



Excerpt from Dandy in The Underworld

I carried on with my quest to find the true hooker. I trawled the brothels - and since lust is merely the interval that passes between imagining a bosomy beauty and encountering a flat-chested tart, I often had to leg it - and often rather fast - and once with the boot of the disdained girl up my backside. But I liked and deserved punishment. And I liked the life. In the mornings I worked. And in the afternoons I fell in love. And then one day I really fell in love.

I met Claudia by chance and it is only chance that can really speak to us. An event is more significant the greater the accident necessary to bring it about. I passed her in Knightsbridge one morning and was so taken by her haunted beauty that I actually followed her. This was a first. And, if it was not sexual obsession then it was at least love.

Love makes the world go round looking so dowdy. But there was nothing dowdy about her. There was an air of great quality about her. The faces of English girls look as if there is not enough material to go around. They have thin lips and papery eyelids, box jawbones and withered hearts. Claudia was luscious. She looked Mediterranean. Her lips were plump and they curled and pouted. Her nostrils flared. Her eyes were black and big as saucers, her eyelids as thick as pastry.

When we concentrate on the idea of beauty we are without realizing it, confronted with the darkest thoughts that exist on earth. And yet she rose like a flame to lighten my darkness and I was Icarus, burned by my love of the beautiful.

She walked and I stalked all the way to Soho and down Berwick Street. No. No way. She couldn't be! She turned, and walked into a brothel. I couldn't believe it. I could fuck Raquel Welch for £25. This was an abnormality in the market that would have confused even Mr Keynes.

In a suit made to measure I went in pursuit of pleasure. I knocked on the door of the Brothel. "Busy, come back in half an hour" came the reply. I came back in half an hour. "Busy, come back in half an hour." At 6.00pm that evening I eventually got an appointment with Claudia.

I walked into her boudoir and disposed myself upon the bed. She sashayed in wearing lace bra and pants.

"Make yourself at home", she purred. "Get undressed."

"Make yourself at home", I replied. "Get dressed - I'm taking you out. This beautiful pale face is your fate."

Twenty minutes and £250 later we were walking arm in arm towards the Ritz. As I opened the door for her I remember being truly happy for once in my life. All the quality of that evening, and all the evenings like it that never came, have remained with me in all their splendour ever since - each memory chasing the next, merging with the next in an endless dreamy chase for lost sensation.

We were lead, amid grandeur and glitz, to our table. There is nothing in all of nature like this ridiculous Rococo palace. To me it is the single, tolerable form of theatre: to sit amid such lush ornament, fussed over by servants with a plush, pink carpet caressing the soles. For the first ten minutes we hardly exchanged a word. What's the point of speaking unless you can improve on silence.

I studied Claudia's hands - then her face. About 22 I reckoned. I like younger women. Their stories are shorter. And on top of that, she was exquisite. Beauty is not so much a woman as a man's idea of a woman - preferably born of a different race from his own or into another class so as to add a pinch of unattainability. My first impressions had been correct. She was Italian.

This is a form of depravity in itself. Italians are bewitchingly beautiful. So - where the ugly Japanese work insanely to save themselves from fucking each other, the lovely Italians don't work a minute long-

er than they have to, so they can have all that extra time off for making love. Claudia went one better. I had found the most voluptuous, most sensual, most languorous specimen of a voluptuous, sensual and languorous race - with an added intoxicating pinch of the puritanical - who had found out a way to let her work and life merge. She stayed in bed for her job.

My pleasure was her business.

It was well worth the price.

"Why pay for it?", women are always asking me.

"How else would someone young, rich and handsome get sex in this city?" I reply.

"But they're prostitutes," they say with a prim little moue.

"Aren't we all, darling?"

I looked across the table. Claudia smiled a little shyly and shook her mane of dark hair, sending a shower of glitters tumbling amid a delicious perfume.

I have sat across this very same table at the Ritz and stared at the shallow greed of some moralistic little madam in a bosom-spilling dress who expects me to pay for her - and then fund the taxi fare home. Isn't she just a whore - but one who refuses to deliver the goods? She looks down on the prostitute. How horrible to have to strip for a living, she says. But she does a job too - she's a journalist, or a lawyer or a TV presenter or something. Her job strips her of all that she's got - including her mystery.

"But it's so horrible to have to be a prostitute," she squeaks.

But aren't you, I wonder. Aren't so many London girls? Except, where a good to honest whore would keep the promise that a nice girl wouldn't make, these teasers accept the terms of the contract that they then proceed to break. The "grasping whore" at least pays up the pound of flesh that has been haggled for. The so called good girl, does a runner with the goods. The main difference between sex-for-money and sex-for-free, I've found, is that sex-for-money usually costs a lot less.

I prefer to pay.

I took Claudia's hand across the table. It was cool. Her long delicate fingers faintly returned my grasp.

"Claudia, my darling, all the worst things in life are free," I said. She giggled cosily and picked up her fork to start upon the asparagus.

I gazed in adoration as the butter greased her lips. There is an allure about the illicit that makes it achingly attractive. I mean, you can't think that Adam was hungry when he took that apple. He only took it because it was forbidden - and because it was offered to him by a girl.

It was December and after dinner we strolled, arm in arm, to my flat. I was hoping for a Christmas present: her presence all wrapped up with me. I leant over to kiss her. She turned her face abruptly away. Hookers (as well as wives) don't kiss.

"I'd rather have two cocks up my arse at the same time than kiss," Claudia elucidated elegantly. "I don't like to get personal."

A kiss is usually an application on the top floor for a job in the basement. With whores the basement is permanently let, but the top floor is locked. But I had been reminded a little too abruptly that I was paying and I felt a stab of hurt.

Still I wanted to see her public parts. I started to unwrap her. She was perfect and dark and voluptuous. And she lay limbs scattered across the carpet waiting for me. I too undressed, and lowered my sorrowful white carcass down beside her. My body is merely an insect crawling about in the mad cathedral that my mind has built. But her physique was pitch perfect. Her performance as a complete fantasy woman was flawless - and maybe because she didn't want me at all.

If you hear that I'm dating someone, then you can be sure it's simply because I'm too lazy to commit suicide.

But the trouble with Claudia is that she made me want to live. I started seeing her regularly. I accompanied her to the Connaught and to Claridges and to her smelly little walk-up in Berwick Street. She was wooing me softly with her moans and coos. I lived, ate and slept for her - and certainly dressed for her. "Am I handsome enough for you?" I asked. But is modesty in a beauty as fake as passion in a prostitute?

We were both dealing with unreality. Hookers and drunks both instinctively understand that common sense is the enemy of all romance. But our imaginary relationship could never truly be realised. It was impossible from the start. She was yearning for that tall dark figure which stalks so many female dreams. I looked a bit like it in outline, but I was paying for her. I couldn't become a real person. I could never be her man because I would always know she was a whore. It was irresolvable. But that didn't make me give up.

Proust's First Law came into play: Love does not cause jealousy; it is jealousy that engenders love.

I remember dating a lady once. She was pretty good looking for a super model. But I was mortified when I found out she had fucked Mick Jagger. I didn't want her anymore. She felt sullied to me.

In the beginning, it excited me to know that Claudia slept with 20 men a day. Why would I use it against her? I mean, a man can sleep around, no questions asked, but if a woman makes a couple (of thousand) mistakes, she's a slut?

Oh No. He who never subjugates himself to another nor seeks subju-

gation, will never be betrayed. Besides, how could I who so valued my personal freedom, try to curtail the liberty of others - even if it was the liberty to become a living public lavatory?

The trouble is the green eyed monster was stirring: the dragon which slays love under the pretence of keeping it alive. "The man who loves without jealousy does not truly love," I suddenly decided. It sounded like a marvellous philosophy. I didn't want one of my girls sleeping with a single other man.

It was the beginning of the end. A man can be happy with any woman as long as he does not love her. Now I would go up to her brothel and wait without an appointment - and often in a queue - outside her boudoir. Beyond the thin plastic shower curtain I could hear her, hear the thrusts and the murmurs; the moans and the creaks; then even worse, the little giggles and the post coital chat. It was ridiculous and I knew it was ridiculous. But I kept prodding at the wound. And still she wouldn't kiss me..

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