

Joanna Kidman

## CITIES, STRANGERS, FILMS

Bridget Bardot and Jack Palance died  
at the end of the movie.  
That's all I remember.  
It was raining the night I arrived  
at the Embassy striding  
through the foyer shaking my umbrella.  
Hello. Hello. Darling—I haven't seen you  
since the last film festival. *Aficionados*,  
glassy-eyed and shaking like addicts  
recount their celluloid excesses  
on the stairways.

Sometimes strangers imprint their image on the retina.

A one-time lover strolls by, arms linked  
with another. We exchange backward  
glances and secret smiles. I could roll  
that name off my tongue.

It tastes of wicked old memories.  
The plot circled around love and betrayal.  
Bardot's naked limbs featured prominently.

I saw her then across the room  
and as usual, our chance meetings,  
unplanned and accidental, had a cloying  
summer sweetness, even in mid-winter.

Call it cinema verité. Or call it  
something else. The shape of a stranger  
who takes you unawares.

The first time, we reached simultaneously  
for the same book on the library shelf.  
Five hundred thousand books and  
a random moment shared.  
But this is a small city  
and we are armed  
against coincidence.  
Barely known, we have collided  
in shop doorways and passed  
each other on remote suburban streets.  
Always carrying books.  
I think that is a rather clever motif.  
Almost *noir*.

Listen—this story could be told in close up.  
Action!  
The woman stands by the shelves.  
Camera angles emphasise the contours  
of her cheekbones. Shh! Quiet on the set.  
My part, played by someone taller and  
somewhat younger, appeals to the middle-class,  
recently-divorced, automatic garage doors  
demographic. But there we are at last—  
under the hot lights and brimming with silence  
in the cat-got-your-tongue hush  
of library afternoons. It begins.  
Her hand, my hand  
reaching upwards.

In this hour  
between dog and wolf,  
it is a narrative of cities and strangers.

20