

T H E *F O X*

Frank Réage

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For being very special.

T H E *F O X*

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B O O K 1

The Mind of a Woman

Chapter 1

Letter from **Sarah France to Arianne Brown**

October 22nd.

..... " your trouble is that you need passion, obsession outside yourself - even some play apart from your endless gambling ... a quick zipperless fuck will do you a world of good, it eases-up on the hormones: you see, you inspire feelings in other people that aren't mirrored in you- all your obsessions are about yourself ... come to New York and get into some new man's jeans- it'll do you good.

Yesterday, anyway, we had lot's of fun, went to the Café Artistique or maybe Studio 51 and watched Warhol (or was it one of his lookalikes) pretending to like the music.

He looked ill, mind you he always does, you know, pasty.

You said something about buying a ticket.
Well, go ahead and buy one! Perhaps I'll see you next
week, like you said last week!

Bye, Sarah.

Fax, from **Arianne Brown to Sarah France**

October 25th

I'll be in NY Wdsday. Kennedy. Pan Am 123.
Thursday I have to do some business, Friday I'm free.
And Saturday.

Go on then: show me a good time!

Love,

Arianne.

A view of lights.

It's late, and as the sun goes down the unfolding
of the resulting carpet of lights reveals the City, on a
February evening.

She, Arianne, is there.

At a thousand windows lovers, and thieves,
watch their loved-ones walk away from them. And
then somebody interrupts their thoughts;

"Hey!" shouts this unknown someone....
"You've changed the game!...", but this remark is lost
in the wind- a wind that has begun to rise, seen only
from the Satellite's eye. For now the game Arianne
plays has shifted, changed invisibly and constantly like
the movement of water within the blossom of a wave.

In the next moment the eye re-discovers the city, a million lights, coloured attractive parades and streets, beautiful precincts; frightening poverty and suffering beyond one's wildest imagination.

Such a City is the place where the finest argument of Trade takes place, and this story will be concerned with the nature of trade-the nature of a trade that recognizes no barriers or boundaries....!.. *After all...* They say, *'There are no barriers to experience, no boundaries to need or fear...'*.

The angle of a concrete structure. Through the laminated shatterproof glass, the end-spectrum of the inner saloon, a list of colours -recorded in the worn leather and old wood.

Outside, the moon's light makes a grey clear cast clarifying the detail of outlines, some broken things, then the shadow signatures of trees and buildings. While inside the structure, light spills over the edge of the tables which are there; light, clear like the moon's, making fine sharp trceries at the edges of the green and sometimes blue baize of the tables. Fine trceries.

The fragrance of worn things. At first the distant radiant smell of wood and polish-this coupled with a certain affectation, a certain chic.

Next-the hard lights over the tables: together with metallic reflections against the wood.

Now-hard glances bereft of expression. Were Arianne to consider it, she would express them as being enigmatic.

That certain reflex created when eyes watch other eyes.

Blank gold, like the eyes of a cat before she pounces...

The movement of those eyes, watching anonymous often bored or aimless manicured fingers contacting those most precious though merely plastic symbols.... things we have learnt to treasure and hate because of the symbols they embody, so indiscreetly....

Their surroundings; tapestries and patterned wall coverings [concealing electronic instruments]; rich carpets underfoot. Patterns against leather.

The aroma of cigar smoke.

The comfortable motion of a warm current of air between the watchers.

One of the players had begun to lose: he turned to his mistress and said, smiling;

"You know, with you I lose my control!" and then they both laughed for some secret reason.

A vibration somewhere in the earth, perhaps the movement of a hidden train; then the clash of lost lights outside, reflected from the angled panels of an unseen secluded mirror.

Arianne, was there - but not playing at this aimless gambling game, having selected another, more complex one, and thus in reality toying in her mind with the fact of the latest deals in 'Hardware'- while placing plastic pieces here and there, on this or that numbered square: almost randomly. There was something important in her mind's eye, something she could not release as easily as a mere piece of pointless material. Hardware and 'Strategic supplies.'

Imagine, now.

Under the crown of the lights, the watchers and the watched are locked in a shared, bewitched circle, frozen for a moment; the girls tied by the light, bent forward over the table.

That certain sag of the body, the slightest flex of skin against fabric. The slightest sign, that signal. Barely controlled and subtly seen.

And then occasionally, the smallest, betraying sigh. (It is strange, that an element of chance, a moment of mere fiction between life and death can bring out the precise quality that the body has, a slight corpulence or a subtle line of sinew beneath the skin.)

Such bodies breath the sexual sweat of unreality, the casual moment of a fleeting contact. Almost regretfully forgotten. The scent of forgotten time.

And then of course there were those gamblers present as there always are, who only slotted tokens together uncaring where the drop was, how the knife would fall. Sharp blades draw fine lines. Why should they care? Coincidence has so much to do with it.

That tension and its supervalent balance. The fast fall, the drop, the edge of the knife; reality; one of these facts contains the key to the body.

Outside, the traffic moved, slowed for a few metres, and then stopped.

Lovers laughed and ran, began to think about sleeping, making love. Not sleeping..

The cold night air whistled and gathered speed.

High above, the eddy so formed dislodged a pigeon from an Edwardian gargoye.

Remember that they say:*'We loose that which we most want, keep that which means least to us.'*

A flurry gathered speed scuffing-up and blowing papers in the wind; while on a grey computer screen the commodity prices flickered and cast a ghostly light against a window pane and then began to

scroll through information, to find the correct file, home-in on the data.

Text appeared: and she, Arianne dreamt of Oil at 17.45, of Rice at 195, of.....

The pigeon. Now the one-legged pigeon made a good recovery, and using the current of freezing air, winged her way over the trees in the pitch dark using the sounds of the bustling eddies in the leaves to navigate.

In the darkened saloon the light over the tables was perfectly clear.

Outside the laminated glass, unheard in the saloon, the scream of a jet overhead late, and low.

Whilst inside, eyes could only follow the movement of the croupiers hands against the etch of the Grass Green, with fascinated, mesmerized, empty intent. Antiqued portraits gazed down at the mileu.

The folding and unfolding of hands; obsessions to be endlessly repeated but never to be shared.

Arianne's skin began to reek of this moment, as it would during sex.

The croupier gathered the tokens.

She watched that body, warm and moist.

But not suffused with the usual strong fragrance, no the light moisture of physical labour.

Then all at once, no reference. The mind, or the screen gone blank. Memory wiped.

Back, behind the forgotten window the computer screen flickered. A mirroring blank screen for a moment.. then: Syntax Error, Absent Filename. Electronic alarms.

Around the tables the watchers watched, eyes moving in that certain cold transport. Here there was no realization, no wishing to care. As for Arianne-she could not invite notice, indeed did not wish it.

But an eye seeking data would see, as it moved around the table- textures and colours:, a refined hand, slim and well manicured bearing a perfectly cut stone of light, marine blue.

Tapered, chiseled slim fingers, the small finger bent-in from an imagined childhood injury; the hand of the manipulator.

There was another darker form set back from the lights: an outfit in light tweed, an accurately cut skirt keeping the line of the hip and the form indenting the stomach where the table line cut into it, where it, she, leaned against the mahogany.

A silk blouse, four buttons. A watch formed in platinum and green gold.

Then, beep, nothing.

To mark it-only the swell of a breast as it eased against the Silk, seemed to fill slightly, burgeon, fall back like the sea, the endless sea.

She leaned there, against the green and the brown, and watched the bodies heave against their restraints.

A universe captured in a stolen electronic memory, and then lost as the power fell too low. All in a mere second..

One of the watchers around the table dropped her purse and leaned to retrieve it; the green card of a pilots licence was momentarily exposed against the rich pattern of the carpet.

She smiled, that crease of a thought flickering across her mouth.

Arianne turned against the richness of the wood, cupped a hand to grasp the laminated card more firmly.

Amid some confusion somewhere else in the room, then the clack of the ball, the rattle as the croupiers hand flicked against the lights.

A tightening of stomach against silk, eyes lifting; watchers plying their desires.

Lights flickering against the steel shutters. A tramp outside on the road sleeping, or perhaps dying.

Arianne saw the lights build and disappear -light

dissolve, wipe, a moment of metallic equilibrium and movement. A lost echo.

To disappear.

But no, it was only an echo.

Now she was to become an echo.

Card from **Arianne Brown to Sarah France**

November 2nd

I had a wonderful time. I think perhaps you put me in a new kind of orientation-your super energy: I mean I feel a subtle change in me, maybe I'm changing under all this crap. Now I've run out of card. Put that blonde I saw you with down! More later - A -

A View of Lights Zurich, March 1st.

A view of lights.

Arianne had been sitting there for a long time.

The companion who had been sitting opposite her rose and began to pace the floor, one hand in his pocket, the other pushing through his hair.

"The fact is..." he said, flicking the stuff of his suit free of invisible pieces of lint (a motion to which she had become accustomed through time, years).. "...that we have to make a decision"

"A positive decision."

That special plan, that plan without end, had begun to grow.

It could have been the spring sun.

".... I was worried about the Certificates of Origin?"

"I was, for a while...you know, trading in this kind of... difficult... *hardware* is tight and tricky"

Do you think I don't understand profit..?!"

"And the originations?"

"I cleared them". He looked across the room at her.

She could imagine a warm day.

She could imagine him making love to one of the secretaries over his desk on a warm Saturday afternoon. [He had told her that he had done just that one night after he had drunk too much champagne.] Last Autumn.

She let her eyes fall, steady, so that she had a clear aspect of her knee. All calculated to give the slight impression of pathos.

"And that, you know is the problem!..". He had once said in that conversational yet confidential tone he always affected at such moments; .. "...She spread her thighs like butter...!" Then she said:

"No, no there's no problem", (feeling savage and then cutting across the thought). "No trouble, leave them to me."

He had misread her lack of aggression, as intended. One of her many mind games.

In fact, at a certain remove she was considering the small syntax of the deal they were making- considering it as if she were in some way someone else, perhaps on the stage, behind the curtain - thus it would be that one could find the precise angle between curtain and audience that would give one the capability to see- yet remain unseen.

Excellent. That would be her method.

But back to yet another game.

Arianne, behind the desk now: very rapidly forcing the situation to a conclusion, making a shape of a shapeless reality, a form from shapeless clay: creating the precise opportunity of shapes in space and time and occurrence that a gunman, blind and deaf as he always would be, could understand with the bludgeon of his small logic, and thus then could use that shape to kill something, wipe it from the earth; in the meantime she maintained her composure, her face unyielding.

After all, Arianne was a trader, out for herself.

"I'm not yet clear on a point or two"

Think. Blind, simple coloured shapes that a fool could assemble in the dark:

'Section 12.A.(7) DoD. This information is Restricted (for Official Use Only) "THE A.230 SEMI-AUTOMATIC RIFLE (7.65 or 5.65mm) STRIPS DOWN SIMPLY USING THE TECHNIQUE OF

MAIN BREAKDOWN OF THE BOLT AND MAINSPRING ASSEMBLY, FOLLOWED BY BREAKDOWN OF THE STOCK WHICH DISENGAGES AS INDICATED (see illustration). THE OVERALL ACTION IS SIMILAR TO THAT USED WHEN BREAKING THE BERETTA AUTO DOWN AND SHOULD BE PRACTICED UNTIL THE OPERATIVE CAN DO IT IN A FEW SECONDS IN THE DARK, WITH REFERENCE ONLY TO A MENTAL PICTURE.'

"Yes, I trade in Arms, and you trade in money, that's why we hold hands.... we both trade with people's lives-tell me the difference: how do you justify your lies"

"The only difference is time." She began to rise and flicked at the texture of her skirt, the smile now an entirely false one, no indication of intentions. Remote. There is no room for innocence in a place controlled by the legalized violence of the government computer. London, for example.

She sat behind the desk luxuriating at her intentions, and vicious, suddenly vicious: rubbing her legs together in secret haste.

Could it be that they, her partners, friends, were unaware of her thoughts, plans: her essential and

dangerous game: in all their greed? so it was now, that they had allowed her an unexpected new angle for her game, her greed, a new window of errors.

Unexpectedly, there was the sudden smell of revenge: so like that smell of fear from the nape of the neck, from the armpits or the hips.

Sweet, rich success hung in the air like a victory.

Chapter 2

The Oasis and the Plan. *London, March 16th*

First. The sky, deep and trapped between structure. Next. The Plan, Arianne's Game. Her personal game. Another day nearer.

She walked to the office, the damp pavement reflecting the sound of a few tattered birds.

Once she had looked up and seen the grey underwings and brown bellies of those swift-like birds with the delicate voices of chimes like bells. Finches in an Oasis of sand, a thousand kilometres beyond the last reach of domination. Such sweet and lost song, high in a Saharan Eucalyptus.

The lift doors eased closed with a wheeze of compression.

Her partner eased himself at a survivably better angle into the chair at the other side of the desk.

Consider. Now, between them was not only the fact that she had been planning something that he had not the wildest idea of, but like a sign of all her duality was the symbolic arrangement of her office, carefully and consciously built up as a buffer between her and the possible aggressors of this, her space, in a sense her own being.

But that had never been in his mind. It never would be. Whoever he was. He could not see her body, and it was only her body that could reveal what she was thinking; the body being swallowed up by the angles of sight, position and then objects. She had worked on her body in the gymnasium, built it up, caressed it to be as she would wish it to be. After all, it was hers, was it not?

Perhaps she trusted him - and he her?

A secretary ducked-in without knocking:

"Mr. Martin is waiting at Reception."

Her partner disengaged himself from the chair and leant on the edge of the desk for a moment, a certain twinge of anxiety crossing his face;

"Well, let me speak to Martin first"

"Fine, fine...."

"Then we can have lunch over it and make a decision later".

He nodded approval. Arianne smiled again, that smile which seemed to share a secret; the serpents smile that she had practiced until it was perfect, in front of the mirror in the bathroom, as a test: never looking at her body, for that it was that that might betray her, give all she was away.

There was no feeling; after all, what is feeling.

Now she too had lost all feeling.

Her partner, while his light eyes sought to pierce the darkness of that space had not seen the deep silence that lay in her mind. In her stomach.

There was a background to all this. A long trace of need for power, greed. Other factors. And then the plan, that game.

The game gave relief to the planning, the deviousness and duplicity that only the body could not endure - for that governments often use computers [which display perfect inconsequence, ignorance; no ability for feelings or the powers of recall, no capacity to make decisions or sort moral judgements-or defy their own existences with some sort of morality.] The Plan had more than a little of the knife to it.

Waiting.

Patience. That was the important component of it. That sharp knife that she had kept hidden for so long in the silken glove - the sudden action that would

happen in silence and without warning: that subtle voice-the whisper of the assassin, that thud of bullet before flash or report.

That would follow.

There would be no crass rationalizations: only considered logical calculations based entirely on cost. Cost has its own reality, just as the records of an accountant are neat re-writes of untidy ancient history. There can be no evasion of the fact of it in the final analysis, only abstractions, blunt axes. Power is the engine.

"But now", She thought about her erstwhile partners for a moment: "perhaps they are too used to living with the fact of destruction, so that like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a car they cannot move until they are stricken, annihilated maybe I will lead them into destruction one fact. Only that fact."

She walked down the steps rather than use the lift, thoughts of 'Hardware', Oil, on her mind.

Bodies in her minds eye; glittering, oiled, beautiful for some reason. *But not here.*

Power Games *March 17th*

She left the office, ostensibly for some cigarettes, crossed Regent Street and walked into the arcade at the other side, wishing only to breath fresh cool air, after the confines of the building.

It was a clear day again, not busy, still Spring.

Her eyes were tempted by a beam that suddenly changed into a stronger white light. A band of mercury on the glass of a window, which she walked towards....she entered a shop, with that certain tick at the back of her mind, a suspicion perhaps of being watched or followed. Now she saw a fine textured black dress and tried it, reasoned with herself and considered that she should have it, entered the main shop and paid for it.

The fineness of the fabric toyed with the imagination, she imagined it on her body, then only naked; standing in front of a man who was both desirable and dissolute. Tall like this, no about that tall. Well formed shoulder, tight waist, like that. She would perspire then, secretly - in fact she could smell her perspiration now: that slightly acrid yet resonant smell that she knew so well from the tables where the money and the power always changed hands.

A trade for a trade. Or a game involving power.

Smells always retain their fresh edge, there is no cast of time on them. Have you noticed?

These girls then, by the table, the eyes confused.

The data fluttering on the screen of a VDU. The cursor pulse finding a cross-reference: automatically.

What was that reference? Could it be used, taken care of?

Her body: moist and warm. You see Arianne knew that sweat affected her fingers: it was the peculiar play of that commodity, stress, upon her. Flesh. She saw it all in her mind's eye; chance, luck and power. That compulsive need to dice with the razor's edge. And what if there were blood-if she found herself cut deep?

She caressed her own arms, turned her eyes up and put away the spectre of loss.

There was an inevitability about it.

Now eating her customary salad, when glancing down at the silverware for some uncertain reason she saw the unaccountable reflection of someone she recognized.

Henry, his main aspect as usual that of contrived and immense relaxation, something she had known about him for as long as she had known him; a watcher intent upon speculation.

Something kicked at the back of her mind; the turning of an ancient moment, as the right hand unclasped and stretched, releasing the tension within, and the shoulder took firmer hold on the chair back.

He leaned towards her, and said with that slight tick playing along the side of his mouth (so generous), and with that undeniable way that he had;

"How nice to see you.."(a beat) "How unexpected.. I was by myself.. May I join you?."

She could discern little in his manner, no hint of the finger loosening the collar, or any nervousness, tick. No change in pallor.

That was normal, there was hardly the betraying movement that would give that impulse away.

Something deep in her mind might start to snarl then, turn half away with such quality of threat. So she smiled, but the smile is always outside on the skin, and the mind inside was snarling, curling. The face betrayed the will with its skin.

Not to be at all friendly, that was the thing, to hold a secret fact silent and to keep it locked away, only uncertain that words might betray it.

In the midst of it all then, rather than because of herself, knowing that this...

What is it that one says when one is suddenly and unexpectedly reminded of a moment that is past, left in antiquity of happening, way back in the file? Then all of a sudden the file is fresh, opened again in front of ones mind, fresh. Arianne sits in front of the VDU and calls-up particular data: now it un-scrolls.

Like a sudden splash of cold air as one opens a door, that unexpected noise hits the ears and causes...it was a moment suspended in air, close to the threshold of air, and drowning, and of course it was ..

Those letters: maintaining an unwanted, desired moment in her mind; a window in her life wantonly left open and needing closing. But now too late.

She knew that, but it was unalterably a fact: it was Bellissimo. She began to become haunted by someone living: wrote to him after their first encounter, but that second first time not comprehending the outcome, and then he began to write his strange broken letters to her - to return his thoughts to her.

Now she seemed to have one in every pocket to remind her of those moments. Life breaks into moments, simple cuts, no dissolve, hard cuts to minimize pain.

Inexplicably his letters still came lovingly written, he would say: "I touch your lips" or "I nestle between your legs", almost casually, as if such things could be any but the deepest realities. Moments pass and those realities have gone, that's the shame of it.

Yet the letters came, like a mixture of peace and conflict. She once said;

"I've gone out of my way not to attack you", and he said,

"It's a famine, a civil war in my mind, a large part of.."

There were 'phone conversations and increasingly infrequent meetings seeming to give the lie

to those early continents of early sexuality and later passion. But wars and metaphors do not merely make way. They are puny in the face of more abstract realities. She was colonized not by force but rather by the unexpected powers of her body to react to desire. Arianne needed that relief, that flight of locusts to degrade her before once more she could begin to describe her birth.

Now, knowing all this, Arianne leaned forward and smiled. He, Henry, sitting opposite her due to the U-shape of the cornice at the end of the enclosure, his eyes off-puttingly inconstant, the left smiling, the right a little cloudy and confused. Yes, he smiled a little crookedly as he began to speak:

Letter from -B- to Arianne Brown.

L.A. January 23rd

Uneven, indecipherable writing met her eyes:

OH, SUCH A MOMENT, SUCH A
LOST MOMENT, ARIANNE!

SOMETIMES I GO TO A MUSEUM AND
STAND IN FRONT OF A PICTURE, SAY A
LEONARDO, AND I REALIZE THAT IT
CONTAINS MANY VERY TRUE THINGS. HAVE
YOU EVER THOUGHT, THAT INSTEAD OF
USING SUCH THINGS AS BAUBLES WE COULD
BE EDUCATED TO READ BEAUTIFUL

ARTIFACTS LIKE VALUABLE DOCUMENTS?
<THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE>-I THINK THAT'S
QUITE A THOUGHT.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT THAT
IF WE WERE RULED BY MEN WHO HAD THE
EDUCATION AND SENSITIVITY
TO UNDERSTAND THIS, OUR CIVILIZATION
WOULD BE A PLACE WHERE WE DIDN'T
HAVE TO FIGHT LIKE PUPPY DOGS FOR THE
RIGHTS OF OUR BIRTHS?

THIS MORNING I ROSE AND
LOOKED AROUND FOR YOU. OF COURSE
THE BIRD HAD FLOWN, LEAVING HER
KNICKERS HANGING FROM THE BED HEAD
WHERE I PUT THEM LAST NIGHT.
<COULDN'T YOU FIND THEM? IS YOUR
FRUIT CLEAR TO THE WIND?!>

SOMETIMES I LOSE MY CONTROL
WHEN I'M WITH YOU.

FOR EXAMPLE - WHEN AND HOW WAS
IT THAT WE MET? YOU SEE, I'M CONFUSED
ABOUT YOU.

THIS MORNING I LOOKED
AROUND FOR YOU AMID THE TOSLED
TURBULENT BEDCLOTHES AND FOUND
ONLY THOSE LITTLE STAINS YOU ALWAYS
LEAVE, TO MARK YOUR TERRITORY.

OH, THESE THINGS ARE SO INSIGNIFICANT... JUST ONE MOMENT IN A WOMAN'S LIFE, I KNOW THAT, IT'S THE PASSING OF ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER PASSAGE OF HAZARDS SAFELY NAVIGATED. <AND YOU WOMEN WHO LIKE TO FEEL SO CERTAIN, PLAY ROULETTE NOT ONLY AT THE TABLES BUT ALSO WITH YOUR LIVES BY RELYING SO MUCH UPON CHANCE....HOW COULD SUCH BEHAVIOUR BE EXPLAINED ?EXCEPT I SUPPOSE THAT IT'S GOT TO DO WITH THE RESTLESS SHUFFLING OF FATE AND TIME IN ORDER TO JUXTAPOSE YOU AT THE RIGHT MOMENT WITH THE RIGHT SITUATION SO THAT THE ROULETTE GAME IS OVER AND CERTAINTY BEGINS...THAT IS HOW YOU MET ME! -remember, my sweet fruit!>....SO THEN I THINK....'HOW MANY TIMES WILL SHE OPEN HERSELF TO HOW MANY MEN WHO AREN'T BELLISSIMO?'

I'M ASKING BECAUSE I HOPE I KNOW THE ANSWER- FOR THAT I WROTE YOU A LITTLE POEM- WHICH I SHALL KEEP FOR YOU HERE AND GIVE YOU THE NEXT TIME I TOUCH YOUR SECRET HAIR WITH MY HAND....FLY BACK TO ME SOON LITTLE BIRD....

-B-

'I loose that control, when I am with you'

Then. Moments - lost like worlds in a galaxy. Arianne faced Henry. They faced each other, eyes met. A moment of futility, inconsequence, for a whole complex of reasons. Henry started. Then. Like a machine which misfires:

"Of course", he said with that slightly broken rhythm in his voice, "It was strange to meet you...it was unexpected... it was one of those days, you know, nothing to do, I left the office and thought I'd stroll to Piccadilly ... I somehow would have thought that you would have other things to do ...Friendships? ..." He stopped.

An interrogation in the gentlest terms. She gave a half-smile;

"Oh?"

"At any rate", he continued, "I sometimes sit in here"

"Me never!.." she said brightly, thinking, 'no change in pallor'. That was normal, the lack of attachment. You see, how..

"It's a pleasant way to spend some moments!" He looked at her like a long-lost friend, come to find her in a jungle. She was uneasy, sensing something predatory and self seeking. Predators wait to find your most secret moments, and waiting is a silent vigil.

He leant forward and laughed.

"You look almost troubled!"

"Not troubled - bloody-minded at the moment!"

Perhaps she had been right. They were drinking Brandy.

"A mint?", said Henry

She had been a victim of her own fantasy, caught off balance with a long way to fall, and she could not help herself now, would he see that?

"A Coffee", she said.

He called the waiter with a wide generous gesture, and now both his eyes seemed clear. She giggled, thinking that the brandy must have cleared them. He laughed too, and then flushed as if embarrassed.

Then his eyes, both of them, fell equally dull.

"Its a shame", he said, "That we have shared so much together" (He meant-'*In the past*', but could find no way to say it)"*That makes things kind of tedious... now..*"

"No, just sometimes confusing!", and the person that was Arianne suddenly wanted to laugh.

"It could be.. it could just be..!"

This time she heard a laugh that had risen from her stomach, laughing a little sourly at herself.

There was a silence, she, left it in the air; the air it was that breathed.

Card: from Arianne Brown to -B: Undated -

..." I liked doing the things we did together: but whether I like it or not that was another yesterday in my life. Don't write to me, otherwise I might hurt you. As it is, you hurt me, you must know that.."...

-A-

Letter from Sarah France to Arianne Brown

New York, *April 20th.*

Hi again Arianne...

Old man insomnia has got me so I'm writing and watching 'EXPRESSO BONGO' (1959) on T.V> and I thought...well, you could have met all the girls and all - it would've been great!

There was this party, if you hadn't've been away in New Mexico or somewhere on one of your crazy jaunts....well...an incredible TEN Room Apartment on PARK AVENUE filled with art pieces and lots (I mean LOT-SA) OTHER P-I-E-C-E-S as well.. you know how that goes...you'd have liked it all.

Suddenly I got all these Hello's from old friends. suddenly wanted to split, go over, see them all, maybe, if I have A good summer. I start an exercise class in two weeks....big self-improvement campaign this summer.....diet and all....might as well get gorgeous if I've nothing else to do!

It was really weird today.

An old black cab driver sang 'Everybody's Gone to the Moon' perfectly, word for word.....ran into Debbie

Harry and Chris Stein tonight at Honeys office....postcard from Sweden (you remember that hit).....problems covering expenses (just blew all my savings paying Amex bills!).

Anyway, when Bellissimo calls he says "just come over here, Baby" (this is how), then I say "why can't you come over here?" -and while we're battering it out and bullshitting each other we're getting dressed, and then we make each other cross..... some stupid word or another, and then we tear off our clothes and land back in the sack! Now the lousy bastard has got a new girlfriend. Yes, another one he won't leak a word about (you know how he always tells me all!).....

Well he's being really weird.

You know, the bastard is definitely in love.....but I know it never lasts long, fortunately! It never lasts long with him.

I told him, I said; you sonafabitch you just come and then you leave and I just drip all day! [You know, gravity!]

I cleaned the kitchen.....(My God).....the living room has got to be next.....its a nightmare.

Honey's gone paranoid. talking about computers and air control or something (what the fuck is she talking about?), begrudges everybody everything- what they have, too!

Why are my needs and goals so self destructive? Have you ever asked yourself that question.....you always play it so close to your chest.....do you know?

Later in the party I met this guy and went home with him. He was O.K. You know, golden haired, lovely smile.

Honey was crazy about that, too: (*you know I don't have anything, you WHORE!*).

Well, I was hoping to meet someone nice, and new. Shiny new.

Anyway, all I got was that.

Then that Bellissimo who was here yesterday was like a total stranger on the phone today.

I just wanted some reassurance, and there was nowhere else to turn.

Any news on the shoes? Send me a fax to the office. Love.

Write soon

Sarah

Chapter 3

Orientation and Selling.

April 20th.

Arianne.

I sat for some hours over my desk. It was a bright day and I alternately scribbled and looked out of the window. Thinking. Not an unusual day.

Weekends are quiet times in Central London.

On a sudden impulse she rose, put the Certificates of Origin away, shrugged on the light coat in the corner cupboard of the office, took her purse, her keys, then walked quietly through the reception area with a certain deliberation. She used the emergency stairs to avoid anyone who might have been there.

Earlier, she had left her flat the same way, lacking, but unable to, sleep; walked through the block using the stairs silently so as not to disturb anyone (though this would be unlikely in such a strong building).

Quiet as a spy.

With consummate stealth, perhaps a certain satisfaction.

Through the delicately dappled shadows of the leaves in the dawn light and out into the road. It was like walking on a black secluded beach, something left over and forgotten, for there was no-one there, hardly anything even stirring.

Gravel crackled under her shoes and she looked down in the unlikely calm to adjust the orientation of her toes.

For some reason she remembered that there was an orientation point in the Sudan which could be used as a satellite tracking point for missiles and which had been discovered and talked about in the last century . More to sell. Everything to sell.

A cat slithered across the sheer gloss of a car bonnet and turned twin golden eyes upon her without the merest hint of an expression.

On impulse she stood under the dappled treeshadow by the wall and let the wind pass her. One day it would be time for her to make the move.....

These were the few moments which succeed night, touching upon dawn, nothing moving, no colours, shapes or forms.

She leaned back against the wall, found relaxation flood back into her body. Amid the generous tracery of darkness against the brick she let her head lie back and felt the warp of the texture roll against her hair. What luxury. She stood without thinking.

Fingers along the brickwork. Hard lines where the coat broke against solid, exposing her skin to the air. We are all alive. We share these experiences.

It was if she were naked (was that her mind?)

She might indeed have been lying horizontally, half in and half out of the dappled cover beneath the trees.

Once again she stopped to breathe. That sense of awareness on her skin.

She stopped. Said, (aloud);

"The perfect..."

For a moment she had imagined herself to be making love. She said;

"It is mine", then, "My moment". The sky touched her skin, where under delicate tendrils of air it felt complete and dry.

Once more the cat was turning blank golden eyes at her.

Fear of loss transfixed her, as if such sensual grace could, unbeknowing, keep her there.

No, she could not be the perfect spy, for she was under surveillance, spied upon by golden eyes. Eyes available for any twist.

She must adopt the cats eyes, wear her fur, affect her disdain of all things.

She would have to change in some mysterious way. How was that? Was that an intuition?

Some moments are fated to freeze.

The Inspector of Tables. *May 4th*

She thought: 'I was singing at an open window, and someone saw me, quite by chance.'

'.....after all, Chance has a construction of such elegance that its appearance belies the fact that it is entirely molecular. The form that chance is, is however complex and always hidden, except to those who at their point of interface can strategize sufficiently to manipulate their strand (usually pointlessly): perhaps that is why politicians heap their rage upon spies, who weave their strands with great elegance, both creative and destructive, but who must be clearly superior to those who merely manipulate in order to satisfy buried Ego: sexual frustrations and inhibition, for example, politicians....'

'.....So camouflaged is this structure that it is almost always taken to be random...!'

There is nothing so lacking in profundity in a complexly structured universe as chance. Neither can it actually exist.

And thus it was that chance had found her.

Arianne stood at the table.

She had lost count of the times she had stood against the mahogany edge like this: thus she laid her hips against the table in that mute gesture of acceptance that the table demands.

Luck. The wheel spun.

As eyes lifted to ease half-imagined stresses, one could see the nature of their syndication among the players: the anesthetization of the conscious, the ritual washing after a sort of sex, as if to wash away the guilt.

The eyes caught the reflection of a cuff against the light. Arianne's eyes.

Through the veil of cigar smoke the subject of her intense, though studied, regard rubbed his eyes.

Simultaneously, the data picture on the video monitor away from both their eye lines faded to a point of light.

May 5th

Another day. An evening without Stars or Moon. Slight drizzle caught in high wasted lights.

Once excited people, celebrating the high culture of their property. The saloon was warm with the hidden scents of flesh.

A stranger rubbed the back of one hand across his eyes, as if suddenly tired.

A waitress came across the eye level and the stranger's eyes bobbed at her breasts.

Then he looked at his lapel as if thinking, and quite suddenly looked away having watched Arianne for some moments, imagining himself unseen, perhaps unseen himself until that moment. After all, she did not know him.

A fly buzzed under the steel shutters of the ceiling, in between the old oak panels and the concrete and steel sandwich.

The Inspector of Tables coughed in his high chair, softly, unseen. Where he sat in the darkness was also the most smoke polluted area of the room.

He had been thinking about the breasts of that particular waitress too, for some time: how they rose and swelled as she breathed, ever so gently. This crystallization had actually taken some weeks, and now in his slow way he had finalized the formulation of a plan.

The Inspector of Tables leaned down and gestured to the waitress.

"What?" she mouthed, and made an O shape with her glossy red lips.

He scribbled a message on his pad and gave it to her as she passed; it said; ' Bring me a whisky - What are you doing after work tonight?- I'm cold and I need a pillow'.

The Inspector of Tables coughed as the warmth and acidity sought his lungs, straightened as he heard the ball clatter, concentrated on the hands below him.

Out of ear and eye-shot the waitress looked up and said softly;

"To cry on?". There was a certain irony.

While Arianne leant her belly against the wood she watched speckles of light dance on the rim of the wheel. Eddies, of heat and of air.

And that other watcher, that stranger, watched on. There was all the time in the world in this secret world.

The Inspector in his unfair umpires chair began to write another note on his pad, refining the remarks he had made earlier. His imagination [as usual] was slow, but he normally succeeded in what he wanted to do, given some effort.

Somewhere in a jungle glade a python swallowed a goat, having squeezed it flat.

Now the inspector began to doodle.

The game continued to unfold, towards its apparently invisible end. The horizon is always at a distance, is it not? Until it is too late.

Arianne knew now that eyes watched her, between the twin lines of people, unblinking eyes, with a blade of gold cast into them by side reflections from gilded lamps.

She thought; *'While they dream they do not know that they are dreaming,..... only when they wake do they know that it was a dream'*<Chuang Tzu>

Now her eyes met with those of another across the intervening space; the time right, for the next game.

Arianne stifled a yawn and he nodded across at her. Those eyes held hers for a moment.

They both held glasses of this-or-that alcohol.

For a few moments Arianne was almost sensuously unconscious of herself - and then found him at her elbow leaning across to light the cigarette she had fumbled from its case.

The stranger stood beside her for a second, unwilling to speak. It was after all, logical. She used the case as a gesture and a pose, to state the obvious.

And then that voice tilted the balance, all suddenly very simple:

"I looked at you and wondered."

For a moment she wondered herself- she said:

"Wondered?" He replied:

"What you looked like without those clothes"

"Better than you might expect!"

"I like you"

"My cigarette is out"

"There's nothing to it"

"No, its easy!"

Such things can be. Much as the slick steel against the glove. Now Arianne wished his scent, his sex. The initial fear was the determining factor. The fear gone, almost panting with the sudden release - she gaily clattered with him; down the steps through the hall, laughter thick in both their mouths, past the eyes of the doorman, simultaneously envious, and lonely.....

Watched by the glass eye of the concealed camera. Little humour in such a machine.

"What a dump!", she said, the better to feel her breasts secretly flex against the dress..

At last, out in the cold air with the stranger, his fingers gently bringing the nerve ends on the inside of her arm to life.

Now she could breathe. Fly like a bird over the trees in the park, use the wind as her motive power, no, her reason for fleeing.

Fly away. Now was the time to begin the change, like a Python sloughing it's skin.

Arianne slid into the leather of a long low car. All angles and confusion of flat and sliding surfaces, the summary of its power from the inside - (*The smile appears on the skin, outside*).

Finally, to shut the eyes and rest the head against the restraint. The unexpected armrests at just the right height, the warmth, the arrangement of dials, seat, window.

The very first time Arianne had flown solo, she had at first landed on a routine flip with her instructor: then without warning he climbed out and then said: 'Now Lieutenant, its all yours.' Arianne had felt her body turn to water, felt herself sweat profusely with terror, her stomach all knotted up with fear of death. She had thought '*Now I shall die for sure*'.

Seen from the pilots seat the nose of the aircraft formed a hump, and one had to taxi it gently from side to side using the rudder, in order to see the runway.

She had done this a dozen times, why was it that she was so scared? Perhaps because she might now die alone, at last. Though she would, anyway, in the end: perhaps in an aircraft similar to this one. There was a foretelling in it, did she but know.

Then, as the engine noise rose and the bumping rushed bye with a colossal swoosh of power, the tail came up and immediately the end of the path was

before her, the plane dizzily beginning to lighten, swerve slightly in side-wind, terrifyingly fast....

Now the trees, as the nose lifted, the engine gave endless power, the perimeter pylons rushed at her...

All blurred.....and that was the first time of change, fear that gave her an ecstasy close to orgasm....

After all, that was why she was so involved in '*Hardware*' or '*Tractor Parts*'.

The car purred along: Arianne all wrapped in this cocoon of speed.

The stranger was in no hurry to start: he took his time and timed it all well. She could only appreciate the gentle suggestiveness of his control of pace.

Something right about the placing of his hands.

Yes, the work of experience and expertise.

'One has to admire technical excellence,' That's what her instructor always said.

Well achieved.

The nature of any well-played game is timing: some would call that gamesmanship: but no, it's pace that is the centre of it. He made comments to make her smile, no sign of a fumble in the mind, or the fingers.

Arianne liked to play. For this reason she played well. She was good. Now the stranger said;

"I couldn't understand you, the way you stood there, the way you had such control, the way.. you kept on winning.. you impressed me!"

"I aim to win... I hardly ever loose".

They looked at one another.

"I was impressed!"

She drew back a little.

"Yes, there was a certain coolness, something about you that defies description"

A silence as she felt her heart beat.

The car sped through Kensington.

"I always get warm on a Motorway!"

"She likes Motorways", he referred to the car as if it were his mistress, needed something from him, had him in the palm of her hand.

"Has she a good body?"

"She's beautiful, you could see that!"

"Yes"

The engine growled as they rounded a curve.

"You have an intricate control"

"You mean, a touch?"

"A touch with the car"

"The controls give me power"

"Yes, I see!.."

"Shall you, I mean.. Do you want?"

"No"

"You need control in a place like that"

"Mainly the face"

"Oh, sometimes the body - that tells you a lot about the face"

"Really?"

"Yes, you leant impatiently against the table, but your face was at rest"

"Oh?"

"And I saw your hands"

"Against the table?"

"Against the table"

"And then what did you think?", he dropped a hand and changed gear.

"I wondered if ever I could control those hands"

"No!.." It came with a species of horror, a secret gasp. An old Moon spirit become Hermes.

"I mean, only..."

"Oh, Yes!"

He let the words tail away and she looked across at him. She looked through the window. In all this tracery was a hidden moment, a string of logical sequences that was leading somewhere-with a precise point needing the perfection of the last sequence to begin another; tantalizingly close and only limited by the logic of rationality, enough to imagine. The key to this game and secret quality of its nature was that the fabric, its structure, was part of intuition, imagination.

"What?"

"Oh, I'm only musing" She had never imagined that her imagination could be anything to reckon with. Now it was. It was independent too, living. Now he stopped the car and leant across to her saying:

"What shall we do.. would you like a drink?"

There was an offer in his eyes: he smiled slightly as his arm moved. He was disengaged, disentangled. Unmoving, still. Unimpressed. She could see a tiny vein beating a rhythm on his forehead, the nervous turn of an eye. Something. He had perfect balance, poise.

There was nothing for it. Far out in the forest the wolves were calling. Time was short. Among the pines the wind whistled and eddied, moving the snow.

For what?

"We could drink something or..."

"Oh, that!"

"Or that!"

Expecting a reaction, finding none. Shading eyes with long lashes, reacting slowly, thoughtfully.

"Yes, I mean that!"

"That". They both laughed, he had his hand on the ignition key and he said:

"Well, lets"

They stopped outside a bar. The street was cold and the pavement was wet with something, maybe a street sweeper's water, perhaps tears.

They drank a lot, deep. A sudden rushing in the head. Rooks rising, disturbed. The sky assuming that dense foggy blue that one associates with dawn. They sat smiling at each other, the clammy plastic veneer of the tabletop reflecting the green cold cathodes from above, lit side-on by the reflectance of the swelling sky. She smiled. Arianne was flushed with alcohol, or something. He said;

"You know, I want you"

"Want?" As if unknowing of such things.

"Yes...but I'm not a polite lover...."

"Want?"

"Want your hands on me"

"Want you, where your legs meet"

Was that in her head? Was it that she wanted sex with him? Or was it that she needed simple human warmth, embrace, need. At any rate, that certain need seemed for a moment to have deserted her. All at once she was downcast.

"Very much"

He smiled at her with his teeth. She smiled back, and thought, *'It's now to think something, be something, do something, be someone, now the dice are down. It's my game, my turn. Then: what am I thinking?'* It was the alcohol talking.

The System, and The Game.

Letter from -B- to Arianne Brown

"...your friend Sarah knows about us- I haven't told her a thing and somehow she's picked it up-

Well? What could I do?

The I thought, well 'Que Sera, Sera'

and if anything good happens between us in the future, it would be a bonus, won't it!

I leave you with that thought, and touch you secretly, there, -B-

"This is a definition of the system", said the M-D Disk brightly, *"basically...."*.

The voice went on to develop a scenario about systems that Arianne was already aware of.

No, her system was better, it had form and a certain tight elegance like any well laid-out game, almost foolproof, with only the clue of identity to betray its existence.

But was there a system which someone could use to evaluate the elaborate business she was set upon?.. There must be!... Did the system feed upon itself, did it scavenge upon others, or was there cross-talk between systems?..... Did it prey, did it have a feral oversight which could drive it quickly to ground when threatened, whilst maintaining its integrity? Huh: but could it play? After all it was an invention of someone like her, someone seeking some kind of totality in control; only now she would free herself from that totality, make the master system her slave.

Could the structure of the system ensure its longevity, or did it need the nourishment of outside forces and influences? She was aware of the need for her own safeguards; oversights could prove suicidal, it had to be a perfect stereotype, and she would have to craft it piece by piece until her system overrode the other, and freed her.

Would they see the failsafes in her copy?- detect the perfect, locked-in evasion? Would it dissolve into the telex chatter as it was intended to?

All caste and class systems work by using two basic strategies: the Institution-generated assumption that certain ordained categories of existence of living things actually exist, and the equally subjective assumption that a set of apparently inherent characteristics differentiate between people at a divine level of what is also assumed to be a naturally existing state of development which is, in some mysterious way immutable by human agencies.

Or, to put it another way: is that such systems work by imposing an essentially illogical understanding of reality (for example by using pseudo-religious prompts) using psychology and subjectivity against the individual, his own inadequacy against himself, creating mistrust and cynicism in the uninformed. Controlling information so that it does not inform, merely

becomes of passing interest, and so becomes unrelated to the facts of existence.

Part information means no information. Or worse, misleads us. Part information is that which we mostly possess, which renders us thus ignorant and defenceless.

The way out? And that is how the ultimate systems work-*perfection!*

How do you break the system?

Of course you must break the rules. Or make the rules to a New Game.

Not the rules of law, though they are in fact capable of endless mutation in order to guarantee their own survival: it must navigate using the assumption of a rigid structure: "*The trees that the wind does not destroy are the ones that bend in its breeze*".

There are you see, three categories of individual for a situation, those as above, those who cannot bend, and who will be destroyed in the course of time, and a third category (most of them) who will go along with the wind, be used by the wind, and will eventually fall prey to this and their own vanities and weaknesses. These are known as The Majority.

People can thus be differentiated, according to weakness or strength.

You can sell yourself, you can become transparent, or you can ignore the bully. The Whore,

Black Marketer, the Merchant Banker, the perverse Magistrate, the political vandal....

But there is a point which interpolates itself here - lawyers represent something which is capable of the worst vanities of man, they are considered not to be for sale, but ultimately are; and if discovered to be solid pillars of unbending honesty, incapable to see things the way others want them to see them, will surely become unemployable. That is the reflection of their essential weakness.

So Arianne had learned this rule: had learnt to bend like them, to change. She was, in a way, transparent. If such was the time, she would learn how to sell herself. That was the essence of it. Mutation faster than the nature or capacity of the system. Games developing their own rules and dictats. Inaccessible. Clever. Vicious. Wildcats.

It had begun to work her way, she had begun to break the system, make the trade play her singular tune.

Chapter 4

The conduct of the Game.

May 15th.

Now for the precise conduct of *the Game*.

Arianne had arranged to meet Kowalski at four thirty in the evening.

At three fifty-five she was outside, trying to find a meter. There wasn't one, so she parked the car on what seemed an unobtrusive pavement's edge.

She turned the motor off, made the doors secure, and played the radio while she composed herself.

There had been much long-distance communication; though the basis of the deal had been struck the precise implementation was still her thing—no one else knew how this co-ordination of waybills

and certificates of origin was to be accomplished, and only she, she had the total overview of the transaction. There had to be someone who knew each part of the puzzle, formed over a long period, and that person was she.

This then was the information that Kowalski needed to start the payment procedure, and she could avoid the involvement of anyone else by creating the correct documentation and addressing it to the right agencies. The correspondent and the executor in a secret, illegal transaction.

That much was straightforward: added to which, she was sure that with Kowalski money would talk too - after all, money was the requirement, the key. That was the main chance, for which she must set herself. An opportunity there too - she could bypass even Kowalski with an inside deal, a deed of contract witnessed signed and drawn on the correct source unknown to anyone except herself.

Or she could play it straight, so that her partners could share in the clean-up. *As if she would.*

This system was inherently elastic; she had found the way through.

'Two cents on the dollar is not enough - I want the fucking dollar - you take the two cents!'

She kicked off her shoes as she sat in the car. She inspected her fingers and her toes.

Then she climbed out, crossed the pavement, through the steel doors, her skirt flat in front.

She entered the toilet to tidy herself, looked in the mirror, checked for creases and faults. None.

Straightened her blouse. Adjusted her decolleté, and her hair.

She made her way up the thickly carpeted stairs, past the curious secretaries in the pool, introduced herself into the office.

Kowalski and Liebermann were waiting for her. They offered her a cup of coffee to stall time whilst the office staff packed up for the day and the building began to empty.

Such business was '*Streng Vertraulich*'

Liebermann spoke for them both:

"I have a very good offer for you"

He seemed ready to tacitly accept that this deal would be with her as sole agent; and they appeared to take it for granted that such secret dealings had no rules, only the rules of payment and supply.

They were sizing her up; one of them said;

"Well, lets come to the point then, we need certain advantages in any contract, as you know"

"You need these supplies fast, in bulk, secretly"

He coughed, putting-up the palm of one hand flat, as a shield:

"Confidentially...."

"That's what I meant, I'm sorry"

"That's right" Cigar smoke rose to the ceiling.

Kowalski gestured to the walls and cupped his hand to his ear.

She nodded.

She passed a piece of paper across, it said: 'Don't refer directly to the goods'. Kowalski showed it to Liebermann and nodded, gravely.

(Destruction is always a grave subject.)

"...*Supplies in bulk..*"

"I do". A marriage without vows.

"*Letters of Credit?*"

"Cash, if you want - but I need 28 days"

"Right", her feet felt suddenly unbearably hot.

"Or LC's back to back"

"*Those will be interesting for repeat supplies*"

"I can arrange with my people to have those officially notified by telex whenever you like"

Like Hell.

"Right, I'll arrange for you to have the new address for direct communication with me". His face became slightly confused.

"Documentation?"

"We'd better arrange to meet with all interested parties in order to complete contracts".

Thus, the arrangements would be notified to the vendors, the loans taken up and phased, the

payments notified and allocated to the banks which were assigned.

She said, with a huge bubble of air seeming to burst through her chest;

"We can do it", she hoped that they did not see her nerves leap, throat gulp.

"We can"

"Good then!"

Liebermann sighed and relaxed. Tension moved away from his face. For the first time that she could remember he smiled, and that normally grey skin awoke a little.

"Let's have a drink on it," said Kowalski, and crossed the room to an ornate cabinet, hidden like a safe behind an elegantly forged Dutch interior. The chiaroscuro shifted as the light moved against its surface.

"Just one thing, Mr Kowalski"

Kowalski lifted an eyebrow, Liebermann tinkled his glass against his teeth:

"Yes?"

"One last thing, is that I must make it absolutely clear that it is in the nature of our contract that nothing be mentioned to anyone else, apart from the three of us or our notified and assigned advisers"

Neither of them looked in the slightest surprised.

"Of course not!"

The tape recorder in her bag squeaked almost soundlessly.

"Good, any slightest breach could provoke..."

"I entirely understand, " said Liebermann, The Straight Man, totally misunderstanding her.

She was hot and cold all over, her body fluid and hard, swollen, as if she were aroused.

"I don't like discussions about such sensitive subjects in places like these"

Kowalski smiled blandly.

"We usually meet in negative places, hotels, restaurants.." By way of an explanation she already knew.

She nodded.

"Of course you do," said Liebermann, misunderstanding yet again.

"This deal is too important for everyone involved"

"I expect that in future we will be better aligned with one another". Kowalski smiled colourlessly, she wondered what he envisaged.

"I expect we will"

Liebermann smiled.

"Lets drink on it!"

They drank.

"Good"

"Thank you Mr Kowalski, Liebermann"

"And you too". Statements of transparently counterfeit regard.

She took a series of increasingly wrought deep breaths as she walked from the building. She had left Liebermann and Kowalski literature and some handbooks on the weapons she was trading. It was a matter for fortune now, for the deal to be completed and the banks to be officially brought into the arithmetic.

The deal was now substantially struck, only last minute haggling remaining to be done, and this time not over long distance telephone lines or telex terminals, but face to face in an hotel suite.

That would be the acid test.

Once outside and alone, she leaned against a wall and vomited onto the stone paving.

That was how it was.

That was how she played this game. Now there would be a time of waiting.

Legerdemain..

May 20th

Arianne shuffled the papers in the attaché case and brought the lid down smartly. Clicked the catch -

picked up the phone and asked for the number, instantly regretting that it may have gone onto a list somewhere.

The operator was clumsy and asked for the number a second time.

She became slightly agitated.

The telephone rang at the other end, and a voice answered against a checkerboard of conversation.

Legerdemain had become almost easy. She said; "I have my people lined up, do you have yours?"

She gave her name.

There was a long moment of suspicion. The voice asked for the reference numbers of the main contract and she gave it across the line. The line clicked and then ticked. The hackles on her neck began to rise.

A beat, and then:

"We've been waiting for days!"

"I'm sorry, these things take time"

"I said, we were here days ago, and we are busy people!"

"Do you have the documents?"

"Of course."

The voice had no manners, for money and manners do not mix.

"Well, I'm ready-"

"What shall we do?"

"I'll fix it.. It's underway!"

"O.K."

"Goodbye"

The phone clicked off at the other end of the line, cutting across the word.

There are no farewells in bank vaults, only the mortal symbols and artefacts of power. And Arianne was in the business of that symbolism.

Now she sat in the foyer of The Inn On The Park waiting for a contact.

Its a pleasant enough place, and as the time drew nigh Arianne began to run through her preparations for the meeting.

The imagination of fantasy is always better rehearsed, though reality too often benefits from rehearsal.

"Miss Von Behrendt?" said a voice:

"Who?"

Someone had tapped her on the sleeve.

"Miss Von Behrendt?"

"Who?"

"I'm sorry, I've confused you with another client", said the sub-manager, and turned away.

Later.

Bells chimed, and the traffic outside the tall windows droned.

Arianne faced him, that one. At the table.

A Fox is always ahead of the hunt - that is in the nature of the Fox.

A distant voice chimed in like the bell, tinkled as it moved: then: a chalked placard moved over the heads of the diners; it came nearer, tinkled, '*Ms P. Von Behrendt?*'.

"Who's that?", he said,

"I have no idea, they thought that I was she?"

"Ah!", he said and leaned closer, tickling the inside of her arm,

"But you could be, my wild one!"

"No!" She drew back.

"Happens to me too, in Hotels", he said, and they both laughed over their coffees, knowing what they had in mind.

Hardware, and Sudden Death.

Assassination is easy- try it if you dare, sometime.

The opportunity has its own ironies and is its own spur; frequently, circumstantially, offering you the right weapons. Killing, after all, is one of the most final of finalities.

Back at the Partnership, they had detected an element of this special game she played. Did they but know. For they were unhappy at the office, something had gone wrong.

"Blast!", said her secretary "that big deal I've been typing-up has disappeared in smoke!" she made a snakelike gesture with an open palm. *'As if her earnings from any deal would be more than a fraction of a percentile.'* The fool.

"It just vanished!"

Sudden Death.

'Everybody has their own price. *Some just want long lunch hours, some need an extra pillow or two. Play between their legs and they have the sensation of confidence and security. But remember that it's yours to take away. They're in your gift, like butterflies behind glass.'*

Earlier, when she had arrived late that morning excusing herself for a dental appointment, a general hush had sat over the office.

"You know, something has gone wrong with that oil and hardware deal!"

Someone pushed over the top page copy of a contract...

"That's the bloody contract!"

Michael sat on the edge of her desk and vented his frustration.

"If that Julie cow wasn't such a dyspeptic bitch it'd...."

"All come clear?"

"Well, you know"

"Really?", she said, concerned - no, playing concerned with a bubble of something like excitement rising in her throat.

"Yes, we're getting nothing from those people", he held up a telex message, "*Give me the bunny light and its go'*: that was signed by Johnstone in Texas - and then, no more.!"

(Arizona actually, where Colt make perfectly forged AK 47's - we buy them!).

"Its actually Arizona.!"

"You don't seem exactly concerned?"

"We have other problems"

"I expect you're right"

"I know I am"

A thief can also steal your mind.

She would take time. Simply wait for the perfect moment. Play involves timing; and that makes the Game.

A Deal.

She 'phoned Liebermann from a box as she walked in the lunch hour sunshine. Nobody had remarked on her leaving the office for lunch, though this was itself unusual. She didn't wish to hurry the conversation, but Liebermann was in a great hurry over something, his manner was curt: "Uhhuh?"

"Mr..Liebermann?"

"Hullo.."

"Thank you for returning the deeds so promptly"

"I notice you're using a public 'phone"

"For security, of course"

"Of course"

"Is everything signed?"

"I shall be available tomorrow, late"

"Then I'll let you know the exact time and day...tomorrow is a possible one.. after that we can fly.."

"If we can do it over the weekend, I think you'll find it more secure!" (Just a hint of irony).

"The Weekend's fine", she said.

In her mind's eye Machiavelli, sitting-up in his sarcophagus and laughing.

After all, the bottom line's that it's not what you're selling, it's how much fun it gives you.

*Letter from **Arianne Brown** to **Sarah France***

Undated.

God! sometimes I feel so lonely. After a few abortive fucks I sometimes feel I'm going to go crazy. What is this bizarre frustration that I feel: yesterday I screwed this creep I met in a club. Well, at first all went well and then the cretin conked-out on the job. Well.. I know that that's fairly normal, but he managed to stain all my clothes (I hadn't had time to get them off like you normally do).

Now I've got a cleaning bill and no Romeo. I shall have to resort to....

Well, what would you do?!

Love,

Arianne

The K-Y and the Commando.

May 29th

Somewhere deep in the forest, something stirred.

'First, it is normal to discover to often profound surprise, that deep in the crannies of such sea dwellings there flourish all kinds of coral. Gummiferous Pterocarpus being only one of the many beautiful living forms that we find being readily available for the craft of mans hands. However, it is also important to recognize that also deep in these coral trenches lives the Giant Conger Eel, the Sea Snake and the Electric Eel, apart from the only unusually dangerous Grouper.

Any of these animals can cost the unwary diver fingers, or even a hand.'

On the Tuesday there was a Porsche stopped outside with its hood in the air. The engine was repeatedly revved, which tried the nerves.

Then he called. Arianne shut out the background of noise with a hand and talked, close-up, thankful for the excuse to seal herself away.

He meandered, on the line, somehow seeming nervous. Her sixth sense cut-in automatically, and

despite herself she listened for a sound, a tap, a hollowness.

No sign.

Finally he came to the point:

"Shall I see you?"

"That would be ..O.K."

All at once his voice lost its strained tone, more relieved perhaps.

She thought, 'I've cracked him'.

For that reason she would dress up, for him, especially. Perhaps it was her imagination.

She arrived home earlier than she had expected that evening feeling grimy and sweating, so she stripped off her things and ran a bath.

She stood in front of the mirror and inspected that body of hers, without the clothes.

Kicked off the shoes, stripped. Looked at herself, and finding tasteless little blemishes busied her hands to rid herself of them.

That only telltale, she thought, was that tattoo high on her thigh, nestled where the hairline started. She had always called it 'My Butterfly', and obviously its position was known to few people. But still, it felt like a telltale. Like any I-D number.

She sobered up from the task of cleansing herself, fulfilling the adequacies of a ritual, and cleansing away the imaginary as well as the actual.

She often needed to feel the water lap around and in her after an afternoon, for example, of unsatisfying sex. Or when the enjoyment of her body had been sullied by the glances or caresses of someone whom she imagined wanted her only for what she was not. Someone had once said to her *'You're just a cunt, you'll take as much as I can give you and then take yourself away to someone who can fuck you all over again, again and again, because you swallow sperm like Whales swallow plankton.'*

So how could you do it? How was it that you could explain that just that smell, that habit of thrust, that weight of flesh, was the thing that the full experience of love could be about-was that there no limit to it?

Now she washed away the imagination, rid the psyche of the detritus of the body, ready in a profound way to forget. *Ready.*

Such thoughts were unproductive.

She played the tape recorder loud and strutted around at her toilet.

She shook her hair down (such length as there was) and found herself staring into those docile but angry eyes, a fire deep inside them.

Then there was luxury, a full subject.

Silks and perfumes, sheer swimsuits, marble stressed against your back while he entered you. Ah, such things of Araby!

And then simple luxuriance, hair against skin, hair meeting hair.

She felt the warm air from the windows as it brushed up the curtains and passed over her fine tender skin..... The new air entered from the window and Arianne saw that it stood ajar. She stifled a sudden desire to display that other person, that butterfly, at the window.

Pure luxury against her legs.

The questions of life continue.

She sat in the water of the bath, spread her fingers wide, felt the warmth enter her, heard her mouth say out loud;

"Now, I have you....", meaning, "Have mercy on me if I have a desire to destroy you".

She knew that he would never forgive her.

Take an example, take Clarissa.

One of those women who like to do particular things. She cycled a lot, spread her legs for athletes, was a large user of muscle, a trawler for sperm, a receptacle for any muscular mans fingers. Oh, Clarissa was such a rag doll!

Clarissa was also a wow in the library, very clever, sailing through encyclopedias and her Masters Degree at the University at Basel. Yes, Clarissa wowed their bodies- and their hands.

She wowed their money too, and the secrets they didn't give so readily, like their neuroses and their sexual deviancies, their accounts of buggery in the Bergstrasse (such beautiful woods) and their friendly fellatios in Schloss Frankenstein.

And then she wrote them all down and kept the book for herself.

Well, apart from the fact that later she used it all as a vehicle for a series of stories in tabloids and magazines such as *Bild Zeitung*, *Quick*, (and whichever other publications would pay her good money for them).

Clever Clarissa. Both her body and her mind could profit that way.

Yes, who can forgive destruction when it is unasked or requested and comes senselessly from a supposed ally?

Could that be an irony? Or was that the trick of a quick passage, a small death?

She sat up late one night and thought -

I had once heard a conversation, just tasty little snippets:

"Can you find it in you to..."

"No, but when he rubbed..."

"Which legs were those?"

"No.. .just imagine....!"

"I preened my legs with the razor."

In reality then, I lined my body up against the mirror and saw where the bush broke away from the slight bloom of the continuity of my thighs. Then with the blade I preened that line with a greater delicacy thus to reduce the break of my fur against the line of my hips, until the line seemed tight enough.

She breathed in, and checked that the line was right. Almost ready. Shivering for some half known reason she clothed herself. Then she lay in the deep set of a window for some time, unmoving.

Now she was quite ready.

She took the underwear from its package and laid the triangle of cloth across her hips. She fastened the ties, which felt good: knowing that now her body was strong and good to see, too.

The pure sense of luxury of the stockings; almost a transport of erotic enjoyment. The hollow between her hips in the dress gave her pleasure, she saw the dimpled out thrust move against the warp of the material, felt the hair pull against the fine skein of the fabric. She posed in front of the mirror, hands over head.

What would they think?

What would he say.....

Would he see that *like that*...?

She stretched her legs and enjoyed the shapes of her body in the mirror against the falling shadows. The snakelike double wind of a twin chain. The sensuous serpent that bound her, made her its slave.

Arianne laughed to herself in the darkness, a little hollow now. She collected her things together.

She had selected them for use, just as a Commando would select his things for efficiency.

Card from **Sarah France to Arianne Brown**

Undated

...." either use K-Y or think twice about your lover!...

Message Ends: - S

Chapter 5

Butterfly.

Around eight, the buzzer sounded.

Commandos kill.

He was right on time, breathless into the intercom at the street door. She kept him waiting. *'After all, this is the way he should be made to wait!'* Not a sound, sometimes a rustle.

Could you die unknowing, fast? Perhaps!

She walked down the stairs measuring her steps, meting out her own time, dictating her own rhythm.

She reached the hall and waited inside the dwell angle of the door, counting moments. He was not aware. Not of her, or that smell, or that crease under her breast: no, he could not be aware, for she must surely be a projection, fantasy, a sort of sophisticated

PLAYBOY girl, with her legs spread like butter ,which perhaps he might get to taste.

Just a taste.

The taste of freedom between her legs, that silky feeling; that tingling expectation framed with tiny rivulets of electricity under her skin.

They run and run, like a river that will not stop and can never be satisfied; her own small butterfly, to fly away.

She placed her hand on the handle and waited, gasping back a sudden twinge of pain low down in her chest.

That butterfly. To fly away. She leaned on the handle and pushed it back. The door stood open and she saw him there.

A very dry "Hullo" (to maintain equilibrium in a mad mind. Yes.) Balance. She smiled at him, perhaps a little remotely; "Rabbits", she thought, "*Later!*"

At some point a street lamp flicked by.

He smiled at her.

She slid into that thick sandwich of steel leather, glass, and she then drew back a little.....

He said:

"You seem rather withdrawn" She answered not a thing, just a distant smile. He started the engine.

"Shall we do the theatre, have something to eat?.." She found the theatre tedious, but socially interesting.

"Yes", she said, brightly, contrivedly.

He was jolly, rather amusing. They ate well, he ate fish, she ate chicken.

"Many girls have a dream", she said. He raised his eyebrows, over the Brandy. "Yes, the dream to be with a good looking man in a racing car and behave the way we're behaving!"

"Oh?" He smiled.

"And here I am sitting there.... all quite normal!"

"It is." He leant forward and she could sense his warm breath on her skin.

They were settled in a comfortable room with some drinks. They had visited a club, they had left for another.

"When I am with you I loose my control!"

After a few hours she had begun to loose that fine control. It was true. She repaired to the toilet, where she was quite alone, and made faces at herself in the glass. Alcohol gripped her. She said;

"That is the kind of man that you are..." Knowing that the received image was merely one of those potentially available, and that the celluloid would in time peel and betray itself, timed, like a piece of

decaying nitrate film: to peel away. Perhaps to consume itself.

She made a round mouth at herself in the plush of that room, preparing her lipstick, and then injected two fingers of her hand in a gesture of Sex, laughed, and spoke to herself in the wall of mirrors.

"How many women come here.... How many whores?" A beat then. "And do they sweat when they fuck...?"

They say that Ladies never sweat. They never paint their sex with shiny red lipstick.

"You're surprised...!"

She looked up from her musings, she was back in the main saloon area.

"I... not surprised...?"

"I like dancing"

"Good"

"Will you dance..?"

"Later..?"

"Later, too..!"

(Ah, how delicate...!)

"Would you like another whisky?"

He flicked his eyelids, with a very slight impatience tempered by a smile. The lashes were long. She enjoyed the long hands, the long face, the dark silk lashes.

Delicate fingers.

Actually, nothing mattered anymore.

She said:

"What is your name?" And he replied-

"A name is something you call yourself"

Like the skin outside. You could paint it and embroider the makeup, gloss it and excite it, but nothing could change the essential fact of it.

He laughed.

They started to dance. It was an intimate club; in the darkness of the saloon no-one wondered what others got up to. Thus in that saloon nobody noticed the way that their hips contacted and flexed.

So he explored her in that dimension, through the medium of her movements, the way in which they interfaced, met, between her hips. She had made that indented hollow ready for him in secret.

Ah yes, he was a sensitive and intelligent man.

She had not noted whether his eyes could find those things which she had seen in the mirror.

Perhaps not. A memory of dishonour.

"Remember that in the end this business is only about greed!"

BOOK 2

The Name of the Game

Chapter 6

Laundry. *June 11th.*

At first she felt nothing. Then the electric heat of Sun on her face, pleasant, as the light flickered and the trees outside creaked with the slight shift of air displacing itself. It was rather as if thoughts had become flowers in a meadow and simply lay sleeping among the warm tussocks.

Aah! But there was the game: the rules and the lines not yet entirely drawn, but the fixture, the structure, all in place.

Later on, things were to awake, for nothing can stop still - and then at those moments what underlay Arianne's lack of rest would make itself evident.

It seemed now at this moment of restfulness that the wind had cleared the imagined dust away. It was a time of cold dawns and warm days, an easy time

to work with, to use for those things she wanted to do and to think.

That was the gist of it, very simply the capability to sit and think and not be asked or required to do anything in particular, the game to just grow.

Friday. Another Grey-blue morning, quiet, cold, early, promising heat, which made her stomach warm in the thought of it.

Laundry to do.

She got to the office earlier than anyone else, catching the last of the Mexican cleaners as they clattered their mops and buckets out of the lift. Hardly any traffic, for she had work to do, things to achieve, and all this would take extra time. After all, secrecy was an essential, there were new things to ruminate and understand. And of course it was time to do the laundry.

She let herself in with the key and walked through the silent offices, not wanting to disturb or be disturbed. Through the empty foyer, hardly a footfall sounding on the density of the carpet.

Then slipped into the office, for all the world as stealthy as a thief. A Thief.

She sat at the desk to orientate, pushing the doors quietly to, and took a visual fix to prevent the entry into that area of anyone she was not aware of.

She leant right out, using her foot as a counterweight, and pulled the panel for the recording unit to access the machine.

She pushed the cassette and it came loose, then placed it in her bag.

Checked through the papers to rid the place of any trace.

Any trace.

Her account numbers were there, and she encoded them into her diary computer, placed that in her handbag's inner pocket, deleted the original trace from both the directory and the Recycle Bin after changing the date setting on the mainboard, back and finally forward to the date now.

Straightened her hair.

She inspected her nose for bumps in the vanity mirror; felt her thighs meet, firm, on the chair.

Felt the slight rasp of fabric against fabric on the seat. Good. Now.

All traces expunged, nothing remaining.

Now to be ready. Soon the deception would be complete.

The quiet of the street broken by the rubbish collectors van. Two raggedy men below on a porch bent forward, listening.

High tide had passed, the water in the river had begun to ebb as the moon waned.

Birds argued in the trees.

Light flooded through the fractured shadows cast by the concrete and brick structures.

Summer was beginning to spill over into the streets with their dark tarmac ribbons, creating black darkness in the deep drops between the buildings, and despite the coolness, her body was hot for deception, all over dust, layered by a micro-thin film, enveiled.

The wind that then rose began to relieve the tattered street below.

She looked at her palms, arms extended fully, with the taper of her fingers away from her.

She leaned from the window and watched two lost strangers pass by in the deep shadows cast by the light against the shapes of stone.

The light developed a sudden muscular strength as she yawned, her eyes hollow for lack of sleep.

The temperature began to rise.

She had been standing at the window for a long time. Now the Sun cut deep scars across the darkness, and the sky was riven with brilliant cascades, silver streamers; brightness so bright that to glance into it was like to be blind, whilst shadows fell like the sharps of piano keys against the blank of light.

Her laundry was washed and dry, immutable as history. Now was the turning point, come to haunt her.

June 15th.

She got up very early again the third day, put on her dressing gown, and walked barefooted to the window. The wind blew cool against the curtain.

She drove to the office and left the car outside the main door. Once in the office she walked from space to space, seeking further papers relevant to the deals she had diverted, but found nothing of much importance, photocopied those items that she couldn't take, turned the coffee machine in the kitchen on and prepared some coffee.

Said to herself aloud:

"And this was merely the way to what I want!" And laughed. "We fight for peace...this is the way to defend..." There was no longer any truth that could not be bent.

There was reality...and then truth...

She put the coffee in the machine, turned towards the door, fancied that someone had entered. Stopped. Moved.

The light went out on the landing by the main door. She made the door fast from the inside using her key.

An echo of the way she had felt the hard muscles of his thighs against her..... The next day.

The next day was the challenge. She stopped, wanting to feel contentment, but there was nothing there that she could feel.

Instead there was an almost tangible irritation, itch; pursuit, surveillance. You could say, *'Thick enough to cut,'* or, *'I felt it in my veins'.*

She would turn to the South, the beauty would change to speed her body, make her more alive. The time for change was come. She had packed a few things. *A great panic,* she felt all kinds of things rushing by, a sense of foreboding, history happening, but she could handle it ..accelerating.

Something unfuelled by any logic or motive. Perhaps nothing.

She made sure that her valise (the Spanish call them *'Maletas'*) was small, to move fast....

Then, it was much earlier, she saw it in her mind; a stupid detail. Bellissimo had seen her to the dockside one warm late summer day. He had said;

"Where is your *'maletta'?*"

Out over the port birds wheeled and turned, their cries subdued by the dust and the dryness.

They could see the dark stain of blood in the water where the offal from the slaughterhouse was thrown into the water. But there were no sharks.

She had looked at him and her mind had recorded that fact. That Dusty harbour, that forgotten port, that ship out of a Bogart movie, that sea, treachery: that deceit, those tears, such bitter tears and the rusty Bedford van, those raised hands and dusty faces, that feeling that that was the end of it all.

Now *History*.

Moments flee and are forgotten, precious beautiful, perfect moments.

"Malettas"

Arianne checked for the tenth time, that the road outside was clear, suspicious almost of her own motives. It was empty.

It was all that time ago.

Arianne standing by the rail as the old coaster felt its way among the sandbanks. A wonderfully warm day. Hot sky to come, but here, now, mere sunrise and the sticky warm salt spray.

From where she stood on the deck, the sea seemed empty. Half a dozen strangers standing on the deck listening to music from an old radio.

How clear such things often remain, regardless of time.

These other passengers looked at Arianne incautiously, wondering if they could take her, get her.

Under one dirty shirt she saw the shiny hard butt of a knife or a pistol.

One of them had only one hand.

They chewed Coca leaves and sang. The cold at night never bothering them. By day they would sit outside and chew, never laughing or giving a sign.

That was their life; and she alone in the centre of an unknown Sea. No sophisticated machinery.

Rape is done with the simplest of means, in the simplest of ways. And that renders the act heartless, empty, lonely, deadly, sad.

An act of desperation often, of suicide, of murder of the spirit, of the loss of oneself.

Feeling that she might still be watched she walked very casually but quickly. The *maletta* so very light.

She had a predisposition to cover herself, walking round the angle of the deckhouse - no, the block - almost back to the present: her flat. (How pointless).

A seventy-four bus came to the T-Junction and she jumped on it as it stopped, caught by the traffic.

There was no-one following her. She told herself: 'Merely hyperactive imagination!'

People looked at her.

She smiled like a ghoul.

"You're crazy, and you're rich!" She laughed. Out loud.

Other passers-by reacted.

Like a delicate Saharan Finch, she would turn her face South.

At Knightsbridge she left the bus and took the metro to Heathrow.

The day became warmer. Orange clouds in convoluted shapes, moving forms like milk dragged across them, as stratospheric winds counter-flowed.

That edge of imminent and meaningless...

Which?

She walked in concrete quadrangles and savored the hot winds as they blew her round the corners, counting 'One, Two, Three'.

She bought a ticket, two hours to wait.

Terminal Three. She counted "One Two, Three!" Lines and faces, hitchhikers. A woman feeding a child from the breast.

The Zoo.

The place began to smell like a zoo, as the temperature rose. A long line for coffee. She had been unconsciously licking her lips. She left the queue, went to the toilets, checked the makeup, patched the damage.

Was it her heat? Her heat against all these constraints? The visage in the mirror grimaced at her and she smiled back like the Mona Lisa on a bad day.

The damp beneath her arms began to spread.

Looking at the now steely blue sky and seeing the concrete angles, squares, shapes arraigned against the skyline, unbroken in it's way on this broken plain.

Intuitively, seeing the immense orange square she felt afraid.

She picked her way through the crowds against the steel heat of the sky, the angles of the quadrangles.

Through the passport check.

Into the departure lounge, wide cool and dark. Lacking that fine panic, angst so beloved of the practical philosopher ('You'll lose weight, my dear, you really will!'). That element of the puzzle of pre-destination sobers you, you cannot panic now for you are caged.

A gangway, a passageway, a metal walkway.

The fuselage sides of the Boeing streaked with the marks of boots at floor level. She wondered what had passed here.

Engines.

Speed and vibration.

The thrust at the nape of the neck.

The helpless rabbit; blood on the face, the fingers bleeding.

Liebermann sitting in his office smoking a Havana and refusing to deal with 'Commies'.

The gold-plated AK47 copy from Arizona in its rich plush case open upon the delicate morocco inlay of the desk in front of her, while the Trade attaché stripped it down to demonstrate quality of manufacture. Pictures of slaughter.

Wilenskis' guttural R's and hollow A's.

Her brown plastic-handled baby Browning, with the gunmetal black on the muzzle worn away to silver grey on the lip of the barrel where it snuggled in her bag together with the makeup and the credit cards, bearing a trace of lipstick against the dark grey

Pigeons on the perimeter track fluttering like torn clothing, fate.

You - by the nape of the neck. Nothing can save you... The downward, urgent, force of the ground pulling away. Wheels.... *Clunk!..*

Banking steeply while climbing...

Her heart stopped, a suspension of time, gaps between the heartbeats, chilling news, dementia, demons, sweat on the pale, pale brow, all gone now into that tunnel of the dark, like a lost memory. We are so transitory- how can we remember those who went so long before us unrecorded? Can we? At least 'Political Correctness' would have it so.

The cloud base dropping. From 30,000 feet one could see interspersed weather patterns. A warm front chasing-in over France, deep thick cloud over Belgium. Scattered silver rain over the Alps, a hint of lightning.

"For a few short hours I will be alive!"

This preparation, a funeral, a loss, leaving, arrival, falling away. A funeral of the identity (*mystery*) a pyre.

Such thought faded away in the sun. Then there were no more clouds.

The distant horizon as if floodlit, at twenty degrees.

I opened my eyes and saw my knees.

Arianne recalled now, that '*...in the darkness of the departure lounge, while traversing the various desks, window shopping, buying 'Duty Free's', one more coffee while the 'plane was delayed...*

I knew that somehow my eyes had caught those of another, for the merest moment, that frisson of contact, the merest psychological ruffle had occurred.'

Another, like Arianne, her age, good legs (for some reason this seemed relevant), the same sort of height....

'Wearing a fawn skirt. Smiling at me.'

Nothing particularly unusual.

But a desired/undesirable, prickle of interest.

And a certain refinement. 'I had the merest feeling, or a sense of being followed not exactly pursued, that quickening of pace, the sort of thing that makes tight clothing feel suddenly uncomfortable.. waiting for a hand.. amongst those quadrangles under that steely sky.

All those angles. And that gaze. *So simple.'* At least that presentiment was easily recognized. A certain quality, those fine etched lines on the imagination,

between the eyes maybe those angles which raised my level of perception a tad.

Ah, such a delicious morsel.

The symmetry of something, a compact angle, a well chosen slope.

Some certain symmetrical arrangement.

Some stupid, half remembered moment, an imbalance, motion of memory, momentary movement.

Some structure of time, a geometrical progress that was made with Grey cold rationality.

How do you describe it? A geometric form, a cone, or a tunnel; it must be progressive and mechanical.

But where were we in the structure? Like a satellite picture it takes in much too much, there is no possibility of the conception of a structure that would be small enough to be identifiably formed. Human.

'And now, where?' I pressed the button for a steward, but none came, answered my eyes.

Arianne rose to fetch a brandy, and the force of gravity suddenly took her in its claws, pulled her back towards the tail of the aircraft. Invisible fingers.

Now my eyes met those of another, in a row of seats further back. I clutched air and found a seat. Any seat.

Then Arianne found herself at a place by the aisle as a stranger smiled. And at just that moment the centre of gravity caused by the gentle curve of the aircraft in the air intervened as she moved along the

aisle and her hair suddenly invaded her face. She sat, unable to make further progress as the moment of force pulled her sideways and down.

A stranger, smiling:

"It's the gravity!"

"It's nothing at all, the seat's empty"

The stranger leaned forward, regarded Arianne with large eyes, then leaned back and smiled slowly, screwing up her own eyes. Beautiful snakes eyes (for a moment) and then clicked back to normality.

"Don't I recognize you from somewhere?"

"No"

"Perhaps"

They talked their way across the Massif Centrale, the aircraft skimming some clouds and diving into long insulated icy tunnels through others, a funnel of dank, broken vapour stretching away forever. The Boeing landed to take on parcels; she watched through the window as a pallet was brought up with identical square packages marked with Red Crosses. She said:

"Where are those for?"

"Oh, the Horn of Africa".

Some forgotten, unimportant war.

The aircraft began its takeoff run in the midst of lightning, storm. That had been Geneva. It was a night like that.

Whilst the world rotated around them on the ground, and cold air spilled in, they drank brandy from a hip flask.

Ciska, was what the stranger called herself.

Ciska it was who rarely seemed to react to anything that happened or was said, who sat there with a weary stance and busied herself with intentness; who listened and was wary-or so it seemed- to speak.

When questioned, this new stranger, Ciska, would incline her head at an angle and bring her lips together as if to lightly brush the forehead of some invisible infant with all the delicacy of her own kiss.

She breathed unhurriedly, content as she was.

Then she would smile with her eyes, sometimes more with her mouth than with her eyes, sometimes more dislocatedly.

She would brush the edge of her lips with the side of a sharp, pointed painted nail, as if to displace some lost smudge of lip colour, lost there and drifting uncontrolled on her face.

The shadow of a smile, made from so many components, and still more, drifting back to earliest memory and motivation.

Ciska turned then to Arianne, with her large pale beautiful eyes smiling, opened showing-dilated pupils. Or was that imagination?

She said; rather slowly;

"I swim at a small beach at weekends, it's not well known and it's quite private - *would you like to come?*" extending the offer.

Forgetting it.

The 'plane sped onwards, the flying surfaces shrieking in the air stream.

Over the mountains vast stripes of electricity and air met in torment. Fifty kilometres of cold blue lightning hung suspended, and immediately disappeared as if it had never existed. Without one trace.

Perhaps a neon light had flashed here in the cabin, and had then expired.

Thirty five thousand feet below, the Eiger and the Matterhorn were as big as the 'Zits' on your nose.

Now the travellers found themselves flying into a huge storm. Whimpering passengers a few rows in front of Arianne. She and her newly-found friend clutched hands as if to save themselves from the Gods.

Arianne looked out of the window and with perfect timing the sky immediately went black at the edges, delicate airbrushed tracteries disappearing at the horizons line. Enormous electronic flashes echoed in silence around the mountain passes below.

Hurricanes of rain.

Crashing into the passes, millions of litres of water. To fall from such a height seems impossible when at such times you imagine yourself immortal.

Descent.

As the aircraft begins to lose height the silver skin is patterned with the high-pressure hose of a six hundred knot airstream. A huge excess of water.

Unaccountably she was tired, very, very old, Arianne's skin creeping with age.

Ciska said, looking at her close, showing a distant gold-capped tooth:

"You look ill, are you alright? Here, take another sip of my brandy!" They huddled together holding each other's hands while the storm seemed to subside. and Arianne fell to dreaming. Steel-like shafts of water opposing themselves to the track of the aircraft. Liquid tracers thickening on the aircraft's skin and then bounding away, broken patterns of light on the wings.

And then the rain was gone.

Bright Moonlight, almost as bright as an overcast day. Extraordinary. Arianne said: '*Extraordinary*' to herself to convince her lips that she was still there.

Now suddenly beneath them, the stark vertebrae of the land, skeletons betraying primeaval beginnings, mountains like bats wings stretched skin-tight below them. The aircraft skewed as it hit a region or belt of

denser air. Through scraps of smoke, dust fog or cloud, deep valleys extended below, tiny winking lights on a night as clear and hard as crystal, as sharp in the wind as a knife. Small nervous needle-heads flickered down in those forgotten Valleys of Giants.

The depths of fortune. How far can fortune take you, before you reach the end of the track?

They both shivered now.

CRUMP! as the wheels hit the ground and the 'plane bounded into the air as if unable to come to terms with its transitory existence. They were down, the wheels bumping, contacting, and rolling. The other woman peering into Arianne's face.

No expression.

A flash from an engine as it threw a turbine blade across the runway. Shock orange and gold, a spew of heat, a cloud of hot steam, a Nacelle against grey-green grass...

Then tearing rain. The engine now gasping clouds of steam and foam. Quiet. The Airport at Fiumicino, as quiet and empty as a prison of glass. Black dark and cold at two in the morning. The slipper of fortune had led so far, and now cool wind blew against Arianne's face as the two of them tracked through this city of transparency.

Darkness, black darkness, at two in the morning. Customs men scanning faces, a cold and

sharp eyed policeman busying himself staring as they came through, abstracted. A plain clothes policemen separating from the crowd and talking to the others. A blind glass computer eye. Distant electricity moving the auto-focus; gathering data.

Through the City of Glass, into a deserted forecourt.

"Of course I didn't expect we would be so late!"

As if that explained the emptiness in me.

Waves of tiredness, another deserted court, the angles of glass reflecting dense bullet proof panes.

"How will you get to town?"

"I have no idea." *Arianne didn't know a thing.* "It seems a long way to come and to not know..."

"I have a hire car waiting for me!"

"Is that an invitation?"

"Naturally!"

Ciska was right. Nothing moved at such an early hour. A few Africans with large suitcases waited for a dawn 'plane and followed whoever moved with disinterested eyes. Wind whistled around barriers and through thin clothes. Most people shivered: Arianne's dress felt at the same time all transparent and cold.

An Arab, praying, or playing with his beads, muttered something. But apart from the chrome and the glass there was substantially nothing, aside from darkness.

In her mind the lights had faded. Then Arianne was getting into a car.

She was not aware at all, in her sleep it seemed hardly a moment before all motion had ceased.

"It's too late to find an Hotel now, you can stay at my apartment". Ciska's Voice.

In a Concrete garage or area.

When Arianne glanced upward she saw the glint of reflected lights against the glass.

Somewhere, someone was having a muttered and incoherent conversation behind a shuttered window. The voices rose and then the conversation became an argument.

There was the muffled sound of a contact: flesh against flesh. The conversation started again, broken now by a laugh, now by an in-drawn breath.

Music wafted in from some secret place on the small wind.

Damp. The cold damp from the ancient rain smelled clear and cool in the gutters.

Dust moved against the window on a dry, deep, sill.

The garage was deep in the bowels of the building that the stranger used. Now they entered the red japanned box of a lift cage.

"See," said the stranger, Ciska; "*Rome is where Africa begins!*", and then laughed. The tiny module of

the lift swayed against the walls of the shaft. (To die now?!).

A key against the light, a doorway as she was ushered through the double doors and signaled into the leather and marble scent of the interior dark.

Another door. Deep carpets.

More leather, parchment, Cedar Wood.

A scent Arianne recalled from childhood, cigars and Eau-de-Cologne. An ultra-modern kitchen, a cooker with a lift-up lid incongruous in the corner -

(I use bottled gas from a bon-bon')

After the cold of the storm, sudden humidity.

The heat was rising. Apologies, open windows. Arianne had been asleep on a couch of hard brocade, lying like a Pharaoh's Queen, the brow against an ivory pillow, the back supported by..... so weary...if Arianne ever woke again it would be in a castle; a fortress of ice, glass and old paintings.

And now, once-upon-a-time to a new beginning, for in the morning Arianne would awake to find the collection of playing cards from many places, the leather furniture, the walls lined with ageing books, the delicately faded and detailed antique chairs, the subtle flow of the wall coverings, the delicate touch of the paintings.

But for now she slept, unknowing.

Chapter 7

Letter from **Sarah France to Arianne Brown**

July 9th, New York.

Hullo Arianne Hon,

Here it is.

Saturday night in New York and I'm watching T.V.! Ronnie just 'phoned me to tell me that they were in Toronto and were going straight home. Hub!

Weird. Weird!

I was sitting here wanting to hear his voice and then the phone rang.

You know, we just couldn't continue because it was a threat...well YOU know.... The fact that we were suddenly so close, in tune like that with each others needs and feelings is probably because we needed the same things.....some one to hold, some one to make us feel loved and needed and special.....it must have been just as much a shock to him as it was to me when we really began to care....I'm too old to indulge that kind of phantasy....the thing is that as long as I know that

he still loves me and respects me and trusts me to be his friend....then I have gained something...you know, he makes me feel pretty and smart...?!

I guess, just knowing that I feel great...sad, but GREAT....you know..?

I put my photo of Gerry back where it was (I know it shows weakness, but I just had to) and there's a poster of you-know-who on the wall (a big one) and Gerry's back behind the coat rack like an old friend (friend?!).

I went out to Max's Kansas City. Then to get my books, and later to Bellissimo's house to work out some of the frustration left over from last weeks disappointments.

Although I was really tired, it worked out really well. Sometimes that relationship really turns me off, but it is nice to have something simple in your life.

Today, Gloria and Genevieve and I for lunch and then us girls shopping as John went to hang out with this girl called Leslie that he knows here..... we all teased him because none of us like her....how grown up..! Right..?

Its just because we want him!

Well, that was it...more later,

Ciao,

Sarah

Suddenly Arianne was aware of the light.

Not the mild blue dawn that she was used to.
Not that certain dawn that contained the hint of frost.
The Western dawn was green and grey.

In it the beating of waves, the smell of earth and dry things, the noises of a collection of disorder, the exchange of wind and Grey-cream spray. That exchange. That sliding of undertow against waves, those keening cries.

Her eyes stayed shut, she could clearly enough see the intensity of the light through her eyelids.

The background began to yield secret sounds, of traffic, bustle, argument, activity.

She opened an experimental eye.

Not that certain dawn that she had seen in the forest, so moist and smelling of leaf mould, dappled with Sundew. Cool, but already a brilliant faded yellow as the sky prepared to burst with Sun.

It was merely twenty-four hours since she had hung over the canyons of Savile Row, now a world and an obsolete thought away.

She said to herself out loud:

"Our cultures can become our gravestones if we are not very careful" - then - "Most people are dead before they have been born, being merely messengers or vessels of obsolete things. There is nothing more. All emotion or sentiment is an embroidery, a vanity, upon their slavery."

"They declare their prisons to be palaces.... Their chains to be strings of pearls"

She woke with a start, feeling fabric meet the hard nodules of her spine.

The loose single filament of sheet maintained the merest sandwich of cool air over her skin.

She slept.

Awoke again in a softer place. How?

Steadied herself with the left hand, felt the indent in the bed beside her with a sudden start.

The tousled pillow and the bump where another head had rested.

She lay in an expanse of coolest cream. No memory, no understanding, only a compulsion.

What?

She checked that body underneath the sheet.
Hers.

(Rape? It seemed not to matter, only to be a figment of her mind, anyway, there was no mark or telltale stain.)

Untouched. Had she forgotten?

No history, no memory.

And then like the frame of a picture falling across a screen, first the edge and then all into purchase, tick, all there.

No concept, no time.

She had seen the dawn and slept; where?

She rose and looked out of the window, where the breeze struggled with the rising heat, wrestled with the curtains, lost, fell back.

No violence, but a certain despair.

Nothing but a blank square, waves of heat, a few parked cars, and moving traffic at the corner, a voice, a snatch of sound (perhaps music). The smell of coffee moved in the air. Left. Right.

A sparrow flitted past the window, caught the telegraph wires, hung suspended at an angle. Moved. Gone. A quiet place.

She strained her eyes: *'Via Pio Foa'....*Where?

Where? She sat up.

The door moved.

Swept open with surprising might:

"Hullo, welcome to my home!" that face, Ciska the stranger; the eyes seemed to laugh at her.... *"My.... You slept long... like a log!"* (Like a log?). She wore a bathrobe, showing her skin.

Lying in the heat. There was lust in her movement - she moved on a wave of energy and then relaxed, subsided.

Obsessive, not wanting to touch her, having awoken as another person The birds in the trees, the beasts of the fields, the animals in the.....

"What did you say...?"

"Oh, nothing.."

"Oh..." the *'Tchb'*, tick of the head sideways.

But which body?

Ciska sat on the edge of the bed and laughed that uneven laugh that reminded Arianne of the forest for some reason, showed her uneven teeth.....

Hysteria? No, energy, wanting....

No, but not wanting to touch her, Ciska ...

Ciska sat on the edge of the bed, perched really, tried not to meet her eyes, her lips, make them move at all.

Oh, the beauty of that warm breeze.

That efflorescent air. The wind off a Sea in her mind.... she could smell it.

Benign.... that waft throughout the room. All the whole world waiting at the threshold to this 'Via Pio Foa'. All the world, that moment a beautiful moment.

Arianne sat up in the bed, exposing her breasts. The strangers eyes wavered not a Centimetre.

"Umm..."

"*My God, this is Rome!*", Arianne said all in surprise - a sort of regret cloaking her from something which had not passed.

"Breakfast..?"

Half in remembrance, a funeral..

"Hey, I've a meeting!"

"Ah! So you remember what you've told me!"

"I've forgotten where, let me see?"

Arianne left the bed and crossed the floor, the others eyes seeming focussed elsewhere.

"*Let me see?*" Ciska smiled with her teeth, that certain hint of gold.

"You have that address?"

"Of course" A gold bridge gleaming at the edge of her mouth, the merest suggestion.

"Let me show you Rome, my Rome, a moment of possession ...I spend a lot of time here!"

"That could be very nice"

"Yeah". Ciska displayed the slurred grammar of one who learns language by the force of chance.

"It could?"

"It could be better...but it is a remarkable town.
.a beautiful town..!"

"So what do you think of London?"

"I work there when I have to, that is all!"

When life stops *nothing goes forward.*

Or is it that nothing stops.

"I see we see things similarly"

"and then Rome..."

"in Rome I have learned to work without working...!"

A brief wrinkle disappeared from around the mouth.

"You've got me confused": Arianne-

"Rome is like that. .if you don't know what you're doing!"

"Business...the..?"

"We talk about business later...Ha!..?"

They both smiled, a deeply shared intuition.

The stranger wrinkled her eyes, and the wind gusted.

Then Ciska arose, threw off the robe. The suddenness of the movement gave Arianne that sort of sensuous enjoyment which she rarely experienced, a huge tremble seemed to run down the very centre of her body, the soft rhythm of that feline thing. For a moment Arianne admired the stranger, who was now naked and stood in front of the mirror as she selected a dress. Arianne's eyes were suddenly, unexpectedly greedy to drink the sight of that body, enjoy it at the level of the palate; taste it, savour it in the strong yellow light, the hot and then cool gust from the window jar.

Then she saw with the surprise of suddenly waking, that longer, slower curve in the buttocks that distinguishes the woman from the male, the gap between the legs created by the pelvic bones; as the light from the mirror passed through and displayed clear bright sky between her legs.

Ciska again spoke.

But now the words had become blurred, there was nothing distinct, only now the movement of that slow- motioned outline against the shifting shapes of the moving, jarring glass with its backdrops of space and sky.

More space as sparrows argued outside the glass, while out on the street a knife-sharpener broke the rhythm of the background.

Sky moved in a juddering line. The stranger turned, the transparency of her underwear serving to accentuate the dome of her crotch and the shape of the bulk of her breasts.

Ciska placed the dress over her head.

Said something (blurred), and then stopped.

She talked on, her breasts displayed in that dress, the nipples erected by the cold eddies of wind. Warm air, then a tangible tightening in her stomach.

Her, Arianne's doctor once said: 'Now be careful... any age is a tricky age if you live stressfully.. and it's beginning to tell on you". He sweated, but it was not the lights in his surgery which caused him to.

Back to the present.

Back to the two of them in their world.

An unfelt bond between them. A common fantasy. Arianne should say something, but silence served better.

Ciska, the stranger, looked sharply at Arianne in the bed, at the dip in the sheet where her legs met. Arianne thought [vicious]: '*Her breasts will sag soon!*' as if it were true, or for that matter mattered to anyone, far less to her.

Her own breasts seemed to sag as she turned, the sweat running down between them, her body all over damp.

Now Ciska:

"What a beautiful body you have! I noticed when I undressed you last night to put you into bed."

Arianne regarded that logic. Looked at her body for a few moments.

The wind stirred the curtains. A distant car hooted.

"Now", said the stranger, Ciska.. "If I were unwise I would say that there are many people who would be willing to pay for a beautiful back like yours!"

"Pay?"

"*Mmmm*, at least at first, just pay for seeing - I can see that you have little experience of people!" Said with just the vaguest whisper of a smile, with the eyes remaining cool.

"Well, of course I do!"

A chuckle, a dry laugh that fluttered from Ciska's throat across the room, traversed the curtains and blew away in the wind, by turns now swift and then dry, cool and then caressing. Now.

High humidity and sunlight.

Arianne sat up.

"One thing", she said regretting starting, pained at the possible implications..."What is it that you do...."

Again?" as if she had discussed the point in some way beforehand.

"No, you tell me First!"

"Just business", said Arianne, the back of her throat just dry. "I'm fixing.... something up.." She hoped that her tone had the right note of committal. No response.

Ciska:

"Are you planning anything?"

"I don't know"

"Stay here"

"Here?"

"Yes, stay here with me!". The other was confiding.

"In Rome?"

"Of course...I have this flat and you can stay here...it's large.. you've seen that.....and I'm in business to enjoy!..."

"Aren't you busy today..?". Creating a possible way out, making space, leaving the door at least ajar...

"Ah!..." with a laughing tone of discovery...LET ME SEE..."that comes later!" (TODAY - LATER?)
"I'll explain.... let me see, today is Sunday..is it not?"

"Of course.."

"I won't have much to do before Tuesday..!..."
She, Ciska, smiled a wry, *Giaconda* smile, "...at the earliest..!"

The Mouth.

"Which gives me plenty of time to show you around"

"Yes.. and that's very kind, truly ..."

"Not at all..! Ha!.." That dry hard laugh again, as Ciska smiled and then grimaced. "Anyway. In case you'd like something to think about.. I was thinking to expand...start a Multi-NationalThere's room enough to expand...!"

"What is it that you do..?"

A long silence. More than a moment.

The wind on the window stopped. The heat took over and began to beat down. Breathless.

"I'd better turn the air conditioner on.."

"Yes", partly to kill time, partly to make space.

Click. Whirr.

"Close that window"

Clack. Pfft. The air began to compress again as the curtains stopped their restless dance.

"Okay?"

"I'm in the hire business!". That face was directly opposite Arianne's, a pink mark on the chin, something under the skin.

"The what?"

"I hire things... items... nothing specially nasty, don't worry".

Ciska passed the back of her hand across her eyes as if suddenly weary. Her breast swelled against the fabric of the dress, then the disturbance subsided like the burgeoning of the interior swell of a wave as it fills, to fall away secretly inside of itself, before it deposits its cargo of green spume on the drowned and bleached sand of the strand.

How would such a body feel against hers?

Would she fight to control it? Fight to gain violent and final possession?

A moment, hour, century.

"Nothing in drugs?". Throat dry, knowing not why.

Dry throat.

"Nothing like that". A look of secrets.

"Oh, good!"

"A finger...", a finger indicated..."like this...a foot in the door.. a deal.."

"Oh..?"

"Making a living"

The stranger, Ciska, wrinkled her mouth as if it were only partly hers.

"Me too, sometimes...", Arianne: a cadence.

"I see, your business is not always whiter than white.."

"Trading never is" Arianne felt herself blush.

"Making a living is sometimes harder than one likes to say"

"Certainly"

"I should explain"

A long moment.

Some moments never pass.

An owl, or a train, hooted.

"You see," said the other, "I've been thinking to expand... but that needs hands you can trust!.." Ciska scratched her ribs contemplatively. Like a Fox.

Arianne pulled an earlobe in sympathy.

"...so it was perhaps a happy coincidence that we met"...

Ciska seemed to perspire. After a moment's thinking: dabbed the end of her nose with a handkerchief.

Now she scratched the inside of her knee.

"I know what you mean"

"Ah, then perhaps you have a certain.. interest..?"

"I suspect I do..", then, "..I've recently been..." she searched for the word

"Locked..?"

"Yes, locked.. I'm looking for another alternative way.. you see.."

"No, don't explain because I understand you"

"Really?"

"You're like me. .like a cat who likes comfort.."

"I have this thing about..." She could not explain. A steel cigar flew between them and the Sun,

shadow moving with compelling speed, wings swept for speed, shriek.

"I was in London.. Looking around for.. *IDEAS*... sort of excavating."

Excavating. What a strange word to use.

"Looking around?"

"Things I should be doing...people to meet"

Click.

The air conditioner whirred on. The air had become dry and cold. Moisture dripped from below the motor.

She knew half, and she knew not. Something expected to interest her. Titillate. Things moved outside the window and caused rippling shadows.

The others eyes sought hers.

"..And your business then?"

She stopped, the other cut her off with a gesture. She said;

"Yes.. my business..." she started. Then...."well, we've certain structural cash problems presently.."

Arianne:

"I think this has been a very fortunate meeting for us.... I think that I may have a certain amount of free cash.. in Dollars..."

The other could see.

"So you're afraid of the money...!"

Arianne cursed herself for not checking her flight case, testing the locks, checking through the papers.

The papers, the way they lay, were collated.

Had the case been... rifled?

She flushed. Just in a moment. Colours.

Naked in the bed.

"Afraid?!", checked herself. Tightened the muscles which constricted her jaw. "Afraid!"

"Yes.. sort of afraid"

"No!" Feigned.

"Well..?"

"I have the usual neurosis that my sources will get out.."

"Ah, yes.."

Silence. They looked at each other, then,

"How DID you get it, then?"

"I took the lot!"

"Huh!"

"The WHOLE lot?"

"The whole lot!"

The room full of laughter. Ciska with great rivers of tears in her eyes. That fact appealed to those snakes eyes.

"The whole lot..!. Have you yet to finalize contracts?"

"Very soon...here."

"My God!.. *NOW* I get it!.. You lucky woman.. My God!" Ciska laughed with her mouth.. "And I thought that that small face which slept upon my shoulder was that of an Angel..!"

The looked at each other, understanding.

An Angel.

"I see"

"I see that you see!"

"Then we must both get dressed and I'll take you out to lunch and celebrate..!"

"A whole mountain of champagne!"

Sometimes your grammar leaves something to desire!

"Ah, Oui, d'accord!"

Chapter 8

Heroes.

"*Mata Hari!*"

"Geronimo!"

They walked in dust through grand piazzas, swerving traffic, dark boys and girls eating Ice-cream and giving them sultry, strange glances.

The jutting elements of buildings occupying spaces generating their own dynamics.

Cold water down your spine.

The Borghese gardens. The stifling heat high walk that is the ceiling of Rome, with its spread of paths and the extraordinary view.

The high outlook, the promontory that is Belvedere. The Observatory. Now they were looking at the stars. But not yet living among them. Not yet.

'Like a man, not like a salami!'

"Do what!"

"Nothing, just a thought."

The Academie Francaise.

The Spanish Steps; worn, pink marble. The decadence of aged decay turned beautiful, the mortality of poets turned to stone.

The worn stones of the Corso, the massive superb cupola of Tiberius's temple turned church turned artefact.

Then the Via Condotti late in the evening.

Cars by the tables, curious eyes. Questing glances, smiles.

The hauteur of someone sitting there in the shadows. Another smile.

Red Ochre walls, tattered paintwork.

"There is no-where quite like Rome," she said softly.

In the dying evening light the mediaeval galleries, the arcane mysteries of an ancient state made geographical uncertainty.

Shivers down her spine.

"There is nothing quite like Rome"

"Déjà Vu", she said softly, in a shadow, to a shadow.

Is this how that new, other, person would work out?...

"What?"

"No!"

Then the African emptiness of Flaminio at midnight. Hairdressers arguing on the steps of a church. German girls weeping, lovers wrangling. Tempers frayed.

Time passes, remote. Time separates us and brings us together; changes us and makes us live other lives; uses up all our plans.

The stars wax and wane.

All contumely turns....violence.

"Déja Vu".

"Have you been here before?" Softly.

"No"

"Are you sure?"

"No, not ever, never!"

Liar.

Someone ate fire at the Piazza Navona, walked over coals that ignited stray pieces of paper.

Exhaustion.

Across the length of Rome the pink granite and marble is worn smooth by the passage of an infinity of feet. People, dead; even alive; historic now, slouching, thinking, fulminating, kissing, leaping, lounging, fucking.

The twinkling lights of Rome.

Touching hands. Oh! Sweet Sleep!

"Oh! Such sweet rest!"

Pidgin conversation.

"Sweet dreams"

"Can you speak Italian?"

"What?"

"Who are you then?"

The *escalier* of the road swinging into the edge of Rome. An ancient via become conduit for the people who traverse the night.

"They make love in the afternoon!"

"That's to my taste!"

"Is that so!"

Monte Mario.... how the tyres sang against the shone stone!

"I keep the Alfa in a closed garage...they disappear like.. like.. Swallows...and they fly to Africa like Swallows, too!"

Their roof the twinkling light of the stars.

The warm weft of the wind.

She had been here forever: that was already history. She sat on the apex of a roof, sheltered under an ancient square umbrella, sipping a nameless, sour drink. Under the bright, starred sky she saw her friends eyes twinkle, saw her body outlined against cold neon light.

All the scents of Tartary were on the wind, breathing, or merely drifting.

A view of the Valley. *July 23rd.*

She rose early, while the blue of the air hung still and deep, thick and textured like velvet over the city and the green damp of the hills. The cold breeze troubled her skin under the glazed soft lines of the shirt.

The upcoming warm breeze caused the Sweat Pearls of the night, rimed like the softest textures of wax, to melt away into the air and the grey-blue of the sky, as the morning rose from its closeness with night and developed the delicate fragrance of a Mediterranean day.

She looked out over the valley through a blaze of the most varied colours and shades that nature can create, catching her breath as she saw a buzzard stoop from the air.

In the thicknesses of their leaves, the fragments of sky she could see through the trees shadows were often of the deepest, most intense blue, though of course ever changing, and the shadow of the leaves and the shapes of those shadows an elegant steel, that begged exact description, so fine were the variations within the whole.

Down, where the tree limbs intersected the leaf patterns and where the shadows showed their delicate veins against the strong light, were sgraffito patterns, created as the Grey of the dawn broke against the blue

of the leaves and relayed all these rich messages back to her eyes.

Delicate filigrees. So delicate. Millions of greens.

Vegetable tracteries cause the eyes to dilate, now seeing only patterns, dark and light shades, and the shift of light against line more finely segmented than the finest man-created artefact, and more beautiful than the most pedigreed tapestry.

These things then, on which to ponder.

Then, the high green of the leaves turning to brilliant azure.

While lower down, the pink, grey and red of the granite struck bright flames.

Wind against the green in the blue.

Inverted ink stains running up at the sky, space frames. Moving blocks of solid air that turned the clouds to frazzled ants. Colossal structures and their skeletons.

She dropped the shirt and turned to face the windows on impulse, hearing wind against glass, stretching her legs. She moistened her fingers and caressed her sex, feeling the warm skin react against the fingers as the moistened tips searched. Waves, walls of yellow pink and white light flooded across the room creating sound, the rushing of the silk of a robe against

the tiles of a floor, the whisper of a thin summer skirt against the legs.

A huge fur had fallen across the room so that she was warm and then cool in alternate striped and then flagged patterns.

She lay then across the bed, stretched out, her whole body poised, tense. Beneath the rimed salt on her forehead was a sudden freezing wafer of sweat: now that her breasts were come alive she felt the roseate nipples hardened and tensile, pricked and tilted.

Her fingers slid across her ribs. The flatness of the belly's skin. She watched the light rise over her body, while there she lay, athwart the light, flooded in it. Way back in the valley the sound of a 'plane, revving as it cleared the crest, its beacon light flashing. Then gone. Only yawning blue wind in eddies across a nameless gully.

She rose and drew the blind. Then she was asleep, in her own arms.

Totally relaxed, totally cold.

Chapter 9

Relative Weights and Measures.

Rome, July 27th.

One must always dream alone. And dreams cannot be transported, or disturbed, or they'll change and spoil.

Such things are what summer days are made of.

And then, in the warmth of those days, she met them, as they had arranged, relaxed and cold.

The deal would go through without a hitch.

Two hundred and forty tons a month for five years, at precisely set unit values. The representative of the Trust Bank rubbed his hands as if to warm them.

Her new account, opened by arrangement some time ago, and now activated, would receive the first tranche of money in the next three days.

Eager eyes combed contracts.

Her new Italian lawyer examined everything through pebble glasses. The Texan and the Saudi swore at each other.

There were a few sticky moments whilst the precise percentages of commission over various items were haggled upon three-thirty-seconds of a cent here and a quarter of a cent there. The unit values were huge.

She felt her brow cold, as pens scrawled across increasingly damaged papers, and initialed dog-eared clauses.

Dreams were cut out. Her mind concentrated on the haggling on hand, in which several people took delight. A long race to the winning post, every inch fatigued and exhausted.

Dealers in such commodities are preponderantly male. One of them, John, expressed a preference for her.

"Now that we're all making profit, why not fly down to my boat tonight - I mean just you and me - my Lear's at Ciampino and I've got to get outa here - its costing me a fortune in storage charges!"

She had pleasure in rebuffing him, knowing that behind the elegant presentation was the child's personality, the Ego of the power-hungry politician, the leader of armies into destruction, the promiscuous and vain thinker out for his own ends. Then the final deals, the final signatures and the friendly back-

slapping and hand shaking and smiles after the pure theatre of scowls and insults. The filling of soiled glasses once more with bourbon ("I don't like to be away from Miami too long... do you want a lift Jack? I'll tell the pilot to pass-by Tucson.")

Sixteen dealers, bankers and lawyers sat back, and felt warm.

This contract had suddenly made her very, very wealthy. She could leave the world of dirty smoke-polluted hotel rooms and rude fat men steeped in their own self-esteem, and now quite literally buy anything she wanted.

The Saudi and the Texan traded last insults.

And Arianne traced her destruction of documents in her mind. Yes, there was no further trace. The system had begun to consume itself.

Apart from the fact that she existed.

Apart from that last fact.

There had been no hint of knowledge or concern, the other middlemen had looked at her quite blankly, though they probably had knowledge of her London origins. Such is the power of greed. (Or Self Interest, as it is called in polite society.)

She had effectively taken several years profit with her from the trading company in Savile Row, and now there would be no hope of retrieval for them. It

was all stolen, secreted away, vanished. It would be weeks before they developed the slightest awareness of their loss. So long as it was kept secure.

Someone among her partners had once said:

"It can be rough...lets face it, we live a risky existence, besides- in the world of Free Trade everyone has to watch his own back!"

He might be the smug one, but now he was the poor cousin to this second citizen. The thought gave her a delicious malicious moment. She smiled widely with her mouth and laughed, as if to laugh out loud, but despite herself there seemed to be no motive for it.

Now she was rich beyond her wildest dreams. Really rich. Not that richness of poverty present in the shiny car, the decaying house. No, a usable, enjoyable wealth.

The thought was like a sudden cold shower. She gasped in the lift as it descended, leaned against the marble mirror and chrome and opened her thighs to gold.

She sat to recover cool oxygen in the lobby. A slim tall man stood near her. She rose as he smiled at her, and smoothed her skirt down over her sex with her palm to indicate the direction of her thoughts.

They had a drink in the lounge and he made idle conversation, he looked at her legs and then her breasts and finally dropped his cigarettes. As he

stooped to pick the packet up he glanced at her thighs through the parting of her skirt, and she widened her legs.

That was how it was.

Chapter 10

The Natural Blonde. *Evening*

She was grimy, tired, and bruised after that adventure. She said;

"I'm celebrating", and he'd ordered a bottle of champagne, which they had gravely drunk together before proceeding further to the excess which she desired so much. Finally, wonderfully, she had release. The hotel room smelt of her sex.

Now she left the hotel walking somewhat awkwardly, well satisfied, but with a sigh of relief, catching the first taxi she saw. She had not thought for a moment what she would do. She told the driver to go to the Via del Corso, then changed her mind and alighted by a large open and lighted bar in the Frattina, Bar Vanni.

She spent time; (*Twenty minutes, Two hours...who knew!*) clearing out the detritus of her thoughts ('everything in there except the kitchen sink..!') Her bitterness against - she knew not what. In the darkness of the street she talked to herself in tones of the deepest intimacy:

"Now I can leave... leave my shackles...."

Her reverie was broken by one of those drunks who hinder others in bars. She shooed him away and he was lost to view in the interior.

"Now the ball is in my court..!". The drunk made lewd shapes with his lips from far away.

She rushed back to Ciskas' flat to seek solace, celebrate, clap hands. The new stranger was not there.

Of course it was illogical, not surprising, how could she expect Ciska to know when she would arrive! No that was stupid! She asked the Concierge, by dint of much sign language, if there was a pass-key. There was, and with the gesturing of the lips and an easy manner the concierge fished in her cupboard and gave it her.

She lay on the couch and luxuriated. She drank strong brandy. She became very drunk, waiting for her friend.

She would have another drink, just another. She would have to find a fresh bottle. As she fished a bottle from its case her elbow ('you clumsy oaf!') knocked a

cupboard door, which fell open. At first she did not notice, and then in her lightheadedness she rifled through the filed papers. They stood on end in covers of varying colours. She fished one out, and with gathering curiosity ('Curiosity Killed the Cat!') began to search through it.

The unlikely thing was, that all the files she saw had impossible fictional titles: 'THE MAN WITH THE BLACK HAT', 'THE ROMAN BLOND' 'THE AMERICAN NURSE' titles like films, fantasies, works of suspense.

That stirred her imagination still more. She searched to find a title which excited her.

They were all similar, so she settled for one at random: "THE NATURAL BLONDE".

Then she sat back, amazed. 'THE NATURAL BLOND' was a dossier with a full set of out-payment accounts headed CASH paid apparently to a girl named Niva.

Niva was a girl who was selected for men who liked blond pubic hair. There was a schedule of her specializations, and more strangely, a sort of score-sheet beside them. Her dossier gave her a percentile as a general 'score', and there was a set of detailed performance notes with headings like 'Length of Performance' or 'Performance Aptitudes'.

Arianne was taken aback, but at the same time found the whole episode incredibly amusing. How

could you organize such a thing...?..she sat on the floor and laughed herself out, and then unaccountably burst into whole floods of tears.

She pulled herself together.

"My God!"

Then she looked through the cabinet and selected one; "'BROWN PAPER" which contained indistinct photographs of a girl wrapped in brown paper having anonymous sex with three men.

'BROWN PAPER' was a girl who apparently enjoyed considerable celebrity, and her reviews were surprising. There was a further set of contact-sheets showing 'BROWN PAPER' having sex in various other guises.

She sat and cleared her head. Thought. One thing the files showed was lack of control, the failure of human nature to see its own shortcomings, to come to terms with itself, to frankly admit its shortcomings and be healed by such acceptance. You could describe that as the sin of pride; and 'BROWN PAPER' was obviously only one of a multitude who catered for the simple simplicities of mans nature. How was it that that girl with red hair had to be beaten by a seeming old man with a hawk-like demean and the tired Grey glazed eyes that one sees in the Judge, the spent Executive, the failing Salesman? - lonely lost men, victims of their own vanity, pedantry and 'Importance'.....

Yet, Red-Hair fulfilled an important function (or she would not be there!) - which was to be seen in the spotlight of the excitement in her clients' eyes as he strapped her spread-eagled and naked across a frame, then beat her until warm blood oozed from the deep welts in her skin. And then he straddled her obscenely, but his ardor filled arms were the usurpers of his sex, which betrayed him.

Highly paid (as Red-Hair was) for her labours, this scene, these thoughts, brought a judder to the body.

She shuddered at the wounds and scars, made another drink, added ice to kill the sudden scent of pain in her chest, her loins.

And then there was 'ROSEMARIE'.

'ROSEMARIE' liked numbers. Colour pictures, there were, and a reference to a film made with her filled to overflowing with men, filled with strong men, jerking men off with her hands, laughing gaily as one man took her from behind as another filled her with his cream. 'ROSEMARIE' it was who specialized in '*Teams*' - anything from Rugby Club Dinners to Sales Conventions. Apparently 'ROSEMARIE' preferred to be shared out among the losers, but all at once, and her overflowing body winked its way across its file with the greatest of gaiety.

"Extraordinary!". She took another sip.

She turned the television on and watched, by chance, the intelligent face on channel 42, flickering and explaining and re-explaining the days events (or so it seemed) and while she did it seemed that she was performing, or so she imagined it, the sperm frothing out of her mouth. her arse, her sex. Imagined the hands of those men, those gnarled hands, those hands with broken nails, those wide seeking strong muscled arms with stubby fingers fishing for her sex, no, more likely her anus, and prising her body apart as one would prise the corpse of a trout open, not to explore, but like the Conquistadores, to conquer, crush, force, subjugate, control and finally destroy, as they filled her mouth with foam and tore her delicate lips as they forced their bodies ever closer to hers.....

And then the ridiculous. After the extenuated jerking and moaning, the ridicule of the repeated rhythm, the cries like babies cries, the moans, the drawing back.

The sensitivity of her body after sex was something she knew, adored; but would they, could they be sensitive; would they draw back and fall into stupor: or caress her, fall asleep against her breast?.....

Were they like children, or would they be animals? would they treat her like baggage, to be deposited and paid for, or would they care for her?....

Letter from Sarah France to Arianne Brown

New York, Undated.

Me again.

I made Maurice angry by staying out on Sunday night until five AM, and then sleeping late. He said I wasn't doing my work, I told him to fuck off.

Tomorrow is Mothers Day, so I'm going out with the family. One Hundred and Sixty Bucks of gifts racked up....My God I spent a fortune on clothes \$ 38 twice and then another \$ 85. Excesses to the end! You know the type!?

Bellissimo 'phoned me. Thursday or Friday it was. Wanted attention (my cold was too bad)- and now I feel up to seeing him...and he's busy. That's show biz!

No matter, its good to say 'No' once in a while, it teaches (Who?) humility.

I'm running out of things to say.....its almost sad....

Later: My God!...This is so old its almost out of date. See the coffee-cup whorls? Yes?

Hey, Rolling Stone is going to run something I've done.....nice, Eh?

I miss hearing from you. Where are you? Fax me or something.

Write soon,

Sarah

"I'm sorry," she said to herself, "I'm sorry that I must leave all this behind me...."

July 29th.

She awoke towards evening and barely had time to take a shower before Ciska arrived, right on the stroke of six-thirty.

Arianne was spilling over with her news.

"I hadn't told you until I was sure!.....but now its all gone through and the money hit my bank this morning!....."

"That makes us both rich ladies!", said Ciska, with a laugh.

She looked at Ciska across the darkling room, and the pictures she had seen in the files came into her mind as if there were a flash of light there in the dark.

Then:

"...And now about your business....perhaps I could help you in that.." A certain gleam in her eyes more evident in the shadow.

She spoke in the foreknowledge of something, not yet certain; still an intuition: it occurred to her that it would need a shift of concept, a new way of looking at her lives.

Lives. Lives.

Lives. That was the clue.

"I'll need another..... partnership....perhaps here....." Something was dawning in her mind. Some unlikely child was being born.

"You need another partnership? "

"why....yes.."

"Well, why not!..." said Ciska giving a moments thought, as if it had been determined previously, "Why not!...but my business might give you rather a surprise..."she gestured weakly, or rather began to gesture, toward the very same cupboard, and then thought the better of it and cancelled the gesture at its formation so that it died like a wilted flower.

"Why then...let me show you!..."

Evening.

Her new friend took her on a walk through Rome, it was, she said, to give her an on-the-ground idea of the environs of her business.

Through this section she saw cars parked way up on pavements, apparent cul-de-sacs that opened out into secret squares garlanded with flowers, isolated fountains and unexpected sights such as marble statues that one would have thought should rightfully be in a museum of beautiful things...flowers drooping down from huge ancient courtyards, tiny squares where children played amid a litter of old bus tickets and Peroni cans.

A wide marbled area. A huge gnarled oak isolated in the middle of a street, in its own ancient bricked flowerpot, while at intervals along the street trees straggled to give shade, standing away from pavements, wondering into the dusty roadway.

Now, hearing the sounds of the Tiber, with a background of jazz bands and rowdy laughter. Pontevecchio. Through a teeming square, past rotting restaurants and smelling of moldy cabbage; suddenly Ciska gestured: 'there it is!..' on the corner of a street, jutting into a square, the front old and worn and beautiful, a fragment of the side and back showing signs of new building...

Battered and delicate, perfectly proportioned, one side intruding upon a busy thoroughfare, the rest laying back, almost hidden, especially now that the shadows were lengthening...thick walls and shadow..

"Here it is.. The thing you'd never expect!.." spoken half in jest.. "Now let me show you a thing or two!..."

A generous doorway, lined with marble, then into a spacious foyer, one wall displaying a company plate among others, all burnished...through a wide marble hallway faced with green and Grey streaked marble with a high finish to it that gave an assured, relaxed gleam, and past a one-legged concierge who raised an eyebrow then smiled at her with a quizzical expression in his eyes, and who then watched them with apparent infinite attention as they gained the stairway.

Arianne chased her fingers against the fine grain of the banister as they mounted.

"There's a beautiful stairway in the Vatican....I think it's by Bernini....and as you mount it, there's no trace of anyone leaving...quite magical.....I could use one here!..."

They were in front of a tall green wooden door, an unblinking square pane of Grey-green glass regarding them from a coaming on high. The door buzzed, and then clicked, as her accomplice held out a magnetic key.

Through into shadows. A stone lions head facing them, caught in the narrow shaft of a light from above.

They entered the ante-room to a second hall. Glass framed them on three sides, and one had to turn sharp left after entering to traverse the double-blind of glass, lit only by picture-lights over heavily framed paintings.

The hall at this point was an entry area where a larger room contained some deep, comfortable chairs, and then a sort of counter-cum-cupboard, where her friend threw their coats.

Combined tapestries, paintings and rich furnishings had the effect of deadening all sound, and the resultant silence was both mysterious, expectant, and restful.

Ciska reached one sharp elegant hand behind a wooden molding.

Clack!, and a glass door swung back to allow them to enter a passageway, as before, richly and elegantly hung with paintings and decorated with antique carpets and objects. Marble underfoot.

Small deep-set windows looked out through metre-thick walls upon a courtyard in which a tall palm swayed. There were few sounds. A few sparrows and finches stirred, listless.

Through into a lounge. Long canvasses on either side smelling faintly of paint....a deep leather sofa.

The tick of a concealed clock.

A bookcase in the wall near the clock as it revealed itself became a door, which swung open to the touch silently....an inner office.

"Before I discuss the business with you, let me show you a specimen of what it's about....." She looked quizzically at Arianne.

"Will it shock me?"

"It certainly will!"

"Now let me shock you!"

"Yes?"

"Will you do me a favour?"

"If I can!"

"I'll need a passport - a new one.... no trace"

"Ah!....."

For a moment there was a clear glint in her eye-
and then it was gone.

BOOK 3

The Game of the Name

Chapter 11

Another sort of Name.

Then Ciska suddenly smiled.

"Now lets see....." She unlocked a cabinet, found a file, and sorted through its contents.

"What about those boxes..?.." said Arianne, almost relishing the moment. Perhaps there was something she should not see!

Ciska looked at her quizzically:

"We could see those." Another glint in the eye. Ciska's hands had found a box...."*But I warn you, you'll be surprised!..."*

Arianne sat on the sofa while Ciska fiddled with the boxes, entered a tape into a player, left the room, and then returned with two coffees and two cigarettes which she lit, before passing one to Arianne.

'Clack', as a videotape started rotating, the steel Grey monitor flickered.

Zigzag lines sprang across the screen, and resolved out of a grey rain into shapes, while red and blue stripes momentarily positioned themselves behind figures and then were as quickly gone. A tingle of anticipation. The tape counter clicked.

"*De Dum, De Dum.....!*", said Ciska, by way of presentation.

Now Arianne saw a blonde girl.

'I am sitting here and watching someone doing something I would be in fear to do myself..!..

The girl, quite generously proportioned, richly dressed in a deep-cut tight fitting Ball-Gown, entered a room.

The girl tousled her hair with her arms, then bit her lip. She seemed nervous, for as she began to unbutton the bodice of the dress her fingers slipped repeatedly over the dome of the buttons.

She stepped out of the dress.

Behind her a man entered and stood with his face in shadow. He wore a dressing gown.

The girl turned towards the man and Arianne could see the young, tight smile on her face. She began to loosen her underwear, and the corselet fell to one side. The man came forward and pointed accusingly at her. She began to moisten herself by rubbing her

fingers over her vulva (this is what Arianne could see, as she stood, legs wide apart).

The man fell to his knees, beckoning her on, and as she moved forward filled his mouth with her sex; he tore away her clothing and seemed to be imploring her to mount him; pain seemed to be the signature of his face, dark detailed lines accentuated by the harsh angle of the light.

For a few moments they were transfixed, the girl with her head back in apparent ecstasy, the man on his knees...

This then was another sort of game. Another species of game

"Did they know?"

"Nobody here knows... except us." Ciska leant back. "Shall I show you more..?...You see, we have to cover ourselves against blackmail." She settled back against the wood of the chair and lit another cigarette.

"You see.. Basically.. Our cash turnover is high, and we have to pay the police a percentage - and lay on a bit extra for them!... but we still have trouble with protection rackets...."

"And what about the clients..?"

"Oh!.. they are well satisfied. Believe me...one factor is that no-one knows we exist... .had you turned the other way at the entry you would have come across a small office, which I run as a coverthat's why I thought of you....."

"But I'm a Trader!"

"Hasn't the opportunity occurred to you?"

Of course it had...

The instinct was still there.

"Yes...!"

"That could be a Trading Agency, just like the one you left....."

"Not left exactly"

"I know...!"

She had decided to play her part of the game this way.

"The clients..." said Ciska

"Clients?"

"Like any business"

"But you cater for them?"

"Think of it like a club where one has Sex"

"Yes"

"Take the gentleman you saw: he's a well-known lawyer"

"How do you know?"

"He takes off his clothes before Ficky-Fick!"

"Oh!"

"Well, imagine for a moment, with the amount of Judges, Cardinals (Oh, and humble Priests too) together with fine upstanding Family Men that we have here of an evening, we have a situation that must, that can, be.... protected....with facility"

"But who else knows about your clients?"

"No-one, naturally, only me!" she said with a wink and an exclamation of the eyes.

The tape ran on. Another gradient of blue on the monitor. The screen cleared with zigzags of black and white: now the man had taken the girl by the shoulders.

Ciska placed another coffee on the table apparently forgetting the movement on the monitor and left the office to search for another cigarette.

There was silence around me, absolute silence. Somewhere in the background I heard a car horn sound several times.

The man made as if to kiss the girl but then suddenly rebelled against his docility, his imprisonment, tore the brassiere from her breast, threw her back against the bed and began to masturbate over her body. The girl seemed to writhe in pleasure, making signals with her mouth and her eyes, running her hands over her body until her flesh stood firm; and then she worked on her own moisture.

Now Ciska enters the office.

"She's very good, is Sandra", says she. There was a certain professional pride.

"Does she earn much?"

"When the lawyer has a hard case....then he's ever so hard!" The man was reaching climax. The girl Sandra reached for his sex, and seemed to climax too, as she swallowed his sperm.

"She's convincing".

"You mean it's all faked?"

"She tells me she doesn't feel a thing... though it could be professional pride...."

"Uh Huh"

"But she won't do any lesbian work".

The girl in the video loosed the sperm from her mouth, and the man rubbed her body all over with it.

"That wasn't particularly unusual"

"No, but we do have some weirdoes - I'm just showing you the fun tapes."

"Is he a pervert?"

"The Lawyer?" said Ciska, then laughed: "Oh, no...." she busied herself with some bills, "Oh, no, he's quite normal.... I didn't want you to see the threes and fours until you'd seen the straight sex - that's what we call it".

"There are others?"

"All kinds, can't you imagine!". Ciska scowled at a bill, screwed it up and threw it across the room. "We have the perverts who can't screw (they're often the most violent), those who only watch; freaks who can only do it in rubber; and then the maniacs who can't see or touch a girl as they enter her".

"And how do they arrange their girls?"

"We make contact, normally by 'phone... they often leave a message on the machine..", she reached

across and touched a key, "We're here for profit and expiation... listen".

"Guillermo....can you get me Little Red Riding Hood for Wednesday afternoon at three..?.."

"See what I mean?"

"Umm!"

"With the proper organization, its a pot of gold.."

"My God!". Arianne stopped, considering the manifold possibilities: ".. But, one thing.. do they ever get hurt?".

"Not often...we check things out".

Now on the video the girl lay on her back on the bed and challenged the man with her gestures. He looked down at her. Surprisingly, he seemed still virile. She noticed that the girls pubis was shaved. The lips pierced by a steel ring.

"A refinement. That's extra." Then. "But really, this kind of work is an everyday assignment- let me explain how it all started."

Again the flashing eyes; "*Dum de Dum...* When I was at university I was broke....and I had a friend who worked in a casino...it was she who showed me how easy it was to earn a few bucks by humping a stranger. That way I got used to the idea. Then I began to administrate....its a lot less bother...besides, I got a Business Degree!"

The man humped the girl violently.

"Lawyers loose their cool very fast, don't they.."

Ciska said this with an understood confidence, as if Arianne had done the same thing many times with strangers, and she coupled it with that certain discerning glance.

The lawyer turned the girl over and rammed her from the back.

He bucked, and fell to his knees.

The tape fuzzed over as the girl stretched forward, her fingertips gripping at the sheets and failing to find purchase.

The tape had gone blank. Only white snow against the black. And now the screen was blue, blue, blue.

Ciska and Arianne looked at each other, and both smiled; unexpectedly finding some warmth between them.

"That's my story ...what's yours.?... well?"

"Well!" Arianne said. "You know what I've told you... I don't have to embroider it... and now I'm thinking of somewhere sensible and basically profitable to put my money." A moment of shared and increasing confidence... "As you know I've done quite well... but there're a couple of details I need to tidy-up.."

"Go on"

Arianne had thought this scenario out quite thoroughly before:

"Number one... I don't want to exist in relationship to my next business"

"I expected something like tha. If I might say so, that's a prudent decision."

"Can you fix it?"

"Can fix"

"And, like I said before"..... a long moment while Arianne found the shape in her mouth.. "I need another identity"

"Why?"

"Only for my reasons."

A long moment while Ciska chased imaginary specks around those perfect lips with her tongue.

"Hardly a problem. I can fix that too" Ciska looked at her friend in the light of the desk lamp through lowered lids, blinking as smoke drifted into her eyes and thought a moment.

"Quite frankly I can fix all those things...and I could use a partner who has skill in business as well ...of course it's a cover, but its also a way of making my spare cash work for me, and you know that that could ultimately be critical."

She shifted her rear, as if uncomfortable.

'Heat, I'm on heat''

"I lost my last partner six months ago ..and this is a two handed business ..like most of them ..."

"Yes".

"...Obviously I need someone to handle the business end, who can make a certain .. investment". Said with the greatest of care. Simply.

Investment?

"Are there be problems?"

"Of course," said the other, raising her eyebrows and loosing contact with that other mouth of hers. "But I'd expect that of course ..it would take a little time .. that would be all". The delivery was crooked, the flow uneven.

"Well, we could get them sorted!"

"Of course, my Dear!"

"Well, make me an offer!"

"Straighten out your affairs and get yourself here first.... Then I'll show you the....ropes ...you can stay at the flat....it's big enough for the two of us... Who knows, we could have fun!"

"I'm just wondering..."

"I know.. .it's your old acquaintances that bother you... .but we can have that ironed out... loose them - everything is fixable when you know how.....I'll fix it.. really!" A strange tingling in the legs as if the heart were suddenly curtailing its pulse.

"We can change your papers... around...perhaps get a new passport... you know...."

"Ah Yes!"

"*Ab Yes*". That other mouth lost its focus momentarily; moved and changed shape. "*Ab, Yes!...that way you can keep your identity separate*".

Enthralling. A new someone of indeterminate worth. Who could that be?

Another one.

"I find it difficult to see how I can capitalize on these girls... after all they seem ..."

"So much like us, you mean?"

"Yes, that's what I was thinking"

"Well my dear Arianne", Ciska's mouth was suddenly soothing: "The point is that they are like us... only they dare and you.... and I too, are cowards!"

"Cowards"

"Try a trick some time and see how you like it!"

"Here?"

"The girls could get too familiar... better to try it al-fresco!"

The documents of time, their edges growing ragged with the use of the wind; they furl and unfurl like hidden prayer-flags on a lost mountainside.

'Om Mani Padme Hum.'

"Now, what about business"

"It's fine by me, the funding..."

"And I'll put the paper changes in gear. Your new ID for example. I'll arrange it. You can forget it."

"Fine". A sinking feeling deep in her cervix.

"That would certainly occur to me".

"The paper changes?"

Those changes. New pages against the wind: new books, new prayers, new ideas and dreams.

A door clacked shut; the wind was blowing. The sky was steel lemon yellow. The paint on the sky was beginning to flake. A breeze caught her legs. A moment in a lost place.

Computers. Cross referencing. There are seventeen ways to write an address, seventeen decodable evasions.

"It would have to be a foolproof identity".

"It would be.....I use mine all the time!"

"Ah! - *You mean?*".. A gust of wind, a window caught against its jamb.

Something moved, then jarred.

"Just for the record", said Ciska with a distorted shape on that mouth, "identities are fairly easy to come by."

"Yes?"

"And one thing, I won't say it again...just for security I'll always refer to this matter as our '*Cosa Nostra*'"

"Corny, but it'll work!"

Now, a hidden shadow. Our thing, our thing. Where have I heard that...?

"Huh!" Ungrammatical. Nonsense. *Quartsch.*
Merde.

"Is that O.K. with you?"

"Of course!" A moment.

"But let me think about that for a moment"

"Of Course!" Thank You.

'Business is growing' she thought...! And there's no need to be Arianne Brown, or anyone else, if you don't want to be. No. No, not any longer'.

"...Just think", said Ciska; "you won't be making money the hard way, like those girls..!"

The Hard Way?.

"There are plenty of them.... plenty wanting to use their bodies to make a few *Mille Lire*....I get them all the time...sometimes they come in from their expensive offices in their fine clothes (such beautiful underclothes) and stripping-off because that's a wonderful way for them to make extra bucks and have a little extra fun.... after the first time it's really quite easy... and the things that money brings them... the chances"

Arianne knew. God, I knew.

The chances, that fading but ever present siren.... the ever present impossibility to fly like a bird.

'If Thoughts were like Eagles...I'd fly...'

"...There's plenty of money to be taken...that's why I thought of you!.... But there's one problem I should explain...the people we work for are often only

wild animals liars, cheats, perverts, bent power nuts, you know, like politicians... well, I don't have to say them allThat's the dark side."

*Letter from **Arianne Brown** to **Sarah France***

Rome. *Undated.*

Hey,

you'll never believe what business I'm toying with - and I shall tell you when I come to New York next week [probably]. Sometimes I think I'm crazy and it hurts - others I think I'm sane and it seems to turn-on a part of me that was once frozen. What can I say, except that you'll be surprised.

Ciao,

-A-

On the wall there is a picture of a woman sleeping....the bed floats on water...that's what I need! - a Myth to live by! The right person and the right place. What is the price of Freedom?

Chapter 12

Arianne was in the office. The office on the other side of the shape of the building.

Some days had passed since their discussion and at last she had discovered in herself the energy to make this venture work for her.

I have no knowledge of my demean or expression other than to know that my lips have grown cold. Ciska leant forward, confidentially, dangerously, wisely, as if giving counsel.

"You seem kind of cold?"

"So many things have happened in so short a time...that is all..." It was in fact warm at least, probably hot. Nearly thirty degrees, and the air hardly moving in this inner office.

I was bemused: I had felt so after the arrival of the first payments in the form of drafts into my numbered account in Vaduz; payments for shipments I would never see, product which I had no image or concept of, ships which I would never be within one thousand miles of. An invisible passage signifying the exchange of power, all de-coded on pieces of flimsy and passed in numbered form to the end users. Invisible.

End User Certificates. Needed of course for 'Hardware'.

"Something you should know..."

"Something?"

"I don't know whether I told you, but we give the concierge..... that man downstairs with the crippled legs, fifty thousand a month for his...."

"Good offices?"

"Yes"

"More?"

"The Police...you'll get to know the faces as they present themselves.....play it cool with them...leave them to me..."

"Oh?!"

"When they're at a loose-end they get the girl of their choice!"

"Ha Ha!"

A cat sprang and trapped a mouse in its jaws.

"Oh, and pray it isn't you - they have some funny ideas!" It was Ciska's turn to laugh at her discomfort.

"What about the man on the street?"

"I pay him weekly.... he looks after the clients cars as if they were his religion"

"They probably are"

She turned to the filing cabinet.

"We don't keep the girls names here." She turned to the japanned cabinet. "The file is a red herring...we keep them here with all their references.." She took a data disk from a drawer and inserted it into the computer. "Look, press 'Shift' and 'Break'," she demonstrated. "Now follow the commands...it's very simple.."

"Just like home"

Something irked me.

"And I keep them here.." she pressed a panel and a spring twanged. The back of the cabinet (which contained drinks) sprang open "Perfect isn't it!....I have things like this made for me by a little firm in Modena... .Italians can fake anything if they ever put their minds to it!.. Such pride!".

Ab Ha!

Ciska flipped a card file.

"All the girls are here, but under their 'Nom-de-Travail's' - I'll show you how we make them inaccessible to outsiders later, it's not important now".

"I'll have to meet them"

"...Oh, most of the girls are French and German.... Some English... As your Italian is inadequate I can deal with the Italians"

"Yes"

"I think the lunch hour rush is about to start!"
She touched a switch and one of the monitors blinked.

I looked at my watch.

The blind light at the corner atop the stairway gained an interior glow. The stairway was empty.

"We have a few seconds until one-o'clock" said Ciska .."...The first girls always get to the entrance ahead of the clientsmy rule is twenty minutes. Today we have only two, but sometimes on Fridays we can get up to six working at a time... So timings can get a bit tight!"

How is the high thin scent of sex banished from a room? Is it ever-present in the ozone? How? That musty smell, of a Woman.

Arianne was abstracted.

Ciska broke in on her thoughts;

"The cleaners, two of them, come in every morning... air all the rooms"

"When all the windows are closed?"

"We have air-conditioning units"

"Ah, yes!"

"All modern conveniences...showers in all rooms."

Is that blood on the floor?

"Possibly, but it's well paid-for"

"Monitors?"

"Monitors or sound monitors to make sure there's no undue violence or..."

"Murder?"

"It could happen... frustration is not merely a sexual phenomenon"

"I see" *I knew.*

Back to the monitor. Steady. hardly the hint of a footfall on the stair, or an echo through the marble well and galleries outside the apartment door.

"Has it ever occurred to you that frustration is a wonderful instrument of control...?"

"Frustration?"

Murder.

"You bottle up a feeling, need....make the subject suffer....and then whatever crumb of comfort you offer them they will consider a special favour..!.."

"I never thought!"

Liar.

"You must have"

"Its something I'll think about"

"Good...later"

A footfall on the stairs. The monitor as steady and clear as ice.

Now a brunette with tired eyes was mounting the stair. Ciska leaned forward and pressed the entry

button. The lock relay on the front door buzzed and clicked: they walked through the maze of doors on the office side and into the lounge through which the brunette had entered.

"Hello Ella", said Ciska.. "..let me introduce Arianne to you" (she used an entirely different name).

"Hullo", said Ella, eyeing her up and down quite coolly, placing her attaché case on the wardrobe bar. "You're working here are you, today?"

"Not today", said Arianne meaning "Not here...like you do.." but not managing to achieve it.

"She could be nice for doubles...." said Ella appraising Arianne's body with a professional eye, misunderstanding her faltering, speaking as if she were not present (to Ciska) ..."She's got a nice body".

"Ella is with a legal gentleman today" said Ciska to Arianne.

"The same as last week?" said Ella, with a hint of weariness.

"You did very well, Dear", said Ciska. Arianne noticed the use of '*Dear*'.

"He sweats!", said Ella. "Well, I expect it's room six again then"

"Thanks", said Ciska. Arianne smiled.

After Ella had gone, Ciska said:

"She's an Italian... . married to a businessman... I suppose she does tricks in the afternoon to amuse

herself.... Ella doesn't work at night; she's a nice girl, if rather simple..."

The door clicked.

Ciska opened it with the hidden button in the lounge. A blond girl let herself in. She was called Monika, and spoke in lisping German. According to Ciska she was good with the violent ones.

The Violent Ones.

Room two.

She seemed a very sensitive girl.

"She has total control"

"Does she? Do I? Can I? Am I a coward?"

"Little Red Riding Hood" Ciska smiled with that lethargic, dislocated mouth. Those lost eyes.

She smiled again when the first man arrived. A guileful; knowing, friendly; smile.

One-o-Clock.

Ciska tracked him on the monitor, used the release button in the office, walked through to the lounge while Arianne watched on the hidden screen.

They seemed pleased to see one another, like old good friends. He stooped and lightly kissed Ciska's cheek, proffering a corsage of small roses. Then he handed her an envelope, while she took his hat and coat to the wardrobe.

He took his leave and made his way to his chosen whore.

Ciska returned to the office.

"The Lawyer?"

"You can tell by the clothes"

One who practices the art of manipulation, and yet is the very centre of his own dissolution. Perfect.

"They dress well, if diffidently". Ciska showed her teeth.

"How long will he spend there?"

"Not that long!"

The monitor flickered.

"He pays well, that one". The envelope was opened, and out fell a shower of notes in different currencies. "Ah!...using his hush-money for his girls ... she'll be asking for change for Dollars!"

Another step on the stair.

"You welcome this Client he likes to think he can speak English!...Oh! And remember this one, he always puts the money in his pocket like a real English gentleman he doesn't like to soil his hands with these things!"

Dignity = freedom to do what one wants + the price you pay for it..?...After all, doubt is a fundamental element of the soul!

Undated Letter.

I watch the movie 'Four Days of a Dreamer'. A man with a matelote jacket gets killed. He has plenty of time (it is only celluloid dreaming). He reaches into his pocket and takes out a picture of his lover. He kisses the picture. The camera stays on the bloody hand.

It falls to the ground.

Now I know what romance is.

Mind you, you can hardly call ninety percent of our affair a romance like celluloid.

No, it was not an affair, either.

It is an obsession. I long for you, I long for the little things of you. Your sweat your smell. To lick your nipples. Stupid things; to run my fingers along the soft insides of your legs.

To smell your musk.

Obsessions are by nature strange.

I always wanted you, since I was born. I feel that in my skin.

When I am eighty-five I will still want you, to touch you, words are almost wasted between us.

I don't have to play that game called communication with you: you see, I know you ARE, like my fingers and toes.

Constant.

And then I got a letter.

Terribly short and despairing and at least a lifetime late. Oh yes, I was despairing; I thought one of my limbs was gone. Why should I

pretend to. Like you, my patience with petty manners has worn thin.

You see, I just love you: terribly, sexually, from my guts. A feeling as paranoid as that cuts out all the politesse. I can't say that birds fly in the sky when I think of you; no the damn sky falls on my head. I go deaf and blind and think that I was dead and suddenly awoke. Its like the feeling of blood in between your teeth. Reality and fantasy face to face, eye to eye. Red eye to foaming mouth.

Oh, there's nothing that's good manners about the way I think of you.

How can you have good manners when you hold your own life in your palm?

Tell me that and I shall promise to be polite about 'our' thing.

No. Right now I want to take you in my arms and squeeze the living life from you.

Bite you until you shout.

The blood pounds in my ears.

And then, soft as a cloud take the jewel from my crown, lay her down, kiss her elegant muscles and dally with my tongue along her arm and finally

Chapter 13

The Place and the Dream.

Another day, both a sob of sadness in her heart for the loss of a lover, and the gladness at the beginning of a new opportunity; absurd. Absurd. Absurd.

The screen flickered.

She thought, '*Colour Too!*' and laughed to herself as if in deep content. Tears ran down her face for the first time that she could care about.

That is control. *That special centre of ice.* Absolute control. That is the nature of the organism.

Another video. The random check was usually consigned to tapes made automatically by timers.

A dark haired girl.

A troubled, passionate face. She was getting rough treatment.

"That's Christine! believe me, she likes getting hurt, I think she has real emotional problems herself... won't do without it. Oh, and she's certainly well paid; say around one hundred and fifty for a few moments of passion...!.."

How did it feel? How long for those bruised thighs to loose those marks, to heal those scratches-to heal...? Does the mind ever heal? Could the money hide the marks?

The layout of the apartment appealed to her sense of the ridiculous. By simply knocking-out a wall which formerly divided two apartments, the apartment on the right hand side of the landing had direct access to the one on the left; being as they were now, a giant horseshoe shape.

So it was that the two front doors faced one another across the marbled landing at one end, both thus commanding the stair. And thus also it was that if one knew the twists and turns of the interior, it was possible to exit or enter using an apparently innocent and unrelated door. Even the girls were unaware of the trick.

The other 'Front Door' was reached through two blind rooms, at the rear of the enclosure of the sauna cabin. Arianne liked to take Saunas.

So it was that two people made their way in (while she lay dreaming of Caribic nights, stroking herself the while) and made their type of love.

The girl Ella, rested her elbows on the shelf while her client used her, their eyes averted; his intent, hers blank and bovine.

They made very little sound as Arianne lay on her shelf back in the shadow with her eyes closed, one arm sheltering her face from the fierce dry draughts of heat. The man grunted, and the shelf moved soundlessly as the two embraced, Ella giggling. Then they left, leaving their smell behind them, thick as musk, heavy as tar, *making my skin prickle, my nipples separately crinkle.*

They seemed not to have noticed.

How strange that situation was. Such was the climate of that place.

The Mountain.

The mountain is the place of dreams.

Her smile and her background brought her the pass she needed into the under-life of society in Rome. Not the qualifications for that stilted society of forged manners and attitudes as easily assumed as discarded, but still the qualifications of inveiglement.

The British Institute has a good library, the Goethe Institute an interesting programme of cultural events. Warm evenings with brown skin; warm evenings in the gardens of the Villa Frascati where '*I Soloisti*' played Vivaldi and Scarlatti in gathering green darkness.

The Corso. Violent heat; the five hundred metres of the Corso taking half a tortured hour. Fountains at street corners. Sweet water, sweet water! Sweet music to the ears, fluid music in the soft slow immovable summer calm.

Rome is still and quite at the apex of summer. And at lunch time and siesta time, slow as well.

The hills. Seven hills which she would explore.

Seven days more. Waiting. What do I wait for?

At *Teatime* one afternoon (*Teatime* - that obsolete expression!). Forty degrees of heat in the shade of a towering painted edifice. August - or July?

Seven hills; seven more days.

No matter.

Under my dress the naked skin clung to whatever it contacted, stuck to stone balusters, seemed to become transparent with the heat, both of my body - and of course of the Sun's rays, which travelled deep into it.

Arianne was struck by the thought. She hoped that her body did not show through the stuff of the dress, or her hair cling to the fabric. Was there a shadow

against the line. A Trace? She cut the hair very short, both that on her head and elsewhere, on her body, between her legs. It made one less hot, it was ... practical. When she looked at herself in the mirror she saw a movement in the face. The Face. To grasp, to speculate. Which Face?

Her body clung to the fabric of the dress as she moved; cool air between her legs. Cool. A hint of change. Changed light in the eyes. A gentler, changed, gleam. An upturn in the (normally) sanguine mouth, and of course, the gradual browning of the skin.

Where she lay usually naked on the beach, the skin turned brown, showing dark against any untanned areas; her body hair bleached, giving her that 'Country Girl' look. Ah! Camouflage can be such an Art! Now she was brown all over, strange, to her own xenophobia.

She licked her skin.

Not Soya.

Or K-Rations...

Salt. And sweat.

So subtle was the change.

Summer rains fell. Fires were quenched.

Mountains, hills, dreams.

Fast Forward.

"That's fine!", he said unzipping his flies. "You'll like BIG ones won't you!"

She leaned over his crotch from the passenger seat and felt the cold reality as his hands toured her blouse from this angle: a certain surprise. She held the engorged cock with one hand and felt it expand while she (so she thought) secretly jacked herself off with the other to stimulate her performance a little. She prised his trousers open and felt the cold thick metal cock-ring contact her teeth. That's how he'd got so hard. Ah!

"Ah!", he said, "Suck it baby", he settled back against the seat, "Suck it till I bust!"

'Oh, NO!

"Oh Suck me, you whore!". He bore down upon her head until the saddle of his cock reared and invaded the very reaches of her throat, affected her hearing.

"You *CUNTI*!".

He grabbed at her waist and tore her skirt. She heard the fabric give.

"You whore!..... So you can't get off on me huh!" He had discovered the location of her fingers. With a twist of his bulk he flipped her over and slid his hand down into her skirt, breaking the waistband. Now his fingers invaded her from behind.

"I'll make you ache!"

He'd managed to rip her skirt and her blouse, and he grabbed her brassiere with one ungentle hand and the clip between her breasts broke away. He had

one thumb deep in her vagina, and began to tear that flesh between her legs with the semblance of giving her some kind of pleasure:

"You'll like this"

She gagged on the cock in her mouth as it slid at the back of her throat for the twentieth time. All her teeth ached separately; the pain was both intense and greatly, secretly, shamefully, pleasurable.

She gagged as he came all of a sudden, and perhaps this saved her life, for suddenly she was outside the car, almost naked and running along the cold road. Now she discovered with an explosion of fear that her mouth was slavered with something else than sperm. She stopped under a streetlight and brushed her mouth.

"Blood, Blood!" She sought something to inspect herself in. On this lonely street she saw the car turn the corner, and then thankfully, turn away, to leave her alone in her distress.

Enwalled in her fear she sat direct upon the grimy ground, curled like a lost child. Suddenly she had lost everything, including what dignity a whore could have.

Chapter 14

The Anatomy Lesson

The library, embroiled in heat. A quiet afternoon of meditation after her weird adventure.

She took down the *'Pschopathia Sexualis'*.

Paedophilia Erotica, Sexual Paradoxia, Pagism, Paranoia, Parasis, Paraesthesia, Sadism.

'Defilement of Female Persons....Lust Murder....Sadism in Women (page 85)....

"A married man...." she read aloud in the empty room, and anyway, in English, the original being in German,..."..would cut his arm and his wife would suck the wound during intercourse and become extremely aroused..".

Valeria Messilina, Catherine de Medici, the instigator of the massacre of San Bartholomew, had the greatest pleasure in seeing the ladies of her court whipped in front of her.

Poor ladies. Where 'Red Hair' had a way of making profit, they only suffered.

Then there was the man who could only satisfy himself by seeing his girl's hands covered with soot...what fascinations plague us.....and he would only talk to her...!..

'Wild Animals!'

Danier, 'Annales de Egienne': *'In fetishism the fetich itself - abstracted from the personality of the wearer, dominates by itself the whole sexual life, brings it into action...and may under circumstances awaken kindred regions of a sadistic nature, which find gratification in the field of the fetich'.*

'The Sadistic act in itself is often enough an equivalent for coitus, rendered impossible by physical and psychical impotence.'

Perhaps a too dramatic change of personality ?

'At twenty three years of age Monsieur C.- began coitus with girls dressed in white clothes....

At twenty five he saw white clothing spattered with mud, and this produced in him a very strong sexual emotion.....from that time on he felt an irresistible impulse to defile the apparel of women, and to crush and tear it..!...

Ah! Freedom.....such expensive Freedom..!"

A Voice in the Mirror.

Through a lens, then.

The girl was naked, and to make her more ready, her client had chained her and shaved all the hair from

her body. Now she was ready, and he smeared oil on her skin. She was chained to a metal chair, which itself was fastened to the floor, and was too low to stoop to, too high to kneel at. She was thus stretched in a kind of way, with her legs parted while he inserted a thick phallus into her. At first she resisted, but resistance was useless, and she sank onto the black leather with a kind of resignation. At length her partner in fantasy had her loaded to her greatest extent and she sat awkwardly upon it with her legs duck-fashion, face almost relaxed. At this point he attached a skein of cord between her legs, passing around the phallus and linking with the rings through her nipples. Now he loosed her shackles and led her stooped around the room. Finally he forced her to all fours while he made her satisfy his engorged cock with her twisted mouth. Only then did he release the links and let her slip the phallus out, while he inspected the enlargement of her vagina with interest.

"I should beat you!" he said, then looked at his watch: "but I don't have the time...Next time then!".

He had loosened the gag.

She unexpectedly smiled.

"It would be my pleasure!"

The room was filled with the scent of physical exertion. Rank with it.

The girl said to the camera: to the mirror as if she knew it's secret:

"Where's my *money*, then?"

Letter from Sarah France to Arianne Brown

New York, *August 2nd.*

Hi, Hey, Reg told me you weren't backstage that day when I 'phoned you. I was wondering if you went to the show. I hope you DID GO and had a good time.

We finally got all the papers together and c'rect today....work and more work.....really insane.

I'm flying up to Boston Wednesday to take care of some business.

The strike hasn't affected me. Lucky. Ridiculous.

I mean, I usually end up walking and taking taxis around the place!

What else?

My birthday wound up being pretty quiet.. just saw a move, what was it called? forgot, but I'll remember and tell you, anyway it was GOOD...then I phoned Bellissimo and he came over for a little extra birthday diversion...! yes, that was nice.

Junior said he had money for me today, but of course he never turned up.

I bought a really cute pair of pink reptile skin shoes for \$50 today. But for that I'm sure they're nothing too exotic.

*Oh! I got the shoes... Birthday too.. WONDERFUL!
Thank You allatonce-you're sweet! You really !*

There's so much work and I never seem to catch up. I had this really upsetting conversation with this guy that I was

casually 'seeing' last year. I've gone out with him once since last summer and he had the NERVE to say that I expected too much of him! I've only SPOKEN to him once in the last four months!

I wanted to tell him that the ONLY thing attractive about him is his face.....I mean his personality is so BORING. Lousy. And I've NEVER had a good time with him (except to look at him!). Kind of insane, don't you think? It really threw me. All I'd done was to say Hullo! Swine!

When you come next time we'll do a tour of Soho. You'll like it. My friend Annie really knows it well. Soho is all Art galleries, boutiques and weird people.

See you soon? Bye fer now,

August

High Summer. Arianne sat once more at the end of a long library table and evaded other's eyes.

'.....I had this experience...an experience

I'm already ashamed about, but I needed to try it...I had to see what others have to do.. what I'm involved in...what horrified me about it was

the lack of pleasure....I mean both of us hated it....he hated me much more than I hated doing it to him....but why?...and is this really how life faces so many other people?...with fear,

violence and dread....and poverty of the spirit?...My God! That's even more appalling - the obscenity lies not in the sex act but in the

violence itself: after all, the most remote sex needs a minimum of regard, whereas obscenity violence and it's like need disregard - unreasoning hatred and fear - real vice!...

She was set to drift, as well as to find her way among the hazards and reefs of an uncharted sea; which thought caused her mind to close for a moment.

She sat back on the flat top rung of a ladder used as moveable stairs in the library, and gazed out of the window drifting, and dreaming. *The Fox is always ahead of the hunt, that is the nature of the Fox.* She watched the dark, almost black, trees sway in the summer heat as the wind took them and scattered any loose leaves below them.

Dappled shadows. The vari-coloured infinite range between blinding darkness and luminous highlightinfinite.. interlocked as intricately as a Chinese puzzle-within-a-puzzle against the high brightness.

The dazzling heat reflection of the ancient stone of the city moved uneasily in waves of corrugated heat. Watched as the haze over the city shifted.

"But anatomists and physicists will not find an ape or a bull," she read softly to herself... *"They will find creatures which are the product of an evolutionary history. The personal history of an individual....for Instinct read Habit.... the only other information we have concerns reinforces and the schedules of*

reinforcement which make a person.... the contingencies are not stored; simply left a changed person. The environment is often said to be stored in the form of memories.... To recall something we search for a copy of it, which can then be seen as the original thing was seen.

A far as we know however, there are no copies of the environment in the individual at any time.... the repertoirc knowledge of a person....is called knowledge. Knowledge.... traits of character....whatever derived from contingencies of survival or contingencies of reinforcement, are also said to be ...circumstances have changed his behaviour. They have not implanted a trait or virtue....

Philosophies are also spoken of as possessed. A man is said to speak because he has a particular philosophy..... the effect of environmental conditions which it would now be hard to trace, but the conditions must have existed and should not be ignored...."

A person who professes a philosophy of Freedom..... must then, be a person who has changed in certain ways.

"Does man sin because he is sinful, or is he sinful because he sins..?... to say that a man is sinful because he sins is to give an operational definition of sin. To say he sins because he is sinful is to trace his behaviour to a supposed inner trait...

Autonomous man.... .has been constructed from our ignorance, and as our understanding increases, the very stuff of which he is composed vanishes."

Vanishes? Not if he fights with his blood and his muscle. Now she saw herself as a part of the system. She was a construct! No. No, that was not the fact; but yet the manipulated masses in the City were also part of their own joint imaginations, and that fuelling was completed by propaganda, self interest turned vanity burgeoning with that urgent need to show oneself, 'Look how clever I am', and then combining itself with such social factors to develop the 'Yuppie' the 'Captain of Industry'. 'The Financier'.

Fame holds the seeds of its own destruction. And then finally it vanishes. Vanishes, that magical word. Save that trace of blood that I can see so clearly.

She recalled from her Graduate School days: *'People conform to group norms.... not because they want them or they like them; but because those norms are the ones which in any particular situation confirm their acceptance of group ideals and their required acceptance by the group by the same process'*. The cementing of a survival pattern, combined with the prostituting of aims, dreams, needs. Quixotic but real. Just survival, the pinnacle from afar. To survive.

But then they could....vanish?

Ah! But they have vanished; into the anonymous face of the crowd; the investors watching the computer screens, the City men in the uniforms of paper violence; the Football Crowd, as likely to bare its teeth as to roar in delight: they have accepted their own

inability to influence except by collective proxy, like children at school. They have joined the herd. They have become bland like the sheep and cattle they consume in order to extend their time of immortality another vacuous day.

Was that why she, as a satellite, belonged to the bank, bordello, trading company....was that why?

Then it must be a game she was playing, simply a game with many intersecting rules, and the flirtations of changing ideas.

Prejudice is the reflection of the individuals thinking of the whole 'Universe' he exists in. The smaller that circle, the more simple and evident the prejudice.

A need to keep to the traditional pattern.

'...Unless we deny that the notion of morality has any truth to it....we must admit that its law must be valid not only for men but for all rational creatures generally.....then it is clear that no experience could enable us to infer...the possibility of such...laws'.

A warning beep outside the window.

'Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws, that is, according to principles.....have a will.

Since the deduction...the will is nothing but practical reason...the relation of the objective laws to a world that is not thoroughly 'good' is conceived as the determination of the will of a

rational being by principals of reason, but which the will of it nature does not of necessity follow.'

She left the bench, replaced the book, breathed-in the leather-bound smell that wafted across the walnut tables, and sank into a chair to think.

No-body had moved.

The warning bleep outside the windows started again as the wind ruffled the leaves.

Gravel scrunched as windblown trees, too hot to have sufficient energy to creak, moved noiselessly in small puffs of wind. A bespectacled scholar watched with the semblance of a smile from a window high up in the thickness of a wall. The librarian looked-up and nodded as she left, the door had swung-too behind her as she walked down one dark corridor after another.

She found herself in a long drive, high walls either side and the sound of Mozart or Cimarosa wafting from a high window.

The texture of the earth ground, and crunched, beneath her feet.

Ashes, and Dust. *Traces of 'Sangre'.*

She walked slowly and her clothing ruffled in a sudden gust. The wind was rising, was up.

I felt the wind run warm ripples and rivulets of dust around my arms...the sensation of bathing in warm effulgent waters.

I felt my feet wreathed in warm air and fine dust.

London, late August.

Bright cold air sped in under the inch of clear space between the window and the frame, in a direct line with where she lay. She felt as if she were freezing, but knew that this was the effect of her thinned blood.

She slipped out of the bed and covered up against the cool. She dressed quickly, at the same time putting the percolator on and checking in the refrigerator for the milk, tidied her hair and applied a base of foundation; camouflage would come later.

She left the house. Crossed the street in a daze of culture-shock, climbed into the car and took the back roads.

She was at the office before the rush-hour started, making herself breakfast in the kitchen.

'So early starts have their plus points!'

She had fixed the details of her face, the *camouflet*, before the first early-bird secretary had arrived.

She sat behind her desk, now denuded of papers, and found the pilots licence in its plastic wallet, inside the log-book where she had not thought to look for it before. What should she do next?

David was there. David was an early bird, flown in on paranoiac wings...he rushed in, brushed past her desk.

"Hello!"

"The Cement?"

"*The Cement!*"

"Yes. .the Cement's going through. .we have a Sicilian contact who's doing rather well..."

"Good"

"*How'd the Rome trip go..?*"

"I was having a holiday"

"Oh"

"And then I flew on to Finland" (she didn't know a soul in Finland). He didn't look up, and scribbled on pieces of paper on the desk, earnestly, like a schoolboy between lessons.

"Anyway.." David started again.. "..The cement is going well." She was suddenly flooded with regret at her duality.

She winced to think that she might hurt David, the earnest grammar school boy who always stuttered and went red-faced as he looked at her breasts and wondered if someday he would bite them, like that, and then scribbled on the desk or nibbled his fingertips. He was so...halting.

Enough of this pointless introspection. It was easy enough to turn a malleable schoolboy into a bully or a twister of other's wills.

David looked up for a moment, with just the trace of a tick in one eye:

"I, I wondered if..."

"Mmm..?" she pretended to be concentrating upon something in the drawer as she ran her fingers over the plastic film of the pilots licence....

"We...that is..." David halted in mid-sentence.

"What about a drink this evening?" she said.

"I..." David was amazed.

"We have a trace on the rice.." she said.. "A man in Eastbourne..." and she flourished a sheet of paper.. "Here, take it, it's all yours!.."

Michael arrived.

Michael was the self-satisfied type, wore gold chains against his bad-taste tie and nylon shirt.

"Things are doing well. Ha!", laughed Michael

"Good", she said meaning, "Go to hell!"

"Yes, we didn't need you that much!", said Michael, displaying the fact that he had brushed his teeth.

She considered for a moment whether this was a smile of warmth and fellow feeling, or just a show of veiled hostility, and settled for the latter.

"The financing will be through RTC", said Michael, and gave a lordly wave.

"The Oil?"

"Nothing on the Oil", said Michael, "I think its another dead end".

"Really?"

"No, Fuck All...!.. Nothing, Darling", said Michael.. I reckon, you know...we can all forget our dreams of a pleasant retirement for now!".

"Ah!..." she said, pulling the air into her mouth as she elucidated the thought. "*Abbab..*"

Now she knew.

No trace, the leopard had changed its spots with perfect complicity. No indication. The sources and the others in that closed room in Rome were keeping quiet for their own reasons, perhaps out of a desire to let realities stay the way they were; perhaps out of pure vanity.

There were more millions in such a future source; Rand, Caribbean Dollars, Reale, Dinar seeking Dollars. Who cared?

The day droned on. Telephones jangled, people talked, word processors clacked, people shouted, and the receptionist painted her nails to hide her inadequacy. She did nothing, seemingly utterly involved in inner cogitation; they always left her alone at times like that, and she knew that.

David left.

There was no business that could be completed that day. She waited by the 'phone for that dead hand to fall.

Nothing.

Mid Afternoon. I 'phoned Jake; found the number in the little calf diary with the pink pages that Ciska gave me. I introduced myself to him and used the expression 'Cosa Nostra', which he picked up right away.

"Yes", said Jake.

"That thing"

"Yes", he said, seeming unamused. She imagined him as a rather elderly individual, perhaps a wearer of shapeless grey suits and white shirts; perhaps a fake Old School tie. Harrow, rather than Eton... the London accent was too pronounced.

He broke-in on her thought.

"Do you have the address?"

She checked it with him.

She spoke with one hand cupped around the microphone, hushed and tense.

He said:

"Laugh if you can't talk now!"

She laughed, twittered rather, and a secretary saw the uncharacteristic show of teeth but did not think to remark or indeed merely think, about it.

"We can meet".

"That's a good Idea!", she said carefully, as if weighing-up an important statement.

"Where?"

"Shall I phone you back?"

"No, I'll phone you", she said, not wanting to give too much away to a potentially perilous acquaintance.

That was the thing. Life stood upon a series of rifts and precipices; as one came upon them one had to make the decision to stay safe where one was and risk nothing, or cross and perhaps profit. Each one offered you the green fields of beyond...or nothing...or worse, injury. But if you stayed safe you would surely curse yourself as you drifted into obsolescence, overweight, lack of mental stimulus. A sort of gradual fading away. But they all do it.

Look around you!

"What?", said this man.

"Thinking.....sorry.." she said.

"Tomorrow"

"Okay"

"Where?"

Her eyes scanned the room, the split levels, the sound deadening room dividers, the yattering receptionist. The skyline outside radiated grey cold. Out of her eye-line a pink neon had started to die, and flickered its blood like paint over the tiled rears of buildings which stood at odd angles and heights to her, especially from this viewpoint.

The clutter of what had earlier been backyards and were now low-rise extensions, seemed to have no

logic to them. Rain flattened itself against the windows as gusting winds threw it against the glass.

"*Tomorrows fine*", she said, "I'll phone you then", and made a mark in the indented paper. "*Yes*".

The phone clicked off.

She straightened the venetian blind and sorted through the desk again, stowing the tapes in her bag as if she could not trust herself to leave no trace.

A secretary came through.

"It's a Mr. Martin"

"Show him in". She couldn't recall Martin's face for some reason.

He came through the door in a straight line, his hand extended and his little beady eyes fixed upon her chest.

"Thank You," he said, "Thank You!"

"Hullo"

"I find you a very capable businesswoman"

He sat down and smiled at her crotch.

"Would you like a cigarette?" Martin took one.

She lit the cigarette with the heavy gilt Arabic inscribed lighter, shaped like an Aladdin's Lamp, which remained on her desk, the product of some forgotten deal. She said:

"Good." And then stopped, thinking. "Eh, was *this* the deal we did last August?.."

"It certainly was", said Martin.

"Ah"

"Things continue to go well.."

"We should do more business together...my company is very interested in your company...!"

She thought for a moment.

"I have an alternative which I think you will want to consider"

"Yes...?"

"I think that a friend of mine who runs a company like this one could do you a very good deal"

"Ah"

"But I must make it clear that this is strictly between ourselves and that no-one must know what I tell you"

"Well of course....strictest confidence."

"It's an operation in.. Europe ...I can get you all the particulars... but that will have to be tomorrow... I must check that they agree, of course..."

His eyes seemed to light up.

An itch of duplicity sought her inner thigh.

His eyes watched her shoulder blade with myopic intensity as she turned to find a file.

"I thought the rice had been brought to a conclusion?"

"One other thing: what a coincidence! The point was..." said Martin..."That I.. We'd like to offer you an opportunity..."

"Aha"

"We've discussed it. And we like your style.!"

But you don't know my style.

It came as a surprise.

She thought of the empty office and the silent telex in Rome.

"Perhaps we can have a little something to eat, somewhere," said with a conspiratorial gesticulation. She smiled.

"I'm sure we can work out...."

"An amicable solution." He stared at her crotch as she rose from behind the desk.

We sat in a Japanese Restaurant in Soho, tinkering with little pieces of dead creatures.

Baccarat. Now Martin offered me a stake in his company:

"A stake in mine for a percentage likewise in yours" The Rome offer had set his mind afire. Cement and rice have dozens of shipping points, both legal and illegal, in the tattered coastlines of both Italy and Sicily.

"I shall get the contact names and details to you in the morning."

In the morning.

The trap had begun to close. But who was the trap for?

"Its the usual job.. making contacts.. meeting people...getting them as clients". The irony was not lost on her. *Chemin-de-Fer.*

"Altogether an interesting proposition!... You'll have the information in a few days...if I may.."

He raised his eyebrows.

Looked at my legs for the umpteenth time.

I felt for a moment like a coquette.

I didn't like Martin, I thought his hands were soft and effeminate, like his body, but rather thin, in contrast. But smiled. Mistaking the signal, Martin beamed back.

We drank **Daquiri**.

Martin lit a cigar.

I thought how to escape, buttoned-up my blouse in the toilet.

We shook hands.

Lies, thick as money, between us.

Later. The office now empty, save for a cleaner. She 'phoned through to the Rome number. The 'phone clicked, and was followed by a long silence; then the signal beamed out like a signal from a spacecraft on its way to an orbit far beyond the reaches of the solar system. Beamed out, beeping out through the detritus of space. Another silence. Another long beep. A click, a hiss.

A voice, disembodied.

"Dear Paula", ' Paula?' she thought, but the mechanical clink of the voice tape simply continued: ..'I'm not here...this is the tape running..' A

conversation with a dead thing. That is if you could be dead having never lived, or for that matter, be alive, having never died because you never existed.

"Leave a message".

"It's me, from London, this is my number..."

The machine clicked off. She broke contact. It seemed for a moment that she had spoken to herself, at home, a ghost.

'Cosa Nostra'

At seven the 'phone rang.

Ciska's voice, sounding somewhat disembodied, somewhere. Ciska said:

"My word, it's a hot day! I can hardly breathe!"

Water dripped on the carpet as the roof leaked. Arianne felt her body harden.

"I have a deal going through with a company which could use the Rome office as a base...what do you think?"

"Very interesting" said the voice at the other end.

"An International connexion could be good"

A moment for a thought.

"Useful"

"Appro *'Cosa Nostra'*"

"Yes?" She sounded suddenly hollow, as if duplicity were a living creature; or was it that the line drained all colour from the voice?

"I'm seeing that man tomorrow"

"You'll like him!"

"He sounds rather old"

"No, but he's rather nice!"

Chapter 15

Music.

She left the office at three thirty and made her way by train to the flat.

I had left the car in the garage because the Metro would be more efficient for timekeeping.

She ran a hot bath, and luxuriated in the oiled water, imagining herself to be one of her girls, imagining that it was to be her who was to perform. The thought brought both the sob of the beginning of a laugh, and the emotional release of a fantasy to her lips. Was it the beginning of a fantasy - had all this happened? Or was it a sadistic and long-running dream, to become a nightmare? Maybe she would wake and find herself beside somebody whom she did not want, in the sweat of an unkempt bed, her hair tousled

and her clothes soiled and torn... and she would have to make her way to nobody knew where and clean herself, clean herself of this other body beside her.

"It must be a fixation!" She said aloud, and laughed. She put her head back against the enamel of the bath and let herself laugh. The water on her breasts had grown cold, and her skin stiffened.

She left the bath and regarded her body in the glass. She took down the razor and shaved the line of the triangle so that it would be neat, just right.

Her body needed more attention.

She oiled it and moisturized the skin, slipping on the bathrobe, feeling now warm, slightly aroused.

Then a thin cool dress, that reminded her of Rome.

Just the dress.

Warm winds. Rome. 'Oh, its a hot day, I can hardly breath!'

No jewellery, only her fake Rolex. A platinum band on her little finger. She drove North-East, crossing Harrow Road and passing Swiss Cottage.

The evening was increasingly warm, now she gained the foot of Rosslyn Hill where she would meet the stranger, Jake, the humidity bringing sweat to her arms and her chest.

She stood by the bar nervously, feeling exposed, even in the light Trenchcoat. A classical guitarist played dry, interesting music.

Academic wallpaper.

"What?"

"No, no, nothing".

Jewish girls twittered around her like sparrows arguing over breadcrumbs.

She felt surveyed. Drank several glasses of wine and then made the mistake of buying a bottle, which made her a little tipsy. Her cutaway shoes seemed to stick to her feet. She sat down and someone tried to talk to her. She moved back and sat at the bar.

Then she saw him. He too was by the bar. She remembered a phrase from her schooldays; one of her promiscuous friends saying; *'My dear, I could literally smell him, Mmmmm...those pheromones!'*

They had all laughed, Sandra had said: *'What I mean is.. You could almost feel the way he'd put it in!'*

She looked across and now knew what Sandra had meant:. You could smell that quality, that deadly unseen chemical. Tobacco and musk. Thick. Perhaps only in the mind's eye. No, the eye of the hunter. A calculating, impassive eye. A slight downturn of the mouth, a wrinkle, smile. One hand with a glass of white wine, stooping and listening to the guitarist.

Brown hair, blue eyes. Clothes like a French '*Boisier*:' Thick shoes, sturdy corduroy. Unlikely.

His eyes creased at their edges. Ah! The eye of the hunter! He seemed rather younger than one would expect.

How young then should the hunter, the killer, be? It was intuition, the recognition was complete in the finish of a second, almost less than a moment.

She approached him and he seemed unsurprised. Unmoved. When he turned his head, almost quizzically, and even when talking to her, his eyes moved continually over her face, sometimes her body; bringing her suddenly to awareness. But not in curiosity, rather as if stripping away old skin in a sensuous almost caressing way. Then peering at her nakedness, looking into her mind. As if he could read and see all the things that she was thinking.

To seek that which was within. Naked, but a caressing nakedness.

They set up table in the middle of the bar and ordered a meal. They began to eat, and again to drink.

Jake was very friendly but gave as yet little indication of what their business was about.

There was a time when I could skin an animal almost in one movement.

He had not yet mentioned Ciska by name.

"And how do you know...?", she began

One finger cautioned her.

"Oh!"

"Later"

"Yes, later".

He grinned, loosened his collar, and then she began to smell him again, but this time like an animal. She felt her skin seem to warm all over its surface; perhaps it was the alcohol taking effect. His jaw gangled, unrelated to his face.

"Well, do you know my friend..?"

"We're good friends", he said.

"Good friends?", she said.

"We were once lovers". He made a grimace as if giving away too much that was secret and beautiful.

"I'm sorry", she said, with just a twinge of jealousy.

"But now we're just good friends"

"Oh"

"And what do you do here?"

The music stopped. The guitarist stepped down and the conversation background became foreground.

He seemed to smile.

Then he leant forward and touched her with one hand, a delicate, dark, rather thin hand with a plaster on one signet ring finger, and she felt a shock like electricity run right through her.

She nearly jumped back (like a scalded cat) , and the stool grated against the boards. Seeing the movement, his eyes momentarily darkened.

He seemed to withdraw into himself, then leant forward and spoke, as far away from her ear as he could speak and still be heard.

"I fixed it!" He looked withdrawn again. "I fixed your new name"

"My new name!"

"Paula"

What!

"Oh!"

"Oh?"

"Just a peculiar sort of... *Deja Vu*...!"

"Its as good as any"

"Yes". An unexpected numbing below the belt. A sudden pain in the stomach.

Paula.

"Oh, one thing I'll need is a couple of small photos of you".

He laughed at her expression, shading his eyes with one hand in the mute gesture of something leaned across the table with the help of a hand, and the tiny lines around his eyes crinkled.

At first tense, but now warm with the alcohol. She leant back and wanted him, no willed him to... touch her.

There was no contact.

He leaned back, and suddenly it was time to leave. The lights flicked on and off, the musician

packed up his gear, the alcohol was finally quenched, the customers began to leave.

He said:

"Will you phone me?"

Not an order, exactly.

"Yes", weak and meaning, 'I'd like to', but knowing that he was ineradicably 'business'.

"Blast!", she said, tonelessly.

"What?"

"Nothing", she said, thinking, 'must business come between me and this moment?' (what a quaint phrase) and continued, "Of course... later!"

Thursday....

She 'phoned him on Thursday morning, while she was still in the bath, and wanted to tell him that she wanted his smell by her, but; instead:

"Do you have those things?"

"Of course" a silence. Hostility perhaps.

"I need a good photo of you, do you have some..?" She said:

"I'll come across to you and bring it all". At once she was hot and cold, her skin seemed to shrink and tighten. Dry in her throat. Terror. Her throat closed up. She ran out of words; dryly lost traction, stopped. He said:

"Hello?" with an urgency, as if he had lost location. She spoke, first taking a deep breath:

"Sorry, I think I leaned on the 'phone".

He passed his address across. Near Notting Hill gate, in that honeycomb of streets behind Camden Hill. She said:

"Are you free tomorrow evening?"

"Why?"

"I can come across then"

"Oh....", as if thinking of something entirely divorced, "Oh.. of course..!"

"Then..?"

"Around eight".

An itch, of something; the warm flow of passion or of pain or of understanding, no, fear in her mind somewhere.....

Friday.....

The street consisted of tidy elegant Georgian houses, each with its brightly painted door, its brass door-furniture. Only his was out of step. The door was of battered carved wood, somewhat dreary and damaged by age.

She stopped outside, and then regretted parking and reversed to the corner: I had a sudden gnawing in me, a secret stupid feeling about my own security.

She walked around the block, felt cold air on her legs. The sound of the knocker rang like a bell down the hallway. Hot and cold.

As she found the keen edge of despair for reasons she could not understand, the door swung back.

Jake.

"Hullo!"

He led her up a steep carpeted stairway, dressed with a beautiful Victorian collection of butterflies behind glass in old grotesque frames- into the apartment proper.

"Well, I've done it, I just need the one thing.."

The person to fit into the life frame.

"Yes"

She gave him the odds he had asked for, including the money.

"I had problems.. the height is a little out - but that's common enough... you'll have to shrink a centimeter!"

"I can wear different shoes or something"

"No matter, they're often wrong"

"I can make it!"

She felt suddenly limp - put her things aside and watched him.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Please"

"Martini?"

"Why?"

"That's part of the new you!"

"Anyway, I like a dry Martini"

"Before something?"

"O.K."

"I'll find the rest of the new you, and you make the drinks.." He gestured at the kitchen, and mounted the stairs at the side of the room.

She fumbled ice cubes from their container and added lemon and then gin and vermouth.

He was standing behind her. Suddenly her hackles rose, as if she had detected the warmth like an unexploded mine, only cell-warm, alive.

"These are the credit cards.... your new passport, and your flying licence, which is a little discoloured on the corner. (Never mind, the smear will wipe away.) There's a patch of brown on the edge of the Diners card, but that will wipe away, too. You pay them from this bank in Austria with this Cheque Book. You also have this account in Luxembourg for your funny money. He gave her a pack of things. Your signature matches nicely ...just practice a little. Anyway, its all in the pack. Just memorize it all."

To return to the present.

She dropped a cube and fumbled for it as it slid across the floor.

"What was that?"

"Nothing", but she stammered, as if something had in fact happened. She could feel his presence behind her, palpable, like a piece of sculpture

occupying space; he occupied an area that she could only describe as if it were a delicious scent behind her.

A pleasure and a fear. Her eyes now in deep focus, things became blurred. He came up close, very close.

"One thing I didn't know...."

She turned and said:

"Find Out!"

His face was three inches from hers, he reached out with his delicate fingers and touched her arm. She went rigid.

Rigid, now with a terrible, cold, icy, hard fear of pleasure.

"Turn round"

"Yes," mutely;

"Can you be someone else... can you do it?"

She turned. He unzipped the back of her dress. She said in a small voice:

"Are you going to rape me?"

"No, never that"

Apart from the touch of his hands on her arm (that strange, icy, feeling) that other evening, he had never touched her.

His face was warm, flushed or something.

She kicked her shoes off, made some asinine joke.

"I want you", she said, icy cold.

"Yes"

They were on the rug in the lounge, he had taken her clothes away; she watched his back in a mirror and in another mirror he could see her face. But out of focus, and un-sharp too.

Now for the Sea-Change.

Sleeping and Flying. *September 1st.*

Now Sleeping. No, flying.

Then the old Douglas found height and soared as it grappled with the wind over the brown mountains in the haze of blue-brown air.

Far south, to the right, over the hump of the starboard motor, and through the blur of the propeller oval, she could see the peaks of Calabria, whereas below here lay the broken glaciated plain that breaks at Salerno.

The dark mass of the old gnarled granite reared below, scooped and drained of soil; like tumbled, solid streams. Mountain chains playing attendants to the east.

The man beside her spoke with a laugh;

"They say in these mountains... in these mountains your only friend is your Beretta!"

He turned his head and watched her mock curiously. She wheeled the Douglas and put it into a slow climb:

"I want to fly North"

"Austrians!"

He leant forward and took the flight plans and maps from the storage pocket. *As he did so I could see the black stalk of a gun-metale handle break the line against his shirt.*

"Do you use that for killing animals?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I could use one".

"We will get you one in Napoli, clean and cheap!"

"And tell me how the rice will be landed?"

"Well, you saw the complex, the rest is as we detailed it in the file"

"Okay,- but next we'll have to check the shipping stage for cement"

"Fine".

"But now I have to go to Chur, to tie up some details ... do you want to come for the ride?"

"Sure"

"Well, press button 'B' on that radio, will you?".

In Rome, now almost become her home, Emma, the outgoing whore, had shown her more mysteries of 'The Apartment', as she now called it. They walked through a dungeon, suspiciously shiny and clean, with chromed metal wear untarnished by age; dry walls, surreal. The rows of instruments of torture awoke in her the first instinct, to flee.

Room Five was no different: Ah! What a surprise, my dear- shackles dangling from a richly brocaded ceiling.

Emma laughed:

"This is the chamber."

"What the hell is this for?"

"Ah!, Illona is a specialist.... ask her!"

She pushed the play button on the VTR, and her further explanation was broken-into by the arrival on the monitor screen of a tall, bedraggled girl.

"Meet Illona"

Emma continued in a hoarse whisper as if the people in that distant room would hear; she ran the tape, the lights clicked on, two reds, then two greens.

Illona was aged around thirty, tall and small chested. She wore nothing, and her body was shaven, its only decoration the metal rings that pierced her nipples, and the thin steel chain that ran through the rings and then round her waist and between her legs.

Her escort was similarly decorated, but wore an arcane leather hood over a large head.

She knelt on the floor, and he began to run his hands over her body, between her legs

"She looks.. *miserable*"

"She truly is"

"My God!"

She watched in awful fascination as the man suddenly took the girl like a bull by its nose ring, and

led her around the room: they stopped, her face twisted in some sort of pain.

"She has no sense of humour"

"He pays double for that!".

This was the key to pleasure.

She had her pleasure, but along the line someone would suffer for it, someone would be contorted in endless grief and pain ...

The Dichotomy. Fairness, Free Trade, Freedom. In reality mutually exclusive. In political fantasy the only standard raised was that of equal suffering for exceptional enjoyment.

The girls are normal ...it's their clients who are perverted... suborned to outside wishes which distort their characters, make them break in secret ways, crumble, turn back into the unacceptable products of their own instinctive ID's. But that's crazy. Crazy.

"What", said Ella.

"It was a thought, a passing thought, that was all."

*Letter from **Arianne Brown** to **Jake Dark***

1st September, late.

My Love,

I am nearly as demented as the woman on this card. I miss you and I need to know you are there for me. I should not need this, you know why, but I do. You are always in my

dreams. What can I say? You were my first true love, and always will be?
Few people in an entire lifetime have anything so special...and to make it the more humiliating-the fact that it happened so fast...but now I refuse to give it up. I know we must dream of each other; we have only love and romance to keep us together: we might not last long with reality. (What do you think?)
I do love you. I will always love you.
I have just tried to call you for the second time in a couple of days. There was no answer. I do so long to hear your voice.
Don't ever be so cruel as our last time together. Our time is so short...
I love you. Our eyes, our mouths. A perfect match.....
Your mistress, your lover,

From here, at this frightening height she could see the crest plateau of a tall broken lava-clad mountain that scrambled up into the air with dizzy torn sides and perilous drops, simmering and wavering in the intense heat.

She shuddered, nothing could live there, nothing and nobody had ever explored those heights without the risk of terrible jagged death, or worse, maiming.

Granite, the sides sloping away pell-mell to the very edge of the hungry waters, where the tumbledown sides of a ruined byre and the wreckage of the sea-worn stones of an ancient farm still held their ground against the tyranny of the encroaching seas.

A grey white tower over the crest, wearily paying witness once again to the murders of a thousand years.

And over the edge of the jagged granite now soared the enormous ragged bulk of a Sea Eagle, her wingtips fanned for greater stability, her neck moving ever so slowly this way and that as she surveyed her domain.

Overlaid, the enormous, baking heat.

The whole land boiled.

In forty five degrees of heat nothing can move quickly, and even the elderly Douglas seemed to heave itself up over the bulk of the hills with enormous effort, bumping and threatening a mock-stall as it gained the apogee of each climbing run.

She slid the craft slightly sideways to take advantage of the thermals that the bird was using. Two buzzards zoomed underneath her and swiftly avoided contact, their broadfeathered fingers maintaining a powerful grip on the air. They soared up over the craft.

Something turned below them on a road between two hills, and flashed cold steel against the purple-grey granite.

"I need to gamble, to go and gamble...I'm beginning to lose the habit!"

Fuck you for taking my body away from me!

Letter from -B- to Arianne Brown

Dearest....

I've read and re-read your letter many times...I recognized your handwriting on the face of the envelope. Your letter was so sweet.

An age ago I dialed your number and heard your 'phone ring....got that far! Then I hung up, for fear that you'd think I was crazy.

September 14th.

Two heads directly in front of me.

One blonde and one black haired, thinning at the crown and receding at the peak. It was one in the morning.

One said this to the other; and she heard this clearly, as their seats were reclined into her line-of-hearing:

"There was this house....not a brothel exactly...."

"Yes, I know what you mean... a '*Maison du Passe'*.."

"Ah!.. Well then, you've heard of it!"

"I've heard that there they cater for everything!"

"Do you like rubber, Charles?"

A late night conversation, just a passing fancy.

She ducked behind the seat, eyes half closed, blanket over her legs. Whoever it was sucked noisily at his drink. The aircraft bumped suddenly in the air stream, and momentarily the sound of the engines rose to a shriek, almost of anguish.

"Yes"

"Everything"

"Do they video the rooms?"

"No"

"Really?"

Silence.

"They have a chamber...."

"You mean...?"

"We could go together"

"Why not."

"At school they taught us how to compromise"

"Ah, but there, there is no compromise...you have the freedom to make your own set of rules... though you have to pay for it..."

"Well, with a good girl you can use all..."

"Your...persuasion..?"

"Forget the persuasion. .she does what I tell her
to.. *I pay her for it don't I...?*"

BOOK 4

The Scent of The Fox

Chapter 16

High, Mountains.

September 19th.

High over the mountains, looking down out of the cabin I could see roads, almost people, certainly trucks, clearly. This reminded me of home, a distant echo now. Where was my home?

Half-left through the screen she watched the mountains sliding below the starboard wing. Two matched autobahns slipped precipitously and identically away, and criss-crossed on the horizon.

Lay-lines against the sharp relief of the hills, as the ground began to rise. Cotton wool, freezing whispers, clouds. Wonderful fairytale white clouds. Tatters and rags and ends, then a flicker as sunlight played upon a wing. Clear of the cloud now, over the

mountains, bumping along through turbulence as they crossed a small area of forest and factories interspersed.

She could see the dark wafers of pollution as they swam in the air. For some moments they broke flurries, and the cabin reeked of cordite and burnt oil waste.

"Sulphur Dioxide", turning to look down out of the window as a car