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**Extract from The Treatment**

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1. [In this extract from Ch20, narrator Carl Hyatt remembers meeting his second wife, Karen, and what she asked him.]

On a night when the millennium was young, Craig Norman, then my boss at *The G\*\*\*\*\**, took me to The Tiresias. It was Craig's birthday and Craig was amply furnished with cocaine - which he wouldn't lay out till we'd been to stare at strippers in Commercial Street and put pounds in the pot, then come west to the Red Fort, and later heavy-stomached, up some stairs in an alley to this club that was the threadbare side of seedy, even church-hall side of seedy, lacking in anything but functional comfort, with tables that rocked and ungrateful chairs. And this was the time when the capital's celebrities of the kind you'll remember for their brilliance, beauty, wit, élan, and tendency to be exculpably involved in the deaths of others who'd been chatting to them only half an hour ago by the open window, wouldn't have been permitted to be seen dead in such a place by their agents, minders, or PR units. Thus, The Tiresias.

Craig signed us all in, me, righteous Ellis McMahon, a buffoon called Dragonheart. Laura and I were now separated, on grounds of blandness and anti-spontaneity (my complaint) and irritation and fake spontaneity (hers), and she was living in Devon; along with a miserable sense of vandalism, I had a gap to fill. By the bar, a blonde in a peculiar hat, and a husky woman in unclean plimsolls and leather trousers, were grouped before a high-backed bench of dark wood, when a voice said, 'Yer look like Charles Bovary in that cap, our Cassie', and they parted to reveal the speaker, who had in her lap a little dog. A hazel-eyed young lady it was, with dark hair and lipstick like a 'This-way-for-Sin' sign, who asked me what I was staring at, and the church-hall became a sort of coven. I was about to apologize or back off, but her eyes were merry, so I asked her who was Charles Bovary, and she cried, 'Sling this one out! Meant to be a literary salon in here. Doesn't know first thing about books!' Craig Norman suggested I knew a lot of other things, and she said, 'Well tell us summat!'

I was saved by John Dragonheart, who found it difficult not to be the most *heard* person in any gathering for many seconds, and began flyting with the dark lady about her accent while I swayed in her eye-magic. Some time after, she came and sat by me at a rickety table like she had the freedom of the place and asked what I'd eaten for tea. Pickled chicken, and vindaloo puffs. She thought as much. Then Craig Norman made signs and we two and Dragonheart went down to a shithouse where the smell of piss was like strong condiment, and the light didn't work. We snorted powder off a pocket-size listings mag, reascending to the coven in good fettle where the dark lady reappeared at my side to advise there was a nice clean lav

upstairs, for future reference. I was about to deal with the little witch, when she disappeared. Dragonheart kept me occupied; the bracket lamps made anchors in his eyes.

At work, I had a mind to ask Craig about her, but couldn't catch him in time, and something suggested keeping it to myself, so a couple of nights later I walked from Farringdon to Soho, with a sense of adventure that I should have been too old for, and which therefore felt kind of fake and ripe for humiliation, muttering, *This is it then!, Tonight your fate is settled! You can do it, son!*, and other naff encouragement. As I cut through Leather Lane onto High Holborn, a long monochrome advert showed the somber head of Beckham: 'Cometh the Hour'. Ominous. But beyond the pomp, delusion, sense of folly, like the breeze that blew air-kisses this May evening, there was something that was nature's own, unstained by what men do and always do.

I had to buzz from the street so I said I was Tara Palmer-Tomkinson and they let me up from curiosity. The dark lady was on the pew again in a plum-coloured dress and fishnet tights, playing with the little dog, and looking at a sheet of paper. Oh it was me. Was I still pissed? She offered to sign me in. Her signature was Karen Tynan. I was her guest.

I bought us a drink and asked what she was reading. It was her column. We both sat on the pew and she told me about it, though her eyes, a way she had of grinning, the closeness and swell of her in that purple dress, distracted me. We were kids on a bench considering homework; I fancied her fanatically. I gathered that Gina (of the dirty plimsolls), who was the hostess and founder of Tiresias, and the owner, who was a lord, ran a monthly mag called *The Dedicated Vagrant*. As it happened, I'd seen it in the newsagents at Chancery Lane, a medley of scandalous confessions, sarcastic reviews (restaurants, videos, shows), execrations of fashion phenomena, blessings of fashion phenomena, an effigy of the month, absinthe recipes, dangerous alleys, decadent doggerel, gnostic sex positions, notes on phrases such as 'turn the cat in the pan' drawn from actual or imagined experience, nice pictures to look at, *grimoires*, advice on addressing, dukes, bishops, gangsters, or taking a whore for a picnic - by this time, she'd produced the last issue for me to inspect from a drawer beneath the pew. Karen Tynan had her very own column, inspired by Flaubert's 'Dictionary of Daft Ideas', composed in French, which might have made a man feel a clodhopper, if he'd forgotten his O-Level French, and hadn't heard of Flaubert's dictionary.

So what was this month's daft idea? Tapping her sheet like there were no flies on me. She looked a bit shy - though she could have been putting it

on (I suspected her capable of all sorts of tricks) – and offered me it to read for myself. Oh ho! says I, coming the Pub Landlord. Anglo-Saxon only, miss! None of this Gallic flim flam! Oh she doesn't know if it's any good in English. Well I'm sorry to hear that, no fan of affectation, plain journalist – and woe to a ponce parlance that anyone with a little cunning can use to bamboozle honest souls. She gives me a green look, translates in good Lancastrian.

And excellent it was; she had a gift for phrasing, and identifying bullshit, which made me sit away in envy, or respect. Then we talked of my paper. I supposed she was angling for an opportunity, since we had such columns at the time, in the weekend section, though they were sarky and laboured compared to hers, composed by young Oxbridge graduates (who often turned out to be uncannily attached to the senior staff of an organ famed for its canons of independence and dislike of 'tradition'). But all she said was it used to be called the *Manchester G\*\*\*\*\**, and how did someone like you get to be working there?

Now what did she mean by that? Thought I was common, didn't she – or *lower-middle class*? The pits.

My old man had been a RAF engineer and I was brought up near Bury St Edmunds. Oh she was from Bury herself, Greater Manchester. We compared our towns. Cops and pogroms. My mother was a clerk on the base. When my old man retired, he started his own bathroom-fitting business. My mother was company secretary and director. So far, so *lower middle*, what? Forgotten majority. And did I take after my mum, or dad? Well she was a good dancer, did a lot of sport, ran road races, and so on – which I didn't take after. And my dad – he hadn't been sporty; waited near the finishing line eating hotdogs. So I took after him? Well, we never we agreed on much. The waiting in the cold and hotdogs did for him, by the way – he'd been dead a couple of years. She crossed herself. (Was she taking the piss?) But he'd been a man of competence; good with his hands, knew how things worked – Vulcans, VHS recorders, boilers, businesses, councils, Quangos – more than I could say for myself. Did I visit my mum? She visited hers, every third weekend. Lively description of her sisters followed, and I told her of Nigel, my solid brother at PwC; how we went to football or cricket together once in a while, sank a few pints ...

While we were at it, she might as well hear about my education.

Well as a schoolboy, I'd been an idler, prat, show-off (had I, actually?), though competent in English, History, Economics, and so, to UEA, where I pretended to study Politics and International Relations. In the student paper, I did bar reviews, club reviews, pieces on CND and apartheid. She

wanted to know about CND (how young she was!). My views weren't popular with the union activists – since I was genned up by the RAF background (not strictly the truth.) Weren't popular with my old man either, who suspected I was being turned commie at the campus. I had it from both sides (exaggeration.) She watched me. I'd also done interviews with musicians who performed at the university or locally. Such as? Oh, Paul Young, Mari Wilson, Billy Bragg, Bananarama, Jaz Coleman, Mark E Smith ... (adding names till someone registered.)

What did I do then? In this rickety coven, her eyes glowed hazard green. A girl at the bar was trying mouse ears.

Applied for a press apprenticeship in Hastings. Mornings were short-hand and libel lectures; after lunch we went out for vox pops. A name that came up was the 'Sly Crew', who were the local mafia, though they didn't go much beyond shoplifting, and hooliganism at Brighton's home games. I got to know the daddy, Frank Sly; the crew were sons, nephews, and a mad niece called Alison, who put the wind up a lot of folk. Frank had the face of a happy pig, zest for life unballasted by conscience. He went about the south coast on the knock, ripping people off. Fantastic patterman. I could hear him now, marching by his stall ...

Players No6?

One and nine a thousand!

he'd just been offered a cheapskate fag. 'Write what you like, son!' he told me. 'Ain't got nothing to hide. Come on the knock. Frankie'll bring you back alive – handles intact!' I didn't take him up, but he had his effect. There were seventies paperbacks on a wire tray. *Run Down: The World of Alan Brett* by Robert Garrett, caught my eye. Two sharp-suited hardcases fighting. One had a cut-throat, the other gripped a rubber bulb.

Why was he trying to spray perfume on him?

'Wet behind the ears, ain't you!' roared Frankie Sly. 'That's ammonia he's got in there you plum!' A sea breeze whipped his stall. He gave me the book as a present. Outside MacDonalds, Alison stood gurning.

'Wouldn't think she set her own cat on fire, would you? Maybe you would.'

What did I see in Frankie Sly? Karen Tynan wanted to know.

He was very up front for a crook - more up front than straight folk. And happier. He gave me time. **[1,887 words]**