

**Marcus Malte**

*Garden of love*

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TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH  
BY CARLA CALIMANI



**Biography:** Marcus Malte by himself. “I was born in 1967 in Seyne-sur-Mer, and there I stayed. By the sea. I studied cinema, but that didn’t work out too well. I was a musician for a while, but that didn’t work out too well. Now I’m trying to write stories. We’ll see. »

**Rights sold :** Italy, Spain, Poland, Vietnam

**Recent publications:**

*Toute la nuit devant nous* (Zulma, 2008, short stories)

*Intérieur nord* (Zulma, 2008, short stories)

*Garden of Love* (Zulma, 2007)

*Plage des Sablottes, souvenirs d'épaves* (Autrement, 2005)

*La part des chiens* (Zulma, 2003)

*Mon frère est parti ce matin...* (Zulma, 2003)

*Et tous les autres crèveront* (Zulma, 2001)

*Le vrai con maltais* (Le Seuil/Baleine, 1999)

*Carnage, constellation* (Fleuve noir, 1998)

*Le lac des singes* (Fleuve noir, 1997)

*Le doigt d'Horace* (Fleuve noir, 1996)

**Synopsis**

One day, Alexander Astrid receives an anonymous manuscript in the post entitled *Garden of Love*, a reference to the great British poet William Blake. It is not long before Alex, a screwed-up, drifting

cop, reads between the lines a troubling and even diabolical version of his own life.

Through the “dangerous liaisons” of a young trio - involving betrayed love, childhood scars, ghosts and monsters from bygone times - the mysterious omniscient narrator perversely begins a manipulative game as if he were playing chess. Alexander’s most painful memories are brought back to the surface, and he finds himself re-living a defining episode in his life: his encounter with Edward Dayms, a young man as brilliant as he is disturbed, with a terrifying hold on others. Alex does what he knows how to do best: he investigates, searches, pries. But this time, his subject-matter is his own past.

With the powerful mastery already displayed in *La part des chiens* (City of Saint-Quentin prize) and *Intérieur nord* (Rotary Club novel prize), Marcus Malte creates a fascinating world of violence and tenderness, populated by characters at the mercy of their deepest weaknesses. With an audaciously ambitious form, *Garden of Love* shows the fatal confrontation between past and present, reason and madness, a mercilessly Macchiavellian one-man show.

Marcus Malte pens a thrillingly assured novel, populated by mysterious and troubling voices that whisper secrets and lies, prompting temptation and remorse. A trap is set with assured aplomb.

## **Extract**

Schubert died when he was 31. Mozart was 35. I was fast approaching 37 and two thoughts kept nagging at me:

What had I done with my life?

What did I know about love?

These questions were as common as they were crucial. The answers should have finished me off. After visiting Florence, I didn’t sober up for two days. The third day and night I slept it off, sprawled on the floor of the children’s room. The angels didn’t give me any signs. I would have liked a helpful hand to knife me in the guts and have done with it. Please, please, I’m begging you to do this for me. But I can’t pull myself together. My prayers don’t go past my lips. Just a bit of spittle that’ll soon dry off. I close my eyes and feel the heat. The cold. The boiling heat. The freezing cold. My back against the floor, my arms stretched out to form a cross, but don't trust appearances, I’m tough-skinned, my carcass resists, the wreckage stays afloat and I’m breathing, bloody hell, I’m still breathing, here of all places, where they don’t breathe any more!

My life. My work.

I weigh out what I'm worth. Once I've pissed out the alcohol and blubbed out the tears, what's left? Lying on the floor I think back to the words of that mystical, mental hooker. I think back to the man in black. I think back to Lena and the angels, perfect and pure still, always. Everything's getting mixed up. As usual, my head and my veins are being gnawed at, I let the little bugs crawl about, hoping they'll eat me alive. But they aren't interested either. I'm rotten meat. So rotten inside that even the bloody bugs grimace and splutter and leave. I stay. I breathe.

I saw dawn break on the fourth day as if nothing was wrong. It seeps through the blinds and sunlight streaks the beds where they don't sleep any more. Why? Why bother bringing light? But the day couldn't care less about these details.

And then... And then I saw a face appear and it was you, Maria. It was you. There was no knife in your hand. Your hand helped me get back up. It lifted me off the ground. It stroked my hair. I had to admit life would go on.

I spent the fifth day walking on the wet sand and thinking. As a cop. As the good cop I was. I decided to make a few calls. Another 48 hours went by before I had my first one-on-one with the devil.

He had been issued with a summons and he was on time. Dressed in black, as usual. Judging by the photos and the limited information I had on him, I'd imagined some sort of little pretentious dandy. As soon as he came in, as soon as he looked me over, I realised that I'd been utterly mistaken.

Edward Dayms wasn't yet 20 years old. But his eyes made him much older. They were the eyes of a man who had travelled through space and time, had lived many lives and had come to the end of them. If the history of the world, past, present and future, is inscribed in each of us, as I believe it is, then Edward Dayms was one of the rare chosen ones able to decipher it. A gift that is perhaps only bestowed on geniuses and madmen. And a burden that is perhaps too heavy to bear.

Mozart, Schubert... As for Edward Dayms, he blew his brains out when he was 33. Yes, I choose my words carefully. I haven't fallen into some sort of easy esotericism. I don't share the blind idolatry of a certain Florence Mazeau. I'm no longer under the influence of alcohol. Years have passed, and now I believe that I've distanced myself enough to write down the events that took place. I know what I'm saying.

Edward Dayms was by far the worst bastard I've ever met, but that's no reason to deny him his... his "powers". It's impossible to understand what happened and believe this story without accepting that he was a unique being set apart from the rest of us. Ed the devil, Ed the sorcerer, Ed the madman,

Ed the killer... He could be called all these things, and plenty more. Some aspects of his personality will always remain a mystery, impenetrable. And although I stop myself short of calling them “supernatural”, some of the abilities he possessed and developed were extraordinary to say the least. It is not by denigrating the powers of evil that we will succeed in overcoming it.

At the time, I still had a private office. With my name on the door. Someone brought in Edward Dayms and we found ourselves alone, just the two of us. I asked him to sit down, then I feigned ignorance of his presence, seemingly absorbed in the process of reading a file. Let him stew: that’s how I thought I’d play it to begin with. Classic technique. Far too basic to have any effect whatsoever on this one. I forced myself to pretend to read, but it was I who felt increasingly uncomfortable. I held out for as long as I could.

When I shut the file and looked up, I realised that Edward Dayms was paying no attention to me. He was studying the photo in a small frame on the corner of my desk. The famous Christmas photo with Helen, wearing her blue earrings, and the two angels dressed up as sheriffs. Edward Dayms was staring at this photo with incredible intensity. I suppose he’d already started to explore behind the scenes, beyond appearances, where scars and secrets flourished. That’s where he got everything.

I had no suspicions. I even took advantage of this moment myself to study his face. Edward Dayms possessed a great, cold beauty - when I say this, I’m thinking of a stunning snowscape, devoid of any human trace - marred only by the thin cut under his eyebrow. I was certain that, unlike Florence, he didn’t do drugs. His “trip” was of another, far more powerful, kind. The silence had lasted long enough. I was about to break it when Edward Dayms beat me to it. “They didn’t have time to catch many bandits, did they?”

Those were the first words he said to me. Not actually a question, in truth. Just the right tone. He was still staring at the photo. My mouth was half-open. I wasn’t sure that I’d understood. “The little sheriffs...” he clarified. “How old were they?”

I looked at the photo, then back at him. I heard myself say: “Six and eight”.

I immediately regretted it. My jaw snapped shut, so hard that my teeth clunked. But it was too late. Edward Dayms looked deep into my eyes. Quietly victorious. He’d just wanted to give me a small indication of the forces present. A warning.

From that moment, there weren’t that many options: either I begged for mercy or charged straight at him, kamikaze-style.

Obviously, I opted for the latter - it was too good an opportunity to miss.

Slowly, I picked up the photo and put it face-down on my desk, so he could no longer see it. Then I

said: “Who do I have the pleasure of meeting today? Matthew? Ariel? Edward? Or maybe someone else? Someone new?”

A hint of a smile, a sad smile, crossed his face. Perhaps he was sincerely sorry that I wasn’t giving up. “Florence told me about your visit,” he said.

“Does she always tell you everything?”

“Everything that’s important to her. I believe that I’m a very good listener.”

“That works out well, because so am I. So we should be able to understand one another.”

The same pained smile crossed his face. I was annoyed at myself for coming out with these lame one-liners. A cop cliché. I needed to raise my game.

“So,” I said. “What’s with this Siamese twin business?”

“It’s just a little game we like to play,” replied Edward Dayms. “I, you, he... When one withdraws, another one takes his place. Which one depends on the subject.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning the different facets of our personality, if you like. As you know well, Mr Astrid, each of us is in fact several people at once. So why not try to get to the bottom of things? Try to give form to what initially seems to be an inner voice. It is a rather disturbing experience, I must admit. Even quite dizzying, at times.”

“To which we can add “dangerous”.”

“It’s true that it does pose certain risks. No doubt this is why most people refuse to take the leap.”

“Which isn’t the case for you, it would seem.”

Edward Dayms intensified his gaze.

“And what about you, Mr Astrid? Have you never been tempted? A change. A conversion... If you were given the choice, for example, between the person you are and the person you would like to be?”

“Oh, because you can choose, can you?”

“You can learn anything.”

“As far as I’m concerned, it’s already bad enough being myself...”

“That is exactly the kind of preconception that holds us back. “To be yourself”, what does that mean? Absolutely nothing. What is “I”? It is an illusion. One among many others. You have not been listening to me, Mr Astrid: we are multiple. We are a multitude. Open the cage and you will see how many fly out.”

A pause.

Ed the manipulator... He could have made mincemeat of me there and then. I was well aware that he was leading me exactly where he wanted, how he wanted. On slippery ground that was his and where I didn't stand a chance. I was well aware that the little 19-year-old shit had me in the palm of his hand. But how to fight it? How to resist it?

Edward Dayms created his own beings. If there was a single adversary worthy of him, it could only be God our Father. All my pathetic acts of rebellion, all my measly moments of pride must have either made him pity me or wet himself laughing.

I didn't like his superior attitude. I didn't like his psycho-mystical gobbledygook. I didn't like his way of saying "Mr Astrid", which reminded me of Florence, although it was much more insidiously penetrating. I didn't like his hypnotic gaze. I promised myself that I'd string him up. Another unkept promise.

Edward Dayms was sat in front of me, and I could see my struggling self reflected back in the depths of his eyes.

"What you're up to is anything but an innocent little game!" I said. "Florence Mazeau, for one, firmly believes in it."

"She's a sensitive, romantic young woman."

"She's a prostitute."

"I wasn't talking about her work."

"Well, let's talk about it! What is Florence to you? You both seem very close. When did you meet?"

"Last year. At college."

"Love at first sight?"

"More of a... mutual acknowledgement."

"Oh I see! And did you acknowledge her rates too?"

He sized me up in silence for a brief moment - the time to adjust his target. I learnt at my own expense that every arrow aimed at him was sent back ten times stronger. And poisoned.

"We can always predict the price we will have to pay for our actions, Mr Astrid. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a coward."

That hit me deep inside, I shuddered within. Up to my very core. I must have made a huge effort to keep my head straight. Not to look at the little overturned photo frame.

Still I continued to dig my own hole.

"You're not going to tell me that you never touched this girl?"

"What do you mean?"

“What do you think I mean? I’m asking you if you’ve slept with her. If you’ve had sexual intercourse. Free or paid for.”

“No. We don’t have that kind of relationship.”

“What a surprise! I was sure you’d come out with something like that.”

“You really are so unbelievably clever.”

The bastard didn’t even bother smiling any more.

“Whatever,” I said. “So, what kind of “relationship” did you have?”

“I like to think that Florence needs me.”

“Oh really? To do what? Protect her, perhaps? Support her?”

“Are you planning to accuse me of being a pimp, Mr Astrid?”

“Why not?” I said angrily. “For want of anything else.”

He looked at my clenched fist on the desk, with its protruding bones and white knuckles. He nodded his head. Then with his deadly soft voice, with that bloody voice that strokes petals before tearing them off, he said: “I understand. I know what it feels like. When pain flares up, becomes rage. Your fist needs to hit something. Tough luck to whoever happens to be passing... (He sat up in his chair. Took a deep breath. Continued in the same soft tone)... You and I are not so very different, Mr Astrid. We have a lot in common. Neither of us wanted to hear the voices behind us. The screams. The cries for help. We blocked out the shouting. We kept on running, running, running. We failed. And the silence is a constant reminder. The silence that reigns at present is worse than anything. Of course I understand... Ah! If only we could make up for it! If only we could explode the silence. Blow it to shreds. If only we could hear their prayers again. And answer them. At any cost.”

“You see, Mr Astrid, I love Florence. I love her... as a sister.”

He stopped talking. I’d hung on his every word. Passive. Numbed.

When I think back to that first meeting, I tell myself that Edward Dayms was already showing me certain paths to follow, portals into his world. Undoubtedly he wanted me to enter it, as a visitor at least. He showed me ways in, here and there, all that was left was for me to find the access codes. But I didn’t manage it in time.