

MONDAY MORNING, MILAN

Translation: Elinor Fahrman

Monday morning, Milan. Middle of April.

He's been to the central station, stored his belongings, continued on the train in to town, got off at the Dome, taken the first of the staircases leading up from underground and thought that soon it's going to feel like a cloudy Swedish summer's day.

Through uniquely desolate and almost frightening Italian corridors. His steps feeling special.

In the beginning he thought that only the Milanese underground corridors were uniquely desolate, but then he went to Rome and discovered they were the same.

His steps feeling special doesn't have anything to do with the uniquely desolate. He searches for the sadness in them, but they remain determined without being particularly fast or slow, and he tries not to think about them anymore.

Another staircase and he's just below ground level. The frightening of the corridors and the special in his steps a little bit more vague when daylight finds its way down the last staircase.

He's thinking he wants something to divert his thoughts, and he's thinking that soon, so soon, something will, when he's struck by the impressive sight that millions of people before him have been struck by coming up these last stairs.

But no. You know what you have and you know what you get. He's been impressed so many times, and halfway up when he sees the gothic spires and steeples, which probably took hundreds of years to build, they're too expected and they don't divert his thoughts.

Still he stops in the piazza in front of the Milan Dome. He remains standing, staring at the church as if it were alive, as if he wanted to say:

impress me now, divert my thoughts, penetrate my body with all your spires and your madonnas and your architectonic pornography.

But the Milan Dome isn't listening.

It just stands there.

Because everything in his head and heart and body is a moving slippery thick thick mess; not unbearable but hard to ignore. The skin and the body and the head a strong wall that won't let anything through that might take the mess away for a while; the thoughts that have been there a long time. Days, maybe weeks. And ached more and more, but even today they're not painful enough to stop him from acting normally.

That's what frightens him; the thoughts that nothing will divert still don't do anything to him, they don't lead anywhere.

Shouldn't he have broken down at some point, maybe this very day? Sat down and cried, incapable of movement, incapable of functioning normally. Shouldn't he have wrapped himself in a thick coat of despair, that heart-breaking despair that children wrap themselves in? The despair he remembers his girlfriend sometimes used to wrap herself in. A state she went into, where she neither could nor wanted to touch ground and where being inconsolable was justified. The relief of being in that inconsolable state, being the child waiting to be carried. To find the purifying and the beautiful in the conviction that you are inconsolable.

He's never been very good at breaking down, at panicking, at being seized with pain in that dramatic way he so envied others.

Sure, the sky is overcast and carelessly you might say that the weather reminds you of Swedish summer. But there are no dark heavy clouds and the sun could break through at any time and bring Mediterranean heat with it.

The sight of the spires of the Dome doesn't push away, doesn't push through, doesn't penetrate, doesn't puncture.

If he were a girl and in exactly the same state, would his desire become almost sexual? Would he stand here and stare at the Dome in a way that said: *Take me! Come into me with all your spires and steeples, rape me and fill all my holes so that everything aching goes away or so that I defenceless can feel the pain?*

He's thinking that he's thinking anything this morning. To delay the big step he must take today.

A new career.

When he was younger there was a band he liked he thinks he remembers did a song called that. But that was probably a different kind of career. He remembers the title because someone older that he knew had said with contempt that David Bowie did a song called A new career in a new town and that the Swedish band must have stolen the title.

As if someone could patent the word career.

But A new career in a new town applies better to him anyway. Presuming a town is still new when you have lived in it for three months. If his morning were a film it would be called A new career in a new town.

Even though he's been outside the Dome countless times these past three months, he's never been here nine in the morning. Especially not on a Monday morning. But to further separate this moment from the rest, to find something new within himself, a new impression, something that would mark the start of his new life that begins today, he's thinking that for the first time he could enter the Dome.

He enters the church.

It's almost empty. Only a few believers praying on their way to work. Or maybe praying for a job to go to.

He walks out again. It looks as if there are more people now. More pigeons.

The day outside the Dome begins later than anywhere else in Milan. Or rather the week.

He proceeds into the Galleria and observes that only a few bars are open. Outside the famous Salotto, tables and chairs are being put out. He walks in and orders a coffee, drinks it sweet and sickly Italian, smokes a cigarette and leaves.

Like he was going somewhere. Which, in a way, he is.

He continues to the old grand bar next to McDonald's and opposite the renowned extravagant restaurant Savini where cloths have just been laid out on the tables and the waiters are busy putting out ashtrays. He sits down facing Savini even though sitting down is more expensive and money is his big problem. The root of all evil. Just like it has been all his life. But today he's going to do what he's always done: provoke being poor. He owns ten thousand lire and a caffe latte sitting down is probably going to cost him half that fortune, in other words a very unnecessary expense. Which is why he has to do it. Just like gambling, he thinks. The same pain as when you're in a casino and have lost too many times, and therefore must play some more just to provoke that pain, provoke the conscience.

He smokes another cigarette thinking that after this his assets will buy him one more packet of cigarettes and maybe a cheap standing coffee somewhere, if he can find some change in his pockets.

People passing by. Proper and correct Milanese walking with distinct steps. Which, for some reason, makes him think of Steve, the American, who this very moment could be made up for the job he himself set his last hopes on and which would have saved him. Or at least given him a respite. Maybe he's been made up already. Steve is probably making money right now, with his beach-volley smile, and the photographer, who he once

worked for himself, could be telling Steve that Steve's smile is a lot nicer than his. But maybe it's just as well. No more respites, no more last hopes.

He's been turned down because there have been nicer smiles, nicer chins, eyes, chests. He's heard it all.

His strength was always being allround.

Being okay at everything.

Allround. That's what they said at the agency three months ago.

"For you no problem Milano will be good because you are so allround."

But those memories will soon fade away.

Away.

He's thinking about cigarette smoke fading away, just like cigarette smoke fading away in old films; that's how it's going to be in his brain.

The beautiful picture he's always liked to lose himself in: smoke fading away.

He's thinking how pitiable he would look in front of the passers-by if he let bitter thoughts take hold of him now, and if thoughts were smoke in the same proportions. Or if thoughts were clothes. The passers-by would make wide semi-circles around him, he wouldn't get served.

But he's not letting thoughts like those take hold of him today.

He crosses one leg over the other. He's thinking how good he's looking. He crosses the other leg over the first. He holds his cigarette nicely, knows that he's showing the passers-by his best profile, which is a nice profile, but a profile that others have nicer.

He sees a sparrow boldly flying in and landing on the floor of the Galleria just in front of him. Very pretty and very silly when it touches down and surprisedly skids across the marble mosaic.

A sparrow skidding on marble.

A sparrow that has skidded on marble looks accusingly at him.

Like it was his fault that it skidded.

Then it flies away.

Then he thinks about what he and most men have fantasised about countless times when they were young: that from out of nowhere a rich beautiful woman who wants a young lover and who's willing to pay for it will appear. He's thinking how she would appear right now, how she, wearing dark glasses, would sit down at his table and ask him how much he wanted. Because no Scandinavian can deny that a lot of the Italian women passing through the Galleria in Milan on an ordinary Monday morning have exactly that look that fits so well into those kind of fantasies. Italian men probably think the same about young blonde Swedish women. Or maybe not. Scandinavian women don't bother so much with their appearance in the same way. At least not any more. At least not in that Italian way.

He happens to be a young Scandinavian man who's had a few offers. But every time it has happened he's been either too nervous or he's found the woman unattractive or once, when it was close, pulled out because of his girlfriend.

But my girlfriend doesn't pull out when the same situation arises, flashes through his mind and his face starts burning and there's a sharp pain in his stomach. *Just as long as there's no money involved, then...* He stops.

He doesn't have a girlfriend.

But he stares fixedly at the dried milk froth in the glass and remembers too easily.

Remembers when the two of them were the most beautiful people in town, a completely different town.

Remembers when the two of them dreamed together, completely different dreams.

Remembers when she was fifteen and he was eighteen and they went to school together in a town called Skara, remembers the spring when she was elected beauty queen and he beauty king. That's how they became aware of each other, and of course his friends made jokes about how the two of them should go out together and her friends did the same.

Summer came and they were eating ice-cream and feeding pigeons together and he was young and thought they both looked good in the same way. The way he didn't fully understand then. The way that's like a dress. Both of them looked good in that simple way that can only be described in one word: model.

He's twenty-five now. Since that summer turned into autumn he hasn't done anything apart from showing every part of his body for money. Just like her.

It was so predictably inevitable. But they thought of it as a proof of love.

For two people in a small small town with model written across their foreheads to follow the obvious path and go out together was to them something so banal that they resisted until they no longer could. And then they had to give in. Turn it into a strength. In the same way as most loving couples turn every banal fact into a strength; something to carry with pride. How could they have ignored what people were saying otherwise? Ignored things like: *So typical for them to go out together, but anyone can tell it's not going to last very long.*

But it did.

The dream of a different life, a beautiful life. They were the only people in their town who could foster that dream, and that brought them together. It was a path and why not walk hand in hand once you have decided to follow it? Like in the nineteenth century when your partner was

predestined, a girl in the nearest village, the same age and from the same background. No one would have thought it strange if they had chosen to walk hand in hand down the same path.

He remembers and he doesn't want to. But he will think about anything today to take his mind off what he's promised himself to do. His only path today. His new lonely path.

They promised never to run away from each other, no matter who ran that path faster.

He realised early on that she would make more money, but it didn't bother him. *We're not like... We're not the same as...* It became a mantra that they repeated to themselves to mark that feeling of belonging together and to distance themselves to a world of surface and falseness.

At the time they never realised that the same mantra was repeated by everyone who entered the same world.

They thought they were above it.

Another sparrow skids surprisedly over marble.

They never learn. He almost smiles. But not at the sparrow so much as at how there isn't a single model who doesn't claim to be different from the rest, to have *other values in life*.

They haven't been back to Skara since that day in September and have no intention of going. At least not him. He wouldn't be able to. Not even on a day like this would he dream of it, not even if someone offered him a ticket right there and then.

He hardly knows anything about his old friends.

Old friends?

Classmates years ago.

One guy a few years older than him became a popstar in France. He saw him on tv in Paris once when he was in his room waiting for Flora to come home.

Flower. Her name was Flora and in France she was nicknamed Fleur and he translated it and started to call her Flower. She liked that name. He's finally managed to stop calling her Flower in his thoughts.

Someone moved to Stockholm and started working in media. Tabloid journalist? He was always the enterprising one. Everyone knew he would become something.

Apart from that he doesn't know, apart from that he knows how their sentence was passed on him and her a long time ago: *From small town legends to city sluts*.

Maybe it would be possible to return, maybe you could be acquitted, do penance. If anyone even remembers who you are. But what good would it do? His parents are probably still there, but he hasn't spoken to them for three years, which is good. Having junkies for parents is much worse if you

live in a small town than in a big city. Or so he believes.

And you won't get either support or money there.

The present is trying to pull him out: *stop remembering, stop running away. There is only one thing for you to do and you promised yourself and it's Monday and you promised Monday morning so get up now.*

How their love grew so much stronger from being judged; how they said: *Us against the world.*

How she used to say how lucky she was to have him when models her age got into trouble and were used by sleazy playboys and photographers and agents.

How he used to say how lucky he was to have her who put up with him even at times when he was out of money and work.

How she used to say: *Yes, but remember that I'll be finished at twenty-three and then I will need you to take care of me.*

How he smiled and said: *I will rock your rocking chair from the day you're twenty-three till the day you die.*

And then they embraced.

No they didn't. That only happens in the movies. But they embraced each other with looks; lost themselves in each other the way only intimate lovers can, lost themselves in each other for seconds that are so deep and so strong, that you get to a point where it's almost unbearable, and instinct tells you to, in spite of the pleasure, look away because you're afraid you might use violence or overindulge.

She slept with others in Paris. He in Athens.

It would *never* happen again.

"You think you're some kind of super model, but you're exactly the same as all the other whores in this business", he shouted at her.

"You think you're some kind of super model, but you're exactly the same as all the other whores in this business", she shouted at him.

They were each others mirrors. The superficial - but sincere at the time - contempt he felt for her when she did what she did, he knew she felt for him when he did what he did, and when you've both seen that reflection in someone else and you've seen how ugly it is, it's easy, you say *it will never happen again*, and you mean it.

But to become trash is so easy.

And then he remembers himself and his memories.

They dress him in clothes so ugly that passers-by make wide semi-circles around him.

A Monday morning in Milan.

Monday morning, Milan.

He has to start now, he has to.

But when he's stood up and passed through the Galleria back towards

the Dome and it's gone eleven the piazza still seems surprisingly calm.

He walks straight into a beggar, says sorry. The beggar asks for money. He averts his eyes and walks on to the centre of the piazza. Beggars used to leave him indifferent but today they make him feel ill at ease.

In Milan there are so many beggars. So many more than in Paris or Athens or Rome. But for some reason they stay away from the train station. Unlike other cities he's been to. It's something he's thought about because beggars seem to be drawn to him like a magnet. He probably looks like a tourist in his designer clothes and his blonde hair. American. They always think he's American. In the south of Europe people always think that ugly or sloppy Scandinavians are Germans and that beautiful Scandinavians are Americans.

In Sweden everyone thinks he's a model, in Italy that he's a model and American. The simplest of looks.

And still not simple enough to get the job Steve got.

Even the pigeons have woken up now and started their new week; a flowing grey sea of pigeons over the piazza and tourists buying little bags of corn from the Pakistani have appeared. The tourists are standing christlike with their arms outstretched and corn in their hands, only to be covered, seconds later by pigeons fighting over the tasty corn. Then they have their picture taken with the Dome in the background.

Inside his head he screams at himself.

Now! Do it! Get on with it!

He's never seen pigeons as tame as these. He's wondering whether they might be the tamest pigeons in the world or tourist pigeons or whatever they might be called. Surely, they aren't as many or as tame outside the Notre Dame or the Sacré Coeur? Or in Trafalgar Square or outside St Peter's church?

Or in Piazza Navona?

He was in Rome for the first time a while ago. On his last job. A thirty second ad for one of those countless Italian sex-lines. He had done a similar job once before and it had been quick and easy and the money wasn't too bad.

This time it was for a different company, and for some reason he felt slightly worried as soon as he arrived on the set by Fontana di Trevi on a freezing morning in February, and it turned out to be a gay-line.

It's like a sea of pigeons and the sea melts into the sky and the Dome. When people walk through it the pigeons move aside unconcerned, never more than necessary. Not even when power-seeking little kids or disgusted women try to scare them off. He's thinking that in this rough sea of pigeons waddling around in search of food he's the island in search of courage.

It wasn't supposed to be pornographic. It was only a teaser for

something that was.

Naked but not showing anything.

It made him think about Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni and he remembered that their Fontana di Trevi scene had been shot in the winter too, and he had heard that Anita had waded through the fountain with Scandinavian courage whereas Marcello demanded thigh high rubber boots to wear underneath his trousers.

The difference between the aggressive corn vendors and the beggars is probably most of all that the vendors look uniformly shabby while the beggars look just as they want; some are well-dressed and relatively clean, others are dirty and ragged. For a moment he thinks about what might be the best theory regarding beggars; to look like a beggar or not.

They spent six months in Athens building up their books. Then a year in Paris, and then back to Athens.

Until she said she could cover both their rents in the beginning, if only he would come. To Milan.

She could have said it in a natural way. Like two lovers who naturally support each other.

But this time it was different.

He didn't want to acknowledge it, didn't want to see the change, but something was different.

They talked about it and he realised that all he wanted to hear was that they still knew where they had one another, that their plans for the future were the same; they would make enough money to be able to quit. As they had always said, as they had always promised each other.

But then, that winter in Athens, being in debt meant more than one thing. Maybe he sensed something different in her voice but thought it was there because deep down she hated Athens. It was where he had cheated on her. Cheated on her with the kind of girls who were out dancing every night in Glifada, girls who people looked down upon.

But she said: *You have to understand, we're too old for Athens, we're too good.*

And she had a point. If she was ever going to make any real money, the only place to go was Paris or Milan. Any protest seemed pointless. Even if Athens provided a fairly steady flow of badly paid jobs for him; Athens may be where the virgins and the b-list of the modelling world gathered, but it was the only place where he could achieve some kind of success.

A few days before they were due to leave he asked her if she still wanted to quit at twenty-three.

"Of course. Which is one more reason for me to go to Milan. Maybe I can make enough money there and feel that I'm quitting when I'm at the top."

”But I’m not necessarily thinking about the money. Don’t you think there’s something about modelling that you’re going to miss?”

”Like what? What do you mean?”

”Well, like making money, having some kind of profession, an identity, being able to feel that you’re good at something. You shouldn’t underestimate that. I mean, it is after all the only thing we’ve done, the only thing we know how to do.”

”What are you talking about? You should *know*. When we have opened up our café in Stockholm, when we have bought our own first flat, and when I have re-sat sixth form and got a proper job, do you really think I’m going to miss this false sleazy world?”

And right then, when she said that, she must have thought about but avoided that most delicate of subjects. What he would never have brought up but had hoped that she would so they could talk things through: *I’m going out with a guy who’s a ”male model who’s not doing so well”, I’m going out with someone who might just be able to survive if he stays in Athens, just like all those sad American male hiv-bimbos who are too old, I’m going out with someone who’s lower than the lowest.*

Self-disgust runs through his body and he’s thinking: *Stop remembering, stop standing here like a statue in a sea of pigeons. Stop thinking. Find the courage and start now. It’s almost twelve and there are people everywhere and there’s nothing else to blame anymore.*

He quickly turns around when he sees Lisen, a Norwegian girl he vaguely knows. Luckily he saw her from a distance because her height and her pace make her stand out from the rest.

He might have model written across his forehead, but she has it written all over her body, on every step and on her whole being. She walks nervously and fast, looks either blindly straight ahead or down on the ground. So carefully avoiding looking at people it has the opposite effect; she radiates that introvert anxiety and fear which is characteristic of most young Scandinavian models.

He knows what they say about Lisen.

That she sucks cock at night and pretends to be a model during the day. That she was going to marry a British popstar when she was sixteen; her parents tried to prevent it but somehow she managed to get permission from the authorities, she was going to become a British citizen, packed up her things and went to London. Where the popstar had made himself unreachable. Something she never got over.

That’s what they say about her.

What the models in Milan say.

And what the models in Milan say might be true. Because here she is walking around aimlessly on a Monday. She walks fast, steps hysterically

determined but she still seems to be walking around aimlessly. You can tell.

But for some reason he's always liked her. There's something soft and kind about her. Somewhere. Something soft and kind inside of her has leaked out and she hasn't been able to hide it. If it hadn't been for Flora he could easily have fallen in love with her.

When did he first realise how much he liked kindness?

Probably in Paris, when all the people around him, even Flora, felt cold and evil.

Embarrassing almost, but kindness turns him on. That's how it feels. Some people are turned on by big breasts, others by a hard or intelligent or superior or dangerous look. Or eyes. Or mouth, or something else. He's turned on by kindness; the soft and the calm and the mild.

It's not about motherliness, it's about kindness.

Instead of staying among pigeons and tourists and the courage he thought he had found, he's unaware walked towards Scala and then on to the fashion district, but even when he's realised that, he feels it's safe to stay there without the risk of running into any model acquaintances, because the fashion houses in Milan are closed on Mondays. At least until late in the afternoon.

No, he's never been an intelligent person. Or clever or talented. He's never had a good head for studying nor has he been what they call street-smart. He's always hoped for the best, appreciated when the future has seemed bright. He was grateful for having a girlfriend who loved him, and even though it's a long time ago now, he accepted when the age difference, which in the beginning made her look up to him, was forgotten and it got to be the other way around. He's never been particularly hurt by anyone, never been bitter about anything. And even though he wouldn't say it out loud, he's probably quite a simple person. A simple and kind and calm person.

Maybe it has something to do with the fact that he's never been good at being depressed; to go into that inconsolable state. Being dramatic has never come natural to him.

Of course, the scene wouldn't actually take place in Fontana di Trevi; apparently no one's allowed to film there anymore, not even real directors. But they were going to stand on the street by the railing, in front of the fountain, naked.

"Piu sensualità!" the director repeated over and over again.

He kind of understood what it meant. Maybe the director only used words that he thought they would understand.

"Not look like hard fucking", was as far as his directing in English went.

Which obviously should have cracked you up.

But it didn't. Not when you were naked in the freezing dawn.

The other model he knew by sight and from his reputation. He was a big, muscular American and something so unusual as a gay model trying to hide his sexual preferences. It seemed sad to him. What could be easier than coming out when you're working as a model, far from home and you're among new people where almost all male friends are both attractive and gay?

His name was Jesse and he was going to stand up with his eyes closed, hands on his head. He himself would be kneeling in front of him, face against his crotch, arms around his waist. The association was oral sex of course, but it wasn't supposed to be explicit.

That was their first pose and he tried to turn his face to the side as much as he could, towards Jesse's thigh, to avoid the rank smell of, and the contact with, Jesse's sex. But minutes passed and every now and then it touched his cheek. Which he was able to handle until Jesse started to get an erection.

He turns off from Via Manzoni.

Monday morning, Milan's fashion district. Desolate, almost eerie, he thinks, and turns into Via Monte Napoleone. Strangely desolate.

Even stranger is that he's here. In the heart of the world which has made him a twenty-five year old man without friends or money or work or girlfriend or education or anything at all.

But that's exactly what he must not think.

It would be so low, so low.

They have all been his choices.

So low, so futile to complain.

Like when he was young and his dad had appealed against some decision the council in Skara had made, and he would go into a lengthy monologue about the unnecessary bureaucratic hassle or their unjust treatment of him.

He remembers how he even as a kid used to think that if his dad would only use half as much energy to make some money as he did on these monologues and drawing up appeals, they might have been quite well off.

Some things are humiliating to think or complain about. If something you can't change upsets you, why waste energy thinking about it? Misdirected conceitedness. Which makes wasting your time on it even more humiliating.

You just have to let them win, accept the humiliation and stay away. Stay away from downward spirals.

But maybe some people must. Must turn the humiliation and anger so many times they get worn out.

Is he really that efficient himself?

Most of the shops have their shutters put up which makes even

window-shopping hard. He walks past Prada without even realising it. But the small Chanel boutique displays their accessories in luxurious little boxes in the wall and he pauses to look at them. Until suddenly he feels ashamed of himself for staring at hand bags for over twenty thousand kronor. Which aren't even nice. Ashamed of himself for coming here where doing what he's promised himself to do today is impossible, coming here where there's absolutely no courage to find, coming here where he's reminded of and gets lost in negative memories and thoughts.

When he leaves he sees Lisen again.

Lisen and Lisen's quick nervous pace on the other side of the street.

Maybe twenty meters in front of him. She must have walked past him when he was staring at Chanel accessories.

What would other people have thought at this moment?

Would they simply have thought: *Saved by Chanel?*

Or maybe: *She must have seen me even though I was facing the window and ignored me and it makes me sad.*

Sometimes he wonders what other people think in certain little situations. The older he gets, the more he worries that he's thinking wrong, thinking negative and stupid in certain little situations and that these little faults make up his big fault.

He can't help feeling a bit disappointed, almost sad, that Lisen had no more intention than he had to say hi, if she saw him. It doesn't fit in with his nice picture of her, it doesn't fit in with the soft and the kind that have leaked out of her.

He's never really believed that she's one of those who sucks cock at night and pretends to be a model during the day.

Even if that's what the models in Milan say.

Even if that was something he told Flora straight away.

Sad how they always had to tell things like that, to scare each other in a way. She would tell him about the tragic fate of some male model she had heard about and he would tell her about some female model, when all they wanted to say to each other was: *I love you and I dearly hope you will stay with me.* But instead all they did was telling gossip that badly concealed: *This is what might happen to you if you don't stay with me.* When he told Flora about Lisen what he really wanted to say was: *I love you and I'm so scared to lose you.*

Is that what all lovers do?

He remembers that when they were ready to shoot Jesse had a full erection and it seemed enormous. The crew had noticed as well but to them it was probably common and as long as it didn't show on camera no harm was done. The thirty second film would be made from this one scene, in slow motion. They were the desperately passionate couple and he was going

to put his hands on his hips and Jesse was going to look down on him and then lift his head, turn his face against the sky and close his eyes. In slow motion and from different angles and then a voice-over and a box with telephone numbers.

He could visualise the finished film. No one had described it exactly, but he had seen a considerable amount of these Italian sex-line films and it was obvious what this one was going to look like.

When they started "acting" and slowly started rubbing against each other Jesse's erection hardly went down. At first he was embarrassed by it, but then he felt ashamed about being embarrassed, it must have been more awkward for Jesse.

First take and then second. And third. Jesse big and hard, touching his cheek, the desperately restrained heavy breathing. The heavy breathing he thought he could hear. The smell.

He tried to think about some gossip about Anita Ekberg. Someone had said that sometimes when Anita felt lonely and forgotten, she would leave the little village where she lived and come to Rome and go for a walk around Fontana di Trevi, where sooner or later some tourists would recognise her. Naturally, she would then quickly cause a commotion and would have to sign autographs and have photographs taken of her, so she could go back home again, assured that she was still remembered.

Like tourists with Pakistani corn in their hands among the pigeons in front of the Dome; is that how Anita wants to feel sometimes when the tourists crowd around her?

Is that how everybody wants to feel sometimes?

Fourth take. He tried to relax and stop shivering. They kept rubbing against each other and he couldn't get rid of the picture of Jesse's big erection resting, or even trembling, against the corner of his mouth and his cheek. There was no hiding. And his freezing trembling and shivering didn't exactly calm Jesse down.

And then. Just when they were finished and were doing some back up shots or whatever. That's when he came. He had sensed from Jesse's desperately controlled muscles and movements and breathing that he was close, but had hoped that it wouldn't get that far. But since his ear was right next to his stomach, it was like he could perceive some sort of muffled groan from inside of him and seconds later feel his whole body spasm. The next moment he had sperm on his neck and in his hair. He made a disgusted face, Jesse let go and backed off.

The team laughed heartily and he even tried smiling himself, though with a disgusted face. But he didn't want to look at Jesse in such an embarrassing situation and in that way add his smile to the malicious ones from the team. Because even if he was disgusted and even if he had warm,

but quickly getting colder, sperm on his neck and in his hair he sympathised with Jesse and felt sorry for him.

A few seconds later he realised he had been wrong.

There he was, naked and freezing cold, on his knees by Fontana di Trevi with Jesse's come on his neck as well, looking up at him only to find him laughing too.

They were all laughing at him, because he was there on his knees with sperm all over.

Like he was the one who had made a fool out of himself.

He was so confused. He wasn't ashamed or felt any anger towards Jesse. Only amazement at how they were laughing at him instead of Jesse.

The make-up artist came up with a towel and wiped most of it away, but only after giving Jesse one to cover himself with.

He might have been able to work up some anger later, if Jesse hadn't apologised then. First in front of the whole team and later, sincerely ashamed, when they were alone. It was almost painful to listen to Jesse when he piteously explained how he hadn't seen his girlfriend in such a long time and that, when they were in that position and he looked down at his blonde hair which looked exactly like his girlfriend's, he had been unable to stop thinking about her and had been reminded of similar situations with her.

He's wondering if he's ever walked as much as he has during this time in Milan. Then he wonders if, during this time in Milan, he's ever walked as much as he has today.

He's circled around the Galleria for a few hours, walked all the way to the fashion district, then walked the whole length of Corso Buenos Aires to Piazza Loreto, where he's sat down on the edge of a giant flowerpot to smoke a cigarette.

When he came back to Milan the same night and told Flora what had happened in Rome, she got angry and shouted at him and wondered how he could accept the humiliation, and then be so shameless and without pride to come back and tell her.

He didn't understand and tried to remind her that she had told him about guys getting erections or even coming when she had been in drawn-out naked and intimate photo-sessions, but that only made her shout the same thing he had an unpleasant feeling she had been shouting more and more often the past year:

"You're either sick or incredibly stupid. You really *are* a bimbo. You really don't see the difference, do you?"

"No."

He tried to explain that Jesse must have felt really awkward and that the guys she had been on shoots with must have felt really awkward as well and in situations like that you can't feel anything but pity.

Only two months have passed since that fight. But it feels like forever. Just like that job in Rome. Thinking about it today he suspects that she enjoyed that fight and wanted to interpret his story as a proof, a receipt that he was someone she had stopped loving; receipts she might have collected, receipts she might have piled up for a long time. And that she, because of that, took pleasure in hearing this story, and maliciously interpreted it as though her boyfriend had let a gay guy come in his face without protesting.

He remembered how she said: *Either you're gay as well and liked it and sometimes that doesn't seem too hard to believe, or you're more of a bimbo than the most stupid little fifteen-year old countryside-blonde on her first job in Paris. Soon you'll be going for dinner at some really nice stylist's assistant house.*

When you've been going out with someone all your grown-up life, screaming like that feels terrible. But even though it hurt deeply he somehow managed not to lose his composure. Just like he didn't lose it when she first told him about Jonathan and he realised she had been going behind his back for months.

But if you can stay calm in situations like that, surely you should? If you can think clearly that you love someone no matter how deeply she hurts you, surely you should? Stay composed and hope for things to get better? You don't have to be submissive, you can show that you're sad and hurt, but if you keep fighting and trying as hard as you can to get back, what are the chances that you'll work things out? Isn't it those who don't want to get back together who keep hurting, keep fighting back?

Hundreds of thoughts on his mind today, and maybe that's just another one of them, one that he should get rid of, one that no one else has?

He gets rid of it.

It's gone three.

He searches for the courage within, finds it, picks it up, feels it, measures it. Thinking it's not too late and it's going to be soon.

Jonathan.

He could have said:

"Flora. Who's the bimbo here? Firstly. Have you ever heard about a fashion photographer who's had a serious or lasting relationship with a younger model? Secondly. Have you ever met a French or Italian or British photographer who's regarded Scandinavian models as human beings? You know just as well as I do what photographers say about Swedish models and what they want them for."

But he never said that. Because that had been humiliating.

Or maybe he's wrong. But in that case he doesn't know how to think.

He's trying to visualise Mussolini hanging by his feet from some

scaffolding here somewhere in Piazza Loretto just over forty years ago.

A bit pleased with himself that he remembers that it was here, in Piazza Loretto.

A bit pleased also that when he stands up his legs ache from all the walking.

And he continues. Towards the station. Which makes him think about Mussolini again and that he thought about Mussolini hanging from some scaffolding less than an hour ago.

Jonathan was the epitome of the English man who so many Swedish girls fancy and who Flora had always said she despised, just like girls who study in London and sleep with popstars instead of modelling always have despised girls like Flora. But had he sarcastically hinted at that, she would have gone mad.

He could have done just that, if he had been one of those who wanted to provoke. He could have said: *Girls with no future become models in Paris, girls with a future study in London. And being a model whore in Milan while being shagged by a London photographer, surely that must be the lowest?*

But he never tried to make any points in moments like that.

It would have been more humiliating for him. He would have seemed like...

Jonathan was moving to Milan because most of his work was there, and for a few weeks he had been seeing Flora secretly in Athens and had asked her to come.

She could have told him then how things were, it would have given him a chance to stay in Athens, if he had wanted to. But no, she wanted him to come with her. Because she wasn't sure about Jonathan yet, or maybe because she felt too guilty to leave him. Speculations and memories hurt. But in an unpleasantly calm way. As if they were floating in big cloudy bubbles. Bubbles that must go away. The only thoughts he can bare are the ones that are free and insistent or not at all. But when they are floating in those bubbles they become bad.

Wearing out. Walking and trying to wear out the bubbles so they will burst and reveal the thoughts which are completely faded and shrunk? Is that what he's doing?

Gas leaking out from the worn out bubble membranes.

But like a vast subterranean landscape inside. Where all the bubbles are floating around and he catches them, one by one, surprised at how their contents seem to have suffocated.

Like opening insects' eggs. To be disgusted by insect fosters crawling in slime.

The bubbles are thoughts, represented by characters or frozen

moments.

But they are faded, he's sure of that. Faded until they are exactly the same shade as the memories from when he was a child; creepy how a memory from when you are five has the same degree of sharpness as a memory three months old.

So vague so faded so strange; the characters in the bubbles.

Thoughts on, memories of.

Greek teenage girls incessantly pulling his blonde and sun-bleached hair while he's having sex with them.

Flora being seduced by Jonathan for the first time and he does to her what photographers are known to do to Swedish models.

He sees the latter more clearly, even though he's never seen it with his own eyes. Is that the same for everyone? Are vivid fantasies more alive in your brain than real experiences?

The agency saying: *You are allround.*

Sad moments with Flora after she's told him.

The first week in Milan, when he starts getting suspicious.

The three uncertain following weeks.

The agency saying: *Stick it out until summer.*

Flora saying: *Of course you can stay until you've found something else, but you can't sleep in my bed, you understand that don't you?*

A British fashion editor on a casting saying: *How on earth do you expect to be taken seriously attending a casting with a five o'clock shadow on your chest?*

Rain pouring down one morning when he's been sleeping on the sofa every night for two weeks and she's hardly been home apart from this dawn when she wakes him up and says: *I understand you're going through a hard time right now, so here, take this, it's not much, but it might be enough for a ticket to Athens or Paris or wherever you want to go.*

How he then reacts very differently from his usual self and feels like he's in a film when he stares at her blankly and takes the money and throws it out the sixth floor window in Jolanda and shouts: *And you're the one who's been talking about how important it is not to be humiliated!*

The agency saying: *You're allround.*

The agency saying: *If you stick it out until summer things will pick up because you're so allround.*

Thursday. Flora and Jonathan turning up at the flat together looking as if nothing had happened and saying they're only picking some stuff up.

Saturday. How she finally says what he's been expecting. How he closes his eyes and feels the tears building up but the relief of *almost* being able to cry stops the tears from coming. How he even then was hoping that something had changed. But how she says: *Me and Jonathan have decided*

that you have to be out by Monday, but maybe you've realised that. This isn't working anymore.

This morning. How he was woken up by her nestling down in his bed crying, how she covered his face with kisses and tears and sobbed that she wanted to make love to him one last time, and how he instantly went hard and she slipped him inside her and started to ride him fast, tears running down her face but all the time staring at him. How he kept thinking whether this was humiliating or not. But since he hadn't been able to hide his erection, he thought it would have been even more vain and therefore more humiliating to pretend not to be turned on. To say you don't want to have sex when you're obviously up for it physically.

The strangest thing was that through all the tears she kept smiling and didn't stop when she could feel he was about to come. He looked at her questioningly, because if there was one thing she was afraid of it was letting him come inside of her and getting pregnant; some time before she had gone with a modelling friend to the emergency ward at the public hospital in Athens and watched while doctors removed black foster lumps that had grown outside of the uterus unknowingly to her friend who had never realised she was pregnant because she was so thin and underfed and had a body completely ruined.

But she didn't stop and she moaned: *Come inside of me, come inside of me, come inside of me.*

And he came inside of her and she smiled happily and cried at the same time, and she collapsed on top of him and he held her gently and tried to think that it was the last time he would be allowed to hold her and if what she'd done was a proof of affection or something else.

Against his chest she triumphantly sobbed in a sick way he couldn't work out: *You came inside of me, you came inside of me.*

"Yes", he said slowly, what else was there to say?

The central station again. He's thinking he's closing today's circle when he buys cigarettes from the same shop he bought cigarettes from this morning, when they had just parted and he was going to the central station to store his belongings.

He walks over to the Gran Bar which looks elegant, despite the red plastic chairs and tables which they have covered with patterned green table cloths, and look as they belong in some back garden in Skara instead of in a neo-classical grandiose bar at the central station.

He observes the young man who is usually there and is the exception to the rule that there aren't any beggars in Milan's central station. But even though he incessantly circles the tables, he doesn't seem to be a bother to the staff. Maybe because he looks so hopelessly depressed. Discreetly and very politely he explains that he's starving and needs money for a panino

and when some elderly hardened lady takes pity on him and walks with him to the cashier and buys him one to make sure the money really goes to feed him, he thanks her and goes to the bar and eats his sandwich. Only to immediately start circling the tables again. Sad eyes once again, begging for some change for a panino once again, probably hoping another lady like the last one doesn't take pity on him so he has to force yet another panino down.

When the man with the sad eyes has passed him by the entrance without asking for money he sits down in one of the red plastic chairs and orders a coffee, hoping he'll have enough money to pay for it.

The pigeons who have found their way here and unconcernedly strut around the tables, feasting on the abundance of bread crumbs, don't seem to be a bother to the staff either. The waiters leave them alone. Maybe they're the same half-dozen of pigeons every day, maybe the staff have names for them, maybe they sleep in their own red plastic chair at night or maybe they have a little nest on top of the wine rack in the bar, maybe they have spent their whole little pigeon lives indoors?

Then all the way back to the Dome again.

Without having any new thoughts, without having found any new courage, to return to the grey mass: the sea of pigeons, the gothic spires and the sky as grey as it was this morning and among all the grey: the people.

It's Monday in Milan and all of a sudden soft and clean and warm have spread inside him, this Monday in Milan he thinks he will always remember.

By the tube entrance next to the Galleria. Where there's just the right amount of people. Not too crowded, not too empty.

Not a single moment's hesitation and he sees himself from the outside and he thinks he looks perfectly unhappy and imploring when he discreetly stretches his hand out towards a well-dressed elderly woman.

"Signora..."

He doesn't finish the sentence before she stops, opens her bag, and sticks a thousand lire note in his hand.

The soft and clean and warm even bigger. And something murmuring. It almost makes him smile. He controls himself. Thinks: *It's going to work out, it's going to be all right.*