



# DUTCH TREAT

## BETTIE SERVEERT

PALOMINE

(Guernica)

PSYCHIATRIC Report. Patient's Name: van Dijk, Carol.

Symptoms: Comes into my office without knocking. Three young men, carrying musical instruments, shuffle in after her (she's frightened of being alone). They strum away in classic chord changes, always chromatic, always minor key. For Carol, life's like that. And if they repeat themselves, or echo other, it's because life's like that too: cruel coincidences and ghostly synchronicity. This is the way she finds easiest to express herself: playing in a band named in homage to 1970s Dutch tennis player Betty Stove. Well, I suppose the way that last return of serve hit the net cord against Virginia Wade in the 1978 Wimbledon final was a pretty good metaphor for the human condition, and hell, we *all* have our eccentricities.

And so she starts singing, in English, in a New York accent (although she's from Amsterdam). She sounds like Suzanne Vega (but that's forgivable, "Marlene On The Wall" was cool), or a less guarded Polly Harvey (especially when her three companions almost break into "Sheela-Na-Gig"). Reminds me of another patient (Hersh, Kristin), but with all the riddles and private language decoded.

Anyway, like I say, she starts singing. Something

about this guy. Stood her up again at the bus stop this morning, and she got thinking. The reflections in puddles, the rain on people's faces. . . it's all connected. The sun always shines on him. *For her, it never stops raining.* She wonders why she's so lonely. How come life sometimes makes her feel so scared? She wonders what it is about her that makes him think he'd be better off without her. It is possible that he and she ever felt the same? But he won't have her worried, she insists. She knows how to take care of herself.

We're not getting anywhere here. We try hypnotic regression, to childhood. Something about a mother whose kids drove her mad. She wished she'd never had them, and beat them up with a baseball bat. I can't tell if she's talking about herself, or if it's just another story. But don't worry, she assures, the kid's alright.

I have to call the appointment to an end. It's drizzling outside, it's been a long day and. . . oh, alright, her stories are too close to home. A doctor should *never* get emotionally involved.

Diagnosis: Patient is clearly a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown caused by uncommon sensitivity to reality. Disease known as Life.

Treatment: Condition always terminal. There is no (legal) cure. A most moving case study, but I'm afraid I can offer no help.

SIMON PRICE