

Robert Wilson

The
Unpublished
Francisco
Falcón
Diaries

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Designed by Jake Tilson

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5th February 1961, Tangier.

I sit beneath the fig tree on the patio. I have both capsules with me. I roll them in my palm. I am not consumed by hate but moved by inevitability. We are at the crux. There is no way to change the outcome.

I hear the Riffian woman call out. Moments later Javier's bare feet thud over the terracotta tiles. I hide in one of the rooms off the corridor to P.'s room. I hear the approach of Javier's rustling pyjamas. I am sorry that it is Javier but he is the youngest and will know no better. His feet are silent on the terracotta floor. As he passes I whisper in his ear and he starts. I take the glass from him, which he is about to drop. I crush the capsule and dip my fingers in the milk saying some magical nonsense to distract him. I bend down and kiss him. 'It's only me,' I say. 'Take it. Don't drop it.' He clasps the glass. I pat his head and send him on his way. I go back to my position under the fig tree. I have a sudden rush of panic that some of the contaminated milk might get onto Javier's fingers and he will lick them. **Moments later Javier runs past on his way back up to his bedroom. I go to the window and look through the cracks of the shutters. P. holds the glass of milk. She blows on it and drinks the first centimetre. She puts it back on the table. By the time she turns back the cyanide has reached her system. I am shocked by its speed. It's as fast as the blood itself. She convulses, reaches for her neck and falls back. The Riffian woman goes to the children's bedroom and their light goes off. She goes to her own room soon after. I go to P. and remove the glass. I wash it thoroughly in the kitchen and fill it to the halfway point with a bottle of almond milk I prepared earlier in the studio. I replace the glass by P.'s bed and turn out the light. I go back to the studio to write this down. I must sleep now because tomorrow I have to be up early.**

6th February 1961, Tangier.

I am late. I run to the house and arrive sweaty and out of breath. The Riffian woman is up and moving about. She sees me and drops her head. I ask her in Arabic if her mistress is up and she does not reply. She goes straight to P.'s room, opens the door. There is a brief cry. I arrive at the door. The maid is hovering over the body in distress then she rushes past me and out of the house. I call my German doctor, Dr. Sasse, and ask him to come to the house. I wait and finger the capsule thinking, if the worst comes to the worst, I will not spend a day in jail. There is a commotion at the door. I open it to the Riffian woman who has brought Dr. Lopez, P.'s doctor, and to Dr. Sasse who has arrived simultaneously. The Riffian woman darts past me. I explain to the two doctors that nothing can be done. If she was alive I would, of course, have called Dr. Lopez, but she has clearly died in the night and therefore I have called my own doctor to... Dr. Lopez cuts in and says he would still like to see her. Dr Sasse is immensely polite in that Northern European way. He bows his head and says, with all due respect, that it is he who has been called to the house. Then the Riffian woman reappears at the door with the glass of milk from P.'s bedside in her hand. She announces to the street (in perfect Arabic, no longer the incomprehensible Riffian dialect) that I have poisoned her mistress. Neighbours appear in their doorways. The Riffian woman has her audience now and goes for the full performance. She tells them that this is not the milk that she prepared for her mistress and turns to Dr Lopez and begs him to take the milk and find out what I have done to it. Dr Lopez is stunned. The woman is already out of control so when Dr Lopez does not immediately take the glass she proceeds to act out her drama. She drops to her knees in front of him clutching at his coat and when he still refuses react she drinks half of the milk, presses the glass into his hand, turns to the gathered crowd and with a terrible convulsion falls to her side as if dead. Dr. Lopez smells the milk. I tell him

that the Riffian woman is not stable, that it is she who makes the almond milk for my wife every night, that there is no poison in it and if there is then it is she who has put it in there. I speak in Arabic and the Riffian woman cannot bear to hear my words. She rises to her feet to denounce me again. We are now in the realms of the absurd and Dr. Sasse takes the opportunity to quietly enter the house. The Riffian woman ululates. Dr Lopez looks from the milk to the miraculously recovered Riffian woman. I close the door and push the bolt across. Dr. Sasse examines P.'s body and writes out a death certificate. Heart failure. He nods and leaves. There is still an expectant crowd outside in the street. The police arrive. I explain what has happened and Dr. Lopez, still with the milk in his hand, can only confirm what I have said. I draw the most senior policeman into the house and give him some money and tell him to disperse the crowd and to get rid of the mad Riffian woman. My children have just lost their mother. I don't want this undignified commotion in the street. The policeman leaves. The crowd disperses. As the Riffian woman is dragged away she points at me and shouts something in her dialect. The crowd murmurs. I ask one of the policeman what she is saying. He is embarrassed, having taken my money but I insist. She has put a curse on me and I have to drag it out of him. 'The curse of your life will be in that which you treasure most.' That is the end of the incident. The Riffian woman has played it all into my hands.

7th February 1961, Tangier.

Before the funeral I feel crushed by the weight of remorse. I look into the children's faces and am appalled by the shock and the grief. Javier is the worst. Some of the nonsense acted out in the street by the mad Riffian woman has got into the house and infected the children's minds. They do not suspect me in any way although they do think that the milk was

in some way responsible. Javier cannot seem to overcome the notion that he was instrumental in his mother's death. I talk to him in the simplest language I can muster but he is inconsolable. He clings to me crying: 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry.' And I begin to think that the Riffian woman's curse is already working its devastating magic.

After the burial Dr Lopez takes me aside and asks if he can help in any way. I tell him about Javier. He hopes that I won't take it the wrong way but he did go to the trouble of analysing the milk in his private laboratory and found it to be almond milk. I ask him if he can somehow communicate that to Javier and he agrees to talk to the boy.

I take condolences from all sides. There was no one in Tangier who knew of the antipathy between P. and me. She was a very private woman and one conducting an affair with an Arab. Something she would not want being bandied about the bars and hotel lounges.

I pour myself a brandy and light a cigar, which R. had given to me years ago. The liquor is rough and the tobacco gone coarse. I stab the ashtray. I test myself by taking out an old photograph of P. sitting on the beach in a bathing costume holding a flowery bathing cap. The brandy rips down my throat, the cigar smoulders. I feel no sadness.

10th March 1961, Tangier.

I go to the tourist shop on Boulevard Pasteur and ask the old man if his son has any more pieces to sell. He tells me of the tragic accident. My distress is real and his news prompts me to tell him of my wife's sudden demise and how the bone sculpture of his son had been a present for her which she had greatly admired. His sympathy encourages some embellishment. I tell him that the sculpture was mysteriously stolen and that I had returned in order

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to buy anything and everything that his son had made or drawn in order to help me and my children sustain the memory of my wife and their mother. He is visibly moved and invites me to his family home. Before lunch I am introduced to the whole male side of the family, which number some fifteen men and boys. We eat couscous from a communal bowl and as the honoured guest I am given the largest and fattiest piece of meat. After the meal anybody under the age of fifteen is sent away and we men sit down to smoke and drink coffee. Some time later two of TC's children come in bearing a small padlocked trunk. My hands spring with sweat as the old man produces his keys, opens the trunk and lays the contents out on the table. They are a series of sketches of his sculpture and metalwork. I didn't seriously expect there to be any nudes of P., but it had to be checked. I offer to buy the contents of the trunk so that at least TC's children can benefit in some way from the tragic loss of their father and his talent. We settle on the wildly generous sum of \$50. The family and especially TC's father are very pleased and honoured. I steal away in the late afternoon clutching the sketches, looking about me like some petty thief.

18th March 1961, Tangier.

A fire starts in my studio and I am lucky to escape with TC's canvasses and my journal. The blaze is quickly brought under control but not before the studio floor is completely ruined. I lose more than four hundred drawings and a lot of paint. I can only assume a cigarette coal slipped through the floorboards and ignited the turpentine, white spirit and alcohol stored below. I have to stop myself from thinking of the wretched Riffian woman's curse. In a matter of months I have gone from sophisticated man to nervous peasant from the 'pueblo'.

20th March 1961, Tangier.

I am spending more time at home while they tear out the old charred floor and replace the scorched parts of the roof. I surround myself with all that I have saved from the conflagration. Behind locked doors I read through my journals with the salvaged canvasses pinned to the walls. Am I at the end of an era? I scoff at my first entry. How naïve. Did I really start this journal to remember who I was? I suppose that sort of thing seems important when you're seventeen. But what was there to remember? All I was at that age was my education, my family and my idiot friends, all of whom I rejected in a matter of sentences to become that very dangerous entity, the entity which no society can stomach – a clean slate. That was why the Legion was so dangerous. We were men without ties – no past and, because we had embraced death, no future either. And in the present we did what we were ordered to do with our own invented and atrocious morality. We were all 'bridegrooms of death' but the Legion was the Mother of all monsters. But am I, as P. once called me, a monster? I have only killed people who were intent on killing me or who would have killed me given the chance. As for P. and her lover, there isn't a court in Spain who would even jail me for such a crime of passion. But I have caught myself red-handed there. This is not the time or place for justification. Somewhere back in all these pages of scribble I have promised myself the truth and if I haven't then I should have done because now that is all I can see as the point of writing these pages. I killed TC because I was jealous. I did not kill him because he was fucking my wife. I killed him because he had achieved with my Muse what I had been trying to do for years. I killed my wife because she had seen the truth and it would be unbearable for me to live with that. There. That is it. The terrible truth. What shall I do? Kill myself? Make orphans of my children? No. I don't think so. That would be to take life too seriously. What are we, after all? What have I been painting but rough smears of

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civilization in a vast and relentless landscape? We are ephemera. And yet. And yet. I look at Javier playing in the patio and this ruthless theory seems to founder...not break up exactly but rather come to rest on an unseen sandbar - the ship of perfect reason intact but completely useless. I don't know what to make of this. What seems to be true for the human race does not hold for the individual.

25th April 1961, Tangier.

I am back at work. The floor has been repaired and with the canvasses hidden above my head acting as divine inspiration I have thrown myself into a new era of work. I will become great, I say to myself. I have it in me. I have acquired a life model to replace my Muse. She is a voluptuous Frenchwoman, who used to be married to a diplomat until she came off the rails in Rabat one afternoon and ended up in Tangier, eager for a new life. She is divorced now and living off whatever work she can get. I set about a series of drawings to get my hand back in. Nape, shoulders, back, waist, arms hands, buttocks, thighs, knees and ankles. It is a start. I do not smoke until evening when I sit alone with TC's four canvasses, letting the hashish open me up so that the form, the shapes, the lines, the colours can slip into me, become a part of me, become mine.

29th April 1961, Tangier.

There is something of the courtesan in this French bitch and it is ruining everything. She turned up yesterday with her buttocks criss-crossed with weals from a thrashing she'd willingly sustained at the hands of an English viscount. Today it was her sex, still glistening like a mollusc from some lunchtime ravishment. She kneels and her arse splays, revealing her anus. It's making a pornographer of me.

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2nd May 1961, Tangier.

I've dispensed with the French whore's services. How can I be expected to paint the purity of the female form when all that is revealed to me is sickening biology. Even her mouth has begun to look like a sexual organ. And all through the work, as I painfully lay on the red, red paint she's telling me of her latest depravities.

8th May 1961, Tangier.

I explain my problem to one of the frequenters of the Bar La Mar Chica, an English writer whose name, Rupert Croft-Cooke, sounds like a list of household chores. The next day he sends a young woman to my studio with a letter telling me that Daisy Richards is an Englishwoman who wants to be an artist, that she comes from a very good family whose father is a 'dear friend' and that the girl must not be 'tampered with'. My English is much improved but I don't know this last phrase and ask Daisy what it means. She blushes and tells me that I mustn't interfere with her. Interfere I've always understood to mean prevent or obstruct and I ask her how I could possibly set about preventing her from doing something if I didn't know what she wanted to do. 'It's our English way of saying things,' she says and wafts past me. I show her the divan I've prepared and how I want her to pose and she sets about my wishes with enthusiasm but...fully clothed. I explain the rudiments of life modelling. She giggles and says that she couldn't possibly get undressed without a private room or some screens. I am bewildered. She explains that undressing in front of a man is too much like a precursor to 'you know what'. But I don't know what and look around myself for guidance. Eventually I agree to leave the studio for five minutes thinking, here we have no problem with purity but a severe absence of passion.

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12th May 1961, Tangier.

I have finished with Daisy Richards. She refused to kneel down and be drawn from behind. She will lie down on the divan with hand demurely covering her pubis, and she will stand and permit me to draw her from any angle, although she somehow contrives to look as if, rather than having just completed her toilet, she has lost her towel. I have asked her many times what is the problem but she clams up. I volunteer to leave the room, let her settle on her knees and then draw her from the end of the room. She won't have it. Eventually she admits that it makes her feel too vulnerable, too exposed. But this is what I'm looking for I roar and throw my tools up into the air. I go to Dean's bar and Dean himself promises to arrange something for me.

A telegram from M. saying she is leaving Miami for the Bahamas and she could be in Tangier by mid June.

15th May 1961, Tangier.

Dean has sent Anne-Marie Petit from Martinique to my door. She is taller than me by some five centimetres with café con leche skin and a freckled face of complete innocence. She is a model and completely unselfconscious. She is sensual, cat-like and, as she repositions herself under my guidance, exhales as if she has just attained some small sexual gratification. It is quite stimulating until, bored by living with the unspoken contents of her head, she begins to talk. She talks in an unending stream of French about the people she has met, her new friends, the parties and more specifically about the International Polo Event being organised by Barbara Hutton which will be presided over by King Hussein of Jordan. No detail of this social spectacle is too small for her mind to make comment. I am delirious with ennui by the end of the first session. I go to Dean and thank him for

sending me this feline marvel and ask him how it would be possible to make her just purr. One of the silly queers gestures obscenely at my crotch and points to his mouth. I realise that this is supposed to be funny because the whole place erupts with laughter. Dean, with his eyelids at half mast, and I are the only ones who remain totally unmoved. Even the depravity has become mediocre in Tangier.

I retreat into the night and on my way back to the studio veer off course onto the beach. I kick off my sandals and walk barefoot to the water's edge. There is an electric storm exploding silently over the southern coast of Spain. I am fascinated. I imagine myself as an observer in the dark cranium of the world into which light comes unpredictably flashing to illuminate with fierce reality the nature of what is there. This thought sends me rushing back to my studio as I am seized by an indefinable inspiration. As I reach the paper, the canvas, the pencils, the charcoal, the brushes and the paint I am suddenly overwhelmed by the pedestrian. My feet on the floor. My body in my clothes. My mind in its trap. I take out the four canvasses and spread them before me. My hands are trembling, my shoulders shake and I weep uncontrollably because all I have seen under the chaotic light of those distant flashes is my loss. I am just the imitator, the copier, the parrot and an ape.

I don't know what has happened in the interim only that I have woken up with a photograph of P. in my hands. I am lying on the bed with the mosquito net gathered up in its knot above me like a ghost's head. I can't think what has possessed me to find the photograph. I go to my chair and see the four canvasses laid out and remember last night's terrible revelations. I look from the photograph to paintings and see it all there in its simple intricacy. The photograph falls from my lifeless hands and I know at that moment that I am condemned to mediocrity.

17th May 1961, Tangier.

I have recovered my equilibrium. I have decided that whatever may come to pass that I shall be unflinching when I face the pages of this book. I set this down because it is likely that it will be the only promise to myself that I shall keep. My next promise is, that having seen the truth and crumbled before it, I shall take the only way out which is to no longer take things so seriously. What is the point after all? What could possibly be considered a worthy, serious worldly pursuit once the quest for truth has been abandoned? R. was so persuasive when he talked about art as just another market and the achievement of the artist as mere presentation. Yes. I can see that, now that I have lowered my sights. With my head in the clouds, light from lack of oxygen no doubt, I was assuming a loftier role for myself. Now in this thicker, more mundane air I can see opportunities.

I pin the four canvasses to the wall and, with a new and expert eye, quite divorced from the mistier sight that was awed by TC's genius (I can admit that now), I minutely inspect each painting and, (ah, my new talent) within twenty minutes I know in which order they were painted. It is dry work, drier than book-keeping even, the work of the art historian. It is the examination of technique, of the laying on of paint. It demands the critic's mind who, standing before the incandescence of genius, in front of a quality of work rarely seen on this earth, still has access to that well of smallness (reached through the vast jungle of his pitiful envy) to say: 'This is not quite as good as that.' Yes, it is rather satisfying to pick TC's work apart like this until, of course, I reach the perfection of what I know is his final work (P. kneeling) and I am left with my head shaking dumbly.

One of the reclining nudes (back view) is the first work. There's some tentativeness in the lines and the colours aren't so well resolved to give the magical, mysterious (or is it mystical?) effects that are brought to

fruition in the third and fourth works , which are the second reclining nude (front view) and the kneeling nude. I roll up the last three works and set about a series of sketches that just bring me to the shapes and form of the first painting. I am exhausted.

22f2nd May 1961, Tangier.

I have just completed the foundations that, in my opinion and from my memories of the rapid glances I stole at TC's sketchbooks, would have led to the first attempt at a finished canvas. The intensity of my thought is interrupted by a knock on the door. It is a demanding knock, not the loose one of a boy on the hunt for a few dirhams. I put everything away and open the door onto a man I don't recognise but whom I instantly know is going to be Ramón Salgado – the dealer that R. promised he would send to me. I am seduced by the timeliness of the man's arrival and decide that it is an auspicious moment. I even welcome him in and make him some mint tea. We sit out on the balcony, sip tea and gaze at the turquoise water in the Tangier bay. Salgado is anxious to demonstrate that he is not a fool and displays a quite phenomenal, in depth knowledge of my work, drawing references not just confined to the art world but to the world of literature as well. Big names are flung out onto the bougainvillea below and I begin to realise that I had no idea how well read I was. I try to accept the extended eulogy as light-heartedly as possible but Salgado is a serious young man and rebuffs my self-deprecation. He declares his intention to bring Francisco Falcón to the greater world. I tell him that I already have numerous contacts in the form of Charles Brown, Mrs Milton Gardener and Barbara Hutton to name but three and what could he possibly do that they couldn't?

I admire the man's energy and it's not as if his flattery has no effect. I allow myself to be charmed and release biscuits of insight as if I'm leading

a dog into a cage. He sucks them up and we find we're getting on famously. He asks me what I am working on and, in a rush of inexplicable confidence, I tell him that I have returned to the female form, which allows him to show that he already knows about my famous charcoal drawing displayed on the wall of the Sidi Hosni palace's inner sanctum. He is excited by this development but tells me not to forsake the abstract landscapes, which brings a lump of silly emotion to my throat. It is pathetic how much I want to be admired. He knows of significant German and Swiss interest in those works, men who 'appreciate my rigorous intellectual approach'. This surprises me because my intellect has never been one of my strengths. Does the concept of the inadvertent intellectual exist? It is clear from this conversation that Salgado is bringing European interest to the table and hopes to get a foothold on the American market by roping himself to me. I am also conscious that it is R. who has sent him to me and that his nose for acumen, or rather the necessary qualities, whatever they may be, has so far been faultless. Salgado and I part agreeing to think about the possibility of his agency.

10th June 1961, Tangier.

I have just completed the development work to the third nude. The deeper in I go the more I respect TC's substantial gift and disdain the paucity of my own.

Salgado and I have formed an agreement. He will represent me worldwide. The deciding factor was seeing him alongside the monolithic Charles Brown, who is in Tangier for this International Polo Event about which le tout Tangier is in a complete frenzy of anticipation. Salgado looked so nimble around CB on his plinth. Why this should persuade me that Salgado is the right man... No. Strike that from the log. I know why he

is the right man. He is young, enthusiastic and, above all, impressionable. The first two are important because I feel we are coming into an unprecedented era where youth will matter, youth will drive everything forwards. CB's generation will seem like the men in top hats of sepia tinted photographs – frozen in old-fashioned time. The importance of Salgado's last quality needs no explanation. He will be unquestioning in his appraisal and devotion and he will persuade the world.

18th June 1961, Tangier.

I am sick with exhaustion. Salgado is quite worried about me and when M. sends a note to say she has arrived and set herself up in the Hotel El Minzah I am too ill to go and see her. I have locked up the studio and lie in bed at home, only coming out of my day long stupor with the calls to prayer. Javier sits on my bed fretting at my state, as if this incapacity is terminal. I can't bear to even smoke. Writing this is like dragging a plough across the page. I wonder if TC was so broken on the wheel of his own genius and I suddenly see myself as a stubby-winged partridge trying to keep up with a phalanx of geese.

25th June 1961, Tangier.

I missed the International Polo Event, which has made me unique. It has conferred on me the status of serious artist, which can do me no harm. I have finally regained enough of my strength to have dinner with M., who is beside herself with excitement at the prospect of seeing the work that has reduced me to such a state. I have become scrawny and am withdrawn, or rather lost, as if I've been dining exclusively with the Gods on phantom food and come back to earth to find that cigarettes taste quite new and I'm

unsure of knife and fork etiquette. I tell M. about Salgado and that she will have to be patient. She is furious and I believe that Salgado will have to work hard to prove his good intentions and flatter M.'s intelligence.

27th June 1961, Tangier.

I have divided the studio, creating a structured maze of all the sketches and development work for the first nude in one half and then exhibiting the finished painting in perfect isolation behind a screen in the other part. I have been in a sweat waiting for Salgado and I try to analyse this. It is as if I am showing my own work, is my first thought until it dawns on me that of course I am and that what concerns me is that its ordinariness will create a disbelief in the provenance of the finished canvas. This, though, I think is to overestimate the incisiveness of human intelligence and underestimate its capacity for dumb faith.

Salgado arrives breathless even though there are only fifteen steps up to the studio's first floor. He is shot through with adrenaline and, as he shakes my hand, is looking over my shoulder as English people do at cocktail parties, in the hope of finding an available Earl or Duke at an inexplicable loose end. A white curtain has ensured that nothing is immediately visible. I put an arm around his shoulders and lead him to the start of the maze, whispering some rubbish in his ear. His legs are shaking in his trousers as I know mine do at the prospect of some new sexual experience. I release him into the maze. My face is a mask. The artist confident of his genius. Only my bowels speak the truth and I have to shoot off to the toilet to release a stinking watery stream, whose stench catches in my throat making me cough like an old man.

I return to silence. I look for Salgado in the maze of drawings but he is not there. The balcony is empty. I panic, thinking that he has

spotted me for the charlatan that I am and left in disgust. Then I hear a sob and find him in front of the finished work, the reclining nude, which is now bathed in late afternoon light which further warms the colours and rounds the lines so that even I, who has mercilessly vivisected this work, am suddenly buttery inside. He turns to me and his face is savage as if I've done him some terrible wrong. 'I accuse you,' he says, and my vacant bowels flutter, 'of genius.' Then he is on me, embracing me, kissing me, his tears on my cheeks. He vices my head in his hands and says: 'If I had a nail paring of your talent I would be a happy man.' He leads me back to the gap in the screen and exclaims to the development drawings: 'That this,' he says, 'could lead to that es una maravilla.' I am, absurdly, irritated by this and ask him what he means and he replies: 'Oh, this development work is so..so painstaking. It is like watching you crawl towards your goal over a kilometre of broken glass. The agony. The suffering. The nearly, nearly, nearly getting there and just failing. And then it is suddenly all resolved. As if the pain purged you and gave you the freedom to an unrestrained expression. You are like an escaped prisoner, ripped to shreds by the wire, but now flying. No more suffering. Just the bold fluid, almost balletic strokes of incomparable genius.' I am happy. We are happy until he leaves. Then the disappointment nearly crushes me. It is ridiculous and illogical. I am disappointed because he did not find me out. I wanted to be discovered. I wanted him to tell me that my drawings were magnificent. I live with both the morbid fascination of wanting to be revealed as an impostor and the profound need for recognition. I am the leader of that new movement in modern art – the Absurdists. I recover myself and shoo these pariahs away. I light a cigarette, pour myself a drink and, taking flamboyant drags and gulps, I laugh a big-bellied laugh.

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3rd July 1961, Tangier.

News has reached our stranded community that the great Hemingway has shot himself. The American fraternity are shocked. This is what happens when you take things too seriously, when the pursuit of truth has gained the upper hand.

16th July 1961, Tangier.

I have spent a torrid fortnight trying to improve the development work for the remaining three nudes but, if anything, the work has got worse and I have been on the roof burning my latest attempts. Below me the three nudes are exhibited with a compilation of the best of the development work as an introduction. Salgado arrives and I let him loose while I pace the roof under the fantastic heat of the afternoon. As my brain starts to boil I go down into the cool of the studio. I find Salgado, who has positioned a chair in front of the final nude and is sitting in front of it drinking it in. He throws himself forward and buries his face in his hands. His shoulders heave as the sobs wrack. I pity him. He recovers himself and abruptly asks me whether I intend to produce more of these works. I look at him agape with mock astonishment. He is embarrassed. 'No, no, of course,' he says, 'there is no where else for the work to go. I can see that. This is perfection.' 'I am not a Cézanne,' I tell him. 'This is not Mont Ste Victoire to be painted again and again. The Muse is dead. This is to the memory of my late wife.' Was that going too far? Yes, I think it was. I should have restrained myself from such sentimentality although it does fit with my new and fast developing theory of absurdism. I can, however, see that this has worked on Salgado, who is solemn and clearly moved. I think that he will work this into his strategy. I see his brain ticking and know that this is what he is thinking about now. He is determined that he shall make his own name with these works. He

leaves, forbidding me to even show the paintings to M. until we have agreed on a way to proceed.

‘We have only four of these works,’ he says, ‘admittedly four extraordinary works. But we must play it right. We must create such intense interest with the first so that by the fourth your reputation and recognition is secure.’ I like that. ‘This world is so small, isn’t it? I, who have been in the middle of the clash of brutal civilisations in the ice fields of Russia, who have witnessed the desecration of humanity on a huge scale, shall be made into a king and my realm shall be a pin head. This theory I have stumbled upon is too apt. But it is why I now realise why I can do this thing. I must learn to be more precise, less of a Daisy Richards. ‘This thing’ is to pass myself off as a genius. I have murdered (twice) to do this. Two whole lives. But I have the blood of thousands on my hands. Given that ‘perspective’ was such an important advance from the two dimensional in the world of art (and this in itself was achieved how?...by trickery of the eye. It is amazing how now, in the peace that sprints away from the horrors of the century, that there is no perspective. We are less than two dimensional. We are an abstraction. We have become shapes and approximations on a vast canvas. Perhaps what we have done to each other has in fact driven us mad and I am just a part and an expression of that madness. (I must stop as the first whiff of justification has now reached my flaring nostrils).

25th July 1961, Tangier.

M. has seen the first nude. It is part of the strategy that she will be our ambassador to those that matter on the pin head kingdom. We stood together in front of the painting and she hugged my arm, pressed her face into my shoulder and expressed some very American sentiments, such as ‘I’m proud of you.’ We release her from the asylum and she does our work.

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Charles Brown (still in Tangier after the International Polo Event) comes pounding on my door demanding 'to see it'. He leaves raving. Such is the nature of our little asylum that the inmates leave madder than when they entered it. This morning the Queen of the Pin Head Kingdom arrived, Mrs Barbara Woolworth Hutton, whose other titles include The Supreme Fantasist, The Guardian of the Precious Things, and most importantly, The Minister of Finance. She made an immediate offer of \$20,000, which had me rocking back on my heels as I realise that a rag of daubed canvas is worth two Cleef & van Arpels clocks. Kings, I have been told, have offered entire kingdoms for a horse. It is all a question of perceived importance. Salgado is happy. We have invitations to BH's party.

28th July 1961, Tangier.

Salgado has gone to Madrid to begin the groundwork for my launch into the international world of art. 'Why Madrid?' I ask. 'You are Spanish,' he replies. I have nearly forgotten this in the international atmosphere of Tangier. I think I must spend most of my social life speaking in English. Salgado and I even use English phrases to each other when we can't find the Spanish equivalent. All music seems to be in English these days. The only modern writers we hear about are Americans. The French have retreated into their intellectual world. The Germans are lost. The new world order is American and here in Tangier we are surrounded by them, so why go to Madrid? 'We are going to make people travel to you,' says Salgado. 'You will become as synonymous with Spain as Picasso. Picasso will come to your show!' He will? I doubt it very much. 'The curator of the Prado will kiss your hand.' He will? 'The Caudillo will embrace you in the drawing rooms of El Pardo.' He will? This is beginning to sound really quite impressive.

So Salgado has gone to Madrid. He is printing the invitations and

slipping discreet press releases into the hands of softened editors. (It seems that his father was once a very powerful man in the Foreign Ministry and he knows everybody). The only Tangerinos to get invitations will be BH, CB and M. The rest, he says, will have to beg. After BH's summer party the FF show will be the premier social event of the autumn. The first nude is now under wraps. The privileged three have seen it and they will spread the new gospel. I now realise that R. was completely right about Salgado. R. as always saw the necessary quality, which was not the claptrap about art (all that can be gleaned from a few texts). R. saw that Salgado has a genius for propaganda which, degraded from its wartime glamour, I suppose now shudders under the fake fur of 'publicity'.

18th August 1961, Tangier.

Sitting with Salgado in the studio in front of the four nudes while he makes notes for the catalogue he suddenly notices that, unlike all my other works, these four paintings have not been signed. I am so gilded with confidence these days that I say it without thinking: 'That is because they are not mine.' This stops Salgado's pen in mid word. He looks up blinking. 'I didn't sign them,' I say, 'because for the first time in my life I had the distinct feeling that the work was not coming from me. For the month or so that I worked on these four nudes (Salgado writes this down furiously) I was rarely aware of myself at work. It was as if my body had been visited by someone who was determined not to be confined by the usual sinew, muscle, skin and bone of the ordinary mortal. You saw my exhaustion afterwards. For those weeks I was performing at some heightened level that my own body was barely able to sustain.' The words spring from his pen. I must not relish this too much. I am liable to make a fatal error. It is such a release though, to be freed from taking things too seriously, that I cannot resist flashing across

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the thin ice, waltzing along the ledges of high buildings, just taking my hands of the wheel at absurd speeds. I must call on all powers of restraint or Absurdism will crash to the ground before it has reached cruising height.

October 26th 1961, Madrid.

It seems right that the last time I was in Madrid, 18 years ago almost to the day, I shuffled out of the city with a kit bag and little else, battle weary from 12 years in the Legion and now I have returned as the conquering hero. I glow with the false aura of celebrity (an indispensable body armour that maintains myth and disguises dress) to mingle (or is it clash?) with the other auras that combined to make the evening such a glittering success. Cecil Beaton, who had been at BH's party in the summer, agreed to take my photograph and Truman Capote has written a piece which will appear in the New Yorker. BH arrived flanked by her latest 'beau', Lloyd Franklin, and the English aristocrat and fellow Tangerino, David Herbert. She was something of a guest of honour because Salgado needed a piece to move the show away from my abstract landscapes and on to the star of the show – the reclining nude. BH supplied the charcoal drawing of P., the only one still existing. There was some deal done with Salgado about BH getting one of the later nudes for her collection in exchange for this favour....at a price of course. At the opening M. was in her element with six American collectors, all friends of her late husband, whose combined wealth could probably have bought several African states. CB had bought three of his collectors over, along with the curator of the MOMA in NYC. There were actors and actresses, singers and bullfighters. Salgado even arranged for a couple to dance flamenco (for the visiting Americans' benefit) and they were a riotous sensation, making what I remember of Luis and Carmela's performance from the Bar La Mar Chica days look like a freak show of

chorus- line crippled donkeys. The whole business served to remind me just what a ridiculous, provincial, bourgeois backwater Tangier has become. If it wasn't for the Queen of the Casbah and the odd American writer of note we would drift out of sight of the rest of the world, coming to rest in a haze of ennui somewhere in the mid Atlantic, off Cabo Verde.

The painting has been bought by the Prado. Picasso didn't come. The rest of Salgado's prophecies materialised as promised.

April 4th 1962, Lisbon.

M. and I were married two days ago. We've taken her yacht up to Lisbon to catch a cruise liner across the Atlantic to NYC for my second major show. M. can't fly, she is terrified. It seems we'll be ocean bound for weeks of the year as we move from show to show. Salgado's already in NYC letting it be known in the market that there is a limited number of the Falcón nudes. Now that my reputation has been established with the hanging of the first nude in the Prado he is expecting a feeding frenzy in NYC. Salgado has proved to be unstoppable. He has found homes for all my landscapes, even some of the bleaker Russian ones, although not to any buyer outside Northern Europe. He knows now not to spew out the art drivel that cakes the insides of catalogues or encrusts the columns of the critics and so declares in his charming way: 'The white ones are too chilly for the southerners or the Americans.' 'And the coloured ones?' I ask, mischievously. 'The coloured ones are too cruel,' he says. The truth of the matter is that mediocre work can be easily encapsulated and the verbiage attached in the quarterlies and periodicals is embellishment, an attempt to round out or imbue work with qualities that, were they there, would make it a more interesting piece. Great works need none of this. An intelligent observer does not need to be told that there's something in between the lines. He knows when he's in

the presence of something that he can't quite define that it is its greatness. All the copy on mediocre works should be prefixed. 'What the artist is trying to do here is...'

June 3rd 1962, New York.

I should have written more on the boat but either it was a bad crossing or I am not built for extended travel on the high seas. I have spent three weeks in a constant state of total nausea, as if I have been forced to live my own life in compressed form. I lost seven kilos and had to be carried off the boat on a stretcher. I spent two days in hospital having my body replenished with vital fluids and learning how to walk again on ground that does not heave beneath me like some vomiting giant. My inauspicious arrival has drawn huge coverage and I have been reading how, rather than suffering from some dehydration, I am lucky to be alive. The room fills with flowers and I lie on my bed as if on some overwrought wedding cake.

June 8th 1962, New York.

The show was a triumph. The reason for this is money. The painting was sold in the public eye before the show took place. I arrived to cheering crowds at the 5th Avenue gallery because everybody knew I had sold for \$50,000 and that BH was the new owner, after a bidding duel with Clifford Jefferson Webster the IV, or was it III? The society pages were incandescent with excitement. I appeared in Life magazine. I was flown down to Washington to be received by the Spanish ambassador and had tea with Jacqueline Kennedy in the White House. It was a big, powerful American production (where the money came from I don't know) and my ability to speak English has made the difference between admiration and stardom. (How small are the details that such things turn on).

July 4th 1962, Tangier.

I have been unable to work. I have canvasses prepared of all sizes but nothing to put on them. I go to the balcony and look for the adoring crowds but there are none. The scene before me is one of complete indolence. I am quite sick of Tangier after the teeming brilliance of New York and it is not just that I miss the constant adulation. The streets of NYC are literally gasping at the expended energy, hot air and steam rises up from the grills in the pavements as if the buildings need these outlets for the tremendous pressure generated inside by the thousands who work there. Ideas are the oxygen and money is the sweat of this city, whereas here there hardly seems to be any air at all. Brains collapse under the torpid, airless afternoons. The sweat of this outpost is nothing but redistilled alcohol which has passed through depraved and idle systems leaving a stale odour to the streets which catches in the throat as sharply as old urine. Even the boys, which half the tourist population are here for, seem to have mislaid their youth. They slouch and slump as if their elastic has snapped and some are quite vile with disease. As soon as M. arrives we will sail along the Spanish coast to the Côte d'Azur and bask in glory as other idols do.

7th July 1962, Tangier

I have quite lost track of Salgado since our return from NY when, just as that thought had drifted across the flat calm of my horizon, a boy arrives with a note from him written on Hotel Rembrandt notepaper and telling me to come immediately to room 321 alone. I'm not so surprised by the note. There is no phone here. It's only as I make my way to the Boulevard Pasteur that I become unnerved. What could have happened that he should think to interrupt me in my work time? I am intrigued and disturbed. The lift in the Hotel Rembrandt, which is only a few years old, is one of those halting affairs

that make me feel as if the cable is about to snap at any moment. I arrive at the door to 321 in a state of impending doom. There's a short corridor between the main door and the door to the room, one of those perplexing design features that seem to be made for just this kind of occasion. It means that Salgado can pull me inside and explain the direness of his circumstances without the full horror of the incident overwhelming us.

The short version – there's a dead boy in the room.

Salgado tells me he's accidentally been killed.

'Accidentally?' I ask.

'He fell over and hit his head,' he says. 'He must have hit himself in the wrong place, but he's definitely dead.'

'How did he fall over?'

'Tripped on his way to the bathroom ... but I've put him back on the bed.'

'Then why don't we call the police and explain the incident like that?'

Silence from Salgado.

'Shall I just take a look at him?' I ask, and don't wait for an answer but push into the room and find the naked boy growing out of a twist of sheet. An arm is flung out. His tongue protrudes from his mouth and his eyes are bulging. There are bruise marks round his windpipe.

'I don't think he knocked his head, did he, Ramón?'

'It was an accident.'

'I don't know how you accidentally strangle someone, Ramón.'

'I was trying to make it better.'

We blink at each other and Ramón suddenly turns to the wall and starts

hitting his head against it and intoning something which sounds like Basque. I sit him in a chair and ask him what happened. He presses his fists into his head and repeats over and over that it was an accident. I tell him I'll call the Chief of Police and he can tell him just that, with the boy lying on the bed sodomized and strangled. He gets up and starts striding about the room, throwing his hands about and making great declamations in the same strange tongue. I slap his face. He turns into a pathetic creature and sinks to the floor. He cries and his bird-like shoulders convulse. I slap him again, which turns him to me.

'Tell me what happened,' I say. 'I am not your judge.'

'I murdered him,' he says.

'Were you in love with him?'

'No, no, no que no!' he says emphatically. Too emphatically.

I stare into him and see his corruption, so terrible that he cannot admit it to himself. I know Ramón Salgado has killed this boy for no other reason than for what he was making him into. Salgado is vain. He is a great flatterer of women. M. and he adore each other. He has affairs which never last. He is now wealthy, famous in his small world and reputable, but ... he likes to sodomize boys and that interferes with his gilded self-image. That's my reading of it anyway. He's killed the boy because he was forcing him to see what he hates.

He says the fateful words:

'I couldn't face a scandal.'

I don't despise him, even for that. Who am I to despise anyone? I sit at the boy's feet. I light a cigarette for him.

'Will you help me?' he asks.

I tell him a story, which I first heard from a friend of B.H. back in the forties, about a wealthy homosexual who'd picked up a bunch of servicemen from a well-known bar for queers in Manhattan and taken them back to a party at his mother's apartment on 5th Avenue. They were all drunk and one of the soldiers passed out. They removed his pants and for a joke started to shave off his pubic hair. And, accidentally – I emphasize that – they chopped off his prick. So what did they do? Salgado looks at me like Javier does when I'm telling him a bedtime story, all hunched and wide-eyed. They wrapped him in a blanket and dumped him on a bridge somewhere. He was lucky, because a policeman found him and got him to a hospital before he bled to death.

'What do you make of that, Ramón?' I ask.

He blinks, desperate not to say the wrong thing and be sent out of class.

'If you help me, Francisco,' he says. 'I will never do anything like this again.'

'What? Kill somebody?'

'No, no, I mean ... I will never go with boys again. I will lead an exemplary life.'

'I will help you,' I say, 'but I want to know what you think of my story.'

More silence. He's too panicked to think.

'They paid the soldier off,' I add. 'So that he wouldn't press charges. How much do you think?'

He shook his head.

'Two hundred thousand dollars, and that was in 1946,' I say. 'You made a lot more money from losing your prick in those days than you did from painting pictures.'

Salgado rushes past me and vomits in the toilet. He comes back wiping his

mouth.

‘I don’t know how you can be so cool about this, Francisco.’

‘I’ve killed thousands of people. All of them as guilty or as innocent as you and I.’

‘That was war,’ he says.

‘I’m just pointing out that once you’ve seen slaughter on the scale I have, a dead boy in a hotel room is not so terrible. Now, give me your comment on my story.’

‘It was a terrible thing to have done,’ he says, drawing on his cigarette.

‘Worse than murdering a boy?’

‘He could have died for all they cared.’

‘Right. And what does that reveal about the people you’re so desperate to impress?’ I ask. ‘The perpetrator is still free, by the way, and he’s still a friend of Barbara Hutton.’

Ramón is too muddled to work it out for himself.

‘We are their lapdogs,’ I say. ‘We are their little marvels – yes, even me, Ramón. They stroke us, feed us morsels, tease us and then grow tired of us and throw us out. We are nothing to the very rich. Absolutely nothing. Less than toys. So remember, when you sip their champagne, that it is for these worthless people’s high opinion of you that you have murdered this boy.’

The words shunted into his chest like high-calibre bullets. He thumped back into his chair.

‘For them?’ he said, puzzled.

‘You killed the boy because you did not like the idea of those people knowing

this about you. You killed him because it is the one thing you find hateful in yourself, and you think others will, too. And you have been very wrong.'

He sobs. I pat him on the back.

'Francisco,' he says, 'where would I be without you?'

'In a far happier place,' I reply.

It wasn't so difficult to dispose of the body. We took it out into the garden of the hotel at three in the morning and heaved it over the wall. We put it in the car, we took it to the cliffs out of town and threw it into the sea. On the way back to town Ramón stared into the window utterly wordless, a man coming to terms with a changed world, in which, because of a moment of blindness, nothing will ever be the same. If you have to kill. If there's nothing to be done. Then always kill with your eyes wide open.

August 3rd 1962, St Tropez.

Life will have its way with us. Once you have accustomed yourself to the sad fact that your innocence will constantly be assaulted by the rapist of time then it's as well not to become too bound up in the absurdities of ambition and the complexities of human relationships. I look at M. She is happy. She, surprisingly, dotes on the children (even though she has never had any of her own and never wanted them until she met Milton) and is smitten with Javier in particular. Our relationship is different. The English have a word for it – cosy. We are not in love. We no longer indulge in any of the passionate wildness, which was the signature of our previous dalliance. We are companionable. We admire each other enormously. We bring solidity and stability to our volatile natures. This has all come about because she fell in love with Milton as she had never done before. Love has defined her. Through Milton she found the right path. The path that

swerved away from danger, the seductiveness of being bad and brought her, not to dullness by any means, but certainly to goodness. Her brightness and gaiety are still there but her wild voracity has been replaced by curiosity and profundity. Her character is immensely attractive to Ramón Salgado, who has joined us on the boat for a week. He too has been quite changed by what occurred in room 321 of the Hotel Rembrandt. He is introspective. I sense a man at a crossroads. He keeps his distance from me (his partner in life and crime) as if he has intuitively understood that it is his association with me that has ruined him and, if maintained, could destroy him. Yes, he is drawn to M.'s goodness. He realises that she has found the right path and he wants to join her. I am certain that we will hear in the not too distant future that Salgado wishes to marry. If I close my eyes I think I might even be able to see his partner – earnest, capable and true. I watch them from the other end of the boat. Salgado drinks M's every word as if she is spouting the communion wine that will save him. She used to make him nervous. She poked through his taffeta of charm, found the chink in his academic claptrap and tied him up in social knots. She was irritated by his commercialism, his social mountaineering and the way he had roped himself to me. Now they sit under their canopy slowly working their way down a bottle of Ricard endlessly discussing the finer points of God knows what as they sip the cloudy urine. (I hate pastis. I think it must be associated in my mind with milk). I sit in the stern with Javier in the crook of my arm reading Camus and, as my mind drifts while I make sure that Paco and Manuela are not drowning, I wonder at the serendipity of life that has brought together a woman who has been defined by love and a man who has been defined by murder and I ask myself: 'What has defined me?' I rattle through the numerous crises of my life measuring the traumas and the enormities until I reach 'the incident' and it is strange to think it was that rather than, say, the wholesale slaughter at Krasni Bor, which has defined me. Why have I never written it down? It's not as if I haven't told a living soul. So why

I am evasive? Will this journal ever be made public? Am I mad? No, this is something to be consigned to the fire. So why bother with this drivel from my diseased mind? I suppose we must all have our mysteries some that not even we ourselves understand and 'the incident' will be mine so that whatever scholarship is applied to my life and works there will always be a question mark, nobody will ever perfectly understand. As I have this thought, in all its brilliant illogicality, I find I am stroking Javier's head over and over and he is sucking his thumb making a little smack with his lips in time. A worm turns in my head and I have the horror thought that I must despatch. I clasp Javier to me and my nauseating doubt subsides. He is mine. We are one.

7th April 1963, NY

On the way to NY Salgado proposes that prior to the showing of the final Falcón nude I should publish my journals. I choke with appalled hilarity at the prospect. What a fantastic undoing that would be. I laugh in great hiccuping gulps. It is Mercedes who's put him up to this. I've seen them hatching their plans and M. has unnerved me on a number of occasions by wafting past as I jot my dysenteric jottings. (She has a pair of very supple and silent gold sandals – I shall have to scatter nutshells to catch her out.) I give Salgado an emphatic no, which tweaks his fascination.

April 12th 1963, New York.

Another triumph. I am very firmly a Spanish artist on the world stage. Whilst I might not share the same ethereal heights as Picasso, whose body of work is so much more extensive, I am certainly ahead of the likes of Tapiés and Saura. My nudes are more appreciated than Picasso's early Blue and Rose

work and their originality has stirred complaints that much of PP's great leaps were achieved by stepping on the backs of innovators like Braque and Matisse. The nudes, at the moment, stand in importance alongside 'Nude in the Garden' and 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon', although there is no comparison in style or execution. It is gratifying that they share the same pedestal. My market value has risen and the third nude fetched \$80,000. These prices are only possible in the madness of New York. I am furious to find that some Italian critics are comparing me to The Great Fraud, Salvador Dali, not in terms of the quality of work but in our apparent avidity for fame and fortune. This is not something I have sought. It has come to me on the back of my Tangier contacts and Salgado's brilliant promotional ideas. I irritate by being too successful with too little work. Andy Warhol says he will stand them all on their heads.

31st December 1963, Tangier

I have been careless and it has changed everything. M. and I were in the studio yesterday. The children were playing in the street below, so excited about their game that they didn't wait to get on to the soft sand of the beach. Javier, desperate to keep up, fell and hit his head. His face was covered in blood. I ran from the studio and threw him into the car and took him straight to the hospital where they put a few stitches in his head. By the time I returned to the studio I could see that everything had changed.

So what is actually different? We are still man and wife, we still live in the same house, we are still having the New Year's Eve party tonight.

When I returned from the hospital M. did not immediately ask after Javier, who was at home with the maid. She was on the verandah looking at me as if I was a lone wolf across an ice field. I walked towards her, telling her about Javier, as if auditioning. She manoeuvred around me back into the room. I

said he was at home and wanted to see her. She practically ran for the door. We drove back in a frosty silence, with Paco and Manuela fighting in the back. She went upstairs and I to my study.

I am still here now, twenty-four hours later, watching her shadow on the ceiling of Javier's room. It is already dark. It is only a matter of hours before the guests arrive for dinner. Later we will go to the boat and watch the British fireworks display in the port. I am nearly paralysed with sadness. I watch her shadow, which has enlarged because she is holding Javier. They come to the window and look into the dark patio and the inkier blackness of the fig tree. I have tears in my eyes because I know that she is saying goodbye to Javier, that she will be my wife at this party and then no more. She is going and in going she will betray me. I shall go to my room now and put on my white dinner jacket.

5th January 1964, Tangier

I am ruined with fatigue but I have to bring myself to the page, my pristine confessional. This is what my journal has become. I vomit and the ghastly nausea of my existence subsides. On the evening of the party I was dressing. She went straight to the bathroom as if to hide. She waited for me to leave before putting on her evening dress. I went to check the children. She didn't come down until the guests arrived. My eyes followed her as she mingled, occasionally our glances clashed and we'd switch away. Dinner was loud and boisterous, but I experienced it as a child under the table. After the meal we gathered in the hall while the women put on their coats and Javier suddenly appeared at the foot of the stairs. M. carried him back up to bed with his face buried in her neck. We left the house in a crowd, M. on Salgado's arm. Champagne corks popped as we arrived at the yacht. The fireworks happened. The guests began to leave.

I said to Ramón that I wanted to take the boat out and asked him to put it to M. 'She'd do anything for you,' I said. 'But she can easily talk me out of it.' The three of us put out an hour later. It was flat and cold and a half-moon added to the chill. We drank champagne at the wheel with M. wrapped in a coat of Arctic fox. The stillness out there was terrible. Then the wind got up from nowhere and Ramón, who was drunk, went down below. I turned the boat back towards Tangier.

Finally M. said: 'I'm leaving you ... you know that now, don't you?' I asked her how she'd found the diaries. She'd persuaded Javier to tell her where I kept them. Her face was very close to mine as she spoke and she added: 'Your secret is between us.' If I thought about it, even for a moment, I would not be able to go through with it, so I rapped her with my knuckles on her solar plexus and she doubled up over my arm. I shoved her hard, firing her backwards to the rail, which hit her below the buttock. She vaulted over and, like a comic turn, her feet flipped into the darkness. The splash was inaudible. I didn't look back. The sea grew before me and there was quite a storm blowing as we came into Tangier. As we entered the port I called to M. and Salgado to come up on deck. Salgado appeared bleary-eyed. I told him to wake M. and he went back down. In seconds he was back saying she wasn't in her cabin. We went mad searching the boat before facing the awful truth and calling the coast guard. We never found her. The following day I told Javier what had happened. He was heartbroken.

'You know why Mercedes isn't coming back, don't you, Javier?'

Javier was mute through this double pain of his pinched flesh and what I could see was the plummeting emptiness of what he feared most.

'This is important,' I said, pulling him to me so that his wincing face was right next to mine. 'You must never tell anyone where I keep my journals. That is

my secret. I want you to remember that ... From now on, Javier, there are no journals.'

13th May 1975, Seville.

I am in such a rage that I have had to return to the confessional in the hope that it will calm me.

The entry told the story he'd heard from El Zurdo and finished with the line:

I cannot think what possessed him to tell me this now, and I roar that at him as I storm out of the restaurant into the street. He says to my back: 'If it hadn't been for me, you'd be painting window frames in Triana by now.' It was an enormous and calculated insult for which he will receive appropriate punishment.

17th May 1975, Seville.

A postscript to my last vent of outrage. I have discovered that punishment has already been served on my old friend R. It seems that his youngest son died in Almería, his wife committed suicide by throwing herself into the Guadalquivir here in Seville, his daughter, Marta, has ended up in a mental institution in Ciempozuelos and his eldest son lives in Madrid and no longer speaks to him. Whatever I had in mind seems like fly-swatting after this series of calamities. I think now that he only told me what he'd done to get rid of me. I was just another relic from that troubled era.

