

Night Thoughts
A Track Limits Outtake

By M A Ford

Jordan woke. The narrow bed was hard and unfamiliar, and light from the car park was streaming through a crack in the curtains. For a moment he lay quietly in the dark, but then the revelations of the night before came flooding back.

Patrice Bernard! It was strange how rarely he thought about his first lover. Like putting a shutter down in his mind, he had tried to put Patrice out of his mind, and in the process had forgotten the good bits along with the bad.

Closing his eyes, he made a conscious effort to think back to those long-ago days. But as he dozed, it was not the heady days of the start of their love affair that he remembered, but the bitter end...

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"It's all for the best, you know..." Despite the confident words, Patrice's voice wavered, while his hands gripped the back of the chair so tightly that his knuckles were white. "It's just one season, and then you'll be back. They're putting you in a good team, in CART, and you'll learn so much. You're too young for F1, really, you know you are."

Jordan lifted his head from his arms, and looked dismissively at his erstwhile lover. "Too young? I got two podiums, and I've finished in the points on another four races. There are plenty of older drivers who haven't done so well. So define too young!" Suddenly, a wave of anger flashed through him, and he thumped the table. "Perhaps you're too old! If they are too scared to keep us both, you could have stepped aside for me. What else is there left for you to achieve? You've done everything."

Patrice sighed, leaning back against the thin motorhome wall. "It's more a case of what else can I do? I need another couple of seasons to secure my future, get the right deals and contracts to set myself up. You've got all the time in the world, Jordan. You'll be back, you'll see. They'll forget all about this little episode, bring you back, and by then I'll have retired."

"But I don't want to go to America," Jordan said, resting his chiseled chin on his hands. "They just go round in circles. Fuck, Patrice – I made it to F1 on my own terms. This is just not fair, and you know it."

"It's all for the best," Patrice repeated slowly. The colour had drained out of his cheeks; he looked as if he needed to sit down before he fell down. "Jordan, love, I didn't mean to hurt you. We had to take the chance when it was offered. It was the only sensible thing to do."

“Why does it have to end? Why can’t we talk to the team, find a solution on our terms? It can’t stop now. Just when...” Jordan shut his eyes and took a deep breath. There was so much wrapped up in those two short words. From a rather rocky start, the experienced champion and the naïve rookie, they had built up a solid working relationship. And then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, things had changed. Shared smiles across the garage, occasional jokes, Patrice had become someone with whom he actually enjoyed spending time. Gradually, they had grown closer still. When Patrice had landed in the medical center after a heavy crash in testing, Jordan had rushed to his side, willing him to wake, to be well. Shared moments of intimacy across that hospital bed had left Jordan badly shaken, scared by the intensity of his feelings, panicked by the thoughts that were running through his mind. During a week of non-stop phone calls, everything changed, and by the next race Patrice had taken Jordan to his hotel room, into his bed, and, Jordan thought, into his life. But now...

“At least it’s all settled. No more speculation. No more wondering.” Jordan’s voice sounded empty and bleak. “Now it’s over. I’m leaving, you’re staying, your reputation intact. I’m the outcast.” He flung himself down on the table, despair suddenly overwhelming him.

Patrice knelt down by him, reaching out, patting him, as if trying to comfort him. But Jordan pushed away the hands he had previously welcomed. “Don’t touch me!” he spat out, despair rapidly turning to anger. “You gave up that right when you told the team that there was nothing between us. That it was just a moment of madness, after the emotions on the podium. How could you have said such a thing, Patrice?”

He gave a very Gallic shrug. “What else could I say? This is my future, my career, my reputation. I could not– will not–”

“You’re a coward,” Jordan spat back at him, anger rising again. “I was just a moment’s fun, wasn’t I?”

“Don’t say that, Jordan. I I–”

“Don’t you dare say you love me, Patrice,” Jordan replied, his voice low and dangerous. “Get out of here. I’ll be out of your hair – what there is left of it – as soon as I can. And then you won’t have to worry about me, or your precious career,” he sneered. “Until the next time you have a young teammate to seduce, that is.”

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In his bed in Spa, Jordan shuddered as the memories came flooding back. He had been angry, it was true, but even more, he had been disappointed, with all his illusions about their great passion dashed. Patrice had been matter-of-fact and practical, taking the situation in his stride. How many teammates had been there before him? How many between him and this probable liaison with Sylvain Delcour?

As Jordan pondered the question in the dark, it gradually occurred to him that if anything, last night's revelations helped. It was the final proof that it had not been one true, great love affair, a tragic event that had ruined his life. It was clear that he was just one of a probable long string of drivers who had passed through Patrice Bernard's bed. And knowing that, he could put it behind him. And concentrate on himself, on his future and his growing closeness with Mark. Mark, with whom he was growing deeper in love every day. Mark, whose recent revelations led him to dream that they might actually have a future together.

Jordan adjusted his pillow and turned over. Tomorrow he'd face whatever was waiting for him out there. For the good of the team. And for Mark, and whatever future they might have together...

Patrice was the past.