

CHAPTER THREE

PEACE AT ANY PRICE

"Have you noticed how no one uses butter anymore? The media wants you to think it's because cholesterol causes heart attacks. It's because of heart attacks all right, but it was Last Tango In Paris that shocked the system, not the dairy fat food, rich in flavor, and poignant memories. No, the media wants to divert the blame, make you think your husband is at risk from cholesterol, not from young women splayed, craving every aspect consumed by passions devouring.

"Bliss is being in the sensual presence, fully folded into the magical feast of the time. The experience of bliss is so intense that it can take a lifetime to build up enough strength to experience it fully. I had confused my search for true love with a premonition of bliss. I was on two paths at once. Thinking them one and the same I kept getting my lessons mixed up. Lessons galore, lessons and lessons and lessons. Life is the school where you are the student and the teacher too. Silly but true.

"We are walking to the movies, me and the babbling geek. He has changed his shirt. We stand in the penetrating drizzle that prefers to condense in city settings. His change of clothes doesn't change him much. I'm wearing a skirt, and a pullover shirt. I'm wearing a long cloth raincoat. I can't remember the colors. In my memory this all happens in black and white, in wind driven rain standing.

"We are standing on a street corner, in a large city drenched in spiky drizzle. The streetlights, traffic lights, lights from stores, taxis and cars, light up the dark with variegated dimensionality. I am moving without my mind. I am moving into vengeance. I say, "I know a movie I want to see. In fact," I say, "it is a double feature. Have you seen Deep Throat and The Devil and Miss Jones? I've always wanted to see those and I've never had the chance." I'd hit his jackpot. He looked at me the way dogs and cats look when they hear the electric can opener whirring, like he had won the national lottery. He had turned one over on a bus, and found himself a bimbo ripe and ready for plucking. We tripped over and through puddles, around other umbrella'd couples, individuals in various states of being and becoming. We couldn't talk much because the street we were negotiating was an obstacle course of people, puddles, leashes and umbrellas.

"We were breathless and laughing when we arrived at the cinema. Quite a sleazy cinema it was. I never faltered. I did not flinch. I felt elated, free, angry. *He doesn't even know my name.* He has not asked me for my name. He does not know that I've been to college, that I have gold plate awards for brains. He thinks he has scored a zipless fuck. He cannot believe his luck. He gladly pays for the tickets. We enter a stuffy, damp-because-of-rain-evaporating-from-raincoats, musty-from-cum-and-sweat, boxy theater. He sits in the aisle seat, I sit one in.

"Deep Throat has already started. It is an extremely silly movie. Up to this point, I have never seen a full out dirty movie or anything more pornographic than Playboy so, for the first few to ten minutes I am genuinely fascinated with what I see happening on the screen.

"It's not a regular movie, clearly. It's not even as carefully made as a B movie. the shots are like those in tacky home movies, the camera angles are amateurish, awkward and unbecoming. The plot is vague to the point of nonexistence, a list more than a plot, a string of unconnected events in chronological order. The perfect blow job rises from the realm of subtext like lava from a volcano, inundating a story landscape barren of meaning.

"The characters are repulsive human beings, stupid and selfish, complete slaves to their snake brains. The heroine looks like those idiot cheerleaders who make high school unbearable. The men look like the relief football team at a very small southern university. *This is what happens to jocks if they flunk high school algebra. These are the people who can't think their way out of paper bags. This is boring. This is stupid. What a long penis. How can he walk around with a penis that big? Is she really going to put that in her mouth? No wonder they call this deep throat, she'd have to have the Alaska pipeline in her throat to tuck that thing inside. That's it! It's not a woman, it's a pipeline in a body wrap.* I am warm. I take off my coat. I notice the opportunist beside me is looking uncomfortable. I realize that he's worried that his dick is not as big as the monstrosity in the movie. He is thinking that I will be disappointed when I see what undoubtedly must be a more humanly proportioned genital configuration. I turn down his offer of popcorn. I try and smile because I don't want him to worry about the size of his dick. I have something worse in mind for him.

"Whether or not the movie made sense, whether or not the plot was absurd, we were watching sexual acts, acts without personal attachments, ritualized acts which, awkwardly performed or not, tap the purpose of ritual, the power of ritual, to stimulate the instinctual. I had a coat on my lap. I have been accosted by men with coats on their laps, felt naked penises brushing against me on crowded buses, in parks, wherever the world is, there are men with coats covering naked penises. I took the geek's hand. I put his hand under the coat on my lap. I fluffed my coat so it covered both our laps, I took his hand and put it's square, sweaty, palm on my ritual inspired, hot, damp, crotch. *He is pleased.* This is obvious.

"He has nice hands. Feeling his hands is a lot nicer than looking at his face. Perhaps because is manually adept in his work there is a character and truth to his hands which is completely lacking in his face, his mannerisms and his language. I let him play with me, around my underpants, he is slow and not too pushy and we have to remain pretty mellow about the whole thing because the

theater is crowded and it's part of the deal that people be quiet, respecting the masturbatory rhythms of others.

"The first movie ended. We hadn't progressed far, we had experienced superficial clitoral stimulation and zipper stroking. I lost interest in the bozos on screen, I became irritable, even my snake brain was bored. Then the Devil and Miss Jones began. I surprised myself by being profoundly moved and actually interested in this wicked woman with her pock-marked face and unruly dark hair. She was a plebeian American version of Jeanne Moreau. She radiated independence, her ugliness was sexy, another kind of independence. She pursued sex, she was a starved huntress out for the perfect fuck. Like the characters in that hippie surfing movie, striving to find the perfect wave, she was an expert, a fanatic. She was brave. Her struggle turned me on. What she was struggling for mattered less to me than the heroic way she strove. I identified with her struggling. She was the first heroine I'd ever seen in a movie who was taking life into her own hands. She took responsibility for her sexual desire. The devil was a device, a way of describing her lust.

"She wasn't passive, a receiving tube like the cheerleader clone, she was a witch likely to be burnt. She knew something. She didn't know what she knew, but she knew that she knew something, and she'd be damned if she'd forget it without at least attempting to use it. *Let's see what we can do.*

"We went on with our manual manipulations during this movie. We did not kiss lips but I let him kiss my ear and my neck. I came. He didn't. He was saving himself I guess or he didn't want to make a mess, or he was a howler. Anyway, we had a good time and got real sweaty. It was fun. When the movie was over the lights stayed down while the credits rolled out of consideration for rearranging clothes. Zippers zipped. Raincoats returned to backs, shoulders and arms. Rags, kleenexes and such, surreptitiously tucked themselves under the seats. The geek put his arm around my raincoat covered shoulders. We re-entered the city in deep night.

It was no longer raining. It was warm. The streets were shiny and wet deep black under our feet. We walked about two sides of a block, there was my bus, I ran, caught it, and got on it. He was shocked still and staring. The bus driver must have been part of my dream because he hauled ass. We were out of there in an instant, leaving the geek alone, gasping for air.

"I ran and sat in the back of the bus and waved so I could watch his face while he realized that he did not know my name, he did not have my phone number, he did not know my address, he knew nothing except his dick was hard and his balls were so blue they robbed his face of that shade which explains why the last image I have of him in my mind is a glowing red face gradually being swallowed by a dark dark night like a warning light on a highway, gradually disappearing into the distance. I felt very good about myself. Isn't that terrible? I laughed all

the way home. I took a bath and laughed. I listened to music and laughed. I went to sleep and laughed in my dreams.

"I had stopped feeling obligated to take care of men's needs in the penis department. I was sick of taking in when I wanted to put out. I was sick of my dad putting himself everywhere, for sticking anyone who would let him, leaving his seeds to grow babies he had no intention of loving or tending. So many men disposing their garbage into loving, nurturing women who are not loved or nurtured, or even heard by the relentless garbage disposers who keep coming and coming and coming; nothing sure but death and taxes and cum.

"What can I say about this part of my life that won't make you hate me? How can you, who've had such a sheltered one-man life understand me, what I came to value? What do we have in common? You would know better than I.

"I once met a man who was dying who told me, quite seriously, that he had been fascinated with the concept of good and evil, he decided to dedicate his life to solving "the problem of evil." He did everything that he thought was evil to see if it made him feel evil. For thirty years he experiments, he can tell me frankly that he has discovered that there is no such thing as evil. I never slept with this man. He lived downstairs from me. When he was very sick at the end of his life he had no one to take care of him. I took his laundry to the cleaners, got his groceries. He didn't eat much by then. He had a nurse and a maid come in, he had money but he didn't seem to have any friends. His life reminded me of a Fassbinder movie. He had a mother, a very tiny frail little thing. I saw her once when I came to pick up his laundry. She was so tiny, the chair she was sitting in enveloped her. She looked very sad, about her tall son dying, but also sad about life, as if her life had been dedicated to sorrow, the weight of it collapsing her into this miniature doll-like person witnessing her equally dedicated son dying both bound by curiosity to a devastating purity.

"She reminded me of a friend of my mother's who had moved away from the neighborhood but she used to be a regular visitor to our house. She had a nice husband, boring but nice, and two kind of thick kids. She was a friend of my mother's from church. She believed so hard in the Lord, she was like those women crazed with love for Elvis, she suffered agonies of love for her King. She desperately wanted to be given a cross to bear. She couldn't believe herself saved, wholly in Christ, heaven bound, washed in the blood of the Lamb until God had blessed her with a her own personal cross.

"People tried to talk sense into her, she would throw back their crosses at them. She said that my father was my mother's cross; Virginity, my aunt's. She could see, rather insultingly, I thought, what was wrong with everyone else. We got to talking about her behind her back, saying her cross was her mouth, her negative attitude, looking always for what's wrong in life.

"Then, kapow, her youngest thick kid gets hit by a truck. There were never trucks in our neighborhood. This truck is lost. It has been lost for an hour and the guy is late and mad and running out of gas and he is trying to maneuver around basically ghetto streets filled with beat up cars and garbage cans, kids, balls and beer cans and this kid is not noticing this truck, everybody else is standing, pointing, laughing, amazed. It's as if Santa Claus has come to town. It is so unusual. But this kid, who is named Billy, drops his ball. It's the red ball he got for his birthday. The ball no one is allowed to touch unless they are playing catch with him. Then only if they swear to God, and on their mother's life, and a couple of other things Billy makes up to make it more personal, to touch the ball only when absolutely necessary, not to steal it, hug it or generally fuck it up. No one thinks this ball is any big deal but they swear cause sometimes there is no one else to play with or nothing else to do. At these times Billy and his red ball command the action on the street. When Mr. Salmonson turns to look at the truck, he says he can never forgive himself for this, he accidentally touches Billy's red ball, which Billy is holding only casually, as he has his eye on Miranda, who thinks he is stupid. Billy is trying hard to say smart things to Miranda so she will like him when Mr. Salmonson turns around and touches the red ball which flies out of Billy's arms and into the street, into the path of the oncoming truck with the cranky lost driver. Billy, oblivious, races after his ball and Santa Claus annihilates him right there in front of the whole neighborhood.

"The ball makes it to the other side of the street. Mr. Salmonson screams, "Oh My God Oh My God." Miranda throws up on her new dress, sobbing that she loved Billy all along. Billy is dead when the ambulance arrives. It's gross and no one who was there ever really gets over it. No one ever played on that part of the street again. Miranda gets very serious about her studies. But Billy's Mom is amazing, she has her cross, she wears black, she goes to church three times a day. Her boring husband leaves her for another woman. People, even the priest, tell her to straighten up before something happens to her daughter. But she adores her grief. She has been blessed. She throws herself into sorrow. She is no longer depressed. Her confusion vanishes. She devotes herself to *the poor*. Her daughter, left alone to her own devices, fourteen, lonely, gets pregnant and runs away with a young cop and they have a couple of really decent years before the cop gets shot. So everyone thinks the daughter did the best she could from a bad situation. The woman becomes a nun. We think they only took her because they were desperate. No one wants to be a nun anymore. I wonder why. The last we heard she was in Africa someplace writing postcards to Mr. Salmonson about the effect of dysentery on the souls of savages, the glory of the cross. Like that.

"The man who experimented with evil didn't seem much different from the woman who had thrown herself equally enthusiastically into the pursuit of goodness or the mother who had dedicated herself to sadness. It all led to the same lonely, tawdry, tragic, end."