



In the Cafe-bar

One thing is certain and everyone agreed on this point later: her arrival was observed by all those occupying tables near the entrance to the cafe-bar, men and women alike. Their eyes followed her as she moved in an inertia-free glide to an unoccupied table near the back, slightly secluded by a potted palm.

They noticed her Gucci and Armani, her black hair expensively cut to look carelessly perfect, her flawless skin adorned with flawless make-up in an impenetrable matt, her eyes like Cleopatra, lined beyond the corners in an uplifted stroke of black, the eyes shadowed by cobalt blue, the brows darkened and enhanced, the lashes tinted in delicate waves. Every nuance was noted and saved away by the women, the effort and time needed to improve on perfection mentally listed and filed away. Every movement as she sat at the table noted at a more visceral level by the men who latched onto every glance at the menu and who envied every interaction with the waiter, which was minimal and appeared to be communicated without visible movement of head, body or lips.

It was only after the waiter had delivered her order and she sat alone that the surreptitious gazes from the onlookers revealed that she had started to weep.

Her tears fell in mascara-blackened cataracts, pooling at her high cheekbones, overflowing to the hollows of her cheeks and on to the final waterfall of her chin, dropping finally to her lap, unnoticed. Her porcelain face remained immobile, no flicker of emotion to give meaning to the cascade of tears, no indicator to permit an interpretation of her mood: sorrow or elation, tragedy or triumph, hurt or happiness.

Her hand moved slowly from the marble table to reach into a shoulder bag hung from

the back of her chair. Her head still immobile, she drew a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from the bag and brought them to the table in front of her. A waiter paused in flight, taking in the potential breach of custom and law, and patrons at other tables, transfixed by her tears, drew audible breaths and held them. Still staring into space, her hand released the pack and lighter onto the table and dropped back to her lap to catch more tears as they continued down. Breaths released, murmured conversation resumed, the waiter moved on.

The distinctive vibration of a mobile phone commenced, to increase with an insistence both irritating and undeniable. She raised her chin just a little and there may have been a minuscule uplift to her left eyebrow but afterwards, observers could not agree on that point. Her hand reached down again and produced a slim, silvered phone and her head finally moved when she raised the screen to look at it. Perhaps then it became clear that it was tragedy that moved her and the phone a well of sorrows into which she peered and from which she discerned increasing grounds for her tears, which redoubled their efforts.

Her elegant thumb, crowned by pearlescent talon, rubbed across the face of the screen, gently obliterating the call, consigning the caller to digital limbo. Then she made some alteration to the phone and there was much speculation later as to whether it was simply a turning off, blocking the caller or more finally, deleting the contact. There was no further call.

Before her lay an untouched coffee of some description, a fashionable cappuccino perhaps, and a slim biscuit nestled against the cup in similarly pristine condition. Her hand moved unfocussed across the table, picked up the teaspoon from the saucer and continued on to stir in slow meandering patterns through the creamy froth, back and forth. More than one patron sat mesmerised by this and claimed thereby to have missed all the action which followed swiftly on.

A couple had entered the cafe-bar, more down at heel in their off-the-peg clothes and sensible shoes than the usual clientele of haute-couture ladies who lunch and Jermyn Street suited gentlemen. Looking around briefly, they went immediately to her table. She rose with a graceful movement owing much to deportment classes and a personal trainer, scooped her cigarettes and lighter into her bag which was taken from her without demur by one of the newcomers. There was a low monotonous murmur as she was invited to accompany them. She held out her hands and handcuffs were placed on her wrists. In single file, they left the cafe-bar to a startled silence and following hubbub.

The careful observer would have noted that, in all of this, her tears had not ceased to fall.

Owen Parry