

Scandalous
by *Angela Campion*



BROWN SKIN
BOOKS



BROWN SKIN
BOOKS

First published 2004 by Brown Skin Books

Pentimento Ltd

PO Box 46504

London N1 3YA

info@brownskinbooks.co.uk

www.brownskinbooks.co.uk

ISBN 0-9544866-2-5

Copyright ©2004 Angela Campion

The right of Angela Campion to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Book and cover design: Renée Michaels Design

Cover photograph: Indra Kaur

Printed and bound in Finland by WS Bookwell

Distribution in the UK and Europe by

Airlift Book Company

8 The Arena

Mollison Avenue

Enfield

Middlesex EN3 7NJ

Tel: 020 8804 0400

email: info@airlift.co.uk

Perfectly relaxed, the man could have been interrupting a stage scene. Josephine saw him reach for the Serb's arm and twist, so that the knife clattered to the floorboards. He kicked it across the room, and it skittered like dropped silverware. Before the Serb could do or say anything, the stranger asked in a quiet voice in French, 'You want to get deported?'

The American hadn't cooled down. 'Goddamn right he's gonna get deported! I'm gonna have his ass kicked out of this country! I'm gonna sue, and this stupid gin joint's gonna get shut down for this!'

'You're going to do no such goddamn thing,' said the stranger. He turned and switched back to French for the Serb, and it wasn't difficult to figure out he was telling the man to get lost out the kitchen. The Serb didn't have to be told twice.

'What are you letting him go for?' demanded the American.

'He's a fool for pulling a knife, and you're a bigger fool for starting all this. You're not in Chicago or Kansas City or whatever stupid backwater you come from. They settle shit here over a glass of Cabernet, and if the wine or the talk isn't to your satisfaction, we can go outside and I can break the same bottle over your head. The *flics* love this place, and half the Paris cop force comes in here after a shift. You're just going to ruin it for everyone else.'

'You're an American! You should be on my side.'

'Well, I'm not—and I'm not.'

'He propositioned my wife!' yelled the businessman. 'And you let the bastard walk out! He's goddamn Slavic trash, and you let him go!'

'Yeah, and even goddamn Slavic trash need to get laid once in a while. Your wife sure looks like she does.'

This got a big laugh, and the businessman whirled around, flustered, not able to take them all on. Finally, he grabbed his wife's arm, and the two of them slunk out the door. The stranger was left standing in the middle of the

room, and there was a burst of grateful applause. He smiled and bowed modestly to the crowd, then walked off the dance floor.

Josephine tugged on Henri's sleeve. 'Do you know who he is?'

'Drummer Thompson. He's a Canadian, and if he's drinking here tonight, he must be paying with someone else's francs.'

'Introduce me.'

'I don't know him personally, Joséphine! And he speaks French like a Quebecois. They all sound like peasants.'

Josephine stood up quickly from her table. She could be wrong, but she was pretty sure she was right...

'Where you going?' asked Frisco.

Josephine's face lit up, her fawn eyes flashing and her famous smile of white teeth briefly rounding her long oval face. 'To go get my icebreaker,' she told him.



Her instinct turned out to be correct. The Serb hadn't fled into the streets—he was sulking in the alley behind the club, probably trying to decide whether to go back in and cut the American's throat. He lifted his head as the light spilled out from the kitchen door into the alley, and of all people to come out, he hardly expected Josephine Baker.

'That man was right, you know,' she said quietly. 'You'll get in trouble if you stay around here. How long have you been in Paris?'

'T—ten days,' he stuttered.

She heard another voice behind her say, 'Let me guess: you just blew the last of your cash in there.'

It was Drummer Thompson, leaned up against the door. Well, well, she thought. What a surprise!

'That's why you were chatting up that fool's wife,' he added. 'You think it's more respectable to be a gigolo than a thief, eh?'

The Serb did his best to look indignant. 'No!'

Thompson stepped into the alley. 'Bullshit.'

Josephine smiled at him, and he smiled back, at last acknowledging her. He lit a cigarette and offered the pack to her and the Serb, who took three, like a child showing stolen apples into his pockets.

‘You’ll need some money to keep going.’

He dug into his pocket, and Josephine was surprised to see him fish out a money clip holding a sizeable wad of franc notes. He counted out a few and shoved them into the Serb’s hand.

Josephine felt she’d better open her purse. ‘Let me give you some, too.’

‘She’s right,’ said the Canadian. ‘Take her money instead. She’s rich.’ And in one smooth gesture, he retrieved the notes out of the Serb’s hand and put them back in his pocket.

Josephine couldn’t believe he’d done that. ‘Hey!’

He laughed at her pique. ‘You saying you can’t afford it? I got his ass out of there, but I’m not Rockefeller. I’m not even the Salvation Army.’

‘You can afford to buy me a drink,’ said Josephine.

‘Ohhhhh, I see!’

‘Don’t get any ideas!’ she warned him, but it was difficult for her to look cross.

‘No, Ma’am.’

The Serb was still in front of them, holding the cash, not sure what was going on now.

‘Okay, okay,’ said Drummer, shooing him away. ‘Off you go, buddy. And don’t cut any more Yanks.’



She was in front as they walked back into the club, and she made sure she kept moving towards her table for two and not over to his friends at the booth. She could feel his eyes on her narrow swaying hips and her small pert ass. With a glance over her shoulder, she caught him in the act and gave him a devilish smile, her eyes, almost as dark as coal, squinting as she laughed.

He had been drinking gin, but he ordered another bottle of champagne.

‘Why’d you help him anyway?’ asked Josephine. Keep him talking, she thought. Don’t let him remember his friends were waiting...

‘Oh, that poor bastard’s all right,’ he answered. ‘Down on his luck, sure, but even a hot-head Slav might make himself useful down the line. I think I can trust him.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because he tried to stab me with that knife a week ago.’

Her jaw dropped.

‘I needed some information, and he was a bit reluctant—at first.’

‘Do I want to know what kind of information?’ she asked warily. Obviously this fellow moved in some dangerous circles. But he could handle himself, and she liked that.

‘Probably not.’

It was a simple, direct response, and he wasn’t trying to impress her. She could tell. So many men tried that she could count the techniques now. Nor did his candour put her off. Gangster and tycoon alike drank in Brickie’s and the other nightclubs, and an infamous hood might be a prince who bought everyone a round while a banker might slap around his girl. You could be anyone in Paris, hadn’t she proved that herself? And you could be a different person on a Paris night when the liquor flowed.

‘Drummer.’ She said it slowly, as if it were a foreign word she’d heard for the first time. ‘Why Drummer? You a musician?’ Her mouth puckered in a teasing smile, her tone mildly challenging.

‘Oh, no,’ he laughed. ‘It’s kind of silly really. I never use my first name, but it’s Drummond. When I was a kid, Drummond became Drummin’, you know?’ He did a little conga beat on the tabletop. ‘Drummin’ became Drum, and then over the years, Drum became Drummer.’

She decided his best feature was his eyes, those dazzling green pools, but it was more than just their colour. His attention never wavered. A waiter dropped a glass, someone yelled a hearty hello to a friend across the bar, but he stayed absolutely focussed on her, never checking the periphery for an instant. There was no reverence in his stare as she encountered with ordinary fans, there was something more tantalising, and it made her feel special in a way she had never known, let alone achieved with her wealth. She’d been wrong. He was gorgeous.

‘So what do you do for a living, Drummer?’

‘This and that. I’ve had all kinds of jobs.’ And he left it there, still looking at her evenly and smiling politely, but adding nothing.

Ah, so we’re going to play it mysterious, she thought. ‘What was the best?’

He took a long pull of his cigarette and blew the smoke through his nostrils like a dragon, his lip curling at the corner as if the information was a

mischievous secret. 'Working in a logging camp out in the forests of British Columbia. The trees can have a diameter as big as a house. It's amazing. And the air is so crisp and clean, it's...' He looked embarrassed for a brief moment at all his rhapsodising. 'Well, it's quite special anyway.'

Very smoothly, she reached forward and put her small hand in his. He took it with a confident, masculine grace.

'I've mined coal, worked on a refrigerator ship, tended bar, grease monkey, bank teller, all kinds of things.'

'So what was the worst job?'

He didn't hesitate. 'During the War. I was tall enough to lie about my age and signed up with the Winnipeg Rifles. When the Germans used the gas at Ypres, our guys were smart. They peed into their handkerchiefs and breathed through them, so most of them got out all right. They got a few of us to be extra stretcher-bearers for the wounded. It was horrible. Men blinded, men gasping like their lungs had been burned away. Just hours of that, and there was nothing you could do for them.'

She was still holding his hand and squeezed it with a gentle pressure.

'That was a long time ago,' he said, squeezing her hand back.

He picked up the bottle. 'And so here we are. More champagne?'

'Yes, please. So what do you do now?'

'I'm a correspondent for the *Toronto Telegraph*.'

'Man, I always heard Canadians were boring,' she teased.

He took it in good spirits. 'Well, they ain't.'



He didn't invite her to dance. He didn't lean in on the excuse that the joint was getting too noisy, that he wanted to hear her better. He offered no pretence at all. It was she who rose from the table, taking him by the hand and moving to the washroom down the narrow corridor. She kissed him hungrily as her sandal pushed the creaking door open, and they stumbled inside.

It was close, the air stagnant and the light harsh through the torn shade of the bulb overhead. She laughed at the seediness of it. This should get him going, she thought. Men either liked to make love to her in the grandness of her house in Le Vésinet, with a thrill of sex like burglary, or they wanted to take her in common surroundings, as if they could strip her down to just

being a woman again, instead of Josephine. There were times when she cared about reasons and times when she didn't, and right now, her own reason was pure want.

His mouth was warm, his tongue soft and yielding. She always thought a man should know when to draw back, to let a girl probe and explore and feel the underside of soft red flesh in his mouth, and he was smart enough to let her take the initiative. She sank her teeth into his bottom lip, felt his eyelashes brush her cheek. She closed her eyes and drank him in again.

Then she pulled him by his lapels, their tongues still colliding, and she perched herself on the bowl of the stained porcelain sink, hoping to God it could withstand her weight. One of her sandals dropping with a dull *clonk* as she tried to wrap her legs around his calves. His hands roamed from her flat belly to her rounded breasts, once girlishly small at the start of her career and now ripe and full, fondling them through the thin cotton. She heard his ragged breath and then, unbelievably, he said, 'N—no—'

'What?' she said. 'What's wrong?'

His face still very close to hers, he smiled faintly and said, 'I don't want you like this.'

'Then take me home.'

'No.'

'What's the matter? You telling me you don't want me?'

'Course I do,' he whispered. 'But every man does, doesn't he? He wants to unravel a mystery, but he only thinks it's in your body. This whole city celebrates you, and you know it. You've danced naked for cheering, applauding crowds, but no one really knows what's going on, do they?'

She was listening so intently that she barely felt his fingertips brushing the inside of her thigh. Stroking so gently, up and down.

So he wanted to humble her. He was one of those. 'And what do you think is going on, baby?'

'You've got the power,' he went on. 'When they stare at you, you've got them. It's their curiosity or their lust or their love of spectacle that's out there, isn't it? *They're* the naked ones. You make them face themselves.'

Stroking her thigh, fingers rising up the skin.

'Yes...' She said it coyly, but her own breathing was getting unsettled, and

she was saying yes to something else. She had lifted her knees to keep her precarious balance on the narrow sink, and now his left hand had caught her foot, the pad of his thumb kneading the soft flesh on the inside of her arch.

Still that exquisite movement of fingers, so gentle, climbing further, stroking slowly, now under the hem of her dress—

‘You don’t like a girl having the power?’

‘I think you’re amazing,’ he answered, and there was a sincere admiration in his voice and in his eyes. Still stroking slowly, climbing—

She crossed her arms in the tight space to reach for her dress straps and pull them down, to make him an offering. He shook his head again, and she would have ignored this and kept on if only his fingers hadn’t distracted her. Stroking slowly, yes, climbing, and now they pushed with a gentle but insistent pressure against her core, resting now on the lips of her pussy, with only the veil of her panties staving off the invasion. She felt a new rush of wetness.

‘I think you’re incredible,’ he was saying, ‘but I’m selfish. I want to be something else for you. I don’t want to be just tonight’s entertainment...’

‘What... are you... saying?’ she asked.

Was he talking about commitment? Did he actually expect her to be exclusive with him when they’d only met a few minutes ago? Ridiculous. But she couldn’t think straight, she didn’t want to talk any more, because his hand had strayed into her panties, his finger finding her clitoris and moving up and down gently, gently, and she felt she was soaking, and he wouldn’t relent, he was, he was—

‘I’m not asking anything of you,’ he said. ‘I’m telling you why I don’t want to give everything of myself...’

Take me, her mind screamed. Why didn’t he just take her? His finger dancing over the head of her clitoris, and she felt like she was burning up in the tiny closet of the washroom, her nipples jutting through her dress, feeling her perspiration paste the fabric against the small of her back.

‘Come on,’ she said. ‘Come on, give it to me...’

She tugged at his shirt and feverishly started to work the buckle of his belt, and now his other hand tried to push her away even while two of his fingers eased into her vagina. Fighting each other, mouths crushed together all

the while, Josephine letting out a whimper as she felt his fingers inside her, working an insistent rhythm. An electric current was sending sparks from her toes up through her thighs, and she couldn't stand it, her hands practically ripping at the buttons of his trousers to open them. There was an exquisite second when she saw the band of bare skin between his shirt and the edge of his boxer shorts, the bulge of his own need, but it was his skin, beautiful bare skin that sent her over the edge—

'Ohhhhh...Ohhhhh...'

She rode a wave of ecstasy, giving in to it, no more power struggle, just surrendering and bracing her palms against the sink, her hips moving like pistons against the weight of his hand, coming like a convulsion.

'Look at me,' he whispered.

She looked into his eyes, those green eyes now wild like her own, the two of them barely recognizing each other. Still coming, she felt the surrealism of the moment, how it seemed so much more intimate than if they were naked and cleaving to each other in a frantic embrace. She felt her energy drain away, and she slumped against the wall, a smaller orgasm hitting her now like ripples, like a distant aftershock.

'Come home with me,' she begged.

He kissed her, hard and long, in apology. He tucked in his shirt, adjusted his pants and opened the door. Then it was closed and she was alone, and still she felt the delicious pulse at the very core of her.



'Hey! Come on!'

The woman had pleaded in French and now she was trying English. *Bam, bam, bam* as her impatient fist hammered the outside of the toilet.

'Give me a minute!' Josephine called over her shoulder.

A quick wash with the bidet, and now she had the water running in the sink and was wiping her brow and bare arms to cool down. She couldn't very well go back out again without being presentable. She squeezed out her handkerchief, replaced it in her purse and then lifted her chin in the air as she opened the door and moved past the waiting woman in the narrow corridor. *Play it regal*, she told herself. Scanning the bistro, she couldn't see Drummer and didn't expect to.

Bricktop was leaned against the bar with her arms folded. She had also been waiting. 'Remind me to swing by and use your *bôite* for a bedroom.'

'I did no such thing!' hissed Josephine. 'Brickie, you're terrible.'

Her old friend was having none of it. 'He sure has a roundabout style of seduction, I'll give him that. Took his sweet time moving in.'

Josephine, feeling embarrassed in spite of her efforts, had had enough for tonight. They were in Paris, yes, but sometimes the only way to get through to the woman was to talk to her as if they were both back in a Midwest saloon. Each had clawed her way up from such dumps, and Brickie could talk plain about what was on her mind.

'Girl, what you going on about now?'

'I'm saying that guy's been asking about everybody you know for the past two weeks,' answered Bricktop.

'What?' Josephine struggled to make sense of it. 'He's a reporter, Brickie. That's what they do—ask questions.'

'Uh-huh. Tonight he's wearing a suit made out of paper. Last Friday he was decked out like Fred Astaire at the Hotel de Ville reception. I was there—one of the cultural guests invited for amusement purposes.' She added huffily, 'I was *decorative*. And he was asking his questions. You tell me, Jo—what kind of story is he working on when he asks about who you been with three years ago? Maybe he's hustling more than one kind of ride out of you!'