

*THE INTERROGATION*

Murphy Guyer

*Winter. A bar in New York City. A table and two chairs. Seated in one of the chairs is a MAN in his late twenties. HE is attractive in a seedy, unkempt sort of way. On the table in front of him are three shot glasses; two empty, one full. Also a glass of water. On the other side of the table sits a Scotch on the rocks, untouched. In the center of the table is a large ashtray brimming with gnarled cigarette butts. The MAN is waiting. HE drums his fingers. HE looks behind him toward the door to the bar. HE checks his watch. HE downs the shot of whiskey. HE stares at the table top and is momentarily lost in distant thought. HE snaps out of it and looks toward the door again. HE grabs his pack of cigarettes and discovers that it's empty. HE removes a fresh pack from his pocket, opens it, and removes a cigarette. HE flicks his disposable lighter a number of times but gets no flame. HE shakes it and flicks again. Still nothing. HE holds it up to the light to see if it's empty. HE continues to shake and flick as a WOMAN enters behind him. SHE too is in her mid-twenties. Attractive and well-dressed, SHE sports a deep tan and positively radiates good health. SHE stands and observes the Man for a moment, not dissatisfied with what she sees. The MAN brings his lighter to his nose and sniffs. The WOMAN smiles at this.*

WOMAN: Hi.

MAN: ...Oh, hi.

WOMAN: Snorting butane again.

MAN: *(smiling sheepishly.)* Out of gas.

WOMAN: Am I very late?

MAN: *(Hastening to reassure.)* No, no. Not very.

WOMAN: Trying to find a cab on Sunday is like trying to find a rabbi in Wyoming.

*(MAN rises to help her off with her coat but it is too late. SHE has already managed it by herself without seeming to even notice his attempt. As THEY settle into their chairs:)*

MAN: So... How are you? How ya been?

WOMAN: Can't complain. Same old table I see.

MAN: Yeah, same old spot... You look good.

WOMAN: Thanks. I feel good.

MAN: You've lost weight.

WOMAN: It's a new diet. I can eat anything I want as long as I don't swallow.

MAN: *(Laughs with solicitous appreciation.)* Where'd you get the sun?

WOMAN: St. Martin.

MAN: St. Martin.

WOMAN: It's an island in the Caribbean.

MAN: Yeah, I know. I was just... It's Dutch, isn't it?

WOMAN: Half Dutch, half French. I was on the French side.

MAN: Terrific. Vacation?

WOMAN: Yeah. Just got back on Monday.

MAN: How was it? Have a good time?

WOMAN: It was glorious. I didn't want to leave.

MAN: And ya got a new hairstyle.

WOMAN: It's easier to manage.

MAN: (*Rummaging for matches.*) Looks good.

WOMAN: Thanks. Is this for me?

MAN: Yeah. Dewars on the rocks, right?

WOMAN: Well no, actually I don't drink anymore. Here, why don't you drink it and I'll drink your water. It *is* water, isn't it?

MAN: Yeah, yeah. You don't drink anymore?

WOMAN: Too many calories.

MAN: You want a light beer? I'll go to the bar and get—

WOMAN: No, no. This is fine.

MAN: Listen, could I borrow your lighter or a match or something?

WOMAN: Sorry, I quit.

(*MAN looks at her dumbfounded. HE is stunned. This is getting distressing.*)

MAN: You quit smoking?

WOMAN: I had to. It was interfering with my running.

MAN: Your running?

WOMAN: I took up jogging a few months ago. I was fine for the first couple of miles but after that I just didn't have wind. So I quit smoking.

MAN: You run two miles a day?

WOMAN: Five now.

MAN: (*Incredulous.*) Five miles a day?

WOMAN: When I can. Depends on the weather.

MAN: (*Smiling but pained HE looks for a cloud in the silver lining of her life.*) Geez... Must get kind of boring, huh?

WOMAN: No. Actually I find it rather exhilarating.

(*MAN returns his cigarette back into the pack. After a brief, uncertain pause HE makes another effort at affability.*)

MAN: So... What did you do today?

WOMAN: Not much. Slept late. Bought a paper. Played a few games of racquetball.

MAN: Racquetball?

WOMAN: I joined a club.

MAN: (*Sinking into despair.*)... Must be nice.

WOMAN: I enjoy it. How about you?

MAN: (*Too depressed to lie.*) I went to Burger King.

WOMAN: Sounds exciting.

MAN: Yeah, you know. Separated my hard French fries from my soft French fries, did the puzzles on my placemat,--

WOMAN: -- Spilled ketchup on your shirt.

MAN: What? Where?

WOMAN: Fourth button down.

MAN: ... Oh. No, that's pizza. From last night.

WOMAN: With anchovies?

MAN: As usual.

WOMAN: I'll never understand how you can eat those things. It's like eating greasy caterpillars.

MAN: I don't know. I find them rather exhilarating.

WOMAN: ... Funny.

MAN: So... How's your love life?

WOMAN: Can't complain.

MAN: Been seeing anybody?

WOMAN: A few people.

*(MAN nods agreeably. Pause.)*

WOMAN: How's Maria? She still playing accordion at the restaurant?

MAN: *(Uncomfortably.)* I'm uh, not seeing Maria anymore.

WOMAN: Oh? What happened?

MAN: It just didn't work out.

WOMAN: Did she go back to Spain?

MAN: *(Looks at her, trying to ascertain if this mistake was intentional. HE can't tell.)* Portugal.

*(Brief pause.)*

WOMAN: So she walked out on you huh?

MAN: *(Anticipating this.)* No she didn't walk out on me. It was a mutual decision.

WOMAN: Aren't they all. When did this happen?

MAN: *(Cavalierly.)* I don't know. A month or so ago.

WOMAN: That's a shame.

*(HE looks at her to determine if she is being facetious but she is giving nothing away. Pause.)*

MAN: What about you?

WOMAN: What.

MAN: (*Matter of factly.*) Been to bed with anyone?

WOMAN: ... What kind of question is that?

MAN: I don't know. I'm curious.

WOMAN: Well I didn't take a vow of celibacy if that's what you mean.

(*Pause.*)

MAN: (*Even more matter of factly.*) How many?

WOMAN: What?

MAN: How many men have you slept with?

WOMAN: (*Drily sarcastic.*) I don't know. I stopped counting at thirty-seven.

MAN: (*With a half-hearted chuckle.*) No, seriously.

WOMAN: I don't think that's any of your business.

MAN: Why don't you want to tell me?

WOMAN: What do you want to know for?

MAN: I'm curious that's all. It's an honest question, what's the big deal?

WOMAN: Four.

(*MAN's artificial geniality melts away.*)

MAN: (*Blankly.*) Four?

WOMAN: Yeah.

MAN: You gotta be kidding.

WOMAN: What's the matter with that?

MAN: Four different guys?

WOMAN: Oh knock it off. You asked me and I told you.

MAN: Jesus.

WOMAN: Jesus what?

MAN: I mean one I could understand. Two *maybe*. Even three if you were drunk, or unconscious, or—

WOMAN: (*Irked.*) Would you mind telling me what is so awful about that?

MAN: (*With facetious nonchalance.*) Nothing. It's great. Just great.

WOMAN: Nine months is a long time.

MAN: Yeah. Especially when you're bedridden.

WOMAN: You had Maria.

MAN: Yeah. *One*.

WOMAN: Well you shouldn't have limited yourself to Spanish immigrants with unnaturally large breasts.

MAN: She was Portugese.

WOMAN: And it's none of your business what I do. You left me, remember?

MAN: Yeah, and I can see you were real broke up about it.

WOMAN: What were you expecting? A suicide attempt?

(*MAN retreats. Pause.*)

MAN: (*Back to his breezy manner.*) So how were they?

WOMAN: What?

MAN: These guys. How were they?

WOMAN: Oh for God's sake.

MAN: It's an honest question.

WOMAN: It's none of your business.

MAN: I'd like to know.

WOMAN: Why?

MAN: I'm curious, that's all.

WOMAN: (*Losing some of her composure.*) Well stop being curious. I don't want to talk about it.

MAN: (*Backing off.*) All right. All right.

WOMAN: Talk about something else.

MAN: Fine, fine.

WOMAN: Give me some of that Scotch.

(*Impulsively SHE reaches across the table and grabs the glass of Scotch. HE watches her drink. Pause.*)

MAN: So... How long were you in St. Martin?

WOMAN: Nine days.

MAN: Did you go by yourself?

WOMAN: (*Pointedly, as if to say "don't start."*) I went with Ruthie.

MAN: (*Lifts his palms defensively. The falsely accused protesting his innocence. Pause.*) Did you go to bed with anybody while you were—

WOMAN: Jesus Christ, what is your problem?

MAN: It's an honest question.

WOMAN: I'm fed up with your honest questions.

MAN: (*Generously affable.*) What's the big deal? You don't have to answer. If you don't want to answer, don't.

WOMAN: Thanks. I won't.

MAN: (*Slamming his fist on the table.*) I knew it.

WOMAN: Oh my God.

MAN: You did, didn't you.

WOMAN: I don't believe this.

MAN: Well? Didn't you?

WOMAN: Yes, I did. All right? Satisfied?

MAN: Were you?

WOMAN: Oh pa-lease.

MAN: No wonder you hated to leave.

WOMAN: Whatever you say.

MAN: Who was he? Some greasy Frog bartender with slim hips?

WOMAN: No, he was an American lifeguard with broad shoulders.

MAN: *(Getting on a roll.)* A lifeguard! Well, well, how fascinating! How, how primitive! Did he walk upright?

WOMAN: He graduated Magna Cum Lauda from the University of Miami.

MAN: No! THE University of Miami?! Wow! Imagine that. That's a correspondence program isn't it?

WOMAN: Don't be such a snob.

MAN: What was his major? Snorkeling?

WOMAN: All right, that's enough.

MAN: Well you certainly didn't lose any time. Nine days. Jesus H—

WOMAN: One more remark like that and I'm leaving. Now knock it off.

*(MAN retreats broodingly. WOMAN glares at him. Long, intense pause. Then, just as WOMAN turns away:)*

MAN: So how was he?

WOMAN: *(Snapping with furious exasperation.)* Will you shut up?!

MAN: Fine! Fine! You don't want to talk about it? Fine!

WOMAN: I don't believe this.

MAN: I certainly wouldn't want you to betray any beautiful trust. I mean I wouldn't want you to cheapen some rare, inexpressible—

WOMAN: *(Exploding.)* HE WAS GREAT! He was incredible! He was tall and he was blonde and he had gorgeous blue eyes and rippling bronze muscles! I was drooling with desire and he knew it!

MAN: *(Glancing furtively about the bar.)* Keep your voice down will ya? There are—

WOMAN: HE KNEW IT! He played me like a Stradivarius! He swept me off my feet and carried me to the beach. He laid me in the moonlit surf and ripped off his clothes. He undressed me with his teeth and I gurgled with delight. My quivering quim yearned for his pulsating rod. I



panted and I moaned and I screamed dirty words. We thrashed about like two sex-starved beasts. He ravished me again and again. I begged for him to stop but he only laughed. Finally, with dawn breaking on the horizon, and waves crashing against my trembling thighs, I fainted out of sheer ecstasy!

*(WOMAN sits and crosses her arms with finality. MAN stares off in mortified resentment. Pause. MAN looks down at the floor, struggling against the compulsion welling up inside of him. Ultimately though, the compulsion wins and:)*

MAN: Did you have an orgasm?

WOMAN: Dear God. You are being ridiculous!

MAN: *(Bursting with furious self-loathing.)* OF COURSE I'M BEING RIDICULOUS! YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW I'M BEING RIDICULOUS?! YOU THINK I *LIKE* BEING RIDICULOUS?! ... Give me some of that water.

*(MAN reaches across the table and snatched the glass of water. HE gulps it down feverishly. HE holds the cool glass against his forehead. The WOMAN watches him with bemused indulgence. Pause.)*

WOMAN: Who cut your hair?

MAN: Guy around the corner.

WOMAN: Very creative.

MAN: He was cheap.

WOMAN: Any scars?

*(HE raises his head and gives her a "gimme-a-break" look.)*

WOMAN: *(Drily.)* You look like shit.

MAN: Well we can't all look like a "Come-to-Jamaica" poster.

WOMAN: *(Laughs in spite of herself.)* I do look pretty plastic, don't I.

MAN: No you don't. You look great. It's depressing.

*(Pause.)*

WOMAN: *(Serious.)* You hurt me you know.

MAN: *(Wracked with guilt.)* I know... I know. I'm sorry.

WOMAN: I wanted to punch your teeth out.

MAN: I don't blame you.

WOMAN: I had all these elaborate fantasies about how I was going to get back at you. I was going to send you a dead rat through the mail. Get some guy with an Italian accent to leave menacing messages on your answering machine.

MAN: Why didn't you?

WOMAN: I didn't want to give you the satisfaction.

MAN: I missed you.

WOMAN: How could you do it?

MAN: *(Grasping helplessly.)* ... I don't know. I was... It was a mistake.

WOMAN: You bastard.

MAN: I still love you.

*(Getting emotional in spite of herself, the WOMAN grows frantic. The following exchange should accelerate and grow in intensity as the WOMAN searches about distractedly while MAN presses with needy solicitousness.)*

WOMAN: Oh Christ, why did I come here.

MAN: You want to leave?

WOMAN: I hate this place.

MAN: You want to go someplace else?

WOMAN: They haven't changed the jukebox in thirty years.

MAN: Are you tired?

WOMAN: *Or* the sawdust on the floor.

MAN: You want to sleep with me?

WOMAN: *(Without hesitation.)* Yes.

*(HE kisses her impulsively. It lasts. THEY look at each other with undisguised need.)*

WOMAN: *(Suddenly.)* Let's get out of here.

*(THEY begin throwing on their coats and scarves with great urgency.)*

WOMAN: I must be out of my mind.

MAN: Hey, can we pick up some ice cream on the way.

WOMAN: Where's my scarf? Where's my scarf?

MAN: It's around your neck.

WOMAN: Oh. Ice cream. Great. There goes my diet.

MAN: *(Counting out crumpled dollar bills.)* Then we won't get any.

WOMAN: Yes we will. And I want mocha mint chip. *(SHE starts off.)*

MAN: Oh listen, I meant to ask you something.

*(SHE stops at the exit as HE tosses the bills on the table.)*

MAN: That lifeguard. Was he number five or was he included in the four?

WOMAN: Oh Christ. *(SHE exits exhaustedly.)*

MAN: *(As HE hurries after her.)* What? What's wrong? It's an honest question.