

BOOK TWO

HAND TO MOUTH

Women are divinities, they are life.
Buddha

CHAPTER ONE

PIRATES

"Often I felt as though I was fighting a losing battle to retain my concept of romance. Finally I lost, romance released me and I was able to enjoy men for what they are - people. Please don't misunderstand me, what I am trying to say is that romance is a shadow play, is not the essence of us. Romance imposes a false formalized structure onto human relationships. Romance is a lie, a dance, a fiction, a blindness. People maim themselves in order to remain blind. They would rather hold onto the fictional romantic non-vision than risk seeing if love can rise with open eyes.

"Men are not universally strong nor women entirely flexible. We don our disguises for an evening out hoping that the other person will go along, will allow themselves to forget, will suspend disbelief, pretend that happiness is a prize externally accessible, that loving another is possible without loving ourselves. Increasingly I did not wish to make the effort.

"One particularly brutal boyfriend had me sucked into the infamous cycle of abuse. He would torture me mercilessly emotionally, promise things, take them away, never be where he said he would be, have affairs whenever he wished me to be distracted from my work. Whenever I had a big moment coming up, a deadline, a presentation, he would create a major disturbance and I would find myself functioning in a somnambulistic trance. After a few years my mind got vague. I could only go through things step by step. I was losing my hearing through endless ear infections. I knew that I was trying to not hear him, most of his brutality came through his words. He was sexually brutal too. I found myself torn and limping after sex. He would repeat something, some action, with his hands or his penis with no variation for so long that there was no chance of it causing pleasure. By the end of the relationship I remember we had to use oils

because I was so dry he would not be able to enter me even after extensive foreplay. Dry as a bone and stoned, I had to smoke pot or I couldn't do it at all. He was very important in the company I worked for, very good looking, beautiful clothes, we had a fantastic apartment which I kept spotless. We entertained often, til the end, when I was always sick.

"He had a sweet face except if you looked closely his eyes were small and his hands were crippled with early arthritis. He had an old man's hands but thick blond hair and blue eyes and he was tall and had a winning smile and, as I said, was highly admired in our company. He made executive decisions. Later I found out that his nickname on the factory floor was The Executioner. He never contradicted his superiors. He dressed for success, the IBM version. He said his style was creative new age management. But he fired all the women after he fucked them in bathrooms, closets or janitor stations. These are the things you find out later, after you disassociate yourself from someone. No one dares tell you when you're living with the guy, you might be in league with him, right?

"He reminded me often what a good man he was, how hard working he was, how much he loved me, how he could not live without my love, how much I did for him. He told me I was a little short of the mark, I needed to wear different clothes, change my hair style, stop thinking of my own needs and think more about his, keep the house cleaner, give better parties, be more understanding of his sexual needs, stop arguing with him, keep my voice down, stop crying, he can't get home any earlier, wasn't I serious about his success, did I want to jeopardize his career?

"One night, right before I left, he told me the motto of his life - "Money talks and bullshit walks." He had determined to do the talking. He would get enough money to say what he pleased. Unfortunately what he pleased to say was not original. Eventually, I took the role of bullshit and walked.

"My ear infection was worse. I was sleeping late. The sun came through a mostly cloudy sky and poured itself onto my face. I opened my eyes into sunlight and for a minute I didn't know where I was. I didn't move. I looked around the room. The sun made all the dust on the floor, in the corners, on the bed table, everywhere, apparent. I thought, *This room is filthy*. I looked around some more. I sat up, still in sunshine. I said aloud to myself, "I better clean it." I sat there. I kept looking at this beautiful room that I had decorated. I could vaguely remember the hopes in my heart when I had begun.

"Somehow I knew I'd never clean that room again. It was the mausoleum of a defunct love. Blandly, my inner voice said, *I guess I'll buy a paper, look for a place, I can't live in a dirty apartment*. I found an apartment that afternoon. I was gone by the end of the week. He came back from a business trip to a note. I left him most of the furniture, the stereo, and everything that was his. I took my favorite kitchen utensils, the things from my childhood, some sun catchers. There wasn't

much of me in the apartment, I had no regrets about leaving it, even though I had been the one who had searched and found it for us, I had done it for him, it made sense to leave it to him.

"He was furious. He came storming over to my new apartment. He almost beat me. He slapped me a couple of times, put a hole in my new coffee table. He didn't rape me. He made himself cry because he spilled the glass of red wine I had offered him all over his expensive white shirt, the \$150 shirt he had worn to his last big wig meeting. The shirt was ruined. The wine on his chest might as well have been blood from the spear I had thrown into his heart. He would be back, don't think I could be rid of him so easily, my career was ruined, things like that spewed out of his money talks mouth. But my ears were still pretty blocked up from the infection and I was stoned. I had bummed some pot from a neighbor because I'd heard that, if you're relaxed, pain hurts less. He left in tears, the stain on his shirt really bothered him.

"For weeks I jumped whenever I heard steps outside my door. My heart convulsed when I heard a knock on the door or the doorbell ringing. Footsteps approaching fast on the street, anything remotely sinister like that really freaked me out for awhile. He never came back. Eventually I calmed down. I never went back to work. I got a different job. Some friends at my old job told me he had knocked up the marketing director. She was a tough cookie from an old fashioned family. He had to marry her. The capitalagnostalist got pressured into a church wedding.

"I saw the happy couple in the supermarket a few years back. He's fat now, his eyes have disappeared altogether into his head. She looks good. I heard they give great parties. She's more ambitious than he is. I think he's stuck somewhere in the middle rungs of the corporate ladder. I try to imagine them fucking, it's impossible. Word has it that he likes teenage boys and her idea of excitement is a busy day with her gold card.

"Why did I care what happened to them? I wanted to know that bad people end badly. I wanted to know that as a way of determining my own future, as a way to motivate myself towards goodness. I've changed my mind since. I figure you have to let go of that whole grid, that good versus bad stuff kept me locked into a predetermined type of event, the type that defies transcendence. It's a big seesaw. I had to get off that tottering plank, stagger over to the cosmic roller coaster and climb aboard."