Pull yourself together,” she said. “We’re leaving.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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