
Jean-Philippe Toussaint

The Truth About Marie

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BIOGRAPHY Jean-Philippe Toussaint was born in Bruxelles in 1957.

PUBLICATIONS With Les Éditions de Minuit, most recently: *Fuir*, 2005 (prix Médicis 2005) (reissued in the collection “Double”, 2009); *Faire l’amour*, 2002 (reissued in the collection “Double”, 2009); *Autoportrait (à l’étranger)*, 2000; *La Télévision*, 1997 (reissued in the collection “Double”, 2002).



Storm, night, wind, rain, fire, lightning, sex and death. "Later, thinking back on the dark hours of that sweltering night, I realized we had made love at the same time, Marie and I, but not with each other."

The Truth About Marie is not, strictly speaking, a sequel, but rather a continuation of *Faire l'amour* and *Fuir*.

Later, thinking back on the dark hours of that sweltering night, I realized we had made love at the same time, Marie and I, but not with each other. At a certain time that night—it was during the first hot spell of the year; for three days in a row the temperature rose to over 100 degrees in the Paris area, and never went below the mid-eighties—Marie and I were making love in Paris in apartments that were barely half a mile apart as the crow flies. Obviously we couldn't imagine at the start of the evening—or later, or ever, it was simply inconceivable—that we would see each other that night, that before sunrise we would be together, and even that we would hold each other briefly in the darkened and disorderly hallway of our apartment. In all likelihood, given the hour at which Marie got home (to our house, or rather, to *her* house, since we had already been separated for more than four months), and the hour, almost identical, at which I got back to the small two-room place where I had been living since our separation, not alone, I was never alone—but it doesn't matter who I was with, that's not the point—it was probably 1:20 or 1:30 in the morning at the latest, the hour when Marie and I were making love at the same time in Paris that night, both of us slightly drunk, our bodies hot in the half-light, the wide open window not letting a breath of air into the bedroom. The air was static, humid, stormy, almost feverish, it did not cool down the atmosphere, but it did comfort bodies in the passive, mighty oppressiveness of the heat. It was before 2:00, I'm sure, I checked the time when the telephone rang. But I prefer to err on the side of caution when it comes to evoking the exact chronology of the events of that night, because one way or another a man's destiny is involved, or his death, it would be a long time before we would know whether or not he would survive.

I didn't even really know his name; it was an aristocratic name of some kind, Jean-Christophe *de G.* Marie had gone back with him to the apartment on rue de La Vrillière after dinner. It was the first time they were spending the night together in Paris; they had met in Tokyo in January during the opening of Marie's show at the Contemporary Art Space in Shinagawa.

It was just after midnight when they got back to the apartment on rue de La Vrillière. Marie had gone to get a bottle of grappa in the kitchen, they sat down in the bedroom at the foot of the unmade bed—pillows and cushions everywhere, their legs resting casually on the parquet floor. The apartment on rue de la Vrillière felt hot, dark, stagnant; the shutters had remained closed since the previous day to keep out the heat. Marie had opened the window and poured the grappa as she sat in the half-light, watching the liquid flow slowly into the glasses through the bottle's narrow silver dispenser, and straightaway she'd felt the grappa's perfume go to her head, mentally sensing its taste even before feeling it on her tongue, the taste buried inside her for several summers; this perfumed, almost syrupy taste of grappa that she probably associated with the island of Elba—had just resurfaced unbidden in her mind. She closed her eyes and took a sip, leaned over toward Jean Christophe de G. and kissed him, her lips warm, and the sharp sensation of chilliness and grappa on her tongue.

A few months earlier, Marie had put some software on her laptop that allowed her to download music, entirely illegally. Marie, who would have been the first to be surprised if anyone had commented on the illicit nature of what she was doing, Marie, my pirate, who, what's more, was paying a small fortune for a staff of lawyers and international legal experts to fight against her labels being knocked off in Asia, Marie had got up and walked through the room's dim light to download a soft, sweet dance tune on her laptop. She had found an old slow number that suited her mood, ultra kitsch and languid (we have, I'm afraid, the same tastes), and she began to dance by herself in the bedroom, slowly unbuttoning her blouse, coming back to the bed barefoot, her arms like sinuous snakes improvising Arabian arabesques in the air. She sat down next to Jean-Christophe de G., who slipped his hand tenderly beneath her blouse, but Marie arched abruptly, pushing him away in ambiguous exasperation, perhaps it was nothing more than an irritated "hands off," at the touch of his warm palm on her naked skin. She was too hot. Marie was too hot, she was dying from the heat, feeling clammy, sweaty, sticky, she had difficulty breathing in the stale, stifling air of the room. She ran out of the bedroom and returned from the living room with an electric fan that she plugged in at the foot of the bed, turning it immediately on high. The fan started up slowly, the blades soon reaching full speed and noisily blasting whirling puffs of air that whipped their

faces and made their hair dance before their eyes; he had to struggle to catch a lock of hair blowing across his forehead and she, docile, head lowered, amiably offered her hair to the wind, making her look crazy, or like Medusa. Marie and her exhausting love of open windows, open drawers, open suitcases, her love of disorder, clutter, chaos, havoc, dark maelstroms, moving air and gusts of wind.

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In the end they undressed and held each other in the half-light. Marie, at the foot of the bed, had stopped moving, she had fallen asleep in the arms of Jean-Christophe de G. The fan was turned down low in the bedroom, stirring up the warm air mixing with the stormy air of the night. The room was silent, lit only by the bluish glow from the laptop, whose screen had gone into sleep mode. Jean-Christophe de G. slipped gently from Marie's embrace and got up, naked, in two stages, heavily, helping himself with one hand, walking quietly on the creaky floorboards toward the window, where he gazed out at the street. Paris was numb with heat, it must still have been around 85° even though it was almost 1:00 in the morning. A bar in the distance, out of sight, had stayed open and voices could be heard in the depths of the night. A few cars went by in the halo of headlights, a pedestrian crossed the street heading toward the place des Victoires. On the opposite sidewalk, directly across from the apartment, rose the massive and silent silhouette of the Banque de France. The heavy bronze gate was locked, nothing was moving anywhere, and suddenly Jean-Christophe de G. had a dark foreboding, convinced that something tragic was about to happen in the calm of this stormy night, that from one moment to the next he would be witness to a wave of violence, stupor, and death, that alarms would go off behind the massive walls of the Banque de France, and the street below him would become a scene of car chases, collisions, people shouting, doors slamming, shots being fired, and police cars suddenly pulling up, their emergency lights whirling in the night, illuminating the building facades.

Jean-Christophe de G. stood naked at the window of the apartment on rue de La Vrillière, watching the night with a diffuse anxiety that weighed heavily on his chest, when he spotted a flash of lightning in the distance. A brief gust of wind washed over his face and upper body, and he noticed that the sky was completely black on the horizon, not the black of a summer night, transparent and blue-tinted, but a dense black, menacing and opaque. Huge storm clouds were approaching the area, moving inexorably in the sky, shrouding the last vestiges of clear night that still remained above the buildings of the Banque de France. There was another flash in the distance, near the Seine, in the direction of the Louvre, mute, strange, streaked, premonitory, with no lightning bolt, no thunderclap, a long, horizontal electrical discharge that ripped through the sky across some hundred yards and lit the horizon in white, staccato, startling, silent spasms.

Cooler air entered the room in swift, swirling flurries. Marie felt a *frisson* of cool wind skim her back and she took refuge in the bed, wrapping her shoulder in the sheet. She removed her socks and tossed them at the foot of the bed while Jean-Christophe de G. began to dress in the half-light; he was getting dressed again and she was undressing in a single parallel motion, with divergent goals. He put his pants back on and then his jacket. Before leaving, he went to sit a moment at Marie's side. He kissed her on the forehead in the half-light, brushed her lips with his, but the kisses lasted longer than a simple good bye, continued and became more heated; they held each other again and he wound up slipping back into bed, completely dressed, pressing himself against her under the sheets, in his black linen jacket and heavy cotton pants, his briefcase in his hand, which he wound up dropping to hold Marie. She was naked against him and he stroked her breasts, he heard her moan and he slid her little panties down along her thighs, Marie helped him by twisting around in the bed, Marie, panting, her eyes closed, unzipped Jean Christophe de G.'s fly and took out his penis, quickly, determinedly, somewhat urgently, with a gesture that was firm yet delicate, precise, as if she knew exactly where she was going, but once she got there suddenly did not know what to do. She opened her eyes, surprised, sleepy-headed, drowsy with alcohol and fatigue, realizing that above all she was tired, that the only thing she really wanted to do now was to sleep, in Jean-Christophe de G.'s arms, maybe, but not necessarily with his cock in her hand. She paused and, needing to do something with Jean-Christophe de G.'s cock, which she was still holding, she shook it, amiably, two or three times, out of curiosity, half-heartedly, she was holding it in her hand and waving it about, watching the result with curiosity and interest. What was she waiting for? For it to take flight? Marie had Jean-Christophe de G.'s cock in her hand and she didn't know what to do with it.

In the end, Marie fell asleep. She had dozed off for a few minutes, or else it was he who fell asleep first, they were hardly moving in the darkness, they continued to kiss, intermittently, in a shared half-sleep, dozing in each others' arms, stroking each other with fleeting, drowsy caresses (we call that "making love all night long"). Marie had undone the top buttons of Jean-Christophe de G.'s shirt and was lazily caressing his chest, he didn't stop her, he was hot, he was perspiring in his clothes under the sheets, he had a bit of a hard on, his penis neglected, abandoned out of his pants, still stirred by the occasional spasm, while Marie's hand moved about under his unbuttoned shirt that was damp and shapeless, its sides sagging and slack around him. She kissed him softly, she was slightly sweaty as well, her temples warm, and without realizing what she was doing, she began rifling through his pockets, sliding a hand into his jacket pocket, curious to find out what the hard, angular object was that pressed against his hip when he would hold her. A weapon? Could it be he had a weapon in his pocket?