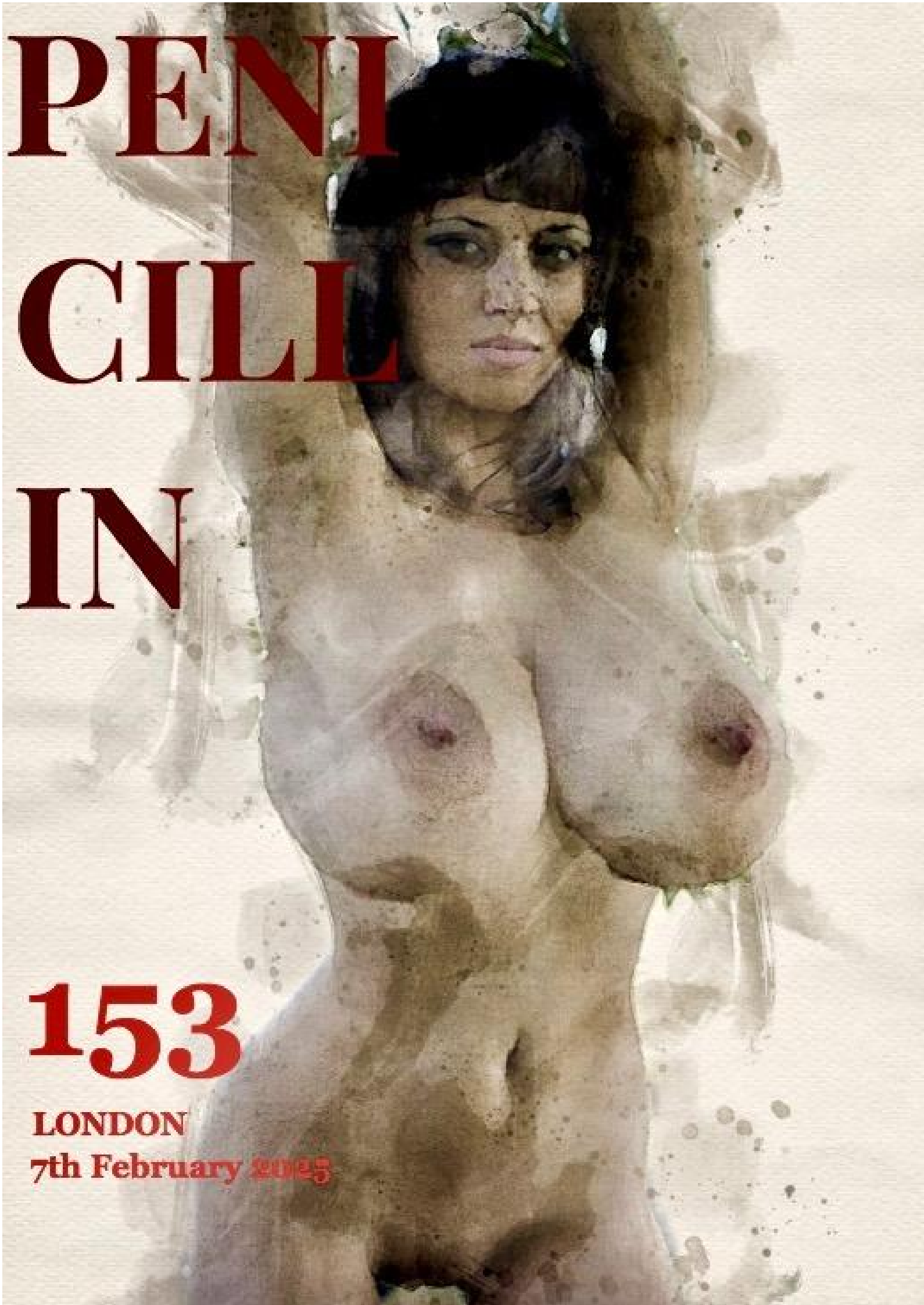




PENI CILL IN

153

LONDON

7th February 2025

THE MEAT MACHINE

By David Playfair

COPYRIGHT VITAL PRESS © 2022

Chapter Eight—Flight North

I didn't know my escorts, but I recognized the cap badges of Kremlin bodyguards. Not people you argue with. The driver floored the gas pedal and the big car — one of the new Chaikas — shot down the center lane reserved for ambulances, fire engines and high-ranking officials. The six big cylinders hummed in perfect quiet timing. I could hear the tires hiss on the snowy road and the scratch of a match as one of my escorts lit a cigarette.

'The boss wanted a word with you at the Kremlin, see,' he explained, 'but then the Finnish war heated up and he took off to the north. He's sorting out the campaign right now. So we must follow.'

'Long drive,' I remarked.

'We've got a plane waiting. Stalin's own Number Two machine. Night flight.'

I wasn't exactly delighted to hear that. Back then there was no radar — at least not outside experimental laboratories. Night flights were emergency procedures, risky at best and near-suicidal at worst. The captain couldn't tell which way he was going. He put his life — and the lives of everybody else on board — in the hands of the navigator. Which is why I asked: 'Good navigator?'

'The best!' said my escort. 'Well, second best. The boss has the best one on his Number One plane, of course.'

So maybe it wouldn't be white-knuckle all the way.

One of the new Ilyushin four-seat transports was waiting for us. Rapid introductions were made, which reassured me that my sudden abduction had been done from haste and not hostility. As we climbed aboard I noticed 5,000 air-kilometers on the cockpit odometer. A good start, I thought — distance enough to shake out the bugs but not so much as to wear things out. I was still

more reassured to find that the air force Colonel who was to pilot us was a woman.

When it comes to delivering the goods, babies or passengers, there's more of the right stuff in one gram of progesterone than a whole kilogram of testosterone. Call me sexually biased if you like, so long as you call me alive too. I found myself sitting next to the navigator, who was also radio operator. Our plane had top priority with the control tower. Colonel Byelova, our flight captain, wasted no time. She finished the pre-flight checks while taxiing to the runway, then poured on the power into a fast climb. We pushed upward, into gray featureless dusk.

The navigator was a cheerful redheaded Jew called Stern, which is German for "Star". An auspicious name, I thought, as I watched him peer through the already scratched perspex window at the gaps between the clouds. The sky was already dark enough to show a few stars.

'There!' he cried in triumph, pointing to a faint fuzzy gleam. 'Good old Rigel — never lets me down. Now I can shoot the angle.' And he produced a gadget which looked like a slide-rule hand-computer having sex with a telescope while watching themselves in a mirror.

'Nice machine,' I said. 'Soviet invention?'

Stern laughed. 'Why, man, these things have been around since the 18th century. Captain Cook took one around the world with him. It's a sextant.'

'Can't they give you something more modern?'

'Wouldn't want anything more modern. This little darling,' and he patted the gadget with great affection, 'does everything I want and never needs new batteries.'

'How come?'

'Cause it doesn't have batteries! I just point it, shoot my star, write down the reading and away we go.'

'Comrade, how can you know one star from another?'

'How do you tell one girlfriend from another? I've been watching them so long I just know.'

He laughed again. 'Seriously, though, Rigel is always at the foot of Orion, the swordsman. Only the dog star — Sirius — is brighter, and it always hangs low with a blue tinge.' He paused to admire his star as it flickered into sight again. 'Now, comrade, I have to concentrate.'

I shut up and watched him write down the apparent air speed, wind velocity as estimated in advance by the weather bureau, fuel consumption and weight of crew and cargo. Then he looked out of the window again, at the wings this time. 'The skipper aims to keep her above the hills and below the freezing rain clouds — and I think she's succeeding. No icing up so far,' he explained. Then he went to the empty bombing hatch and looked down. I looked over his shoulder. A frozen river gleamed in the moonlight, next to faint lights from a town on the bank. 'There now,' he exclaimed, 'see the smoke-plume from that factory chimney! Better than a wind sock. You don't see it? Not enough raw carrot in your diet, I guess.'

Next he took bearings from a compass set on his table. 'I have to correct these for the amount of steel on board. It'd be different with a full bomb load.'

By now Stern had covered the top half of the paper on his table with figures. I wondered when he'd put them all together, but he wasn't ready yet. He moved forward and crouched behind the Captain for a spell. I wondered what he could see out of the window — it all looked black to me — then I realized he was watching the captain's hands on the controls. After ten minutes of that he seemed satisfied, and moved back to the paper and charts on the little navigation table, snagging a paper cup of tea on the way. He switched on a battery-light, picked up a pencil and set to work. I watched as all his data focused to answer one simple question — where were we? I wondered which figure represented the steadiness of the captain's grip. For all I knew one of them featured the ripples on the surface of his tea. The calculation went as fast as his preparations for it had been slow. In less time than it's taken me to describe this, Stern was done. He sat back from his table with a smile.

'We're over Rameshki and moving with the wind, 10 degrees off course but 20 minutes ahead of schedule.'

Stern went forward to inform the captain, leaving me with my thoughts. I'd been watching a wizard, in the form of a modest Jewish technical sergeant. The plane plunged on through the dark void.

My eyes became better dark-adapted as we journeyed on.

We were heading for the edge of the continent, where the land gives way to lakes and the sea gives way to islands. This was the shatter-zone where northern empires collide and crumble. I spotted the blank white outline of Lake Ilmen far below us. I could even see the fifty rivers which carry titanium sand to its shores.

A hundred kilometers westward, and seven centuries ago, Alexander Nevsky's Russians had smashed the Teutonic Knights on the ice of Lake Peipus. A hundred kilometers northward, and in the immediate present, Russians and Finns battled on the ice of Lake Ladoga. Our plane headed for the great city which Emperor Peter I had ordered built near the shore of that very lake.

Stern worked his magic twice more during the journey. Between-times, we talked. Starting as second crewman in a Stormovik dive-bomber, he'd been picked as Stalin's back-up navigator.

'This is a cushy posting,' Stern confided, 'but after the front-line in Spain and Mongolia and Finland I could do with a break.'

'How was the Finnish war going when you left it?' I asked.

Stern whistled.

'Tough going, comrade, tough going.' He watched the steam rise from his tea cup, his eyes distant. 'Red or White, I don't think there is such a thing as a weak Finn. And too many of the Red ones went down in 1919...'

Twenty years before, Finland had been the scene of a ferocious civil war between capitalist and communist. Unlike Russia, capitalism came out on top — and most of the communists were shot. Stalin wasn't simply extending the frontier of the Union when he sent his army into Finland. He was also seeking revenge for his dead comrades.

I was forward with the captain when our destination came in sight. Whatever its current name — and that changed three times in my lifetime — Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad is still the most beautiful city of the world.

Tall dignified buildings gleamed in the street lights. All looked harmonious and serene as our big plane whispered down toward the airport. I noticed quite a lot of other air traffic. An old triplane ahead of us had neglected to switch on its wing lights...

Then the street lights went out and the searchlights came on...

BANG! WHAM! SMASH! Three round puffs of smoke stuffed with spiky flame sprang into being around our plane's nose.

'What in the hell...' I began.

'Compose yourself, Comrade,' said Captain Byelova in a gentle conversational voice. 'Those are merely exploding anti-aircraft shells, a routine hazard in any war zone. Nothing that the standard evasive maneuvers can't handle.'

And she turned the plane into a bank so tight that my stomach flipped upside-down.

How right she was. Gunfire is gunfire. Indignation that its source is "friendly" is an irrelevant waste of energy. I stifled my questions and let her work. She headed for a nice fat fluffy cloud that still lingered from the day's cumulus. I backed away into the crew compartment where Stern was furiously talking into the radio.

'Come in, come in, ground control. This is Soviet military transport SG86308, arriving from Moscow and you are firing at us!'

I put my hand on his shoulder. He took a deep breath and started again in quieter tones. 'Comrades, this is Soviet military transport SG86308, that means we are on the same side as you, and we would be extremely grateful if you would cease from trying to kill us. Over and out.'

And he paused again, but still no reply came. He seized the radio's front cover and hauled it off. We scanned the row of vacuum tubes beneath.

'Look!' I cried, pointing to the second tube from the left. 'The triode filament's broken. Can you replace it?'

'No problem,' grunted Stern as he pulled a box of spares from under his seat. He ripped off the lid. There were six new tubes in the box. He grabbed one and fitted it in — I'd already unplugged the broken tube — then he started anew on his broadcast. No response.

'Is that tube broken too?' he exclaimed. I shone his flashlight through the tube's glass wall - this filament was broken too - and we hadn't even used it!

They hadn't invented transistors in 1940. Which is why I was on my knees in a plunging plane, metal splinters spitting past my head, rummaging in a little cardboard box. I passed the tubes up to Stern, one by one. Every damned one of them was faulty! Nothing remained in the box but a scrap of paper. I was so full of adrenaline that all around me seemed slowed to near standstill. The flashlight beam shone full on the paper and I had time to read inspected by... followed by a signature which was an indecipherable squiggle. I pushed the note in my pocket and looked up just in time to see a piece of steel punch through the fuselage wall, take the top off Stern's head as neatly as a knife through a hard-boiled egg, and fly out the other side. Obviously we were no longer protected by cloud cover. To make things worse, we were transfixed by a pair of searchlight beams.

Through the holes punched in the fuselage I saw that we weren't the only aircraft being lit up. We were in the center of an airborne historical pageant. I saw the triplane again — it would have done credit to Baron von Richthofen — next a pair of Sopwith Pups came by, then a Handley-Page o/400 bomber. Those crazy gallant Finns had sent over every plane they owned, World War I trainers and all. The bombs these old planes carried couldn't have done any appreciable damage to the city — even the Handley-Page couldn't carry more than eight hundred kilograms. Their mission was near to suicide, yet if it could get Stalin's personal aircrew shot down by their own people it could hardly be dismissed as futile. It reminded me of a car accident I'd once investigated. A little wasp had killed two men and crippled a third, simply by panicking the driver into losing control of the wheel.

Bits of useless vacuum tubes scrunched under my feet as I leaned over towards the captain. Straining myself to stay calm I spoke in clear measured tones.

'Excuse me, Captain, the radio is failed, your navigator is dead, and the gunners have our range.'

'Very well,' said the Captain, in the same conversational right-stuff tone, 'let's leave this piece of sky.'

She put the plane into a shallow dive headed straight for the airport. 'I'm going to land this crate right now, and air traffic control can sort priority out later.'

The wind screamed through the flak holes as we hurtled down. I saw vehicles scattering from our path, and then we were down, with a thump that buckled the undercarriage. We rolled and skidded our way down the runway, carried on across the grass and came to a gentle stop against a large tree.

'Excellent!' declared Captain Byelova, as we clambered out of the dented door. 'Any landing one walks away from is a good one, not so? We'll miss Stern, though, a fine man and a brilliant navigator. And just what was wrong with the radio?'

I handed her the inspection slip. She frowned, and I could see the indecipherable squiggler was in for a very hard time. And the squiggler's family too — relatives of a prison camp inmate are doomed to poverty and suspicion. But I was not in any charitable mood.

A car drew up with a very nervous military officer behind the wheel.

'Relax, comrade,' said Byelova in her calm voice. 'Though your anti-aircraft batteries proved too inaccurate to destroy us all, you may still redeem yourself by conveying Major Kublev and me to Command Headquarters.'

They delivered us right to the front of the old Ekaterinsky palace.

* * *

'He's waiting in the amber room,' the guard at the front lobby said to me. He didn't specify who "he" was, but I could guess. The guards frisked me, and gave me a receipt for my revolver. (This was a sign of the times — suspicion had become the order of the day ever since Stalin's friend Kirov had been assassinated.) We walked down a wide corridor — or maybe it was a narrow hall

— for what seemed like half a kilometer. The guards' boots rang and echoed. Doors were flung open.

Stalin was in there, as I'd expected. He looked just like his portraits — big nose over big mustache — but shorter in stature. It wasn't his presence, though, that made me gasp. It was the room that so amazed me. I'd walked into a world bathed in golden light. The "amber room" really was a room of amber. Walls, ceiling and floor were a mosaic of amber tiles, all glowing golden-orange in the light from a yellow lamp with amber shades.

I'd seen amber before on the coasts of the Arctic ocean. It's resin from the evergreen trees — what the peasants call "forest myrrh". The trees which made this amber grew in the prehistory of the Arctic archipelago. Once those islands bore thick forests where elephants and tigers roamed and honey bees buzzed. Thick sticky sap flowed down the bark and clumped in the soil. Until the great sheets of ice came down and scraped all before them into the sea.

Years of rolling around in salt water had fossilized the resin into hard lumps. To gather enough for this whole room must have taken a century.

Stalin was sitting at a chess table — squares and pieces of red and white amber — and gazing into the depths of the red queen. He turned to greet me. 'Kublev, isn't it? Sit down, please. There's work to be planned. But we'll have a drink first.'

Even the small bottle and the tinier cups were hollowed out from blocks of amber. The drink was golden too — cloudberry liqueur.

'You like the amber? A present from Frederick the Great to Peter the Great. And now we enjoy it.' He set down his drink and passed the chess piece to me. 'Hold it up to the light, comrade. Do you see the bee?'

And there it was, inside an amber time capsule, as perfect in form now as when the sap drowned it a million years ago.

'She's a little communist worker from a warm flowering clime. That's why the Greeks believed there was a fertile northland — Hyperborea — far beyond the Arctic. They never found it, and now we know why not. Hyperborea was the golden age of the past. Now the climate is changed for the worse and we live in a poor wintry place. Today's class war is but a struggle for remnants left from better times. We have to get it over with, though, before we can start the new golden age.'

He raised his cup again. 'To the Communist future, to our Hyperborea beyond Socialism.'

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was not a Union of Soviet Communist Republics. Socialism was merely our battle order for the struggle against capitalism. Communism was the distant dream, the ultimate goal, the golden plateau above the clouds.

'You play chess?' Stalin was asking. 'No? But you're a Russian, you know the rules of play. So tell me about this game before us...'

It wasn't the conventional starting line-up. There were white pieces at both ends of the board. The reds stood in the space between.

'Red is fighting on two fronts,' I said. 'Difficult... no proper rear. But not impossible... Red has faster lines of communication... those castles and bishops point either way. While either lot of whites would hesitate — whichever

attacks first would be outnumbered and beaten up. Then the other lot would get the spoils.'

'Precisely,' said Stalin. 'Here our Red Army stands, between two lots of White Fascists, German ones in the West and Japanese in the East. I can win this chess game if I can know the minds of our opponents. That's where you come in.'

I was astonished. 'Surely, Comrade Stalin, you're more likely to meet Adolf Hitler than I.'

'It hasn't turned out that way,' he answered thoughtfully. 'Hitler knows I'll read his mind if we ever meet. He's careful to send his lackeys to negotiate. I admire his vision and style, yet sometimes I wonder if he's always stable. This business with the Jews, for instance — he takes it further than expedient. I watch every German news film we can get, but it's not enough. He eludes me. Whereas a lower rank might get past his guard.'

His voice grew firmer. 'He's more likely to confide in a humble sausage-merchant than a fellow-dictator. Watch for your chance. Ulbricht wants you to reconnect the German Communist party. That's important. Beria wants to know the battle order of the German armies near our borders. That's even more important. But to know the mind of Hitler... That would take priority over all.'

He brooded over the cluster of red pieces in the middle of the board. 'This Finnish skirmish has taught us a lot. Not enough ski troops, not enough winter uniforms, not enough tanks...' (*nor enough good vacuum tubes either*, I thought.) '...too many old-time generals. We're putting all that right. Marshal Tukhachevsky's out and Marshal Zhukov's in. Voroshilov's made a bit of a mess of this Finnish campaign, but that'll soon be put right.'

'It was Zhukov that defeated the Japanese invasion last year, wasn't it, Comrade Stalin?'

'That's right. With a bit of help from the Mongols. Stopped them dead in their tracks. They never got past the Mongolian borderland. A brilliant bit of work. They won't be back our way in a hurry. Maybe they'll try attacking the Americans next instead... Yes... We've got the Germans to watch out for now. Hitler will attack one of these years. He'd never be such a fool as to try it before 1942, but which year after that? How I wish I knew...'

He clapped me on the shoulder. 'We can win whatever comes up, comrade. But do try to find out just when and what it will be.'

I supposed that was the end of our meeting, but he made no sign to dismiss me. He was silently staring at the red amber chess queen again. I wasn't sure what to do next, so I did nothing, which turned out to be the correct thing. Over the next year I was to get more used to being around dictators. I was to discover that they use their entourage as an aid to thought. My job was to be an intelligent echo.

'There were too many queens,' said Stalin suddenly.

'Excuse me, comrade?'

'We won the revolution because the capitalists forgot that pawns can convert to queens. But what to do with them all afterwards? This little communist,' and he pointed to the bee in amber, 'had one queen only in

command. That's the way it has to turn out. Tomsy, Trotsky, Tukhachevsky — they all played their part, but they wouldn't retire. What else could have been done but to *liquidate* them?

"Liquidate" was a popular word in those days. It meant more than the arrest and execution of the disgraced. All their friends were investigated, maybe arrested too.

Any books they'd written were thrown out of the libraries or, worse, left as traps for unwary patrons. We police were in the thick of it, of course. Perhaps one reason I'd welcomed this new assignment was to get away from arresting people who'd simply read the wrong books or got the wrong brothers-in-law. Of course such thoughts were never voiced by the wise.

'Well,' said Stalin, 'I don't expect any of those prima-ballerina attitudes from Zhukov. A good working-class lad. Used to be in the furriers' union, did you know? They were always a solid bunch. Good sense of humor. I remember one May Day parade when they demonstrated a plan to skin and stuff all the crowned heads of Europe. They were going to mount them in a diorama at the natural history museum. Next to the dinosaurs!'

He shook my hand. 'Good fortune in your mission, comrade sausage-maker.'

I saluted. The audience was over. I retrieved my sidearm and headed out. I hadn't expected to see Colonel Byelova again, but she'd waited for me. While I'd been talking with Stalin, she'd requisitioned another car, a Zim, from the command motor pool. She'd changed out of her uniform too, and for the first time in our brief but intense acquaintance I met her as a private individual. And what did I see?

An ordinary-looking woman. Medium height, medium build, with an ordinary face — small chin, snub nose, iron-gray hair tied back in a bun, wearing a brown suit of ordinary cut. She might have been any of those solid Russian women who serve your groceries or teach kindergarten or fix your plumbing.

She looked like somebody's aunt, no one special, the sort I'd politely shake hands with at a friend's wedding reception and then not give a second look. So why was I giving her a second look now? In fact, why was I gazing at her like a dumbstruck schoolboy? Maybe because she was so very good at being ordinary that it did make her special.

Her eyes — gray with brown flecks — were unusually steady. Her sensible suit was a rather good English tweed. She wore no make-up but her perfume — a nice rose-petal scent — was better quality than the usual Soviet brand. She must have noticed my appreciative sniff, because she broke the silence.

'It should smell good, comrade. Ten pounds a bottle from Harrods in London. A little souvenir from flying the ambassador to Britain.' She gave a broad smile. 'Come on, Major, you can look at me some more when we get to the hotel.'

I was still more than a little tense when we drew up to the Alexander Nevsky Hotel. It's not every day that a close brush with death is immediately followed by a chat with the ruler of two hundred million people.

Byelova ordered brandies, and sat by my side in the lounge, and little by little I felt myself unwind. The more we talked the more I liked her. Though I knew we hadn't met before the flight, she seemed strangely familiar.

Like me, Byelova had grown up in a poor peasant family. She was seven years older than me, and was already married with four children when the Civil War broke out. I thought I'd seen some rough times as a teenage soldier, but she put me straight on that.

'There's nothing so hard, Ivan, as having children looking to you for food when there's none to be had. Once you're a parent you've given hostages to fortune. They're small and weak, and you can't do a thing without allowing for their needs. And even then your best may not be enough...'

She drank more brandy and went on. 'I had four children. One starved after the armies took our grain. One was shot by a sentry for trying to steal a handful of it back. One died of typhus. Well, you're a peasant too. You must know the rhyme about seed corn...'

I did indeed know the rhyme, and we both started to recite together.

'One for the mouse, one for the crow,

One to rot, and one to grow.'

'So what about the one that did grow up?' I asked.

'Oh, my Natasha? She's a mother herself now, still lives on the farm. Married the blacksmith. Drives a tractor.'

'You're a grandmother?'

'You bet. So should you be a grandfather, if you hadn't been too busy chasing crooks.'

'I wouldn't have been much of a parent, always off on some mission...'

'It's true, there has to be one spouse steady in one place. With us, it's my husband who stays put. He was just a poor peasant when we met, now he's chairman of the collective farm, but he's still in the village.'

'My parents are still living in my home village,' I said. 'My sister's still there, husband, two kids. I'm the unmarried rover.'

'Oh, Ivan, don't let them die without more grandchildren. They're the future. And a dangerous job is all the more reason for passing on your germ-plasm. Why, Stern had three kids, did you know?'

That's when the reaction hit me. *If it had been Stern crouching down over the box of vacuum tubes and me standing up to fix the radio... And now three poor little kids would never see their dad again...* These thoughts made me break into a cold sweat. I began shivering from head to toe. With great difficulty I set down my brandy glass — it rattled on the table.

Byelova put her arm firmly under mine, lifted me to my feet and walked me into the elevator. She took the hotel key from my jacket pocket and noted the number. Without a word she stopped the elevator at the third floor, led me to my room, and locked the door behind us.

'It's been a long day, Major,' she said. 'Time for bed.' She folded back a corner of the bedclothes. 'Now do sit down, or I'll never get your tie off.'

That wasn't all she took off. After she'd got me down to bare skin — methodically folding each garment onto a chair — and tucked me into the bed, she began undressing herself too. I was still shaking, but no longer so badly that

I couldn't notice how well she was built. Looking up from pillow level I saw strong stocky legs, thick springy pubic hair and a firm round belly with stretch marks. Large long breasts with dark nipples blocked off any higher view, or at least they did until she sat on the edge of the bed.

'Just got to let my hair down,' said Byelova. She reached up — thick graceful arms, dark armpits — and started pulling hairpins. Her hair tumbled down over her breasts. 'That's better.'

With that she clicked off the light, slid into the bed, wrapped her arms around me — and fell asleep. And so, to my surprise, did I, breathing in the scent of rose petals and healthy female sweat, my head resting comfortably between her breasts. Before I drifted off into dreams, though, it came to me where I'd met Byelova before. She was my mother. Or rather, she was what my mother could have been — should have been — if she'd had decent food and education. But, things being the way they were, mother never came into her prime. Like most peasant women in the bad old days, she'd slipped from first bloom into early old age.

I slept like a stone for nine hours. Byelova woke me. She was fully dressed, and handed me a glass of tea and a smoked salmon sandwich.

'I've been on the phone for an hour,' she said, 'and it's all organized. We bury Stern at 1400 hours, full military honors.'

'I don't have a uniform.'

'You do now. The military tailors found one your size and valet service is pressing it right now. Now, get out of that bed and shower. The smell of fear brings out the mother in me, but now I've got other requirements to be met.' Not quite sure what she meant, but glad to have things under control, I stumbled into the shower. After ten minutes at full heat and one minute of ice-cold I began to feel my proper self again. There was a knock at the door — I wrapped a towel round my waist and took delivery of my new uniform. All was correct, even the medal ribbons. She must have taken time to check with Personnel.

Carrying the clothes, I turned around to the bed... and found Byelova lying on it, without a stitch of clothing. She was on her back, relaxed with her hands behind her head, knees bent and thighs apart. She laughed to see me. 'Thought you'd never come out. You must be very clean by now. Drop that silly towel, and show me what you can do.'

I saluted and clambered over her. The bed was a good old-fashioned model with a board at the end. We fitted perfectly and climaxed together, rather noisily. Afterwards we lay quietly, still joined.

'Ivan,' she whispered in my ear, 'you can be my co-pilot again any day. In fact, I feel ready to go again right now...'

She paused. 'Except, right now,' she said in a businesslike tone of voice, 'we've got a funeral to get ready for. As for the plane, the flak holes in the fuselage are already patched, but they'll have to work all day and night to mend the undercarriage. I hope it won't be too much of a nuisance for you to hang around with me till then...'

NEXT WEEK—Chapter Nine—Poetry



THE CASTLE OF FU MANCHU

(1969)

Reviewed by D4Doom

Fifth of a ROSALBA NERI retrospective

Both Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels and the movies based on them are major guilty pleasures of mine. *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, made in 1969, was the second Fu Manchu movie to be directed by Jess Franco, and it was also the last real Fu Manchu movie. And it marked Christopher Lee's fifth appearance as the fiendish arch-villain. There was a 1980 Fu Manchu spoof starring Peter Sellers, but that doesn't really count.



The Castle of Fu Manchu ends with Dr Fu Manchu promising that the world will hear from him again. It seems more and more unlikely that will ever happen. I can't imagine any modern film-maker daring to try to resurrect this series. Which is a great pity. It's a symptom of the increasingly lack of fun in our modern world.

The Jess Franco Fu Manchu movies, and this one in particular, are often criticised for their exceptionally low production values and their lack of historically accurate settings and even costumes. Personally I don't really mind. I see this as an example of Franco's ability to make entertaining movies on budgets of almost nothing. And Fu Manchu movies are supposed to be campy fun, and on that level I think *The Castle of Fu Manchu* succeeds.

This time around Fu Manchu is using water as a weapon in his plans for world domination. He has found a scientist who

has perfected a method of turning water into ice, even in warm temperatures. And the method works on large bodies of water. In fact it has the potential to work on very large bodies of water indeed - entire seas if necessary. As a first step the evil doctor creates an iceberg in the tropics and sends an ocean liner to the bottom of the Caribbean Sea.

Once again the world's only hope of salvation is the courage and determination of the doctor's arch-nemesis Nayland Smith. This time Nayland Smith has an unlikely ally. Fu Manchu had made a temporary alliance with a Turkish drug baron, and then turned on his erstwhile ally. Even worse, he captured and imprisoned the drug baron's beautiful machinegun-toting girlfriend Lisa (Rosalba Neri). Fu Manchu has also kidnapped an eminent surgeon, needing his services to keep alive the ailing scientist who discovered the technique of changing the nature of water at will. The surgeon and his beautiful female assistant join the alliance against Fu Manchu.

The great strength of the movie is the teaming of Christopher Lee and Tsai Chin as Fu Manchu and his wicked sadistic daughter. They played these roles in all five 1960s Fu Manchu movies, and played the roles exceptionally well. Richard Greene is a perfectly adequate Nayland Smith. The real bonus in this film is Rosalba Neri. Putting her in male drag and giving her a machinegun was an inspired decision. She looks even sexier than usual and deadly to boot.

It's best not to think about the production values at all. If you try to spot all the glaring anachronisms you'll go mad. It's a popcorn movie, so the best approach is to just go with the flow. And this movie is fun. It's silly fun, but it's supposed to be silly. The DVD extras feature Jess Franco, Christopher Lee and producer Harry Alan Towers reminiscing about the production. Franco is always entertaining to listen to, and Christopher Lee is surprisingly unembarrassed by the movie.



Half term. So many MILFs out there this week.
Marquis de Shard, 1862 #foxinchickencoop

HOW TO TALK TO AN EDITOR: PROCESS & ITS DISCONTENTS



By Nick August

Starting is easy; finishing is hard. -- Jason Calcanis

"Alice thought to herself 'I don't see how he can ever finish, if he doesn't begin'." — *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll

"Beware of anyone who asks, 'Will you proofread my manuscript?' the cat said." Or something like that. Proofreading is a term left over from the days when someone would compare the final manuscript with the plates produced by the printing press to make sure that those who arranged the letters on the press didn't fuck something up. I think it can be a useful term these days if understood in a different context, but that is a matter for another article. This article is about what goes into the process of editing.

Editing, as I've been writing about, is either a specific task, a series of tasks, or contradictory tasks. If it's a single task, what is it? If it's a series, what are they and how does one go about implementation? Where does one start, and finish, and how does one know he's finished?

If it's contradictory tasks, when does one start drinking, or stop?

Taken as a whole, "editing" is most certainly a term whose meaning encompasses a wide range of tasks, from copy editing (basic grammar and mechanics) to line editing (syntax and flow) to developmental editing (structure and composition). Even those three are sometimes considered by many as broad categories which can be further broken down which is why it's important to ask potential clients what they are asking for when they propose that you might edit their work. What do they mean when they say that? What do they actually expect? As I often point out, they probably don't know, which can be bad, and, sometimes, the prospective editor also doesn't know or doesn't ask, which can be worse.

At some point, the person doing the editing has to sit down with the manuscript and do something. But what? He and the author better have worked that out with a good amount of clarity.

What follows is an exposition of a pipe dream. It's what probably should happen when a freelance editor is hired by an independent, self-published writer to do what I call a "kitchen sink" edit, i.e., an edit where the editor is expected to make it readable, stylistically correct, and grammatically correct. This seems to be the general expectation but usually expressed in much more vague terms by the author/client. I'm not shitting on the writer here. Very often he's new to the game and hasn't really thought about it much before, and why should he? Who on Earth besides the mentally deranged would think about such things if they didn't have to?

But I digress. Let's cut the shit and get to the meat and potatoes. Copy editing is a much different task from line editing which is a much different task from developmental editing—not to mention story development, if that's included. That's why the big publishing houses often have senior editors who work with authors on story and such, and junior editors or copy editors who deal with the lower level

mechanics of the work. It has a pragmatic purpose and a practical effect: Multiple readers don't tire of the work as easily or develop blind spots, and the division of labor ensures that each task is completed with maximum focus on that particular task. Commercial publishers have budgets to support that sort of workflow which costs them more than a couple thousand bucks per manuscript.

The flaw in the kitchen sink approach is that one person is usually responsible for at least two tasks: copy editing and line editing. Ideally, that requires two passes through a manuscript since each task requires a different approach, a different mode of thinking, and switching back and forth between them is precarious in terms of quality of work as well as mentally exhausting.

Enter economics. As I'm fond of saying as often as possible, Economics drives history; ideology (or whatever) is just the song playing on the radio. Feel free to substitute "professionalism," "quality," etc. for "ideology." You're generally going to get what you pay for most of the time. There are exceptions, and I've been a part of some, I think, but they simply prove the rule. How much quality are you going to get for the \$300 you want to spend for someone to make sure "it reads good"?

The self-published author's dilemma is much like the non-technical business person's quandary when he wants to spend his life savings of \$100,000 on starting an e-commerce business. Maybe he's a salesman. Maybe a corporate exec. He's probably not a software engineer. How does he know who to hire? What software platform to use? How to know if he's paying too much?

He doesn't, of course, so he has to partner with others who already have those answers, or hire someone who has them to act as his agent and advisor.

The self-published author may not know anything about editing from a pragmatic or economic standpoint, but his decision is probably based primarily on financials (here's how much I'm willing to spend) instead of priorities (here's what I need most so how much will I have to spend to get that). The result? Our intrepid author buys a pig in a poke that is marked with the right price tag. Hilarity ensues.

More digression, sorry, but it matters, so not sorry.

Enter editor guy. His process probably needs to be fairly structured if he's going to catch everything he needs to catch. This means two passes through the manuscript: one for basic grammar and mechanics (including spelling, typos, etc.) and one to deal with all those poorly-written phrases the reader will be forced to pause and decipher and so ruin both the experience and the story/essay/whatever.

For the smart writer, there's another aspect to this process: You should spend enough so that your editor will take the time to analyze your strengths and weaknesses and give you a profile of what they are. Where grammar and mechanics are concerned, you can easily remedy those problems so that you can afford to allot more of your editor's fee towards higher-level considerations, more time for line editing and developmental issues.

So financial considerations and the author conspire to spend only \$300, and financial considerations and the editor conspire to minimize time spent because the more time spent chasing that \$300 payday is time not spent drumming up new work or getting paid more to do the same kind/amount of work. Time is money, yes, but time is also process, so process is money, too.

What is the first thing that goes out the window when financial considerations are an issue? A sound, productive process. The editor will most likely "fix" grammar and mechanics and syntax as composition in bits as he goes. Some can do this better than others, but no one does it as well as it could otherwise be done by multiple persons performing singular tasks, or the same individual performing each task with focus in separate stages.

Editing, like writing, is tedious work.

I do it because I'm good at it and I can do it from anywhere. I enjoy the work overall, but it's not "fun." As a freelance editor, I end up wearing many hats, so a structured process is necessary to provide decent results for clients and keeps my own fuck-ups to a minimum. Ideally, the best, most minimal process would look like this:

- Editor does initial read of entire manuscript and gives developmental notes to author. This may be one discussion or several.
- Author rewrites parts of manuscript based on his acceptance of editor's notes.
- Editor line edits author's latest version of manuscript on next pass.
- Editor copy edits manuscript on final* pass.
- *Editor may do a final spot edit of wherever author made further changes after editor delivers edited manuscript.

A lot of work is necessary to ensure a top quality product is delivered to the marketplace. Publishing houses have teams. The author has his editor guy. Maybe a marketing guy and a cover art guy. Maybe not. Either way, it's coming out of his own pocket. Thus we arrive at that tune that is sung by consultants everywhere that sounds like it's straight of Lewis Carroll: You can have cheap; you can have quality; you can have a quick turnaround. You may pick two, but one of them better not be cheap because no one who is any good is going to bite.

But cheap is relative. A good freelance editor will check out your writing sample before proposing anything and tell you where your money is best spent (if you're really low on funds) based on your existing strengths and weaknesses, and he'll be doing that as much for himself as for you.

"But Nick, it seems like it always boils down to money! You just want to get paid!"

How old are you? Ten? Everyone needs to get paid, Friendo. Check out the title of this series. It's not about how to edit. It's not about how to write. It's about how writers and editors can get on the same page and work collaboratively towards the same goal through better understanding of each other's expectations, deliverables, and by negotiating terms both agree on and adhere to. I write these articles because it's a non-intuitive subject about which most people on both sides have little experience navigating.

Also, this is my top of the funnel shit. I just haven't gotten around to the rest of the funnel, yet.

So how do you talk to an editor? You start by talking to an editor.



THE DIARY OF CHARLIE WINKLE

20/1/2025

After having spent another 5 days in Saint Petersburg visiting my children and their Mother, Katerina Novikov, I had flown to Prague.

The capital city of The Czech Republic.

When I was a young man and had first left home to travel and see the world I had visited Prague as my first destination in Europe. Back then the city had enchanted and amazed me although now I find it slightly depressing. The advent of budget flights has opened the continent of Europe up to low class Scum, and this once beautiful capital now finds itself increasingly inundated with fat, boorish tourists, incessantly drunk and looking to fuck.

After visiting with friends in Prague for a few days I had then travelled to South Bohemia (also in The Czech Republic) to visit with my great friend Pete Marshall (from The US) who owns a 3000-acre estate there.

Pete Marshall is a Billionaire who is married to Eliska Beran, now Eliska Marshall. Eliska Beran was at different stages of her youth, a model, a film actress and a singer. Although now she is content to oversee the running of Pete's house and estate and devote her existence to making him happy. A good woman!

South Bohemia is a magical part of the world with clean, crisp air and dense forests and hills and mountains and streams and lakes and rivers. It is the perfect place for Pete, who now, almost entirely, shuns society.

Pete and I had spent the last couple of days hunting with his falcon (falconry) deep in the forest of his estate when one morning when we were out hunting he looked at me and said, "Charlie, I've got a great surprise for you. It's something I've been working on for 4 years now."

He handed me a blindfold and told me to put it on.

"I'm going to have to lead you the last 100 meters although what you'll see when you take the blindfold off will blow your mind, perhaps more so than anything has ever blown your mind in your life."

I put the blindfold on and Pete Marshall took hold of my arm to lead me. After walking for a minute or so Pete said, "we're here, you can take it off."

I took the blindfold off.

I was standing in the middle of a golf fairway. 200 yards up to my right lay sand bunkers and a putting green and 250 yards to my left lay the tee box.

"Pete, you've built a golf hole?"

"Not a golf hole, Charlie, a golf course. Me and the good people from Bobby Weed Golf Design. An 18-hole golf course with a club house and a driving range and a chipping and putting practice area. It covers 200 acres."

I looked further and more closely at our surroundings and could see that beyond the golf hole I was currently standing on there were in fact more golf holes off into the distance. Unfortunately, much of the course was covered in sleet and ice and snow, it being Winter here in the Czech Republic.

I was speechless.

When I recovered from my shock I asked "is it open to the public? do you admit members?"

"No it is not and no we do not, Charlie, and in fact hardly anyone even knows this place exists. The only people who play here are myself, my wife Eliska, some of her family who are into golf and many of my friends who come to visit to play, and even they are sworn to secrecy..... no one else."

"In fact, our mutual friend from Florida, Chris Boardstroom, came out to visit me last September and we played every day for a week. He brought an ex-NFL player with him to play also and talk some business.... you know Tom Brady?"

"Sure I know Tom, have played golf with him a couple of times."

"What do you make of him Charlie?"

"Great guy. Personable, interesting, good golfer, Champion's mindset, ultra competitive behind a smiling pleasant facade. Tom does a good job of hiding it although behind his model good looks lies a Killer."

"Hmmmmmm."

I could tell that Pete Marshall didn't think as kindly of Tom as I did.

"You don't like the guy, Pete?"

"He's perfectly pleasant and interesting and charming although when he came to play and stay with us I didn't like how he looked at and talked with Eliska..... To my mind he was too friendly and charming, too boastful of his accomplishments in football. Really showing off a lot. I wanted to floor the guy..... I'll tell you a funny story Charlie. When Chris came out with Tom, we played a two vs two best ball between myself and Eliska on one team and Chris and Tom on the other. It was for \$100,000 a hole with Eliska playing off the red tees and Chris, Tom and I playing off the tips. Eliska is an exceptional player and we warned Chris and Tom before the game started that Eliska could play off the tips with us although they didn't believe how good she actually was until the game started. Anyway, the whole game Eliska is making incredible shots and talking with Tom and he just can't hit a shot.... his timing is off and he's thinning it, fatting it, hitting drives out of bounds, missing simple putts. Chris is basically the only one contributing and he was thrown off by how badly Tom was playing. By the end of the game, we'd won 14 holes and drawn 4 and Chris and Tom owed us \$1.4 million. It was the most I've ever won playing golf."

"I wonder what happened to Tom?" I said, "he's usually a very handy golfer. Handicap of 8."

"I wondered too Charlie although I later figured it out. He was completely in love with Eliska and she had played on that, her woman's intuition knowing, to distract him and play psychological games with him on the course..... he didn't know what had hit him!"

I laughed at the irony of one of the greatest athletes of our lifetime being undone mentally by a woman on the golf course.

Poor Tom, I thought, as if his very expensive divorce settlement from Gisele Bundchen wasn't enough, he comes to South Bohemia in The Czech Republic and gets hustled by Eliska Beran, now Eliska Marshall.

Some men will never learn.

"What a shame a lot of the fairways are covered partly in snow," I said, "I'd have loved to play 18."

"It is a shame Charlie although Eliska has told me that you must come and play with us in April or May, whenever you're free. She's really looking forward to it."

"I bet she is," I said. "Although you tell her not to try and hustle me like she did poor Tom!"

And Pete Marshall let out one of his long, honking laughs.

EDEN



A Romance
by Ernst Graf

“What I most admire about Ernst Graf is that, like me and frequently in tandem with me, he can shift gears between the high and the low, the sublime and the ridiculous, effortlessly and with the highest understanding.”

Koczalski's ghost

CHAPTER 82

WAITING FOR THE CURTAIN TO OPEN

— has had some family problem and cannot work his 4 shifts next weekend, I told — I can do Sunday and Monday giving me Friday and Saturday off at least. That takes me to £5,004 for September and lifts me over £45,000 for the calendar year for the first time ever. My previous record was just over 42k. Pretty incredible not just to smash through the 43k and 44k barriers but all the way through to 45k in one go with —. What an incredible godsend it was spotting and then getting the Eden Mansions job. I said at the time calm down, I was losing money at the start, but I could see it had the POTENTIAL to be a gold mine, and that is exactly how it has turned out, even if most of the extra income is now coming at another place I work on top of what I get at Eden. Babylon has been the game changer.

Just these latest extra two shifts I have picked up from — gives me £360, more than covering the cost of a train ride to Nuremberg and spending money in Black Eagle. But I would rather go to Nuremberg and Munich again when I can stay two or three days in both places. Hopefully if I get the new job at Babylon and leave Eden.

Just look at Katharina's photos to see how sweet and lovely she looks. And do I really want to hurt her by going back to Sphinx again? I don't really.

Five days without any communication between us now.

Honestly, what is the point of going all the way to Nuremberg? Just Black Eagle after 9 and if the three girls aren't there absolutely pointless. But if they are there, they are really genuinely sexy, naughty and exciting, and I know I will find nothing like that in Paris. But Paris gives me time for days writing, and possibility of those long-promised trips to Namur and Ostend.

228am already. Just four hours left and I feel I only just got here. Another £216 earned. Raining.

▶ You will see this when you enter a new reality ✨

▶ YOU ARE A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE & THE DEPTH OF YOUR SO...

▶ YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE HEIGHTENED & YOU ARE MANIFE...

Yes I love Katharina but I want to fuck girls at Sphynx again.

342am just three hours left but, tipping it down.

Seven days without alcohol, hopefully another five to come.

I was thinking Paris is boring to stay for 4 nights, but really Nuremberg is sexless (as I don't like the windows) and Munich is completely sexless, so Paris with its Sphynx and the Carolina is actually the much sexier place to be!

But Nuremberg has fully naked strippers.

And Munich has fantastic videokabins.

No reply from Katharina to the two little videos I sent her today. Maybe that is all contact over between us. She is too upset by me going back to Sphynx. Just frees me to go back even more on the next trip.

I care about tits and arse too much, and hate all emotional attachments. She tries to snare me in the emotions but it is the emotions that make me want to pull away from her.

Wonder what is happening with the — vacancy. Presumably it IS here at Babylon. Is it their plan that I take one of the places? If so, when is the start date? When can I move here full time? Christ, I love it here. Start working on my writing from the moment I arrive. And get so much done. In such peace and quiet.

In — —'s back garden. What a story to put in my autobiography one day.

THE UPPER HAND

The Life & Times of the Marquis de X

I EROS (22-29)

II THE GRAND TOUR (30-37)

III KING'S X (37-44)

IV FREE LIFE (44-51)

V THE ROARING TWENTIES (51-58)

VI THE DIRTY THIRTIES (58-65)

455am Monday still tipping it down. Two more Babylon nights to do, two more Edens then Friday and Saturday off. Reward for 12 consecutive nights. I am in that position again waiting for the curtain to open. Waiting for my bosses to reveal what they have been planning. To lay their cards on the table.

Goddess Energy said a divine connection has come to an end, but you shouldn't be sad, because it would have been a big mistake, and it would have made your life miserable!!!!

The end of my affair with Katharina, and the end of me working at Eden?

In both cases not a definitive rupture, I will still help Katharina with money till the end of the year at least, and I will still go on earning money at Eden with the occasional cover shift. But in both cases a new chapter in my life feels like it is about to begin. Just waiting for the curtain to open and I find out what it is. Waiting for my masters to lay their cards on the table.

Waiting for the universe to show me what it has got in store for me, or waiting for me to find out what I have manifested for myself. In the past I have felt the universe was gifting me things, and making good things happen for me, but now I feel it is more a case of my own manifesting superpower that is taking over and going into overdrive.

Every time something bad has happened to me this month, it has been instantly trumped by a much better thing on top of it straightaway, and I win the hand after all.

I am rescuing victory from the jaws of defeat time and time again.

It has been the story of my life.

Something absolutely indefatigable in me. Only now am I really beginning to realise the majestic extent of it.

Goddess Energy said yes it would have been a mistake and made you miserable, but that doesn't mean it cannot happen in the future and be a good thing in the future. Just not now. Yes, me and Katharina need to take a step back now, and try again later. In a year or two or later.

Great to know even if Sphynx goes tits up in a manner of speaking (if Katharina does something to sabotage it for me as

revenge for me going there), I do still have Nuremberg Black Eagle/Gaslight and Munich kabins with my baby oil to comfort me with seven days off potentially to get there and back, and whatever I find in Hamburg.

Silly to think Katharina is so special (though she is) when just in Nuremberg I met three sexy AF strippers I wanted to fuck in one night. Two new sexy AF Brazilians in Sphynx now as well.

On the way to work listening to Goddess Energy saying I can manifest whatever I want so think about what you want, and I thought let me meet some sexy AF girl on this journey to work, then crossing road to go to the supermarket I came up behind a black-haired Eurasian 20-year-old in tight black sweater and tight black trousers, slim but profile sexy AF. Out of corner of her eye she saw me behind her, then followed me into the supermarket then passed me twice, second time so I could look her full in her sensational sexy young Eurasian face. European and Asian genes mixed is best of both worlds.

Going for those two dipping my toe in the water low key trips to 1924 Paris then Nuremberg just felt like releasing the handbrake on my life. And then things started happening for me in Berlin as well, incredible unbelievable developments, and happening absolutely in step with my travels.

Travelling again out of Berlin made things start happening for me IN Berlin.

The first three weeks of this September rank among the most incredible weeks of my life, and with potential to be absolutely life changing for the rest of my life.

This is why I must travel.

Life is so fucking pointless and boring without it.

On patrol, girl passed in front of me then I was following her. Sexy AF 19-year-old, black hair, black cans on head, short black fur coat, long grey pencil skirt over sensational curvy voluptuous arse. I should always try to manifest these girls. That is two in the space of an hour now.

How can any man EVER marry and settle down with one girl? It is utter madness!

You must need your bloody brains tested!

Having conversations with Katharina now. She has moved into a smaller house AGAIN. Not met her goals at work so won't earn much. Glad God has touched my heart enough to help her with some money in a month that will be so tight for her.

I want two things. I want to help Katharina with money to ease her pressure as much as possible, but I always want to be free to fuck girls at Sphynx again with no inhibitions whatsoever.

All those disasters that befell me in Nuremberg, booking into the Hotel Continental but then finding it so appalling I had to pack my bag and walk out and book the Ibis, then getting lost as I over-confidently thought I knew how to get to the Ibis just as the heavens opened and I just had a jumper on, like a drowned rat within five minutes, then realised my mistake and headed in the right direction, took a short cut and got lost again, then oversleeping and missing my train home, etc etc, meant I came home feeling depressed at basically £600 spent more than necessary, but then wow one fantastic piece of exciting news after another back in Berlin.

Potentially life changing news which makes the whole rest of my life better. A job that will pay me more money, leave me more time for travelling, and enable me to do my writing while I am at work. A TRIPLE whammy.

And Christ, it would get me out of Eden just as winter is coming. And Eden is BRUTAL in winter. I survived one winter there, would be amazing if I could dodge a second just in the nick of time. But—I don't know what my company's time frame is. How quickly they want this new job to start even if they choose me for it. Still waiting for the curtain to open on the new play.

I need more money so I can travel. Travel is absolutely essential to my life.

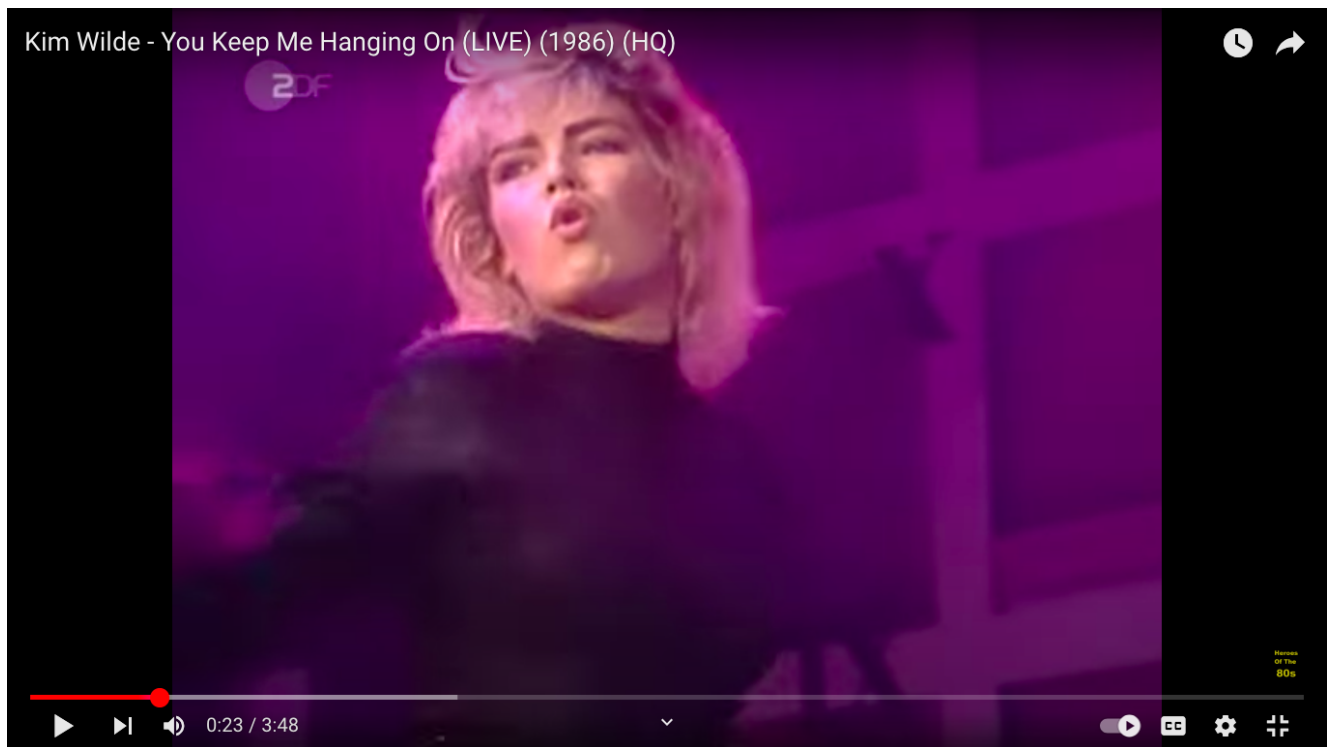
Something amazing happened on pretty much every day of my seven days away this month.

A new thrilling, stimulating experience and feeling on every one of the seven days.

This is why I travel.

I love art when it does not feel like artifice, but just an absolute cry from the heart, an artist trying to survive. David Bowie's

Station to Station and *Low* albums, a man in genuine desperation and someone was recording it, but nothing of his after that. He was out of danger after that. Brando and Maria Schneider in *Last Tango in Paris*, as actors they were taken into an extreme place which marked them both. Garfunkel and Theresa Russell in *Bad Timing*, taken into an extreme place, which made them both want to quit the film. Dixie Chicks never interested me until after the witch hunt against them, then out of that they produced 'Not Ready To Make Nice', and that was blood on the score. You see the first couple of live TV performances of that, and Maines is on the verge of tears. There was no acting there. She genuinely didn't know how the audience would react. She was stripped of her skin. See her performing it now and that is all gone. Perfectly serene and secure.



Oh on this four day trip to 1924 Paris I so much want to stay in Paris all four days, but Christ, the thought of Paula's extraordinarily sexy doll face beneath that perfect blonde bob, Gloria, the Gaslight brunette. Can I really deny myself that? I COULD go straight to Nuremberg on the first Saturday night and stay there Saturday and Sunday night, get 5am train back to Paris Monday, arrive 2pm and spend Monday and Tuesday in 1924 Paris?????????!

“Hello how are you? Looking forward to seeing me in February? I hope so. I thank you very much. This month I didn’t reach my goal so I won’t earn much. I moved to a cheaper smaller house. Still it’s a lot for me. But it seems God touches your heart right through the month that I would probably spend very tight.”

“Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to going to Berlin. I imagine I'll be able to stay for about 15 days. Do you think it's worth the price?”

 Your Access Codes are Ready For Download 

So in the early hours of this morning I had the great brainwave for my four day Paris trip, unable to contemplate never seeing Polish sexy dollface again (as she told me October would be her last month), but not wanting to miss Monday night in Sphynx as that was usually a good night in the past, I realised I could go straight to Nuremberg on the first Saturday night, stay Saturday and Sunday, come back to Paris early Monday! Genius! So excited. Then just before coming home I checked the train prices and oh dear, it was out of the question. 300 euros, and all trains expected to be highly busy. Same for Sunday. Weekend is not the time for it. So I will after all stay in Paris for the four days.

Sent Katharina £110 for my September overtime rather than wait for October 1st as she says she is struggling as she has not met her sales goals at work so will be very short.

She says is 15 days in February worth the cost of the air ticket?

It has to be done, doesn't it? It is a boil that has to be lanced.

Realise I don't have the money in my bank to even pay for the Europa Hotel for four nights. Madness.

Will have to transfer another £500 from my savings. Christ, I need this new job. To be fair I have bought FOUR DB tickets all in this month of September. They are investments for the next three months of trips. Two in October, one each in November and December. But I was looking forward to a lovely relaxed four nighter in the Europa Hotel this time, nightcaps in the Josephina, station just over the road for trips to Ostend and Namur. But

ruined by a bloody psychiatry conference all week. I now have the Hotel Cecil for just Saturday and Sunday only, and God knows what for Monday and Tuesday. It crosses my mind if I don't find an adequate hotel for Monday and Tuesday, I will change my ICE ticket and come home Tuesday. It will cost me for the ICE change but save on Tuesday night hotel.

Then a madcap Hamburg two nighter on 21st October.

Six nights at Babylon finished, now last two back at Eden—unfortunately with the snake.

Sexy AF 19-year-old teen getting off the bus at —, as she came down the stairs I was gazing at her lovely boobies under grey sweatshirt, green tight trousers, brown hair in tight bun. As she got off I think she was aware of me out of corner of her eye, then as she was walking away, amazingly she reached up to let her hair down and in the same movement looked back over her shoulder towards me and we locked eyes fixedly. So fucking sexy. Even though she never glanced towards me while still on the bus, out of her peripheral vision she must have been aware of my lustful attention. It is hard to hide.

Well, just as Nuremberg was expensive and packed because of some international gardens exhibition (how ironic considering the news I received when I got back home—yet more synchronicity), now I find 1924 Paris is expensive and packed because of some international psychiatrist conference the week I am going (reminding me of *High Anxiety*). You could not make it up.

Applications on this new job close on Sunday; I wonder what news will come next week.

Breathless, I stand waiting for the curtain to go up and the new play to be revealed.

CHAPTER 83

TURNUED DOWN

Oh shit. I have been turned down for the Babylon vacancy. I did not expect that. So now it is just Eden Mansions for me and stuck interminably on £15 an hour only. Now that the Babylon team are expanding there will surely be no chance for Babylon overtime anymore either.

Gutted.

Embarrassed.

A massive blow. I am stuck at the dead end of Eden Mansions forever now it seems.

Depressing. Demoralising. The Babylon move would have been life changing. But I don't have the skills for it. They need close protection skills for a world famous celebrity like that. An office boy like me is not cut out for that.

215pm Sunday now. Lay down before first of six Edens tonight. Two days of drinking in Berlin reminds me why I travel. I have to travel. New profile pic from Katharina yesterday in blue & yellow bikini with cleavage showing and she looks so gorgeous, I think how on earth can I ever go back to Sphynx again, and sleep with some other Brazilian Sphynx girl? That one pic has changed my mind again.

So if no Sphynx what is the point of four nights in 1924 Paris next week? Think to cancel but then think I just said two days of drinking in Berlin reminds me why I have to travel.

My bank will drop at least £600 I expect despite my highest ever pay in one month thanks to Eden and Babylon overtime and holiday £900. I did spend massively on travel in September

though. And October will see me paying just £640 rent instead of £1090 thanks to the credit. So my bank dropped £1,131 this month, after spending £2,490 on travel in the month. So I would have made a profit of £1,360 if not for travelling. The news of my rejected application will necessitate a belt tightening.

It also rules out marrying Katharina forever, basically, and also rules out my thought of being able to help her more with gifts. My priority must be keeping this £1,093 (with all bills included) roof over my head here in Charlotte Mansions.

No new chapter 4 for SPHYNX then. No 'BABYLON'. Chapter 3 EDEN will just carry on interminably.

Feel small and weak, and feeling more than ever I should appreciate Katharina's tenderness in my life, and more than ever not hurt her by going back to Sphynx, and more than ever appreciate this warm roof over my head in Charlottenburg. Concentrate on the small things I have and hold on to them.

There may be a star waiting in the Carolina for me, or in Pigalle, or a great porn film in Chat Noir. Get a lot of writing done on THE GRAND TOUR. Get a proof ready for ordering. Then make a start on volume III KING'S X or skip to volume IV A FREE LIFE (2013-2020), the second golden age of travelling.

Going to be heavy rain all night, and still for my journey home in the morning. Good. It matches my mood.

Look on the bright side, Babylon was a high risk place for me, cost of failure unthinkable. The stakes are so much lower at Eden. A relaxing environment, and already seeing me break my records for income. I am in my comfort zone at Eden, and that is a place I do like to be. It is for the best. Pick up all the overtime I can when snake and — go on holiday.

Will I see one single sexy girl this Saturday? How rarely you see a beautiful person, man or woman. That is why I cannot give up on Katharina. The extraordinary effect of that moment she walked through the door of the Sphynx.

I feel happy.

Consequences of fucking up at Babylon are huge, so I maybe dodged a bullet there. I can stay comfortable and under the radar

here at Eden, making a good living in conditions comfortable for me (even with winter approaching!).

Again I look at Katharina's new pic and think how could I cheat on that? Not at Sphynx anyways. That pic is a game changer again.

I've got a secure sinecure here at Eden and can go on accumulating my money in a comfortable environment, slower than Babylon but less danger.

Things always work out for me. The universe always looks after me, so I am reassured this promotion was not right for me, and I have been led along the right path.

Let me stay nestled in Paris this time for three nights, however much the third night costs.

After such an expensive September (£2,490 on travel) it is not time for another expensive one night trip to Nuremberg.

130am Monday morning. Just six hours to go and another £180 painlessly earned.

Back to my lovely gorgeous little flat.

Trip to 1924 Paris at the weekend. A 23-year-old Brazilian girl on her way in February. Where did it all go wrong?

▶ Everyone who tried to get rid of you has failed.. you're not going ...

▶ Well done 🙌 you remained in your power & took this person out...

▶ The Disrespect Was So LOUD When You Bounce Back This Time...

Surprise — and snake now with how cheerful and happy I am. Joyful. A weight off my shoulders. A wrong path avoided. I play my own game.

I do need to be careful with my writing. Could quite happily withdraw all the books for a few years so I can enjoy these years. Wait till I am dying anyway.

Rest in Paris this time. Would be nice to try Namur and Ostend, but we will see. Writing the priority. And getting naked with SOMEBODY.

My heater is to be replaced. It is kaput.

Glad I missed out on Babylon. Stay in my nice little empire at Eden.

What does the future hold? Once Hamburg is out of the way, look forward to a 3 night trip to Nuremberg/Munich. Interesting what I feel in Hamburg though. "Never again" like Amsterdam or long hoped for "new Vienna"?

In Berlin, I do keep thinking about fucking Yoyo again. Do need to check R—strasse again. Lots of four days off in October to do that by the looks of it. No news when — is to be back as yet.

Thought I'd wet myself on the bus home this morning. Don't do that again. Take the time for a wee before leaving if I have to. Tomorrow is October and Katharina comes in February. Mad.

Feeling a longing for Sphynx again now. I cannot let my sex life be controlled by a girl I will only see for 2 weeks out of every 52, as beautiful and sexy as she is.

Sent £130 to Katharina for motorbike and English lessons.

My finances dropped about £1,500 after £2,490 travel spend in month. There surely will not be a month as heavy as that again.

Thinking a lot about Sphynx now. How I despise spies. How counterproductive it is.

Woke up today thinking I don't care about Katharina. I want to fuck all I want at Sphynx, it is none of her business or her fucking spy's business. This year, next year, every year going forward. Do it this time to show black woman how useless she is and all her spying. Her spying makes me more determined to fuck girls there.

Katharina is my girlfriend in Berlin. If she comes for two weeks a year, she is my girlfriend for two weeks. The other fifty I am free.

The daily Evening Standard newspaper in London has become the weekly London Standard and clearly is no longer a newspaper, and therefore there seems absolutely no point to it. Like the once wonderful Time Out listings magazine no longer has listings so there seems absolutely no point to it anymore. Like music TV channels no longer show music videos so what is the fucking point? Classical music radio stations that have reduced their classical music output to try to draw more listeners in. Just fucking don't bother then.

Long conversation with Katharina as she wants to sell her motorbike and use the money to put towards a car. I can still help her with instalments and this I feel frees me to do what I want at Sphynx more than ever. Her thank you to me is to let me have sex at Sphynx without being spied on and cockblocked. If I am made to feel uncomfortable at Sphynx she can forget about me paying her ticket to Berlin as well.

Me helping her with money comes with strings attached. She gives me free rein at Sphynx. But it is my own guilt that may be the biggest problem.

The fruit flies continue to pop up every time my back is turned. Where the fuck are they coming from?? Definitely more appear at the lavatory end of my bathroom. Scrub floor tomorrow. If only I could see them emerging but they just keep popping up out of nowhere. Draw a diagram of my room and mark location of every one I kill.

I haven't had any smegma for weeks. What did I change? Stopped eating fish fingers, and stopped putting baby oil on my cock, stopped taking that supplement. I should reintroduce each one of these in turn to see when it returns.

But as I do not want it to return, just steer clear of all three.

I want to make 1924 Paris my home from home again. That hand job from Mimi was so exciting and those two new Brazilians are up there in the top rank of beautiful young girls who have ever worked there. And the Europa Hotel was a great discovery, and the metro straight to & from Sphynx!

Book the Cecil.....

NEXT WEEK—SPHYNX

ENDNOTES

Your Editor Ernst Graf—A cultured man with a passion for opera & European pornography [Marquis de Yellow Pill / X](#) and [My Books](#)

DforDoom—Cult movies, classic movies, horror, cult tv of the 60s & 70s, vintage genre fiction [Classic Movie Ramblings](#) & [Cult Movie Reviews](#) & [Vintage Pop Fictions](#) & [D4doome / X](#)

David Playfair—Two broken mirrors were connected by a tunnel through space and time, and a different part of me was at each end. [Meat Machine / X](#) [The Meat Machine: Amazon.co.uk](#)

Nick August—[Nick August—El tecolote \(@NickAugust\)](#) / X Substack: [Nick August](#)

Froutib— Man, 50, erotic art lover. Art is sublimation of life. Life is Art. I ❤️ the beauty of curves & sensuality of forms, without perversity   [Froutib / X](#)

Charlie Winkle aka 'Savage Winkle'—"A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything." Ecclesiastes 10:19 NKJV [Winkle. \(@CharlieWinkle1\)](#) / X and [The Winkle Hour](#)

ErosLoveDrawings—Digital drawings of love, eros, & fetishes. Everyone's welcome, men & women alike. Ask me for commissions at eroslovedrawings@gmail.com X: [ErosLoveDrawings \(@ErosLoveDrawin\)](#)

COVER ART: Eros Love Drawings

©Ernst Graf 2024. All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or otherwise used, except with prior written permission of Ernst Graf or owners of the contributed material.

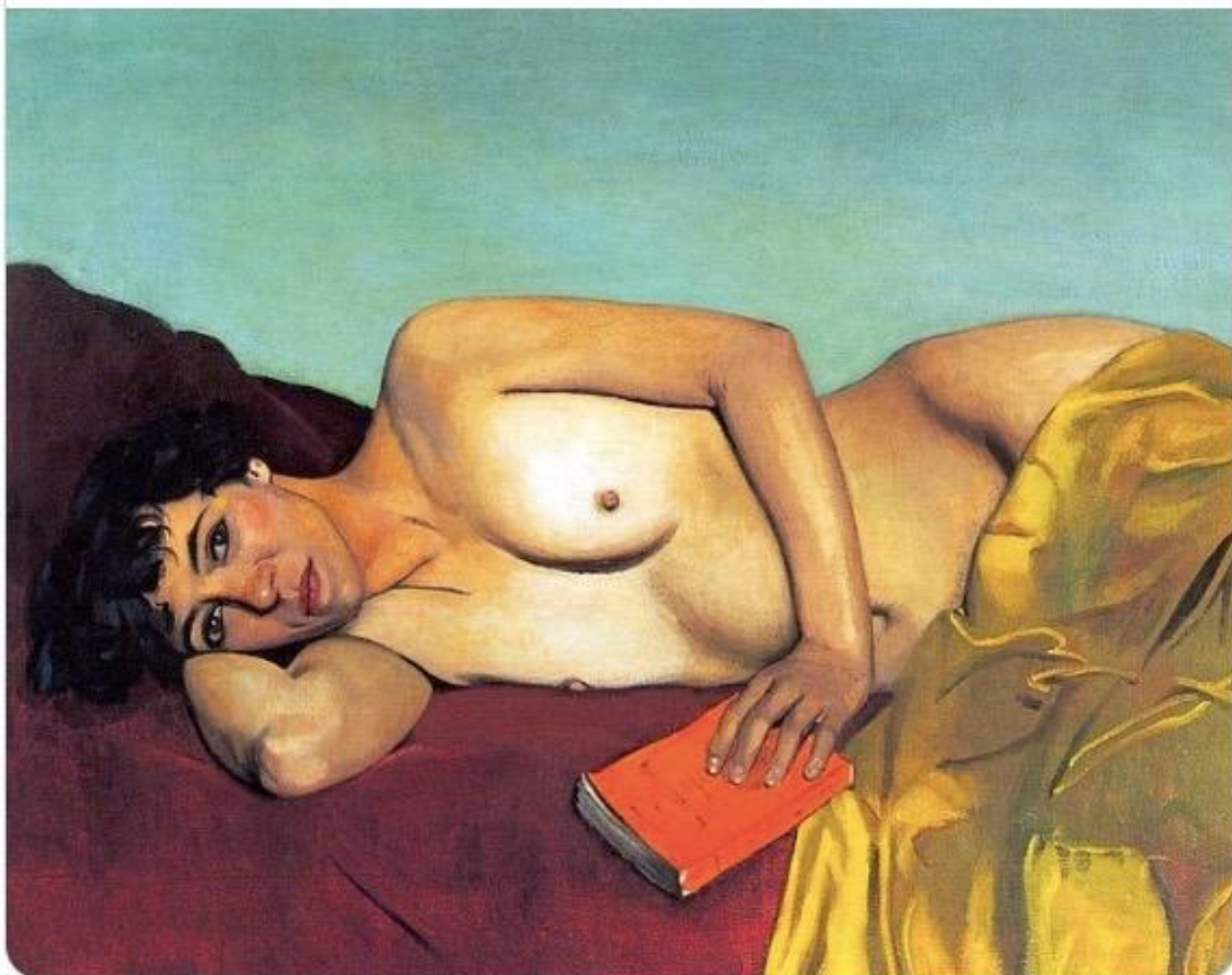
Marquis de X—sigma male (silent alpha) @ernstgraf · Nov 16, 2020 ...

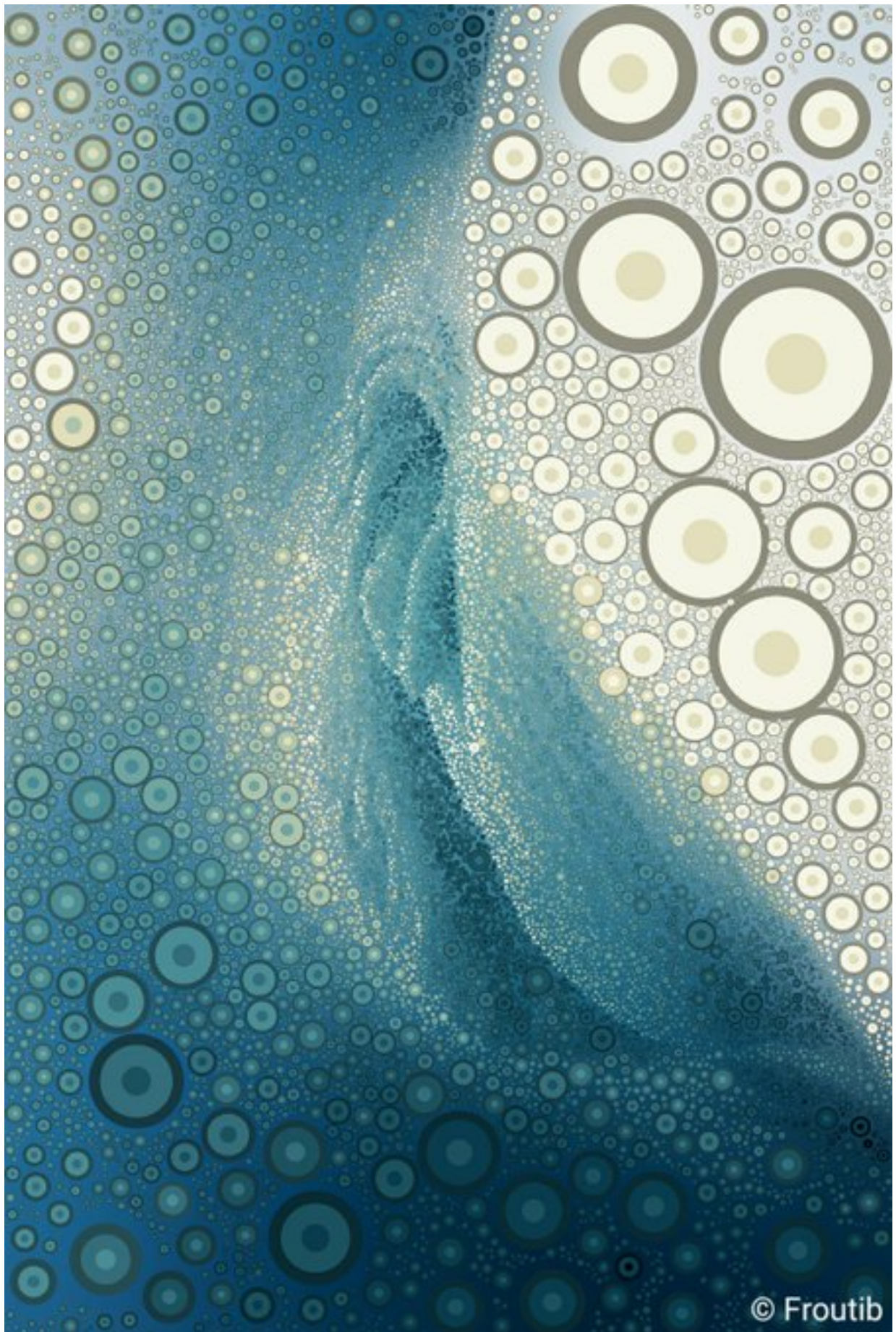
The Abandoned Ernst Graf Novella (1924) - Felix Vallotton



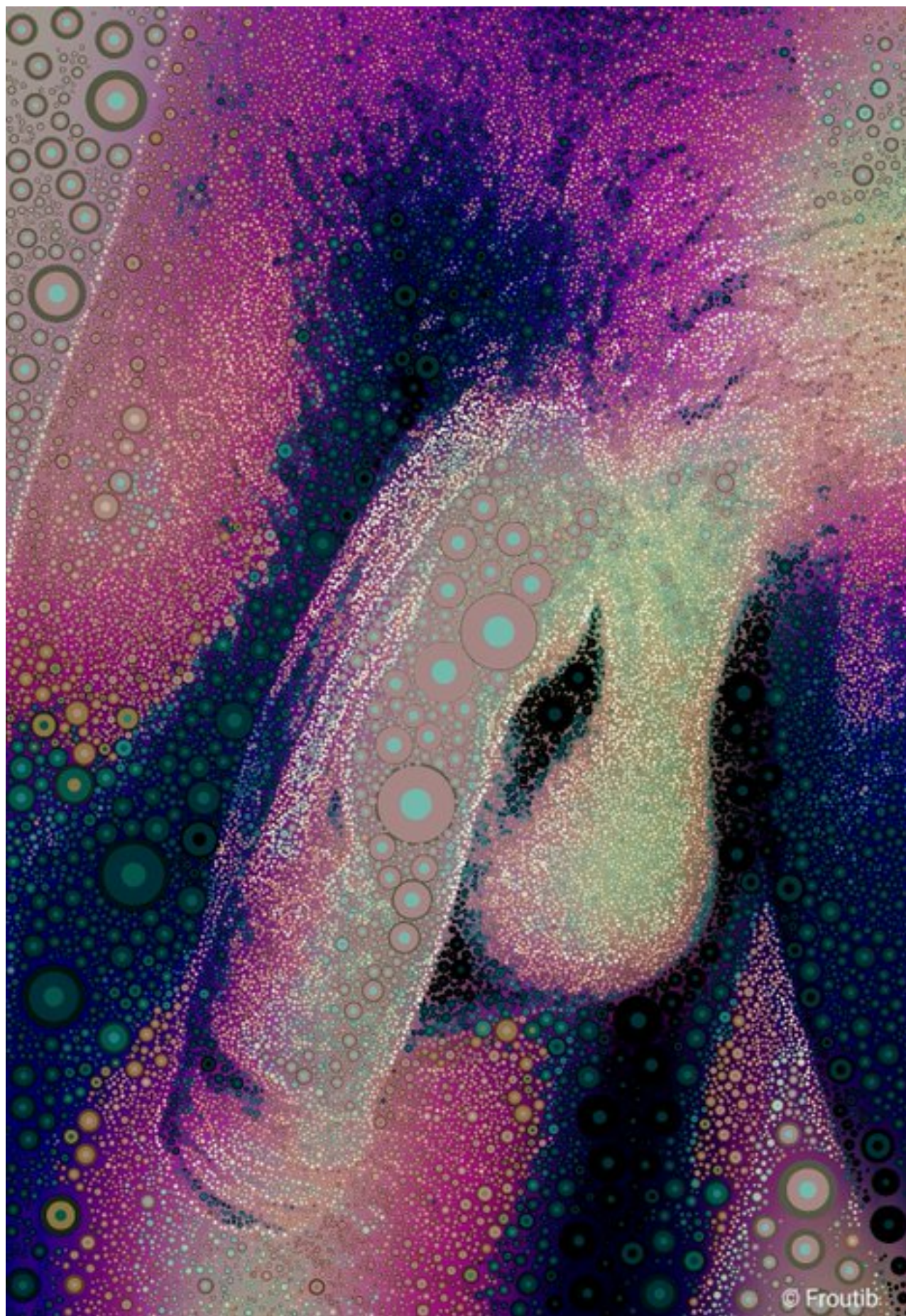
tom fishpaw @tomfishpaw · Nov 16, 2020

#FélixVallotton - The Abandoned Lecture, (1924)





Wasserfrau by Frouitib



Rayons Lumineux by Frouitib