

JJ SANDRAS

CONRAD & ALICE

EPISODE 5 THE ECOLOGY MURDER



EPISODE 6 THE SPACE-TIME BUBBLE MURDER



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Conrad & Alice

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BOOKS IN FRENCH:

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Guy Marais, détective privé

Les mésaventures comiques d'un détective privé sud-africain à Paris.

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Conrad & Alice and the ecology murder

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**Conrad & Alice
and the space-time
bubble murder**

To my Himalayan brothers, Yuba Raj and Karsang.

*Not all of the characters, names and events
in this book are entirely fictitious.*

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CHAPTER 1

SAME PHILOSOPHY, DIFFERENT ATTITUDES

“This man will certainly interest you,” said Alice on her cell phone.

“And why’s that?” asked Conrad.

“Because he’s onto a mystical path.”

“There are so many people doing that these days,” said Conrad. “Religions are losing followers to meditation groups and the like because of the spiritual wave sweeping across our planet since the beginning of the third millennium.”

“Then André Malraux was right,” said Alice with a giggle.

“Right about what?” asked Conrad.

“When he said that the third millennium had to be spiritual in order to exist.”

“So the third millennium is saved!” exclaimed Conrad with a laugh. “But why are you telling me about your latest patient?”

“Because you both say the same things but very differently.”

“I don’t get you.”

“The poor man is so unhappy,” said Alice, “about mystical teachings that comfort you.”

“And so?” Conrad was confused.

“I believe that you could help this man.”

“But you are the shrink!”

“And you the Buddhist!”

They both laughed and agreed to meet in the Café Fusain near Conrad’s apartment.

Readers having already read an episode of the Conrad and Alice series can skip the next two paragraphs.

Conrad was well into his sixties and had spent most of his adult life in the computer world before it changed dramatically in the early years of the third millennium with internet. He was neither fat nor thin and his face was rather square. His hair was closely cropped as well as his beard and moustache. With good eyesight for his age he didn’t wear glasses. He had earned a good living by working in various countries, mainly in Western Europe, as a software engineer in main line systems. Having grown up in sunny South Africa he started his computer career with IBM in Johannesburg in the late nineteen-sixties before moving to France six years later because of a serious emotional attack. He had fallen in love with a young French girl on holiday south of the Limpopo River who had responded favourably to his amorous advances but who insisted on going back to her country. If he wanted to carry on their lovely relationship he had to follow her. He wanted to and thereafter they spent ten years together in France before the young lady complained of his being a workaholic. The truth is his job took so much of his time and energy that she said she was living with a phantom who was often away for several days at a time and when at home too tired to pay her the attention a woman expects of her man. The flame of passion had diminished with time and after their separation Conrad lived mainly for his job which he continued to find

most interesting and his interest with the Dalai Lama’s version of Buddhism. Although he was vegetarian and a teetotaler he was no ascetic. He continued to frequent friendly females. Being good looking and kindly disposed to women, he obtained what he desired while giving as much, if not more, than he took. Now that he was on pension he remained in Paris, a city he loved, and spent most of his time as a tourist in that famous world capital. His desire for intimate relationships with women had dwindled to the point of his being content to only spend time with them as friends.

Alice was tall, slim with long silky light brown hair falling gently on her shoulders. With an oval face she was an attractive woman of twenty-six who loved her job as psychologist to the point of being a workaholic which perturbed her love life. Her boyfriend put up with her because he knew she didn’t sleep around and that her relationship with Conrad was purely platonic; two workaholics. The young lady had met Conrad recently at the annual Paris Book Festival when they bumped into each other accidentally. When moving in a dense crowd one inevitably bumps into people and their encounter was truly unintended by either of them unless one wants to believe it was their karma. After apologising to each other in French at the same time they both burst out laughing and ended up having a cup of coffee together. She liked Conrad’s English accent and virtually begged him to always speak English with her to allow her to improve her command of that language which she loved so much. As we already know Conrad was always happy to have an attractive young lady for company and he gladly accepted. They discovered that they had many interests in common and where they differed they were happy to learn the other one’s point of view. Conrad being old enough to be Alice’s grandfather he had the advantage of having more experience in life and she often asked him for his advice, just as she was doing now.

Drinking their espressos at a table giving a wide view of the passers-by in the street our two crime investigators spoke of Vincent, Alice's latest patient. "Of course," she was saying, "as his shrink I cannot tell you his personal problems but I believe that if he met you it would help a lot."

"Then tell me what you can about him," said Conrad, "like that I can decide whether to meet him or not." He smiled. "I have met some of your patients in the past and I must admit that that has often been of interest me. So, I'm all ears."

"Glad to hear that," said Alice. "You see, this man discovered a mystical path in India and has embarked upon it. But instead of bringing joy to his life it has done the opposite."

Conrad shrugged. "Is he sure it's because of the path he follows?"

"Yes," replied Alice. "He's sure of that."

"What happened to make him believe that?"

"I cannot repeat things my patients tell me but I do believe that you can give him a positive view of mysticism."

"I'm no mystic," objected Conrad. "I only have my personal point of view."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Alice. "And from what you have explained to me I know you have a positive vision of life. That is why I would like you to talk to Vincent." She tapped Conrad gently on the forearm. "I cannot help him anymore and I'm sure I'll learn more about your mystical path that I like very much."

Conrad leaned back into his chair shaking his head. "As long as he's not involved in some kind of crime," he said.

"Yes and no," said Alice.

"I don't understand."

"His wife's death."

"She died recently?"

"Yes and the police are still investigating because her death is suspicious."

"And, of course," said Conrad, "when a wife dies under ambiguous conditions the husband is automatically a suspect."

"And vice versa," added Alice.

"He's not in jail?"

"Oh, no. The police interrogated him and apparently his answers are being verified because some of them leave a shadow of doubt."

"What do you think?" asked Conrad.

"I strongly believe he didn't kill her but like you often say: human beings are capable of anything."

Conrad smiled. "God is limitless with his compassion," he acknowledged, "and we, being his children, are also limitless but in our case it's with our stupidity."

Alice clapped her hands. "Like you once said: God didn't create man in His own image, but man created God in his own image."

"That's for religions," Conrad said.

"But what did you say about Socrates on this issue?" Alice frowned racking her memory. "Wasn't it 'know thyself and thou shalt know the gods?'"

Conrad nodded. "It is one of the maxims inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi," he replied. "We are gods incarnated on earth to experience life as human beings." Conrad leaned forward. "But let's get back to Vincent. Do you think he'd like to meet a cynical pensioner trying to follow the path of the Buddha?"

"A cynical pensioner trying to follow the path of the Buddha is just the kind of person he'd like to meet," said Alice. "So, do I organise a meeting?"

"Does he meditate and is he vegetarian?"

"Of course," replied Alice. "People into Buddhism and the like are obviously vegetarians and practice meditation."

Conrad shook his head. "Not necessarily," he said. "I've met Buddhists from Indo-China who do not meditate and

are not vegetarian.” He frowned. “They have their version of the Buddhist teachings just like Christians and other religious people interpret their past masters’ teachings.”

“Well,” sighed Alice, “this much I can say. He is vegetarian and he does meditate. And that’s the problem. Every time he sits in meditation things go wrong.” She pursed her lips. “Is that enough for you to meet him?”

“Have you spoken of me to him?”

“No, of course not.” Alice frowned.

“Sorry,” said Conrad. “Stupid question,” and when Alice’s frown changed into a smile he added, “you’re not angry with me?”

“Of course not,” she said. “I understand you.”

“You’re my shrink free of charge,” said Conrad.

“And you’re my colleague free of charge!” exclaimed Alice and they both burst out laughing. “So,” said Alice, “will you meet him?”

Conrad nodded.

“Where and when?” asked Alice.

“Afternoon coffee in a pleasant Paris café,” suggested Conrad.

“There are so many of them,” said Alice. “Café Livres near the Hotel de Ville metro station?”

Conrad nodded again

“Tomorrow or another day this week?”

Conrad kept on nodding.

Alice drew her cell phone from her handbag. She called Vincent and a meeting was organised for two days later. She put her phone back into her handbag. “Thank you, Conrad,” she said. “I’m sure we’re going to have a very interesting conversation with Vincent.”

CHAPTER 2 VINCENT’S COMPLAINT

The meeting Alice organised took place in the charming Café Livres with its many shelves of books which customers can look through at leisure. One enters the café through a terrace facing the tour Saint-Jacques. Situated just around the corner from the Hôtel de Ville, it is in central Paris. Food is served non-stop from midday to 11pm. The pleasantly relaxing atmosphere encourages private conversation.

Because Conrad had never seen Vincent, Alice told him to turn up five minutes late as she would be on time. Like that he could go to the right table straight away. Both Alice and Vincent were present when Conrad entered the café/restaurant. He marched straight to their table with a wide smile.

Vincent was in his forties. His oblong face was marked by drawn cheeks. He had a long nose, wide mouth with thin lips, narrow eyes and a low forehead. His clean shaven head hid the fact that he was almost totally bald. His expression was harsh, like someone in dire straits. He got up when Conrad