

Jackie Collins



HER LATEST
INTERNATIONAL
BESTSELLER

Hollywood Wives

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Hollywood Wives

Jackie Collins' first novel, *The World is Full of Married Men*, was published in 1968 and became an immediate success. Since then she has written seven other bestsellers: *The Stud*, *Sunday Simmons and Charlie Brick*, *Lovehead*, *The World is full of Divorced Women*, *Lovers and Gamblers*, *The Bitch and Chances*.

Also by Jackie Collins
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The Bitch
Lovers and Gamblers
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Jackie Collins

Hollywood Wives

Pan Books
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prologue



He stood in the living room of the small house in Philadelphia. He stood and stared at the three of them. Three pigs. Three laughing faces. Teeth and eyes and hair. Three pigs.

There was a black rage within him. A rage which beat at his head from the inside.

The television was on in the room. Archie Bunker mouthing futile jokes. Canned studio laughter.

And more laughter. In the room with him. More inane laughter. His mother. Mousy wisps of brown hair. A sagging body and a sagging mind.

His father. Balding. Skinny. False teeth that clicked in and out at will.

Joey. He had thought she was different.

Three pigs.

He walked to the television set and raised the sound.

They took no notice. They were too busy laughing. At him. Yes. They were laughing at him.

The rage was in his head, but outwardly he was calm. He knew how to make them stop. He knew . . .

Fast and fluid. Before they had time to stop laughing and start thinking . . .

Fast and fluid. The machete swung in a lethal circle.

Fast and fluid as the blood spurted. His mother and father felled with the first lethal sweep.

But Joey. Swifter, younger. Her eyes bulging with horror as, clutching at her wounded arm, she staggered towards the door.

You've stopped laughing now, Joey. You've stopped laughing now.

He swung the machete again, felling her before she could progress further.

They did not scream. Not one of them.

He had taken them by surprise, just like soldiers were trained to

Oh. Only he wasn't a soldier was he? He wasn't a soldier . . .

Archie began to shake his head violently. Swinging his arms which convulsed his body as he wielded the machete. Dealing with all three of them equally. Indulging in a frenzy of grisly death blows.

The television drowned out the sounds of the carnage. Archie Bunker. Canned laughter.

And the machete continued to whirl and slash as if powered by some demonic force.

book one

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1

Elaine Conti awoke in her luxurious bed in her luxurious Beverly Hills mansion, pressed a button to open the electrically controlled drapes, and was confronted by the sight of a young man clad in a white T-shirt and dirty jeans pissing a perfect arc into her mosaic tiled swimming pool.

She struggled to sit up, buzzing for Lina, her Mexican maid, and at the same time flinging on a marabou trimmed silk robe and pressing her feet into dusty pink mules.

The young man completed his task, zipped up his jeans and strolled casually out to view.

'Lina!' Elaine screamed. 'Where are you?'

The maid appeared, inscrutable, calm, oblivious to her mistress's screams.

'There's an intruder out by the pool,' Elaine snapped excitedly. 'Get Miguel. Call the police. And make sure all the doors are locked.'

Unperturbed, Lina began to collect the debris of clutter from Elaine's bedside table. Dirty Kleenex, a half-finished glass of wine, a rifled box of chocolates.

'Lina!' Elaine yelled.

'No get excited, Señora,' the maid said stoically. 'No intruder. Just boy Miguel sent to do pool. Miguel sick. No come this week.'

Elaine flushed angrily. 'Well why the hell didn't you tell me before?' She flung herself into her bathroom, slamming the door so hard that a framed print sprang off the wall and crashed to the floor, the glass shattering. Stupid maid. Dumb ass woman. It was impossible to get good help anymore. They came. They went. They did not give a damn if you were raped and ravaged in your own home.

And this *would* have to happen while Ross was away on location. Miguel would *never* have dared to pretend to be sick if Ross was in town.

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Elaine flung off her robe, slipped out of her nightgown, and stepped under the invigorating sharpness of an ice cold shower. She gritted her teeth. Cold water was best for the skin at night and everything up – and God knows – even with the gym and the yoga and the modern dance class it still all needed tightening.

Not that she was fat. No way. Not a surplus piece of flesh on her entire body. Pretty good for thirty-nine years of age. Pretty damn good.

When I was thirteen I was the fattest girl in school. Etta the Elephant they called me. And I deserved the nickname. Only how could a kid of thirteen know about nutrition and diet and exercise and all that stuff? How could a kid of thirteen help it when Grandma Steinberg stuffed her with cakes and latkes, lox and bagles, strudle and chicken dumplings. Constantly.

Elaine smiled grimly. Etta the Elephant, late of the Bronx, had shown them all. Etta the Elephant, former secretary in New York City, was now slim and svehte. She was called Elaine Conti, and lived in a six bedroomed, seven bathroomed, goddamn Beverly Hills palace. On the flats too. Not stuck up in the hills or all the way over in Brentwood. On the flats. Prime real estate.

Etta the Elephant no longer had a sharp nose, mousy hair, gapped teeth, wire rimmed glasses and flat tits.

Over the years she had changed. The nose was now retroussé, cute. A perfect Brooke Shields in fact. The mousy hair was a rich brown, cut short and tipped with golden streaks. Her skin was alabaster white and smooth, thanks to regular facials. Her teeth were capped. White and even. A credit to Charlie's Angels. The unbecoming glasses had long been replaced with soft blue contact lenses, without them her eyes were slate grey and she had to squint to read. Not that she did a lot of reading. Magazines of course. 'Vogue', 'People', 'Us'. She skimmed the trades, 'Variety' and 'Hollywood Reporter', concentrating on Army Archerd and Hank Grant. She devoured 'Women's Wear Daily', but was not really into what she termed hard news. The day Ronald Reagan was elected President was the only day she gave a passing thought to politics. If Ronald Reagan could do it how about Ross?

The tits, while being nowhere in the Raquel Welch class, were a perfect 36B, thanks to the ministrations of her first husband, Dr. John Saltwood. They stuck defiantly forward, no pull of gravity would ever harm them. And if it did, well . . . back to good old Johnny. She had found him in New York, wasting himself doing

plastic surgery for a city hospital. They met at a party and she recognized a plain lonely man not unlike herself. They married a month later, and she had her nose and tits fixed within the year. Then she talked him into going to Beverly Hills and setting up in private practice.

Three years later he was the tit man, and she had divorced him and become Mrs. Ross Conti. Funny how things worked out.

Ross Conti. Husband. Movie star. First class shit. And she should know. After all they had been married ten long years and it hadn't all been easy and it wasn't getting any easier and she knew things about Ross Conti that would curl the toes of the little old ladies who still loved him because after all he was hitting fifty and his fans were not exactly teenagers and as each year crept by it was getting more and more difficult and God knows financially things were not as good as they had been and each film could be his last and . . .

'Señora.' Lina hammered on the bathroom door. 'The boy, he go now. He want pay.'

Elaine stepped out of the shower. She was outraged. He wanted paying – for what? Pissing in her pool?

She wrapped herself in a fluffy terrycloth robe and opened the bathroom door. 'Tell him,' she said grandly, 'to piss off.'

Lina stared blankly. 'Twenny dollar, Meesus Conti. He do it again in three day.'

Ross Conti swore silently to himself. Jesus H. Christ. What was happening to him? He couldn't remember his frigging lines. Eight takes and still he was screwing up.

'Just take it easy, Ross,' said the director calmly, placing a condescending hand on his shoulder.

Some frigging director. Twenty-three if he was a day. Hair hanging down his back like a witch at Halloween. Levis so tight the outline of his schlong was like a frigging beacon.

Ross shook the offending hand off. 'I'm taking it easy. It's the crowd – they keep on distracting me.'

'Sure,' soothed Chip, signalling to the first assistant. 'Calm them down for crissakes, they're background – not auditioning for Chorus Line.'

The first assistant nodded, then made an announcement through his loud speaker.

'Ready to go again?' questioned Chip. Ross nodded. The director

turned to a suntanned blonde. "Again, Sharon, sorry babe."

Ross turned. *Sorry babe. What the little prick really means is sorry, babe but we gotta humour this old fart because this old fart used to be the biggest thing in Hollywood.*

Sharon smiled. "Right on, Chip."

Sure. Right on, Chip. We'll humour the old schmuck. My mother used to love him. She saw all his movies. Creamed her panties every time.

"Make-up," Ross demanded, then added, his voice heavy with sarcasm, "That's if nobody minds."

"Of course not. Anything you want."

Yeah. Anything I want. Because this so-called hotshot needs Ross Conti in his film. Ross Conti means plenty at the box office. Who would line up to see Sharon Richman? Who has even heard of Sharon Richman except a couple of million television freaks who tune in to see some schlock programme about girl water ski instructors. Glossy crap. Sharon Richman - a hank of hair and a mouthful of teeth. I wouldn't even fuck her if she crawled to my trailer on her hands and knees and begged for it. Well... maybe if she begged.

The make-up girl attended to his needs. Now she was all right. She knew who the star was on this picture. Busily she fussed around him, blotting out the shine of sweat around his nose with an outside powder puff, touching up his eyebrows with a small comb.

He gave her a perfunctory pinch on the ass. She smiled appreciatively. *Come to my trailer later, baby, and I'll show you how to give a star head.*

"Right," said Chip the creep. "Are we ready, Ross?"

We are ready asshole. He nodded.

"Okay. Let's go then."

The scene began all right. It was a simple bit of business which involved Ross saying three lines to Sharon's six, then strolling nonchalantly out of shot. The trouble was Sharon. She stared blankly, making him blow his second line every time.

Bitch. She's doing it purposely. Trying to make me look bad.

"Jesus H. Christ!" Chip finally blew. "It's not the fucking soliloquy from Hamlet."

Right. That's it. Talking to me like some nothing bit player. Ross turned and stalked from the location without a backward glance.

Chip grimaced at Sharon. "That's what happens when you're dealing with no talent."

"My mommy used to love him," she simpered.

"Then your mommy is an even bigger moron than her daughter." She giggled. Chip's insults did not bother her. In bed she had him under control, and that was where it really mattered.

Elaine Conti drove her pale blue Mercedes slowly down La Cienega Boulevard. She drove slowly so as not to spoil her nails which she had just had done at a sensational new nail clinic called The Nail Kiss of Life. Wonderful place. They had wrapped her broken thumb nail so well that even she couldn't tell. Elaine loved discovering new places, it gave her a tiny shot of power. She pushed in a Streisand tape and wondered - as she had wondered countless times before - why dear Barbra had never had her nose fixed. In a town so dedicated to the perfect face... And God knows she had the money... Still... It certainly had not harmed her career... nor her love life for that matter.

Elaine frowned and thought about her own love life. Ross hadn't ventured near her in months. Bastard. Just because he didn't feel in the mood...

Elaine had indulged in two affairs during the course of her marriage. Both of them unsatisfactory. She hated affairs, they were so time consuming. The highs and the lows. The ups and the downs. Was it all worth it? She had decided no, but now she was beginning to wonder.

The last one had taken place over two years previously. She blushed when she thought about it. What absurd risks she had taken. And with a man who could do her absolutely no good at all except fix her teeth, and they were already perfect. Milton Langley, her dentist - and probably everyone else's with money in Beverly Hills. How indiscreet of her to have picked him. But really he had picked her. He had sent his nurse scurrying off on an errand one day, climbed aboard the chair, and made fast and furious love to her. She remembered the day well, because he had climaxed all over her new Sonia Rykiel skirt.

Elaine giggled aloud at the thought, although she hadn't giggled at the time. Milton had poured mouthwash over the damaged garment, and when his nurse returned sent her over to Saks to purchase a replacement. After that they had met twice a week in some dreadful motel on Santa Monica for two hot months. One day Elaine had just decided not to go. End of that little episode.

The other one wasn't even worth thinking about. An actor on one

of Ross's films. She had slept with him twice and regretted both times.

Whenever she mentioned their lack of a sex life to Ross, he flew into a rage. 'What the frig do you think I am? A machine?' he would snarl. 'I'll get it up when I want to - not just because you've read some crap sex magazine that says you should have ten orgasms a day.'

Chance would be a fine thing. She was lucky if she got ten a year. If it wasn't for her trusty vibrator she would be climbing walls.

Maybe his erection would return if the movie he was doing turned out to be a hit.

Yes. That was what Ross needed - a massive shot of success. It would be good for both of them. There was nothing like success for putting the hard-on back in a man's life.

Carefully she made a left on Melrose. Lunch at Ma Maison was a must on Fridays. Anybody who was anybody and in town invariably showed up. Elaine had a permanent booking.

She made a right into the small parking lot, and left her car in the hands of a parking jockey.

Patrick Terrail, the owner of Ma Maison, greeted her at the entrance to the small outdoor restaurant. She accepted a kiss on each cheek, and followed a waiter to her table, keeping an eagle eye out for anyone she should acknowledge.

Maralee Gray, one of her closest friends, was already waiting. She nursed a spritzer and a sour expression. At thirty-seven Maralee maintained more than a shadow of her past prettiness. In her time she had been voted the most popular girl in high school and Miss Hot Rod 1962. That was before she had met, married and divorced Neil Gray - the film director. Her father - now retired - owned Sanderson Studios. Money had never been Maralee's problem. Only men.

'Darling, I'm not late am I?' Elaine asked anxiously, brushing cheeks with her friend.

'Not at all. I think I was early.' They exchanged 'You look wonderful', admired each other's outfits, and cast their eyes around the restaurant.

'And how's Ross making out on location?' Maralee inquired, extracting a long black cigarillo from a wafer thin gold case.

'You know Ross - he makes out wherever he is.'

They both laughed. Ross's reputation as a cocksman was an old Hollywood joke.

'Actually he hates everything,' she confided. 'The script, the actor, the crew, the food, the climate - the whole bug-ridden crap as he so charmingly puts it. But Maralee, believe me -' She

leaned confidentially towards her friend. 'He's going to be dynamite in this movie. The old Ross Conti - full force.'

'I can believe it,' Maralee murmured. 'I've never counted him out, you know that.'

Elaine nodded. Maralee was a true friend, there weren't many of them around. In Hollywood you were only as hot as your last hit - and it had been a long time between hits.

'I'm going to have my eyes done,' Maralee announced dramatically. 'I'm only telling you, and you mustn't mention it to anyone.'

'As if I would!' Elaine replied, quite affronted. 'Who's going to do it?'

Maralee laughed. 'The Palm Springs connection, of course. I'll spend a couple of weeks there - after all I have the house - then I'll come back and nobody will know the difference. They'll just think I was vacationing.'

'Wonderful idea,' Elaine said, thinking to herself was Maralee stupid or what? Nobody took a vacation in Palm Springs - even if they did have a house there. They either weekendened or retired. 'When?' she asked, her eyes flicking restlessly round the restaurant.

Maralee shrugged. 'As soon as possible. Next week if he can fit me in. He's so busy.'

They both stopped talking to observe the entrance of Sylvester Stallone. Elaine threw him a perfunctory wave but he did not appear to notice her. 'Probably needs glasses,' she sniffed. 'I met him at a party only last week.'

Maralee produced a small gold compact and inspected her face. 'He won't last,' she remarked dismissively, removing a smudge of lipstick from her teeth. 'Let's face it - Clark Gable he's not.'

'Oh yeah, that's it... Don't stop... don't ever stop. Oh yeah, yeah... Just keep on going, sweetheart, keep right on going.'

Ross Conti listened to the words pouring from his mouth and wondered how many times he had uttered them before. Plenty. That was for sure.

On her knees, Stella, the make-up girl, worked diligently on his weak erection. She sucked at him like he was a water pump. Her technique could do with some improvement. But then - in his time - Ross had had some of the best little cocksuckers in the business. Starlets, whose very livelihood depended on doing a good job. Hookers, who specialized. Bored Beverly Hills housewives who had elevated cocksucking to an art.

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He felt his erection begin to deflate, and he dug his fingers hard into the girl's scalp. She yelped with pain and stopped what she was doing.

He wasn't sorry. Quick as a flash he tucked himself out of sight and firmly zipped up. 'That was great!'

She stared at him in amazement. 'But you didn't come.'

He could hardly lie. 'Sometimes it's better this way,' he mumbled mysteriously, reaching for a bottle of tequila on the side table in his hotel room.

'It is?' She continued to stare.

'Sure. Keeps all the juices inside. Keeps me buzzing. That's the way I like it when I'm working.' If she believed that she'd believe anything.

'I think I know what you mean,' she began enthusiastically. 'Sort of like a boxer before a fight - you mustn't release that precious energy. Instead you have to make it work for you.'

'Right! You got it!' He smiled, took a slug of tequila straight from the bottle, and wished she would go.

'Would you like me to . . . do anything?' she questioned expectantly, hoping that he would ask her to undress and stay.

'There's a million things I'd like you to do,' he replied. 'But the star has got to get some sleep. You understand, don't you?'

'Of course, Mr. Con . . . Ross.'

He hadn't said she could call him by his first name. Mr. Conti would do nicely. Women. Give them nine inches and they frigging moved in. 'Goodnight, Sheila.'

'It's Stella.'

'Right.'

She finally left, and he switched on the television set. Just in time for The Tonight Show. He knew that he should call Elaine in L.A. but he couldn't be bothered. She would be furious when she heard he had blown his lines and walked off the set. Elaine thought he was on the way out. She was always nagging him about keeping up with what the public wanted. He had done his last movie against her advice, and it had bombed at the box office. God, that had pissed him off. A fine love story with a veteran director and a New York stage actress as his leading lady. 'Old fashioned garbage,' Elaine had announced baldly. 'Sex, violence and comedy, that's what sells tickets today. And you've got to get in on the act, Ross, before it's too late.'

She was right of course. He did have to get in on the act because he was no longer Mr. Box Office, not even in the frigging top ten. He

was on the slide, and in Hollywood they could smell it.

Johnny Carson was interviewing Angie Dickinson. She was flirting, crossing long legs and looking seductive.

Abruptly Ross picked up the phone. 'Get me the bell captain,' he snapped.

Chip had come grovelling to his trailer after his walk-out earlier. 'Nothing we can't sort out, Ross. If you want to quit today we can schedule to reshoot the scene first thing in the morning.'

He had agreed. At least they knew they were dealing with a star now, and not some nothing has-been.

'Yes, Mr. Conti. This is the bell captain. How may I help you?'

Ross balanced the phone under his chin and reached for the tequila bottle. 'Can you be discreet?'

'Of course, sir. It's my job.'

'I want a broad.'

'Certainly Mr. Conti. Blond? Brunette? Redhead?'

'Multi-coloured for all I care. Just make sure she's got big tits - and I mean big ones.'

'Yes sir!'

'Oh - and you can charge her to my account. Mark it down as room service.' Why should he pay. Let the film company pick up the tab. He replaced the receiver and walked to the mirror. Fifty. He was soon going to be fifty. And it hurt. Badly.

Ross Conti had lived in Hollywood for thirty years. And for twenty-five of those years he had been a star. Arriving in town in 1953, it had not taken long before he was discovered hauling boxes in a food market on Sunset Boulevard by an ageing agent's young wife. She was entranced by his blond good looks, and set about persuading her husband to handle him. In the meantime she was handling him herself - twice a day - and loving every minute.

Her husband discovered their affair on the day Universal decided to sign his young client. In a fit of fury the old agent negotiated the worst deal he possibly could, waited until it was signed, then dropped Ross, and badmouthed him as an untalented stud all over town.

Ross didn't care. He had grown up in the Bronx. Spent three years kicking around New York grabbing bit parts here and there, and a Hollywood contract seemed just perfect to him, whatever the terms.

Women adored him. For two years he worked his way through the studio, eventually picking on the pretty mistress of a studio executive, who promptly saw to it that Ross's contract was dropped.

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Two years, and all he had done were a few small parts in a series of
 torch party movies. Then suddenly - no contract, no prospects, no
 money.
 One day, lounging around Schwab's drugstore on the strip he got
 talking to a girl called Sadie La Salle, a hard working secretary with the
 most enormous knockers he had ever seen. She was not a pretty girl.
 Overweight, suspicious of a moustache, short of leg. But oh those
 magnificent tits! After talking for a while he surprised himself by
 asking her for a date. She accepted readily, and they went to the A-ward
 Inn, ate health burgers and talked about him. He loved every minute of
 it. How many girls were prepared to discuss him and only him for five
 solid hours?
 Sadie was very smart - a quality Ross had not encountered in a
 woman before. She refused to go to bed with him on their first date,
 slapped his hands away when he went after the magic tits, gave him
 sound advice about his career, and on their second date cooked him
 the best meal he had ever had.
 For six months they had a platonic relationship. Seeing each other a
 couple of times a week, speaking on the phone daily. Ross loved
 talking to her, she had an answer for every problem. And oh boy, did
 he ever have problems! He told her about the girls he was screwing, the
 trouble he was having finding work. Going on interview after interview
 and getting nowhere was depressing, not to mention terrible for his
 ego. Sadie was a wonderful listener, plus she cooked him two great
 meals a week and did his washing.
 One night he had a narrow escape while visiting a noble girlfriend.
 Her out-of-town husband returned home sooner than expected, and
 Ross was forced to drop out of her bedroom window desperately
 clutching his pants. He decided to pay Sadie an unexpected visit and
 tell her the story, sure that she would love it.
 When he arrived at her small apartment on Olive Drive he was
 shocked to discover her entertaining a man, the two of them sitting at
 her candlelit dining table finishing off a delicious smoking pot roast.
 There was wine on the table, fresh cut flowers and her best cutlery.
 Sadie was wearing a low cut dress and looked flustered to see him.
 It had never occurred to him before that she had boyfriends, and for
 some unknown reason he was extremely pissed off.
 Ross, I want you to meet Bernard Lejcovitz," she said primly,
 eyeing Ross's crumpled clothes and mussed hair with distaste.
 He hung himself familiarly into a chair and drew a brief silent nod
 in Bernard Lejcovitz's direction. "Get me a drink, hon," he said to

Sadie, reaching out to slap her on the ass. "Scotch, plenty of
 ice."
 She glared, but did as he asked. Then he ousai Mr. Lejcovitz who
 finally left an hour later.
 "Thanks a lot," Sadie exploded, as soon as the door shut behind him.
 Ross grinned. "Asshammer?"
 "You know what's the matter. Walking in here like you own the
 place, treating me like one of your... your... goddamn women!
 She was spluttering with anger. "I hate you, Ross, you know that I
 really hate you! You think you're such a big deal. Well, let me tell
 you -"
 He grabbed her fast. Moved in for the kill - for he knew that's what it
 would be - a killer scene, all lights and heat and those amazing
 mountains his enveloping him.
 She pushed him away. "Ross - she began to object.
 He wasn't about to listen to any reason why they shouldn't. Sadie La
 Salle was going to be his and only his - screw the Bernard Lejcovitzes
 of this world.
 She was a virgin. Twenty-four years old. A resident of Hollywood
 and a virgin.
 Ross could not believe it. He was delighted. Ten years of solid
 fucking and she was his first.
 The next day he packed up his things and moved in with her. He was
 two months overdue with the rent on his apartment anyway, and
 money was becoming a definite problem. Moving in with Sadie seemed
 like a great idea, plus she loved having him in her life. She said
 goodbye to Bernie without a second thought and devoted all her time to
 taking very good care of Ross indeed. "We have to find you an agent,"
 she fretted, because she knew his failure to land a part in a movie was
 upsetting him more than he cared to admit. Unfortunately all the
 agents he visited seemed to have got the message - Ross could equals
 bad news.
 One day she made a major decision. "I'll be your agent," she stated
 quite seriously.
 "You'll what?" he roared.
 "I'll be your agent. It's a good idea. You'll see."
 The next week she gave up her job, withdrew her savings from the
 bank, and soon found a tiny little room in a seedy building on
 Hollywood Boulevard. She stuck a notice on the door - Sadie La Salle -
 Agent to the Stars. Then she had a phone installed, and was in
 business.

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Ross found the whole thing hysterically funny. What the hell did Sadie know about being an agent?

What she didn't know she soon found out. For six years she had worked as a secretary in a large law firm which specialized in show business work. Sadie had the legalities down pat. And the rest wasn't difficult. She had a product. Ross Conitt! And when the woman of America got a good look at him they were going to want to buy.

'I have a great idea,' she told him one day, 'and I don't even want your opinion of it because it'll work. I know it's going to work.'

As it happened he loved her idea - although it was a little crazy, and very expensive. She borrowed the money she needed from her former boss, an uptight jerk named Jeremy Mead who Ross suspected wanted to ball her. Then she had Ross photographed by the Pacific Ocean in just faded Levi cut-offs and a smile. And she had the picture blown up and placed on as many billboards as she could afford all across America, with just the words - 'WHO IS ROSS CONITT?'

It was magic time. Within weeks everyone was asking, 'Who is Ross Conitt?' Johnny Carson began making cracks on his show. Letters started to arrive by the sackload, addressed to Ross Conitt, Hollywood. (Sadie had prudently informed the post office where to forward them.) Ross was stopped in the street, mobbed by adoring women, recognized wherever he went. The whole thing took off like a rocket just as Sadie had predicted it would.

At the peak of it all Sadie flew with her new famous client to New York, where he had been invited to do a guest appearance on The Tonight Show. They were both ecstatic. New York gave Ross the feel of what it would be like to be a star. Sadie was thrilled that it was she who had done it for him.

He was marvellous on the show - funny, sexy, and magnificently attractive. (By the time they got back to Hollywood the offers were piling up. Sadie sifted through them and finally negotiated an ace three picture deal for him with Paramount. He never looked back. Success as a movie star was instantaneous.)

Six months later he dumped her, signed with a big agency and married Wendy Warren, a rising young star with impressive thirty-nine inch breasts. They lived together in much photographed luxury on top of Mulholland Drive, five minutes from Marlon Brando's retreat. Their marriage lasted only two years and was childless. After that Ross became the Hollywood backdoor. Wild stories, wild pranks, wild parties.

Everyone was delighted when in 1964 he married again. This time to

a Swedish starlet of seventeen with, of course, wonderful tits. The marriage was stormy. Lasted six months. She divorced him claiming mental cruelty and half his money. Ross shrugged the whole thing off.

At that time his star was at its peak. Every movie he appeared in was a winner. Until 1969, when he made two disastrous films in a row.

A lot of people were not sorry to observe his fall from superstardom. Sadie La Salle for one. (After his defection from her loving care she had faded from sight for a while, but then she had resurfaced and slowly but surely built herself an empire.)

Ross met Elaine when he went for a consultation with her husband. At thirty-nine he thought that maybe he needed a little face work. He never got the surgery, but he did get Elaine. She moved in on him without hesitation, and she was just what he needed at that time in his life.

He found her sympathetic, supportive and an excellent listener. The tits were nothing to get excited about, but in bed she was accommodating and warm, and after the aggression of the usual Hollywood starlet he liked that. He decided that marriage to Elaine was just what he needed. It did not take a lot of persuasion for her to divorce her husband. They married a week later in Mexico, and his career took a sharp upwards swing. It signed up for five years, then slowly, gradually, it began to slip. And so did their marriage.

Forty-nine. Heading full speed towards fifty. And he didn't look a day over forty-two. The blond boyish good looks had aged nicely. Although he could do without the greying hair that had to be carefully bleached, and the deep indentations under his piercing blue eyes.

Still... he was in excellent shape. The body was almost as good as new. He stared at his reflection, hardly hearing the discreet knock on the door.

'Yes?' he called out, when the knock was repeated.

'Room service,' crooned a feminine voice.

Room service was twenty-five and stacked. Ross made a mental note to tip the bell captain royally.

'He was never a normal boy. Deke Andrews wasn't, always a strange one.'

'Yeah? How so?'

'You know . . . Not interested in television, movies or girls. Not like the other kids round this street - even when he was growin' up.'

'What was he interested in?'

'Cars. First job he got he went right out and put a down payment on an old Mustang. Loved that car. Polished it, tuned it, worked on that old jalopy for hours on end.'

'What happened to it?'

'Got sold. Don't know why. He never did get another one.'

'You sure about that?'

'Sure about what?'

'That he never got another car.'

'Course I'm sure. I know everything goes on in Friendship Street. I've sat lookin' out this same window for thirty years. Did I tell you 'bout my accident? Had heavy machinery collapse on my legs. I ain't never walked a step since. Compensation? You think I got money? I got *nothing* for all the stinkin' time I put in at that lousy plant. Have you any idea . . . ' The old man went red in the face as his voice rose and shook with anger.

Detective Leon Rosemont rubbed the bridge of his large nose and stared at a cheap framed print on the wall. Who could ever figure people out? This old man was more interested in what had happened to him thirty years previously than what had happened only hours before in the house across the street. As a witness he was useless. He had heard nothing. Seen nothing. Knew nothing.

Soon the newspapers would be screaming their banner headlines. SAVAGE TRIPLE KILLING. MURDER HORROR IN SUBURBIA BLOOD MASSACRE. How the press loved a good juicy mass murder. Three people brutally murdered in a small house on

Friendship Street in a respectable suburb of Philadelphia. Jesus! How he wished he could wipe the morning's carnage from his mind. Bile rose in his throat, and he swallowed it down sharply.

Detective first grade Leon Rosemont. A heavy-set man in his early fifties, broad shouldered and powerfully built, with a mass of thick grey hair, shaggy eyebrows, and sharp, kindly brown eyes. He looked like an out-of-condition football star. And that's exactly what he had been in college - the hero of the field. He had been twenty-nine years on the force. Twenty-nine years of mutilations, sex killings and vicious slayings.

How he hated all the shit that came his way.

They gave all the pretty ones to him, but this was the prettiest in a long while. Three people backed to pieces for no apparent reason. No sexual assault. No robbery. No nothing. And not a good god-damn thing to go on. Except maybe Deke Andrews, the son of the household who seemed to be missing.

So - was this just another nice old-fashioned family murder?

Deke Andrews wasn't around to tell. But then perhaps he was away on a trip, staying with friends, or shacked up with some girl. After all, it was only Saturday afternoon, and according to forensic the killings could have taken place any time between 11 p.m. Friday and 4 a.m. Saturday.

Deke Andrews. Twenty-six years old. A looser who kept to himself.

But then how many people had been questioned about him? Four? Five? The investigation hadn't even started yet. These were early days.

'Niggers' the old man stated fiercely. 'They're causin' trouble all over.'

'What?'

'It's these niggers moved in down the street. I wouldn't be surprised if they did it,' he snorted. 'I keep my doors locked now - (not like the old days - why I can remember when you didn't hafta have locks.'

Detective Rosemont nodded curtly. There was a sour taste in his mouth, and the memory of the early morning tableau danced horrifically before his eyes. His head ached, his lips were parched and his eyes felt sunken and dry. He wished he was at home in bed with his wife, sweet black Millie, and wouldn't *that* give this old bigot something to think about.

'They should stay on South Street where they belong,' muttered

the old man ominously. 'Comin' to live among decent folk. It ain't right, there should be a law.'
UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA

Detective Rosemont pushed himself heavily out of the overstuffed armchair he was sitting in and headed towards the door. Screw it. He was beginning to feel suffocated. 'Thank you, Mr. Bullen,' he said tightly. 'We'll be needing a formal statement of course. One of my men will be back later -'

'Niggers!' screeched the old man hysterically, warming to his subject. 'They shoulda been left in Africa runnin' around naked. That's what I think. That's what all decent folk think.'

Angrily Leon Rosemont let himself out of the small house. It was raining, a bleak relentless drizzle. The television trucks were blocking the end of the street, and some ghoulish sightseers huddled in a group behind a police barricade. What did they come for? What was so exciting about the outside of a house where violent deaths had occurred? *Just what the hell did they expect to see?*

He shook his head. People. He would never understand them.

Grimly he pulled up the collar of his old English raincoat and hurried across the street.

In all his years of hard grind service he had never had to deal with a murder case where he knew one of the victims. This was a horrible sickening first. And in a chilling way he wondered if any of the guilt was his . . .

3

Montana Gray gazed at her husband, Neil, as he studied himself in the dressing room mirror of their Coldwater Canyon house. His obsession with his appearance whenever he wore a suit amused her. She waited patiently for the inevitable question.

He did not disappoint. 'Do I look alright?' he asked, quite secure in the fact that he looked fine, but anxious for her approval anyhow.

She grinned. 'How come you're always so insecure when you know you look terrific?'

'Me? Insecure. Never,' he replied, sounding more like Richard Burton than the original article. 'I merely enjoy your praise.'

She loved his English accent, it had always been a turn-on.

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'Hmmm . . .' She regarded him quizzically. 'Later - in bed - I'll praise you 'til your hair stands on end.'

'Only my hair?' he mocked.

'And anything else you can think of.'

'Oh, I'll think of something.'

She laughed. 'I'm sure you will, not only are you the greatest movie director around, but your imagination ain't bad either!'

He grabbed her and they began to kiss.

Montana was twenty-nine. Neil fifty-four. During a year of living together and four years of marriage the twenty-five year age gap had never bothered either of them, although it still bothered a lot of other people. Neil's ex-wife, Maraloc. Some of his friends, and all of their wives.

'Hey.' Gently she pushed him away. 'We have a whole bunch of guests anxiously awaiting our illustrious presence at the Bistro. We'd better shift ass.'

He sighed theatrically.

'Don't go giving me any heavies about tonight. This whole celebration bit was your idea, Neil.'

He mock bowed and ushered her to the door. 'Well madam, in that case let us - as you so succinctly put it - shift ass!'

Montana. Five feet ten inches tall. Waist length black hair. Direct gold-flecked tiger eyes. A wide sensual mouth. An unusual and striking beauty.

Montana. Named for the state she was born in by parents who were unconventional to say the least. Her father was a geologist. Her mother a folk singer. They both loved to travel, and by the time Montana was fifteen she had been around the world twice, had two short affairs, spoke fluent French and Italian, could water ski, snow ski and ride horses like a cowboy.

Her parents were strong, independent people who instilled in their only child a fun sense of confidence and self-worth. 'Believe in yourself and you can do anything,' her mother often said.

'Never be frightened in life,' was her father's motto. 'Face whatever comes your way with dignity and strength.'

It was alright for them, they had each other, and although they loved her very much, she often felt like an intruder, so when they finally decided to settle down on a ranch in Arizona, she knew the time had come to move out into the world on her own. She took off with their blessing and a small amount of money to keep her going. It was 1971.

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MILIK
RUJUKAN PENDIDIKAN
FISIP - UNAIR

she was seventeen years old and filled with all the energy and enthusiasm of extreme youth. RUANG PUSTAKA UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA

First she went to stay with an older cousin in San Francisco. He gave her pointers on sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll and left her to her own devices. She was inquisitive and anxious to learn, trying out a series of jobs - everything from waitressing to making silver jewelry and selling it on the street.

This kept her busy until she met a rock musician who talked her into India and meditation. They ended up in Poona, sitting at the feet of the celebrated guru, Rajneesh. She tired of this sooner than her companion, and travelled on to London alone, where she stayed with friends in Chelsea, mixing with photographers, models and writers. She tried a little of everything until eventually she moved to New York with a radical journalist and began to do what she had decided really interested her most of all - writing. The pieces she turned out were both cynical and stylish, and it wasn't long before she developed a name for herself, and a regular page in 'Worldly', an avant garde magazine. It was on a working trip to Paris that she first met Neil.

A party on the Left Bank. Crowded. Noisy. Montana arrived with a sometime boyfriend - Lenny. Neil was already there, stoned on a mixture of Jack Daniels and Acapulco Gold. A wasted looking man with intense eyes, a well lived in face, and a mass of unruly greying hair, he was sitting in a corner holding court while a group of admirers hung on to his every word.

'You know - I really want to meet that guy,' Lenny said. 'He's better than Altman.'

'Nobody's better than Altman,' she replied dismissively, heading in the direction of friends.

It was hours later when she finally wandered over to the group still gathered around Neil Gray. Lenny introduced her.

By this time Neil was so drunk he could hardly speak. But he did manage, 'What kind of a bullshit name is Montana?'

She ignored him, smiled sweetly at Lenny and said, 'Let's split.'

Two days later, while browsing magazines in the American Drug Store on the Champs Elysees, a voice said, 'Montana. What kind of a bullshit name is that?'

She turned, and for a moment did not remember him. Then he breathed whisky fumes in her face and she recalled the party.

'Want to have a drink?' he asked.

'Not particularly.'

Their eyes locked and for a brief moment something sparked. She

was intrigued enough to change her mind, although older men had never been her scene.

He took her to a bar where he was obviously a regular patron, and proceeded to get totally smashed. Before doing this he impressed her with sharp, knowledgeable and witty conversation, and she began to wonder why he had this need to obliterate the present.

She took the trouble to find out more about him. He was a complex man bent on self-destruction. A talented director, he had alienated many people along the way with his drinking and erratic behaviour, and he was now reduced to shooting television commercials for large sums of money which he used to support his ex-wife, Maralee, who lived in great style in Beverly Hills.

In Paris he seemed to enjoy his celebrity, starting off each day sober, but by early afternoon becoming hopelessly drunk.

Montana postponed her return to New York and began spending more and more time with him. Neil Gray was a challenge, and that excited her. Her father would have said she had the hots for him. Sex had always been a very open subject when she was growing up, and the only advice her parents had ever given her on the subject was to do whatever she felt was right. Something told her that Neil Gray was right, although he made no move to get her into bed, which intrigued her even more. She finally invited herself, and to his drunken amusement he couldn't get it up.

Montana did not find this funny. She thought that maybe the time had come to do something about Mister Neil Gray, so she hired a car, borrowed a friend's chateau in the country, and persuaded him to spend the weekend. He agreed, expecting a two day binge of booze and fun.

The chateau was isolated and empty, Montana had made sure it housed no spirits. She hid the keys of the car, pulled the connection on the phone, and kept him there for three delirious weeks. Well, after the first few days it was delirious, when she calmed him, stopped his furious ravings, and finally got him into bed in a sober state. He was a devastating lover when he didn't have alcohol slowing him down. No young stud, but a man who she felt very comfortable with indeed.

By the time they returned to Paris they had both decided togetherness was the name of the game. They stayed in Paris for only a few months. By that time Montana managed to convince Neil he was wasting his talent, and he finally agreed to return to America. Word was out he was sober and straight, and by the end of their first year together, he was back in action shooting a low-budget thriller movie on

the streets of New York. The film was a mild hit, and once more Hollywood heckoned. They headed west. 'You'll hate Beverly Hills,' he warned her. 'There's more shui per square inch than a sewage plant.'

She grinned and busied herself with her own projects. She had an idea for a television series, and there was a book she wanted to write about Hollywood in the thirties. Neil encouraged her all the way. He also insisted that they get married. She would have been happy leaving things the way they were, but he was not prepared to risk losing her. She was special. She had dried him out, got him working again, and given him a whole new outlook on life.

They got married in Hawaii, and from then on commuted between a permanent suite at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel and a New York apartment.

Montana wrote her television series - which was quite successful. She collaborated on the book about Hollywood, and drawn towards the movies, she wrote, produced and directed on offbeat, short film about children in the Watts area of Los Angeles. It won two awards.

Neil was proud of her accomplishments, he had more than encouraged her on the next project she became involved in - a gritty screenplay titled 'Street People' which she wrote in six weeks flat. When he first read the script he was thrilled. As a director he felt it had the potential to be an exciting and important movie. And he knew at once that he wanted to do it. He was hot again due to the fact that his previous two movies had made money, and several studios were ready to back anything he cared to do. But he wanted control, so after discussing it with Montana, he took the scripts to Oliver Easterne Productions. Oliver was a snake, but Neil knew he would give them the deal they were after.

Now everything was agreed, and as of that very morning contracts were signed.

It was an excellent deal. Total artistic control - which means that no one could mess with Montana's script or with what Neil planned on putting up there on the screen. As long as they stayed under budget and on schedule, no interference from anyone. They were both delighted.

Final cut. Total control. Magic words, and now a special dinner to announce the project to their friends.

Montana stared moodily out of the car window as three hours later they drove home. As far as she was concerned, the entire evening had been one big waste of time. Friends. She could manage quite nicely without them thank you very much. As long as she had Neil of

course, because he didn't give a damn about anybody, and she admired that quality in a town full of ass kissers. In fact it was one of the qualities that had attracted her to him in the first place.

'Cigarette?' He shook one out of the pack while he guided his red Maserati across Santa Monica, up Beverly towards Sunset.

She accepted it without a word, and thought yet again about the reaction to their news from Neil's so-called friends. They had all said, 'Wonderful!' 'Congratulations!' Then one by one they got their little digs in.

Bibi Sutton, the social pacesetter of Beverly Hills. Chic, French wife of one of filmland's biggest stars, Adam Sutton. 'Sweetie? Neil? He really do film you wrote?' Her obvious amazement was hardly disguised.

Chet Barnes, a talented screen writer with two Oscars to prove it. 'Writing for movies is a very specialized art, Montana. It's not like hacking it out for T.V.' And fuck you too, Mr. Barnes.

Gina Germaine, thirtyish sex symbol trying to be taken seriously and looking like an overgrown Barbie Doll. 'Did you have a ghost writer, Montana? You can confide in me, I won't tell. As a matter of fact I do a little writing myself . . .'

And so on and so on. One crack after another. People were just plain jealous, and that was the truth. Good looking women had roles in life and they were supposed to stick to them. They could be movie stars, models, housewives, hookers, but God forbid they should skirt onto what was strictly regarded as Big Boy's Territory. Writing a major movie for a major director was Big Boy's Territory. And in their own pretty little way everyone wanted to let her know that. She felt soured by their jealousy. But then, what had she expected?

'Sometimes I hate people!' she exploded.

Neil laughed. 'Don't waste your energy, my love.'

'But they were all so -' 31

'Envious.'

'You noticed it too?'

'I could hardly help it. Karen Lancaster kept on asking me to admit that I wrote the bloody movie myself.'

'That spoiled bitch!'

'And then Chet insisted on telling me I'd ruin my career. Oh, and even Adam Sutton wanted to know why I was helping you this way.'

'Christ! Friends!'

He took his hand from the steering wheel and patted her on the knee. 'I told you when I first brought you here never to take any of

them seriously. Hollywood's a funny town with funny rules. You break them all.'

'I do, huh?'

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'Most certainly.'

'How?'

'Well . . . let's see now. You don't shop on Rodeo Drive. You don't give catered parties. You don't lunch with the girls. You don't employ a maid. You don't have impeccable fingernails. You don't gossip. You don't spend my money at a speed faster than sound. You don't -'

She held up her hand, still laughing. 'Enough already! Let's go home and make out.'

'And you don't want to be asked.'

Her hand slid across the gear lever and settled on his crotch. 'Aren't you the lucky one?'

The Maserati swerved across the street. 'Who, my love, is arguing?'

Montana slept soundly as Neil crept quietly from their bed early in the morning. He found that the older he got the less sleep he needed, so he showered, did a few half-hearted push ups, then walked out to the patio and admired the view. When the smog wasn't in action you could see for miles, sometimes as far as the ocean. It was one of the main reasons they had purchased the house several months previously. A lot of people put Los Angeles down - but Neil had a genuine love for the city. Born and raised in England, he found he never missed the place. America was his home, and had been for over twenty years.

Neil Gray first came to Hollywood in 1958. He was a young brash director who thought he knew it all. The studio who brought him over after his first big English film treated him royally. A bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, a parade of beautiful starlets, and an endless expense account.

The movie he made for them died at the box office. A woman slapped him with a paternity suit which he hotly denied, and, suitably chastised, he fled back to England.

However, American fever was in his blood, he wanted more, and early in the sixties he returned to Hollywood - this time with no studio to back him. He rented a room at the Chateau Marmont, a modest

old-fashioned hotel above the Strip. There he tried to get a script he had optioned off the ground. The going was hard, until one day, round the pool, he quite literally bumped into Maralee Sanderson. She was a pretty, spoiled teenager whose mother had died when she was fourteen, and who had been raised by her father, Tyrone, the founder of Sanderson Studios. At the time Maralee was having an affair with a New York method actor, but she took an immediate fancy to Neil and switched affections. He had no choice. What Maralee wanted - she got. Besides, he was flattered. She was young, gorgeous and rich. And daddy owned a studio. What more could an out-of-work film director want?

'Daddy'll put up the money for your movie,' she remarked casually one day. 'If I ask him, that is.'

'What the hell are you waiting for?' he yelled.

'A little thing called marriage,' she replied innocently.

Marriage. The very word scared him. He had tried it once at nineteen and found it sadly lacking. But now . . . seventeen years later . . . many women later . . . much booze later . . .

Marriage. He thought about it for a week. Then decided why not? It was about time he took the big step again, and besides, it seemed to be the only surefire way to get his movie off the ground.

An inner voice nagged him constantly: 'What about integrity? Making it on your own? Love?'

'Fuck it - he thought. I want to make this film. I want a little clout in this town. Fuck it.

'Yes,' he told Maralee.

'Good,' she replied. 'Daddy wants to meet you.'

Tyrone Sanderson had not got where he was by charm. He was short and thick set. He smoked outsize cigars and favoured starlets with outsize attributes. He was desperate to marry his daughter off. She had bedded half of Hollywood but Neil Gray was the first man she had shown any permanent interest in.

'You wanna do a movie - do it,' Tyrone growled at their first meeting.

'I have a script for you to read -'

'Who reads? Do it.'

'Aren't you interested in what it's about?'

'I'm interested in you marrying my daughter. Period.'

Maralee and he were married on the terrace of Tyrone's Bel Air estate two weeks later. Most of the big names in Hollywood attended the wedding. They honeymooned in Acapulco, and returned to live on

Rodeo Drive in the house daddy bought them as a wedding present. Neil went straight to work.

His first film was a success both artistically and financially. From being referred to as just 'the son-in-law' he became the new wonder kid in town. Every studio was after him, and since Tyrone Sanderson had not signed him to a contract he was free to do whatever he wanted.

'You have to stick with daddy,' Maralee insisted. 'He gave you your first chance.'

'Screw daddy,' Neil replied. 'I took my first chance, he never gave me anything.'

Neil made a succession of hot movies, while Maralee indulged in a succession of hot affairs. Neil drank, Maralee spent money.

Then came the flops. Suddenly Neil was bad news. He took off for Europe after a major fight with Maralee which ended when she summoned her father to the house. 'If you bring him into our life it's over,' he threatened.

'So goodbye,' she snapped. 'You no-talent-pain-in-the-ass-English has-been!'

Montana turned up at just the right moment.

Divorcing Maralee had not been easy. Although she didn't want him, she didn't want to not have him either.

The divorce was messy and expensive. But worth every cent.

Neil gazed out at the sweeping view and thought about Montana. She was strong, intelligent and sensual. And he had been faithful to her for longer than he had ever thought possible. But in the last year he had disgusted himself with the occasional bird brain he took to bed. Fluffy blondes with low I.Q.s.

If Montana ever found out she would walk, just like that. He knew his wife.

So why did he do it? He honestly didn't know. Maybe the risk element was exciting. Or the fact that sometimes he felt the need to have a woman underneath him who wasn't his equal. A full breasted piece - who was just that - a piece. No conversation. No intellectual meeting of the minds. Just a lay.

Not that Montana wasn't the best. In bed she was as stimulating as ever. But she was always his equal and sometimes he felt this burning desire to bed a woman who wasn't. Sometimes all he wanted was a hot impersonal uninvolved fuck. He was fifty-four years old. Life goes on and you never learn a goddamn thing.

He left the patio and went indoors to the kitchen where he fixed himself a cup of tea and a dent of cereal.

Gina Germaine. Fluffy. Blonde. Dumb. And worse. A movie star. He had bedded her twice and was going back for more. It was madness, but he couldn't help himself.

Getting lost in the city of New York was no problem for Deke. Burying his anger in a small room in the Village. Thinking. Brooding. Working things out.

Got a job. Changed his name.

No sweat.

Altered his appearance. It was easy. A pair of scissors was all it took to cut off his shoulder length hair. A barber finished the job, shearing his scalp until all that remained was a tight sprouting - less than a crew cut - more like a delousing.

Could not do anything about the eyes. They burned black and angry in a pale nondescript face.

He was tall, thin, built like a million other young men who wore the uniform of Levis, shirt and lumber jacket.

He was obsessively tidy. Everything in his room was neat. Not that there was much to mess up: when he left Philadelphia he had taken nothing except a small carryall.

He worked in a seedy hotel in Sobo. The afternoon shift - twelve noon until six p.m. He sat behind a desk and handed out room keys to a strange assortment of customers. Visitors to the city with an obvious lack of money, bookers, eccentrics, businessmen who didn't want to be seen on an afternoon tryst with their secretaries.

For the first six weeks he took a regular trip to the newsstand in Times Square which carried the Philadelphia papers. Back in his room his eyes devoured the newsprint from front to back, missing nothing. When he was finished he neatly clipped out all the stories on the Friendship Street murders and studied them intently. Finally, when he was satisfied that he was missing no details of the investigation, he hid the news clips between the pages of a racing auto magazine which he then stuffed under his mattress.

APPENDIX II

TARGET LANGUAGE

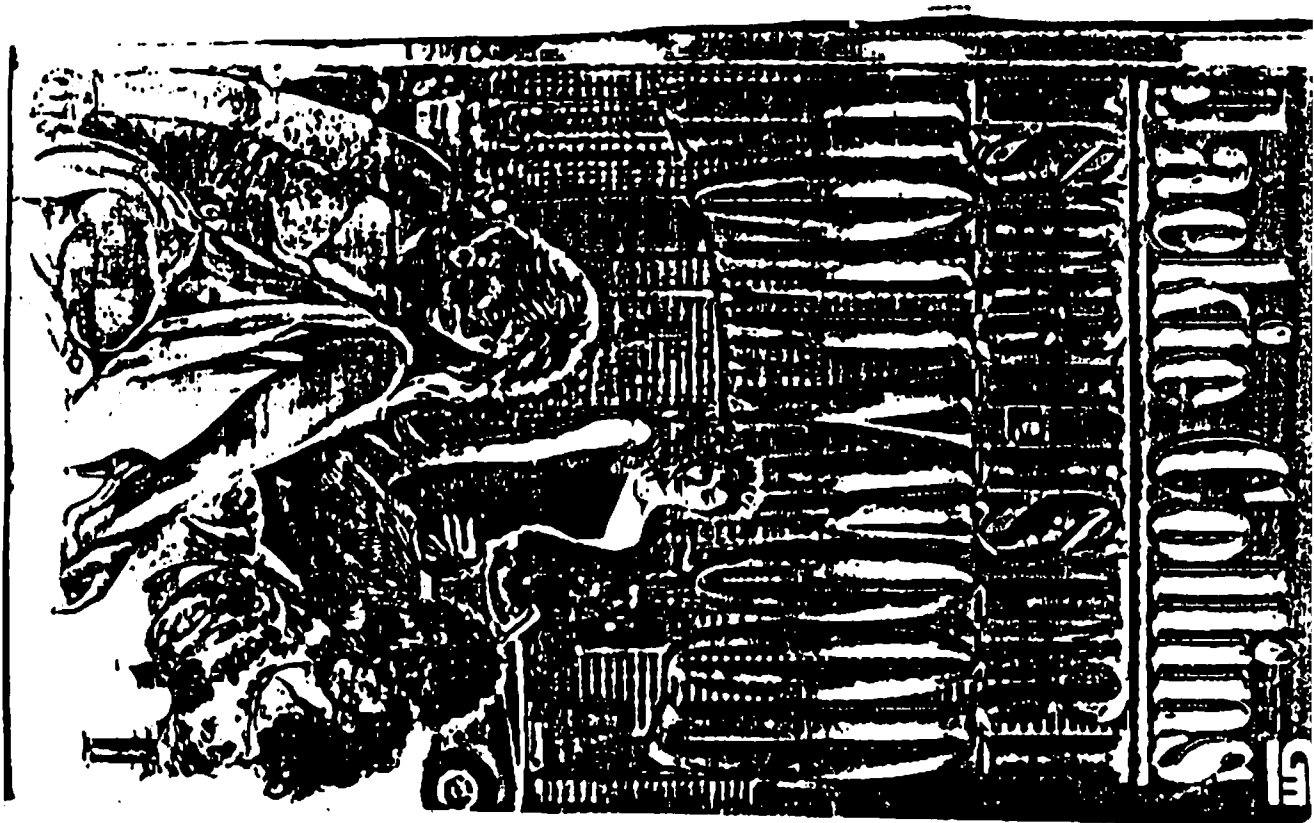
ISTRI-ISTRI HOLLYWOOD

BY

JACKIE COLLINS

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN MARTO



ISTRI-ISTRI HOLLYWOOD—mereka bisa membeli pria mana pun, membantu karier atau menghancurkannya, mengalahkan saingan dan menaklukkan orang-orang penting. Mereka bersantap di Bistro dan Ma Maison sambil bergosip—gosip yang mempercepat turun-naiknya nasib dan reputasi mereka sendiri. Mereka cantik, seksi, dan agresif. Mereka adalah:

ISTRI-ISTRI HOLLYWOOD

Sanksi Pelanggaran Pasal 44:

**Undang-undang Nomor 7 Tahun 1987 Tentang
Perubahan atas Undang-undang Nomor 6 Tahun 1982
Tentang Hak Cipta**

1. Barangsiapa dengan sengaja dan tanpa hak mengumumkan atau memperbanyak suatu ciptaan atau memberi izin untuk itu, dipidana dengan pidana penjara paling lama 7 (tujuh) tahun dan/atau denda paling banyak Rp 100.000.000,- (seratus juta rupiah).
2. Barangsiapa dengan sengaja menyiarkan, memamerkan, mengedarkan, atau menjual kepada umum suatu ciptaan atau barang hasil pelanggaran Hak Cipta sebagaimana dimaksud dalam ayat (1), dipidana dengan pidana penjara paling lama 5 (lima) tahun dan/atau denda paling banyak Rp 50.000.000,- (lima puluh juta rupiah).

Jackie Collins

ISTRI-ISTRI HOLLYWOOD

buku kesatu



**Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama
Jakarta, 1993**

HOLLYWOOD WIVES

by Jackie Collins

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ISTRI-ISTRI HOLLYWOOD 1

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813

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Isi di luar tanggung jawab Percetakan PT Gramedia

Untuk Tracy, Tiffany, dan Rory.
Dengan sepenuh cinta.

*Tak seorang pun boleh gagal dalam radius
tiga kilometer dari Hotel Beverly Hills.*

- Gore Vidal

MILIK
RUJUKAN PENDIDIKAN
FISIP - UNAIR

PROLOG

IA berdiri tegang di ruang keluarga, di sebuah rumah kecil di Philadelphia. Matanya menatap tajam tiga manusia. Tiga manusia sialan. Tiga wajah mengejek. Gigi, mata, dan rambut—semuanya melekat di wajah-wajah yang asyik tertawa. Tiga makhluk jahanam.

Di dadanya menggemuruh bara amarah. Amarah yang terus-menerus menghantam kepalanya.

Televisi masih terus menyala. Archie Bunker sedang melucu. Studio dipenuhi gemuruh tawa geli.

Terus penuh tawa. Di televisi dan di dalam ruangan. Tawa yang hampa.

Ibunya. Rambut coklatnya kusut masai. Tubuhnya melengkung kaku, sekaku jalan pikirannya.

Ayahnya. Botak. Kurus. Gigi palsu berderit, keluar-masuk mulutnya.

Joey. Ia pikir Joey berbeda dari yang lain.

Tiga manusia jahanam.

Ia berjalan ke pesawat televisi, dan memperbesar volume suaranya.

Ketiga orang di depan televisi tetap tak peduli.

Mereka asyik tertawa. Menertawakan dirinya. Ya menertawakan dirinya.

Bara marah masih mendera kepalanya, meski dari luar wajahnya tetap terlihat tenang. Ia tahu bagaimana menghentikan tawa ketiga makhluk itu. Ia tahu.

Cepat dan lincir. Sebelum mereka sempat berhenti tertawa dan mulai berpikir.

Cepat dan lincir. Pisau itu mengayun cepat, mematikan.

Darah muncrat secepat ayunan pisau. Ayab dan ibunya dengan cepat jatuh setelah tebasan pertama.

Joey. Lebih tangkas dan lebih muda. Matanya memancarkan kengerian, tangannya menggapai, menutupi luka di lengannya. Dengan tergepoh-gopoh ia mencoba lari ke pintu.

Tawamu sudah berhenti sekarang, Joey. Sudah berhenti sekarang.

Ia mengayunkan kembali pisaunya. Kali ini lebih cepat dan penuh tenaga. Joey jatuh, bersimbah darah.

Mereka tak sempat menjerit. Tak seorang pun sempat.

Ia membunuh tanpa berkedip. Tindakannya cepat, dan mendadak, bagi seorang serdadu yang terlatih. Hanya saja ia bukan seorang serdadu. Ya, kan? Bukan serdadu.

Isak tangis mulai mengguncang tubuhnya. Isak tangis pilu dan asing. Pisaunya telah bertugas dengan sempurna, membereskan tiga manusia

jahanam itu dengan tebasan liar, mengerikan, dan mematikan.

Acara di televisi masih penuh tawa, melarutkan tragedi pembunuhan tiga manusia. Acara Archie Bunker. Tawa dalam kemasan.

Dan pisaunya masih terus terayun, seakan digerakkan oleh kekuatan iblis.

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BAGIAN PERTAMA

1

ELAINE CONTI menggeliat bangun dari tempat tidur mewah di *mansion*-nya yang super mewah, di kompleks perumahan elite Beverly Hills. Elaine menekan tombol elektrik. Tirai kamar terbuka. Di halaman tampak sosok tegap seorang anak muda memakai *T-shirt* putih dan celana *jeans* dekil sedang kencing ke dalam kolam renang ber dinding keramik.

Dengan susah payah Elaine duduk, menekan interkom untuk memanggil Lina, pelayannya yang orang Meksiko. Pada saat yang sama, ia memasukkan kakinya yang indah ke dalam sandal kulit halus berwarna merah jambu, dan mengenakan kimono sutera *marabou* yang khusus dirancang untuk tubuhnya yang terawat baik.

Anak muda itu selesai membuang bajat. Dengan santai ia menarik *ribsleting jeans*-nya, lalu berjalan dan menghilang dari pandangan.

"Lina!" jerit Elaine. "Di mana kamu?"

Lina datang. Acuh tak acuh. Bersikap tak peduli menghadapi teriakan majikannya.

"Di kolam ada orang tak dikenal. Panggil

Miguel. ^{IP. PERPUSTAKAAN UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA} Laporan ke polisi. Kunci semua pintu, perintah Elaine dengan penuh semangat.

Seolah tak terpengaruh, Lina malah mulai membereskan meja kecil di samping tempat tidur majikannya. Tisu kotor, gelas yang setengah berisi anggur, dan sekotak coklat.

"Lina!" bentak Elaine jengkel.

"Tidak perlu gugup, señora," tukas si pelayan dengan tenang. "Tidak ada orang luar. Hanya pengganti yang dikirim si Miguel. Miguel sakit. Tidak datang minggu ini."

Elaine naik darah. "Mengapa kau tidak melapor sebelumnya?" Ia bergegas lari ke kamar mandi, membanting pintu sedemikian kerasnya, sehingga sebuah potret berbingkai jatuh. Kacanya pecah, menyebar di lantai. Dasar bodoh. Perempuan tolok. Sungguh sukar mencari pelayan pintar di zaman sekarang. Mereka datang dan pergi seenaknya sendiri. Mereka tak peduli apakah majikannya diperkosa atau dirampok di rumah sendiri.

Dan semua ini selalu terjadi saat Ross berada di lokasi *shooting*. Miguel takkan pernah berani berpura-pura sakit jika Ross berada di rumah.

Elaine melempar kimono-nya ke lantai, membiarkan baju tidurnya melorot jatuh. Telanjang. Dibiarkannya tubuhnya disiram air *shower* yang sedingin es. Giginya gemeletuk. Tubuhnya menggigil kedinginan. Hanya sekejap. Air dingin merupakan obat terbaik untuk mengencangkan kulit. Dan, Tuhan tahu meskipun sudah dibantu dengan

senam, yoga, dan semua latihan dansa modern, pengencangan kulit tetap saja diperlukan.

Ini bukan berarti ia sudah kendur atau gemuk. Sama sekali tidak. Dengan rasa puas ia meneliti seluruh tubuhnya. Tak ada lemak berlebih, meski satu ons pun. Cukup sempurna untuk wanita so- usia dirinya. Tiga puluh sembilan.

Saat berusia tiga belas tahun, aku adalah remaja paling gembrot di sekolah. Julukanku Etta si Gajah. Dan aku memang pantas diberi julukan itu. Bagaimana tidak gembrot, jika Nenek Steinberg selalu menyediakan kue-kue, coklat, es krim, dan segala macam camilan berlemak? Tapi siapa peduli dengan diet, berat badan, nutrisi, dan senam kebugaran waktu masih umur tiga belas tahun?

Elaine tertawa kecut. Etta si Gajah, keluaran daerah Bronx, telah membalas semua ejekan. Etta si Gajah, bekas sekretaris di New York City, sekarang langsing menggiurkan. Ia bukan lagi si Etta, tetapi Elaine Conti yang hidup di istana berkamar tidur enam, berkamar mandi tujuh, di kawasan elite Beverly Hills. Di *mansion* super mewah lagi, bukan di daerah perbukitan atau di pinggiran Brentwood. Di daerah *real estate* nomor satu.

Etta si Gajah bukan lagi remaja dengan rambut kusut, hidung mencuat, gigi renggang, kacamata berbingkai kawat, dan dada rata.

Ia telah berubah. Hidungnya sekarang mungil menggemaskan. Persis hidung Brooke Shields. Rambutnya menjadi coklat keemasan, dipotong serasi

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dengan wajahnya. Kulitnya putih alabaster dan sangat halus. Giginya sudah dibenahi, putih, rata, dan tanpa cacat. Kini ia bahkan jauh lebih cantik dibandingkan aktris-aktris *Charlie's Angels*. Kacamata kunonya telah diganti dengan lensa kontak berwarna biru lembut. Tanpa leasa kontak, warna matanya agak kelabu, dan sedikit juling sewaktu membaca. Tetapi ini bukan akibat banyak membaca. Ia hanya membaca majalah *Vogue*, *People*, *Us*. Ia juga membaca sekilas *Variety* dan *The Hollywood Reporter*, banya berkonsentrasi pada kolom gosip Army Archerd dan Hank Grant. Ia juga tidak melewatkan *Beverly Hills People* dan *Women's Wear Daily*. Tapi ia jarang menyentuh berita-berita berat. Berita politik hanya sekilas dibacanya, pada saat Ronald Reagan dilantik menjadi presiden di Gedung Putih. Itu pun dengan pikiran *Jika Reagan bisa, mengapa Ross tidak?*

Dadanya, meskipun tak mungkin menyaingi Raquel Welch, cukup bagus juga. Ukuran 36B dan bentuknya sempurna. Kencang, menantang, tanpa tanda kekenduran sama sekali. Ini berkat operasi plastik yang dilakukan suami pertamanya, Dr. John Saltwood. Mereka bertemu di sebuah pesta di New York. John bekerja di bagian bedah plastik di rumah sakit pemerintah. Suatu pekerjaan yang—menurut Elaine—hanya membuang-buang waktu. Elaine melihatnya sebagai pria yang polos, pemalu, dan kesepian. Sungguh berlawanan dengan sifat Elaine. Sebulan kemudian mereka menikah. Hidung dan terutama buah dadanya, dioperasi

oleh John. Dalam setahun semuanya berubah sempurna. Kemudian Elaine membujuknya untuk pindah ke Beverly Hills dan membuka praktek sendiri.

Tiga tahun kemudian, ia dikenal sebagai ahli operasi buah dada. Elaine menceraikannya, dan segera menjadi Mrs. Ross Conti. Sungguh aneh nasib seseorang.

Ross Conti. Suami. Bintang film. Si bedebah nomor satu.

Dan... o, ya... ia sudah tahu semuanya. Bukanlah mereka telah menikah selama sepuluh tahun? Dan selama itu hidupnya tidak selalu bergelimang madu dan cinta kasih. Makin lama bahkan akan makin sukar. Ia tahu bahwa Ross takkan segan-segan bersimpuh di kaki para wanita setengah tua yang masih memujanya sebagai bintang film, karena betapapun, (usianya sudah mendekati lima puluh tahun, dan para penggemarnya sudah tentu bukan dari kalangan remaja lagi) Semakin lama keadaan ini bahkan akan menjadi lebih parah lagi. Tuhan tahu apa dampaknya semua ini bagi keuangan mereka. Mungkin saja setiap film yang dibintangi Ross akan menjadi filmnya yang terakhir....

"Señora," Lina mengetuk pintu kamar mandi dengan keras. "Si pembersih kolam ingin bayaran-nya sekarang. Dia mau pulang."

Elaine melangkah keluar dari *shower*. Ia jengkel sekali. Apa?! Minta bayaran? Untuk apa? Mengencingi kolam renang?

Ia membungkus tubuhnya dengan kimono ban-

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duk dan membuka pintu kamar mandi. "Katakan padanya," nadanya penuh wibawa, "pergi ke neraka."

Lina memandang tanpa berkedip. "Dua puluh dolar, Mrs. Conti. Dia akan datang tiga hari lagi."

Ross Conti menyumpahi dirinya tanpa suara. Ya, Tuhan! Apa yang sedang terjadi pada dirinya? Ia tak bisa mengingat dialog yang harus diucapkannya. Sudah delapan kali pengambilan ulang, dan ia masih saja tak mampu mengingatnya dengan tepat.

"Tenang, jangan terlalu dipikirkan, Ross," hibur si sutradara sambil menepuk bahu Ross sebagai tanda simpati.

Sutradara sok tahu. Mungkin saja usianya baru dua puluh tiga tahun. Pakaiannya lebih menyerupai tukang sihir di malam Halloween. Rambut panjang kusut masai dan celana Levi's yang terlalu ketat.

Ross menepis tangan si sutradara. "Aku selalu tenang. Kerumunan orang itu yang membuyarkan konsentrasiku."

"Aku mengerti," hibur Chip, si sutradara, sambil menggamit asistennya. "Bereskan kerumunan itu. Demi Tuhan, mereka kan hanya figuran, bukan apa-apa. Memangnya mereka anggap apa?"

Si asisten mengangguk. Diraihnya pengeras suara. Pengumuman segera berdentung.

"Siap untuk mulai lagi, Ross?" tanya Chip. Ross mengangguk setuju. Chip segera memberi aba-aba

pada seorang pemain berambut pirang yang tubuhnya kecoklatan karena terbakar matahari. "Mulai lagi, Sharon. *Sorry, Sayang.*"

Ross jengkel. *Sorry, Sayang. Maksud sebenarnya adalah sorry, Sayang, kita harus sabar pada si tua bangsa ini, sebab setidaknya dia pernah menjadi bintang besar di Hollywood.*

Sharon tersenyum. "Siap, Chip."

Pasti Siap, Chip. Kita siap menertawakan Ross, si bintang tua. Ibuku pernah memujanya setengah mati. Dia selalu menonton filmnya berulang-ulang.

"Mana tukang rias?" tanya Ross dengan nada memerintah. Lalu disusul dengan nada sarkastik, "Ini pun jika tak ada yang keberatan menunggu sebentar."

"Pasti tidak. Apa saja yang kauinginkan, Ross."

Yah, pasti. Apa saja yang kuinginkan: Bukankah si orang top ini sedang membutuhkan dia, Ross Conti, dalam filmnya? Ross Conti jaminan box office. Siapa pula yang mau nonton Sharon Richman? Siapa yang pernah mendengar namanya? Paling beberapa juta pencandu televisi yang sempat melihat program murahan tentang para instruktur ski air. Murahan. Sharon Richman—cuma rambut pirang biasa dan mulut penuh gigi. Takkan mau aku meladeninya, meskipun dia merangkak dan berlutut memohon-mohon di trailer-ku. Tetapi, mungkin saja aku mau jika dia bersedia mengemis-emis.

Juru rias segera melayaninya. Nah, sekarang semua baru tahu siapa sebenarnya bintang dalam

film ini. Juga dia berjasa untuk yang sedang menggelap keringat di wajahku, membedaki hidungku, dan mempertebal alisku.

Diremasnya pantat si juru rias dengan gemas. Yang diremas tersenyum genit. *Jangan ragu, nanti ke trailer-ku, Sayang. Akan kutunjukkan bagaimana seharusnya memuaskan seorang bintang besar macam aku.*

"Oke," kata Chip. "Sudah siap, Ross?"

Sudah pasti siap, jahanam! Ross mengangguk.

Pengambilan film segera dimulai. Dalam adegan, Ross hanya perlu mengucapkan tiga kalimat pada Sharon, lalu berjalan acuh tak acuh keluar dari sorotan kamera. Masalahnya terletak pada Sharon. Gadis itu menatapnya terus, hingga Ross lupa lagi skenarionya. *Si jalang. Dia sengaja melakukan ini. Dia ingin mengacaukan konsentrasiku. Dia berusaha menjatuhkan reputasiku.*

"Sialan!" Chip akhirnya meledak. "Adegan ini kan tidak sesukar drama *Hamlet*."

Benar. Dia mulai lagi... menyamakan diriku dengan pemain film murahan. Ross meninggalkan lokasi tanpa meoleh lagi.

Chip bersungut-sungut kepada Sharon. "Inilah akibatnya bekerja dengan seorang amatir... tanpa bakat."

"Ibuku dulu sangat memujanya," Sharon tersenyum bodoh.

"Kalau begitu, ibumu lebih bodoh daripada anak perempuannya."

Sharon hanya tertawa genit. Hinaan Chip tidak

berarti apa-apa baginya. Toh di ranjang lelaki itu tunduk padanya. Dan ini yang paling utama untuk menjadi bintang di sini.

Elaine Conti mengendarai Mercedes biru pucatnya di sepanjang La Cienega Boulevard. Ia menyeteri perlabahan-lahan untuk menjaga kukunya. Klinik khusus Nail Kiss of Life baru saja merawatnya. Pekerjaan mereka memuaskan. Klinik sensasional. Kuku ibu jarinya yang patah dirawat demikian baiknya, hingga *dia*, si pemilik kuku, tak bisa berkomentar lagi. Elaine senang mencobacoba tempat baru. Hal itu memberinya rasa berkuasa. Diputaranya kaset Barbra Streisand. Elaine tak habis pikir mengapa Barbra tak mau mengoperasi hidungnya. Di kota yang sangat memuja kesempurnaan lahiriah... dan Tuhan tahu uang bukan masalah bagi Barbra. Tetapi, tetap saja karier wanita itu melesat, juga kehidupan cintanya.

Dahi Elaine berkerut memikirkan kehidupan cintanya sendiri. Sudah berbulan-bulan Ross tak pernah mencumbunya lagi. Mendekat pun tak pernah. *Bangsat. Aku dikorbankan hanya karena dia sedang murung.*

Elaine sebenarnya juga pernah dua kali menyeleweng selama perkawinannya dengan Ross. Dua-duanya gagal total, tidak memuaskan. Tidak sepadan dengan rasa gelisah dan tergesa-gesa diburu waktu. Ia memutuskan takkan ada penyelewengan lagi dalam hidupnya. Tetapi sekarang ia

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mulai berpikir, mungkin menyeleweng bisa meng-
bilangkan kejenuhan perkawinannya.

Yang terakhir terjadi dua tahun lalu. Pipinya memerah setiap kali teringat peristiwa itu. Betapa absurd risiko yang diambilya. Dan dengan pria yang sebetulnya sama sekali tak bisa memuaskan-nya. Pria itu hanya bisa merawat giginya yang sudah sempurna. Milton Langley, dokter giginya—barangkali juga dokter gigi langganan wanita-wanita kaya lainnya di Beverly Hills. Betapa tolongnya Elaine karena memilihnya. Tapi sebenarnya Milton-lah yang memulai. Milton menyuruh perawatnya keluar, membeli sesuatu, lalu ia main cinta dengan pasicennya—cepat dan terburu-buru—di kursi dokter gigi. Elaine ingat sekali hari itu, sebab gaun Sonia Rykiel yang dikenakannya jadi ternoda.

Ingat akan kejadian itu, Elaine tertawa geli, meskipun waktu itu ia sama sekali tidak merasa hal itu lucu. Milton mencoba membersihkan gaunnya, dan ketika perawatnya kembali, segera disuruhnya wanita itu pergi ke Saks untuk membeli gaun pengganti. Setelah kejadian itu, mereka bercinta habis-habisan, dua kali seminggu, di motel-motel murahan di kawasan Santa Monica, selama dua bulan penuh. Suatu hari, Elaine tiba-tiba memutuskan tak ingin berkencan lagi dengan Milton. Cukup sekian.

Penyelewengan satunya bahkan tak layak di-ingat-ingat. Dengan salah satu teman Ross,

seorang aktor. Elaine tidur dua kali dengan aktor itu, dan kedua peristiwa itu membuatnya kecewa.

Pernah ia mencoba mendiskusikan masalah kebutuhan seks dengan Ross. Yang didapatnya malah omelan. "Kau kira aku ini siapa? Mesin cinta? Jika aku mau, pasti akan kulakukan. Jangan sekali-kali percaya pada bacaan yang menganjurkan sepuluh kali orgasme dalam sehari untuk mencegah ketuaan."

Ha! Sepuluh kali sehari? Sudah untung kalau bisa sepuluh kali setahun. Kalau bukan karena vibratornya, mungkin Elaine sudah minta dirawat psikiater.

Mungkin, mungkin Ross akan kembali bergairah jika filmnya laku keras.

Ya. Itu yang dibutuhkan Ross sekarang. Sebuah film yang laku keras, yang mampu mengembalikan kejantannya. Sukses terhebat di dunia adalah keberhasilan seorang wanita mengembalikan kejantanan seorang lelaki.

Dengan hati-hati ia membelok ke kiri di Melrose. Makan siang di Ma Maison adalah acara rutinnnya setiap Jumat. Suatu keharusan. Siapa saja yang punya nama di Hollywood pasti menjadi langganan Ma Maison. Elaine sudah pesan tempat secara permanen.

Patrick Terrail, pemilik Ma Maison, segera menyambut Elaine di pintu masuk restoran taman yang nyaman itu. Mereka saling menempelkan pipi. Lalu diikutinya *waiter* ke meja yang sudah dipesannya. Elaine, dengan pandangan setajam

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mata elang, melihat sekeliling ruangan, kalau-kalau ada yang dikenalnya.

Maralee Gray, salah satu teman dekatnya, sudah menunggu. Di depannya ada segelas *spritzer*—anggur putih campur soda, dan wajahnya masam. Di usia tiga puluh tujuh tahun, Maralee masih menyimpan sisa-sisa kecantikannya. Di SMA, ia gadis paling populer, dan pernah menjadi Miss Hot Rod 1960. Itu sebelum ia bertemu, menikah, dan menceraikan Neil Gray, sutradara film. Ayahnya, pemilik Sanderson Studios, sudah pensiun. Uang bukan masalah baginya—banyak pria yang jadi masalah bagi Maralee.

"Sayang, aku tidak terlambat, kan?" Elaine bertanya sambil menempelkan pipinya ke pipi Maralee.

"Oh, tidak, sama sekali tidak. Aku yang kepagian." Mereka saling berpandangan. Saling mengagumi. Saling menukar pujian. Kemudian masing-masing melihat sekeliling ruangan untuk memastikan ada kenalan mereka atau tidak.

"Dan bagaimana kabarnya Ross di lokasi?" tanya Maralee sambil mengeluarkan *cigarillo* panjang hitam dari kotak rokok tipis yang terbuat dari emas.

"Biasa, kau kan kenal Ross. Dia selalu mencoba menyekweng, di mana saja berada."

Keduanya tertawa bersama. Reputasi Ross yang sok jantan sudah jadi bahan lelucon di Hollywood sejak dulu.

"Sbenarnya Ross membenci semuanya," Elaine

berterus terang. "Skenarionya, lokasinya, sutradaranya, sampai-sampai makanan, cuaca, seluruh kru film dia benci. Tapi, Maralee," sambil setengah berbisik, "percaya atau tidak, dia akan sukses besar di film yang satu ini. Si tua Ross Conti. Ross si Perkasa."

"Percaya, aku percaya. Aku kan tak pernah mencoretinya dari daftar. Kau tahu itu."

Elaine mengangguk. Maralee benar-benar teman sejati. Di Hollywood jarang ada teman yang benar-benar teman. Biasanya kita punya banyak teman di saat kita top. Setelah itu, siapa yang peduli? Dan untuk menjadi top lagi, dibutuhkan waktu yang sangat lama, atau bahkan tak pernah top lagi sama sekali.

"Aku akan operasi kerut mata," tiba-tiba Maralee membisiki Elaine. "Dan ini hanya kau yang tahu, lho. Jangan sampai menyebar."

"Pasti tidak, jangan ragu!" Elaine meyakinkan teman eratnya. "Tapi, untuk kita sendiri saja, siapa sih nama dokternya? Siapa tahu, kapan-kapan aku juga membutuhkan jasanya."

"Koneksi di Palm Springs. Aku akan tinggal beberapa minggu di sana—di vilaku. Kemudian, balik lagi ke kehidupan normal. Siapa yang akan tahu bedanya? Mereka akan menyangka aku hanya berlibur sebentar."

"Ide yang brilian. Kapan?" Elaine memuji basa-basi. Maralee ini bodoh atau tolo!, sih? Siapa pula yang sudi berlibur di Palm Springs—walau orang

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itu punya vila di Beverly Hills yang peristiwanya di Los Angeles mereka yang berakhir pekan yang ke sana.

"Secepatnya. Mungkin minggu depan, segera setelah dokternya siap."

Mereka berhenti ngobrol begitu melihat Sylvester Stallone memasuki restoran. Elaine melambatkan tangannya, tapi tidak dibalas. "Mungkin dia sudah waktunya pakai kacamata," Elaine mencoba menghibur dirinya sendiri. "Minggu lalu kami masih ngobrol di pesta."

Maralee mengeluarkan tempat bedak mungil dari emas. Disapunya bekas lipstik di giginya. "Dia takkan bertahan lama. Siapa sih Sly Stallone? Mengangnya dia Clark Gable," katanya sinis.

"Oh, ya... oh, ya... terus... teruskan... jangan berhenti... kau memang benar-benar pandai, Sayang...."

Ross Conti mendengarkan suaranya sendiri dan bertanya-tanya, sudah berapa puluh kali ia mengucapkannya. Sering sekali.

Stella, si juru rias cantik, berlutut di bawah kaki Ross, tubuhnya berkeringat. Segala teknik telah dicobanya, tetapi percuma saja. Ross Conti, sang aktor film, ternyata impoten. Tak ada reaksi sama sekali. Bagaimana tidak? Lelaki seperti Ross Conti telah berkencan dengan puluhan perempuan yang bersedia berbuat apa saja dengannya. Para aktris pemula yang kariernya tergantung pada keterampilannya di tempat tidur. Para pelacur yang punya teknik-teknik khusus. Para istri yang bosan dan

kesepeian di Beverly Hills, yang punya teknik dan selera lebih tinggi.

Ross mulai bosan. Ditariknya rambut Stella sampai gadis itu mengerang kesakitan, dan menghentikan apa yang sedang dilakukannya.

Ia tak peduli. "Cukup. Kau sungguh hebat." Ross memujinya sambil menarik ritsleting celananya.

"Tapi... tapi kita baru saja mulai... kenapa berhenti?" Stella memandangnya tak mengerti.

"Kadang-kadang aku cukup puas dengan begini saja." Ross mencoba berbohong. Mulutnya menggumamkan sesuatu yang tak jelas. Ia meraih botol *tequila* di meja, di samping tempat tidurnya di hotel.

"Anda yakin... sudah puas benar?" Stella masih tetap tak percaya.

"Ya. Stamina perlu dijaga selama pembuatan film. Aku tak suka memboroskan tenaga jika tak perlu benar." Kalau gadis itu percaya omongannya, berarti dia mudah dibohongi.

"Saya rasa saya mengerti maksud Anda. Seperti seorang petinju yang hendak bertanding," Stella berkata dengan antusias, "tidak boleh membuang energi. Energi harus digunakan sebaik mungkin."

"Benar! Kau paham, kan?" Ross terseenyum, meneguk *tequila* dari botolnya, dan berharap gadis itu segera pergi.

"Anda ingin saya... saya melakukan sesuatu?"

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nya Stella penuh harap. Sudah mudahan Ross menyuruhnya tetap tinggal.

"Banyak, banyak yang kuingin kaulakukan," jawab Ross. "Tapi, bintang film seperti aku harus istirahat. Tentu kau tabu."

"Tentu, Mr. Con... Ross."

Ia belum pernah mengizinkan Stella memanggilnya Ross. Mr. Conti lebih baik. Tetapi perempuan di mana-mana sama saja. Beri mereka sedikit kenikmatan, dan mereka pun bersedia melakukan apa saja. "Selamat malam, Sheila."

"Stella, bukan Sheila."

"Ya... ya... Stella."

Stella akhirnya pergi. Ross menyalakan TV. Tepat acara *The Tonight Show*. Ia sebenarnya ingin menelepon Elaine di Los Angeles, tetapi segera dibatalkannya. Dibayangkannya betapa marahnya Elaine jika tahu pagi tadi ia berkali-kali gagal sewaktu pengambilan film dan meninggalkan lokasi *shooting* begitu saja. Elaine merasa popularitas Ross mulai meredup. Ia terus-menerus mendesak agar Ross mau menuruti selera publik. Film Ross yang terakhir tidak sesuai dengan anjuran Elaine, tapi hasilnya cukup meledak di pasaran. Yah, siapa bilang ia tak bisa sukses? Film itu film cinta yang manis. Sutradaranya sudah berpegalaman, dan pemeran utama wanitanya seorang aktris panggung dari New York. "Film kuno," komentar Elaine kasar. "Seks, kekerasan, dan komedi, itu yang diinginkan publik sekarang. Kau harus main dalam film-film seperti itu, Ross, sebelum terlambat."

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Elaine memang benar. Ia harus segera merebut kembali masa jayanya. Sekarang Ross Conti bukan jaminan *box office*. Masuk sepuluh besar saja tidak. Ia sedang dalam tabap meluncur ke bawah. Di Hollywood, semua orang tabu, siapa-siapa yang sedang dalam tabap seperti Ross Conti.

Di TV, Johnny Carson sedang mewawancarai Angie Dickinson. Gaya wanita itu sangat seduktif. Duduknya menyilang kaki, dan kakinya yang indah amat merangsang.

Ross meraih telepon. "Segera panggil kepala pelayan. Ini Ross Conti," katanya kasar.

Ia ingat bagaimana Chip datang merunduk-runduk ketakutan setelah ia tiba-tiba memutuskan meninggalkan lokasi *shooting*. "Sorry, Ross. Kejadian siang tadi memang mengecewakan. Tetapi... jika kau ingin istirahat, kita bisa mengulang pengambilannya besok."

Ross setuju saja. Akhirnya mereka sadar, siapa sebenarnya bintang dalam film ini... bukan hanya sekadar mantan bintang.

"Ya, Mr. Conti. Di sini kepala pelayan. Apa yang bisa saya bantu?"

Ross menjepit pesawat telepon di dagunya, dan mengambil botol *tequila*. "Anda dapat dipercaya?"

"Tentu, Sir. Ini pekerjaan saya."

"Bawakan saya seorang pelacur."

"Tak ada masalah, Mr. Conti. Rambut pirang? Coklat? Merah?"

"Warna apa saja. Yang penting dadanya menggiurkan—benar-benar menggiurkan."

"Sup. Sir!"^{JR} - PERPUSTAKAAN UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA

"Dan... masukkan bayarannya ke dalam rekening saya. Tulis saja *room service*." Mengapa ia harus membayar sendiri? Biar saja perusahaan film yang menanggungnya. Diletakkannya pesawat telepon, lalu ia berjalan ke kaca. Lima puluh. Sebentar lagi ia akan berusia lima puluh tahun. Dan ini menyakitkan. Sangat menyakitkan.

Ross Conti melewati tiga puluh tahun dari hidupnya di Hollywood. Dan selama dua puluh lima tahun lebih ia hidup sebagai seorang bintang besar. Ia datang ke Hollywood tahun 1953, dan segera ditemukan oleh seorang wanita muda—istri agen bintang film yang sudah tua. Waktu itu Ross bekerja sebagai tukang angkut peti di pasar makanan di Sunset Boulevard. Wanita itu terpesona oleh ketampanan dan rambutnya yang pirang, dan segera membujuk suaminya agar mengorbitkan Ross. Tak lama kemudian, wanita itu menjalin hubungan gelap dengannya. Mereka bercinta dua kali sehari.

Suaminya mencium penyelewengan itu ketika Universal Studio memutuskan menandatangani kontrak dengan kliennya yang masih muda. Dengan marah agen itu merundingkan perjanjian yang sangat merugikan Ross, menunggu sampai ditandatangani, kemudian mengusir Ross dengan tak lupa menyebarkan gosip bahwa kliennya adalah cowok paling tak berbakat yang pernah dikenalnya.

Ross tak peduli. Ia dibesarkan di kawasan

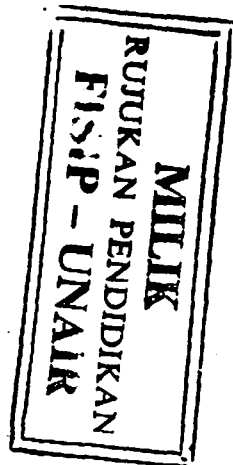
Bronx, menghabiskan tiga tahun di New York dengan kerja serabutan. Jadi, kontrak main film di Hollywood—apa pun persyaratannya—baginya oke saja.

Kaum wanita memujanya. Selama dua tahun Ross bertualang. Berpindah dari ranjang yang satu ke ranjang yang lain, sampai akhirnya ia berkenan dengan seorang simpanan produser film Hollywood. Begitu sang produser tahu, kontrak filmnya segera saja dibatalkan.

Dua tahun, dan selama itu ia hanya jadi pemain figuran di film-film kacang, tentang pesta-pesta di pantai. Lalu tiba-tiba... tak ada uang, tak ada kontrak main film, dan tak ada prospek.

Sampai suatu hari, di toko obat Schwab di Strip, ia berkenalan dengan seorang sekretaris yang penuh semangat dan bertipe pekerja keras, Sadie La Salle. Wajahnya tidak cantik. Kakinya pendek, sedikit gemuk, berkumis tipis. Tetapi dadanya... dadanya sungguh istimewa. Besar dan penuh berisi. Segera saja ajakan Ross untuk makan malam diterimanya. Mereka pergi ke Aware Inn, makan hamburger, dan asyik membicarakan impian Ross selama berjam-jam. Tanpa berbuat apa-apa. Sungguh suatu pengalaman yang membuat ego Ross puas. Mana ada cewek yang tahan membicarakan karier dan impian seorang cowok yang baru saja dikenalnya selama berjam-jam?

Sadie merupakan tipe gadis cerdas, suatu kualitas yang belum pernah dijumpai Ross sebelumnya. Ia tak pernah menyerah kepada rayuan Ross. Dengan





tegas ditolakinya. ^{RAJAKU} ^{ROSS} ^{SADIE} ^{ANGGA} ^{ANGGA} penuh keyukinan mencoba menasihati bagaimana seharusnya Ross bertindak demi meraih impiannya menjadi seorang bintang di Hollywood. Ross menyukai Sadie, seseorang yang mau membantunya merenda impiannya, meskipun saat itu hampir mustahil diraihnya. Dan masakannya... sungguh masakan seorang ibu rumah tangga ideal.

Selama enam bulan mereka menjalin hubungan platonis. Bertemu beberapa kali seminggu, berbicara di telepon setiap hari. Ross sangat senang berbicara dengan Sadie. Gadis itu selalu punya jawaban atas segala masalah yang dihadapi Ross. Bahkan terhadap cerita serongnya dengan beberapa wanita mantan pemujanya. Juga terhadap keluhannya bagaimana sukarnya hidup di Hollywood, tanpa pekerjaan. Dari interviu ke interviu, semua tanpa hasil. Sadie seorang pendengar yang baik. Dan dua kali seminggu, Ross bisa menikmati masakan Sadie yang istimewa.

Sampai suatu malam, Ross nyaris tertangkap basah sewaktu sedang serong dengan seorang wanita yang suaminya kebetulan sedang tugas ke luar kota, tapi pulang lebih cepat dari dugaan mereka. Ross terpaksa melompat ke luar jendela kamar tidur sambil bersusah payah mengenakan celana panjangnya. (Ia memutuskan mengunjungi Sadie tanpa janji lebih dahulu, untuk menceritakan kejadian pahit yang baru dialaminya. Sadie pasti akan senang mendengarnya.)

Saat itu Sadie sedang makan malam di apar-

temennya yang mungil dan rapi di Olive Drive, bersama teman kencannya. Tiba-tiba Ross masuk. Sewaktu melihat bagaimana Sadie duduk makan berdua, diterangi nyala lilin temaram, menikmati makan malam yang lezat dan anggur merah, sementara meja dihias dengan bunga-bunga segar, Ross merasa cemburu. Egonya terluka. Apalagi dilihatnya gaun Sadie terlalu rendah di dada.

Tak pernah terlintas di pikirannya halwa Sadie punya teman kencan lain.

"Aku ingin kau berkenalan dengan Bernard Lefcovitz," kata Sadie dengan kaku. Pandangan matanya menunjukkan bahwa ia tak suka melihat penampilan Ross yang acak-acakan.

Ross hanya mengangguk dingin ke arah teman kencan Sadie, lalu duduk di sofa, dan tangannya mencubit pantat Sadie. Ia berkata, "Beri aku Scotch, penuh es batu, Sayang."

Sadie menatapnya dengan marah, tapi melakukan apa yang dipintanya.

Satu jam kemudian, setelah mengantarkan teman kencannya ke luar, Sadie marah besar.

"Kauanggap dirimu siapa, Tuan besar?" teriaknya, begitu pintu tertutup.

"Lho, ada apa? Kok sewot... Apa salahku?"

"Apa...? Apa salahmu? Oh... aku benar-benar membencimu, Ross Coni... pengangguran nomor satu... pemimpi terbesar abad ini."

Dengan cepat Ross menarik Sadie ke dalam pelukannya. Gerakan yang mematikan—gerakan

yang mirip dengan film *JUST ANOTHER WOMAN IN THE MOON* yang selalu diimpikan Ross.

Pada mulanya Sadie menolak keras. "Ross... jangan... kau anggap diriku murah... aku bukan milikmu!" Dekapan Ross makin keras. Ciumannya makin bernafsu. Tolakan Sadie makin melemah.

Ross tak mau mendengarkan alasan Sadie. Gadis itu harus jadi miliknya, bukan milik Bernard Lefcovitz.

Gadis itu masih perawan. Dua puluh empat tahun. Tinggal di Hollywood dan masih tetap perawan.

Ross hampir tak percaya dengan apa yang sedang dinikmatinya. Ia merasa bangga. Selama sepuluh tahun menggauli wanita, Sadie adalah perawan pertama baginya.

Esoknya, Ross membawa semua barangnya pindah ke apartemen Sadie. Lagi pula ia sudah menunggak sewanya selama dua bulan. Uang sudah jadi masalah besar baginya.

Sadie sangat senang Ross masuk dalam kehidupannya. Tanpa berpikir dua kali, ia memutuskan hubungan dengan Bernie dan membaktikan seluruh waktunya untuk Ross. "Kita perlu mencari agen yang serius bagimu, Sayang." Sadie tahu bahwa main film tetap menjadi obsesi Ross, dan kegagalannya mendapat kontrak main film membuatnya sedih—jauh lebih sedih daripada sikapnya yang pura-pura tak peduli. Sayangnya, setiap agen yang dihubungnya sudah mendapat edaran yang

menyatakan bahwa Ross Conti sama artinya dengan "berita buruk".

Suatu hari, Sadie membuat keputusan besar. "Aku akan jadi agenmu," katanya serius.

"Apa?" teriak Ross.

"Aku akan jadi agenmu. Ini gagasan bagus. Lihat saja nanti."

Sadie bergerak cepat. Ia berhenti dari pekerjaannya, menarik semua tabungan miliknya, dan menyewa sebuah ruangan kecil di Hollywood Boulevard. Di pintu masuk ia memasang plakat: Sadie La Salle, Agen Bintang. Lalu telepon dipasang, dan mulailah bisnis barunya.

Ross menganggap semua tindakan Sadie sebagai hal yang lucu. Sadie tahu apa soal keagenan bintang?

Tetapi Sadie dengan cepat belajar. Pengalamannya selama enam tahun bekerja sebagai sekretaris di sebuah kantor pengacara besar yang mengkhususkan diri dalam bisnis hiburan, sudah tentu sangat membantu. Ia sudah memahami seluk-beluk hukumnya, tinggal soal lainnya yang tidak begitu sukar dikuasai. Di atas segalanya, ia punya produk yang dapat diandalkan, Ross Conti. Kini tinggal bagaimana memasarkan produknya, sehingga para wanita Amerika mau membelinya.

"Aku punya gagasan bagus," suatu hari ia berkata pada Ross, "dan aku tak mau tahu pendapatmu, karena ini pasti berhasil. Aku tahu ini pasti berhasil."

Ross ternyata sangat senang pada gagasan

Sadie kalau kedengarannya agak *gila-gilaan* dan biayanya sangat mahal. Sadie meminjam uang dari mantan bosnya, seorang pengacara genit bernama Jeremy Mead yang dicurigai Ross punya niat mesum pada Sadie. Kemudian ia menyewa juru foto untuk membuat foto Ross yang sedang tersenyum dan memakai celana Levi's butut dengan latar belakang Samudera Pasifik. Senyum Ross tampak sangat menawan. Foto itu kemudian diperbesar, dicetak menjadi ribuan poster, dan dipasang di papan reklame di seluruh penjuru Amerika. Di bagian bawah poster tertera satu kalimat: **SIAPA ROSS CONTI?**

Pengaruh poster ternyata mengejutkan. Hanya dalam beberapa minggu, setiap orang bertanya, "Siapa Ross Conti?" Johnny Carson mulai menyinggung hal ini di dalam acara TV-nya. Ribuan surat datang, dialamatkan ke Ross Conti, Hollywood (Sadie sudah mengatur dengan kantor pos, ke mana surat-surat itu harus diantar). Di jalanan dan di tempat umum, Ross mulai dikenal, dikejar-kejar, dan dikerumuni para wanita. Semua ini memang sudah diramalkan sejak awal oleh Sadie.

Puncak segalanya adalah undangan bagi Ross Conti untuk muncul sebagai bintang tamu di *The Tonight Show*. Sadie terbang ke New York bersama kliennya yang mulai menanjak kepopulerannya. Mereka sangat gembira. Di New York, Ross baru mengetahui bagaimana rasanya menjadi seorang bintang besar. Sadie sendiri juga sangat

bahagia. Apa yang mereka capai tak lain adalah hasil dari gagasan dan kerja kerasnya.

Di depan TV, Ross tampil prima—lucu, seksi, dan sangat menarik bagai magnet. Begitu kembali ke Hollywood, tawaran untuk Ross sudah menumpuk. Sadie menyeleksi dengan cermat, dan akhirnya merundingkan sebuah peran penting dalam film besar produksi Paramount. Ross tak pernah lagi menoleh ke belakang. Sukses sebagai bintang film datang begitu cepat.

Enam bulan kemudian, Ross mencampakkan Sadie, menandatangani kontrak baru dengan agen bintang yang lebih besar, dan menikahi Wendy Warren, seorang aktris muda yang mulai menanjak dan memiliki dada menggairahkan. Mereka tinggal di rumah mewah—yang sering dipublikasikan di pelbagai media massa—di sebelah atas Mulholland Drive, dekat rumah peristirahatan Marlon Brando. Perkawinan mereka hanya bertahan dua tahun, dan tanpa anak. Setelah bercerai, Ross menjadi bujangan Hollywood. Pelbagai skandal, pesta seks, dan gosip mewarnai dirinya. Lalu ia menikah kembali pada tahun 1964, kali ini dengan seorang aktris Swedia yang baru berusia tujuh belas tahun, dan sudah tentu ber-dada sangat montok. Kehidupan perkawinan mereka penuh pertengkaran, dan hanya bertahan selama enam bulan. Istrinya yang muda usia menceraikannya, memperoleh sebagian hartanya, dan mengatakan bahwa selama menikah dengan Ross

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ia menderita ^{IP. BERPUSTAKAHO UNIVERSITAS APLI ANGGA} ~~siksaan~~ mental. Ross menganggap enteng semuanya.

Pada waktu itu bintangnya sedang berada di puncak. Setiap filmnya selalu menjadi box office. Sampai pada tahun 1969, saat ia membintangi dua film yang secara berturut-turut gagal di pasaran.

Banyak orang yang gembira dengan kejatuhannya dari puncak kemasyhuran, termasuk Sadie La Salle. Setelah dicampakkan oleh Ross, Sadie menghilang selama beberapa tahun dari Hollywood, lalu muncul kembali. Dengan perlahan tapi pasti wanita itu merintis usahanya sendiri hingga berkembang menjadi sebuah perusahaan raksasa.

Ross bertemu Elaine ketika ia akan berkonsultasi dengan suami Elaine. Pada usia tiga puluh sembilan, ia merasa memerlukan operasi pengencangan wajah. Ia tak pernah menjalani operasi, tapi malah berkenalan dengan Elaine dan menjalin hubungan dengannya. Kehidupan dengan bintang macam Ross merupakan kehidupan yang didambakan Elaine selama ini. Tanpa berpikir dua kali, ia langsung masuk ke dalam hidup Ross. Ross sendiri menganggap Elaine sebagai wanita yang penuh pengertian, mampu menunjang kariernya, dan pendengar yang istimewa. Dadanya memang tidak montok, tapi ia bisa memenuhi kebutuhan Ross di ranjang. Ia hangat dan tidak agresif seperti halnya para wanita Hollywood yang dikencani Ross selama ini. Ross merasa tenang dan aman bersamanya. Akhirnya ia memutuskan untuk mengawini Elaine. Tidak dibutuh-

kan waktu lama bagi Elaine untuk menerima pi-nangan Ross dan menceraikan suaminya. Mereka menikah seminggu kemudian di Meksiko. Karier Ross menanjak kembali dengan pesat. Dan mampu bertahan terus selama lima tahun. Kemudian, secara perlahan tapi pasti ia mulai meluncur kembali ke bawah. Begitu juga perkawinan mereka.

Empat puluh sembilan tahun. Hampir lima puluh. Untungnya ia tampak seperti baru berusia empat puluh dua tahun. Memang wajahnya mulai sedikit menua, dan untuk menutupi beberapa uban di rambutnya yang pirang, ia membutuhkan cat rambut. Di bawah pelupuk matanya juga mulai tampak sedikit lipatan kerut.

Tetapi, secara keseluruhan ia masih tampak prima. Tubuhnya masih tetap langsing berisi. Ia berdiri di depan kaca kamar hotel, mengamati tubuhnya sendiri. Suara ketukan di pintu hampir tak didengarnya.

"Ya?" ia berteriak, ketika ketukan di pintu terdengar lagi.

"Room service," suara lembut seorang wanita.

Ternyata gadis room service yang datang masih muda usia. Dua puluh dua tahun, rupawan, dan bertubuh aduhai. Ross memberi persen dalam jumlah besar pada si kepala pelayan hotel.

2

"DEKE ANDREWS memang aneh sejak dulu, lain dari yang lain."

"O, ya? Bagaimana anehnya?"

"Ya... begitulah, tidak pernah tertarik pada gadis-gadis, tidak seaneang nonton TV... pokoknya lain dari remaja umumnya."

"Lalu, dia tertarik pada apa?"

"Mobil. Gaji pertamanya dipakai untuk membayar uang muka mobil Mustang tua. Tiap hari dia menggosok catnya, menyetel mesin, dan tidak pernah berhenti merawatnya sampai dia bosan sendiri."

"Setelah itu, apa yang terjadi dengan mobilnya?"

"Dijual. Tak tahu mengapa. Dan dia tak pernah membeli mobil lagi sejak itu."

"Anda yakin tentang itu?"

"Yakin tentang apa?"

"Bahwa dia tak pernah membeli mobil lagi?"

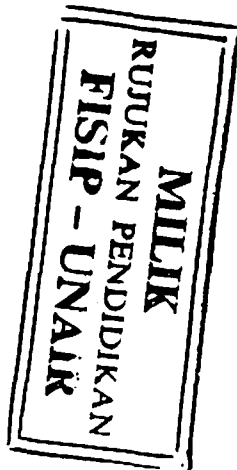
"Tentu saja aku yakin. Aku tahu setiap kejadian di Friendship Street. Aku telah duduk di belakang jendela ini selama tiga puluh tahun. Apakah aku

pernah bercerita kepada Anda tentang kejadian yang menimpa diriku? Mesin sial itu jatuh menimpa kakiku. Kompensasi? Tak ada. Mereka melupakan semua jasaku di pabrik itu. Apakah Anda bisa membantu memperjuangkan nasibku?" Orang tua itu bercelotob dengan penuh emosi. Wajahnya merah menahan amarah.

Detektif Leon Rosemont menyeka pinggirannya yang besar. Matanya memperhatikan lukisan murah di dinding. Siapa bisa menduga nasib manusia? Orang tua ini banya tertarik pada kejadian tiga puluh tahun yang lalu. Ia tidak tertarik pada kejadian beberapa jam yang lalu di depan rumahnya. Sebagai saksi, ia tak berguna. Ia tidak mendengar apa-apa. Tidak melihat apa-apa. Tidak tahu apa-apa.

Tak lama lagi surat kabar akan penuh dengan berita mencolok: PEMBUNUHAN BRUTAL. TIGA KORBAN DIBANTAI DI DALAM RUMAH. Sungguh santapan empuk bagi nyamuk pers. Tiga manusia dibantai di sebuah rumah kecil di daerah pinggir kota yang tenang di Philadelphia. Oh, Tuhan, kalau bisa aku ingin menghapus semua ini dari pikiranku. Membayangkan saja membuat perutnya mual.

Detektif Kepala Leon Rosemont. Usia lima puluh tahun. Bahunya kukuh, tubuhnya tinggi besar, rambut abu-abu tebal, mata coklat dengan alis tebal. Ia tampak seperti mantan pemain *football*. Memang ia pernah menjadi bintang *football* sewaktu masih kuliah. Sudah dua puluh sembilan



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tahun ia berkarier di perusahaan itu. Tahun-tahun yang sarat dengan kasus pembunuhan dan pembantaian sesama manusia. Betapa memuakkan jika mengingat semua itu.

Ia selalu diberi kasus-kasus yang memuakkan rasa kemanusiaannya. Dan kasus di Friendship Street ini sudah kelewat batas. Tiga manusia dibantai tanpa alasan. Tak ada perampokan. Tak ada kejahatan seks. Tak ada apa-apa. Kecuali Deke Andrews, putra korban yang hilang lenyap begitu saja.

Jadi... apa arti semua ini? Hanya musibah keluarga biasa?

Deke Andrews mungkin sedang ke luar kota, atau berakhir minggu di tempat teman. Bisa juga sedang bercumbu dengan teman wanitanya. Jangan lupa, sekarang baru Sahtu sore, dan menurut petugas bagian forensik, pembantaian kemungkinan berlangsung antara hari Jumat pukul sebelas malam sampai hari Sabtu pukul empat pagi.

Deke Andrews. Dua puluh enam tahun. Pemuda yang suka menyendiri.

Ya, tapi sejauh ini sudah berapa orang yang ditanyai tentang pemuda itu? Empat? Lima? Penyelidikan resmi belum juga dimulai. Masih belum tiba saatnya.

"Negro sialan!" Orang tua itu mengomel. "Mereka selalu menimbulkan masalah di mana-mana."

"Apa?"

"Itu, para negro yang menetap di ujung jalan. Aku tidak akan terkejut jika yang melakukan pem-

bantaian ternyata mereka." Ia mendengus jengkel. "Aku sekarang harus selalu mengunci pintu rumah, tidak seperti dulu. Aku masih ingat saat itu, ketika kita tak perlu punya kunci pintu."

Detektif Rosemont mengangguk pendek. Mulutnya terasa asam, dan ingatannya kembali ke drama pembantaian tadi pagi. Kepalanya pusing, hibirnya kering, dan matanya terasa berat. Ia berharap saat ini sedang berada di rumah, di atas ranjang bersama istrinya, Millie, yang hitam manis, dan tidak perlu berbicara dengan orang tua di badapannya ini.

"Para negro itu seharusnya tetap tinggal di South Street," kata si orang tua dengan jengkel. "Datang untuk tinggal di sini, di lingkungan orang baik-baik. Sungguh tak bisa dibiarkan. Harus ada hukum yang mencegahnya."

Dengan agak kepayaban, Detektif Rosemont beranjak dari tempat duduknya, sebuah sofa tua, dan berjalan menuju pintu keluar. Persetan dengan semua itu. Ia mulai merasa tercekik. "Terima kasih, Mr. Bullen," ia berkata seperlunya. "Kami pasti akan membutuhkan keterangan resmi dari Anda. Salah satu asisten saya akan kembali ke sini nanti."

"Negro sialan!" pekik histeris si orang tua. "Mereka seharusnya masih tinggal di Afrika, berkejaran dengan tubuh telanjang. Itu yang kuinginkan. Itu yang diinginkan semua orang baik-baik."

Leon Rosemont keluar dari rumah kecil itu dengan perasaan marah. Di luar masih hujan rintik-

rintik. Truk-kar televisi menuntun jalan. Kerumunan penonton berdiri di belakang barikade yang dibuat polisi. Untuk apa mereka datang ke sini? Apa yang akan ditonton dari rumah tempat pembantaian hiadah itu? Katakan! Apa yang bisa dijadikan tontonan?

Ia menggelengkan kepala tak mengerti. Manusia. Ia takkan pernah bisa memahami mereka. Dengan tergesa-gesa ia menyeberangi jalan, sambil menaikkan kerah jas hujannya yang sudah tua setinggi mungkin.

Selama bertahun-tahun bertugas, ia tak pernah menangani kasus pembunuhan yang kebetulan korbananya ia kenal secara pribadi. Baru kali ini, dan rasanya sungguh memuakkan. Ia bahkan jadi bertanya-tanya, apakah ia turut bersalah dalam hal ini?

3
MONTANA GRAY memandangi Neil, suaminya, yang sedang mematut-matut diri di depan kaca di rumah mereka, Coldwater Canyon. Ia heran, mengapa Neil begitu perfeksionis dalam berpakaian. Ditunggunya pertanyaan yang sudah ribuan kali dilon-tarkan suaminya.

"Apakah penampilanmu sudah sempurna?" Neil bertanya, meskipun ia sebenarnya yakin bahwa dirinya sudah apik tanpa cela. Ia hanya butuh dukungan dari istrinya. *duh*

Montana menyeringai geli. "Mengapa kau selalu kurang yakin akan dirimu, padahal kau tahu bahwa penampilanmu selalu luar biasa?"

"Aku? Kurang yakin akan diriku? Tak pernah," Neil membantah dengan aksen mirip aksen Richard Burton. "Aku hanya senang mendengar pujianmu."

Montana sangat tergila-gila pada aksen suaminya yang begitu khas Inggris. Mampu merangsang nafsunya. "Hmmm..." Ia menatap suaminya dengan gemas. "Nanti—di tempat tidur—aku akan memujimu sampai rambutmu berdiri semua."

"Hanya rambutmu?" goda Neil.

"Dan semua bagian tubuhmu yang bisa kau pikirkan."

"Kalau begitu, nanti akan kuberitahu bagian mana saja."

Montana tertawa senang. "Pasti, aku yakin kau bisa. Kau bukan saja sutradara film terbebas, tetapi juga suami dengan imajinasi tanpa batas!"

Neil memeluk Montana. Mereka mulai berciuman.

Usia Montana dua puluh sembilan, usia Neil lima puluh empat. Selama satu tahun hidup bersama dan empat tahun menikah, perbedaan usia sebanyak dua puluh lima tahun tak pernah menjadi penghalang. Hanya orang-orang tertentu saja yang mempersoalkan perbedaan ini—Maralee, mantan istri Neil, beberapa teman Neil, dan semua istri mereka.

"Hei." Montana mendorong tubuh suaminya dengan lembut. "Semua orang sedang menunggu kita di Bistro. Sebaiknya kita cabut sekarang."

Neil mendesah. Gayanya bagaikan seorang aktor sandiwara.

"Jangan mengeluh, Neil... bukankah pesta malam ini merupakan gagasanmu?"

"Kalau begitu," ia membungkuk, seperti sedang menyilakan seorang putri bangsawan lewat, "seperti Nyonya besar sarankan, mari kita cabut sekarang."

Montana. Tubuh tinggi, seratus tujuh puluh tujuh senti. Rambut panjang, hitam pekat sampai

pinggang. Matanya tajam bagai mata harimau. Mulutnya sensual. Kecantikannya mempesona.

Montana, nama yang sama dengan nama negara bagian tempat kelahirannya. Orangtuanya mendidiknya secara liberal. Ayahnya insinyur geologi. Ibunya penyanyi lagu-lagu rakyat. Mereka gemar berpindah tempat. Saat berusia lima belas tahun, Montana telah melihat hampir seluruh bagian dunia. Pernah berpacaran dua kali. Menguasai bahasa Prancis, Itali, main ski di es dan di laut, dan mahir menunggang kuda seperti layaknya seorang koboi.

Orangtuanya tergolong pekerja keras, dan percaya pada kebebasan serta harga diri setiap individu manusia. "Percaya pada dirimu sendiri, dan kau akan bisa melakukan apa saja," ibunya berulang kali berkata padanya.

"Jangan pernah merasa takut dalam hidup" merupakan motto ayahnya. "Hadapi apa saja yang menghalangi jalanmu dengan kekuatan dan martabat tinggi."

Bagi kedua orangtuanya, hidup adalah saling memiliki dan saling melengkapi satu dengan yang lainnya. Karena itu, walau Montana tahu bahwa mereka sangat mencintai dirinya, ia tetap merasa sebagai penghalang kebahagiaan mereka berdua. Pada waktu mereka memutuskan untuk menetap di sebuah ladang pertanian di Arizona, Montana memutuskan untuk mulai hidup mandiri. Dengan bekal uang secukupnya dan doa restu mereka, Montana mulai melangkah kaki keluar dari rumah.

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Waktu itu tahun 1971. Usianya tujuh belas tahun, penuh gairah hidup dan rasa ingin tahu seorang gadis remaja.

Di San Francisco, ia tinggal di rumah saudara sepupunya. Melalui dia, Montana dikenalkan dengan seks, obat bius, dan musik rock 'n' roll. Seperti gadis remaja umumnya, Montana juga ingin sekali mereguk makna kehidupan selengkap mungkin. Segala pekerjaan dicobanya. Bekerja sebagai pelayan rumah makan, pembuat perhiasan perak, dan menjajakannya sendiri di jalanan.

Kemudian ia bertemu dengan seorang pemusik rock yang mengajaknya pergi ke India, bersimpuh di kaki guru meditasi Rajneesh. Tak lama kemudian, Montana mulai bosan, lalu pergi ke London sendirian. Di sana ia tinggal bersama teman-temannya di Chelsea, bergaul dengan para penulis, fotografer, dan para modelnya. Ia mencoba semuanya, sampai akhirnya ia bertemu dengan seorang wartawan radikal dan pergi bersamanya ke New York. Ia sekarang sudah menemukan apa yang diinginkannya dalam hidup—menjadi pengarang. Gayanya menulis agak sinis bercampur keceriaan seseorang yang penuh vitalitas hidup. Dalam waktu yang tidak terlalu lama, ia berhasil memantapkan diri sebagai seorang penulis, dan tulisannya mulai muncul di *Worldly*, sebuah majalah seni beraliran baru. Sewaktu sedang bertugas ke Paris, ia bertemu untuk pertama kalinya dengan Neil.

Sebuah pesta di Left Bank. Penuh sesak.

Berisik. Montana datang bersama teman kencannya, Lenny. Neil sedang dikerumuni para pengagumnya. Agak teler karena pengaruh wiski. Penampilannya awut-awutan dengan rambut yang mulai memutih. Wajahnya tirus, namun sinar matanya tetap memiliki daya sorot menikam.

"Oh, aku sungguh ingin bertemu orang itu," Lenny membisiki Montana. "Kau tahu, dia lebih baik dibanding Altman."

"Tak ada yang lebih baik daripada Altman," Montana meyakinkan Lenny sambil pergi ke kerumunan temannya sendiri.

Beberapa jam kemudian, saat Montana melewati kelompok pengagum Neil, Lenny menggamit lengannya dan memperkenalkannya pada Neil Gray.

Waktu itu Neil begitu mabuk, sehingga nyaris tak mampu mengucapkan apa-apa. Sewaktu mendengar nama Montana, dengan agak gagap ia memberikan komentar, "Montana? Nama apa itu!"

Montana tidak mengacuhkan olok-olok Neil, malah melemparkan senyum pada Lenny, dan berkata, "Mari kita cabut dari sini."

Dua hari kemudian, saat sedang membolak-balik majalah di sebuah toko obat Amerika di Champs Elysees, terdengar suara menyapanya, "Montana. Nama apa itu!"

Ia berbalik, untuk sesaat tidak mengenali Neil. Wajahnya wajah seorang pemabuk. Napasnya berbau wiski. Montana jadi ingat siapa dia.

"Bagaimana jika kita minum bersama?" ajak Neil tanpa basa-basi.

"Kurang berminat."

Pandangan mata mereka bertemu, dan untuk sesaat saling bertaut. Ada suatu desiran di hati. Montana tergoda untuk menerima tawaran minum Neil, kendati pria berumur bukanlah tipe pria idealnya.

Neil mengajak Montana mengunjungi sebuah bar di mana ia dengan hangatnya disambut sebagai seorang pelanggan lama. Di dalam bar, mereka bercakap-cakap. Omongan Neil cukup ber-hohot, tajam herisi, dan sarat pengetahuan, namun semuanya jadi ngawur setelah ia mulai tak sadar karena pengaruh alkohol. Montana makin tertarik untuk mengetahui mengapa pria ini selalu ingin melupakan kenyataan dengan mabuk-mabukan. Ia mulai melakukan penyelidikan. Neil Gray adalah pria yang kompleks dan sedang berada di ambang penghancuran diri sendiri. Seorang sutradara berbakat yang sering menyakiti hati orang lain hanya karena pengaruh alkohol dan perilakunya yang angin-anginan. Sekarang ia terpaksa menyutradarai film-film iklan televisi dengan honor besar, dan sebagian besar harus dikirimkan sebagai tunjangan cerai pada mantan istrinya, Maralee, yang hidup penuh kemewahan di Beverly Hills.

Di Paris, tampaknya ia menikmati kepopuleran. Ia memulai hari-hari kerjanya dengan sadar, tapi menjelang malam mulai minum dan mabuk-mabukan sebagai orang tak berguna.

Montana menunda kepulangannya ke New York. Sekarang ia lebih sering melewatkan waktunya bersama Neil. Baginya, Neil adalah tantangan untuk diaklukkan, dan ini sangat merangsang daya intelektualnya. Jika mengutip istilah yang sering dipakai ayahnya, Montana melihat adanya kehangatan pada diri Neil. Baginya, seks bukan merupakan obsesi, juga bukan merupakan masalah. Ayahnya mendidiknya agar terbuka dalam masalah seks, asalkan ia merasa cocok. Beberapa temannya mengatakan bahwa Neil cukup normal untuk urusan seks. Suatu hari, ia nekat mencoba merangsang Neil. Herannya, Neil tak sanggup memenuhi fungsi kekelakiannya, walaupun dari reaksinya ia tetap memiliki gairah.

Montana merasa makin tertantang. Pikirnya, masalah utama Neil hanya terletak pada waktu dan ketenangan. Ia pun mengambil inisiatif dengan meminjam vila temannya yang terletak di pinggiran kota Paris. Neil setuju dengan gagasan berakhir minggu bersama Montana. Pikirnya, ada orang yang mau mengurusnya pada saat ia mabuk hebat. →

Vila itu letaknya terpencil dan kosong. Montana sebelumnya sudah diyakinkan temannya bahwa vilanya tidak berhantu. Ia menyembunyikan kunci mobil, memutuskan hubungan telepon ke luar, dan mengurung Neil selama tiga minggu. Memang, pada awalnya ia harus menaklukkan keinginan Neil untuk selalu minum; juga kegelisahan dan keberangan seorang peminum berat macam Neil.

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Akhirnya ia berhasil membuat Neil sadar dan menjauhi botol minuman. Dalam keadaan normal, ternyata Neil bukan kekasih yang mengecewakan. Sudah tentu, jika diukur dengan pria muda usia, Neil bukanlah seseorang dengan napsu membara dan menggebu-gebu. Tetapi ia tetap seorang kekasih yang romantis, dan mampu membuat Montana merasa nyaman berada di sisinya.

Sekembalinya di Paris, mereka memutuskan untuk tinggal bersama. Setelah beberapa bulan, Montana berhasil membujuk Neil untuk pulang ke Amerika. Sungguh sayang jika bakat dan potensi Neil disia-siakan di Paris. Di Amerika, kabar tentang Neil yang sudah tidak diperbudak alkohol dengan cepat menyebar. Setahun kemudian, Neil mendapat kesempatan menyutradarai sebuah film berbiaya rendah tentang kejahatan di jalan-jalan kota New York. Filmnya cukup berhasil di pasaran, dan sekali lagi Hollywood memberi tempat bagi Neil. Mereka berdua segera memutuskan pindah ke Pantai Barat Amerika. "Kau akan membenci Beverly Hills," ia mengingatkan Montana. "Di sana lebih banyak kutu busuk dibandingkan dengan tempat pembuangan kotoran sebuah pabrik."

Montana menyeringai, dan menyibukkan diri dengan proyeknya sendiri. Ia mempunyai gagasan untuk sebuah film seri televisi, dan juga akan menulis sebuah buku tentang Hollywood di tahun 1930-an. Neil sangat mendukungnya. Ia juga mendesak agar mereka segera menikah. Ia merasa takut kehilangan

Montana. Sebenarnya Montana sudah cukup berbahagia dengan keadaan sekarang—hidup bersama tanpa perlu menikah. Tapi, bagi Neil, Montana merupakan wanita khusus yang telah menyelamatkan dirinya dari pengaruh alkohol, mendorongnya untuk berprestasi, dan memberinya suatu pandangan hidup yang sama sekali baru.

Akhirnya mereka menikah di Palm Springs. Mereka tinggal di Beverly Wilshire Hotel, sambil sekali-sekali pulang ke apartemen mereka di New York.

Naskah film serial televisi Montana cukup berhasil. Kemudian ia mulai masuk ke bisnis film. Menulis skenario, memproduksi, dan menyutradarai sendiri sebuah film pendek tentang anak-anak di daerah Watts di Los Angeles. Hasilnya dua penghargaan khusus untuk film pendek.

Neil tentu saja sangat bangga atas sukses Montana. Ia mendorong penulisan proyek selanjutnya—sebuah skenario film keras berjudul *Street People*. Proyek ini selesai ditulis Montana setelah ia mengurung diri secara total selama enam minggu. Sewaktu Neil membaca skenario ini, ia merasa tertantang. Sebagai sutradara, ia tahu bahwa skenario ini memiliki potensi untuk menjadi film yang penting dan menarik. Ia ingin sekali menyutradarainya. Keinginan untuk berprestasi kembali bergelora dalam dirinya. Dua filmnya yang terakhir terbukti cukup berhasil di pasaran, dan beberapa studio menyatakan siap membiayai proyek-proyek film yang ia ajukan. Tetapi sekarang ia tak ingin

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sekadur menjadi berbudak saya. Ia juga mungkin ingin kontrol atas filmnya. Setelah berdiskusi dengan Montana, ia membawa skenario *Street People* tersebut ke *Oliver Eastern Productions*. Pemiliknya, *Oliver Eastern*, adalah produser film yang licik bagai ular. Neil tahu, jika ia yang bicara, *Oliver* pasti akan setuju membuat perjanjian sesuai dengan syarat-syarat yang diajukan olehnya dan Montana.

Ternyata Neil benar. Perjanjian berhasil dibuat, dan kontrak pun ditandatangani bersama.

Isi perjanjian cukup memuaskan. Neil dan Montana memiliki hak kontrol sepenuhnya atas aspek artistik film, yang berarti tak seorang pun diizinkan mengacau isi skenario atau apa saja yang direncanakan Neil atas film ini. Selama mereka bekerja di bawah anggaran yang sudah ditetapkan dan tepat waktu, takkan ada campur tangan dari pihak lain. Mereka berdua senang dengan perjanjian ini.

Bereslah semuanya. Kini tinggal mengadakan pesta makan malam khusus dengan teman-teman dekat untuk merayakan awal proyek film garapan mereka berdua.

Tiga jam kemudian, dalam perjalanan pulang ke rumah, Montana termeanung memandang ke luar jendela mobil. Baginya, makan malam tadi hanya buang-buang waktu saja. Teman-teman? Huh, ia tidak membutuhkan mereka, selama masih ada Neil di sisinya. Neil pun tak peduli pada orang-

orang itu. Itulah salah satu sifat Neil yang sangat dikagumi Montana, dan membuatnya tertarik pada pria itu.

"Rokok?" Neil mengeluarkan sebatang rokok dari bungkusnya sambil mengemudikan Maserati warna perak melintasi Santa Monica, naik ke Beverly, menuju ke arah Sunset.

Montana menerimanya tanpa berkata sepatah pun. Masih terbayang dalam ingatannya reaksi teman-teman Neil sewaktu mendengar pengumuman mereka. Semua memuji, "Bagus sekali! Selamat!" Kemudian, satu per satu mulai mengeluarkan komentarnya.

Bibi Sutton, biang gosip nomor satu di Beverly Hills, asal Prancis, istri salah satu bintang film terbesar Hollywood, Adam Sutton. "Neil? Dia benar-benar menyutradarai film yang kautulis?" Nadanya mengandung rasa tak percaya.

Juga Chet Barnes, penulis skenario dengan rekor dua piala Oscar. "Menulis skenario untuk film cerita membutuhkan seni khusus, Montana. Tak bisa disamakan dengan menulis skenario untuk film TV." *Sialan! Semoga kau pergi ke dasar neraka, Mr. Barnes.*

Masih ada Gina Germaine. Simbol seks berusia tiga puluhan yang sedang berusaha mendapat perhatian, dan tampak bagai boneka Barbie ukuran besar. "Apakah kau memakai penulis bayangan, Montana? Kau bisa mempercayai aku. Aku sendiri juga menulis sedikit-sedikit, lho!"

Dan masih banyak lagi yang lain. Semuanya

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hanya karena rasa iri. Menulis skenario hebat untuk disutradarai orang hebat seperti Neil. Ini hanya wilayah para pria. Sebelumnya tak pernah dijamah wanita. Di Hollywood, setiap wanita bisa menjadi istri, bintang film, pelacur, piaraan, model, atau ibu rumah tangga biasa, tetapi tak pernah dihayangkan menjadi penulis skenario film besar seperti yang dihasilkan Montana sekarang. Dan dengan cara masing-masing, setiap orang ingin mengemukakan hal ini, agar ia tahu.

"Oh, kadang-kadang aku jadi benci pada manusia!" Emosi Montana meledak.

Neil tertawa. "Jangan buang energimu dengan percuma, Sayang."

"Tapi mereka begitu..."

"Iri hati."

"Jadi kau juga merasakannya?"

"Sudah tentu. Kau tahu... sampai-sampai Karena Lancaster bertanya apakah bukannya aku yang menulis skenario film kita."

"Dasar pelacur sialan!"

"Dan juga Chet coba-coba mempengaruhi... katanya kerja sama kita berdua hanya akan menghancurkan karierku. Apalagi si Adam Sutton... dia ingin tahu mengapa aku menolongmu dengan cara seperti ini."

"Oh, Tuhan! Itu yang namanya teman?"

Neil menepuk-nepuk lutut Montana. "Sudah kukatakan sejak dulu, tak usah mengacuhkan mereka. Hollywood merupakan kota yang lucu, dengan

aturan-aturan yang menggelikan. Dan kau mematahkan semua aturan ini."

"O, ya?"

"Ya, sudah jelas."

"Bagaimana bisa?"

"Kau tak pernah belanja di Rodeo Drive. Kau tak pernah hadir di pesta-pesta mereka. Kau tak pernah makan siang dengan teman wanita. Kau tak pernah merawat kuku di klinik khusus. Bahkan kau tak pernah ikut-ikutan bergosip, apalagi memboroskan uang suami seperti mereka. Kau tidak..."

"Cukup!" Montana tertawa sambil mengangkat kedua tangannya. "Mari kita buktikan di rumah, apakah aku benar-benar tidak berbakat menjadi istri Hollywood."

"Dan, untuk yang satu ini pun kau tidak menunggu sampai diajak lebih dahulu."

Tangan Montana langsung melewati tongkat persneling mobil, mencubit mesra paha suaminya. "Kalau begitu, kau suami yang beruntung, dong!"

Mobil Maserati jadi agak doyong ke tengah. "Siapa yang membantah, sayangku?"

Esoknya, pelan-pelan Neil bangun lebih dahulu daripada istrinya. Hari masih pagi. Montana masih tidur lelap. Neil merasa makin bertambah usianya, makin kurang kebutuhannya untuk tidur. Setelah mandi dan sedikit senam ringan, ia keluar ke teras untuk mengagumi pemandangan kota di waktu pagi. Dari kejauhan, jika sedang tidak ada kabut, akan terbentang pemandangan sampai berkilo-

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kilometer jauhnya, bahkan Samudera Pasifik pun dapat terlihat samar-samar. Pemandangan seperti inilah yang menjadi salah satu alasan utama mereka membeli apartemen ini. Memang banyak orang yang memandang rendah Los Angeles, tetapi Neil justru amat menyukai kota ini. Ia tak pernah merindukan Inggris, tanah kelahirannya. Amerika telah menjadi rumahnya, selama lebih dari dua puluh tahun.

Neil Gray datang ke Hollywood di tahun 1958. Seorang sutradara film yang masih muda, tetapi merasa mengetahui segalanya. Filmnya yang terakhir dibuat di Inggris sukses besar di pasar. Sebuah studio film di Hollywood mengontraknya, dan memperlakukannya bagai pangeran. Vila di Beverly Hills Hotel, kerumunan aktris-aktris muda yang cantik, dan anggaran pengeluaran yang tak terbatas.

Film yang dibuatnya ternyata gagal di pasar. Ditambah tuntutan seorang wanita yang mengaku mengandung anaknya. Dengan berang ia menghadapi tuntutan itu, walau akhirnya ia dinyatakan kalah dan harus membayar sejumlah santunan. Ia kembali ke Inggris, nyaris bangkrut.

Tetapi demam Amerika sudah merasuk dalam darahnya, bahkan lebih dari itu. Pada awal 1960-an, ia kembali ke Hollywood—kali ini tanpa dukungan pihak studio. Ia menyewa sebuah kamar kecil di Chateau Marmont, sebuah hotel model kuno yang sederhana di atas kawasan Strip. Kemudian,

dengan susah payah ia mencoba menawarkan skenarionya dari studio ke studio. Selalu gagal. Suatu hari, di kolam renang hotel, ia secara tak sengaja berkenalan dengan Maralee Sanderson, gadis cantik yang manja, putri tunggal Tyrone, sang pendiri Sanderson Studios. Ibunya meninggal saat ia berusia empat belas tahun. Saat itu ia sedang terlihat cinta dengan seorang aktor sandiwara dari New York. Pertemuannya dengan Neil membuatnya mabuk kepayang. Sedangkan bagi Neil, apa lagi yang diharapkan. Sutradara tanpa kontrak. Keuangan yang makin mengering. Tampaknya ia tak punya pilihan lain. Maralee cantik, kaya, dan muda. Dan ayahnya punya studio!

"Daddy akan membiayai semua filmmu," ujar Maralee dengan enteng. "Jika aku memintanya, sederhana saja."

"Lalu apa lagi yang kautunggu!" teriak Neil.

"Pernikahan," jawab Maralee tanpa sungkan.

Pernikahan. Satu kata yang membuat Neil merinding. Ia pernah mencoba menikah di usia sembilan belas tahun. Gagal total. Sungguh suatu lembaran pahit dalam hidupnya. Sekarang, tujuh belas tahun kemudian, setelah begitu banyak wanita dalam hidupnya, setelah begitu banyak minuman keras...

Pernikahan. Ia memikirkannya selama seminggu. Kemudian memutuskan, mengapa tidak? Sudah waktunya ia kembali melakukan langkah besar. Lagi pula, tampaknya ini merupakan satu-satunya

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cara mengembalikannya fungsinya sebagai sutradara film.

Tapi hati nuraninya terus-menerus membisikkan sesuatu. Bagaimana dengan integritas? Berdiri di atas kaki sendiri? Cinta?

Persetan dengan semuanya, pikirnya. Aku mau membuat film ini. Aku butuh sedikit pengaruh di kota ini.

"Ya," jawabnya pada Maralee.

"Bagus," jawab Maralee. "Ayah ingin bertemu denganmu."

Tyrone Sanderson seorang raksasa dalam usahanya, meskipun fisiknya sangat tidak menunjang. Tubuhnya pendek gempal. Cerutnya kebesaran, dan ia menyukat bintang-bintang film muda yang seksi. Ia ingin cepat-cepat menikahkan putrinya yang liar. Neil Gray adalah pria pertama yang benar-benar disukai putrinya.

"Jadi kau mau membuat film? Kerjakan. Jangan ragu." Tyrone memberikan jaminannya kepada Neil.

"Saya membawa skenarionya untuk Anda baca."

"Aku membaca? Buat saja!"

"Apakah Anda tak ingin mengetahui isinya?"

"Aku hanya ingin kau mengawini putriku. Tiuk!"

Pernikahan mereka dilaksanakan di teras salah satu istana Tyrone di Bel-Air, dua minggu kemudian. Hampir semua nama besar di Hollywood datang. Setelah berhulan madu di Acapulco, mereka tinggal di Rodeo Drive, di rumah hadiah

perkawinan dari Tyrone. Neil langsung bekerja membuat filmnya.

Film itu berhasil, baik dari segi pasar maupun segi artistiknya. Neil yang semula hanya dikenal sebagai "si menantu", kini mulai diperhitungkan eksistensinya di kalangan film. Ia dianggap anak ajaib dari Inggris. Setiap studio besar mengejar, menawarkan proyek. Karena sejak awal ia tidak memiliki ikatan kontrak dengan sang mertua, maka Neil bebas menentukan pilihannya sendiri.

"Kau harus ingat jasa Daddy," desak Maralee. "Ingat, dia yang membuka jalanmu di sini."

"O, ya?" Neil bersikap sinis. "Persetan dengan ayahmu. Dia yang membuka jalan, aku yang bekerja mati-matian. Apa yang pernah diberikannya padaku?"

Neil membuat film kedua. Dengan studio lain. Lebih berhasil. Namanya makin melambung, walaupun harga yang harus dibayar sangat mahal. Rumah tangganya retak. Alkohol lalu menjadi tempat pelariannya, sedangkan Maralee menghamburkan uang sebagai kompensasi.

Kemudian film-film Neil berturut-turut gagal di pasar. Tiba-tiba saja namanya mulai disamakan dengan nasib jelek. Ia pergi ke Eropa setelah bertengkar hebat dengan Maralee. Ketika itu, Maralee memanggil ayahnya untuk datang ke rumah mereka. "Jika kau mengikutsertakan ayahmu, perkawinan kita sampai di sini saja," ancam Neil.

"Baik, kita berpisah," bentak Maralee. "Orang Inggris tak berguna!"

Montana muncul pada saat yang tepat.
Menceraikan Marilee tidak mudah. Walau ia tak menginginkan Neil, ia juga tak mau kehilangan pria itu.

Perceraian mereka penuh keributan, dan memakan biaya sangat mahal. Tetapi Neil tidak menyesal.

Neil masih menatap panorama pagi hari itu. Pikirannya melayang kepada Montana. Wanita itu mandiri, pandai, dan menggairahkan. Dan selama ini Neil bisa tetap setia padanya, kecuali sekali, tahun lalu, sewaktu ia lupa diri membawa wanita-wanita berambut pirang ke ranjangnya. Apa sebenarnya yang sedang terjadi padanya? Jika sampai Montana tahu, ia pasti akan minta cerai, tanpa pikir panjang lagi. Neil tahu betul watak istrinya.

Jadi mengapa ia tetap melakukannya? Sejujurnya, ia sendiri tak tahu mengapa. Mungkin unsur risiko yang membuatnya bergairah. Atau mungkin juga ia membutuhkan seorang wanita yang tidak memiliki daya intelektual yang sama dengan dirinya—cukup hanya seenggok daging montok saja. Tak perlu banyak bicara. Tak perlu ada ajang diskusi. Cukup bermain cinta saja.

Tidak berarti Montana jelek. Di ranjang, ia tetap menggairahkan seperti biasanya. Tapi Montana sore lalu seimbang dengan dirinya, dan kadang-kadang dalam diri Neil timbul rangsangan untuk bercinta dengan wanita yang tidak seimbang dengan dirinya. Kadang-kadang ia merindukan percintaan

yang panas, tanpa perlu ada hubungan prihadi. Sekarang usianya sudah lima puluh empat. Hidup berlangsung terus, dan kita tak pernah bisa belajar sesuatu yang berguna.

Neil meninggalkan teras dan masuk ke dapur, menyiapkan sendiri kopi dan bubur cereal untuk sarapannya.

Gina Germaine. Pirang dan menggairahkan. Bodoh. Bahkan bisa dikatakan dungu. Dan aktris film.

Ia sudah dua kali bercinta dengan wanita itu, dan akan mengulanginya kembali. Sungguh gila, tapi ia tak mampu mengendalikan diri.