

## Chapter 1. Were All Women Sex-Mad?

Here is an old familiar road. It's muddy from the rain but it's not raining now. The mud is a rich chestnut colour. On either side of the road are trees, on one side the trees are poplars which are turning yellow and on the other side are gum trees glistening and silvery. There is a sign which says it's an open road, that you can accelerate up to the maximum speed limit. But it's treacherous in this weather.

On the side of the road there's a man walking on the grass. On his right about a hundred yards back from the road, there is a house painted white with a red roof. It's behind a garden with several different kinds of pine trees. Running up the side of the house and up to the road is a windbreak of dark, tall pine trees. The windowpanes of the house are divided into small squares. Two women are looking out of the windows onto the road. Aunty Cis and Julie. They are talking about the old man.

–He's been walking back and forth along the road every day since I got here, why does he do it?

–He's a bit off you know. He thinks his wife is going to come back one day and he walks up to the main road to look for her car. She drove off 20 years ago in his big Buick. She came back once to see the kids in a Datsun. He bought a Falcon once and just left it in the yard for the dog to sleep in because he couldn't face the idea of cars. His brother bought him a dog kennel and took the car. The Child Welfare came and took the kids. Then he really went bananas. Strange how the mind operates.

–Whose mind?

It is love which holds all of us together. Gently binding us across time and for miles and miles, around the world to Australia where it's spindly through the bush, subtly able to avoid and deflect the light twigs and prickles. It continues. We know it probably will.

–I can feel you in my stomach. Do you feel that? I can feel you walking across the floor in my stomach. It's disturbing. Why do you have to go away, I've hardly even got used to you being here.

He sat in a chair on a lot of papers and clothes, holding his stomach.

–I've got to go away, what choice do I have? I'm just a traveller at the moment. I don't normally do this.

–I've never known anybody who wanted to 'end up' with me. In 8 years I think I'll be finished, I've gone steadily downhill since the '60s. The girl I used to live with has had one after another of hopeless boyfriends since we split up. She moved in with me and just stayed in bed, in my bed, for 3 days – that's when I realized she'd moved in.

–Look I'm looking for just one person too, someone I can stay with for a while, I

hate this insecurity. All these short affairs drive me crazy. The last thing I want to do is leave you now, I don't often meet someone like you. I've already been crying. It's so hard to keep on leaving people or having them leave you. Do you know I can tell straight away whether I really like someone, like love them I mean, and almost immediately I can tell whether it's going to work out or not. But working it out with someone doesn't happen overnight I wish it bloody did.

–If you stayed with me you'd get sick of me pretty quickly you know. I don't have any deep feelings. I'm shallow and superficial.

–You don't know what men say about me. I'm supposed to be too much to take. I talk too much about things you're not supposed to talk about.

They moved around each other in the tiny room knocking over glasses and records and books. She couldn't go.

–I can't go. I'm really late.

Outside the leaves were beginning to turn and fall on the old flagstones.

–I won't be here long, he said. It's too small here, look at all this crap. I hate my job, I hate travelling, I don't have many friends.

–Come with me.

–I can't. You're being stupid. My brother's coming to visit me.

–Okay, well, couldn't you just walk down to the station with me?

–Of course.

He began dressing. It got later and later.

–I can't believe this, it's stupid. What are we going on about you'd think we'd been married 30 years or something.

–It seems like 5 bloody minutes to me. Just a week would've at least given us enough time to start to realize we weren't meant for each other.

–We're not meant for each other. Stop it.

–I don't want to go.

–Well don't go. Stay here with me. I don't want you to go. You're leaving me not the other way round. This is all bloody Eric's fault.

They walked to the station together without saying anything.

–Well see you later.

–No you won't. Goodbye Marthe.

They both laughed.

–Julie, when I was staying at this hotel, an Indian man and his son walked into the restaurant. I noticed them as I had before at the airport but they didn't notice us. They sat down. The son was much darker than his father but was wearing much lighter clothes so the contrast between his skin and his clothes was greater. When I went to the bar to order another drink the son was leaning up against the railing waiting for his father. I noticed him again as I went past and for the first time felt him notice me — he'd already seem me 3 times in the last 24 hours. They hadn't realized that we were sharing the same hotel, their imagination was not as vivid as mine, mine had already outstripped them or undressed them, you know.

Whenever I see someone I think, Will I know this person, will I become close to them? And I know instantly whether I want to or not. And I know whether our

paths will cross or not. When you know that your paths won't cross and that you like this person it's a bit tragic because you've lost another opportunity for closeness because of someone else's blindness or inhibition.

People think it's dangerous to respond to people who are responsive. Why isn't it dangerous for me? I know where there's danger and where there isn't. Others don't know, and if you don't see danger where it is then I suppose you've got to see it everywhere until you've sounded out a situation. 2 bloody years you know I think it often takes people. That's what I've noticed.

I'll probably meet the Indian man and his son but they don't know this yet though they could. They don't like to presume this. And when we meet they'll probably misconstrue the nature of the meeting. I don't know how or why I know these things. I don't want to think about it. I don't want to recognize people I will know in the future but I always do. The recognition is always instant. To explain it I'd have to resort to weird explanations. I don't have a rational explanation. The feeling is like this, that I feel a sense of comfort with a person, a lack of desire to push them into friendship. That's how I felt with you.

Helen walks down the steps of the block of flats she lives in. Julie is walking quickly down the front path heading up the street. Helen calls out to her and Julie immediately walks back still with her head down. She's crying. Helen grabs her and runs her back up the stairs with her into her own flat, into the bedroom and sits her down on the bed. She shows her a group of drawings and asks her opinion. Julie stops crying and Helen says,

–What's the matter.

–Nothing, it's gone now sweetheart.

–Okay now we'll have a cup of tea and then we'll go up the street hey?

–Yes. Look. I don't know what I'm going to do.

–Neither do I. And what am I going to do for Christ's sake?

–I don't know.

–Why don't we learn how to predict the future. You can predict mine and I'll predict yours.

–Okay. Yes, I think I do know what you're going to do.

–What am I going to do?

–I don't know if I should tell you.

–Okay but if I really need to know will you tell me?

–Okay.

–Will I ever be happy?

–Yes.

–Soon?

–Yes.

–Will I find a relationship?

–Yes.

–Who with?

–It's someone you haven't considered yet or don't know.

–Bugger, who could it be? Mr Right, just around the corner.

–He is. He loves you.

–I think this is just plain supportive. I don't know if any of this'll happen at all.  
–Something'll happen.  
–Yes I'm sure it will.  
–Well am I going to stay with Bill? I know I will. Christ.  
–I think you'll stay but I can't tell how long. Into the conceivable future, how long's that? You'll have to ask me every 6 months or something.  
–Don't worry I will.

The teapot is in the middle of the table on a lace tablecloth. Plates and cups and saucers, and pepper and salt cellars are clustered around them. The afternoon sun is shining through the windows and onto Julie's back. The heat in the kitchen makes them drowsy.

–How's the job situation?  
–I don't want a job at the moment. If one fell into my lap I'd take it but not otherwise. I need a rest.  
–The best thing is for us just to do lots of things. Get so many things going you can't think about your shattered illusions. Let's express ourselves. Let's talk about what's going on. Let's go swimming. How about an exciting journey into the city. Something turns up.

–Helen, you know I was just up at my Auntie Cis's place a while ago? There was this old Russian guy who walked up and down the road outside her place all the time. He walked up to the main road and back to his house down the way. His wife had left him and their kids 20 years before. The owner of the local pub told me she'd come back once and sat in the ladies lounge knocking back scotches. She drove in from the direction of the city and drove straight out again the same way. She spent a couple of hours in the pub but didn't go down the road to his place. The owner of the pub said she probably didn't want to get mud on her new radial tyres. She wore furs and had bleached hair. They thought she was European too and that she earned her money now as a whore or as a mistress to some wealthy man in the city. But a Datsun isn't such a display of wealth is it? The old guy used to bring Auntie Cis apples he grew and different kinds of vegetables.

No one in the town ever really spoke to him and the kids weren't popular with the other town kids. They used to skip school and go off into the bush with a couple of the other wild kids of the town. Sometimes they stole a few things. Then the truant officer reported them to Child Welfare who came and took the kids to a home. Auntie Cis had never spoken to the woman in the 8 years before she left. The whole town avoided them from the start so it was quite normal not to speak to them even though they were neighbours. I'm talking about the 50's you know. Rock 'n' Roll.

–I think isolation could drive you crazy even if you weren't already.  
–Yes and how about desertion and kids and a whole town full of people who won't speak to you.  
–Well, why don't we just walk up the road and get yelled at by the morons outside the Toxteth pub.

–No I just want to sit here inside these four dirty walls and do nothing. Where's the joint, man.

He suddenly appeared late as usual around the corner of the entrance to the Underground. He was wearing red and black, and whistling, Born to lose and now I'm losing you... He walked up to Marthe, took her arm and walked out with her before saying hello.

–Late again I see.

–I won't ever be late again.

–I won't see you again after the next 14 hours.

–Bloody Eric.

–You know the girlfriend I lived with? I've got to talk fast we've only got 14 hours. Well I was so in love with her when I first met her but she was in love with this other fellow. Their affair went on and on and it only stopped because he moved to another city to take up a job. He still writes her very intense letters.

–Do you see them, does she show you?

–Yes. I feel as though something in me, 'in my heart', which was totally devoted to her, died and that I'll never really feel that about her again. Maybe that's life.

–Infatuation dies anyway

–I think she loves me very much now but I feel as though it's too late.

–I've felt that so many times. No it's like no one ever seems to be able to coordinate with me so we're both in love at the same time.

–Do you think all women are sex-mad?

–Yes. The Female has far greater sexual capacity and endurance than the Male. Women are long-distance and their performance improves with age.

–The Male varies.

–Usually from bad to worse. No, seriously, I think men have capabilities which are as yet untapped. They're probably quite capable of being understanding, kind, generous etc.

–I don't like men very much. I think I belong to a third sex. I'm not interested in anything masculine. I find cricket and football completely boring. Often other men can't understand why they like me because I don't like sport or any of the things they're interested in. I manage to have conversations with them for hours and they find them very entertaining but they don't understand how I do it, as though I sweep them away into another realm they don't normally penetrate. But I think they think of me as a bit of a card you know, not really normal. I've got a kind friend called Norman, he's not really a friend, I know him. He calls himself Norm. Can you image that – like – The Norm. He doesn't get upset about his name or try to change it to something else. Norm suits him fine. I don't like David or Dave so much but it doesn't mean anything else.

–David's alright. I like him, but I'm not normal.

## Chapter 2. Born to Lose

–How long have you been travelling. I've been travelling for years. I've stopped sometimes for 2 months but not longer. But I'm so tired. I'm drinking too much. The Swedes are amazingly puritanical – that feeling when you first arrive in Stockholm of walking down the streets. You realize that you're frivolous and superficial and that your life isn't worth a pinch of shit here. No alcohol, no drugs, no fun, no future. Then you have your first conversation with a Swede and you realize what the massive severe buildings were saying to you: 'You are frivolous and superficial. Here we are very concerned about our environment, we are very interested in the education of our young people. Marijuana is extremely bad, we don't smoke it here. We must discourage the young people from it because they will use heroin.'

The huge red brick walls, the cobblestones, the autumn leaves and the mist. Why are you so sad? Isn't the sky beautiful?

We walked along through the centre of Amsterdam at night. We laughed and joked nervously, we went in and out of the bars, looked in the shops. The flower market stalls lit up with hundreds of light bulbs reflected in the water.

–Christ, our hotel manager is a puritanical dead-arse. Have you seen the way he stands behind the desk being so bloody correct and Germanic. He probably clicks his heels when he forgets himself.

Then the red-light district.

–I don't care if we go there or not. Okay let's go there.

–I'll speak to them in Gaelic.

–No please, we heard enough Gaelic last night.

–Did I speak Gaelic last night?

–Christ, were you that drunk? Don't you remember they were screaming and yelling in Dutch at the bar and you were sitting at the table with us, screaming back at them in Gaelic.

–You were great. They thought you were a foreigner.

–The red-light district. None of us spoke for 2 miles round and round the canals. The men in the street were silent. The women had red and ultra-violet lights on them. They sat on chairs or divans in windows right on the street and behind them there was always the room with a double bed. When they had a customer, they drew the curtains. There was nothing to say. It was such a shock to me. I've seen prostitutes before but this was different. The atmosphere was oppressive. I'm sure I couldn't get it up if I went into one of those rooms. The 2 women were even more effected by it. They were exhausted and completely freaked out by the end of it. It's understandable I guess. I mean they were just other women sitting there behind the glass. A lot of them had needle marks on their arms. Some of them were wearing the most grotesque wigs and make-up and sex-shop kind of underwear – you know, purple and black. Some of them wore white, which glowed under the ultra-violet light.

–How do you know this woman Julie?

–She became attached to a male friend of mine and then we've lived close by each other for several years. I think we understand each other. Not just personally, but each other's positions with other people. That's valuable. Or it's valuable that it continues, that makes it seem more real, that it's not just an idea you have about somebody yourself. Not like being 'in love' where you hardly need the other person to think anything about you, you can just love them in your own head. It's crazy.

–Well you're a Citizen of the World now.

–You know the Russian family near Aunty Cis. The people in the town said they'd never seen a man treat a woman with so much respect. He was always incredibly gentle with her and with the children. They thought, the men in the town, that he was a spineless fag or something and that's why she left him. A woman likes to be told who's boss. I saw him one time, not with her of course, but with Aunty Cis, gently guiding her by the elbow to his gate after she got some eggs from him. He always listened very attentively to her and paused before he made any reply, maybe he was self-deprecating but he seemed to make these things a formality, little rituals he went through. I thought he was very self-centred or self-absorbed. Absent, dreamy.

–Overseas you always find romance – maybe lots of it but you have to leave people. And have to think about living, maybe staying years in another country with a person if you're going to take them seriously. And wouldn't that be like the Russian woman? By the way, she wasn't Russian at all. She was Italian. But of course in that town they wouldn't know the difference. They're all bloody wogs. She was a blonde Italian so they just thought she was Slavic. It's a strange combination for those times, hey? An Italian and a Russian. But so. If I stayed in this country don't you think I would have the same problems trying to become accepted by the local community, maybe never being accepted? Unless of course we both wished to be International – you know, Citizens of the World. Hey?

–These crazy things you do, are they the ones you regret later?

–No. The things I do which I regret are the things I do which I think I ought to do. The things I think I'm obliged to do. And when I regret them what I regret most always is that I didn't follow my heart. Usually I have a terrible sinking feeling when I do them but feel compelled for some reason upon which I've decided, to distrust this feeling. Stupidity, sometimes it's stubbornness, not wanting to appear weak or not wanting to allow someone power over me. But the impulsive things I've done often seem to be quite good. I think that's because when you have a feeling that's strong enough for you to feel it like a compulsion, then it is a very strong feeling. After all, you have enough experience to assess and judge a situation by the time you're 15. I don't think you need to be always thinking about it. Like what can you think about someone you love? Only I love them or I don't, if you need to think then that's the sign that you're unsure and that's where all the

forcing comes in. No? This is something Helen always used to say, If you've got to think for longer than 2 seconds whether you love someone, then you don't. That's the acid test. If you think of the person in that cold suspicious way, if you're always wondering what they're on about, then they're an interesting case for you and that's all.

–The thing I find most irritating about love is the way it doesn't just occur when you want it, like when you're feeling lonely and hopeless for instance. Or when you've just broken up with someone and desperately need it. It's a real bum trip. And then you look back and realize that you and everyone you know has only had really big loves on rare occasions. One in 10 years or so. I know some people who've never been in love, who've just hung around letting one thing happen or another. I can't conceive of that kind of lack of idealism, doesn't everyone want the perfect love? If not why not? Like lots of women say things like, Oh well, he had a good job and he loved me, so I thought I shouldn't hang around waiting for the perfect love. Or sometimes people say things like, I was really in love with this man/woman but my parents didn't like him/her, or, But he/she had to move to another city and I married the boy/girl next door. Compris? Is that tragic or are our lives tragic? It depends on your point of view doesn't it? Someone asked me once which I would choose if I had to: career or marriage. Can you conceive of having to make that choice? Can you conceive of a reason for having to make that choice?

–There isn't a reason. it's one of those 'beliefs' some people have, that somehow you can just have a relationship and do nothing else in the world or that somehow a person having a career means loss. It's madness.

–There was one time when he, David, suddenly told me I was sweet, as though feeling suddenly struck by the fact. I was talking (he didn't speak much) and I was telling a story about a man I'd been with. At one point I said something which wasn't true, so after I said it, I told him it was a lie and he said, You're sweet. He was touched because it was an admission. But I can't remember what it was I said or who I was speaking of. It was someone who hurt me.

–Things which you forget seem so mysterious. You remember a time, a situation, a feeling, and then miss one important detail. Very Freudian. It must be explicable but it still seems a mystery. That way too that no matter how much you think about your life and what you should do, it never really happens the way you expect. New elements suddenly come into being, not through you own internal workings but sudden]y from outside – a new person, a new way of thinking, a new social problem – something you hadn't bargained for which upsets the apple cart. I wish sometimes I could make everything stop moving, changing. One friend of mine says his life is static, boring and completely under control. I can't imagine my life being boring, I can't find a way to stop it changing. Maybe only by being with a person like him who had that kind of power to control his own life. But I think he leads a boring life too – I agree with him. It's him, he's lost interest in people, he's not intense or alert. He craves love but runs away from it. He craves poverty but is always comfortably off. He craves change but will never agree to a change in plan if you try to suggest it – or an impulsive action. When I

look at him I don't really think my life is so bad. Really the only times I think it is bad are when I feel miserable – but those are short and at least I never feel bored. There are other people too. I feel they're judging me and sometimes they show me the advantages, all the consolidation they have, the continuity – particularly of love. It's continuing love I've never had, never in my life. I mean the feeling of someone else loving me for a long time. It's never happened. Sometimes a person shows me that they love me or respect me more than I expected. I suppose that's the key.

### Chapter 3. Crazy Dreams

–A, Ah. Greek music. It's so sad. It's like a cry of pain, the cry of love.

–You'll become an International Person. A Citizen of the World.

–Yes.

–But you can't go backwards after that eh? Once you know many people, many places, can you lead the simple life again? No.

–We can't get married, we can't settle down. We've lost our innocence. Once you've made that first big break you've gone past the point of no return. You step outside convention and then you forget it. Then convention seems arbitrary – for anyone who does it anywhere in the world. And all the innocents, the people who must work, who must marry, they keep the world working the way it does.

–We are the lucky ones but I am feeling – we are the most unhappy ones also. N'est ce pas?

–Hey, 'born to lose'.

The music comes across the small bay, the sun shines on the houses painted like coloured chalk. The islands, the misty islands. The coast of Turkey.

–You come here to feel and think.

The loneliness of the coast. The hills are completely bare where the goats have eaten everything. It's grey and brown. The music which could be screamed from the hills and never be heard. We shout and scream at the coast of Turkey. Here is one taverna, here is one restaurant, this is the post office. Do you know Darwin?

Australie, Australie.

At dusk we walk along the main street from church to church and back and then coffee.

–And after, we eat. This is the program.

–We speak as a matter of course. We touch each other as a matter of course. When the English walk together, they don't hold each other, they walk separately. That's the beginning of the end. They lose touch. They've lost it. They've lost. They write cleverly in their newspapers. So witty. So biting about everything. They hold each other to such strict confines.

In an interview in the Guardian, Dirk Bogarde speaks about his time working with Visconti on the film Death in Venice.

–We didn't need to speak, we didn't discuss the film at all. We'd be sitting on the set and after some time I would know and Visconti and I would rise together and begin work. He watched, he didn't speak. We hardly did any second takes. After each session Visconti would say, So. And we would finish for the day. At our last meeting I went to his rooms to say goodbye. We sat at his table and ate and drank. He spoke of another film for the future. I said, Maybe but I must have a rest. I have finished, I have had my career and now I want 2 years away from it. I'll live in France. I must rest, I'm older now, you understand?

–Yes, but we will make another film.

–Yes, after 2 years.

Then it was time for me to go to the airport.

–I'm going to France. Do you like the film we have made? He grabbed me and hugged me and kissed me and said quietly but intensely,

–Ah, si. Bravo, bravissimo Bogarde!

–Love is the International language. If you want to travel, learn to fuck well and guard yourself against disease. If you want anything, learn to fuck. Then if you want more than that, learn to love the people you fuck. It opens doors. You open your heart and the world steps in.

–Sometimes I shock myself this way. I can lose myself completely in one person and that's dangerous because you forget time, everything, and just live for love. It goes for weeks sometimes. It depends on the other person – if they do it too, lose themselves, it could be chronic. Ah, chronic love, I've got a case of chronic love – I think I'll get married. But what if I don't want to get married.

–Learn to cry at the slightest thing and when you leave someone, cry your heart out and learn to forget. But. To forget properly you've got to be really miserable for at least a week. Okay?

–But I feel terrible when I leave someone. I feel as though I'm going to vomit for a week as well as cry my heart out. And I don't forget.

–Well, maybe you're not cut out for the life. You haven't got what it takes. What you need is guts. I don't mean that, I don't know.

–Someone should set up a school, the School of Life. Why not.

On the slopes of the hill are some cypress pines. Outside the door there's one. We're not so far from Cyprus. The colours of the place are drab, much more so than Stockholm. Here everything's bleached by the sun and washed out by the rain. The paint is coloured but fading and always flat. The difference is the sunlight.

–I see you 20 times a day. Sometimes you're riding past me, sometimes I visit you at work. This is a dream life. You must have exploitation but I can't see it. Even you have a place here, a position of respect. Everyone is anonymous in my country. So to have a good name or a big name is difficult and it's prized above money sometimes. But for you money is your ambition because you have a name – you're born with it and can't change that. So – on the one hand, you

have a name because you're born with it, on the other hand if you hadn't been born with a name, there'd be no way you'd get one anyway and your ambition would still be – money. No?

How can I compare our countries. I had no idea they were so different. I understand so much more now. To change countries, what a step that is. I can imagine Australians coming back to Europe and finding a way to live, but to imagine how a European can live in Australia, to give this away, I don't know how they survive the loss. Well they don't survive it. They just manage and they think of their 'home' all the time.

–And your 'home', where is that?

–My family comes from 2 different countries and lives in a third country. We gave away the idea of 'home'. No, we laugh at it but we feel the absence of it. We depend on other people, maybe another person, maybe a building, something we own, to give us our sense of home. But me, I've never had one except once with one man. With him our home together was so strong. In 5 years we lived in 9 different places, It's finished now. I walked away from it. I still don't really know why. There are so many reasons. But I've always regretted it, always, and I won't be happy until I find it again. But next time it must be safe, it must continue. It's those kind of losses that kill you.

This village is the most beautiful on the island. From above coming down the hill on the motorcycle we can see the small plots with orange trees – a much darker greener green than any other green on the island. And dividing these plots are white walls. When we're down in the village, we can't see anything but white walls and orange trees because the walls are shoulder height. The smell of orange blossom. We go through the winding paths to the small harbour. It has a bend in it, you can't see the open sea or the coast of Turkey and on each side are tall, steep cliffs. The water is that blue, Mediterranean blue.

–It's beautiful.

–Yes it's beautiful but not so much for me. I know this place. I don't come here for myself. I come here for you.

–This ring, you put this ring on the finger which is for the best friend. The best friend I have. It's funny

–And the same finger on the other hand?

–It's for friends, male, female, lovers, you know. But not for my best friend.

–And now?

–And now we eat.

–And now I eat you.

We go for coffee and in the cafe – only men. We go to the restaurant to eat – 2 women and their husbands and 50 men. And at the disco – men.

–Where are the women.

–At home.

–This is a man's life. This beautiful life is a man's life. I want to be a man.

–I rule my life by chance. If I worry about some decision, I toss coins. Not flippantly but very seriously. Always in threes. Sometimes I toss 3 times) sometimes in groups of 3. You'd be surprised how often it works out okay. I've never known it to fail. Because you rule your fate with your hand and you throw the coins with your hand. And what you can't control is chance – in life and in the coins. It's the same. It's the best way. It stops you getting into a rut if you allow yourself to be subject to chance.

–And do you think you're free?

–Free? Free? I can only be free from one single person – by leaving them. That's the only kind of freedom you have. In everything else you're not free – you must earn some money somehow, you must find somewhere to live. We live in quite narrow confines really. But there are choices to make, alternatives, and those I find hard to choose between so I toss coins.

–Crazy.

Julie dear friend,

I want to come home and I want to stay here. I want to come home and see you all and sit with you all in the house and talk and do nothing. I want to go to work and earn some money. I want to sit in the sun. I want to be with the people I love. I'm sick of moving because I know this will be my life. It's always been my life more or less. And everywhere I have people now, all over the world. And somewhere I have one special person who is only for me. But I want to come back. Here I come ready or not.

Lots of love, Marthe.

Sunday on the island. The ship was late. People were gathering on the wharf where it should have been one hour before. There were storm clouds moving over from the Turkish coast. At 2 o'clock the clouds came over the island and the owners of the cafes moved the tables inside. People stood inside the cafes looking at the wharf waiting for the ship. The wind came up in short bursts and blew things around. Some men were riding motorbikes up and down the main street waiting for the ship. They had their heads down and their teeth clenched against the wind. One old man was walking slowly along the street. At last at three o'clock the ship arrived. Everything was grey – the water, the ship, the sky and the concrete wharf. One patch of sunlight lit up some of the blue and white houses on the hill. The people in the cafes watched as the half-witted porter trundled along the street with some baggage of the ship's passengers, in a handcart. It rained for a few minutes. People sat down in the cafes and ordered more coffee. Some left and walked home.

–I want to remember that first moment on the island. The excitement of it. The strange feeling of the place. The first sight of the cafes and the kiosks with racks of worry beads beside them. It was cold. I don't remember why I was so happy. Just expectations, fantasies. Along one road there are the beaches which most

of the tourists use in summer. The beaches are tiny and sheltered by the tall cliffs which enclose them.

–There are some people here who look at you differently. I don't know who they are, I don't speak to them, but they look pained. Why is this?

At night the mosquitoes are bad everywhere on the island. Everyone burns mosquito coils and smokes the strong cigarettes sold in the kiosks. The motorbikes buzz around the narrow streets and gradually thin out as the night wears on.

–Something terrible is going to happen.

–Like what?

–I don't know. I'm puzzled and a bit frightened.

–Some terrible things have happened here over the years. I could tell you some amazing stories. Really.

–I don't know if it's best for you to tell me or not. I'm trying to figure out the nature of this catastrophe. I've no idea if it concerns us or something, someone else. I'll listen tonight in the music of the motorbikes.

–Good. Sweet dreams then.

–You think I sleep?

–One time Marthe was talking to me about loneliness. (And for your benefit I'll add that it breeds paranoia.) She said that when you get that feeling of loneliness when there's really no need to feel lonely and when it becomes that strange feeling of panic, of complete isolation, that it's not simple loneliness. Not just the absence of company. It's the beginning of a realisation which takes a lifetime to accommodate. That you're all alone in the world. Whether you have friends, lovers, husbands or wives, sometime you become aware that you're a separate entity and that there's a limit to what other people can do for you.

You're alone, you're totally alone.

It grew dark. Inside the lit up cafes the people looked at the ship put on its lights, loading for the next leg of the journey. Out of season, the ship was never filled to capacity.

The wind dropped again at 10 in the evening as the people walked home from the restaurants. A man and a woman walked arm in arm along the main waterfront, around the church and up beside the fishing trawlers towards the last restaurant. The pizzeria. As they walked over the nets spread out on the path a man drove up to them in a small 3-wheeled truck and shouted urgently to them.

–Something terrible. Please come.

–A woman, a tourist. English speaking but originally Italian I think. She came off the boat with everyone else, had her luggage taken to a hotel and went there herself. She paid one week in advance which she didn't have to do and went into the room. That's all the people at the hotel know. They didn't see her leaving. But they often don't notice who comes and goes. Anyway she's not dead but she's in hospital. She's in shock and badly bruised and looks like she's been raped – that's not absolutely certain.

She's not young, is in her 40's. They found her on the beach just behind the

wharf. Very close to town. I don't know how it could've happened without someone seeing it. You can see almost the whole beach from the wharf and there are a few houses along one end of the beach too. I don't understand it. She must have screamed or struggled. Maybe she was unconscious and dragged there.

–It's possible she did something stupid like go and sit quietly at one end of the beach out of sight.

–She won't talk about it. I think there's some kind of story behind this. Something personal, something in the past.

–The locals have this idea that the Italian woman is a prostitute. I think because she's alone and she won't contact anyone from another country, says she has no family. She's travelling on a British passport. It's intriguing. She's very unhappy. She said to the doctor, I'm alone, completely alone. I have no one.

One day after the other was warm and sunny from the time that particular boat came in.

–There's the Italian woman walking past us again. Every day she has coffee and then walks up to beach and back to the church about 4 times. Then again in the evening. She doesn't speak to anyone.

–I don't think she looks like a prostitute. It must just be that style she has they don't understand. I remember there was always a woman like her in my town, usually quite respectable and married but always with the blonde bouffant hair, imitation leopard skin coat, the little black frock and plain black stiletto court shoes. That used to be called flair or chic. They stand out from the crowd and everyone thinks they're snobs. Maybe they are.

–Proud I think. She looks like a time traveller to me. Self-contained. You could pick her up and put her anywhere and she wouldn't know the difference and she'd probably be wearing the leopard skin coat.

–I have just heard at the post office that the Italian woman jumped off the roof of her hotel and killed herself this morning. She's been here 2 weeks.

–Christ.

–I think her life must have been in shreds. They found out she had a husband who she divorced on grounds of mental and physical cruelty 15 years ago. Also that she had 3 children she hadn't seen for 8 years or so and who were in homes in Australia for years. Australia's where she was married also but she's lived in many countries. One of the doctors managed to get this information out of her. She talked to him sometimes but not much – just like giving answers in an interview. The doctor said she was chronically depressed and that's why she couldn't speak much.

–I think we'll have to stop talking about this.

–Marthe, I'd love to be with someone who was straight-forward and plain-speaking, who could just be themselves, say what they were thinking. Not feel it

was necessary to hide things. Do you think it happens to older people, do they get wiser? Why don't we live the way we want to, like our most fantastic dreams?

## Chapter 4. Remember To Forget.

The wind comes up in a strengthening way. The cold is never a biting cold. The salty air is always invigorating.

–Unhappiness is something to sing songs about and sing them from the cliffs around the bay where no one hears you. Or not. Sing them to me.

The wind refreshes.

–And then, we rest.

–Have you ever had that experience of looking across at the person with you and suddenly realizing that this is the person, the person you'll stay with?

Night after night after night in the bars of Amsterdam we talked about the ways different countries differed.

–You know I've travelled all over the world don't you – any place you can name. Well, I'll tell you this – Australia's great for a holiday but I wouldn't live there. It's unique I'll say that. Anyone can feel at home there because it has a strange character or atmosphere which is like an absence of character, a kind of neutrality. I think it's very tolerant or maybe just very anonymous. No really, I do like Australia. When I lived there I liked it. But I realize coming away again that there's some strange pressure there. It's subliminal, very subtle. I don't think I could describe it exactly because it's an abstract quality which pervades everything there, the work situation, the politics, the social life. It's a place that gets you down. The amount of drinking the people do is phenomenal. And it's as though everyone's bitten by the same bug – some kind of desperation or hysteria which is never expressed. They're stoics, the Aussies. The most cynical people in the world. Beyond morality – like the English but more sophisticated because they never say anything. The English talk and talk and talk, endlessly trying to reason things out, playing with words really but they're expressing attitudes. The real Australian attitude is never expressed. If you talk to an Australian about being Australian, they just say, "What's it to you", or "Why don't you go back to Pongville, mate, where you belong", or "Want a match? Your face and my arse. Christ all this talking's given me a thirst". They're always on the defensive. To get an opinion out of them is like getting blood from a stone. They think conversation on a serious level is a joke. Not that they're so wrong. I'm sure they know they have opinions and that you might differ in opinion but that seems irrelevant to them. They just laugh and say, "Don't get your tits in a tangle, come and have a beer." They make friends with the people they happen to be thrown together with, not necessarily the people they like.

Everything's said in what's not said. Everything's strangely inverse not quite perverse. They've got a strong ethical code but they probably couldn't or wouldn't

tell you what it is. I think it's a bit Japanese, Zen you know but without tradition or maybe just a tradition which has never been articulated. A conspiracy of silence. They present this strange face to the world – of boomerangs, kangaroos, country life, the out-of-doors. It's a fantasy tradition and you get the feeling that they like that because it means they have protection. No one gets to show what they really are, what the Australian character is, particularly the good side of it. I can think of one really tragic thing about Australians though and that's their lack of aspirations. Ambition is considered very bad, unethical. They say, "Why do you want to crawl to top of the shit heap, hey, got some kind of problem?" Their taboos aren't like the taboos of other countries. I expected them to be like the English or Americans, they're not.

I was in one of the pubs in the city once and the people who were drinking were the most 'Australian' men I'd seen. They were screaming and punching each other in the shoulder and speaking the broadest Australian dialect. I asked the barman about these people. He said they weren't celebrating any special occasion, that this particular group were always like this. Then he told me they were mostly important people – some were rich, some were public figures, some were artists and writers – you know the kind of group I mean. So in Australia, the people who are least Australian, the ones who know about international affairs, who travel etc. are the ones who take up the Australian stereotype most strongly for fear of looking un-Australian.

–Choose a country or a city or a town. Which country is it? Don't tell me. Now close your eyes and tell me what you see and I'll guess where it is. When you remember something as a visitor it's always typical.

–I remember the island and every time I think of it it's the same picture again and again of the main street and then close up, the kiosks, then closer, the racks of postcards on the metal tree, like a pine tree and the worry beads. It's night, the kiosks are yellow, the light inside them is yellow. There are other pictures I can think of also. The beautiful village with the strange little harbour, the silence. And another – on top of the hill I suddenly see the big concrete cross. It was always there but I only noticed it once. The sunshine, the sunshine, the sunshine, the song – 'Good morning Sun'.

The misty islands, the coast of Turkey.

–Now we're treading on unfamiliar ground again. The cross - why do you think of the cross.

–When I was a child in the mountains there was a cross on the top of a mountain at the cliff's edge. A young kid fell from the place the cross stands and died.

Everything you see reminds you of something significant. If it doesn't you don't notice it.

–There's something about the physical appearance of things sometimes which embodies an idea. Sometimes I can recall something exactly, some feeling of a place but it's a picture, and it's difficult to say what this is. Like in Amsterdam I remember a picture which has many of the canals, and many of the buildings at both day and night. Something I never could've seen – there's much more in the

picture than I could see at any moment I was there.

It's like lots of simultaneous pictures – you couldn't make it.

–Yes. And how could you make a picture which showed that you felt you'd seen this before. Or one where a row of buildings also means for you a time when you worked too hard for 2 weeks.

–A really bleached-out glary day always reminds me of being hung over. You know how your eyes are more sensitive to light.

–Sunny early mornings – they're beautiful but can seem sinister if you have to set out early to do something difficult. And all the years of going to work in the early morning. But then there are trips to the sea at dawn or watching the sunrise over the city after staying up all night.

–That's Australia – sunrise at the beach, sunrise over the city.

Here is a beautiful painting of an old-fashioned steamship on the sea. It is night and everything is lit up by the full moon.

–This is a painting for the full moon. Do you see this ship. Inside the hull are all the hidden thoughts which lie between us.

–What are they?

–We don't know, we can't. Forget it. It's just a painting.

–I remember the night we slept at the orchard just before the full moon.

Remember the first night? I was walking on the broken glass. I just remember that now. It was okay, it didn't hurt me. But that was strange. We were both walking on the broken glass beside the bed.

Now the moon wanes, another month finishes. Everything was filled up and now it's draining out. Preparing for another ascent.

–You're tied to the moon.

–Every woman's tied to the moon. Women have lunar cycles.

–But you're completely up when the moon's full and afterwards, you come down as the moon does. In the evening you rise when the moon rises and you're tired as the moon fades in the morning.

–Some people aren't only influenced by the moon but subject to it, dominated by it. It gives them their strength and it takes their strength away. The full moon can be a strange time for people ruled by the moon because they're strongest at this time but strong in a lunar way – that's a passive receptive way. Everything depends on what's being received. You're like a boat tossed about on the waves. The stronger the impulses around you are, the more rocked by them you are. Lunar people are often overwhelmed at this time. But when it breaks, you surface again. It's just a couple of days. Women should talk about it more and help each other through these times because it's possible to become quite unhinged.

–And in Australia?

–Forget it. There, you'd think the moon didn't exist. It's one of the secrets. It comes dangerously close to a direct hit at one of the taboo subjects. Remember?

–I want to feel, I want to think, I want to live and love.

–Don't go to Australia.  
–There's no love there.  
–There is love. It's love which binds us together. But in Australia it's been stretched like a very thin high-tensile wire. Sometimes visible but mostly invisible. In Australia you can't want to love, you either do or you don't and you don't tell anyone about it. Not even the people you love. You can't want to be loved either. You realize you are loved.  
–Afterwards.  
–After what?  
–After you've felt you weren't loved. When you get used to the idea of not being loved. These secret things take years to understand. I think maybe some people don't ever understand. But now it's changing a bit at last. They're starting to come in from the cold like the old stockman returning to the bright lights of the station after 2 weeks riding the fences in the cold and the dust. While he's away he has to remember the warmth and light of his home but when he comes back he can forget it.  
–He says, And then I get home and wouldn't you know – the wife started her period today. Forget it.  
–I think you're starting to understand.

## Chapter 5. We Were There Once

–The water of my home is always gleaming in the sun. Except at night when it's in the moonlight. The houses are always bathed in the sun and washed out by the rain. Everything is salty, always. I can't forget this. I don't even like to speak about it because it might fade away. I can't explain to you how I know every inch of that place in the same way that I know your body. There isn't an inch I wouldn't touch, that I haven't already touched a thousand times. I know you and I know 'home', and it's the same thing. I touch you and I touch home.

–Marthe, Aunty Cis wrote to me today. The chickens are doing very well and they had a good crop of apples this year. She's just recovering from a bad cold. The doctor told her to stop smoking at least while she had the cold so she just had one cigarette a day and threw the butts out the window so the doctor wouldn't notice when he came. He was very pleased with her. But most of the letter was about the Russian man. Since I've been talking to her about him and about other countries, she's been much more interested in his story. She suddenly realizes that it's like a film or a long TV series. The last couple of months she's been asking him about his life. He doesn't like to speak about it much because it hasn't been so good. She says it's very touching – one time he cried a lot. I think they're actually hitting it off together in some kind of way because she said that she sometimes tells him things which have happened to her, like how lonely she felt when her husband died, just so as to get him talking. I think she wants to talk herself and that she feels very close to him.  
Some time ago he got word from some foreign country saying his ex-wife had

died there. His name was the only one they'd managed to find in her belongings. They also sent the only valuables she was carrying. She said when he first got the package and saw the name of the place on it, he was quite shocked. He said that the man his wife left him for years ago, came from this place – a Mediterranean island. This man had a wife and children on the island but came to Australia to work for about 5 years. For the first 2 years he lived in Aunty Cis's town, then he and the Russian man's wife left together. No one except the Russian (his name is Alex) knew this, even though they began their affair as soon as the second man came to town. 2 years. The reason they kept the secret so well was because Alex helped them hide it. Alex said that he knew the first time he saw this man that his wife would love him, so he didn't even try to stop it being any other way, maybe he even encouraged it. Alex said that after 5 years, the other man left Australia to go back to his family. He didn't want to leave the woman but because he was a responsible person, he felt he had to look after his children. He told Alex and his wife that he didn't think it was fair to anyone to try and live 2 lives with 2 women so he'd stay with his own wife and finish with Alex's wife completely. And if she tried to follow him, which she wanted to do at the time, he'd have to throw her out as soon as he saw her so as to protect his family.

Alex also told Aunty Cis that he never really loved his wife and that she never loved him. They both knew this and promised each other when they married that they would always help and support each other no matter what happened because they were both in the same situation, being foreigners in a strange country.

–Maybe if Alex hadn't been so understanding, the other man would've stayed in Australia.

–They were all doing what they thought was the right thing but I think that Alex's idea of the right thing was different from the other 2. Aunty Cis agrees with Alex about the right thing – she had a similar experience with her own husband when they were young. It's just another idea about love, another attitude. Alex is lying when he said he never loved his wife. He did love her but he was unable to show her so he never saw himself loving her, he never heard himself telling her. He only saw himself renouncing her.

–Do you think Marthe will come, will she come home?

–She can come home and go away as well. She can come home now and go away later.

–But why does she want to stay away at all? The life's better here, you can earn money more easily.

–But she doesn't think about money so much. You know this. Even when she has nothing, she never mentions it. She never borrows money, she just lives on very little. The only time I've heard her speak about money was when she spoke about the kid. She knows she'll manage. She's never had a problem with money. She thinks that people who're interested in money are like people who're interested in stamps, they like to collect something. She doesn't collect anything. If she wants something she gets it, she uses it and then she's finished with it.

And if some other person wants something she has, she gives it to them. I say, Why did you give that away? And she says, Because they wanted it. I don't want it. She moves house in the same way. She must've lived in 20 different places now but it's never been a desperate kind of moving – it's always for a reason. Like, That place didn't have any sun and this new place does have sun. It's all perfectly understandable. She told me she trained herself to be like this when she was a child, by thinking about something she valued and then imagining that the house was burning and trying to decide which things she would take if anything. She always decided it was best just to get out and make sure everyone else got out too. And when you put objects up against your life they do seem insignificant.

–She says she wants a home, that she's never had one but she never makes a home, she never stays anywhere long enough to make a home.

–She doesn't think that home is something you make, it's something you find. You find either a place or a person and that's where you plant yourself, that becomes home. She doesn't believe in accumulation or becoming accustomed. She has this idea that her home will make itself apparent to her, when she sees it she'll recognize it immediately. It's as though she had it once and lost it. She told me she hasn't been trying to find it until now because she was doing other things but now it's become more urgent for some reason and she needs to find it.

–What if she never finds it.

–She'll find it in different ways. She's tried a couple already but doesn't know it. Also she's looking for something she can't quite describe which she'll recognize when she sees. I think she'll find it and if she doesn't, she'll find some good things on the way. Some people are travellers.

–I don't understand the problem.

–Good for you, you don't have the problem then. It's a migrant problem.

The dirt road is baking in the sun. It's dry and dusty. The dirt at the side of the road has dried out in ridges, crusty and yellow. The poplars are green like the gum trees on the other side of the road. The cicadas are making a lot of noise. A girl is walking by the side of the road on the grass. She walks past Cis's place and looks carefully at the windows of the house to see if Cis is looking. She sees Cis with her back to her hanging sheets on the clothes line past the house a long way back from the road. The horse is standing by the fence looking at her hanging out the washing and Cis turns and pats the horse on the nose. The girl walks on to the orchard She turns up the drive past the apple trees, walks up to the house, knocks on the screen door and goes in.

–Maria. What are you doing here, have you run away from the home again.

–I've come home. Isn't this my home.

–Maria, I'll take you back on the train, they'll send the police. Please. Come now. Alex picks up his money from the table and puts it in his pocket.

–I haven't come to stay papa, I've just come to tell you I'm leaving the home. I've met a man and I'm going to live with him. He'll find me a job.

–Has he asked you to marry him?

–No I don't care about that. This man loves me and wants to give me a home and

look after me. He's a good person.

–This is stupid Maria, you're too young. You're only a baby. Who is this man who takes a young girl, what kind of man is this. The police will find you. You're a prostitute now like your mother.

–They won't find me and you won't find me either. I hate all of you. I'll forget all this. I'm going to live in the city and change my name. I'll send money to the kids. Goodbye.

My dear Bella,

Since I've been here my life is completely empty. Everything looks boring to me. Everything fits into the pattern of life here but sometimes I see you, your body, running on before me like a film laid on top of everything else I see. The touch, the smell of you. I'll never forget this. Everything else fades, falls into place, everything else is understandable. Only this one thing I can't put away. It stays and stays. It all fits into one compartment or another, but this doesn't. It overwhelms me, the wrong I've done you and my powerlessness now to change it back. But please don't come here. Maybe I can see you in Italy.

I never forget you,  
Spiro

–Marthe, this is the letter Aunty Cis showed me. It was written to Alex's wife by the man she ran away with.

–Please don't tell me any more Julie. I know this story. I lived in that orchard once.