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# DEJA VU

VACLAV CHVATAL

CUT AROUND THE CORNER, cut it real sharp and tap a few staccato syncopes along the way. The Montmartre-like street with pictures for sale hanging on the walls and a silent sweet black girl sitting there on the pavement with melancholic eyes from an Evergreen cover. And five teenage Quebecois beauties hanging around a boutique speaking their incomprehensible language — I'd never be able to explain to them that I want and/or need more than a jukebox & lazy Sunday afternoons on a beach — besides, I am not their type either, having no honda no leather jacket

and no one wants me anyway — why does no one want me? why is there no girl for me? — the ratio is five girls to one boy in this city (according to statistics) which means five first-class beauties for me, five ravishing beauties in white pullovers, yellow pullovers, pink pullovers, green pullovers, the whole spectrum of pullovers sitting now at the street cafés not acquainted with the laws of statistics

but there are gangs of them mixed in with the local boys, café gangs promenade gangs discothèque gangs closed in impenetrable shells like secret medieval societies & no one is going to introduce me to one of them —

besides, I wonder if I really want the introduction, being fed up with chasing girls up and down these streets (the big sex supermarket windows) overflowing with a sudden big rebellious self-esteem feeling at last. Why should I devise one hundred more great opening lines? Why should I prostitute myself? Why should I offer myself to ten more girls who are bound to be stupid, boring, empty & non-appreciative anyway? Count me out, my beauties. I quit the national game. No more low low prices on my body and no more discounts on

my soul. Not me. No no no no no. The sale is over. Stick your Free Discothèque Masonry Club registration forms up your lovely asses. To tell you the truth, I would be bored to death after one discothèque week. I am not that type either.

But still . . .

I want a girl. I want a girl who would be very close to me from the very first moment. I want a girl who would sneak in my room when the darkness comes, who would make love to me, whom I would love, who would love me without worrying about all the definitions of love, a primitive of sex and intellect (the same for all the ignus, after all), who would know that life may be a dirty trick but who would not believe it, never say it aloud, because this is the only way to play a wonderful one-up undefeatable and in the most genuine way religious countertrick. Who would not drag me through discothèques every night, who would let me write a great book. Who would be the same with me and yet not the same, to make the miracle greater. A Jean Harlow for me, Billy the Kid.

Anyway. Either you get the telepathic shock, the unmistakable click, and then you just KNOW it — the only thing you can be absolutely sure about, outside the cogito-ergo-sum syllogisms world. Or you don't and then there is no way to put it into words for you. Searching for total comprehension you suddenly realize you went around the world and find yourself on the simple side again.

(Greetings to those who understand and a koan for those who don't.)

I wonder if Hegel had this also in mind, talking about his triads.)

However. Back to the story.

There are no such girls. Not anymore. There is no mate for me and I am the last dinosaur.

So I cut around the corner & whistle a few blues choruses to the indigo sky. And I am as lonely as I can be. A great saxophone solo hanging from the rooftops through this VanGogh street & its yellow café lights, when Charlie Parker died, there was a tiny feather, falling and floating, floating and falling, tenderly and gently, from the high ceiling of Birdland . . . The Promenade is empty now, this is THE place for picking up girls in the funny sociological setup of this city with its unwritten laws & rites — what's perfectly normal here is absurd a couple of blocks away, the end of the promenade is the fence of the City Mating Area. But as I said, I don't feel like ritual mating tonight, I cancelled all the discounts. Actually I go there just for the chance of a girl Claire being there, the girl Claire who speaks

almost no English — and I speak almost no French — but whom I still managed to charm last Saturday by saying *Je suis le roi de Morocco* and who seemed to like me (the sweet friendly looks saying *Fuck the language barrier*) in spite of her girlfriend obviously hating me — anyway, she was just a teenager for some reason tenderly nice to me for fifty minutes & that's it, that's all & I don't care, she is perhaps at home now or with some of her boyfriends, have a nice time, Claire, I don't care. The promenade is empty & I am lonely, just with the beat of my heels on the midnight pavement. And the dark indigo sky. And I see myself as an old bum in New York City, wrapped in newspapers in the Penn Station night (Penn Station being one of the first places I wanted to see in New York City, because of Holden Caulfield), Penn Station where I actually arrived one May night after hitching all the way from Chapel (Pulpit) Hill, N.C. — in fact, I wanted to stop in Washington to see the White House etc. but he was going to New York to see his girlfriend, we talked, clicked, got excited on Virginia highways, finally I decided to forget about Washington — then I drove the car at a steady 75 which was the absolute limit — the shaky wheel! — (he kept it on 55-60 before, now sleeping quietly as a happy child in the other seat), with red eyes I zoomed through New Jersey right to the center of Manhattan — where are you, Dean Moriarty? — and here we were at last, Penn Station 3 am & about twenty bums wrapped in newspapers, as I said, and all of a sudden I feel so safe and know I would be safe everywhere, I wear the International Bum Society stamp on my soul and we are all innocent babies in this world's soft arms (although I didn't have exactly the same feeling later on in L.A.), so I walk through the empty dark avenues to the 42nd to find more life (beggars, prostitutes & homosexuals, to be more exact) and at 5 am I finally get robbed of my new pack of Camels.

But now, I am walking up this street, all alone in the indigo, whistling my improvised blues — riffs sharp as broken bottles — maybe my brother is with me now, my brother who was born four years before me during the war and died at the age of six months and who is with me all the time but it's me who sometimes forgets about it — and Kerouac is in heaven and Charlie Parker is in heaven, my brother and Kerouac's brother Gérard are big buddies in heaven —

BUT I AM ALL ALONE!

This is Québec City Blues.

There is a boy standing on the corner, he may be 17, his eyes shin-

ing with fever cutting through passing pullovers right to the sweet round nipples, his Adam's apple jumping up & down, his mind brooding through the endless pubic hair forests, too high on hormones, too much desperate & too much bound to fail, he will end up tonight masturbating in his squeaky bed wondering if his parents ever find out — I should put my arm around his shoulders and say We are all fellow sufferers martyrs of love hunted by desire

Instead, I cut around the corner again and this is my favorite refuge, the place with jazz and beer, but crowded as usual, no place for me to sit, no human place for me to sit down on my human ass & have a few beers. Then a couple is leaving, I don't question the reasons for their early departure, 80% of the local girls will sleep lover-less tonight. Two other beauties sneak in the empty place but there is still room for me, so I sit with them. But I am going to take revenge now. That is, I am not even going to *try* to pick them up. Which they don't know. On the contrary — like every other beauty in this city — they know I am going to make a pass at them. Which they will routinely decline. Which they *would* decline if I made the pass. That's the point. I won't even smile at them, I won't even look at them, I will just ignore them or maybe stare right through them leaving them in confusion, asking themselves what's wrong.

They are talking in French to each other but I don't look at them. They don't exist. Instead, I think of the book I am (hopefully) going to write — yesterday I decided to call it *Déjà vu*, for no particular reason, I just like that title. Besides, odd things happen here. In Los Angeles, I used to hear a distant sound of a bell, the railroad crossing bell from my pillow. But there were no railroad tracks around and when I took my head away from the pillow, the sound vanished. Now, I hear the same sound again every night. Only it is the real sound, coming from the open window of my room. Things disappear and come back again . . . Every day I meet people I know, only I know it can't be them, they are far away from here now. Yet they smile at me knowingly, then another one zooms past in a white sportscar & waves his hand at me . . . at any rate, *Déjà vu* is a great title for a book.

Then I realize that those two girls have switched to English now. Which makes me forget for a moment about the whole hard-to-get game & I turn to them to ask them — just for the sake of curiosity — what sort of a bilingual couple are they. And they say they are Americans, they talk French to each other just to get more practice — not exactly true, as I learn later on, they share with me the paranoia

that all French Canadians hate all English-speaking people (partly true, after all — English is a fucking language, a Québécois in Montreal told me & meant it). And then again they sit in silence or perhaps say something unimportant to each other, not for my ears anyway, but not hidden from me either, no games of ignoring me, no games of giving me looks, just sitting there, two sweet American girls lost in a strange city, talking a strange language so that no one gives them nasty looks. Sweet or non-sweet, it does not matter to me anyhow, I have switched my male-centers off and given up all hopes of ending this night other than alone in my lonely bed in my lonely room in this lonely world

but being anxious to talk to someone I forget about my vow of silence and ask them where are they from. They say Ann Arbor, one of the friendliest places which ever greeted me in the middle of February snows — I tell them I talked to Jerry Rubin there and their faces light up which is unexpected which is good so I tell them they tell me they tell me I tell them, the band is playing now, I have the third beer they have their first — no time for thinking, which is good, too — they know all the books by Kerouac, they tell me all about Ken Kesey, they like Nina Simone my secret love — but this is no name-dropping talk — Virginia highways, where am I — God has only negative attributes, no positive ones. Firecrackers behind our eyes, fuses blowing, safety valves whistling and stars exploding in the sky. Here comes the girl selling flowers. It is all a big First-shoot-then-think Bonnie&Clyde movie, the only timing is the perfect timing, as she passes among the tables on her way back, I get up, I get two roses, I give them to my sisters-ex-machina but

The eyes! The grace! The sweetness! I will go mad!

I gave them the roses for the sake of pure absolute 100% poetry, nothing else I could do — no explanations — but I did not expect the eyes. They are beaming & they are happy, the two lovely American apparitions who are just perfect because they are themselves they are real they are

There are no words (which doesn't bother me at all)

The band is packing up, the band is leaving the apparitions must leave tomorrow but this is not the way to end it all — for the sake of absolute 100% poetry, as I already said, and we are going to die anyway, but this is no carpe diem, it is — there are no words — God has only negative attributes

I tell them the best solution is not to sleep at all, I tell them I have

a bottle of bourbon & a bottle of cognac in my room, I tell them we are going to get gloriously drunk tonight

They say yes — they can't say anything else —

There is not much sense in hitching and we all three jump into the back seat of a taxi. They love Elvis singing from the radio — revolution was born from Elvis' gyrating pelvis & I think of a friend of mine from the great era of our superb black humour & terrific dada & big practical jokes at the age of fifteen, my friend who was getting plenty of girls every Saturday night by just standing there in the spotlights, plunking his guitar, nodding absent-minded and staring blankly from the stage, maybe singing his crazy home-made rock'n'roll, too. I never envied him, though, and we were great buddies

And we are great buddies now, all three of us

We are the same species of animals

We are the last dinosauruses

Revolution was born in the back seats of American cars — and as I tell them this, this tiny sexual lightning makes its appearance for the first time and flashes through the space — we are all sitting in the back seat

(If this was a movie, the musical leitmotiv would burst out here.)

We are walking through the silent dark campus each shouting over the other's voices — cool it baby this aint no chicks residence

But we get to my cell safe. Phil Marlowe! Where are you! One of them wants the bourbon, I get it from the drawer of my desk.

I am in love with both of them, I am desperate and they are going to leave tomorrow.

Since we clicked in so many points, I say, we could/should click in the last (not least) one, too. I am a sex maniac.

If there was just one of you, I would rape you mercilessly. But I have no idea how to handle both of you.

They look at me and one of them says they have black belts in karate & at my first attempt to rape them they will shove me through the screen in my window.

Which brings their attention to the screen and they say they are going to take it out for me, so that I can barbecue and sunbathe on the rooftop.

I LOVE THEM!

BOTH!!

Why must this always happen to me? (Dr. Bernie is in heaven, too.)

WHY COULD IT NOT BE JUST ONE GIRL?

I tell them they may have their black belts but I was pretty good at judo when I was thirteen (true) & still remember a lot. So that there is a sort of balance of forces in this room.

I LOVE THEM BOTH!!!

I am in love with them I love them I love them both I love them

This is the sweetest night of all and it is going to be utterly platonic.

They tell me it is hard to be a girl. They cannot go camping, everyone wants to get them.

I tell them I can imagine it is hard. And it is hard to be a boy in Québec City, dying of thirst at the well, the ration five to one and all. All the idiotic rites & roles, boys supposed to be aggressive, girls supposed to be defensive, one big commedia dell'arte.

We hold a great international conference — sexual roles in contemporary society.

Can I forget for a while that they are girls?

I tell them why should I? I tell them if they were boys, I would be happy I met them, I would get gloriously drunk with them, we would be great buddies. And so on. Which is true. But the fact that they are girls should make it better. And it does. Now I get into all my old almost forgotten theories about male-male relationships & male-female relationships (I don't know too much about the female-female ones) lecturing on the primeval jungle cry (We be of one blood, ye and I) & how to add the free bonus of sex on top rather than spoiling it all — as usual — by all the prestige & jealousy feelings leading inevitably to the betrayal betrayal bitter betrayal bitter end

We are not getting gloriously drunk. As a matter of fact, we are not getting drunk at all.

But the wireless beams are flashing through the room all the time  
And we know we always had them

We do not have to talk — we never had to —

Went around the world looking for the total comprehension

We have no past no future we are immune to all the dirty tricks

We are primitives of sex & intellect

It's pretty hot in the room, I take my sweater off & sit there in my Kerouac-style black and white domino shirt. With holes on my elbows.

This is going to be a sentimental story, says one of them. We will mend his shirts & take care of him. We will take him home in our luggage.

I tell them I love them. They tell me they love me. We all know it is true. We all know that this is a great tender magic platonic love story.

Now, when we have cleared up the sex matters, I say, I will try to forget that you are girls and we will finally get gloriously drunk. What more can you tell me about Ken Kesey?

They just give me one big Fuck-Ken-Kesey look.

These two absolutely attractive lovely beautiful sweet strictly miraculous girls.

GIRLS.

I let out a scream of torture and desire like Yossarian in Catch 22.

I WANT YOU BOTH.

I know it can't be I know I know

An overdose effect par excellence

O Great Bernie who art in heaven now, Why Must This Always Happen to Me? Look, says one of them, just try to relax every single point in your body.

We all laugh, it is always the sexual alchemy, one way or the other.

Shall we give him a massage?

Shall I undress?

Just the shirt, says one of them. A *very* professional voice.

And they treat me like a bag of meat. You work on the top, I work on the bottom.

And I lie there on my belly without even knowing who's who & who is working where. One of them takes off my blue jeans and

Now, I have got you! Oh no, my dear readers, this is not a paperback full of lust & flesh, fresh import from Denmark where pornography is free. This is a tender love story, get it. Give up all hopes.

Of course. Of course, it was a put-on. She takes off just my socks. And they are working on my top. And they are working on my bottom. Alchemy anyway.

And it's pleasant and it's ticklish and I start reaching for them, I start grabbing them — not knowing whom & whose what — they keep getting rid of my hands, they keep working on me, I keep reaching, they keep working I keep they keep we keep

The light is out & then it is the three of us lying in my bed with me barechested in the middle & one girl in each arm, two sweet apparitions who came from nowhere and will disappear at noon. The ancient method for getting young again. Two girls, one at each side. Only there must not be any sex going on. Exactly.

Angels at dawn.

It's so absurd, says one of them, reading our common mind. Yeah, it's so absurd (that's me). But it is so absurd! says the third of us.

And a piece of paper on the inner side of my door, the paper on which I typed the Beatles lyrics.

Treat me  
Like it is  
The night before

One of them is going to the bathroom and I guard the door. When I am alone with her, we kiss each other. The other one is going to the bathroom and I guard the door. When I am alone with her, we kiss each other.

The time is whirling faster. Isn't there an empty room in the whole residence? The vision of myself with one of them — just one, at last — in bed. IN BED!

But there is, obviously, no empty room in the whole monster, I keep trying locked doors, locked doors, all I manage is to wake up a few people who did not lock up their doors before going to sleep & now they see a barechested lunatic in blue jeans running down the hall

Those sweet young bodies!

(Let's face it: I may have been a primitive of sex & intellect an hour ago. But the intellect is gone now.)

And the man downstairs tells me no, I can't get a room for a friend of mine before 8 am no matter whether he arrives from Montreal at 5 am or not. To the other pavillon, across the grass with morning dew & shivering in the cold — hopeless everywhere & I can't drag one of them to a motel, it would be completely out of tune

And so I come back

In despair

It would be nice to be true

I am not responsible for the whole thing anymore, count me out

A bleak gray morning

I come back to my room, but they don't sleep. They are sitting there & looking at me. I collapse to my chair & flush a glass of cognac down the toilet-bowl of my throat.

We have come to a decision.

All right, what decision? Don't have pity on me. I am prepared for the worst.

One of us will go for a walk.

And before I even realize what's going on, she is out. Before I

understand it, I am with one of them — oh yes, one, at last — in bed and

Let us skip the details, OK? (The funny point is, I am going to skip them whether you want or not, because it is I who am at the controls of this story.)

Centuries whistling through our ears, 747 taking off — a fast flashback on my girlfriend lost a long time ago — gray-haired alchemists bent over their cauldrons witches waving at us merrily from flames, McClure roaring through San Francisco

We are very peculiar animals

And when the other one comes back, her twin is all dressed again but I lie there naked — not responsible anymore & besides, maybe they are going to share me equally and the twin will go for a walk now — but she does not and stays in the room & we are all sleepy & we are all in love, I dress and go to sit downstairs (with a new glass of cognac) so that they can get some sleep now.

A sort of an instant breakfast, this cognac

My brain refuses to work

So let it rest for a while

Those girls don't exist

It is all too incredible

We are going to be life-long buddies

Yeah

Drinking champagne in a castle in France one day

The birds are singing

Courvoisier for breakfast — keeps you going until lunch

I am almost seven hours old now

There was nothing before last midnight

I have no past

Then I get obsessed with the idea of bringing them breakfast in bed — having told them I will wake them up at nine — a technicolor vision of two rosebuds opening their eyes to see a tray with bacon and juice and eggs and all; I see them bathing in the warm pleasures of the food and bed and the new day's sunrise

So I go to the cafeteria and fetch it all

Vous avez un grand appétit, says the girl at the counter

Right. You bet I do. And the cashier stares at me blankly as I leave with a matterhorn of plates & glasses, through the morning cold, across the lawn once more

I tell them we are going to be great movie directors, we are going to buy a house in North Carolina & sit on the porch in rocking chairs,

highballs in our hands, and they are going to mend my shirts. To which the two sweet rosebuds scream in unison:

BULLSHIT!

The most tender moment of the story. Which kicks me straight up to the Happiness Peak.

And they get very practical, although they suspect I am going to say goodbye to them now — we are the same even in our doubts

So I make it explicit I am going to go to the train with them & kiss them goodbye on the platform

We are all desperately in love; we look at the two roses in the sink

They must pack everything in their room downtown. The perfect oxygen uppercut outside, we are all balancing on the edge of sleep and madness, we finally broke through to the endless joy tonight

Full of a sleepy pride, I walk to one of the houses, destroy a tree in its front lawn & hand them more flowers, we are trying to hitch and finally get on the downtown bus

I feel alive, that's all that counts (Marianne in Pierrot le Fou)

They have a terrible mess in their room, one more reason to love them (don't bother me with any reasons or I'll punch your nose) & they are going to take a shower together, obviously to make me jealous at the sound of the water splashing on their naked skin, they say the shower is too small for all three of us

So I sit behind the shower door, listening to the water jinglebells & occasionally shouting at the top of my lungs: This is a queer joint! This is a queer joint! just to draw their attention to myself — they told me to keep quiet and the other room is occupied by a homosexual couple

But when they get out I feel that the climax is over, we have passed the peak of our adventure and now I am empty & good for nothing, I can just sit there completely dumb & watch them & bore them to death. Which is what I tell them & explain that I must leave now to leave them with nice memories of myself — and I take a vague step towards the door

However, once God is nice to someone, he is really nice

Therefore they grab me tell me I am crazy & if I am bored with them they'll give me something to read, and they do

Which is the last straw to make me realize that I could never think of two copies of myself, so exact as these two, that I could never design them (besides, I would not think of two of them, either).

They are packing and I am lying across the bed like a piece of a

wet wash, reading aloud from their Freud's Interpretation of Dreams (millions of girls reading Nurse's Passion and True Love magazine on trains!)

And we get into some sort of an argument over Mick Jagger being all lips & is it sexy or not, I start telling them about my (living) brother who is all lips, they say they would be delighted to meet my brother

They've finished packing and I keep talking in the sleepy voice of Robert Desnos composing his great dream poems, now it is the Egyptian cure once more & we are all in love, that's all that counts, I kiss them in turn in their bed, they kiss me in turn, all that counts —

And finally I say I want to make love with the other one this time  
Her twin goes for a walk

Two angels again, in the three dollars queer joint, sun exploding, two kittens purring softly, salt in the mortal wounds of Hollywood

Stop telling me there is something wrong with sex education in the United States

I feel like shouting from the window through the golden air in the golden moments of our lives (& I do), I feel like running up and down the street & she turns to me — we are both beaming — and says she feels like running up and down the street

Then the twin comes back, overwhelmed with her new experience: I met this man in the park & he was exposing himself! (*ex-posing*, she says) she barely closed the door behind her and we ask her millions of very technical questions, excited

HOW CAN THEY BE SO PERFECT?

And the exhibitionist serves as a surrealistic counterpoint to our story (these girls know all about surrealism, back in my room I had three books & they could tell the author of each picture with just a quick glance from a distance — flashback on myself always trying to explain everything about surrealism & psychoanalysis & Beat Generation to all my newly-acquired girlfriends — and they were not showing off at all, the books just happened to be there, that's all & they even don't study art)

THEY DON'T EXIST!

Now it is the time to go, I grab the two suitcases & down the stairs of this beat hotel (back in their room I told them I was afraid they were going to sell me to those homosexuals to be able to pay the rent — they said if I feel afraid being with them, how should they feel being with me — shitless scared, I said, it made them laugh)

On the street they insist on carrying their suitcases, so that I will have my arms free to put around their shoulders

Which I do

And the Montmartre street is full of sun

We are all in love

Gold everywhere

Yes, we catapulted ourselves from the reach of Alphaville gravitation, finally we crushed through the old shells into paradise forever

In this Five-to-One Frustration City everyone envies me for I have two beautiful prophets of joy messengers of love ambassadors of paradise in my arms

They tell me everyone envies me

We think the same thoughts as we always did since the beginning of the world (& the Earth still boiling)

We float through the sunshine to the railway station and we still have twenty minutes left, 100% synchronized we realize that the only thing to do is to pay homage to Kerouac, to get a bottle of cheap red wine, to get drunk in the grass of this old red-brick railway station with the smell of asphalt wood oil freight trains — only they don't sell wine in the local épiceries, so I come back with a sixpack of Molson beer

When I return they tell me they decided they are in love with me

I am in love with them

Saturday noon

And it is a high time to get gloriously drunk at last

(High Noon, Gary Cooper strolling through the dangerous silence of his mid-west town)

We drink the beer from the cans

Here we come, the crazy triple & they kiss me. And when I say kiss I mean send a wire to Hollywood, call collect, this is the ultimately last word in the movie world of lust, flesh & passion. The people on yellow benches staring at us in confusion, trying to straighten it all up in their minds

We are the most wicked triple in this world

Blessed by a touch of lightning, children of the Night and Edgar Allan Poe

We are divine

Before you can pry any secrets from us, you must first find the real us, which one will you pursue?

We will take him home in our luggage

Then one of them takes a long hair from my sweater & says

Which of us?

The conductor staring at us utterly confused

Our hearts are breaking, you can hear them crush a mile away

Get on the goddam train, go home, stop it, it is too much

We are stars in the sky, in love forever

And then the train leaves

And I wander through the golden city with my pajama belt  
around my neck & two cans of beer in my hands, talking to myself  
incoherently, moaning aloud & losing my mind

Eternity

The sun

Night before