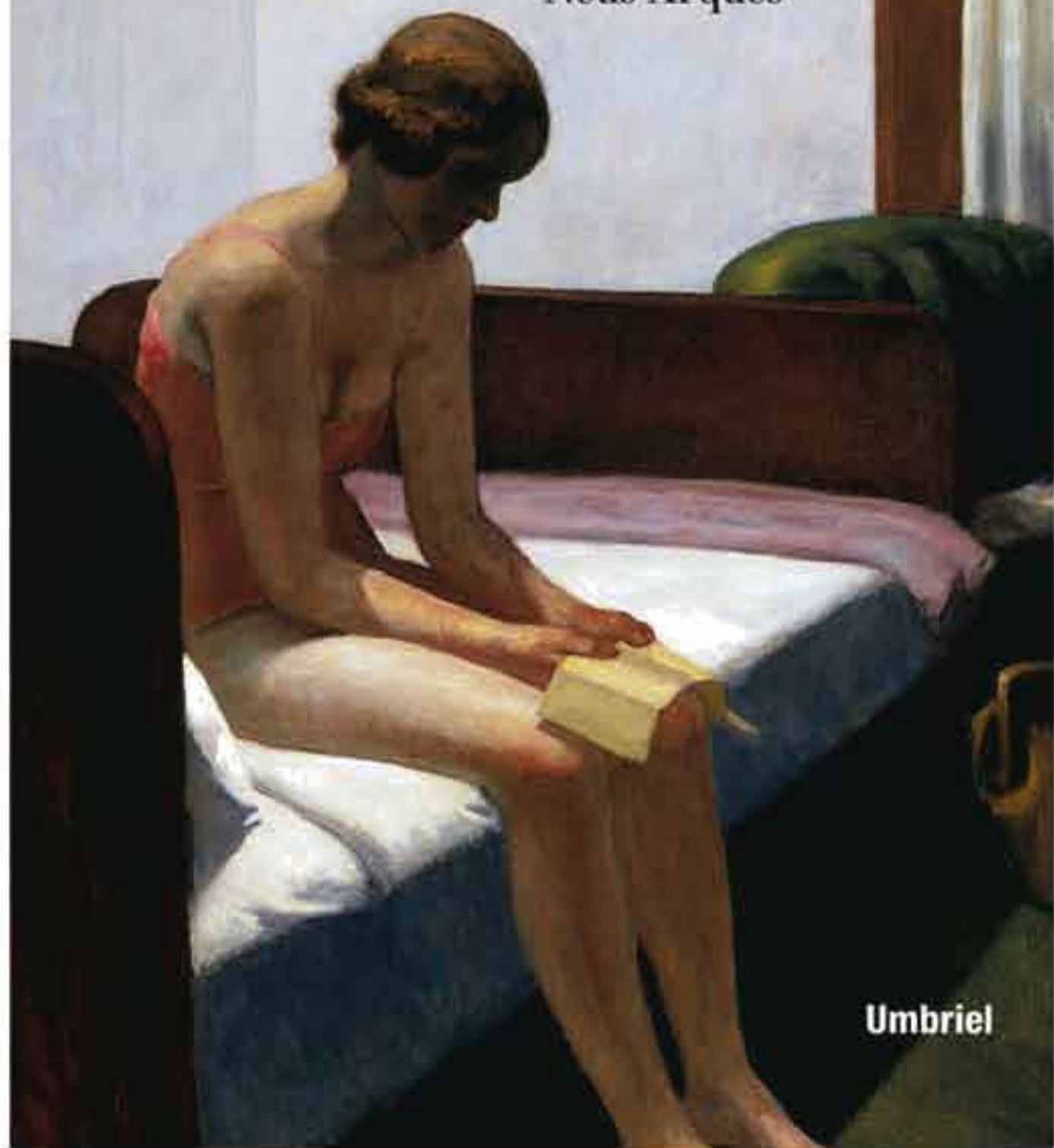


*Un
hombre
de pago*

Neus Arqués



Umbriel

ARQUÉS, Neus

A Man for Hire

(Un hombre de pago)

Chapter 1: Single and Unattached

Translated by Neus Arqués and Steven Tolliver

A Man for Hire

Set in today's Barcelona, *A Man for Hire* is a conversation on the ways women manage desire and also friendship. Which is better/worse, to pay a man for sex or go to bed with a friend's boyfriend? Why does no one ever talk about male prostitution? How does it work? Who are the customers?

Chapter One:

Rosa confides in her beautician, Merche, about her latest romantic disaster. Merche replies with some surprising advice: stop trying romance and hire a gigolo! With Merche's help, Rosa begins to explore for-hire, no-strings attached sex.

About the author



Neus Arqués writes about real life for real women.

In ***A Man for Hire*** (*Un hombre de pago*) she wonders if sex without love is indeed an efficient proposition. ***A Woman in Your Position*** (*Una mujer como tú*) joins four girlfriends in their winding road to personal fulfilment.

With a fresh voice and a strong sense of dialogue, Arqués dives fearlessly into our secret agendas and uses Almodovar-like situations to present the reader with uncomfortable topics.

Barcelona born and bred, the author, who holds a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins University, runs her own marketing agency. Other projects by Arqués include being a mother, being a wife and keeping up with her friends and her [blog](#).

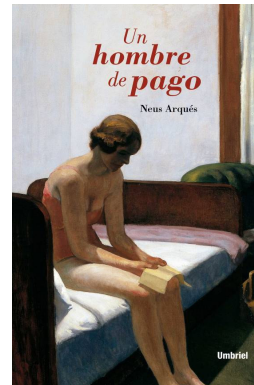
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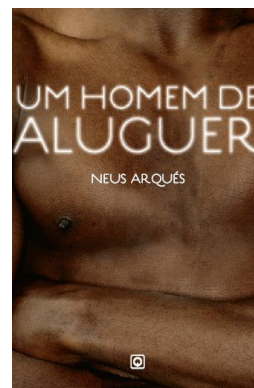
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A Man for Hire/ Un hombre de pago

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I refuse to accept the idea that from this point in my life onward the only hands that would touch me would be those of my massage therapist. Laying face down on the massage table, I closed my eyes as Merche draped a towel over my leg as she began massaging the other. The dim light of the studio was perfectly conducive to relaxation and that made me all the more tense.

“You seem very charged today;” was Merche’s diagnosis as she kneaded my lower leg as if it were a lump of dough, “with a lot of static electricity, I mean. Much more than last week.” Her skilled fingers gently sought out the most painful pressure points.

“Well, maybe I am doing worse”.

“Don’t you tell me you had an argument with Pedro,” she ventured as her eyes briefly met mine before turning her attention back to my leg. She covered it with the towel and began massaging the other one.

“I’m afraid so. We’ve split up.” I tried to lose myself in the massage and failed completely. Images of the last time we met, full of hurt feelings and reproaches, filled my head. ‘I thought you were a keeper’, he said, ‘but I can see I was hoping for too much once again. There’s no pleasing you women’.

“He was too possessive...”

“Mmm, but, what did you expect? What a man looks for in a fifty-something woman is a sort of nurse to care for him in his old age. For the other stuff, they chase after younger girls”, she sighed. “I can really tell how hurt you are. Have you noticed your ankles? They’re

totally swollen. It's obvious that for you sadness causes water retention. Thank God the massage can help with that..."

"Well, I should tell you that I am not that sad; angry is more like it. With myself, I mean. Because I'm a fool, Merche. I take a chance on someone and put too much trust in them too soon. I don't go looking for a caregiver in my old age...." Pedro was a born ladies' man. He drove all the women crazy at the dance class where we met and when I realized he really noticed me, I nearly died of happiness. At first, he makes everything so easy, he is very attentive, and of course, I was delighted to have his company. We became an item, and at the dance school everybody knew and all the other women went green with envy. I was utterly stunned when, on Friday nights, when they played the slow songs, he would dance with me and refuse to change partners. It sounds silly, but he made me feel like a woman.

But, things were always a bit off when we were alone, something which happened rarely, as he was very careful to always include other people when we went out. In private, Pedro wilted. He was very traditional, only missionary position and not much else. Nothing else, really. And whenever I plucked up the courage and dared suggest something new, he would roll over, turn his back to me and pretend to be asleep. Yet he always made sure he came... It was in bed where I started to realise that not all that glitters is gold. We did what *he* wanted, how and where *he* wanted it. If I dared suggest something different, it meant a guaranteed argument. And obviously, I did not go through a divorce to wind up with that garbage. So, I just lost the feeling. Even being alone seemed better.

Merche was done with working my back. "Roll over", she said. She covered my legs again with a towel and my breasts with another, smaller one. I never quite understood why breasts were untouchable in her massages. "Look, Rosa, you know I am not a big believer in giving advice..." she trailed off, "but you need to make up your mind. What is it you are looking for, exactly? Because if you are looking for companionship, you have to accept a lot of crap. Look at me: thirty years with Paco and I have seen just about everything. But, if you are looking for a thrill to keep you entertained, well, that's another story.

"Well, maybe it is true that there is no Santa Claus," I replied, half smiling. "I just thought it is possible to have it all, but that doesn't seem to be the case. I do not want to be alone; the thought scares me to death! But, on the one hand, it seems that I have become an invisible woman in the eyes of men and, on the other, I don't feel like playing the game anymore. Merche, I may or may not be having a good time, but, for sure, I am not dead. And I *like* men. But it seems completely ridiculous to spend so much time and effort trying to seduce them to then find out they are not what they seemed..."

"Hey, nobody says you have to get married, hon. What do you want, a bit of fun? Well, pay for it and have your fun! Hire some one to give you a thrill and you're happy: end of story. In the end, men are like mushrooms, as some pop up while others disappear. "You wouldn't be the first customer I've had to do something like that, and certainly not the last one. And believe me, I respect them for it, because if we don't take care of ourselves, then who will?" Merche gathered up more lotion in her hands and prepared to attack my upper arms. She fell silent, yet what she had said echoed in my brain. Why not pay? Suddenly, it seemed like an option.

“You wouldn’t be the first customer I’ve had to do something like that, and certainly not the last one. And believe me, I respect them for it, because if we don’t take care of ourselves, then who will?” Merche’s words encouraged me to bring up the topic again. “Do you really respect them for it?” I asked, looking for confirmation.

“You bet I do! I respect everyone and everything. Why do you ask? Are you willing to give it a go, but aren’t sure how?” she asked, while continuing the massage.

In the half light, I hoped that Merche was not able to see the crimson blush on my face. “Well, maybe I will give it a try. I do not want another disappointment like the dancing school. My relationship with Pedro was neither happy nor did it have a happy ending. And this goes for any other candidates as well. I realize that looking for companionship is not at all the same thing as looking for a lover. The first seems so very difficult. The second one should never be that complicated”. Since my divorce I had had several relationships, all of them sexually unremarkable. And, as if the total lack of satisfaction increased desire, I couldn’t help staring at men’s asses in the street. In my dermatology practice, I was assaulted by fantasies about to playing doctor and patient. I was, as they say, “feeling the urge”.

“OK, Rosa, this is what I’m going to do. I’ll ask around and when we meet next week I will give you the details. And now let’s roll over again....”

* * *

I had never felt so embarrassed as when I returned to the dance school, after the final argument, and saw the sheen of victory in the eyes of the other women: "Pedro is no longer yours". In a single instant, I had lost my partner, my set of friends, my weekend plans... I was back to being alone.

I had signed up for dance lessons two years after my divorce, when the worse was over and I felt capable of going out again. Someone suggested the place: they offered lessons in every conceivable dance style, age was not an issue, the atmosphere was "healthy", and their range of activities was endless; just what I needed. So I gathered my strength and signed up for "Ballroom dancing Level 1: fox, cha-cha, *pasodoble*, rock, waltz, salsa and *merengue*".

As I was registering I discovered that having a dancing partner was mandatory. "Oh my, what do I do now?" I blurted out in confusion. The school secretary, a woman my age trying a bit too hard to look foxy, looked at me like a veteran lifeguard saving drowning person for the umpteenth time. "What you do is put your name on the sign-up board for dance partners. It costs 10 euros. Give me your name, age, height, phone number and the class you are signing up for. We post the information on the board", she pointed to a white wall peppered with post-its of various colours organized per group. "We do not match people. You can call up the guys on the board yourself or they'll call you. If you find a partner, the 10 euros will be applied to the registration fee; if you don't, we'll refund your money. The sign-up board is not technically part of our service and we take no responsibility for the results. Just trying to help, you know?"

I know, I thought, and I also know that the more couples there are, the more students the school can have enrol. Anyway, I signed up.

What did I have to lose? The next day a guy named José called me up. He was a nice young guy (10 years younger than me). He was also divorced and he ran his own pastry shop. Following the recommendation the school secretary gave me, we met for coffee before jointly committing to the course. The conversation wasn't exactly flowing: how could he be interested in skin treatments? How could I be interested in custard pies? But he looked like an OK guy, his height was perfect and he seemed delighted.

On Fridays, after class, we stayed on, practising and that was how I met Pedro. The first time he asked me to dance I thought I would die of embarrassment, because he was already taking the advanced level IV class. To be fair, he was -is- an excellent dancer. I remember how he whispered in my ear "one, two, cha-cha-cha, three, four, cha-cha-cha. And one and two..." I am a good follower if the guy knows how to lead, so in the end not only did I manage not to make us look bad, but that dance instantly positioned me in the "good dancer" category, a mandatory requirement for joining the "in" group at the school.

And that's how things went, one Friday and the next. My partner the baker seemed frustrated but I was not about to feel guilty. I always treated him as a friend and if he had ever made a pass at me, well, I must have missed it. And that would not have been from a lack of desire on my part, rather more to the contrary. It was almost difficult to remember last time I had had a satisfactory sexual encounter. But Pedro had me taken in and more than seeing him for the mediocre lover that he was, I saw him as a potential future husband. And we signed up together for all of the schools activities: week-end getaways, tango workshops, Mardi Gras parties... He even organized a group trip to Paris, with a dinner at Maxim's included. The food was terrible and the trip cost us a fortune, but we were all convinced that

thanks to Pedro we got our dose of glamour, so no one complained. Everytime I think about it my hair stands on end for having been so stupid.

To make a long story short, after our final fight, I went back to the school, to the Friday night session, to be exact. True, I was somewhat looking forward to seeing him, but especially the rest of our group. What a bunch of assholes! They gave me the cod shoulder: it was clear that when push came to shove, they chose the aging bachelor who would give new lustre to their pathetic social lives.

I felt so lonely, so awful, that I cancelled my registration to the next level. The baker would have no trouble finding a new partner in that universe of ravenous women. Pedro was back to being his charming self and I was turned back into an ugly duckling. I was livid: why was I the loser? I left on the verge of tears and took a cab. "Alone again, alone again", I repeated the expression to myself, as if it were a mantra. And I drowned in an ocean of fear contained in those two words. But anger took hold of me and before reaching home I had sworn to myself that I would never join any other organized group and that, from then onwards, I would be solely responsible for finding my own fun.

* * *

Merche kept her word and then next time I was back on her massage table seven days later, she told me "The place you're looking for is called 'Latin Boys'. It is off of Urquinaona Square, right above the porno magazine shop. You go in; you explain what you are looking for and then go into a waiting room. The catch of the day will parade in

front of you. You pick one. He takes you to a room, he fucks you, you pay him; simple as pie”.

“Well, it sounds easy but,” I replied, a bit shocked. I had almost forgotten what we had talked about. At any rate, the proposal seemed overwhelming, no matter how strong the urges I felt.

“I would be willing to come with you, but I’d skip the fucking part, OK? My Paco suits me just fine. But, I’d be curious to see what the place looks like. So we could go together. I can have a drink while I wait and you.... How does that sound?” I looked at her adoringly. That woman was so much more than a massage therapist. “If you want, we can go next Wednesday evening: I don’t have any bookings then. Would you be up for it?”

I had no choice but to ask my assistant to reschedule my appointments for that afternoon. As it was later in the day and toward the end of the month, it was not that hard to get my patients to accept the rescheduling. The thought that a week from then I would be having sex with a stranger was something that was more difficult to accept.

I slept poorly for the next few nights, swinging from curiosity to panic. How would the place look like? How would I react to the touch of a stranger? What if I did not like the guy? I was not completely sold on the idea but my curiosity was piqued. What if the sex was inventive and I reached some unusual orgasm? I could make do with a good climax, with no funny looks or inappropriate phone calls attached. Plus, having Merche come with me served as the guarantee that someone would be watching out for me.

On d-day we met at the Urquinaona metro stop at seven-thirty and ten minutes later we had found the building. "You pressing the buzzer, Merche; I am too embarrassed", I begged, wringing my hands. They would turn cold when I get nervous and now they were frozen solid, even though it was nearly summer.

Merche's eyes shot me a sardonic look that said "coward" as she pressed the door buzzer with conviction. An elegantly dressed young man opened the door. I was expecting him to eye us up and down but instead he greeted us as if it were a perfectly normal occasion and escorted us to a small waiting room. "Could you please bring us a glass of Champagne?" Merche asked as she looked at me from the corner of her eye. Perhaps she was afraid I was going to faint. The man returned with two glasses and an explanation: "You'll now meet the boys of the house... Just say hello and pick the one that strikes your fancy".

A small door opened behind me and the catwalk began. One by one, dressed only in a sort of smock, the boys paraded in front of us. -Hi, my name is Jorge -said the first one, an effeminate-looking blond guy. He kissed us on both cheeks and left through the same door. Next came Marcelo, followed by Juan, Dario "from Brazil" and then Pedro. And following him, our host reappeared. "So, ladies, was there anything you found appealing?"

"I'll take Pedro, please!" Merche announced. I was struck dumb. Wasn't she just going to have a drink and wait for me? She stood up, with that natural grace of ladies from southern Spain, gave me a sly wink, and walked out of the room with her arm around a hunk of a man. I was trapped. "Marcelo", I whispered. He was the one with the

less massive muscles and he seemed kind. When he came back, I latched onto his hand and followed him to the room assigned to us.

Decoration was plain: a large bed plus a bathroom with a Jacuzzi tub. In front of the bed, covered with an orange curtain from Ikea that Marcelo quickly removed, there was a wall to wall mirror and, hanging from the wall, a screen. By the carefully arranged x-rated videos on the bedside table I guessed that it was a video screen. "That doesn't record, right?" I asked. I was worried.

"Of course not! But let me unplugged so it does not bother you", and with a flick of his wrist, he pulled the plug from the socket. He turned to me, smiled and asked: "Active or passive?"

"I'm a newbie", I replied, still wringing my ice-cold hands. "Marcelo, look, I will pay for your time, but I think I'd rather we just talked."

He looked at me, sat down beside me and put his hand on my leg. "Don't worry. That's fine. We can talk about whatever you want. If you want, I can tell you a bit about how this works, so next time you won't be a first-timer anymore..."

Marcelo told me what the other boys in the house specialised in. Some went with men, others with women, other "ate both meat and fish". "If you can, try and avoid those ones", he recommended. "They are so used to fucking men that they lose the art of making foreplay".

He also told me it was up to the customer to decide if they let themselves be taken or if they took the initiative. In the first instance, they were free to specify what kind of caresses they were looking for. In both cases, however, the gigolo would not ejaculate.

"Hey, we are not complete sex machines. If we had to cum everytime we fucked, we would be dead in two days. So we learn to control it".

Marcelo also told me that the alternative to boudoirs like this one were private arrangements between the customer and the gigolo. "Here's my number. Just don't let on that I gave it to you", he said, writing a number on a paper napkin. "In the house they aren't happy about us giving out our numbers and, in fact, it is forbidden for us to place ads in newspapers. But as soon as I can, I'm going to fly solo: its less work and less work by the clock. I could spend more time with the lady, get to know her better, escort her, seduce her", he looked at me and gave me a mischievous smile. "So? Have you changed your mind?"

I said no. I felt like a girl that had been caught and was scared. Plus I was worried, hoping that Merche would be ok. What would she be up to? Was I going to tell her that I hadn't done a thing or was I going to pretend? I stared at my hands in silence. After a time which seemed reasonable to Marcelo and endless to me, we went back to the waiting room. Merche arrived five minutes afterwards. She was beaming. "Let's go girl!" she said, grabbing me by the arm. She passionately kissed her Pedro goodbye while Marcelo kissed me on the cheek, winked at me and said "See you soon."

Our host escorted us out. "That will be 90 euros a piece," he announced. I took 180 euros out of my purse and, before Merche had a chance to make a move, I handed the money to him. "Thank you very much." he said, counting them as a bank teller would. "I trust you have had a good time and hope to see you again soon."

As soon as we were out on the street Merche exploded. "Come on, come on. I've got to tell you everything!" And again she grabbed my arm decidedly. "Well, you really are looking upbeat," I replied, but she didn't say a thing until we had sat down at the farthest table at the back in a nearby tapas bar.

"Girl, now that's what I call spectacular!" was how Merche ended her review of "her" Pedro's prowess. She went on to add, "I know for a fact that you can tell by looking at him whether a man is good in bed or not and that Pedro was excellent. What a great way to rejuvenate. It's like I've had a facelift. And how about you?" she asked all of a sudden, as if she had just discovered that she had not been the only customer.

I chose not to lie. "It was good and bad. Marcelo is a very kind, very handsome man, you name it, but I was blocked. We only talked", I continued wrangling my hands, which were slowly warming up.

"So you spent 90 euros just to talk?" Her disbelieving stare was superseded by the business woman in her. "Speaking of which, let me give you back the..."

"Merche, you don't owe me anything. I am the one in debt with you, for coming along. And I haven't spent 90 euros just to talk: I spent them to find out that I cannot just see a man and fuck him. I need a little more intimacy. Marcelo mentioned private ads in the paper, a more private relationship. Maybe that's the way".