

A r i s M a r a n g o p o u l o s

True Love

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S u m m a r y o f t h e n o v e l l a

in the form of a short story

“Angel: Creates a good effect in love and literature”

Gustave Flaubert, Bouvard and Pécuchet, *Dictionary of Received Ideas*

Part One

His testimony

I Epiphany of an Angel

You never know when the Angel will shine on you; these are life's surprises. I was deep in fatigue, in wine and in light small talk with friends, in my wife's absence. It was summer, late evening and there She was, arriving out of the blue and taking her place next to me. The experience resembled those agonizing moments before drowning: when your whole life, film-like, rushes before your very eyes within split seconds. But as drowning was not the case with me at that instance, what I saw instead was a crystal-clear formation of my near and distant future. I saw pink, pink dew. Before me, a candyfloss horizon loomed, or something of the kind. Everything was reflected in fast-forward motion in her face and I did not choose to pause. My eyes went goggling (I guess) and I let the film run uncut.

The Angel's appearance was for my eyes only. How this sounds to you, I sincerely do not know. In all likelihood, this leaves you unconcerned, I'm sure. You read nothing and you hear nothing. Because there is simply no chance that you will hear. When was the last time you heard, anyway? When did you last see an Angel? As if an Angel's face has ever shone upon you! Well, if any of you have ever been through such a daunting experience, there is no need for you to read this confession further. You know it all, seen it all, read it all.

That moment acted as a savor of what was due to follow. Meanwhile, the others sharing the table with me neither saw, nor did they realize a thing. I was trying hard not to burst into convulsions because I knew that the creature sitting next to me was coming across to everyone present as a young girl, somewhat merrier, somewhat more idiosyncratic than the others, with a tint of an essence that made a difference but nothing more and nothing less than that. Still, to me it was an Angel sitting on my side. This knowledge was exclusive to the beholder. The Angel had arrived solely for me, to evangelize New Life.

The Angel opens up a tiny hole for you to see the light where a granite wall used to stand. The Angel is discreet to show to you where sorrow and where happiness lie (I speak of

happiness and I mean *true joy*, when your battered body and your tormented soul in their entirety soar like a child's laughter on seventh heaven, which is to say that you don't give a heck for anyone or anything. You could be threatened with losing your life but, being in a state of sheer rapture, you may even scream at the crowds passing you by indifferently: "Kill me if you like, stab a knife into my heart if you may, I'm long gone, that's it! I don't belong to this world, I don't care about fuck-all Bush, about Afghanistan, about the impending melting of the ice caps and the resulting inundation of the world, I am gone, long, long gone!" This apolitical Angel fills you up with a mad lust for *this present life*, not the life to come, She points Her finger at the horizon that you could previously hardly make out and there you see a bright new world, full of comrades and paradise hours. *Unbelievable as it may sound, the Angel hands out the love you have never felt with no parsimony at all.*

The sensitive issue raised here is for you not to treat Her like you would with any common mortal. The Angel loves but does not demand, gives but asks nothing in return. This is what you should do, too. The Angel is difficult. The Angel is not to be abused. I am putting these down to paper exactly as they now come to my realization; you may perceive them as a kind of warning, say, something to prepare you in case you find yourselves in my shoes. Since the Angel paid a visit to someone like me, an atheist, a misanthrope and a misogynist, anyone can be called upon by Her. There is no one in this world without the smallest streak of spite and vulgarity in them. This is the rule of survival in the context of our fucking routine. So, anyone may stand a chance of crossing paths with the Angel.

II

Slut statistics

According to my most moderate calculations, I must have met approximately a thousand women in my life. I guess this is the case with most men reading my testimony right now. When I say “have met”, I do not mean seeing them in the street, passing them by, etc. I mean that I was given the chance to converse extensively with them, have coffee with them, mingle with them in the same big company, do joint work with them, spend some hard or pleasant time with them, burn the midnight oil with them, etcetera, etcetera. I am a man of a certain age. I have been to many places and met many people. This means that I have my share of knowledge when it comes to women. I claim nothing strange.

Now, of all these thousand females, three hundred of them – the number may be a bit larger, but I have no intent of exaggerating – were my love partners. I more or less flirted with them, made out with them slightly or in earnest, kissed with them over heavy drinking or during an orgy (back in the eighties), did a one (perhaps two)-night stand(s), got to see them again a couple of times, spent the night together again; since then, whenever we run into each other, we kiss like good old friends and, come to think of it, a good friendship has indeed emerged between some of them and me (for the simple reason that there is no need for secretiveness between us any more. Occasionally, in cases of emergency on my part or theirs, we do each other a good turn with no strings attached: it is the same as when a nearby ship comes to the rescue of another one in danger in the same stretch of seawaters...).

Now, of these three hundred women, thirty of them – the number may be a bit larger, but again I have no intent of exaggerating – struck such good contact with me that we ended up being together over, say, a full month, or two to three at the utmost. It is those women that, was I to be asked to compile a list of my most special love partners, those who left something on my body’s sensitive pores, I would easily and without second thought include to the roll. I remember them effortlessly, every now and then they haunt my mind like ghosts, when I need to masturbate I directly fantasize about them, and so on and so forth.

Of these thirty females, ten – a larger number would definitely be an exaggeration – were those with whom I made the terrible mistake to start what common people call an “affair” or a “steady relationship”, or according to the least lucky of them, “marriage”. With five of them, the relationship exceeded two years, with two it exceeded three and with the rest I must have been together for a year, or a year and a half, but I’m afraid that I no longer have reliable recollections.

My point is: all these ten women happened to be sluts. All of them. None was otherwise. So was the last one I had been living with some time prior to the Angel’s appearance.

I would hereby like to provide an explanation to the nature of a slut. I by no means refer to common prostitution, as I have met countless prostitutes who were not sluts. They were ladies of exceptional ethics, professionalism, a thousand times more morally superior to the millions of married women of this cruel world who entered wedlock for the sake of money. Consequently, the term “slut” here is used firstly in the sense that women themselves attribute to it in their intimate conversations, when they make comments about an acquaintance or about a friend and refer to her as “slut”, for instance, in commonplace utterances like: “This Kiki girl is such a little slut you wouldn’t know...”

Thus, by “slut”, women mean that Kiki, at all times and regarding all issues, *is never her true self*. At the back of her mind, she always connives, conspires, thinks up mysteries, games and frauds to the extent that these schemes have become second nature to her and serve her need to survive next to the man that managed to buy her (so he thinks) for life. But how can anyone live with such a monster? Still, thousands are the men in this world that get to share their lives with monsters. What saves them is that they have no awareness of their situation. They find out when it is too late, soon after the inevitable has occurred: lots of cheating, a heart attack, theft etc., like I myself found out once too late. After my Angel made Her appearance.

The second meaning with which I am using the word “slut” here is the one that we men render to it. For instance: One fine morning, Kiki tells her partner, “Baby, I love you, you drive me crazy!” among other such likely stories, which are usually the result of momentary exaltation. At noon, when he – vexed by her words – calls her to sweetheart

her a bit in return (and to elicit a promise for the night), she leaves him hanging high and dry: “Right. Thanks darling, I’m in a hurry now, Sia will be here to pick me up in two minutes and I still haven’t taken a shower”; or, “OK baby but I’m heading to a meeting with the manager, talk to you later”; or, worse still, “Right, Mimis, cool down, it’s not as if I promised you a rose garden, we’ll talk later”, and all the like shit which since day one of the world has been driving poor men to hell, to suicide and to sheer horror.

By and large, especially in the male jargon, when a reference is made to women who are not conspicuously dating someone, the term “slut” is used, out of male solidarity, in order to protect a friend who has fallen for the Kiki in question or is wooing her in a loving mood, as in the following dialogue:

“Hey, I think that this Kiki likes me ... last night we almost ended up together...”

[The other one interrupts] “Listen, man, you sure need a shrink to give you a check-up. Have you got any idea where you’re getting yourself into? You and Kiki, together? She’s a downright slut, you jerk, she’s driven three men to suicide and two to heavy drinking ... have you lost it completely?”

Now that the use of the term “slut” has been clarified, I am inclined to repeat that all those ten long-term relationships involved sluts. No one should rush to the conclusion that this was accidental, that I alone struck unlucky, that my statistical sample is limited, that I was simply the perpetrator of the recurrent mistake to involve myself with sluts, or (a more advanced kind of thought) that I have a natural liking for sluts, which is why I run solely into sluts. None of this is true. My statistical sample is quite representative (cross-checked through friends and acquaintances), thus we may freely and without reservation conclude: I did not just draw the lot of the ten sluts, more or less all women have their considerable share of a slut’s character – since the days of that first woman, who did not hesitate to do it with a non-entity, a fucking snake, behind innocent Adam’s back.

I must admit that some women are the exception to the rule. Their kind does exist, like edelweiss, like beluga caviar, like some 1920 Château Margaux bottles, like truffle, like gold in some rivers. All right, I do admit it, they exist. Somewhere. But (with the exception of my Angel) I have yet to meet these rare females.

III

Rotten man

All my life, I have treated things superficially. I only see the crust of things and no further. Do I not want to probe into deeper waters? No one knows, and now that I have turned fifty, it is too late for me to find out.

I see women in the street and I want them all, I mean ALL. I do not pay the least attention to their character, I do not care about a thing. I just want to get inside them, grab their hips and breasts, lick them, this is my sole interest. And this has always been.

I am fifty years old. I have never submerged myself under the surface of things. I have never gone for the so-called “essence”, I have never fallen in love. I want a woman who can speak softly to me, who makes as little noise as possible, has nice breasts and tight hips, takes no offence at my liking to other women; I want a woman of no existence. Non-existent. A shadow. A painted picture. An elf. An Angel.

Everything is an image to me. Everything. Images.

I like the skin of chicken or fish (whether roasted or boiled) and of all foods alike.

I like all crusts.

I eat the crust of bread, never the crumb.

I like the surface of the sea, its bottom means nothing to me.

Women mean nothing to me. As far as they are concerned, I solely desire their body. I know, most females will surely call me a pig. I do not mind. Many were the women in my life who fell for pigs... some went over their tops for me. It is the only explanation I can provide for our great lovemaking.

Come to think of it, I do not know if I love anyone, if I have ever loved a human being. What kind of thing love is I will never find out, since I have not managed to do so over the fifty years I have spent on earth. I envy loving couples. They are a rarity. The world

will no longer be the way I imagined it as a child. I have advanced in age and it has remained the same. As I grew to know it back then. It is too late now. The duties have been well allotted and all is kosher: home, work, home and back again. It's all so complicated. I am still supposed to be fighting against private property, power and the state. To me, it is a matter of taste and upbringing. My kind never took to this world. We still don't like it. I am not lying. This is why I am writing all this. Perhaps the Angel chose me for this reason.

I am now thinking about what has become of all those women who once inundated me with their liquids. Are they dead or alive, have they become little ladies, moms, broads, sluts, Barbies ... it makes me wonder, though this overview of my past is pointless.

Part Two
Other Testimonies

I

An autopsy

The room was horrific and appalling. The walls were covered in a queer slime: brownish and oily, as if unwashed for years, and of a strange quality, as if made of plasticine. They gave the dreadful impression that if you laid a finger on them, they would subside. The furniture was scarce. The whole house was a mess. There were magazines, newspapers and a heap of books scattered in all directions, like stones on a rocky beach. A large, gamma-shaped sofa, covered in books alike, occupied one fourth of the space, but its surface was soiled by blood. Its beige color had been drowned in it. There were bloodstains all along it. In all probability, the victim had lain there a while before ... It is hard to describe the victim's exact position, as the body did not lie in the same place as a whole. One leg was jammed in a huge glass vase at the foot of the bookcase; it was one of those vases which we fill with dried flowers or with amaranths. The leg was cut off at the knee, probably with a cleaver, as the kneecap was shattered like the joints of animals on the butcher's counter. Smashed to smithereens. The other leg lay closer. It covered the distance between the vase and the sofa. There, in an order that brought to mind Mengele-type monstrosities or Bokassa-like cannibalism lay the remaining body in utter contrast to human existence. Marred, broken and amputated, a body that reminded not of man. It was as if hyenas had charged onto it to tear it apart and then left it uneaten because they smelled something foul on it, their appetite had been spoiled ... the scattered books lay open like dumb eye-witnesses; many were spilled with blood, others were creased on the edges. Obviously, they had played a leading part in the event. They had been used in an outburst of rage, probably on both sides...

The room was pitch dark, it looked as if the curtains had not been drawn for years. However, the amputated body emitted a fluorescent light, quite uncanny, especially in the areas of the vagina and the breasts. When I arrived, there were many people in the room assigned with a job that had to be carried out, too many indeed, as the case was a top

priority in our precinct. Damn it, torn apart bodies are not something you come across on a daily basis.

When I arrived at the scene, Inspector Porfyrus had been there already. He was interrogating the tenants of the block in a small room nearby. They were many in number and waited for their turn patiently. They had taken seats wherever they could in an effort not to disturb the Inspector, though their sense of duty to inform blended with their need to be informed themselves. At least this is how I perceived the situation. There is no other explanation for it. At that moment, they appeared to have forgotten their jobs, their wives, their husbands, their kids, their petty quarrels, everything. The occasion called for devout concentration, sobriety and a pretentious sense of duty, to say the least. Most of the people present were indeed seated as if attending a church mass.; grave, with a thousand thoughts crossing their heads. They were gripped by an invisible fear. What if the unknown perpetrator visited their own backyard one fine day? The caretaker upstairs was preoccupied obsessively, so his resolve weakened and he confessed: “I have fitted security doors since that break-in last summer, but what if Eudokia was caught unawares and opened the front door?” Cold sweat was running down his spine and he was acting as if the burglar had already gained entry to his home. The owner of the flat on the sixth floor tried to calm him down: “These things don’t happen every day. The poor girl was destined to die from a killer’s hand.” Some agreed. Mostly they nodded in approval of the epithet “poor”. Because, however, at that instance, which was the moment the attribution “poor girl” was uttered, everyone was carried away and the noise they made was unacceptable for a church and that equally holy place which hosted the interrogation concerning the brutal crime, I had to reprimand them back to order, pointing at my busy superior who was calmly questioning a witness at a dark corner of the room.

What is worth mentioning in such tragic situations is the ease with which people come to terms with the event. How can it be that a cut off leg is found in a vase for dried flowers, with the rest of the body lying nearby, and the people in the next room making remarks as if nothing has happened? It is a kind of defense. They cannot so cool about it inside them.

This is how I perceive it. There is no other explanation for it. A defense it is. Not all people are so cruel. Not all people amputate bodies. As if the world has gone bananas!

II

A male friend's testimony

He has explained to me how he feels in every detail. Let us not exhaust the issue further; I will directly go through one of his e-mails, which is about his meetings with the Angel:

“When we meet, I feel Her like my missing better half, flesh from my flesh. At those moments, my ecstasy reaches the limits of utter Knowledge, my blood pulsates in my veins in a crazy manner, my temperature runs high, I forget all differences between us and I trip, buddy, away from the horror of this wild world. My folly is that, from a moment on and for a while, that is for as long this vertigo lasts, it dawns on me that this thing is love. As if I have never fallen in love in my life before – who, me – *as if I lack awareness of the limits to this experience*. Luckily, when the Angel leaves, I resume my ordinary pace, I am in peace.”

The man went berserk. He was unprepared for such Grace. Gradually, the Angel made Her visitations scarcer. And my friend, in an outburst of unbearable distress and bitterness, tried to play it smart. He came out with the pretext that he was in no need to see the Angel again either. He pretended that his salvation had been completed and that he had no longer a want for Her visits. We, men, are strange animals. The above took place during the best phase of their contacts; when the Angel showed such endless affection that only an outlandish creature could, a tenderness which, according to him, wrapped him up like a sugary cloud and travelled him away from the hardships of the world and the velvety boredom of living with his wife.

Still, most of the times, my barmy friend would react as if he was in the company of a naive lassie. He was playing it smart, bragging conceitedly about the divine blessing that had fallen upon him; in short, he pretended to be someone, but who this someone was exactly, he himself did not know. He was in the arms of tranquility and beauty but he was acting as if seized by a hysterical woman. When the Angel, fed up with his behavior, expressed her wish to see him less frequently, he reacted despicably, horrifically, deplorably. Such treatment is unacceptable even when addressed to a cheap broad. Initially, he would make wild scenes, as if She was his property, and later on, upon the realization that such tricks brought no effect, he begged Her and implored Her for pity like a schoolchild. Awful stuff, indeed.

I firmly believe that there is no greater sin than to displease the Angel that fate sent you. It is enough that your paths crossed and the Angel deigned to be with you, you should not try to question Her inner beauty, Her mental stamina, the infinite depth of Her sweet eyes. Every Angel possesses Beauty, Strength and Depth. My friend had no reason for complaints; everything was being handed down to him easily, economically and quickly. Beauty, Strength, Depth. After each meeting, he himself grew prettier, stronger, a deeper man. But, in all probability, Mimis was unable to realize the fine but essential changes that the Angel's love had brought about in his person. By slowly losing his old self, he also abandoned the ability to rationally manage the world around him. The Spirit caved in for the sake of the Body; and from a certain moment on, Mimis turned to flesh and blood only.

I repeat: you do not fall in love with the Angel. You glorify the Lord's name for the Angel looking down on you, you bless the nature and the mountains surrounding you day in day out, and you just let Her guide your paralytic steps. However, not all people are emotionally crippled. OK, my friend was. Kiki had driven him to that state. Kiki his ex. Within nine to ten years of living with him, she had sucked the living sap and all his freshness out of him to the extent that he had gone dry. (To be honest, I suspect, but without much evidence at hand, that the woman 'had been around' quite a lot). Nevertheless, on meeting the Angel, my friend blossomed like some trees that had come out with an ugly dryness but suddenly bloomed again with brand new and fresh leaves in

the first rainfall of the autumn. At the Angel's touch he sprouted again, his juices started flowing back to his body, soon he would even grow buds: he would be the recipient of the comment "You've blossomed, my friend" by most people who knew him and ran into him in the street. "I may have blossomed," he muttered in unrest, "but this God damned drought will be back," and added "I must take measures soon," and again, "take measures."

III

A female friend's testimony

"Kiki, girl, the time has come to hear out a few things once and for all. Make him understand what's going on, where you two stand. You owe it to yourself. It's not fair to spend the best years of your life with someone who is sick and tired of you and you are fed up with. But nor can you do that other thing you keep saying, wake up one fine morning when the going has got tough and bid him farewell. You'll surely give him a stroke."

"As if I cared. Do you expect me to feel sorry for the asshole?"

"Hey, Kiki, you're hiding something. You've never been like this before, something's going on ... is there anything I should know about?"

"My fucked up luck it is. Yes, there *is* something going on."

"Like what?"

"Remember when we were saying that Mimis has eyes for no other woman?"

"It wasn't just saying, it's a fact. ... Come on, now, you don't mean that Mimis ...?"

"Well, yes! Can you imagine his nerve?"

(The interlocutor bursts into unrestrained convulsions. Trying to catch her breath and still laughing) "Shit, I'm going to pee myself, this is too much. Good old Mimis ..."

(Her friend's face has turned sour) "Stop laughing, you're getting on my nerves!"

"Come on, take it easy, you yourself have been cheating on him for years!"

"Yes, but I wouldn't have expected that he'd do the same."

(The other one, in a hard effort to hold back her laughs and to demonstrate a tittle of restraint for her friend's sake, repeats in admiration) "Can you imagine ... Mimis boy ... How did you find out?"

"He's been acting like crazy for two weeks now. I've never seen him like this before. Once he wouldn't even take me to the movies, he wouldn't take me out for a drink, and now he comes and goes in the most unlikely hours. He wakes up in the morning, he looks at me and bursts into laughter as if he's heard the funniest joke on earth and he scatters the books here and there when he used to grumble about their order on the bookshelves. Then, he grabs a tape measure and starts measuring my leg knee down, he's gone mad I'm telling you, he's gone childish, he's lost it, he doesn't hear a word I say, he's ... can you imagine, it's Mimis we're talking about!"

"Has he explained himself? Haven't you asked about the chick?"

"He says nothing. His lips are sealed. Nada. He's got no shame. He's a different man. He's been transformed, the asshole. He only mutters one thing: "I must take measures soon. Take measures ... keep my inspiration safe," as if he's Kafka or Chekhov. I can't believe all this mess. God knows who he's got involved with, surely she tells him things ... just when I was ready..."

"To run away with Robert ..."

"Don't be so blunt about it."

"And how should I be?"

"You know that I've been trying to pick up the pieces of this relationship with Mimis and keep it working for years now, I'm doing my best."

"Yeah, he can't complain, you've been cheating behind his back alright, Kiki!"

"It doesn't matter, *he doesn't know!*"

Part Three

Loving Couples

I

How the mind of a (way-ahead-of-his-time) cop works

After all witnesses were examined and having consulted with Forensics and all Homicide employees in high and low places, Inspector Porfyrus tried to re-enact the horrid crime in his head. The unlucky woman must have been sitting on the sofa watching TV. The appliance had been left on and bore her fingerprints only. The Inspector (who, strangely enough, happened to be a serious man) did not avoid asking himself the question: “What did she want all those books for? To enhance the décor, perhaps? What do you need the TV for when you have the alternative of reading a book? But the books may have been exclusively used by him,” was his correction to his own pondering and he immediately jotted something down to his notebook. Then he locked up in his favorite sophisticated style, which, when assumed, made his inferiors think twice before disturbing him for no serious reason.

He lit a cigarette and observed the position of the amputated body; he even approached the neck, and then stared at the dead woman’s expression waiting for a word. He always expected bodies to say something to him. Hardly ever did he get a plausible answer, but something else, equally bizarre, would happen: When he concluded that someone was guilty, the victim’s face would come to his mind either to reinforce his arguments or to make them wane. He knew not how this thing occurred, but it happened and he liked it. It was his secret code, his contact with the supernatural, his favorite joke – which he nonetheless took quite seriously.

The woman’s face was not distorted. “It may have been *in the inside*,” Porfyrus thought again as his look scanned the dozens of books scattered here and there. Her unkempt face, no make-up on, revealed a sophisticated woman of medium caliber. In ‘medium caliber’ Porfyrus classified those cultured individuals who are frequent theater and cinema goers, read the books and articles in vogue, are, in short, updated; when, however, you ask them something of essence, something that can touch the heart or can relate to people’s worries, they either offer condescending replies (such as “what kind of questions are these?”) or they stand aloof and give no reply at all. Obviously, they do not have one.

Porfyrus generally feels genuinely sorry for this category of the cultivated; he considers them miserable, because these human beings, in his own humble opinion, never look themselves in the eye. They hide behind their artistic preoccupations. In addition, he thought as he leant really close to the amputated intellectual's unkempt face (one or two hairs protruded on the chin), the women of this category are doubly miserable: because they very often lack the experience of a good fuck. Porfyrus was a man of principle (which, for a cop, is hard to explain). Upon such contemplation, he almost felt embarrassed, but he had avoided expressing himself aloud, nor was anyone present. Still, he got up at once and started giving the required orders for the body to be collected.

He then tried to sort out the information he had gathered from the tenants. The victim had shared the flat with a writer for years, whose name Porfyrus had never heard. All testimonies agreed that he was a genial person. What about his whereabouts at present? The answer was that they had split up two months before. "Did they separate in a civilized manner?" was his question, to which the reply was that they had never been heard fighting or quarreling, they had been giving the impression of a loving couple, this was agreed by all. The gentleman, Mimis was his name, had not been heard shouting once. "Just one time, when Kiki brought home a huge floor Kosta Boda vase, the man protested loudly, the whole block could hear his voice," the witnesses agreed in their entirety.

On hearing the expression "loving couple", Inspector Porfyrus grew really upset, as he felt that he was being fed with false evidence about his investigation. "There are no 'loving' couples, just horny ones," he would tell himself. Inspector Porfyrus believed in true love only. "Once the flame turns to ashes, this is it, it's over," was his favorite remark. This was a good excuse for his own loneliness. A convenient pretext. No one had ever seen him with a woman. He had remained conscientiously single and no one had any idea of how he managed love-wise, how and where he placed his soul and his dick. Entry to his privacy was off bounds. This made him more amiable than his appearance of a man in his fifties allowed, with his grey hair, the slightly protruding belly and the equally slightly bowed shoulders.

On hearing the tenants consistently and fulsomely repeating the phrase “loving couple”, he thus marked in his mind: “Obviously, they were fed up of each other.” What remained was for him to find out how they coped with their boredom as cohabitants. In all likelihood, the key-clue to the crime nested there. He took one more glance through the information in his notebook, which he had collected from questioning the tenants: he was in his fifties, she in her forties. No kids. He folded up against the world, she was open to it. He was conservative in appearance, she went for the expensive outfits. He had few friends, she had plenty. He read books, she watched the TV. He ate meat, she was a vegetarian. She was an early bird, he woke up late. He made little money, like all writers do, she had her own well-paid job, and so on and so forth. Inspector Porfyrus grinned in satisfaction as his list of evidence reached its end, as if the culprit had been brought to light. “Hmm, loving couple ...,” he sneered and closed his notebook by adding: “Well, well indeed ...”

II

How the mind of an (ordinary) Angel works

I myself don't know how it happened. At first, I saw him from behind and a bit to the side. I have always had a partiality for grey hair. I was carried away eavesdropping. He was so eloquent. Everyone sitting at the table was listening to him and no one dared to interrupt. He must have had a flair for public speaking, a liking to the sound of his own voice, what a smooth voice that was, something stirred in me when I heard him speak, I had not heard anyone speak like him, only dad had that gift because he had been teaching in primary school for years, the educated, oh, those educated people, Thomas is not like this, whatever he does he can't be like this, but in the beginning, when I approached the table and sat by him I thought, I'm not sure of what I thought, how it occurred to me to sit by him, I have no idea, but I reckoned, why not have a look at his face, his face is so sweet when he speaks, his eyes suddenly turned to my direction only a moment after I had been seated there, I was wearing that flowery dress with the low cut in the front, it

was very hot that evening, we had drunk wine, too, though I'm not a regular drinker as it gives me a spinning head, I had had a bit more wine than the ordinary that night, the conference was over, everyone was having a great time, and he turned towards me as if wanting to check on the individual who had dared sit next to him out of the blue, he had not addressed me in the least at the conference, not a look did he cast on me, as if I was not there, and why should I exist as far as he was concerned, my job had nothing to do with his, his job involved writing and speaking nicely, my job ... I wish I knew what my job was, my uncle Takis who organizes conventions had said "*Vivian, why don't you come to give a helping hand, you'll make good money,*" having to run here and there for pocket money at the age of twenty-eight when I could easily be making the same by working as a hair-stylist, but Thomas is adamant, "*as soon as I get my booker's license, money will flow, my woman won't have to work left, right and center, I won't have you end up a whore,*" and other such stuff, they're all the same, OK, but I am not very fond of beggary myself and does he, I wondered from the moment I sat next to him, does he make any money at all, his appearance gave me no clue, I wasn't particularly impressed by his clothes, but his eyes were fixed on me while he kept his persistent speech, how can they speak so unremittingly, where had he learnt all those things, he must be a real bookworm, and everyone had become his attentive audience listening to something about GroManion, something about prehistory, he was saying something, explaining something, and as he was going through his exceptional description, what if I understood only half of it, he made everyone laugh because he turned his whole body towards me and said "*let's take this beautiful young lady, for instance,*" and he touched my head like a doctor and turned it to the right and to the left, I was left in his hands which shook my head as if nothing was the matter and everyone stared at me, I was lost for words though I was flattered by the compliment, which was that I was beautiful, it was totally unexpected in the presence of all those people, and even though I looked fine in my dress, my hair was not that well styled, I could have done better with it, but most people merely gazed at my breasts, at least that's how I perceived it, but why so I do not know since they are not that big anyway, when Thomas grabs them he goes mad and then I have him wrapped around my little finger, they stared at me and chortled, but I guess he – which he explained to me that same night – had not meant to offend me, they had not laughed at

me but out of embarrassment, he said “it struck them as sudden that I used *such* a random example,” which was me, “*but you, sweetheart, are not random at all,*” he said “*you are a true Angel,*” or something of the sort was what he whispered to me, and from then on it was Angel this and Angel that, and his eyes at that moment, because it was almost dawn and we had been lying in bed in each other’s arms for hours, his eyes scrutinized me, as if he was going to discover the lost Atlantis in my little pussy, and I really liked it, caught up in an engagement with Thomas for three years has worn me out a bit, he’s not too bad, he works day and night, he takes me out dancing every Saturday night, we eat out every second evening, but he lacks this man’s patience, when this man licks he can go on for three hours without a sign of fatigue, he licks like he speaks, he does it with an air, very quietly, with an unbearable confidence, eventually you overflow with it, and it’s nice, though his dick is not like Thomas’s and he loses his hard-on more often but he soon gets horny again, all it takes is for me to say a word to him, just a trivial word and, wops! there he goes again, weird man he is , are they all like him at that age, I must ask mum, because he’s like daddy, now I know, but that night I mistook him for a man in his forties and I continued to believe so for the following two weeks, and we had a lovely time and he showed no sign of jealousy that in the night I was with Thomas, I was straight with him from day one, straightforwardness means no offence taken and the like, everything was settled fine, being with him in the early afternoons, at his place which was cluttered in books, because his wife was constantly absent, how many books there were, no joke about it, but I liked it that she was not there and he did it to me on the huge sofa, and he went Angel this and Angel that, not bad at all, but he never called me Vivian, not even once, not for a change, that I didn’t like, but I slowly grew used to it because, apart from speaking nicely, he took good care of me, he bought me a lot of stuff, he had much kindness in his heart, and the what’s-her-name can’t have been treating him well, I personally think she didn’t love him, otherwise they would be going out dancing once in a full moon like normal couples do and she would be at home before ten o’ clock at night once in a while, which suited us fine of course, but gradually he wanted me more and more, until one day he spat out: “*I’m breaking up, tomorrow I packing my things and I’m leaving.*”

I got scared when the words came out of his mouth. *"I had to take measures,"* that's about what he added. *"I can't even write any more,"* he said. That was fast, I thought, but on second thoughts it'll do him good, at least he won't have to put up with that bitch anymore, but I still got scared, because I reckoned that he wanted something from me as well, but as far as I was concerned no way I could give it to him, not that I knew what it was, he wanted me to live with him, something of the sort I imagine, he went on 'my Angel this and my Angel that' until he became a bore and, anyway, I had no intention of leaving Thomas, let alone the age difference issue, he's twenty something years older than me, what will the world say, my father would kill him, my mum would have a stroke on the spot, no way, I didn't spell it out to him that bluntly of course, but I somehow tried to cut down on my early afternoon visits, I came up with the pretext that I had found a permanent job at my uncle's, that's about what I came up with and so on and so forth, and he initially almost lost it, dropped dead for real, that's when I realized that things had gone too complicated between us, that we had gone overboard, but he insisted *"please, please don't leave me now that I'm ready to fly."*

A friend of his, who has been giving me bedroom eyes since the start got in the middle and things went under way slowly. They cooled down. After he split up, things got better. There were times when he'd almost made me dump Thomas, he took me on a trip or two, we had a great time in Madrid (I won't ever forget the central Zara International store, no comparison with the Greek branches, I almost emptied the store myself), he rushed me to see the Naked and the Dressed Mayas, he insisted that we saw them together, but it was worth it as it was the first time I had heard about painting, he explained everything so nicely as always, something really touched my heart, and that other time in Paris, there in the Saint Cloud forest, lying under the enormous chestnut trees with the squirrels jumping from branch to branch he took me from behind and I really enjoyed it because I was really carefree, I didn't have to see Thomas that night, it had been quite some time since I'd last felt so carefree and for a moment I said to myself: *"doing it with him is as good as doing with anyone else,"* ah, why couldn't he be a bit younger, and for a second, just a split second, the thought crossed my head to say *"yes"* on condition that he'd kick the bucket in ten years' time, so I would still have plenty of time ahead of me, but who has

eyes for a woman in her forties, and what if he got me pregnant and I grew plump, I do have a tendency to gaining weight you see, I must be careful, so I thought about it again and did not say “yes”, as he was kissing me all over and I was really carefree, soo carefree as I had never been in my life, those French and the Germans and the Portuguese and all Europeans are so lucky with their big parks, and when we came back, not a week had gone by, just when I had put all my clothes in perfect order on a chair so that they didn’t crease (my knickers were on top of the pile) and in my heart I was ready to give it to him, he turns and makes a grand announcement: “*I’m done, at last I killed the bitch!*” That’s what he said and I turned to stone.

“*What have you done? What have you done you crazy man?*” I yelled at him as soon as I could recover my voice from hearing the news of the ghastly crime and he took on a massively appeasing face, the expression of a God announcing the creation of the world, a face I will never forget, because it messed up my mood at once, and though I was stripped naked and ready, I started getting dressed in a flash because I was scared, dead scared, if he did away with his wife, I thought, he’s a murderer, what business have I got with killers, and his eyes are no longer that sweet, he had assumed that conceited look of someone who can fuck the whole universe, I am well familiar with that look, it’s the same as Thomas’s every time he comes up with a dirty business in his plumbing work, I hated it, he suddenly seemed so low to me, so stripped of his dignity, but he wouldn’t let me go and then I got terrified because so on and so forth, but as he caressed my hair in his own special way, he turned sweet all of a sudden, it all happened so fast, he turned from devil to angel or something of the sort, but I was dead scared, I wasn’t sure of exactly what he was saying, until he repeated once, twice, three times that he’d killed her in a symbolic manner, “*what’s that supposed to mean, have you killed her or not?*” I asked out of breath and at that moment he burst out laughing, he turned into a child at once, like I used to know him, and then he said sweetly: “*my Angel, you!*”, he explained that he had written a detective story in which the author-protagonist kills his wife, he’d cut her to pieces, on the very sofa we had made love, had thrown her leg in a vase he detested (a Kosta Boda original), so he was supposed to have been freed and redeemed for good now that he had written all that bullshit and had killed her on paper. So he said.

I'll never get to understand men. And I'll never get to understand writers.

"I'm fine, now," he finally said. He gave me a kiss on the forehead, just like my daddy does, he thanked me, which I'm not sure I understood why, and he cleared off. For good.

The End