

Excerpts from The Shame Game by D. F. Dumaresq

The Shame Game is about a beset cab-driver; a mysterious suicide of a publicly shamed politician; a social network of sociopathic role-playing gamers stealing identities to embarrass their owners, and a Hell's Angels' boss mainstreaming his business.

Chapter 13 - Puzzling Power

For as long as Zena could remember she loved puzzles, and like all great loves, it had started with her father. On many mornings, she would come down to the kitchen early and wait while he made his ritual cup of tap-water coffee, which he swore was absolutely the only way to drink Instant coffee. He would dump a heaping spoonful of Nescafé into a mug - running the hot water tap - then pass it under the tap until it was full and topped with a slick of brown foam. Finally he would sit down with the morning paper and she could climb up into his lap.

Want to do the crossword puzzle? he would ask, nuzzling her neck. She would giggle helplessly and nod, while he riffled through the paper, pretending to look for the crossword. The smell of his aftershave would blend with the newsprint, and the Nescafé, and strangely make her think of wild horses.

Her father used these puzzle sessions as an opportunity to teach her a sort of moral vocabulary.

Okay Sweetie, can you give me a nine letter word meaning to live

life through someone else's experiences?

He would say the word in her ear and then spell it as she pencilled it in.

(Vicarious.)

V. I. C. A. R. I. O. U. S.

Excellent! Vicarious is when you're watching the other kids play out on the street and enjoy it almost as much as they are. Now, give me a 12 letter word for stealing company funds.

(Embezzlement.)

E. M. B. E. Z. Z. L. E. M. E. N. T.

(Her uncle's life had been fraught with troubles.)

Terrific - you're brilliant! You know about stealing, right? It's not nice, is it? That's my girl! Now another one - this is a toughie. Let's have an 11 letter word for letting an offence pass without punishment.

(Forgiveness.)

F. O. R. G. I. V. E. N. E. S. S.

You're my angel! And don't angels forgive us our many faults?

You have such beautiful printing!

Usually by this time, there was a honk of a car horn out front. Her father would frown and they would do one more.

Alright, a really big one to finish with. A 13 letter word that means Has No Manners.

(Inconsiderate.)

I. N. C. O. N. S. I. D. E. R. A. T. E.

Perfect! We know a few people like that, don't we Angel?

Then he'd tickle her until the tears were running down her cheeks. *Kiss Mom goodbye for me, okay?*

Her father had been late for work so often they started sending a car for him, which irked him. Especially, because he liked to walk in the mornings, and the government building was just a short stroll away. Zena didn't realize until she was much older that most people would have been fired if they'd been late for work as often as her father.

It didn't bother her that she didn't know what puzzles he solved for the government; however, it did bother her that they stopped picking him up, the moment his mind began to lose its powers.

A ten letter word...

A. L. Z. H. E. I. M. E. R'. S.

Chapter 25 - History Repeating

Someone was talking to her, but all Diamond heard was a vague mumbling buried in the accident noise. The speaker was drowned out by her mind playing over and over the roar of shattering glass and rending metal. The sound made her think of adults in Charles Schultz's televised version of Charlie Brown's Christmas.

Wah-wah! Wah, wah-wah. Wah!

She saw the face of the little boy clearly in her mind; he had straight brown hair, a little too long in the front. It was hanging in his eyes. He was squinting into the sunshine reflecting off the Hummer's chrome and high polish detailing. He was a little on the heavy side and had rosy apple cheeks. His eyes were a startling blue, the bluest eyes she had ever seen. They held surprise, curiosity, affable good humour, but, inexplicably, no terror.

How could someone look death squarely in the face and not be terrified? She was puzzled by this question, but only momentarily. The bulk of her guilt filled her to overflowing with shame and remorse, sweeping every other person/place/thing aside. She was trapped somehow, inside herself, watching as the scene played, unrelenting, over and over again. She and Niro, laughing and careening over the body of the small blue-eyed boy, but instead of hearing their laughter, she heard only the sick crunch of bone and the shriek of tearing metal.

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Are we doomed to repeat our worst mistakes? Diamond was remembering a well buried incident which occurred 10 years earlier, while driving her first car. She (Jackie, as she was known in this

life) had taken driving lessons, two, anyway, and was still quite timid in traffic. It was a bright day in late Spring and it was the weekend, so traffic was heavy on Vancouver's west-side, as people massed on foot and bicycle upon the funky shops and pristine beaches, or jammed by automobile the tree-studded ring roads surrounding Stanley Park, the emerald entrance to the majestic North Shore mountains. She and her new boyfriend, Chris, were heading to the slopes to do some end-of-season skiing. They had overslept and just come out of the Whitespot restaurant on Bidwell, after a hurried breakfast. She was proudly driving her little ruby-red Volkswagen Beetle and trying to get them all safely across Georgia street. Traffic was hopelessly busy in both directions, and she was being her timid self, the self she hated, and was languishing at the intersection, anxious and fretting, certain she would never get across, that they would die there and never see the ski mountains again. Maybe she was having a reaction to the food.

"Come on, Jackie. Get the lead out!" Chris shouted from the passenger seat, irritated and impatient, as usual. "What are you waiting for? An invitation? You're such a scared Wabbit!"

She hated it when he called her that. It was a name her father called her when she chewed with her mouth open, or did pretty much anything that he thought was uncouth. Which was everything. She should never have confided that to Chris. Seething now, she ignored him, getting madder, and colder. The stream of traffic was endless. The car was hot and small. Its floorboards were rusted out. *What a pushover I was to buy this piece of crap!*

Chris continued to goad her, "Let's go! You shouldn't be driving this pile of shit anyway! Wabbits don't drive, better let me!"

With that, Chris jumped out of the car. And as he crossed in front, perhaps thinking he would easily do what she had failed so successfully at, she spied an opening in the traffic. She looked ahead, saw him directly in front of her,

And floored it.

Chris looked at her with shock. His green eyes wide open in terror, his small mouth a perfect 'O' of surprise. And then he was under the tires and she was flying, her wheels rumbling, trundling, crumbling, over him and into a miraculous space of empty intersection. She swung the steering wheel hard left and made a neat merge into the westbound lane.

"I'd better pull over and see if he's all right," she told herself, but there was no stopping in the curb lane on Georgia. "I know, I'll turn left on Denman and go 'round."

But the left turn lane was filled with cars, stretching back up the street. She had missed her chance to get into it when she turned onto Georgia. Now there was nowhere to turn, unless she went into Stanley Park, but it would take forever to find her way back. It might be better to just go across the bridge, and into Park Royal, turn around, and come back. As she crossed the red-green ribbon of Lion's Gate bridge, she felt a wonderful euphoria. The snow capped Lions seemed to be guarding and protecting her. The blue-black water of Burrard Inlet beckoned her and she decided she'd take a long swim after spending the afternoon gliding down the world famous ski slopes. On the Upper Levels highway, heading for Whistler, thoughts of turning around and going back to see about Chris were utterly forgotten.

She never told anyone about what happened that day. It was a

shameful secret that she even managed to hide from herself most of the time. No one came looking for Chris. No one asked. The two of them had only been going out for a month or so. Her girlfriend April knew she was seeing someone, but they hadn't met. Jackie/Diamond had been excited about the prospect when she first decided that Chris and she would hook up. She often chatted about him with April, but now she never brought him up. When April asked, the once, Jackie said,

"He was uncouth, so I dropped him."

End of story.

Eventually, she forgot him - it - them.

She would never be able to forget the surprised face of the blue-eyed boy.