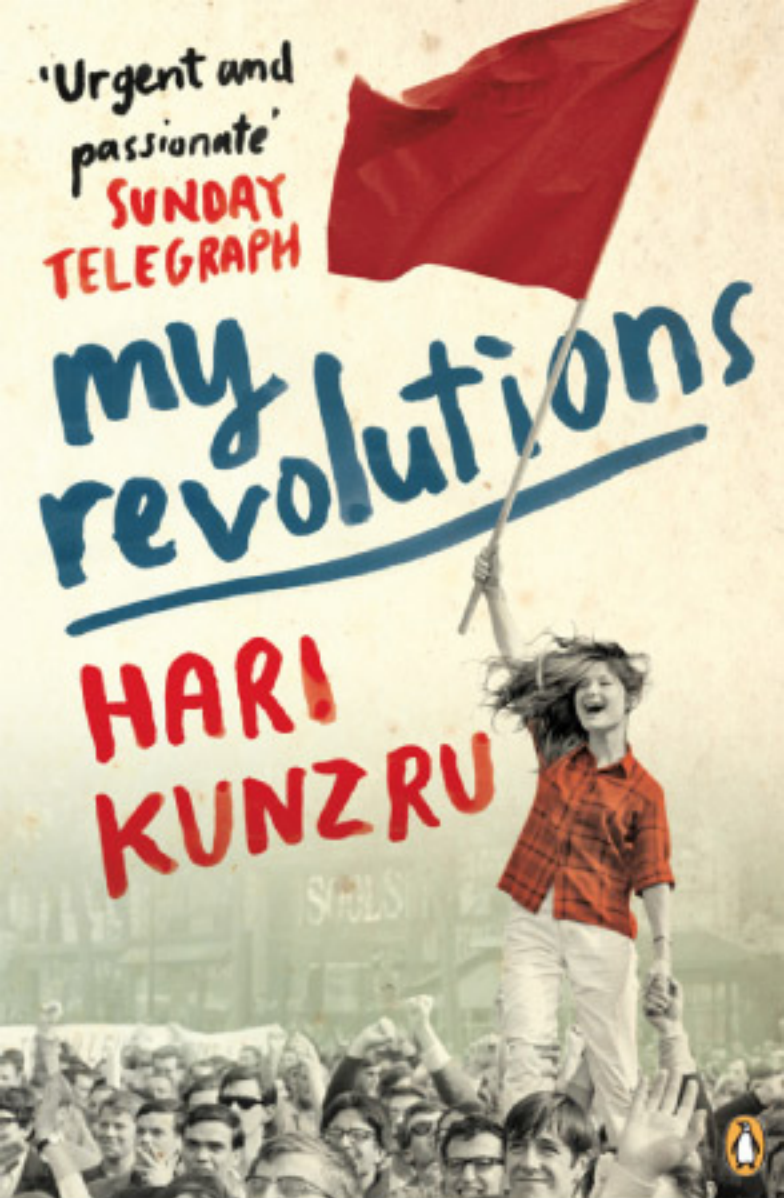


'Urgent and
passionate'
SUNDAY
TELEGRAPH

my revolutions

HARI
KUNZRU



My Revolutions
by
Hari Kunzru

Copyright © Hari Kunzru, 2007

All rights reserved



Penguin Books Ltd

This is a limited extract from My Revolutions

To find out more please visit www.penguin.co.uk

Outside in the garden, workmen from the marquee company are bolting together an aluminium frame on the lawn. They shout to each other and make jokes, theatrically throwing bolts and brackets across the blossom-strewn patch of grass under the tree. It's an old tree, taller than the house, and in autumn the fruit smashes when it falls to the ground. We should, I suppose, have had it cut down. The men seem happy. Maybe it's because they work in an atmosphere of constant pre-party excitement. Perhaps celebration gets inside them. The secret of the good life: putting up tents.

Other people are out there too. Caterers, a delivery driver; all preparing for the big do. Miranda has gone out for something or other, ribbon or flowers or place cards. For once, she said, she wanted *me* to be the centre of attention. She knew I wouldn't approve, but everyone deserved the chance to wish me a happy fiftieth. Everyone, I thought. Everyone? They're her friends really, but I knew how kindly it was meant. And I found myself looking forward to my party. For a long time, more than half my life if you want to look at it that way, I've avoided large gatherings. It's become instinctive, part of my personality. However, during the last few years I've started to lower my guard, a little. Which 'karma-wise' (as Miranda would say, meaninglessly) seems to have been a mistake.

I look away from the window. The study has been transmuted by Miles's visit. It's as if, by coming here, he's put the room in brackets. The oak desk silted with spreadsheets and reports, the shelves of books. Even the chipped grey filing cabinet has taken on a provisional, insubstantial look. The party preparations going on outside, which are, I have no doubt, at the very centre of

Miranda's consciousness, feel to me as if they're taking place on TV, a scene from one of those early-evening dramas where well-heeled suburbanites experience a little formulaic frisson in their lives; romance or a murder-mystery.

The workmen are laying out a white awning beside the metal frame. I sit very still, not wanting to disturb the atmosphere of the room, the pattern of the life I've led in it. Miranda will be back soon. What will I say to her? What can I say?

Voices in the hall. Not Miranda or Sam, not yet. I open the study door and meet two young guys, all gum and hair gel, carrying musical equipment. They ask where it should go and I hear myself give them directions, modulating through a series of cheery cadences. *Mein Host* the birthday boy, his mask still more or less intact under pressure.

I have to be clear. It's already over. All this – the house, my family, this ridiculous party – no longer exists. But accepting that doesn't mean I know what to do next, and even if I choose to do nothing, events will carry on unfolding, and very soon now, days or even hours, my life here will be over. In the sitting room there's a photo of Miranda, which I took on a cold weekend walk at the Norfolk coast. She's standing with her back to the camera, looking out to sea. The light is coming straight at the lens, and she's little more than a silhouette: big boots, narrow shoulders wrapped in an ethnic something-or-other, hair streaming in the wind. Somehow that's the image which comes to me: frail, romantic Miranda, rather than the arranger of breakfast meetings, the recipient of local chamber-of-commerce awards, the Miranda of the last few years. Soon a wave is going to break over her: police, maybe the media. How will she cope? I wish I could feel optimistic, but Miranda isn't a person who deals well with the world's unpredictability. She's always fought hard against randomness, with all the weapons in the stationer's: a little arsenal of agendas and diaries and wall-planners dotted with coloured stars. Poor Miranda, no amount of Post-its will ward off what's about to happen to you. You're utterly unprepared.

The stairs creak as I climb up to the bedroom. I have to duck my head to go through the door. I've never found the low ceilings and narrow corridors of country cottages quaint, at least not straightforwardly. They're scaled to the small stature of poorly nourished people; an architecture of hardship and deprivation. Of course I've never said this to Miranda. Irregular walls and creaking floorboards please her. I think she'd like to forget she was born into an industrial society. I can't, at least not in the same way. That kind of mystification has never seemed right to me. It's so incoherent, for one thing. A country life, but with plumbing and telecoms and antibiotics. A rich person's fantasy.

But this is our house, or rather Miranda's house, the house she allowed me to share and always wanted me to love as she did. I realize I'm standing with my fists clenched, glaring at the William Morris wallpaper, the patchwork cushions on the armchair. Above our bed, hanging from the oak beam, is a dream-catcher. I tug at it, breaking the string. I've wanted to do that for so long. Such an absurd, out-of-place thing. Our house is filled with these objects – tribal, spiritual, hand-crafted little knick-knacks that are supposed to edge us nearer to Miranda's wish-fulfilment future of agrarian harmony. There are corn dollies and old glass bottles and prints of medicinal herbs with quotations from Culpeper printed underneath in calligraphic lettering. 'Only from lucre of money they cheat you, and tell you it is a kind of tear, or some such like thing, that drops from Poppies when they weep.' That's outside the bathroom. Culpeper is *natural*, and *natural* is the flag Miranda waves at the world, the banner standing for righteousness and truth.

Why am I doing this, breaking her things? None of it's her fault. She's worked hard to make the life she wanted. She's tried to be a good person. And she has loved me. I know what will be the most terrible thing – the look on her face, the gradual opening of the abyss. Everything she has known or believed about me, her lover, her partner for sixteen years, the man who has been a stepfather to her daughter, is untrue. Or if not untrue – for I've tried not to tell unnecessary lies – then partial, incomplete.

Listen to me. *Partial, incomplete*. I'm even lying to myself. It could hardly be worse; she doesn't even know my real name.

My bowels are loose. I lock myself into the bathroom, among the lavender bunches and embroidered hand-towels and the rows of Bountessence products in their little recyclable bottles. Bountessence is the highest expression of Miranda's romance with nature. Bountessence is Miranda, though in public it's the two of us, because I still cling to some undefined administrative role and occasionally squire the boss to events and dinners in the West Sussex area. I'm a sort of Denis to her Margaret. Michael Frame and Miranda Martin of Bountessence Natural Beautycare.

It's peculiar. Those words make no sense to me. I can't connect myself with them, or with the couple they represent. They're just sounds. Ever since I became Michael Frame, all those years ago, I've existed in a kind of mental crouch. When I was a child I used to have night terrors, not quite dreams, more semi-conscious imaginings that took on narrative form, like scenes from films. In one recurrent situation I was wedged under the floorboards, holding my breath and waiting for the German soldiers to stop searching the attic where I was hiding. I could hear the clatter of their boots, a guttural voice barking orders. I used to lie rigid under the covers, the blood pounding in my head, my entire consciousness occupied by the effort of not making a noise. I think when I went underground those night terrors colonized my waking life. Remaining undetected has consumed all my energy, has hollowed out my sense of self. Nothing that has taken place in the meantime has ever quite felt real.

Except that tomorrow Mike Frame will be fifty, five weeks after me. This life, this Michael Frame life, has been it. This is what I have had.

I flush the toilet and wash my hands at the basin, trying not to look in the mirror. What will happen to Miranda? Will she have to move away? She's put so much into this house. If she's very lucky they might leave her alone. Maybe it won't make any difference to the world at large, what I did. Maybe it will end with the

two of us. And maybe she'll find a way to feel we did have a connection. Although there were things she didn't know, there were also things she did, which were important and real. I could say that to her. I could say, *Maybe one day you'll come to understand and find consolation*. But would I believe it? Not really. And would she? I don't know. Because I don't know if it's true about understanding and consolation. And I'm not certain we had anything at all.

Miranda will be back soon. She has allowed Sam to drive her to the shops in her nineteenth-birthday present, a second-hand Fiesta. An act of faith on Miranda's part: she's a nervous passenger and Sam only passed her test a few weeks ago.

Sam's room is just as she left it at the start of term; the neat row of shoes in front of the cupboard, the pile of outgrown soft toys on the bed. An orderly and rather conventional room. Only the backpack and the Discman dumped on the bed signal that, despite the argument we had last week, she's come down from university for Mike's officially-becoming-ancient party. I can't imagine what this will do to her, the media circus, the betrayal of trust. There's a chance she might just shrug it off. She's a practical girl, and startlingly worldly for a nineteen-year-old, at least as I would have judged a nineteen-year-old of my generation. Certainly Sam isn't your idealistic type of law student, interested in righting injustice or fighting for the little man. She says she wants to 'do corporate' because that's where the money is. And, I think, because she knows it scandalizes her mother and me. Little Sam and her embarrassing hippie parents; by now 'Soma' will be off her passport too. She hasn't allowed us to call her that for years.

Fuck. I can't do it. I can't face you, Sam. There's no way.

Working quickly, I open cupboards and pull out a sports bag, start stuffing in socks, underwear, a couple of shirts. I need to move fast, before they get back from the shops. My passport is in the study, in a box file. At least, that's where I think it is. I check and find it isn't and for the first time since Miles left I lose control. When you panic you forget to breathe and your heart-rate rises. I know this; I tell it to myself; but things start to speed up and soon

I'm sweeping papers on to the floor, pulling out drawers and sobbing with rage and frustration. Outside there's the sound of a car and I freeze, but it isn't them, just one of the marquee riggers. At last I spot the passport on a bookshelf. *Frame. Michael David. British citizen. 10 April/Avril 48.* 'British citizen' is the only part that is true.

Five minutes later I'm in Miranda's big silver BMW, approaching the junction with the ring road. I head out of town and along the coast towards Newhaven, obsessively checking the rear-view mirror to see if I'm being followed. A blue Sierra preoccupies me, then disappears at a set of traffic-lights. I'm so busy staring at it that I narrowly avoid rear-ending the car in front as it slows for a turn.

What am I worried about? By now Sam and Miranda will have got back home. Before long they'll realize I've gone. So what's left to salvage? At the port I pull into the ferry terminal and park between cars packed with luggage and fighting children, all waiting to be transported across the Channel for the holidays. I only really admit to myself where I'm heading as I queue for a ticket.

Last year I made this journey with Miranda. She was exhausted. Over time the business, which once involved filling little bottles on the kitchen table, has grown, slowly but steadily, into a substantial operation. It now consumes all of her energies. Bountessence sells beauty products – face cream and shampoo and conditioner and massage oil and so on – through a network of telesales agents, mostly women, some working at home and others in an office above a tanning salon in the town centre. When I met her, Miranda was making the stuff herself, boiling witchy cauldrons on the hob at her flat. Now 'her ladies', as she insists on calling them, sell factory-made 'natural botanicals' on commission to customers whose names appear on a list she rents from a marketing agency in London. A surprising number of people don't seem to mind being phoned by strangers to talk about moisturizer, and lately Miranda has begun to glimpse a grand and lucrative future.

I insisted on the holiday. I wanted to slow things down. She'd just secured funding for further expansion and was looking at space

in an industrial park. There was talk of online sales and meetings with a brand consultant, whatever one of those is. When she came home from signing the contract with her new investors (a pair of ambitious local solicitors) I expected her to be elated. Instead she sat and sipped pennyroyal tea in the garden, fidgety and withdrawn.

Unlike me, Miranda has the knack of living in the world. Almost effortlessly she seems to find herself on the crest of whatever preoccupation is currently sweeping the lunch table or the Sunday supplements. I've come to think of it as a gift. It isn't something she works at; Miranda certainly isn't a modish person, at least not consciously. In the last few years everyone around us has become very excited by money and, sure enough, her talent has led her to it, like an ant following a pheromone trail. There used to be a contradiction between money and Miranda, a short circuit. Like me, she belongs to a generation whose selfishness was tempered by a more-than-passing interest in renunciation. We had the notion that in some variously defined way, simplicity was glamorous, hip. So although she's now a thrusting entrepreneur of the type celebrated in the glossy magazines she buys with increasing frequency, Miranda remains conflicted about consumerism. I diagnosed her silent tea-drinking as a symptom of guilt, the unease of a woman who'd once spoken about alternative lifestyles with the emphasis on 'alternative' rather than 'lifestyles'.

Or maybe she was just tired. Either way, I could tell she wasn't sure that expansion was what she wanted – and I had my own private reasons to worry. I was being stretched thin by Miranda's ambitions. It was increasingly hard for me to keep a channel open to something important, something I don't really have a name for any longer. An ideal, maybe, though I'm not comfortable with the word. A vision of the future? Perhaps just to a person, someone I never was but once hoped to become.

It was clear we both needed space to breathe, so I rented a holiday apartment in the Languedoc and in my best stern-but-loving tone ordered my common-law wife (a charmless and apparently legally

null phrase that winds Miranda up whenever I use it) to take ten days off. She complained bitterly. Didn't I understand it was a crucial moment for the company? I was insane if I thought she could just pack up and leave, we weren't kids any more, and so on and so forth. I held firm, tried various arguments, told her she had to think about her life holistically – meaning, in Miranda-code, that her work was getting in the way of her relationship with me. That got her attention, to an extent.

In the end I think she was only persuaded because of the car. To my horror, the woman who had for the first five years of our cohabitation driven a Deux Chevaux with an *Atomkraft Nein Danke* sticker on the back bumper had arrived home one evening in a brand new silver BMW, which she called a 'Beamer' in an affected Cockney accent and justified to me by saying the car gave her 'credibility' and made 'a statement' to her suppliers. I've always been grateful to Miranda for pulling me out of a hole and, heaven knows I've reason to be wary about setting myself up in judgement on anyone, but the car crossed a line. A strong stomach and a streak of low cunning were required to sell the holiday to her as a chance to take the thing on a road trip. Depressingly my ploy worked. Her eyes sparkling with advertising imagery of alloy on scenic country roads, she agreed.

So we drove through France and for a few days, as I'd hoped, Bountessence receded from our lives. We were just ourselves again, two people who had the capability to make each other happy. We avoided the motorways and made our way south on Routes Nationales, Miranda overtaking lorries on long straight roads lined with cypress trees, me humming along to a tape of Charles Trenet *chansons*, wishing I understood more of the words to the one about being happy and in love on Nationale 7. We stopped overnight at a hotel in a forgettable small town where we ate Coquilles Saint-Jacques and slept in a room papered with an alarming pink rose pattern, which had migrated like a fungus to cover not just the walls but the ceiling and the panels of the wardrobe and the bathroom door. We had sex in the soft, lumpy bed, giggling like children

as the iron frame creaked and the headboard banged against the wall. Our neighbour retaliated by turning on the TV and we fell asleep to the muffled sound of gunfire. In the morning we woke up and dragged our cases out of the rose room and back into the car, silent and hung-over. I put on the Charles Trenet and Miranda switched it off again. Eventually we arrived.

The place I'd booked was described as an ancient stone house on the outskirts of a tranquil village near Béziers. It turned out to be a cramped little maisonette, with the rough white textured plaster, dubious wiring and mismatched crockery of holiday apartments all over Europe. Miranda went out to buy flowers, and I opened the shutters and was hit by clean white southern light. We decided to be happy.

Our idyll lasted four days – days of waking up to the noise of the village street under our balcony, of chopping tomatoes, speaking bad French in shops, driving to the river, sopping honey on to fresh bread and drinking little bottles of beer that accumulated in a green gang by the side of the loudly humming fridge. We visited markets, Miranda pointing winsomely at produce she packed into a wicker basket as I picked through a phrasebook, vainly searching for the names of fish and vegetables. I followed her around contentedly, enjoying the way her thin cotton dress silhouetted her legs.

Miranda liked to take a siesta. She wanted, she said, to live to a Mediterranean rhythm, at least for a couple of weeks. I'd brought a fat book with me, a thriller I couldn't get into, and as she snoozed in the heat of the afternoon, I lay beside her on the bed with it balanced on my chest, my eyes skating off the print as I cycled through a familiar sequence of thoughts. How circumscribed my life was, how regulated. How – I hesitated to use the word *trapped*, even to myself, but then again I was with Miranda Martin, who'd been one of those little girls who get to the age of ten with every detail of their wedding day prearranged in their heads, who retained the ability to make a plan and then slot the world into it, like a peg into a board. That was certainly how it had been with us. She had a vacancy; I was interviewed; I got the job. As usual when my

mind worked in this fashion, I resolved nothing, just ran through my list of complaints like a man turning the wheel on some rusty piece of agricultural machinery.

On the fourth afternoon I finally fell asleep beside her, and woke up refreshed, comforted. I suggested we spend the afternoon at a village I'd been reading about in the *Green Guide*. Sainte-Anne-de-la-Garrigue was an hour's drive away. It was a place with a bloody history, the site of a siege during the Albigensian crusade, after which its Cathar defenders had been burned at the stake. The Michelin people gave it two stars.

We packed hats and bottled water and turned the air-conditioning up high to dispel the awful heat in the car. Though it was late afternoon when we crossed it, the sun was still beating down like a drummer on the narrow stone bridge over the river. We drove on through a paper-flat world of white limestone, yellow-green scrub and cloudless blue sky as the road picked its way up the side of a gorge, passing through a pinewood to emerge into gorse and thistle and a series of hairpin bends whose vertiginous drops were punctuated on the worst corners by white-painted rocks and battered metal barriers.

As we passed over the col I caught sight of Sainte-Anne, a spiral of red-roofed stone houses knotted tightly round a jutting white rock. When we got closer I saw that on top of the rock was a stark broken rectangle, the stump of a tower, which the guidebook informed me was 'of uncertain age'. We parked outside a church in a little square, completely without shade. The village appeared deserted; the heat had driven everyone inside. The only place that seemed to be open was a café, the generically named Bar des Sports. We sat down at a table under an umbrella and drank little round-bellied bottles of Orangina, trying to work up the energy for sightseeing.

'It's pretty,' said Miranda, a note of approval in her voice.

'You sound like a teacher giving out marks.'

She frowned. I'd meant it as a joke. Sainte-Anne-de-la-Garrigue was undeniably pretty. There was a little *mairie* and a war memorial,

and behind the church a narrow cobbled street that wound upwards in the direction of the tower.

'That was where they executed the heretics after the siege,' I told her. 'Over there. Right in front of the church door.'

'Mike?'

'Yes?'

'Put the guidebook away.'

'But that's the whole point of this place.'

'What is?'

'What happened here.'

'Why should I care what happened here? Nothing has happened to me here. It's just a pretty little village on a very hot day.'

'But —'

'Mike, I want to feel peaceful, not think about people being burned at the stake.'

So we sat in silence. Miranda took a picture of me and I smiled distractedly. There was something occulted about Sainte-Anne, something I wanted to decipher. The mid-afternoon quiet had a physical quality, an apparent potential for form and weight.

'Do you want to climb up to the tower?' I asked.

'Not yet. Give it ten minutes. Let's have another drink.'

We ordered mineral water, and I sat and listened to the tiny fizz in my glass as it mingled with other tiny sounds: insects, a transistor radio muttering in the back room of the bar. I watched an old man cross in front of the church, leaning heavily on a walking-stick. He was dressed in some kind of long robe; I wondered if he was the *curé*. Then something peculiar happened. I could put it down to the heat, I suppose. Perhaps I fell asleep for a few seconds, enough time for the old man to round the corner and a second person to appear in the same spot. However it happened, I suddenly realized the person I'd taken for an old man was actually a woman. There was no robe, no stick, nothing even to suggest them. The transition was seamless: one minute one figure, the next another. This woman was tall, wearing pedal-pushers and a sleeveless cotton top that revealed a pair of wiry, muscular shoulders. Shadowing her

face was a big straw hat. She carried a string bag filled with fruit: oranges, peaches, a green-skinned melon. Though she was a long distance away, I sensed something familiar about her. Maybe it was her walk, an unhurried but somehow purposeful amble, one brown arm swinging the bag, the other raised occasionally towards her hidden face. Smoking a cigarette. Who used to walk that way? Who used to walk along smoking, swinging a bag?

The woman didn't look like a villager. A tourist? I thought not; at least, not a day-tripper. She looked too purposeful. From such a distance it was impossible to say how old she was. She turned the corner into the street that led up to the tower.

'Come on,' I said to Miranda. 'Drink up. Time for some exercise.'

She looked at me sulkily. 'Right now?'

'Why not? I'm bored. I want to move.' I tried to put something jaunty into my tone, to disguise the sudden need I had to get up, to walk after the woman and see her face.

'But I haven't finished my drink.'

I grinned a big fake grin. 'All right, see you up there.'

'Christ, Mike, can't you wait two minutes?'

'Of course. Take your time.'

I was gripped by a powerful anxiety. What would I miss if I lost sight of the woman in the straw hat? I tried to wait patiently for Miranda, then gave up. Opening my wallet, I tucked a banknote under the ashtray, scraped my chair back from the table and stood. Miranda sipped her drink with deliberate slowness. I turned round and started walking. I was half-way across the square before she caught up with me.

'You obviously didn't want your change,' she said sarcastically. I didn't reply.

The street that led up to the tower was steep and narrow. As we reached the church I could just see the woman up ahead, turning a corner. I walked fast, not looking behind to see if Miranda was keeping up, passing rows of identical little doorways and shuttered windows with terracotta flowerpots on the sills. I reached the

corner just in time to see the woman stop and fit a key into one of the doors. As she went inside, she half turned towards me. I suppressed an impulse to break into a run. She was still too far away to be sure, but I thought – It was ridiculous what I thought. Increasing my pace I approached the point where she had disappeared. Sweat was pouring off my forehead. My shirt was plastered to my back. When I judged I was outside the right door I stopped, feeling dizzy and slightly sick. The house looked newer than some of the others, but patches of its cement facing had peeled away, giving it a forlorn, down-at-heel aspect. My dizziness worsened. I couldn't be certain, could I? I leaned forward, propping my hands on my knees.

Miranda bustled up, flushed and annoyed. 'What on earth's got into you? Are you all right?'

'I don't feel well.'

'Sit down. Sit on the step. Why did you charge off like that?'

I flopped down on the doorstep and lowered my head between my legs.

'You shouldn't do these things,' Miranda admonished gently. 'You're no spring chicken. And in this heat –'

'Yes, all right. Don't go on.'

'Well, excuse *me*.'

It couldn't have been her. That's all I could think. It couldn't have been. But there was something about the way she held herself. Familiar and yet unfamiliar. I thought of my own body, letting me down after a short climb uphill. How had twenty-five years changed the way *I* walked, the way I swung my arms? Weakly, I allowed Miranda to help me back down to the car, where she made me drink gulps of warm plastic-bottled water. Then she drove me home.

After that, nothing was easy. In the evening, Miranda potted about in the kitchen and I lay in the darkened bedroom, frozen into a kind of rigid panic. The next morning I felt physically better, but I couldn't reconnect mentally with the way I'd been before we drove to Sainte-Anne. Could it really have been Anna? We went to the market and I found myself nervously scanning the crowd.

Two days went by. I was sullen, unable to settle or to enjoy anything. I'd lose myself in thought and realize Miranda had asked me a question. Several times I caught her staring at me, her jaw tight, her eyes narrowed. Our holiday was almost over and the atmosphere between us was so poisonous that, regardless of what else happened, I began to wonder whether we'd still be together when we got home. When we finally had a proper argument, I felt weirdly relieved. One minute we were preparing a tense salad in the kitchen, getting in each other's way. The next we were standing in opposite corners of the tiny room, shouting. The content was irrelevant – I can't even remember now what sparked it off; underneath she was telling me I was impossible and selfish and cold, and I was telling her she was controlling and stupid and shallow. I grabbed the car keys from the table and stamped downstairs. I had the excuse I needed.

The weather was cooler than before. A light wind blew dust over the road, hazing the air and moving flecks of cirrus cloud across the sky. I took the hairpins on the way up to Sainte-Anne-de-la-Garrigue at speed, pulling the wheel hard and sending little showers of white gravel spitting on to the crash barriers. Roaring into the village I brought the car to a halt in front of the church. Outside the Bar des Sports a group of old men were playing cards. As I got out, they stopped their game to glare at the foreigner whose loud car had disrupted the afternoon's peace.

As I walked up the steep hill towards the tower, all I knew was that I needed to see the woman's face; after that I hoped the rest would become clear. I'd arrived soon after lunch, earlier than before. If she had a routine, and if I waited long enough, maybe I'd see her. I was wearing dark glasses and a floppy cricket hat with a wide brim, the kind of hat that identifies its wearer as English, beyond any shadow of cultural doubt. It was supposed to be a disguise. The glasses obscured my eyes and the hat hid what was left of my hair, which when Anna had last seen me had been long and wavy.

I realized I'd begun to take seriously the possibility that it was

her. I wasn't sure whether the chill I felt was fear or excitement.

Outside the cement-faced house, a pair of old women sat on high-backed chairs. Despite the heat they wore headscarves and pinafores and thick black stockings. A lean tabby cat rubbed round their feet, mewling. As I approached they put down their sewing and inspected me balefully. I said a gruff '*Bonjour*' and walked past, trying as I did to peer through the open door into the house. The thinner of the two, whose jaw worked in a constant nervous motion, squeezed her neighbour's wrist and said something. The neighbour made a dismissive gesture. A little further up the hill, I stopped. I was confused. Maybe I had the wrong house. With two pairs of eyes boring suspiciously into my back, I didn't want to loiter around to check. The street showed no other sign of life, just a long row of closed doors and shuttered windows.

I walked back to the old women and said a second *bonjour* into the silence. '*La femme – la femme qui habite ici?*' I asked, gesturing at the house.

'*Une femme?*' asked the thin one, her chin quivering accusingly.

I made 'tall' signs with my hand. '*Ici.*' I pointed to the house. '*L'Anglaise.*'

The thin one spoke rapidly to her friend. They both shook their heads.

'*La Suédoise?*' suggested the friend.

'*Suédoise?*' I asked eagerly. '*Elle est suédoise?*'

They nodded warily, pursing their lips at my insistence. The thin one pointed to the next-door house.

'*Elle habite là?*' I asked. They adopted the closed expressions of respectable women who know there is a limit to the amount of information one should give a foreigner in the street. Realizing they weren't going to reply, I thanked them and walked on.

So I'd been imagining things. The woman was Swedish, some teacher or accountant or civil servant with a holiday home in the village, and somehow from out of the depths of my stress I'd conjured Anna Addison. Relieved but inexplicably disappointed, I headed on up the hill. The street gave out into a narrow path,

bordered by a mat of dry undergrowth that made me think about snakes. Feeling like a tourist again, I stood for a few minutes, catching my breath and looking down over the roofs of Sainte-Anne. Beyond them the valley dropped away towards the glittering snail-trail of the river. I toiled on up to the tower, which was completely featureless, four blank masonry walls with no sign of an arrow slit, let alone a door. It was hard to see what it might have been used for. Around its base was a path, which I followed, trailing a hand against the warm stone. As I completed my circuit I thought I heard a man's voice, but when I turned round to look, no one was there. It was time to go home.

I was completely unprepared to meet her. As I made my way down she appeared in front of me on the path, very suddenly, as if she'd risen out of the ground. She was wearing a sleeveless blue dress and the same straw sun-hat as before. It was crammed down low on her head, the way Anna always wore hats. When we lived at Lansdowne Road I used to tease her by asking if she was expecting a high wind. 'Pardon,' she said, and stepped round me, striding on up the hill. Her voice was pitched higher than I remembered. My legs felt weak. I could hear the crunch of her footsteps; all I'd have to do was call her name.

And what then?

God, her face. Anna's face. The high cheekbones, the full mouth; a mouth now nested in lines but *the same mouth*. There was always something primitive about Anna's face. In certain moods she could fix it into a carved wooden mask, a thing to be worshipped, feared. Did I even see her eyes? Anna's eyes were green. When things were good between us, I couldn't bear to meet them for too long in case I gave myself away, blurted out all the promises I was trying so guiltily to extract from her. But she hadn't looked up. And I hadn't been recognized – her pace didn't falter as she passed by.

Anna Addison. Who'd been killed in the conference room of the German embassy in Copenhagen in 1975.