

Temporary Passport

by Penny Goring

It is late in the twentieth century and I'm on my hands and knees for you. Down on the boards of this stationary freight train, it's dark and your coat is our tent. Toulon: too long ago to clearly remember your hands or the feel of your mouth.

On a speeding train I took off my knickers and the open window grabbed them from my hands. We were glugging red wine from plastic flagons, going to Nice to beg on the beach.

Those sand-blasted beggars were feral, stole your knife as we slept under sheets of damp chipboard. You forced me to shop-lift a tin of sardines, if it wasn't for you we would starve.

Busking in Brussels was futile, me screaming and you on the bongos, all you'd accept from your father, before he returned to New York. Plastic flowers bunched in my carrier bag, eyebrows unplucked, hair greasily grasping the wind.

Marseilles with a flimsy message propped at my feet, slumped against a wall trying to look hungry, my puppy fat making it difficult. You always watching from a distance, making sure I was safe.

Poverty was too much for me. You said I was too much for you.

At Bettina's expecting a welcome, we weren't wanted at all, but she fed us and took us to the nightclub where her boyfriend was a DJ. Our contest to see who could pull first, you seemed gleeful when I won hands down. All I did was stick my head out, under the lights at the bar.

He was a good-looking Belgian, singer in a band he said, and he wanted to buy me a dress. He came round the next day so I had a shower and he took us all out for coffee and chocolates, then dined and seduced me alone. You were angry I didn't bring a doggy bag back, I was numb with cocaine.

Eating raw cabbage in Oxford watching lots of uppity yahs, we danced with exuberance at their party, heathens, wild for them all.

You shagged some girl on the staircase, I nicked a tenner from her dressing-table drawer. It was then you knew I was yours.

I was relieved we lost her before Paris, even though the guards beat you up. I stood frozen, train jolting, as they took turns to punch you and called you 'roast beef', your teeth flashing broken and whiter against your open mouth slashed with red.

They threw us from their cells early morning, we walked silent streets swigging milk from the doorsteps and I loved you, your beauty coagulated in blood.

I drew you for three days in Calais, my pencil recording your fantastic face, I should have held onto those drawings, I'd have something left of you now.

You never answer my letters but you still come looking for me. You find me at night when I'm trying to sleep and tell me all about why you can't stay.

