Part I

BEYOND THE BEAT

She dreamed that she and her father were together in a great wide field of wild flowers on a beautiful summery day. He was reciting poems of Mallarmé, but it was as if he himself had written them; and Candy was much younger, and she ran about the fields picking flowers, and though she would sometimes be at quite a distance from her father, she could hear every line he spoke. He spoke the lines perfectly, with exactly the right intonation and feeling for each word. Sometimes when he finished a poem, he would say: "That wasn't a bad poem. Now here's another — this is one I wrote for you, sweetheart; it came to me in a *flash* — in a terrible, beautiful flash just as I was releasing the sweet powerful seed from my testis that made you!"

— *Candy*

Chapter 1

Paris: 1947–1953

Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenberg met in Paris in 1948. Both had come on the GI Bill and were — ostensibly — studying at the Sorbonne. Exchanging glances at the Café Royal on St. Germain, they must have immediately recognized each other as kindred spirits. They were an odd pair. Mason's Peter Lorre–like, hunched, bug-eyed demeanor (very New York) was in sharp contrast to Terry's Presbyterian, Texas-bred, hawklike features and reserved manner. At times they were like a comedy team — entertaining each other and those around them.

They shared a similar extreme distaste for the clichéd or hackneyed — the two of them could be very dismissive — and very funny.

Hoffenberg had large blue eyes that protruded, which his future publisher Maurice Girodias described as "full of false promise." As Girodias recalled:

> When people saw him, they would start laughing convulsively without knowing why. He became a master of the minimalist approach: it was enough to look at someone in a certain way, to stare at a girl . . . with a haggard grimace, to suggest a whole story.

Mason's delivery was Brooklynesque and nasal. While he spoke the raw truth as he saw it, often in harsh, uncompromising terms, Terry was a master of understatement, preferring to deflect the obvious via a surprising remix of clichés.

"Old values are crumbling" was an expression that brought particular satisfaction and mirth to them both — indeed, they

relished it, for they were on the front lines of late '40s–'50s hipster iconoclasm, sending up and smashing down smugness wherever they found it. From their vantage points in Paris, and later Greenwich Village, they regarded the straight world as populated by Paleolithic squares, while the world of arts and letters offered an urgent creative antidote to a culture increasingly paranoid and conservative. Terry developed a pointed lexicon of nuance: a birdlike tilt of the head, a quick wince of the eyes, a click of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, lips frozen in a pained half-smile, smoke rising from a Gauloise — peppered with hash, no doubt. Mason's style, on the other hand, was more straightforward and confrontational — a nonstop commentary of brilliantly relevant non sequiturs, delivered in a kind of hipster whine. On Pernod-soaked evenings, when they could afford it, Mason and Terry could both be seen leaning toward each other at a café table, heavy with Sartre's "iron in the soul" — their attitude: bemused detachment, cutting insight, or outright stoned hilarity. As Terry recalled of those days in an interview with Mike Golden:

> From '48 to '52, the cafés were such great places to hang out — you could smoke hash at the tables if you were fairly discreet. There was the expatriate crowd, which was more or less comprised of interesting people, creatively inclined. So we would fall out there at one of the cafés, sip Pernod until dinner, then afterwards go to a jazz club. . . .
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> That . . . was a golden era for Americans in Paris. All the great black musicians — Bird, Diz, Thelonius, Bud Powell, Miles, Kenny Clarke, etc., etc. — were first appreciated there, so it was a very swinging scene musically. Also, there is a large Arab quarter in Paris, and hashish was an acceptable (to the French authorities) part of the Arab culture — so the thing to do was to get stoned and listen to this fantastic music. That was the most important aspect of life in Paris in those days.

Terry and Mason embraced the notion of the Absurd as championed by Camus, who wrote, in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* "The absurd

is not in man nor in the world, but in their presence together." Existentialism struck a deep chord in Terry, one which lasted throughout his life. "You do what you do," he once said, "I don't think intentions, opinions, expressions of attitude . . . count for anything at all."

Many in the *Paris Review* crowd regarded Southern, photographer (future filmmaker) and jazz enthusiast Aram "Al" Avakian, and Hoffenberg as ultra-cool vets on the expatriate scene. The Southern-Avakian-Hoffenberg preference for pot and hash over booze also put them in a class of their own. John Phillips Marquand, son of the well-known novelist and a writer himself, found them intimidating. Southern seemed a "silent, inscrutable presence" who was, as described by Terry Southern biographer Lee Hill, "often seen in an attitude of enigmatic conspiracy with Avakian," who also frequented the Old Navy, a Left Bank hangout on the Boulevard St. Germain. At the Hotel Bar Américain in Pigalle one night, Southern told the more solvent Marquand it was bad form to buy a girl a drink: "You ruin it for the rest of us if you pay for her beer." On another occasion, Marquand recalled how he returned to a café to retrieve some papers he had left under a chair. Terry was there, and said with mock sympathy, "Forget it, man — it wasn't any good." Later, they became best of friends.

Their favorite hangouts, like the Café Flore in Paris and the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village, were once described by Terry as places "where the whole point was not to write a book but to talk one." Actually getting published was often an afterthought:

> It was sort of an embarrassment like you had sold out or something. If it was corny enough and square enough and bourgeois enough to get accepted by some of these asshole editors, how could it be worth anything? . . . [The literary scene] was all about reading and turning people on to things you had read like Mallarmé, Malaparte, and Canetti. . . . And then showing people stuff you had written and then there were those things where people would read aloud, which seemed a little suspect and too social for me.

As Henry Allen wrote of that era in the *Washington Post:*

> The essence of hip was being in on the joke, aware of the irony and facetiousness of even your compadres in hipness. . . . Hipness was a constant struggle over information and who controlled it: you, the government, the newspapers, the guy drinking coffee at the next table. If you put him on, you controlled it. Terry Southern [and Mason Hoffenberg] took this grim doctrine and made it funny, satirizing both hip and square in a style of spectacular grace, clarity and modulation through all the realities you could bite into like a napoleon, all the flaky layers.

Put-on as reality check was a key foil to the "moldy figs" who threatened to dampen everything with their stodginess. And "sense derangement" neutralized all. Besides hashish (whiz), marijuana (boo, bush), and Pernod, there was the music, the girls, and the *put-on*. Pulling off a put-on provided a contact high, one which Terry strove to replicate in his writing. Mason did it live — in real time. *Shock* — and something more — was what they were after in both their writing and their repartee with each other. Terry recalled the "Laurel and Hardy" aspect of their relationship:

> Back in the late forties, when I was living in Paris on $75 a month from the GI Bill, Mason and I used to eat at this student restaurant, and it was really pretty bad — the kind of place where every now and then you get a piece of meat with the hair still on it. So it wasn't a scene that was too easy to make, but there was this very cute chick who also ate there, and I used to try to sit where we could see her eating this crap, because I felt, well, if she can do it, so can I. I had this image of her being so delicate and fastidious that nothing could possibly touch her lips unless it was perfect. And so one day I mentioned it to Hoff, and he stopped eating, turned towards me and said:
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> "Are you kidding? She's probably been *sucking cock* all day!"

They kidded each other constantly about getting laid, though both had very different ideas about the art of seduction. Terry

played it cool and, when warmed up, was a consummate gentleman and teaser. Although Terry loved to kid around, and Mason played the role of agent provocateur and tough cynic, at heart they were both romantics. They became fluent in the French culture and the language. Terry's patois was put to service to bed French girls who sometimes resembled his Candy Christian. In an interview with Lee Server in 1986, he describes his techniques for picking up American college girls in Paris:

> 1) pay a French person to annoy her at a café, then go to her "rescue," dispatching him with rapier thrusts of Parisian argot.
> 2) hang around the American Express mail line until the girl with perfect American derriere and nips arrives, then get behind her in the mail line, concealing your appearance with a newspaper; and in that way learn her name (when she asks for her mail); then follow her to a hotel or to a café — and when opportune, approach her. . . . It can help if you are able to see where the letter she gets is from, then you can get some regional rapport at ID going ("Say, didn't you used to be a cheerleader in Racine, Wisconsin?").
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> The third surefire way is to go to the Louvre and sit on a bench in front of a large El Greco, studying it. . . . Then, when the time is right . . . you make your move ("I know this is going to sound, well, sort of forward or silly even — but I couldn't help noticing how much your hands are like those of the women in El Greco's paintings.") Never fails . . . Poon city!

Despite Terry's elaborate pickup fantasies, Mason was the one who managed to "score" in a serious way with the charming young Frenchwoman he would eventually marry, Couquite Matignon. When they met, Couquite was having an affair with Mel Sabre, who had written a novel about his time as a paratrooper during the war. Couquite recalls:

> Mason started having eyes only for me, and decided to seduce this girl Mel had. My guess is that he was more interested in irking Mel, whom he was making fun of constantly, than actually starting something serious. Anyway, in no time he succeeded. When I told Mel, in

> The Old Navy, of this development, I found myself lying in the sawdust on the floor with a bloody nose and stars moving in front of my eyes: Mel had hit me with his huge paratrooper fist right in the middle of my face. Mason quite enjoyed his winning and picked up the debris.

Couquite's family was an interesting one. Her father was an oil prospector who died in a plane crash over Russia; her grandfather was Elie Faure, a writer and well-known art critic whose writing was favored by Henry Miller and Ezra Pound. Mason met Couquite at one of their favorite spots, the Royal, on the corner of rue de Rennes and boulevard St. Germain. Couquite recalls:

> Mason was a "bad boy," and we had a lot of fun. Mason knew everybody. Jack Kerouac wanted to come live with us, which I wouldn't have minded — he was so handsome at the time — but when he suggested it, Mason kicked me hard under the table. Terry was so handsome and distinguished looking, always with tall, extremely elegant skinny girls. Doris Lessing [the novelist] was one of them and became my friend. Al Avakian, Johnny Welch [a light-skinned black Sorbonne student and jazz fan], Terry, they all lived in this little hotel in the 5th arrondissement — there was a stove in every room — to visit with your friends there — it was like going to a fabulous café.

One of Terry's friends, William Styron, was in another little hotel not far away, the Libéria, awaiting the publication of his first novel *Lie Down in Darkness*. He wrote in a memoir:

> I was living then in a room that Doc Humes had found for me. . . .* The hotel was on the little rue de la Grande Chaumière, famous for its painters' *ateliers;* my room cost the equivalent of eight dollars a week or eight dollars and a half if you paid extra to get the henna-dyed Gorgon who ran the place to change the sheets weekly.

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*Harold "Doc" Humes was one of the founders of the *Paris Review,* having already published the *Paris-News Post.*

Another of Terry and Mason's pastimes was cultivating grand eccentrics, among them "Hadj" and "Zoon." One hangout was the Café Soleil du Maroc on rue des Rosiers in the Jewish quarter, where lemon tea was served with pipes of hashish. The two Americans adept in the French argot became friendly with the café's owner, a Moroccan named Hadj. As Couquite recalled:

> It was a time when Jews and Arabs lived peacefully together in the 4th arrondissement. Mr. Hadj, so-called because he had done the Mecca pilgrimage — or pretended so — was jointly selling grass and changing dollars at the black market with a huge profit for both the GI Bill boys and himself.

Terry and Mason later dedicated *Candy* to Hadj, and also to Zoon — who, if you asked him for a light, would oblige "by focusing sunlight on your cigarette with a magnifying glass." According to Terry:

> He was really Mr. Soun . . . a grand old man with a snow-white beard that came down to the middle of his chest. He was from Mongolia, and one of his IDs said he was eighty-nine. His story was that he had walked to France. He had no abode and slept on benches. He'd go into a trance and get several hours' rest that way. He hung out on the boulevards and wore a loose-fitting cloak with big pockets full of books, booklets, and clippings. He'd come to the Soleil du Maroc, and when you mentioned something, he'd pull out the relevant document from his cloak. If he phoned you, he'd say: "Ici *Zoon*!"

Mason and Terry grooved for years on characters like this in both the Village and Paris.

And then, of course, there was the writing. Early on, Terry developed the habits for composition that remained with him for the rest of his life. "Let discipline be my touchstone," he wrote in his journal of the early '50s, and later, toward fulfilling his minimum "page a day," he would say, "Get up, no matter what time, have

coffee and go to the desk. Chain yourself to the chair." In his writing, Terry relished Edgar Allen Poe's technique of "taking things further." Terry's tales began combining a Beat sensibility with a refined narrative prose style. He seemed to attempt to "one up" the stylings of the top scribes of the '30s and '40s — Flannery O'Connor, Hemingway, Faulkner, O'Henry — while introducing contemporary themes: race, drug use, politics. He was trying to make beautiful prose do something new and relevant.

Despite their cynicism about publishers, both Terry and Mason were eager to appear in print, and the burgeoning small presses springing up at the time offered possibilities. One of the first magazines to showcase new writers on the European scene in English was David Burnett's *New Story.* Its cutting-edge aspirations attracted Terry and Mason, Mordechai Richler, James Baldwin, and others. Mason had published in *Botteghe Obscura* and *Janus,* a literary magazine edited by Daniel Maroc, a translator of Melville and Rilke, who published French and American writing.

Another group, more well heeled, emerged in 1953, revolving around George Plimpton. William Styron was also involved. Plimpton later noted that Terry was partly responsible for the birth of *The Paris Review:*

> In the early stages of publishing a Paris-based *New Yorker* imitation entitled *The Paris News-Post,* its editors, Peter Matthiessen and Harold L. Humes, were so impressed by the strength of a story ["The Accident"] that they decided to scrap the *New Yorker* imitation and start a literary magazine.

Merlin, a more edgy literary magazine, was founded in 1952 by Alexander Trocchi, a Scottish poet with tremendous energy and wit. Shortly after the first issue, he was joined by Richard Seaver, a handsome, intense young man studying literature at the Sorbonne, who would soon marry the beautiful young Frenchwoman he met at the Paris Conservatory, Jeannette Medina, a budding violinist. Terry became especially friendly with this group, whom Beckett would later refer to as the *Merlin* "juveniles." Aside from Terry and

Mason, the Merlin group was the poorest of the expat lot. One future Merlin editor, Austryn Wainhouse, had toured Europe on a motor scooter before settling in Paris. Austryn spoke in a fluent but decidedly archaic eighteenth-century French and often wrote with a quill pen. Trocchi's girlfriend Jane Lougee, a banker's daughter from Maine, financed the magazine, at least in its early stages.

Terry found he had much in common with the Merlinois: he favored pot and hash as did Trocchi — as opposed to the scotch and schnapps of the *Paris Review* set — and they, like he, never seemed to require sleep. Terry was particularly taken by Trocchi and Christopher Logue, a British poet who exuded a kind of regal debauched enchantment. The two men, highly educated and decadent, their Olympian good looks and charm transcending their dire straits, were in stark contrast to the junkies and weirdos of the Village, who often seemed a bit cagey and somewhat dangerous.

It was Dick Seaver who gave *Merlin* its big break. In 1952 he was living on rue du Sabot — Street of the Wooden Shoe — just behind boulevard St. Germain and intersecting with rue Bernard-Palissy, home to the fledgling publisher Editions de Minuit. Passing that publisher's window one day, Seaver noted that two of the titles displayed were novels in French by Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* and *Malone meurt (Malone Dies)*. A Joyce fanatic, Seaver remembered that Beckett, himself a fervent Joycean, had written an article about *Finnegan's Wake* in Eugene Jolas's magazine *Transition* before the war. Intrigued, and curious about how this Irishman had moved from Joyce's inner circle to novel writing in French, he entered Minuit (which had once been the local bordello), mounted the rickety stairs, and bought both volumes. He read *Molloy* overnight and was stunned. Ditto *Malone Dies,* which he read a day or two later. Bringing them to Trocchi et al., he said in essence that this was the kind of author *Merlin* must publish. He recalls that the rarely-uttered word *genius* was mentioned. In any case, Seaver wrote an essay on Beckett in the second issue of *Merlin*. Then the director of Minuit, Jérôme Lindon, revealed that when Beckett was a member of the Resistance, he had written a novel in English called *Watt,* which had never been published. Seaver wrote to the

author, asking to see it for a possible excerpt in *Merlin*. For weeks there was no reply.

As Seaver recounts in the introduction to his anthology of Beckett's work, *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On,* published by Grove Press in 1976:

> We had all but given up when one rainy afternoon, at the rue du Sabot banana-drying *depot,* a knock came at the door and a tall, gaunt figure in a raincoat handed in a manuscript in a black imitation-leather binding, and left almost without a word. That night, half a dozen of us — Trocchi; Jane Lougee, *Merlin's* publisher; English poet Christopher Logue and South African Patrick Bowles; a Canadian writer, Charles Hatcher; and I — sat up half the night and read *Watt* aloud, taking turns till our voices gave out. If it took many more hours than it should have, it was because we kept pausing to wait for the laughter to subside.
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> We never had a real editorial discussion about which section we would use in the issue: Beckett had seen to that. He had specified which section we could use. . . . I suspect Beckett was testing the artistic fiber of *Merlin* in so specifying, for, taken out of context, that passage might well have been considered boring or pedantic, waggish or wearily experimental-for-experimental's-sake, by any literary review less dedicated to berating and attacking the Philistines without mercy.

Subsequently, Seaver, Trocchi, and the other editors decided to publish the book in its entirety. But for *Merlin* to publish books legally in Paris, it needed to demonstrate to the French authorities that they had a French business manager. Through Austryn Wainhouse they approached Maurice Girodias, who had just started a new publishing house, Olympia Press, and had a reputation for breaking ground where others feared to tread. Girodias was receptive, and he and *Merlin* agreed to publish *Watt* under a newly formed Olympia imprint, *Collection Merlin*.

The marriage of *Merlin* and Olympia was fortuitous for the young Americans, as it was for Girodias, for his previous publishing house, Editions du Chêne, a relic from another era, had been ig-

nominiously taken over by the giant publisher Hachette, leaving him angry and bruised. The appearance of these intense young people marked a new dawn, not only for Girodias, who was looking for new opportunities, but for a postwar world that was desperate for new expression.