

Also by Eugene Vesey

Ghosters

Hearts and Crosses

Italian Girls

Venice and Other Poems

Thirty-nine Poems

OPPOSITE WORLDS

Eugene Vesey

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All characters in this publication are fictitious
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for
Xiaoqian

CHAPTER ONE

‘I can to speak with you?’

‘Sure,’ he said, only too pleased – she was a good-looking Greek girl who had stayed behind at the end of the lesson.

‘We can to go somewhere?’ she asked in her sexy, husky voice.

‘Would you like to go for a coffee?’ he suggested, secretly excited – she looked like a model, with long, jet-black hair, a tanned if slightly rough complexion and a voluptuous figure. She was wearing a tight red sweater, which accentuated her generous breasts, and tight, black, velvet trousers, which did the same for her hips. A slightly upturned nose added a certain pertness to her features. Around her shoulders hung a leopard-skin coat and as always a pair of sunglasses was perched on top of her head even though it was winter.

‘You are sure you have the time?’ she asked.

‘Well, I’ve got some time,’ he said, checking his watch, suddenly feeling nervous. She wasn’t trying to come on to him, was she? She couldn’t be – she was far too glamorous to be interested in *him*, a humble EFL teacher in a back-street private English school in Soho!

He had noticed her before, because she always sat at the very front of the class, staring at him. He found it difficult not to ogle her during lessons – especially those tantalising breasts – and often fantasised about fondling them, but had never expected it to happen, still didn’t. She couldn’t possibly fancy him, could she? No, she probably only wanted to ask him for help with her visa or some such mundane matter, as students often did.

‘Let’s go, then,’ he said, picking up the plastic bag he

used as a briefcase and ushering her towards the door. ‘*You and I*,’ he quoted from Elliot’s poem, but silently, since he doubted she had read ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’.

As she went down the narrow, bare, wooden stairs of the school ahead of him, leopard-skin coat draped over her shoulders, sunglasses nestled on her head, he couldn’t help noticing what a sexy backside she had too. God, she was sexy! He felt himself getting aroused but suppressed it. It was better not to raise his expectations. *If you’ll pardon the pun*, he chuckled wryly to himself, following her out.

They went to a coffee bar just along the street from the school. Being in Soho it was surrounded by strip clubs, sex shops and porn cinemas, as well as restaurants and pubs. He found the area stimulating in a sleazy sort of way – not that he had ever availed himself of any of the services, lonely and frustrated as he was. He would be too embarrassed even to go into one of the cinemas. The films looked crass anyway. He was curious about the strip clubs, but was put off by the thuggish, shady-looking doormen, didn’t fancy being surrounded by lecherous German, Scandinavian and Japanese businessmen and was afraid of being ripped off. As for the prostitutes who advertised in doorways – he would never have the nerve to try one even if he wasn’t afraid of catching some gruesome disease.

Anyway maybe he could get off with this Greek girl, he thought. No, he was kidding himself. He had no chance. She was far too glamorous for him. He wasn’t bad-looking, he supposed, and had quite a good figure – he was tall and slim, a bit skinny perhaps – but he was no film star or model. Even though in fact a tailor had once told him he could be a model! But he definitely wasn’t in *her* league.

What did she make of Soho, he wondered? He was faintly embarrassed by it, but she didn’t seem fazed at all. Maybe it was just him, because of his background, he reflected uncomfortably. After all he wasn’t just an ex-Catholic, but an ex-seminarian too. *From Seminary to Soho* – it’d make a good title for a novel, he smiled to himself. It wasn’t funny though. He was messed up, he supposed, but

there was no use moping about it. The thing was to *do* something about it. That was partly why he had come here to London. All he needed was a girlfriend. Like this girl maybe ...

‘Sorry, what’s your name again?’ he asked, sitting next to her in the coffee bar.

‘Kalli,’ she said, offering him a cigarette, which he declined, and lighting up herself. She had long fingernails varnished red, he noticed with a ripple of excitement.

‘Is that from ‘kalos’, meaning ‘beautiful’?’ he asked. Very appropriate too, he thought, wondering if he dared say so.

‘No. ‘Kalos’ is mean ‘good’. ‘Beautiful’ is ‘omorfi’.’

‘Oh. That must be Modern Greek. In Ancient Greek ‘kalos’ means ‘beautiful’. As in ‘kaleidoscope’ – ‘kalos, beautiful, eidos, sight, skopeein, to look’.’

‘You speak Greek?’ she exhaled, neatly-pencilled eyebrows raised.

‘No,’ he laughed. ‘I learned Ancient Greek at school, that’s all.’ Little did he think all those years ago in the junior seminary that one day it would come in useful for chatting up an attractive Greek girl in a coffee bar in Soho! What would Father Percival, the classics teacher, make of it, he wondered? He might be chatting up a woman somewhere himself – several of the priests who had taught him had also left, from what he had heard. No doubt they too had seen what a nonsensical way of life it was. But no, not Father Percival – he was far too prim and proper, positively priggish. He couldn’t imagine him even chatting to a woman, let alone having sex ...

‘Really?’ she asked, impressed.

‘Yes,’ he said, pleased with himself. ‘So you see, I think your name means ‘beautiful’.’

‘I don’t think so. Is just name,’ she exhaled.

‘Well, it’s a beautiful name and it suits you anyway,’ he said, surprised at his own nerve.

‘Thank you,’ she exhaled again.

God, she was so sexy, he thought, struggling to suppress his growing excitement. She couldn’t really fancy him,

could she?

‘So what did you want to speak to me about?’ he asked, deciding to get to the point, since he didn’t have much time before his evening class.

‘Nothing special. I just find you interesting,’ she said, in her sultry, Marlene Dietrich voice.

‘Oh, well, thank you,’ he laughed, trying not to blush.

‘I can to ask you something personal?’

‘I suppose so,’ he said.

‘You are married?’

‘No, why?’ he laughed to hide his embarrassment.

‘I just wondered,’ she shrugged her sexy shoulders. ‘You have girlfriend?’

Blimey, he thought, she was nothing if not direct! ‘Not at the moment,’ he said, trying not to blush again, and not to think of Marina, who had left him and gone back to Yugoslavia only a few lonely weeks ago. ‘Why?’

‘Nothing. I am sorry. Is not my business.’

‘It’s all right, I don’t mind,’ he said, actually rather pleased to be discussing such intimate matters with her. ‘What about you? You’re not married or anything, are you?’ She had a ring on her wedding finger, he noticed, but one on almost every other finger as well. She was obviously into jewellery.

‘I would not be here if I would be married,’ she smiled archly.

‘No, I suppose not,’ he laughed, resisting the impulse to give her a quick lesson on the second conditional and wondering whether she meant ‘here’ with him or in Britain. ‘How long have you been here?’ he asked.

‘Six months.’

‘And what else do you do, apart from learning English?’

‘I am singer.’

‘You’re a singer?’

‘Yes. I sing in the restaurants. The Greek restaurants.’

‘I see.’ It was his turn to be impressed. ‘Is that what you did in Greece?’

‘Yes, but in Greece I was actress too.’

‘An actress? What kind of actress?’

‘On television. How you call it – ‘soap’?’

‘Soap opera, yes. I see. So you were famous, were you?’

‘A little bit. I was also model.’

‘Really?’ He was surprised although it wasn’t surprising, considering her looks.

‘Yes. I can to show you photograph if you like.’ She searched in her handbag.

‘Yes, if you’ve got one,’ he said, becoming more infatuated with her every minute.

She took out a large, glossy, black and white photo and passed it to him. It was obviously professional and showed a sexy-looking girl posing with one hand on her hip and one behind her head, in a short, patterned dress with a shiny-black belt round her waist and shiny-black, knee-length boots. God, she was not only good-looking but talented as well, he thought, trying to stop himself falling any further in love with her, since he still couldn’t believe he had any chance.

‘It’s very good,’ he commented, handing the photo back to her.

‘You can to keep if you want,’ she said, exhaling.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Please,’ she said. ‘I have more.’

‘Well, OK, thanks,’ he said, putting it in his ‘briefcase’ and wondering why she should be giving him a photo of herself. Did it mean something? *No! Don’t count your chickens, Frankie boy!*

‘So, er, why did you leave Greece?’

‘You know situation in Greece is very bad?’

‘You mean politically?’

‘Yes.’

‘I know – the Colonels.’ It was ironic – the country that had given democracy to the world under a military dictatorship! ‘Was that why you left?’

‘Yes.’ She didn’t seem keen to talk about it.

‘You had problems?’ he pursued anyway.

‘Yes. And now I have any problems here.’ It sounded like ‘proplems’.

‘You mean ‘some’ problems,’ he corrected her.

‘Thank you,’ she exhaled.

He wondered what kind of problems, but didn’t want to probe too much.

‘Is why I want speak with you,’ she said. ‘I want ask you make me favour.’

She was gazing at him, her big brown eyes, complete with false lashes, imploring. She looked as if she might be about to cry. His heart went out to her. He wanted to throw his arms round her and hug her. He wanted to do more than hug her! ‘What favour?’ he asked.

‘You will?’

‘Yes, of course, if I can,’ he shrugged, his voice catching in his throat.

‘I like you, Francis,’ she murmured, her eyes gazing into his. They seemed to have a hypnotic quality that drew him closer and closer. Inexorably! The smell of her perfume made his senses swim. Then suddenly, to his amazement, their arms were round each other and their lips met in a long, intimate kiss ...

‘I like you, too, Kalli,’ he whispered into her ear, caressing her face tenderly with his fingertips, stroking her long, jet-black hair, holding her close so that he could feel her breasts pressed against his chest, giving him a huge hard-on, wondering if this was really happening.

‘What is it you want me to do for you?’ he whispered. To his annoyance though, at that moment the waitress came to clear their table, so they let go of each other.

‘I prefer not speak about it yet – I want know you first,’ she said. ‘You will to come to restaurant tonight?’

‘Which restaurant?’ he asked, wondering why she was being so mysterious.

‘Restaurant where I sing. Is called ‘Acropolis’. Is in Charlotte Street, not far from here.’ She reached into her bag again, pulled out a card and gave it to him. ‘You will to come?’

‘What time?’ He suddenly felt nervous again.

‘I start at ten but you can to come before.’

‘Are you sure it’s all right?’

‘Is no proplem.’

‘All right,’ he agreed. What the hell, he thought, checking his watch – it wasn’t every day you were invited by a sexy-looking girl to go and hear her sing. ‘I’d better go,’ he said. ‘I’ve got another class.’

They stood up and went out into the busy Soho street. ‘I’ll see you later then,’ he said awkwardly.

‘Efharisto,’ she said, giving him a peck on the cheek and sashaying off sexily, to be swallowed up in the throng of tourists and commuters.

He hurried back to the Shakespeare School of English, hardly able to contain his excitement at the prospect of seeing her again later, hardly able to wait for the next few hours to pass, hardly able to believe he had kissed her, she liked him, she had invited him to see her! But what was this favour she wanted? She hadn’t actually said. It didn’t matter, he told himself – he fancied her like mad. He’d do anything she wanted! As long as it was legal ...

The Acropolis was nearly full, mostly of fat, middle-aged Greek men. It was small, with just a few tables, and pictures of the Parthenon on the walls. In one corner, on a tiny stage, a young male musician in a red shirt was playing a bouzouki, accompanied by a drum machine.

‘Table, sir?’ asked a man who looked like Aristotle Onassis, only even uglier.

‘Er – I’ve come to see Kalli, please,’ he said, uncomfortable, almost regretting coming. Onassis gave him a suspicious glance, then waddled off through a door beside the stage.

A few moments later Kalli came out, said hello and led him to a table at the back. ‘Who’s that?’ he asked, sitting opposite her.

‘Plato. He is owner,’ she said, asking a waiter for a menu.

She pronounced the name ‘Platto’, not ‘Plate-o’ like the name of the famous Greek philosopher he had once written an essay about at university. He thought of cracking a joke about how the second pronunciation would be more

appropriate for a restaurant owner, but decided not to bother.

‘I don’t want to eat,’ he said quickly. He was hungry but didn’t have much cash on him, wasn’t used to eating in restaurants. Anyway he was too nervous to eat.

‘You must to eat something,’ she insisted, looking at the menu. ‘What you would like?’

‘Anything,’ he shrugged. ‘Just something small though.’ Who was going to pay, he wondered?

She ordered something from the waiter, who went off. ‘You shouldn’t,’ he said to her.

‘No proplem,’ she said.

‘Aren’t you eating?’

‘No. I must to go and change. I eat later.’

‘Oh,’ he said, disappointed. ‘Are you going to sing now?’

‘Yes. See you later.’ She stood up.

‘OK. Sorry – endaxi,’ he added, practising his Greek.

She disappeared backstage. He sat listening to the bouzouki, enjoying the sound, but still feeling uncomfortable sitting there on his own. After a few minutes the waiter came back and put some food on the table, with a bottle of wine, from which he poured him a glass. ‘Efharisto,’ he said self-consciously, tasting it.

‘Endaxi,’ the waiter smiled and left him.

He drank some wine and nibbled the food – ‘dolmades’ Kalli told him later – while waiting. He felt self-conscious but excited too. It was certainly better than being on his own in his bedsit in Clapton!

Suddenly the lights dimmed, the bouzouki player stopped strumming and announced in Greek, then English: ‘Ladies and Gentlemen, here to sing for you, the beautiful Kalli!’ A spotlight switched on and a glamorous-looking diva stepped into it. Her hair was coiled up on top of her head, she was wearing a long, red, low-cut evening gown that revealed a voluptuous cleavage, and was dripping with jewellery. For a few moments he couldn’t quite believe it was Kalli – it looked more like Shirley Bassey. But it was Kalli!

She picked up the microphone, the bouzouki player struck up and she started to sing in Greek. He was impressed – she not only looked but sounded like Shirley Bassey! As she sang she swayed sensuously to the rhythm, sometimes playing a tambourine. God, he thought, not only was she great-looking, she had a great voice too! He couldn't help feeling excited at the thought that he had *kissed* her. What would it be like to go to bed with her? *No, better not think about that ...*

'I would like sing next song for somebody special,' she suddenly announced into the mike, after she had done a few numbers to mildly enthusiastic applause. 'He is sitting at back.'

The other diners looked round and so did he, but then he realised she was talking about *him*! Embarrassed but flattered, he listened to her sing in Greek what sounded like a big, romantic ballad, followed by several more numbers.

'You're very good,' he told her, when she came back to join him during her break, enjoying the jealous glances of the other men in the room.

'Efharisto,' she said, exhaling a cigarette. 'You like the Greek music?'

'Yes, I do. Especially when you're singing.'

'You like food too?'

'Yes. It's delicious. And the wine. You don't have to pay for it, do you?'

'Is from Plato.'

'Is he actually the owner or just the manager?'

'He is owner.'

'What's he like?'

'I don't like him but he pays me,' she shrugged sexily.

'Why don't you like him? Doesn't he pay you enough?'

'He pays enough but he wants sleep with me too.'

'Oh, I see,' he said, shocked. *The lecherous bastard!* But he'd like to sleep with her himself so he couldn't be too judgemental, could he?

'I don't think he will keep me if I won't sleep with him.'

'You mean, you'll lose your job?' He was even more shocked.

‘Yes. He told me.’

‘The bastard!’

‘Is everything OK?’ Plato asked smarmily, suddenly appearing at their table. *Speak of the devil!*

‘Lovely, thanks,’ he forced himself to smile. ‘It’s very kind of you.’ *You lecherous swine!*

Plato looked at Kalli, tapping a chunky gold watch on his hirsute wrist, and said something in Greek.

‘One minute,’ Kalli said, exhaling. Plato glanced from her to him and waddled off.

‘You wouldn’t sleep with him, would you?’ he asked her and immediately realised he had put his foot in it.

‘You think I am prostitute?’ she asked, offended.

‘No, of course not. I’m sorry,’ he said, blushing. *What a bloody stupid thing to say!*

‘I better go back,’ she said, stubbing out her fag and standing up.

‘Shall I stay?’

‘You want leave now?’

‘No, not at all. I’m enjoying myself,’ he said quickly, realising he had struck another wrong note.

‘I see you later then,’ she said, to his relief, going back to the front and picking up the microphone again.

‘What do you want to do now?’ she asked, rejoining him when she had finished performing and changed back into her everyday clothes – tight red sweater and black velvet trousers. She had left her hair up though, which made her look even more sexy and sophisticated.

‘I’d better go home,’ he said, looking at his watch – it was nearly one in the morning. Not that he wanted to!

‘You live far?’

‘It’s about half an hour on the bus. If there is a bus. I’ll have to get the night bus, I suppose. What about you?’

‘I go with minicab.’

‘How long does it take?’

‘Half an hour.’

‘That must be expensive.’

‘Is OK – Plato pays it.’

‘I see. Well, I’d better go, I suppose,’ he said, starting to get up.

‘I can to go with you?’ she asked, putting her hand on his arm to stop him.

‘You mean – ?’ Did she mean what he thought she meant? He could see from her eyes that she did! A current of excitement went through him. ‘Yes, of course,’ he said, taking hold of her hand.

‘I call cab,’ she said, getting up and going over to the payphone near the door.

In the back of the minicab she sat so close to him that their thighs touched, sending an even higher voltage current of excitement through him. Almost immediately their tongues were eagerly exploring each other’s mouth, hands eagerly exploring each other’s body. He put his hand on one of her breasts and started to fondle it, when she suddenly grabbed hold of his wrist. For a moment he thought she was going to stop him because he had gone too far, but instead she pushed his hand under her sweater. Then, with a shock of delight, he felt her hand slip down to his crotch and begin rubbing his already huge erection. However this excited him so much he had to stop her, because she was almost making him come. Besides he noticed the taxi driver glancing surreptitiously at them in his mirror.

As soon as they got into his room they pulled each other’s clothes off impatiently and made frantic love on the single bed. She made love with an abandon that shocked and excited him, so he quickly lost all his own inhibitions. It was so much easier than with Marina, his Yugoslav girlfriend, who had been so terrified of getting pregnant she would never let him do it properly with her, not even with a condom.

But Kalli was obviously experienced. He hoped she didn’t notice how inexperienced he was – it was actually the first time he had ever made love properly, so technically he was still a virgin. It wasn’t too difficult to hide though, because she was so passionate. They made love in a whole variety of positions, like actors in a porn movie. Her

favourite position seemed to be sitting on top of him with him inside her, bouncing up and down as if she were riding a horse, her head thrown back, her hair down her back, her boobs bouncing up and down, panting and gasping, groaning and moaning with pleasure.

She didn't seem to be worried about getting pregnant, so he supposed she was on the pill and, when he couldn't hold back any longer, came inside her. Later she came with him on top, crying his name out faster and faster, louder and louder, until she finally came in a noisy convulsion of pleasure. Afterwards they rested for a while, then carried on again and again and again, until they were both exhausted and fell asleep in each other's arms.

He went to the Acropolis – and a Turkish restaurant where she worked as a belly-dancer – every weekend. Afterwards they went back to his room by minicab and made love. He enjoyed wining and dining for free while he watched her singing or dancing. He enjoyed seeing other men ogling her lustfully or trying to chat her up, knowing she was *his*, it was *he* who would soon be making love with her and not they! Making love with her was what he enjoyed most of all and yet – there was something wrong, something missing. He couldn't quite work out what though.

Why did he always feel guilty afterwards? Was it just the usual Catholic guilt about sex? After all according to Catholicism sex was a sin, a *mortal* sin – except in marriage and for the purpose of procreation. You could go to HELL for it and *burn* for all eternity! That was what he had been brought up to believe, like most Catholics – like most Irish Catholics anyway. Not that he believed in Hell – or any of it – any more. Catholicism – indeed Christianity and all religions – were all superstitious nonsense as far as he was concerned now. Fairytales. Hell was a particularly sick, superstitious fairytale, designed to instil terror in both children and adults. And of course designed to keep the men in frocks in power ...

In his case though, there was more than the usual

Catholic guilt about sex. There was something else wrong. Was it something to do with the Ghosters? With the fact that for nine years, from the age of twelve to twenty-one, he had been brainwashed by a bunch of black-frocked celibates against women? With the fact that one of them had –

No, he didn't even want to think about *that*. He refused to think he might not be normal. That would mean they – the Ghosters – had won. That was unthinkable. He *was* normal! And he was determined to prove it to himself by fucking Kalli as often as possible – and enjoying it.

He couldn't quite shake off the feeling there was something wrong though, no matter how much he tried to analyse and rationalise it. He wondered if it had something to do with the 'favour' Kalli had said she wanted to ask him for, with the fact that she wouldn't tell him what it was, kept stalling whenever he mentioned it.

'Why are you so cryptic about it?' he asked her one night in bed, after making love, when she had avoided answering yet again.

'What means 'cryptic'?' she asked, exhaling a puff of smoke, post-coital cigarette held elegantly between long, brown, ring-adorned fingers, fingernails painted bright red.

'You should know – it's Greek!' he laughed and explained the etymology of the word to her, but she still managed to evade the question.

Her evasiveness had started to bug him though. He was determined to get it out of her the next time he saw her.

'So, come on, what's the big favour you want me to do for you?' he demanded, taking a first sup of Guinness with a gasp of pleasure and licking the froth from his moustache.

They had gone for a drink in Soho and she had promised to tell him what it was, having put him off for several weeks. She wiped more of the froth from his moustache with a tissue, a gesture he found erotic because it reminded him of how she used a tissue to dry him off after sex. She took a sip of her wine.

'You will marry me, Francis?' she asked, taking another

drag on her fag and blowing the smoke out sideways, but keeping her big brown eyes fixed on him.

‘Marry you?’ he laughed, spluttering as he took another sup of Guinness. She must be joking. He had never thought of that!

‘Yes,’ she said, serious.

‘Why?’ He took a slug of Guinness to fortify himself.

‘I want to stay here, so I need to marry British citizen.’

He had been vaguely hoping she might say, ‘Because I love you’.

‘You mean, you want a “marriage of convenience”?’ he asked, shocked, as it dawned on him that she was deadly serious.

She nodded. ‘Why you look so shocked?’

‘I’m not shocked,’ he fibbed. ‘It’s just that – well, I thought you might say, ‘Because I love you’.’ He laughed ironically.

She put her hand on his, rings glittering. ‘But I do love you, Francis – you already know that, don’t you?’

Did she, he wondered, scrutinizing her? ‘But you just want a “marriage of convenience”?’

‘I don’t want – what you say – tie you up?’

‘Oh, you can tie me up if you want!’ he joked, trying to evade the question himself now, trying to think of what to say.

‘Why do you laugh?’

‘It’s a joke!’ he explained. ‘“Tie up” means like this.’ He crossed his wrists. ‘Some people think it’s quite sexy! You mean, ‘Tie down’.’

‘I don’t want tie you down,’ she said, still serious. ‘After one year, two year, we can make divorce, if you want be free again.’

He took another slug of Guinness, trying to think.

‘You will do it for me, Francis?’ she cajoled, in her sexiest, huskiest voice, holding his hand tightly.

‘I don’t know, Kalli,’ he said. ‘I’ll have to think about it.’

It wasn’t the answer she wanted, he knew, but for some reason the idea scared him – he couldn’t quite work out