

Life is a Belly Dance

Chapter 1

The more I thought about her - the more I fantasised about her - the more intrigued I was by her.

Life is a belly dance, of that I was convinced, and, in the brief moments I had glimpsed her, she had personified that dance, without displaying anything of her belly or much of her other fleshly endowments.

She was a "professional." I don't mean that in any derogatory sense. I don't even mean that she sold her body for another's pleasure, although in one way or another she may, for all I knew, have done that, occasionally or as her regular way of life.

Rather was she a trained and talented professional from the way she appeared. She was well and modishly dressed and made up. Her expression was vivacious and pleasing and, at the same time, confident.

Her features were classically beautiful, her eyes a rare shade of blue-gray, alive and full of feeling.

The way she responded to those who cheered or sneered at her as she walked along the centre line in the Ring motorway, showed that she knew clearly how to handle the denizens - including the mean and ugly beasts - who performed their obscene belly dances in the muddy jungles of a life so alien to hers.

The belly dance was, in her view, much more than a simple exposure of the belly with its central button whirling in seductive frenzy.

The modern mode has been for women and especially adolescent girls to show their navel and decorate it in a variety of ways. However, that is no more than a fashion. There is little that is exciting in such a display of the neatness or otherwise with which the doctor has disposed of what is now no more than a functionless umbilical residue.

The belly dance is much more than that.

It is a thing of beauty.

It is too a temptation to sin...an ante-chamber to passion...a prelude to pleasure,

Sometimes women are asked how often they think about sex. Some reply -

"Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. What else is there?"

That sexual preoccupation is with much more than the inelegant sexual act itself. It is about the themes and arts of the belly dance. It is about the sweet charm or the physical wildness of the dance. It is about sensitivity and, yes, it can be too about orgiastic obsession.

It is about everything that makes everything else worthwhile.

Reflecting on her in this way made it all the more imperative that I see her again. I must find out what had made her walk with such seeming recklessness in the middle of that busy street. What was the belly dance she was performing or, I must acknowledge, from which she was escaping.

That led me to ponder the varieties of belly dance I had seen other women perform.

Those recollections now intrigued me even more.

She - the girl - is usually in command, even when she might not appear to be. She can signal "Verboten!" or she can gently and discreetly flash a green light. The girl with talent can do it without committing herself to anything if the response is negative or if no response is made at all.

Indeed, I shouldn't have said that she "flashes" her invitation - any invitation. Rather is it so discreet and is, among the more distinguished of her kind, issued with such apparent nonchalance, that the brutish male might not get the message at all. It passes him by or he fails to give it the significance it deserves - and, of course, that she intended.

In that event, he misses those exquisite delights that, by some kind of sexual semaphore or tender telepathy or instinctual mating call, she is saying she has in mind to offer.

She has in mind to offer....

It is not a free gift. A bargain must be struck. Her offer is of value - more precious than diamonds if and when it is directed to the right target. He who takes it up must show that he is worthy of it. His first test will be whether he gets the message and interprets it correctly.

If he fails to get the message or construes it wrongly, then she will, in all probability - we cannot be absolutely certain of this, as we shall see below - she will probably discard him.

But if he does get the message and if he responds discreetly and elegantly, then the rewards can be spectacular.

I want to tell you a story that was passed on to me - in all its intimate detail - by a good friend. Male, of course.

He was in the midst of one of those empty periods we all go through from time to time.

A former torrid and, at times, quite overwhelming relationship had suddenly come to an end. She went off to some exotic spot half a world away and stayed there. He was neither so young nor so inexperienced that, despite her denials, he couldn't guess what had happened.

Already, that was several months ago.

No new relationship had blossomed. He was the spare man who is said to be so very much in demand but who, in fact, is rarely needed for anything that will do him much good.

This friend of mine - I will call him Jack - was busy by day as well as into the evenings and much of the night during the working week. By the time he finished, he was healthily exhausted and wanted only to fall into bed, there simply to sleep to renew his forces for the tasks next day.

But there were times when he was more relaxed, especially at weekends.

Then he felt the emptiness of his emotional life.

He had no one to talk to intimately.

He had no one to embrace.

Above all, he had no one to make love to - or, more earthily, as he took pains to explain to me, though, since we are both robust males, he had no need to, he had no one to ****. Jack used a familiar four-letter word that summed up his need inelegantly but exactly.

He felt himself to be getting old. The line of his lips was becoming lean and hard. The lips themselves were turning inwards so that they almost completely disappeared from view.

So he thought, anyway, as he shaved and was forced to look at himself every morning or - very occasionally - as he prepared to go out at night.

There was something about shaving that made him think about days - and nights - that had been more fulfilling. He knew no excitement no, except through mempry and he wondered whether his capacity for loving might be dying from misuse.

He didn't like what was happening to him - not one bit.

Though it didn't happen often, there were rare occasions when he was needed as a "spare man." To such a request to perform socially, he sometimes responded.

Sometimes he didn't respond at all - or not positively.

It depended who the hostess was. He could tell fairly accurately what sort of group any particular hostess would assemble and whether he'd be less depressed by staying away than by attending.

For this particular party, he was called early in the week for a dinner-dance to be held on the Saturday.

He accepted immediately. He liked the hostess and her husband was a very old friend. He knew she'd assemble a group of attractive couples, who would always predominate, but that, somewhere in the group, there'd be an unattached - and presentable - female for him. Perhaps more than one, although then there'd be other unattached males.

When he turned up at eight, he found that there were six couples, five of whom he knew and a single unattached female.

He knew her slightly.

They'd met a few years before.

She was then, Jack said, in her later teens. She gave him a lift to a party, at which she did not stay. They exchanged a few pleasantries. Nothing more.

Then, a few weeks before the Saturday dinner-dance, Jack went with a small group to see - again - a performance of "The Sound of Music."

"It's always stirred the romance in me," Jack told me.

Not lust.

It's much too pure, too sweet, he said, to arouse anything but the most virtuous of romantic feelings.

He wanted, afterwards, he said, "to kiss a girl's hand."

That was all.

Perhaps sweep elegantly around the dance floor with her in an old-time waltz.

Then, "Kiss the hand" again and bid her "Auf Wiedersehen."

After the performance, he accepted an invitation from a couple to an after-theatre drink at their home.

He was there half an hour or so and was just about to leave when suddenly, from a back room, she appeared.

She was not dressed romantically - nothing like those who peopled "The Sound of Music" - or sexily.

"I've been working," she said.

She was dressed in jeans, with an unrevealing top.

She was, she would have said, dressed in a way not to provoke - in a way to kill rather than excite any passionate feelings.

But she did it with care.

She probably had, as she said, been "working."

But, when she stopped, she took time to prepare herself to make her entrance.

She was a model of carefully studied negligence.

As she took the few steps across the room before sitting down, she wobbled her bottom appealingly.

"You noticed that?" I asked Jack.

Jack laughed. "I'm human - and male. When a beautiful girl moves like that, I look. I can see her now. I still feel excited when I think how she looked - how she walked - that night."

"But you were in Sound-of-Music mode. You were romantic. You wanted to sing songs, kiss hands..."

"Not after she walked in."

"So she wanted to excite you."

"Why do you say that?"

"A woman never does that undeliberately, unwittingly, without meaning to..."

"But we were a group. She didn't necessarily mean to excite me. It could have been one of the others in the group."

"True. That can be a woman's dilemma. If she excites at all, she probably excites more than one. Is that what she wants? If she doesn't, how can she send a message that he - and he alone - will receive?"

"She can't. Not when there's a group."

"Can't she? Can't she rely on his good sense? Can't she hope that he'll be observing the others in the group and conclude that the message must be for him?"

"And if he doesn't?"

"She'll have to think again. She'll wonder whether her choice - her tentative choice - was wise - was well-made."

"So she doesn't try a second time?"

I hesitated.

"It all depends. On how powerful a message she intended to send the first time. On how distinctive a message she sees it to have been in the circumstances - the composition of the group, the openings for him to respond and so on. She might have to leave it to him to respond on a later, more favourable and more auspicious occasion. She's baited the hook. It's for him to take it; but he'd better be fairly quick and perceptive or she'll

angle elsewhere."

"You make it all sound very scientific and professional. Do women reason like that when they're planning their more intimate behaviour?"

"It's instinctive. They don't take a course in it. No lectures or seminars - not for the more talented anyway. It's a mating consciousness they're born with."

"Born with?"

"Perhaps it arrives with puberty. Anyway, it's there when they need it."

"Interesting. But you hesitated back there," Jack reminded me. "You seemed to be wanting to say something, then - I think - you switched..."

"Oh, yes, it was what might cause a woman to try again - to persist when the initial auguries mightn't be as good as she might have wished."

"And?"

"Well, it depends on how much she herself is excited by the one she intends to be the recipient of her message - how much she lusts after him. Never forget that a woman's lusts may be different but they're every bit as compelling as a man's - or they can be."

"Of course."

"Now, when she came into the room and moved her bottom so enticingly in the few steps she took towards you, what did you do?"

"I rose from my chair..."

"She would have liked that."

"I was in Sound-of-Music mode, remember."

"And then?"

"I waited until she was introduced to the others. Then, when my turn came, I waited for her to extend her hand."

"You didn't kiss it?"

He laughed. "No. I didn't imagine she'd appreciate it."

"Or kiss her on the cheek?"

"I'd have liked to...."

"You didn't try?"

"She extended her hand - not her cheek. That was the message."

"She would have been pleased that you got it. But what did you say when you took her hand?"

"Oh, I don't know. Something about, 'We've met before.' That sort of thing. Nothing special."

"She may have thought it was. You had met only once, some years before? Is that right?"

"A few years earlier. Yes."

"And you remembered?"

"She's a very beautiful girl. Not easily forgotten."

"Quite. But she doesn't know that - or she's not sure of it. Never forget that even the most beautiful women are not always convinced of their own beauty. They like to be reassured..."

"And by saying we'd met before, I said she was memorable and she concluded that she was memorable because I found her beautiful? Is that what you're saying?"

"Something like that. You gave her the reassurance she needed. And then what happened? That evening?"

"Not a lot. The conversation was within the group. There was no pairing off."

"And when you parted, what did you say to her?"

"It was all quite formal. In the midst of the crowd - a small crowd but still a crowd - it had to be. I said something about, 'How nice to have seen you again' and that was pretty well that."

"Did she have a twinkle in her eye?"

"Look, she's beautiful and she's full of life. Her eyes were twinkling at everyone that evening - and other evenings. That's the sort of girl she is. I'm conceited enough to think she twinkled at me a bit. But that's about it."

"What did she say when you parted?"

"Now that's something. She said, 'Au revoir.' To some of the others, maybe to all, she said, 'Goodbye' so - I thought - maybe I would see her again - she expected to see me again - maybe even wanted to see me again..."

"And she did?"

"See me again? Yes - at the dinner-dance."

I don't know that I was thinking particularly of Jack that morning when I saw that beautiful girl - shall I call her Delicia? - walking so recklessly down the middle of the Ringstrasse.

But I knew I had to see her again.

She had sent me a message.

Or I thought she had.

Those rare blue-grey eyes had, I thought, softened perceptibly as I passed by, with great care not to harm her, in my Lamborghini sports and, discreetly, signalled my concern for her safety.

Of course, I should have responded more actively, by stopping and urging her to take the seat beside me.

We could have driven down past the Opera House together and on

to....

Where?

To our own special Paradise?

No more than seconds later, I began to dream that eternal belly-dance dream...

To be with the one I loved - forever...

But I hadn't stopped.

I had not been the "parfait knight" putting my own body at risk to save the fair damsel.

Now all I could do was the next best thing.

At the street before the Opera House, I turned right in the direction of Kärntnerstrasse, then left to hand my car into the keeping of the concierge outside the Hotel Sacher.

He didn't hesitate.

Even to the Hotel Sacher, a Lamborghini sports adds a special touch of romantic grandeur.

I raced madly back, alongside the Opera House, to the Ringstrasse, my eyes wild and wide, searching for her.....

By then, I had indeed begun thinking of Jack, what had happened to him after that night of The Sound of Music, and the delights he might have missed, if good fortune had not smiled on him, at precisely the right moment.

My recollection focussed on Jack's failure to take any initiative after the night of The Sound of Music. Indeed, he took none before the dinner-dance of which he had begun to tell me.

"Did *she* take any initiative to be with you at the dinner-dance?" I asked him.

"No. Not so far as I know."

"You'd taken no initiative of any kind to see her again?"

"No. It sounds pretty unenterprising of me, doesn't it? But it was only a short interval really. I was busy. Away on a business trip for a few days too."

"She could have taken some initiative without your being aware of it?"

"She could have accepted an invitation for herself, you mean, and dropped a hint to the hostess that it would be nice if I were to be at the party too?"

"Is that possible?"

"I've got no evidence of it."

"And when you met at the party?"

"She was polite. Smiling and well-mannered as she always is - no more than that."

"And, at some point, that changed?"

Jack went into reminiscent mode. He was far away, living in another time, and the feelings of that time - the emotions, the excitement - were taking over.

I let him be for a while. Then I asked -

"How did she look? After Sound of Music, you saw her dressed in jeans. But, for the dinner-dance, she wasn't wearing jeans, was she?"

He came back from far away.

"Looking? How was she looking? Marvellous. Skirt this time. Short evening dress. Above the knees. She's got lovely legs. Good in jeans but magnificent in a dress. Nothing too revealing. No deep-diving décolleté or anything like that; but you could see she was well-endowed..."

"I asked you when the polite - the formal - atmosphere between you changed. Was there a particular moment? Was there something dramatic?"

Again he went into reverie. When he answered, he was recalling it all to himself and only quite incidentally telling it to me.

"We danced together. The first time ever. It was pleasant. Very pleasant. She was...nice to the touch... nice to hold. You know - how you get a thrill out of putting your arm around someone you like - someone you're drawn to. Her body felt...good. She danced well. Didn't complain about my mistakes but compensated nicely. We chatted about this and that. Nothing in particular. I took her back to her place. Thanked her. I didn't want to leave her. I wanted to stay. I wanted just to enjoy her company. But, you know how it is... Afterwards, I danced with someone else. She did too. Then, in due course, I asked her to dance again..."

He stopped. He was living those moments over again.

"All very standard, orthodox, comme il faut, no? And it was. Just another evening. I was feeling disturbed - excited - but there was no sign that she felt anything. There was nothing dramatic in the atmosphere - the environment - of the party - nothing at all - anywhere - and then ..."

I dug him with the spur of silence.

"...and then it happened. Just like that. No preliminaries. So suddenly. So unexpectedly. So...decisively."

He stopped again. This time, I decided he needed urging.

"And just what was it that happened, Jack? What was so sudden - so decisive?"

"We were just dancing, right? Silently for the most part but

comfortable with one another. Then, without warning - no prelude - no foreplay in conversation or anything like that - she just pressed with the fingers of her left hand on my back."

I couldn't help giving a little half-gasp, half-laugh of surprise.

"That was all?"

"Absolutely. You don't believe me, do you? But it said everything. She could have sent a long letter - she could have written me a whole book - and she couldn't have said more or said it more clearly. She liked me. She wanted to be closer to me. She wanted me to hold her, hug her..."

"It said all that?"

"More, much more. Of course, you get euphoric at moments like that. I had to tell myself to slow down - not assume she meant all I wanted her to mean. So I responded with just the same discreet pressure she'd used - a little hug, I suppose you'd call it, gently moving my right arm a little more tightly around her..."

"And then?"

"Well, that was it. Everything came together. Soon we were dancing cheek to cheek. Then the music stopped - but not for me. My soul was filled with melody. That sounds corny - immature - doesn't it? But we all are at moments like those, I think. Anyway, I thanked her - warmly, because I wanted her to know how much I appreciated the new bond - I felt already I could call it that, at least to myself - how much I appreciated the new bond between us...."

"You were very wise - and perceptive."

"I hoped I had been. Anyway, I took her back to her place. More than ever, I wanted to stay with her but..."

"She had a good guest's role to play?"

"She flashed me a smile..."

"Another message?"

"Unmistakeable. She was saying I'd done well so far. She'd like some more."

"And that was all?"

"No. We danced together only once more - closely but with a propriety I knew she'd want. We were in a party. We had to be discreet. But that second dance said it all. When the party was breaking up, I asked if I could drive her home. I knew she'd say 'Yes' before she said it."

His car was parked on the other side of a dual carriageway. That was a good excuse to shepherd her across, his arm protectively around her.

"In the car, you wouldn't believe it," he confessed, rather shyly. "I took her hand - like a young fellow on his first date..."

"You were living out the Sound-of-Music syndrome?"

"Perhaps. But it worked. She squeezed my hand as though she loved it - and she smiled."

He thought about how it went next.

"I had to turn the car around to head in the direction of her place, so we unlinked our hands and we didn't talk until we got on to a less busy road, lined as I remember with blossom trees. Then we held hands again and I pulled in to the side of the road. I drew her gently towards me and touched my lips to hers.

"Remember I hadn't had a woman for several months. I'd been totally celibate. So I was randy as a billy-goat. I wanted to take her right there - in the car..."

"But?"

"She was beautiful...elegant. It wouldn't have seemed right. We kissed and I hugged her. She must have known how much I wanted her. At one stage, I know I murmured 'Darling' as though I'd known her for years. She held me tight and kissed me. 'Thank you,' she said..."

"Why did she thank you?"

"Not really sure, actually. I thought it might be because I called her 'Darling' or just because I was 'nice' to her. Anyway, I thought the time had come to say, 'Will you come home with me for a late-night coffee together?'

"She giggled a little at that. A coffee? We'd had enough coffee - and all sorts of other drinks - already. But she knew what I meant....."

"You used the right code. The protocol was in place. Again, she would have liked that."

"I suppose so. Anyway, she said, 'Yes' right out loud and gave me a little kiss to confirm it...."