

BERROCA

by Julie Burchill

Last night I dreamt I was hanging at Madderley again, like back in the day. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive for way long, feeling well scorched because no sucka would let me in. There was a padlock and a chain upon my arms and legs and these seemed to both hold me back and yet be the clue to my freedom. I stood there like for ages just obsessing on this.

And then I remember the magic word - and it was a name.

Re-becc-a.

Three syllables.

Sounds like 'Berroca'. But different.

Me, but at my best.

Blank of my blunt, riddle to my enigma, hole in my Krispy Kreme.

RE-BECC-A.

It was majestic the day in early May that Maxi de Winter, superstar DJ, 'coptered me back as his blushing, head-rushing bride to the Madderley House of Fun - about five o'clock, just in time for that tea-time E. I can see myself now, unsuitably dressed as usual in a snood, schoolgirl uniform and high-heeled sneakers, just marvelling at how this had happened. No word, I was twenty-six and a half and looking down the wrong end of a tequila gun at ten summers in San An. The back end of a baker's dozen dance videos. Remember the third lesbo stripper from the left in the Spirit/Soul remix of 'Trash My Arse' by the Dirty Blondes?

That was me.

It was awesome, Cornwall. Like Ibiza, but boring. While Maxi got on the bone to his boy in Newquay, I necked half an E and went down to the jetty. I was just about to take the edge off when I felt this like presence in my retro vista.

Lo and bo, it was this senior honey, a coffee-coloured cougar if you will, ketching me. And she

said: 'Madam?'

I was about to vitez-vousz when I caught it. 'Yeah, yeah - I am!' It struck me as so transastically humorous that I was this respectable person and being addressed in the manner by this really hot Asian babe-dominatrix type. 'But you can call me Berroca.'

She gave me this look, like I'd showed her my nee-hee and asked her to blow a line up it. But then she looked closer at me and her face sort of...opened up, like a fast-mo flower on a nature programme, or like my gran when she passed over.

(And I loved my gran and all! 'You're pretty enough to be a prostitute, my little love,' she told me tenderly when I was nine, on Christmas Day after the Queen's Speech. 'Don't you never get a proper job!' My mother, the cow, heard her, and gave her a right mouthful. But luckily, the damage had been done. I never was a pro (though there had been that hazy summer when I was sort of salaried girlfriend to that third-rate local DJ the White Van Hopper) but I never got a proper job, either - the best/worst of both worlds. And now, well before I hit the big three-oh, my prince had arrived, riding on a big white line, to save me from that sad old San An tragic roundabout of BJs, ODs and DOAs.)

Anyways...

'Berroca...what an unusual name.'

'Good, innit? I got it 'cos it was the only thing I could keep down for 36 hours after I did E, when I first went to San An when I was a kiddy. But!' And here I held up my first finger, right hand. 'I did a twist on it. WITH TWO Rs, NOT ONE! In case of breach of copyright...'

Here I became aware that she was holding out something white with a pair of tongs; some sort of exotic bread, perhaps. She wasn't to know we'd been off our tits on gak in the 'copter, bless; obvo thought I was hungry. So I took it politely and was chewing it dutifully - it was sort of tough, to be honest, but then I figured it might be what they call an acquired taste, like olives and fellatio - rather than offend her culture, when from behind me I heard That Voice.

'Mrs Verdun, you appear to be attempting to choke my new wife to death with a face flannel. And her only chatelaine-in-residence for half an hour! Have you no shame?'

Ooo... THAT VOICE! It hit me RIGHT WHERE I LIVED, if you get my drift. If anyone ever said to me, on national TV, right? 'Berroca Glass, why did you marry middle-aged multi-millionaire superstar DJ Maxi de

Winter?' I know straightaway what I'd say and it ain't that he's a superstar DJ, no way!

Max's voice...you know -- or maybe you're like DEAD and you don't -- that all the superstar DJs had a gimmick. Fatboy had his lairy Hawaiian shirts, Mark Moore had his red phone, Judge Jules had his bugle - well, Maxi's gimmick was his voice. But that's a bit like saying that a unicorn's gimmick is its tusk, horn, whatever. It seems silly to call something so magical a trick. Tell you what, his voice was like some perve had mixed sperm with honey, warmed it up a bit and then poured it in your ear. Of course, you'd have to keep your head to one side, or otherwise it would all run down your face, and that wouldn't be poetic or magical at all - just more of a boring home movie sort of thing. Everyone loved it, and he'd tease the crowd at Space or Pacha by just speaking these really few words - 'COME ONNN!' - 'YOU LOVE IT!' - between tracks. So when he came up behind me on the jetty and started talking to Mrs V, I was getting all lathered up and ready to roll. Especially when she just stropped off.

Maxi and I just stood there, looking at each other and laughing - not specially at her, but at ourselves, the universe and everything. We were in that THE

WONDER OF US bit; let's face it, I'd wasted enough time on the White Van Hoppers of this world to know a good guy when I finally saw one, and Maxi was it. I don't just say it 'cos he was posh and rich; it's the little touches that money can't buy that make a gentleman, like warning you before he chokes you when he's doing you from behind. Or handing you a tissue after the One-Eyed Pirate.

Manners, see. They can't be bought.

And another thing - he'd never asked me to have a threesome. Excuse me - unusual or what? To men these days, asking for a threesome on the second date is about as unexpected as them offering you a line of coke. Especially in Ibiza - no man has a Plus Ones on the door any more, they have Plus Twos if they're at the bottom of the food chain, way up to Plus Ten for a SDJ - all girls, all hot. And of course everyone in the club is meant to believe he's gonna bang each and every one of them at bedtime. Hmm...like he's NOT going to be off his bonce on Class As by then, and about as much use as a Cheesy Wotsit in a tsunami.

It's funny what you get used to. I mean when you're a little kid you dream about meeting The One - not The One and the Plus One. Yet before Maxi, I'd been with

blokes I'd mistaken for real good guys because they asked me what sort of girl I preferred as a third - blonde or dark.

(Time-saving tip: when a man asks you your preferred sort of girl, DON'T bother saying 'Invisible!' I've tried it - never works.) It didn't used to be this way, apparently: men thought they were like living it up big-time if they copped off with one decent-looking girl whose surname they didn't know. But now it's changed for sure, and I reckon it's because recently so many men are afraid of the Muslims; they try to be more like them so as to blend in. And they don't wanna forsake bacon sandwiches, so they go 'Hey, sheikh-features, you've got ten wives, a harem, whatever - look, I've got a bunch of bitches too! I've copied you - don't bomb me, pleeeze!' I mean, each to his own, but isn't this going BACKWARDS? What comes next - living up trees and searching each other for fleas?

Only asking...

(And anyway, it's certainly someone to talk to after the Main Attraction, King Cock The One-Minute Wonder, has hit the V.I.P Enclosure of the Land of Nod. But the thing is, Max never even asked.

And, if you wanna be icky about that, I respected

him for that. I respected him for respecting me. When there was so little to respect...)

'Shall we, Mrs de Winter?' Maxi put out his arm to me like something off the Quality Street tin and I actually felt myself blush. How weird is it that men treat girls so dodgy these days that when they step it up, so they're like a drawing of a bloke on a tin of rubbish sweets, it's something that makes us come over all soft-centred and gooey! Like a rubbish old melted Toffee Finger...

He gave me his arm and I minced up the Madderley driveway to the manner born. And I felt like I was giving the toffee finger to the world...

The next day, Maxi went to Dubai to DJ and I decided to nose around Madderley properly for the first time. Of course he'd shown me the house, after a fashion, but I'd mostly seen ceilings and floors, as you do.

'You don't have to worry about the house,' Maxi had told me as we lay in each other's arms after he'd tenderly dabbed Dettol on my welts. 'Mrs Verdun does everything. All you have to do is make me happy. And be happy yourself, of course.'

'Making you happy makes ME happy,' I said. And I

meant it.

'Then we're going to have a rather satisfactory marriage, I'll wager,' he said. That Voice! He must have seen the look in my eye, because he flipped me over and we were off again.

I'd felt so close to him after he'd done me five different ways, I told him all my secrets. Stuff I never told anyone - stuff that it seemed to me was so much the opposite of the Berroca Glass I'd always shown to the world that I might even disappear if I said it. Like the fact that ever since I was twenty-three, I'd been going back to England in the low season, and trying to do normal jobs, and failing at them all miserably. The last time I did it, I was working in a shoe shop in a West End department store, and a girl I recognized from Ibiza - young, posh - came in, high and loaded, and gave her young posh friends a right laugh by making me bring out twenty-five boxes. Twenty-five, that is, before I ran out of the shop and vomited into the gutter and never went back.

Posh girls ruined Ibiza. Their confidence. They can do anything, no matter how slaggy, and somehow they get away with it because they know at least three foreign words for it. Whereas if you only know the

English word for what you do, it means you're a slag. Whereas it should just show that you're honest.

Maybe it was because of this that I wanted so much to be a photographer. On the other side of the lens, my age, my voice, my everything couldn't be used against me. I felt unsafe at first saying this, but every time Maxi squeezed my hand or nodded, I felt braver. And told him more.

I don't think I've ever slept as deeply as I did that night, 'cept when I've blacked out drunk of course, and when I woke up I felt brand new, born again. Maxi was long gone, on the way to Dubai, but as I remembered the night before, and how I'd told him everything there was to know, I felt such a massive rush of love for him I leapt out of bed laughing. I was going to search the house from top to bottom to find out everything about him...

There was a floor above us, I knew; it had some sort of baby-gate at the bottom. I'd asked Maxi the night before and he said it was just a really drab and dull part of the house that he'd never had the time or inclination to renovate. Well, maybe I could show him just how much I loved him by doing it for him...

The minute I got to the top of the stairs it felt like

another world - or rather, it smelt like one. The rest of Madderley smelt like an explosion in a fizzy sweet factory; up there, I can only describe it as the smell of the saddest flower in the world - a flower that knows that it's going to die. And the colours - whereas downstairs it was like a kiddy had run amok with a palette of primary coloured poster paints, up here everything was...

'It's all so black and white,' I said in wonderment as I stepped over the threshold of a big, beautiful, airy bedroom with a high white ceiling and shining black beams.

'Everything IS black and white,' said Mrs Verdan, coming out of the en suite, black and white bathroom, folding a white pillowcase with black edging. 'The only people who think it's not are the people who've had some of the grey rub off on them...'

'That's clever!' I went to the window seat and sat down. 'Did you make that up?'

Mrs Verdan smiled and shook her head. 'No. It's from a detective novel. It was one of Rebecca's favourite sayings.'

'Rebecca?'

She turned and looked straight at me. 'The first Mrs

de Winter.'

No word, you could have knocked me down with a Fetherlite. I began to choke, and clutched at my throat. As I did so Mrs Verdan darted forwards and pulled my hand away. 'What are those marks on your neck!'

'I - I just did it to myself,' I said weakly.

'Don't be so STUPID!'

'I...fell. On a...choker!' I ventured hopefully.

'And I'm a superstar DJ!' tutted Mrs Verdan. She walked towards the door. 'Come on. Time for tea and sympathy.'

Next door was a spotless sitting room with a little kitchenette; again, everything black and white. The sad smell was still there, but less so.

Mrs Verdan saw me sniff. 'Tuberose. It was Rebecca's favourite scent...'

I shook my head. 'I didn't even know there WAS a Rebecca...'

Mrs V started doing her thing with the crockery. 'It was in the papers when she died, just before he made it really big...'

'I've been abroad for most of the past ten years. And I don't read the papers. Never have,' I admitted.

'You probably wouldn't have recognized the names

anyway. He's not REALLY called 'de Winter', you know...'

'Really?' I felt really sad, like someone had died. Which they had, of course. Rebecca.

'His real name's Paul Prattley. Not such a cool handle for a superstar DJ, is it!'

'So I'm...MRS PRATTLEY?!' I couldn't help it, I burst into tears. In a moment, I felt Mrs V's arms around me...

And by the time Maxi got back from Dubai, I was SO over it...

Which was a good thing too, as he wasn't alone...

'Who's this? Your sister with a different mister?' I quipped, shooting evils at the dusky piece of jailbait he'd picked up in the Land of Ceaseless Shopping.

'This is Nabila,' he smirked, shoving her towards me. She held out her arms and made a kissy-face. She wasn't displaying none of that fabled Muslim modesty, that much was for sure!

I shoved a tenner at her. 'Here, nip into Newquay and get yourself a lollipop.' I turned back to Maxi. 'Why didn't you tell me about Rebecca?'

He looked bored. 'Oh, has Mrs V been telling tales? Trying to keep her lady love's memory alive?'

I wasn't shocked; Mrs V had told me as much. As well as letting me in on the fact that while Rebecca was supposed to have died 'accidentally', off her head and tumbling into the sea from the de Winter pleasure-boat, 'Powder Monkey', she, Mrs V, believed that Rebecca had been doped and drowned by none other than one Paul Prattley Esq. when she finally called a halt to the threesomes. Because, and he wasn't feeling this ONE BIT, because she was already tucked up tidy with Mrs V! And the way they looked at it, three was a crowd - and thus they were planning to do a runner with a huge hunk of cash-in-hand moolah that Maxi had hidden one night after coining it big-time on Millennium Eve. Hence the 'accidental' drowning...

'Don't try and shift the blame. Why didn't you tell me that you were married? Why didn't you tell me about Rebecca?'

He looked well miz. 'What would have been the point? I loved her; she played me - with every man, woman and beast that set foot inside Madderley; I didn't love her; she got depressed and would be out of her mind on drink and drugs for days on end; she drowned.' He looked at me beseechingly. 'It was a nightmare. The whole sad fiasco made me realize that

when you meet posh girls in Ibiza, nine times out of ten they're crazy. And crazy ISN'T sexy, when you get right to the heart of it - crazy is SCARY.' He reached out his hand to touch my face. 'I was burned bad, Berroca. That's why I never wanted to commit to any woman again. Till I met you...'

You know what, I near enough melted right there and then; everyone wants to be wanted, needs to be needed, don't they? My wavering must have shown on my face, because before I knew it Maxi was on top of me, breathing in my ear with That Voice... 'Come ONNN...you LOOOVE it...'

I realized that he was looking over my head and twisted round to see his souvenir of Dubai still lurking in the doorway, oblivious to the lure of Newquay's finest confectioners. 'You!' I yelled in exasperation. 'Can't you go and do something to that moustache of yours? From where I'm lying it's older than you are!'

I didn't know what the freak I was saying by this point, but my aim must have been more or less true because Junior burst into tears, only to be marched firmly off by Mrs V. 'You're going to have to go back to London and thence from whence you came, dear,' I could hear her saying, firm but kind. 'This house is no

place for children - there's a reason why it's called adultery...'

I smiled at Maxi triumphantly from my prone position, and a truly grotty sulking look took hold of his face. Ick - why had I EVER thought he was like a CATCH? A prize, even! Booby prize, more like!

'I see you've got Mrs V going through the same routine she learned at Rebecca's knee - or feet, rather,' he said bitchily, like an old queen, releasing my arms and standing up. 'Doing her Taliban routine at the merest whiff of fun -'

'Not only is that statement offensive to a lady of the Sikh persuasion, it's inaccurate, too,' I said smugly, jumping to my feet and brushing myself down. I was well tarted up especially for the Big Boss Man's homecoming, and I could feel his eyes creeping all over me. Why had I ever thought that was a nice feeling? Low self-esteem, I think they call it. Like feeling grateful if a slug slimes all over you or something - 'Ooo, he must really like me, to leave a slimy trail on me!' As IF!

'Looking good, Berroca...' He looked closer. 'WHAT THE! - you're wearing...'

'Rebecca's favourite playsuit,' I finished. Of course I

was; Mrs V had picked it out for me three hours earlier when we'd hatched our cunning plan. It was tighter than a tourniquet and shorter than my attention span, with a long zip that started at the low neck and ran all the way around, eventually splitting the whole garment into two parts, just hanging by a thread...

'Rebecca and me had some fun with her wearing that,' he said, putting his hand out and playing with the zip. 'When I came back from a gig, I'd call her and tell her if I was bringing a little souvenir back with me. And if she had the playsuit on' - and here he leered horribly - 'it meant she was ready to plaaay...'

It was like he was hypnotized; hypnotized by his own dick, as often happens to men in my experience, and under the influence there was no way these guys feel at all responsible for their own actions. He cracked open a bottle of Jagermeister and washed two blue pills down with it. He offered me two; I spat them back into the bottle, betting that he was already too loaded to notice.

'And Rebecca played a lot, didn't she, Maxi...because she really wanted to, or because she was afraid of losing you...'

'A bit of both, really,' he said in this sing-song voice,

dead creepy. 'I was just starting to make it really big, and she was just an ordinary, beautiful, intelligent girl with nothing special to offer...'

Reader, will you get these guys! Do they have Magic Mirrors or what!

'And so I guess she realized that the way to keep me was to set me free...' Scratch a hipster and find a Hallmark card! 'But then she met Mrs V - took a shine to her - moved her in as housekeeper while I was away one time.' He laughed nastily. 'It was a right happy homecoming, so to speak - walked in and found them starkers going at it in the window seat in Rebecca's room. I was just getting naked when they stop what they're doing - and believe me, they were DOING A LOT! - and tell me to get out! ME!' He snorted disbelievingly. 'And you'll never guess what crap they came out with next-'

'Go on.' I was fascinated by his swinish take on events, even though I'd heard it all from Mrs V a few hours before.

'They said it was private. PRIVATE! Two good-looking women having sex!' He shook his head incredulously. 'I didn't mind her having a soft spot for Mrs V. I'm not the jealous type - and I'm certainly not a

racist! But PRIVATE...' He shook his head uncomprehendingly, swigging from the bottle. 'What's private about girl-on-girl! If ANYTHING was meant to be looked at, it's THAT!'

'Well, listen...' I had the words ready, just like Mrs V had coached me. 'I think you'll find she's changed her mind now...' I attempted what I hoped was a seductive smile, though it felt like a death's head grin from my side.

'Mrs V?' Maxi gaped unattractively. 'How - what did you do?'

'What do you think?' I leered.

He burst out laughing, drank deeply and hugged me tight, stinking of booze and perviness. 'Berroca, my little chav princess! So you've managed to reach the places that Rebecca's cultured fingers couldn't! Good call!'

'Just tell me one thing, Maxi...' And here I put his fingers on the playsuit zipper so as to make the question playful rather than accusing. 'Why didn't you ever ask me for a threesome all that time we were together in Ibiza?'

He laughed, flicking the zipper. 'I was waiting till we were married. And you didn't expect it. It's no fun just

seeing one San An slapper with another San An slapper - same old same old! But my WIFE with a kiddy-whore - COME ON! YOU KNOW YOU LOOOVE IT!' He looked at me with real admiration, the sicko. 'But THAT'S why you sent Jailbait cracking, and Mrs V set her on her way...'cos you two had an EVEN BETTER surprise for me...' He looked around groggily, the drunken old fool. 'Where is she...where's Mrs V...'

'She's waiting for us on the Powder Monkey...'

'On the...ohhh! I SEE! It's a PROPER game, innit...' He snickered smuttily to himself. 'I LIKE!'

We'll see how much you like this game, hombre! I thought grimly as I led the gibbering idiot through the French windows, across the lawns and down to the jetty, where the Powder Monkey was moored. Mrs V stood on the deck in a long black halter dress, champagne and three glasses on a silver tray in her hand.

'What kept you both?' she purred. 'I was just about to start without you...'

The clown who called himself Maxi de Winter stumbled and almost fell flat on his face as he boarded the boat in his haste to taste the henceforth forbidden fruit that was Mrs V.

'Steady on!' Mrs V steadied him, which he was sober enough to turn swiftly into a full-on grope. 'Well, I think that YOU TWO may have started without me!' She turned to me and winked. 'Is that right, Madam!'

I giggled in a drug-sodden manner and ran my hands down my body. 'I was born ready, baby!'

'Too right!' Maxi shoved me towards her. 'And don't call her madam - call her BEE-YATCH!' And with this supremely uxorious utterance, he began to tear recklessly at his clothing.

'Now hold that thought RIGHT THERE,' Mrs V hissed harshly; both Maxi and me stared at her amazed. She handed me a black-and-white striped scarf, scented with Rebecca's sad flower. 'You let US take control of you now. The two of us...together. I promise you, you won't know where one ends and the other begins...'

Talk about like a lamb to the slaughter! Or rather, a sham to the water. Dangle a bit of dyke action in front of 'em, and a good proportion of men will, apparently, sign their own death warrant.

'Course, he thought better of it towards the end. But shortly after that, he went under for the last time, so it was a bit late really. But not too late for him to reveal

the whereabouts of that fat wad of tax-free rainy-day dosh in exchange for his life - a bargain I'm afraid we broke. Women, eh - don't trust us! We'll get you every time...

'The window seat! In Rebecca's room!' Mrs V marvelled as we dashed up there. 'Of course! Who ever lifts the lid of a window seat...' She looked a bit miz, no doubt remembering the first time she ever got it on with the boss-lady on that very spot. But she soon cheered up when we lifted the lid and got an eyeful of EXACTLY HOW MUCH one night of a superstar DJ's life had been worth, cash in hand, once upon a time.

Talk about two tons of fun!

And before you could say, 'Home Jamelia, and don't spare the 'copter,' I'm wearing tweed, twin-set and pearls and waiting on the landing pad for Mrs Verdan, Ibiza-bound. We're gonna cast Rebecca's ashes over the sea she loved, and then when we land, Mrs V and I are going to get to know each other a little better. We might come back for the reading of the will, but I don't reckon there's gonna be that much for me on the dotted line. As opposed to under the padded seat! But there'll be the insurance of course...

Who's this! Why, it's Mrs V, in her flying leathers, a smile tugging at the corners of her stern, sexy mouth and the whiff of kerosene intoxicating on her long, lovely fingers. 'Get in,' she says, opening the passenger door, 'it's going to blow any minute....'

'It's not the only one...' I wink at her over my tweedy shoulder as I step up into the helicopter.

And she smacks me lightly on my tight tweedy BTM and smiles properly now. 'Will Madam be requiring anything else?'

'Yes, but not while you're driving...' I smoulder.

She laughs, and it's like a threat. Yummy!

'Here we are,' she suddenly says. 'This is where we leave her.' She indicates a black-and-white china jar on the floor. 'You do it, Berroca. You're the second Mrs de Winter. It's up to you to lay the first one to rest.'

I pick up the jar and take off the lid and lean close to the window. And for once in my life, I don't screw it up; the ashes don't blow back in my face, I don't drop the jar - nothing! Just a gentle breeze and a whiff of tuberose and the last of the first Mrs de Winter is borne away down to the sea. 'Goodbye, Rebecca,' I whisper.

Tell you one thing I know - if the good life's not

handed to you on a silver platter, all you can do is hang on like hell and try not to chip your Hard Candy in the process. So I've grabbed my girl and my chance. I'm out of England and heading for the great unknown. And I gotta say, it feels sweet.

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