



HOTEL CHELSEA  
*New York, 1978*

∴[VIII]∴

THE RING  
*and the*  
FLOWERS

---

*Backwards to the Present*

**D**IVINE favor has freed me from most human passions, but one insatiable lust remains that I have as yet been neither willing or able to master. I cannot get enough books.

—PETRARCH, 1346

## [29] The Ring and the Flowers

**A**NITA LEFT ME TWICE, once for almost a year and a half, during which I was quite distraught. She finally called me from Hawaii and told me she was coming home, but this took a few more months. She was only twenty five and she knew what she was getting into with me. This was the third time and it was not going to be easy to get out of, you can be sure. When she finally arrived in New York in 1979, she had just had an intensely desperate final fling with a married Moslem artist from Bali whom she met in San Francisco on the way back from Hawaii. He came to New York to see her for five days while I kicked and screamed.

You know how you wear your friends out during one of these episodes? People soon began changing the subject with unconcealed boredom. Only Chrissie, now living with another man in Mendocino, California, was always available for heart-to-heart telephone counseling service. About the Moslem lover, Chrissie said, "Oh, don't worry about him. He's going to go back to his wife because she knows how to make the kind of food he likes." Talk about culture shock. Anita told me that one night after they made love, he asked her how many men she had sex with before him. She wouldn't tell him, so he started guessing. "More than ten?" he asked. "Yes." He got very quiet and turned his face to the wall and didn't talk to her until the following day.

After he went back, Anita went through a dreadful unrequited love depression. She stayed out at her mother's and told me that I was not it, that nothing could change her mind. Chrissie said, "She is just saying that because she wants you to reassure her that you forgive her and you really love her. Go buy her a gold wedding ring. It has to be gold. Then send her the ring with a dozen white roses for her mother. Her mother will give her the ring and she will put it on and that will be that."

"That will just kill it!" I exclaimed. "She will say that I'm pressuring her!"

"Just do what I say!" Chrissie commanded. "I'm the expert about women, not you! Where have you gotten so far with your own advice? If you were such an expert, we would still be married!"

So I did it. The flowers thrilled Anita's mother. Anita wouldn't put



SITTING ON THE TERRACE

*Yelapa, 1977*

the ring on at first, but she left it on her night table. Then after a few hours she put it on. It fit perfectly. That's how Anita and I got together again. Sometimes I think that is what the book is really about, how much Chrissie (and the other women in my life) really loved me and how little I ever appreciated it because of how scarred I was. I still am, but at least now I can see the scars. I did love Chrissie and I have come to see her side of things, but nothing much can be done about it.

When Anita and I first met, we went to the house in the jungle. One afternoon, we sat on the terrace and watched the clouds go by.

I said, "My mother visited here on her honeymoon with Gray. They stayed at the Camino Real outside Puerto Vallarta. We stayed at a little hotel, the Fontana del Mar, a neat place with white tile kitchenettes. Our apartment this time unfortunately faced a restaurant that had hired a mariachi band for the Easter week crowd. The band played, 'Ai, yi, yi, yi,' over and over again until we found ourselves singing it out loud. "Please, no more ai, yi, yi,' Faera complained.

"We took Mother and Gray out to our house in a speedboat and fed