

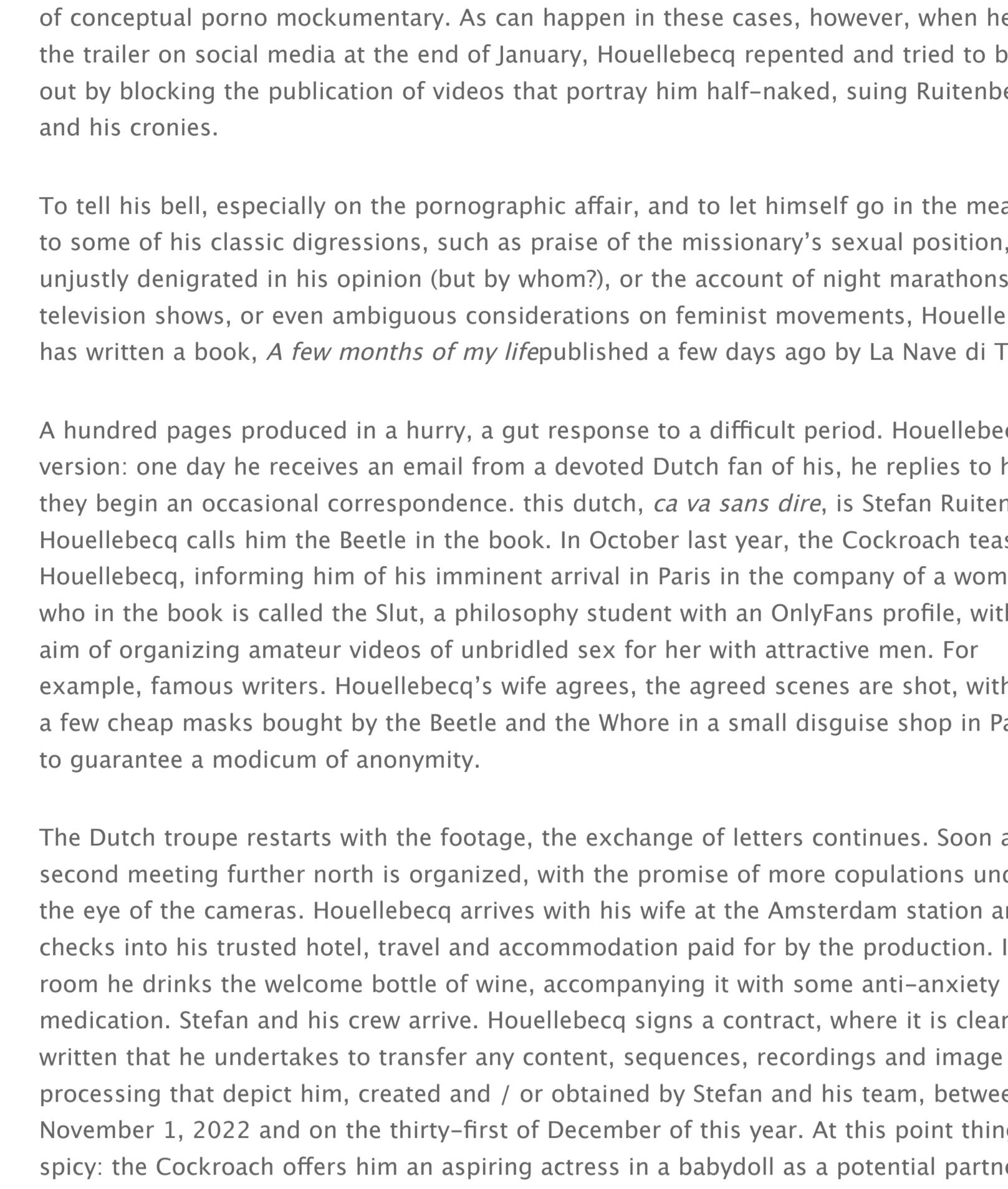
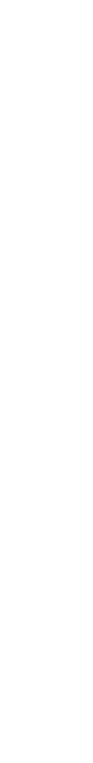
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## ↙ The most embarrassing six months of Michel Houellebecq's life

BOOKS Barbara Entertainment about 5 hours ago REPORT



The most embarrassing six months of Michel Houellebecq's life

The last few months have not been a walk in the park for Michel Houellebecq. The reasons are known: first he got into trouble again because of certain, shall we say, questionable statements about the French Muslim community, the suburbs and the civil war, collected in an interview published in a special, best-selling issue of the magazine *Popular front*. Shortly thereafter, Houellebecq became entangled in an unpleasant red-light headache that you may have heard of: he let himself be convinced by Stefan Ruitenbeek, founder of Kirac (which stands for *Keeping It Real Art Critics*), a ramshackle collective of Dutch artists who contest the dynamics of the contemporary art market, to participate as an actor in a kind of conceptual porno mockumentary. As can happen in these cases, however, when he saw the trailer on social media at the end of January, Houellebecq repented and tried to back out by blocking the publication of videos that portray him half-naked, suing Ruitenbeek and his cronies.

To tell his bell, especially on the pornographic affair, and to let himself go in the meantime to some of his classic digressions, such as praise of the missionary's sexual position, unjustly denigrated in his opinion (but by whom?), or the account of night marathons television shows, or even ambiguous considerations on feminist movements, Houellebecq has written a book, *A few months of my life* published a few days ago by La Nave di Teseo.

A hundred pages produced in a hurry, a gut response to a difficult period. Houellebecq's version: one day he receives an email from a devoted Dutch fan of his, he replies to him, they begin an occasional correspondence, this dutch, *ca va sans dire*, is Stefan Ruitenbeek. Houellebecq calls him the Beetle in the book. In October last year, the Cockroach teases Houellebecq, informing him of his imminent arrival in Paris in the company of a woman, who in the book is called the Slut, a philosophy student with an OnlyFans profile, with the aim of organizing amateur videos of unbridled sex for her with attractive men. For example, famous writers. Houellebecq's wife agrees, the agreed scenes are shot, with only a few cheap masks bought by the Beetle and the Whore in a small disguise shop in Paris, to guarantee a modicum of anonymity.

The Dutch troupe restarts with the footage, the exchange of letters continues. Soon a second meeting further north is organized, with the promise of more copulations under the eye of the cameras. Houellebecq arrives with his wife at the Amsterdam station and checks into his trusted hotel, travel and accommodation paid for by the production. In the room he drinks the welcome bottle of wine, accompanying it with some anti-anxiety medication. Stefan and his crew arrive. Houellebecq signs a contract, where it is clearly written that he undertakes to transfer any content, sequences, recordings and image processing that depict him, created and / or obtained by Stefan and his team, between November 1, 2022 and on the thirty-first of December of this year. At this point things get spicy: the Cockroach offers him an aspiring actress in a babydoll as a potential partner, called the Goose in the book, but things don't mesh, there is consensus but there is no chemistry. The sixty-seven-year-old writer throws a tantrum, hides under a sheet, his guests leave the room. Meanwhile, poor wife Lysis supervises the filming and seeks mediation. Other unsuccessful attempts by the Beetle to find a woman for Michel Houellebecq follow, until the writer gets impatient, quarrels with the Beetle and returns to Paris empty-handed, indulging in self-pity and excessive use of alcohol and tobacco.

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In short, it is a book of hatred and rancor. Perhaps Houellebecq is playing dumb, as in the first pages of *Extension of the domain of struggle*, his first book, where the protagonist loses his car but is ashamed to say it, and therefore reports its theft so as not to appear crazy. Or maybe, an even more unforgivable sin for someone who should be a contemporary diviner, he doesn't understand the unmentionable today very well. Like someone who complains about online advertisements that recommend Rolex and Viagra, ignoring that they are made to measure. The impression is that Houellebecq realized too late that he had given the public parts of his life that he would have preferred to remain secret, on the wings of momentary enthusiasm. He is surprised to read him so bigoted, and involuntarily dumb. His excuses, in the book, are ridiculous: I agreed to go to Amsterdam because I like the train, I agreed to be filmed thinking I was shooting private amateur footage that I would see in my wife's bedroom, I thought the videos would be released only after my death. He also declares himself persecuted by justice, especially the French one.

After having received several blows to his reputation, translated into several languages, the Cockroach also told his version. There's a YouTube video of him being interviewed by a podcaster. The interview is in Dutch, with all those consonants, but has English subtitles.

Lo Scarafaggio, a vague resemblance to Marzullo, is about forty years old, has the bright eyes and the cunning gab of someone who has shone at hundreds of vernissages. He talks about his artistic provocations while nibbling on a cracker with cheese, how Kirac achieved a niche success with a fifty-minute film, *Honeypot* where a far-right philosopher is seen having sex with willing left-wing female students who try to manipulate, humiliate and buy him diamond jewellery.

On the same YouTube channel there is also a fabulous interview with Troia, Jini Van Rooije, among other things the leading actress of *Honeypots*. She doesn't seem shaken by Houellebecq's unflattering description of her in the book. She has very clear ideas and a convincing speech, net of some fall in style when she describes Houellebecq's yellow toenails. Her whole process seems like a joke to her. You say that if Houellebecq has agreed to shoot the film, you can't start setting conditions now, it would be like tearing out the pages of a book that has already been written. She accuses him of being a manipulator old and lonely, and she pitied her wife for her. Her deal was clear: she offered beauty and youth, and he in return offered popularity, his intelligence and his status as an artist.

There is a filigree theme: we cheerfully grant large slices of individual freedom and information about our private life, but we are surprised when something unpleasant happens. The book ends the day before the sentence. In the end, the Dutch court agreed with Stefan Ruitenbeek, the evidence is overwhelming. Houellebecq, accustomed to being pampered and revered, a potential Nobel prize winner, got involved in an art project of which he understood nothing. Last Saturday the Beetle showed up, uninvited, at an event where Houellebecq was a guest in Amsterdam, dressed in a cockroach costume, accompanied by a retinue of video cameras. He messed up a bit and walked out, there was no confrontation from the two litigants. Soon, it is not yet known when, Houellebecq's soft porn film will be available for a fee. Meanwhile, life goes on. Lysis Houellebecq posted a photo of her husband on Instagram last May 17 in a proto-American diner, Buffalo Grill, in the fourteenth arrondissement of Paris, with this caption: «Michel promised to take me to Texas if the court verdict was positive for us. He kept his promise, he's a good husband! I'd say she deserved a little trip to Austin.

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