

MELODY (LOST)

By Kevin B. Chatham

Blurb: An almost romantic tale of an affair that blurs the lines of self and identity

I first met Melody by the pool at a hotel in Monte Marte. I commented on her oversized sun bonnet and she commented on my being over-dressed for the weather. We chatted for a while and then agreed to meet later at the lounge. Then she ran off to meet her friends.

Evening came and she floated into the bar like the shadow of a butterfly. We sat and talked for a while and at some point we spoke of our rooms, hers on the mezzanine by the pool and mine, one of the top floor suites. I flippantly said that the luxury of my room far exceeded the comfort of my own flat in London and that, because I travelled so much, hotels felt more like home to me now. She said, "Well, since these are temporary homes, we should be temporary people." She decided that she would be a nightclub singer from Germany who specialized in the songs of Jacques Brel and that I should be a local talent agent working for a big American record label.

And with that, we began our affair.

We would meet once or twice a month, depending on our travels. Always in a different country. Always at a different hotel. And always as different people.

In Prague, I was a college professor and she was a nervous student so close to failing. In Tokyo, she was a stern nun and I was an unrepentant school boy. In Copenhagen, she was a news reporter looking for her big break and I was a fireman who had just rescued seven children from a burning building.

At the end of every encounter, we would pull out our itineraries and coordinate our next location. Then we would decide who we wanted to be the next time. A shell-shocked soldier on leave. A famous but reclusive author of controversial novels. A deposed prince in exile. And then we would part.

As the affair went on, we went deeper into these roles. We would do research to provide authenticity, practice voices and accents, change hairstyles, learn new languages. In one month, I gained 30 pounds so that I could be an accountant from a firm in Boston. And then I did nothing but work out for two months so that I could convincingly portray a Ukrainian ballet dancer when we met in Sao Paolo.

In Tel Aviv, I was a patient in a psych ward and she was an experimental psycho-therapist. I still have a scar on the side of my forehead from that night.

But then, in Hong Kong, she wanted me to be the kind-hearted doctor so that she could be the terminal patient dying of a rare, incurable disease. She asked me to make love to her one last

time before she passed on. And as she lay there pretending to die, I slowly pulled back the sheets and climbed into the bed with her. And when we were done, she silently got up, put her clothes back on, and walked out of the room.

And I never saw her or heard from her again.

But, once she was gone, I was lost. I was so many different people when I was with her, that I forgot who I was before. I look in the mirror and I can't remember if that is my own face. When did I decide to grow a beard? Did I like it before I shaved it off? Did I know Italian before we met in Morocco? Did I even like sushi? What side did I part my hair on before I first saw her?

So, now I rummage through old receipts from restaurants, dance clubs, museums, and costume shops as I try to assemble some sort of timeline of my identity. And, I wander from city to city, from room to empty room. Trying to rebuild these fractured memories. Trying to find her. Trying to find...