
Opening Extract from...

A Guide for the Perplexed

Written by Jonathan Levi

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A Guide for the Perplexed

A NOVEL

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Duckworth Overlook

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For Stephanie

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A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

... in most treatises on the violin, a great deal of attention is paid to the manufacture of the Perfect Sound. The author strains to pass on to the student his own experience of Technique which, in combination with that indeterminate quality called Taste—and the proper instrument, of course—will infallibly produce the Perfect Sound.

These teachers are putting the bow before the horsehair, holding the fiddle with their teeth! The proper concern of both teacher and student, before bow ever touches string, must be the Origin of the Perfect Sound itself. For how will we recognize our Sons if we don't know our Fathers?

—Sandor, *In Search of the Lost Chord, A Brief Guide*, p. 3

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

Dear Reader,

You are traveling. You are perplexed. You want to know.

Not just which restaurant serves the strongest margarita, the freshest *chirimoya*, the tenderest tenderloin, the most incendiary vindaloo; not just which hotel room cradled Napoleon, Babe Ruth, JFK, Liz Taylor, and Jim Morrison; not just which beach boasts the softest sand; which island the most perfumed breeze; which city the most lyrical opera, the tallest women, the broadest burlesque, the most compelling philosophers, the lowest average humidity and incidence of pickpocketing.

You've come to the right place.

I am the one who comes up with two on the aisle, a box for the seventh game on the first-base line, a mosque in Provo, a fifth of Jack in Jedda, a last-minute ticket (upgraded to first class) on the sold-out plane to your mother's funeral. I am the one who moves your great-aunt's porcelain without breakage, your miniature schnauzer without suffocation, your cares without delay. I know the schedules. I write the schedules.

But be warned. There are no itineraries in this *Guide*. No three-hour signposted walks, no *routes touristiques*. No train schedules. No seasonal weather maps. No stars, bars, rosettes, toques, forget-me-nots,

forks, or chopsticks. There are letters from readers, occasional opinions, bits of history. Subjective, subjective—I'm the first to admit.

The current *Guide* contains a series of letters from three women facing a common dilemma in the south of Spain. I introduce this latest edition, however, with a note from an old friend, an old traveler, a puzzle that has introduced so many editions past.

Dear Ben,

I grew up in a country at war. I learned in school and at home to love my land, its trees, its flowers, its flag. When I was old enough, I fought alongside my brothers and cousins to protect the borders from our Enemy to the North. Later, as both sides tired of endless fighting, I was asked to negotiate a peace. I traveled to the North, and was treated most luxuriously and with the greatest deference. In the course of my mission, I had occasion to taste rare meats, bathe in the ocean, and fall in love several times.

When I returned home with a treaty, I was hailed by some as a hero. But others, to my surprise, greeted me with a certain scorn, as if my interests were no longer theirs, as if I loved my country less for having been abroad.

Shortly thereafter I was sent by my government to negotiate a peace with our Enemy to the South. Once again I received a splendid welcome. I dined on fruits that rid the body of fatigue, on nuts that rid the mind of care. I drank wines full of fabulous histories and wisdom, and lost my heart more times than I can count.

When I returned home, with a settlement far better than my countrymen had dreamed of, I barely recognized my neighbors, so ill did they treat me. Without unpacking my bags, I set off on private business to the West.

I have been traveling so long now that no land is new, no ocean fresh. I have seen every flower, every bird, every side of every issue, and no longer have a heart to lose. I returned to my country once to find that

our old enemies to the North and South had moved south and north. Strangers were living in my town, in my house. They greeted me with open arms.

I no longer have enemies. I no longer have friends. I set down roots, but the sun drives me away. I wander, but the moon laughs at my back. Where shall I go? How shall I go?

To this traveler, to those of you who have been traveling for five days, five hundred, five thousand years, I dedicate *A Guide for the Perplexed*.

Ben

ITINERARY ONE

AEROPUERTO

PLAZA LA RÁBIDA

MERCADO

VILLA GABIROL

HOLLAND—DUTY FREE

8.00 p.m.

Ben Darling,

To see Cristóbal Colón is to see the dim future of travel. Everything about it is new, newer than new—an airport designed by teenagers, illuminated by dental surgeons, accessorized and fragranced by anti-vivisectionists, and musicked by reliable descendants of the Grand Inquisitors. Halogen, zirconium, french curves. Everything shines, everything reflects, everything flows.

Iberia, BA, and the rest of the Majors have yet to stick their big toes into the hottest tarmac on the Costa del Sol. Only the Torremolinos packages and the Marbella-bound super-specials like Air Flamenco and British Armadan have cut their Mylar ribbons and chamois-milk brie. Which is all very much what it is, seeing that my flight is an hour late. Nonetheless, sculpted chairs, adjustable table tops, and Conchita's coffee almost write my last review for me.

But before the review, the real discovery—Sandor is In The Can.

Not just the interview—Histon and Duxford flew that back to London yesterday. Eight hours of evasions and half-truths, the kind of doddering, pedantic, overwhelmingly charming nonsense you'd expect from a seventy-nine-year-old hermit. On his Youth in Peru: "A tune on my fiddle bought a packet of cigarettes, a packet of cigarettes bought an hour with a girl, and an hour with a girl bought a measure of

Paganini." On his Departure to Europe: "The last time I saw Lima was from the back of a tramp steamer hauling jute from Conchin through the Panama Canal." On Why He No Longer Plays the Violin: "Ask my fiddle."

In my can lies the real Sandor, the unheard Sandor, thirty-one minutes of Sandor playing the Bach D Minor Partita, his first performance *for anyone* in seventeen years, played for me and the Spinoza Portacam, its PanaTrac lens drawing every bit of light from half a dozen candles and the moon, a barely touched stuffed pheasant, courtesy Sandor's remarkable María, an empty bottle of Marqués de Riscal, and two oversized snifters of the Grand Duke on the fountain behind Sandor, both backdrop and sudden inspiration for the signal event, too precious a reel to entrust to any airport, thank God some clever soul invented telescopic wheels.

Sandor and Bach. And what Bach! Perhaps, as in the bad days of the early nineteenth century, Bach unplayed, Bach that had been lying dormant, ruminating at a barely viable temperature in its fugal sac. A German Bach and a Spanish Bach. A Brandenburg Bach and a post-Holocaust Bach. The Mathematical Bach of the Six-Part Fugue, the Acrobatical Bach of the sixteen children. The dark poetry of the Allemande, the insistent tussle of the Courante, the stately striptease of the Sarabande, the breathless Gigue around the four-poster, and finally 272 relentless bars of Chaconne—a theme repeated and a theme repeated, sometimes solitary and self-satisfied, sometimes layered in an orgy of quadruple stops, the melody soaring on top, pounding below, squeezed by the staff, tickled by arpeggios into lacy underthings, throbbing, gasping, squeaking, mewling, a brief pause in D major for a smoke, and then six more variations in search of a climax.

Hungry?

LA ROSA NÁUTICA

La Rosa Náutica is properly approached on foot by a narrow pier leading from the parking lot on the beach of El Palo, approximately 4 km (2.5 miles) east of town. (There is also a small landing for private boats on the seaward side.) The building is constructed in the octagonal shape of its namesake, the Compass Rose, with the pier providing the traditional extra length of the Due North leg. A circular bar, reputed to feature the widest selection of Spanish brandies in the country, fills the middle of the restaurant. A spiral staircase at the bull's-eye leads down to the subterranean kitchen, a structure that dates from at least the end of 1491, when, legend reports, Columbus huddled with ten advisers to plan his final assault on the purse of Ferdinand and Isabella.

Sixteen tables ring the restaurant. Ask Abbas, the Moorish maître d', for West-Southwest with its mixed view of the Mediterranean, the port, and the gardens of the Gibalfaro above the city. The decor is early nautical slum, designed to bring nostalgic tears to the heavy-lidded eyes of the Piraean shipbuilders and Saudi arms dealers who are the restaurant's most dedicated patrons. Planked tables (white linen optional), pewter flatware, leaded glassware. Nets, antique spyglasses, and astrolabes hang from the conical ceiling next to worm-eaten chandeliers ripped timely from some galleon graveyard. And everywhere snailshells and musselshells, bits of lobster and saffroned rice, swept up every half hour or so by a posse of flamenco-playing gypsies.

My companion had a five o'clock plane to New York, and my appetite suggested only a light lunch before my own flight a few hours later. We ordered the Zambra de Mariscos, a fresh assortment of lightly fried shellfish. A basket arrived that must have held two kilos of cockles and mussels, starfish and winkles, squid, octopus, sea urchin, crayfish, crab, lobster, scallops, and giant sardines the size of bread knives, all fried in an olive oil that smelled of wood smoke and sherry. With time to waste on a bright December afternoon, Mediterranean finger food can

be masticated at leisure. The basket faded slowly, as did two bottles of brightly chilled Campo Viejo.

Expect to stay at least two hours and to pay what you would a high-class masseur. Cash only, credit cards not accepted.

Submitted by H.

A little note—don't include this, Ben—but Sandor introduced me to the owner, Santángel, a tall, soft-eyed greybeard (couldn't possibly be Spanish!). He intimated there was a documentary in the history of the Rosa Náutica, but with a certain forceful nonchalance (is that really possible or am I just a sucker for soft eyes?) that reined in my Ugh-Reflex—something about Columbus and the Expulsion of the Jews. I told him, ever so politely, that we had all the footage we needed on that particular subject, care of a Sephardic filmmaker in Kentucky. Of course, he said. He himself was an amateur historian, and was preparing "something modest" for the Sephardic Pavilion at the '92 World's Fair in Sevilla. If only I had more time, I said, demurring like a bitch. But Santángel was all manners, and sent over Abbas with a bottomless plate of *alas de mariposas*, butterfly wings—exquisite crescent-shaped hazelnut biscuits.

Superb restaurants, Ben, throughout Andalusia. But, of course, you know. Why do you value my retelling? Which one of us is preacher, which one convert? What's in it for you?

Three hours later, Ben Darling.

A Question: Why do I always buy Carlos III when in Spain?

An Answer: Because all other Spanish brandies are named after useless battles and royal shits.

- "Cardenal Mendoza"—Yenta of Spain. Hooked Isabella with Ferdinand, Columbus with his boats, the Church with the Inquisition. *¡Muchas gracias, Mendy!*

- "Gran Duque d'Alba"—Cut off every towhead in the Netherlands. *¡Qué tal macho!*
- "Lepanto"—Picture it. October 7, 1571. A fine, cloudless, mezzotinto Thursday of a morning. Philip II of Spain (and half the longitudes of the known World) and Pius V, Pope of the Catholics (and the Jews and the Lutherans and the bloody Jehovah's Witnesses for all I know), send the floating, leaking Christian might of Europe to drive the Ottoman fleet from Cyprus. Cyprus, for bloody-sake! They sit around bobbing on the Med like Bush and Gorbachev in a Maltese bathtub, hundreds of men drown, thousands are maimed, including the author of *Don Quixote*—although not badly enough to keep the lifts of the twentieth century from playing endless nasal oboe passacaglias of "The Impossible Dream"—collectors of Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese make a mint on oil and canvas Lepantos, and then two years later the Venetians give the greasy little olive grove back to the Turk!

That's why I stick to my Carlos—Carlos Tres of Spain. Son of Philip V and Isabella of Parma. A truly enlightened despot. A man of Faith within Reason. Swapped Florida for Havana, put the Inquisition in its place, helped negotiate American independence from Mad George. All that and less than ten quid a litre, Duty Free.

My flight is late, Ben. Very, very, late.

I could have stayed in Mariposa. Sandor offered me the run of his villa. But all those years at the BBC trained me to view every story as having a beginning, middle, and end in that order. It would have broken every rule to return to the set for a retake.

While I've enjoyed making friends with Conchita, who has kept coffee in my cup and roving businessmen from my table, the steady stream of happy travellers—shop clerks to Tangier, secretaries to Palma, curious girls on convent trips to Tenerife, none of them quite the right

age—has dwindled to a trickle. I have finished my Fay Weldon. I have finished the Fay Weldon I was saving for the plane.

Step Four of my System for Dealing with Delays is to locate the Ladies', which is normally adjacent to Duty Free, as if the architects who specialize in the mechanical design of Waiting have practised the sport with greater concentration than we mere commercial travellerettes—and thank God for the cosmopole who created the universal symbols for peeing, the only successful use of Esperanto south of Finland.

Of course, the Spanish *Señoras* is only this side of two footprints and a hole, even in the freshly unwrapped Aeropuerto Cristóbal Colón, so brand-spanking new that when I saw two sinks were stopped up and a third bled brown water, I attributed it more to the surprise of opening than to sabotage—the five seats in a state of wide-mouthed astonishment that their doors had not yet arrived. I generally don't care whether my habits are witnessed, but I still have enough of a social conscience that I prefer to transfer Carlos III from flask to thermos in the private confines of a stall.

It must have been well on to 8.00 p.m.—I was in the Ladies' for the third or fourth time, adjusting my lipstick in preparation for boarding—when the Tannoy crackled on. Three flights were called to board, two charter and another regularly scheduled British Armadan direct to Stanstead, all leaving after my 8.45 departure.

Out in the corridor, the video screens were no more helpful. British Armadan Flight 802 had disappeared. I wasn't immediately concerned, veteran of the infamous Stanstead-Isle of Wight connection that I am. But I felt one of those five-cup-o'-coffee sweats coming on, until an immensely cheerful modern Spanish woman—no doubt rewarded with a job at Colón after eight years of refuelling Piper Cubs in the Estremadura—popped up from behind an unlit Information sign. She

plugged my question into her chic little Minitik terminal and ten seconds later handed me a chic little printout.

" 'Flight 802—Weather Delay at Destination'?" I asked her. "Then why is Flight 41 scheduled to depart on time to Heathrow?" Another slip of paper—"Flight 41—On Time."

"You are now going to ask me, Señora, when Flight 802 is scheduled to depart," she said to me in prettily accented English. "I am afraid I have to tell you I do not know. But do not fear, when it is known, it will be announced." I trudged back to the coffee shop. Efficiency is disarming.

At 10.00 p.m., when I should have been gazing down at the lights of Bristol, Conchita brought me a note with a cup of coffee: "Flight 802 delayed until 11.00 p.m. Intermittent weather. Apologies. Srta. Alicia Zacuto."

"Intermittent weather," Conchita asked me, "is it very bad?" At 10.45 I returned to the counter. Duty Free was deserted. The shop hawking Seiko watches and Hermès scarves was shuttered and dark. A pair of businessmen took the final dive of the day into the Encyclopedia of Booze. The whiskey clerk flicked off the lights in her stall. Señorita Zacuto had disappeared. In her place, a man in a military uniform.

"Are you Information?" I asked him.

"What do you need to know?" He sighed, looking around my shoulder with the nonchalance of a Spaniard who is not attracted to the woman he is attending.

"British Armadan, Flight 802. Can you please tell me its rescheduled time of departure?" He pecked at the keyboard, all the time his eyes on some distant point. The Minitik terminal beeped. He sighed.

"Flight 802?" he asked. I nodded. "Perhaps the Señora has made a mistake. Please check your ticket." I did. I had not. He punched Minitik again, another beep, another little white slip. "British Armadan Flight 802—No Such Flight."

I looked up sharply. There was something about this military man that looked familiar and out of place—Spanish but not quite, military but in uniform alone—like Rod Steiger playing the Mexican bandito in *A Fistful of Dynamite*.

"Where is Señorita Zacuto?"

"I do not give out such information."

"She told me an hour ago that Flight 802 not only existed but was delayed by weather conditions."

"Then you are certainly better informed than I." He smiled, all oil and no more questions.

"Please." I smiled back, with no need to win, only to fly home to the gas fire of Kensington Gore. "Could you check Flight 41?"

"Whatever you wish, Señora." He pushed. It spat. I took the slip. The flight was leaving in ten minutes.

"Please"—I smiled again—"can you change my ticket, give me credit, whatever, and get me on Flight 41?"

"But, Señora ... Holland?"

"Holland, *sí*," I answered, with the all-purpose matter-of-factness I employ when I have no wish to defend my singularity of name.

"Señora Holland," he apologized with the merest whiff of sincerity, "how could I possibly change a ticket for a flight that does not exist?"

"Fine." I pulled out my wallet in defeat. "Give me a seat on Flight 41. First Class." There is a rule I learned in my assistant days called the Law of Jammed Film. If there is anything wrong when you sign out a camera, Do Not Attempt to Fix It. Get a new camera. Get a new cameraman. Leave the country.

"Ah, Señora, it is our fault," he said with his Rod Steiger smile, "but the airport is not yet equipped to handle credit cards. Perhaps you have traveller's cheques?" I looked at my watch, turned around, and ran to Duty Free.

Armed with another demi of Carlos—paid for with my unravelling ball of toy money—I wandered in search of unjammed Information. Fifteen minutes later, and none the wiser, I was back at the Ladies' doing my flask.

I was puzzled, not cursing you, not yet. I have relied on your travel suggestions for what, almost fifteen years, and have always been pleasantly surprised by the small serendipities, the upgrades, the complimentary champagne and caviar, the side trip to the diamond merchant, the room with the best view of the old Moorish Quarter. But this delay was out of character, perfectly understandable with any other travel agent, but for you, as rare as a decent cup of airport coffee. I took an unladylike, uncoffeed swig in front of the painted tile. I wondered whether the man in the military uniform was correct, that Flight 802 was No Such Flight. I apologize, Ben. I doubted.

"*¿Qué lindo, no?*" Conchita was standing at my shoulder, appreciating the mural across from the mirrors.

"*Sí*," I said, for want of any better response to the surprise.

"I am very proud of this picture, Señora Holland," she said. "The artist copied it from a painting in my home."

"Really?" Again, I was at a loss. There was, in fact, a mural painted on the tile, reflected in the long lipstick mirror. I hadn't noticed it before, but then, the picture was not particularly beautiful. A seascape, three boats, three women on the shore waving handkerchiefs, a few shacks. The blue was dull, the red crosses on the sails garish, and the focal point of the mural a smouldering ruin on a hill, charred and frankly hideous.

"It is Colón, who you call Columbus, the discoverer of your country, no?"

"No," I said, "I am from England." But now, at least, the picture made a certain amount of sense. "What is the ruin, Conchita?"

"I am sorry, Señora, but I do not know. That part was not in my picture." She picked up her bag. She had changed out of her waitress uniform into a rather striking black sheath, with a reasonable slit up the outside of one thigh. Her hair had fallen out of the elastic waitress net and been caught up by a palm-sized emerald comb. Otherwise, she was all black and red. I hadn't realized how truly attractive.

"Your work is finished, Conchita?"

"*Sí*, I must hurry to meet my *novio*. We have a meeting, and then a concert. Would you like to join us?"

"That is very kind of you, Conchita," I said, "but you forget. I am here to catch a flight."

"Oh no, Señora, there are no more flights tonight. Everything is closed." Conchita looked at me and my flask.

"You must be mistaken," I said, and then the Tannoy crackled on.

"We regret to announce that British Armadan Flight 802 has been unavoidably delayed due to weather at the destination. The new departure time is seven o'clock tomorrow morning, December 31."

"You come with me. You like flamenco?"

"Thank you, Conchita," I said, "but I think I will try to get some sleep. You never know with these flights. Sometimes they take off as soon as the weather lifts."

"As you wish, Señora." Conchita shrugged. "But there are no sofas in this section of the airport. You must return through Passport Control. Good night." An attractive girl, I thought, as she turned and her skirt rode up to show a bit of Iberian peninsula.

The trickle of remaining passengers shuffling through Passport Control bore out Conchita's message. All seemed hassled, tired, confused. One older woman struck me as less perturbed. I followed her towards an unmarked door.

"Excuse me," I called, "Flight 802?"

"Yes?" Luminous blue eyes, round, whites as bright as the halogen lighting, a face as wrinkled and soft as a chamois cloth, surrounded by wayward strands of stone-white hair. "If you want to claim your baggage," she said, without waiting for any further questions, "come with me." It was a rough voice, brusque, impatient, filled with the gravel of unfiltered cigarettes and travel. It was an American voice with a hint of something else behind it—more than the stray foreignness that many solitary travellers cultivate. The hurry, the strangeness, the familiarity, the luminosity—of course, Alice's White Rabbit!

"Do you know what happened to Flight 802?" I asked her.

"No!" she said, and I expected some mollifying hypothesis instead of the minute investigation of my hair, my ears, my scarf, my blouse.

"Then what makes you think ..." I began, adjusting this and that about my person. But just at that moment, a flicker of light shot behind the scraggle of the woman's hair, from the second level of terrorproof glass on the Spanish side of the balcony overhanging the Duty Free Lounge.

It was the silver tip of a violin bow, a Torte perhaps—although I never acquired the same ability to identify instruments as I did music—attached to a slender hand, attached to a solitary violin player. She was not a tall girl, but had a full-arm vibrato, very Russian school, and laid her cheek on the chin rest, one eye peering over the bridge up the strings to her left hand, down through the glass to my gaze, only twenty feet away. With the slope of her cheek just disappearing around the dark side of the fiddle, with her brown hair long, the way we all wish we could wear it, dipping below the floor from my vantage point, with her picador nose and single eye, she was the reason Picasso was born in this quarter of Andalusian gypsy country.

My own violin studies never survived adolescence. But in preparation for the film on Sandor, I watched so many hours, so many weeks

of footage of Heifetz, Milstein, Elman, and, of course, Sandor, that I developed, at first, a kind of perfect pitch, where I could hear a note on the violin merely by seeing the position of the left hand on the neck and the angle of the bow on the string. Later, as my knowledge of the repertoire expanded, given fifteen seconds of videotape with the sound turned off I could beat all but the greatest fiddlephiles at Name That Tune. There were exceptions, of course. Itzhak Perlman, with a mitt as big as Muhammad Ali's, reaching and stretching and groping for every note like a wolf spider from an eternal third position in the middle of his web. And then the prodigies, the five-year-olds with the full-size Amatis, playing impossible stratospheric exercises because their tiny arms couldn't reach past the f-holes.

But the girl on the bulletproof balcony, sixteen, perhaps seventeen years old, was in perfect proportion. She began with an F, an octave and a fourth above middle C. A long note, even though I had missed the upbeat of preparation, the swing forward of the elbow, the contact of the downbow. As the F stepped carefully and deliberately down the carpeted stairs of E and D to a long C, the White Rabbit's voice melted into the familiar tones of the continuo, the regular ebb and swell of the second movement of the Bach Double Violin Concerto in D Minor as played by, say, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields under the direction of Neville Marriner. Turning away from the girl, away from her fingers, looking out the far window to the light of the moon on the Mediterranean, I could still hear the B-flat, A, pass to the drawn-out mordent around the lower F, back to B-flat, the roll of the harpsichord glancing off the crests of the waves, the thrum of the double bass tugging on the lights of the runway, the elegant modulation like a raising of the spirits, lifting the chin, the eyes, up to a higher vantage point, the scale down, the G, F, E, D, leading with such hope and necessity that, turning back to the girl on the balcony, I expected to see the

first violin appear at its famous entrance, expected the holy note, the exquisite high C, expected Sandor.

No Sandor, of course. I had driven him to the airport from La Rosa Náutica. I had seen him strut across the tarmac with his precious Guarneri, climb the stair to the Tristar, watched the plane taxi, take off to the south, and turn into the sunset towards Gibraltar and Carnegie Hall. No other violinist either. Why would some young beggarita choose to play the second violin part alone? Why not a solo sonata, a partita, a local folk tune, a *malagueña*? What brief and tragic partnership ended when the first violinist's plane lifted its wheels off these Spanish shores, leaving the young girl alone with her descending scale, her G, F, E, D, leading with hope and necessity to an inevitable silence?

"Last chance," the old woman snapped.

"But the flight will be leaving," I said, half an eye still on the girl. "Aren't the bags on the plane?"

"Suit yourself." She pushed through the door. Up on the balcony, the girl was gone. I voted against Rabbits and trickled back through Sheep Control.

The pandemonium of Flight 802 barely touched the empty hangar of the departure lounge. I had my pick of telephones. I rang through first to Sandor's villa. No luck, María probably asleep. I doubted, after our behaviour in the last ten days, disrupting her routine with cables and cameras and endless pots of Spanish roast, whether she would welcome me back in Sandor's absence. The concierge at the Hotel Mayor apologized graciously over the phone. My suite had been given up, and he doubted whether any other hotel room "of a reasonable class" could be found, as a shoe convention had just occupied the Plaza de Toros.

So I dialled the number of your Mariposa office. Your machine, your machine, *encore* your machine. I left a message, in the vain hope that

you'd ring in and find me, wherever I'd kip down tonight. I wish we'd hooked up, Ben. At least for a drink.

Other passengers, mostly families, were queuing for vouchers and boarding a coach to the Youth Hostel, 10 km west on the coast road. A few businessmen were jockeying for an international line out to Jolly Olde E. Four couples, the men in designer windbreakers, the women, Benetton cardigans draped over their shoulders, local Socialist millionaires on their way to the Harrods sales, had settled down for a few dozen hands of hearts, an aluminium shaker in the middle of the table and a pile of plastic airport martini glasses. Half a dozen Spanish students in Union Jack T-shirts were drinking wine from a *bota* and playing reggae music from a buzzbox at the foot of a giant plastic Orangina. No girl, no violin.

I arranged the right combination of armless benches with decent cushioning in a deserted aisle near the seaward window where the radiation was least harsh. Shoes, handbag, wheels collapsed, precious Sandor on the bench, Issey Miyake jacket folded above, head weighing all down, I clutched my handbag to my chest, took one last look at the moon over the sea, voiced one last profanity at the customs officer who had separated me from my beloved Charlie Three, closed my eyes, and began to think myself to sleep.

I saw myself watching Sandor in the Moorish courtyard, hundreds of years older than the rest of the house, arcades finished by delicately arched cypress transoms, low olive trivets topped with hammered copper trays, thick carpets and pillows everywhere embroidered with episodes of the Moorish occupation, from the retreat of Charlemagne at the battle of Roncesvalles to the tears of Boabdil mourning the surrender of Granada. In the center, a simple fountain weeping into a pink granite pool.

And Sandor, like an Arabian knight in his ever-present caftan, all sixty-four bantam inches, dark, compact, wispy grey hair blowing

away from his head in the windless sanctuary, eyes closed, lashes resting on unwrinkled cheeks, violin parallel to the ground, bowtip balanced, well-rosined horsehair flat on the G string, wrist firm, little finger raised in balance, index tensed, all in anticipation of the first upbow.

As I drifted, Sandor grew, the years falling into the pool at the base of the fountain. The woman watching Sandor became the beggar girl on the balcony, more child than woman, perched on the Siege of Granada, legs gracefully tucked beneath her, long hair curving behind a shoulder, under one armpit and around into her lap, back so grenadier straight, eyes so wide open you'd think she'd never seen a man play the violin. And I tried, in my dream, to lift her chin in one hand, to peer under her eyelids, ask her a question, to be sure, to be sure.

A voice crackled, "Ladies and gentlemen ..." I blinked and stared at the ceiling. No Moorish stars, only pre-stressed concrete. "Ladies and gentlemen. We regret to inform you that the United Andalusian Workers of the Air have announced a strike at the Aeropuerto Cristóbal Colón. We are sorry to have ..." and then another sound of banging metal and heavy chanting. I sat up. Thirty feet away, a phalanx of cleaning ladies and pilots, visa stampers and dishwashers, Duty Free clerks and tile scrubbers, were marching on my position. Conchita in her black sheath led the way like Victory, wing in wing with—God forbid, could he be her *novio*?—the anti-helpful military man, banging on dustbins, overturning benches, armed with broom handles and hoover hoses, chanting vaguely heard slogans. I grabbed my bag, my jacket, jumped into my pumps, telescoped my wheels, and blinked desperately to locate the outside door. A strong hand grabbed my arm.

"Help me and follow ..." It was my White Rabbit, the lady of the grey hair and the chamois skin, with an oversized steamer trunk of Marx Brothers vintage. One hand on my wheels, the other on a strap

of her trunk, I stumbled over the abandoned buzzbox and kicked the overturned martini shaker across the lounge, the roar getting louder, the workers tripping us with their mops, throwing cartons of Duty Free Gitanes at our backs, picadors goading us past Bureaux de Change and Bikini Stands, around giant Fundadors, me trying to keep Issey Miyake between my teeth, and thirty-one minutes of Sandor upright. My shoulder, tortured by the weight of the Rabbit's trunk, shouted to be heard above the roar. We ran. We ran from sheer sound, from the union Concorde taking off at our heels, past the desks of Air Flamenco, Air Oporto, Air Divine, searching for any exit from the noise. Finally swinging the trunk through a double door, up into the fetid, jet-fuelled, real night air, only for the dying roar of the workers to crossfade into the unbearable attack of a dozen unseen aircraft, camouflaged underbellies, otherworld silhouettes, shrieking down at us from the hills, until the blast, the explosion into the pit of my stomach and then out the same way, punching me down behind the trunk with a forecast of hail and shrapnel and airport refuse, but only the fallout of motion-becoming-sound as the sonic boom of the fighters—cryptic hieroglyphs close enough, but too fast, to read—erupted overhead and flowed over the airport, down the beach, into the Mediterranean. And me, peering up, somewhat abashed, on scraped knees, as my White Rabbit hurled the trunk single-handedly into the boot of the last taxi, as Conchita rammed a broom between the handles of the outer doors, shrugging her shoulders as if sympathy would pick me off the ground, as the Aeropuerto Cristóbal Colón on the Costa del Sol—with easy access to all major European destinations—went suddenly, totally, black.