

Various pages
from earlier drafts.

the party if ever it became powerful. They include a number of our civil servants, as you know. You speak fluent Italian. All useful stuff." Here he leaned forward. "Has it occurred to you that you could supply us with useful information? I can give you the name of someone at your embassy you could go and see."

"Wouldn't dream of it."

"You could earn a bit of money too---more than translations bring you."

"I told you, it's out of the question."

The result of this interview was that his soggiorno was cancelled and he was given 72 hours to get out of the country. The police told him his father wanted him ~~back.~~

~~Just~~ a month before this he'd met Laura, the blonde English girl. They started an affair---and as suddenly it went wrong. She denied she felt anything for him. They had a series of incomprehensible rows. There was trouble with Luciana, the girl he was living with, when she found out. He was perplexed, confused, especially as Laura was a quite different woman in bed. Only years later did it occur to him that someone was pulling his character down behind his back.

He left his apartment in Luciana's hands, furniture and all, and flew from Ciampino airport intending never to return and believing he might forget Laura. His last week in Rome had been a turmoil of people turning their backs on him, and inexplicable rebuffs, even in his own bar on the Via Margutta. He felt like a child all over again---needed the large cool parental house in Colonial Heights with its wire netting over the windows and a swimming pool behind the trees.

All his father said was, "Get yourself into a bit of trouble?"---then a chuckle and a proud shake of his head.

It was being trailed at the age of nineteen, and the espionage offer by a high-ranking official, that gave James El his first taste of the sweetness of danger. It never left his system. Back in Virginia he enjoyed long days at the pool with his new girlfriend Betty, who was in her first year at Sarah Laurence, and he even thought he was in love with her. And he was bitterly angry with Laura, which helped him believe he was finished with her. Another couple of years and he married Betty, now out of college. He tried to forget that he'd enjoyed a life in Rome of a quality he'd never dreamed about before. Little nostalgic scenes kept coming to mind. Only one thing reconciled him to a marriage largely organised by his parents, and a home and a job: his secret determination to lead a dangerous life, somehow, somewhere. He looked around for risk all the time. And when he started up in real estate with an office of his

1) James Elroy Merton was born in Richmond Va., so named by his wealthy British immigrant father after his favourite poet James Elroy Flecker. James El, as he is known to his friends, returns to Rome after an absence of twenty years in October 1977.

He was last in Rome at the age of nineteen and fell in love with an English girl called Laura. They broke up after a short scene together but no other woman, including the wife with whom he lived in various parts of Virginia for over fifteen years, meant as much to him as Laura. He was determined to see her again. His wife knew nothing about this. Nor did his friends. He never once wrote a letter to Laura in the twenty years he was absent from Rome, never once referred to her.

In his teenage Roman days he was quite a communist. In the Fifties Italian communism was different from the later militant, trade-union orientated variety. At that time there was a lot of poverty in the country and trade unions were hardly known. James El became convinced that further injections of American capital into Italy would ruin Europe's 'little garden' as it was called and eventually plunge it into civil war. He was a regular at PCI meetings and frequently went to communist headquarters at the Palazzo Colonna. He was also picking up good pocket money translating treatises and legal documents into English, and had a small apartment on the Via Margutta, its windows overlooking RAI headquarters. Here he gave small parties from time to time and came to know a good many government officials, partly because of his translation work and partly because, being a potentially wealthy young American, he attracted a lot of social attention anyway.

Ralph Marriot was one of his closest buddies in those days. No one knew much about Ralph. He was said to be English but never went near England. He did go to Malta from time to time and some said he had a wife and child there, and a shop. Where his money came from was anybody's guess but he never seemed short of it.

James El's first stay in Rome was brusquely cut off by an early-morning call from the dreaded Questura, Mussolini's internal security police who had been retained under the post-war constitution. Even James El's heart did a jump. He was told to go to headquarters at once and announce himself. He took a taxi, still unshaven, and to his astonishment was ushered into the office of the Questore himself. It wasn't the Questore behind the desk but a high-ranking official: however, the point had been made---James Elroy Merton was considered important bait. For two hours the genial,

lazily smiling official sat talking to him. The gist of it was that he'd been trailed everywhere during the last six months. He'd been seen visiting PCI headquarters several times, so had his girl. At the end of the two hours the official suddenly suggested that James El should work for the American Embassy as an informer. James El refused and was out of the country in three days flat.

Just a month before this he'd met Laura, the blonde English girl. After an ardent start together they had a series of incomprehensible rows. Only years later did it occur to him that someone had been pulling his character down behind his back, and that this someone might have been Ralph Marriot.

He left his apartment in her hands, furniture and all, and flew from Ciampino airport intending never to return.

Back in Virginia he enjoyed long days at the parental swimming pool with his new girlfriend Betty, who was in her first year at Sarah Laurence. He even thought he was in love with her. Another couple of years and he'd married her.

Only one thing reconciled him to a marriage largely organised by his parents---his determination to lead a risky life even in straight business. Somehow the espionage offer in Rome had produced a catalytic change in his blood. When he started up in his father's real estate office he soon saw the possibilities. He began making money so fast that even his father became alarmed.

When the second child came along he realised that he intended to return to Laura however many years it took him. He heard from Ralph Marriot occasionally, the slack, amiable letters you'd expect him to write. Nothing about Laura. He opened a special bank account in New York---the 'journey to Rome' account. His savings went into it over a period of at least ten years. He swore to return to Rome as soon as he was free of his family.

Providence helped him by tipping off the police about some of his real estate deals. His 'colleagues' advised him to leave the US for a time, which was just what he wanted. His father got to hear of it, so did Betty (James El made sure of that).

He was just ready to leave when she plonked a legal injunction on him. She got a nice fat settlement which absorbed most of his savings. Legal fees to protect him against an investigation, and generous 'gifts' to keep key people quiet, took care of the rest. By the time he left for Rome he had just enough to keep him alive for six months---if he was careful.

Even his inheritance became a chimera. His father blocked it by setting up a trust-fund available in part to his children and in part to anyone James El wished to name in his last will and testament. It was a bitter personal blow that had a lot to do with the later events of his life.

In one other respect too he was a very different

CHAPTER SAMPLE 1.

It was half-past nine and most of the city was at dinner. He'd never seen the street so deserted. The daily murders, the thefts, muggings and assassinations had enforced an unofficial curfew on this earthy, voluptuous yet sceptical city.

James El crossed the Garibaldi bridge into the brash and popular district he loved most.

You could never be sure what lay behind Ralph's glances, casual as they were. He looked at you when your eyes were turned away. Besides a weak mouth he had a broad unlined brow as if thought and care were unknown to him. Ralph went in for wind-jackets summer and winter, and tight Italian slacks and high-heeled shoes which were unsuitable for his age and out of date anyway.

Ralph was alone at a table for two.

They shook hands and James El felt a sudden yearning for the heady effects of the trattoria's home-grown frascati. A litre carafe of it was put before him almost at once and he downed a glass in a few gulps.

"Worried?" Ralph asked him.

Then, without waiting for an answer, "I talked to a friend of mine called Johnny Lucubrese. He must still have been in nappies when you were living on the Via Margutta. He'd like to see you. Tomorrow at the Flora, about midday, in the bar downstairs."

"How will I recognise him?"

"He'll recognise you."

Next day it was just like the old Rome, bright and warm with a bounce in the air. He took a taxi to the Via Veneto and sat in a traffic jam for twenty minutes cursing himself for not having walked.

"What's the hold up?" he asked the driver.

"Another murder." Very laconic and flat.

"Some minister. Three of the kidnappers were wounded but they got the minister first."

He got to the Flora ten minutes late and Johnny was already there, an easy-going, well-dressed type. They went upstairs and sat outside in the stink of the slow-moving traffic.

"I've seen you around with Ralph," Johnny told him.

When they'd had coffee they strolled to the top of the hill into the Borghese Gardens.

He was surprised to find that Johnny was nervous too.

"This evening somebody's going to phone you," Johnny said. "Hang about your hotel-room between eight and nine."

"There's no phone in my room."

"They'll call you downstairs won't they?" Johnny said with irritation. "Now all you do on the phone is just listen and say yes and no and fine and things like that. Don't ask questions or make comments."

"OK."

"We'll meet again tomorrow same place same time. Now before you come I want you to call at the Banco di Roma and have a look at your balance."

"You know I've an account there?"

Johnny gave him a look of contempt.

Next morning James El found his account had been credited a thousand dollars. He just nodded to the clerk and handed the statement back without enquiring where the credit came from.

Then he strolled up the Via Veneto and waited for Johnny a second time.

But Johnny didn't come. James El gave him an hour and then went back to his hotel.

As for the phonecall the previous evening, it hadn't come either.

But now, just ten minutes after he got in from the Flora, the woman from the desk downstairs knocked on his door and said, "Telefono."

minister, within two in a position of entire confidence.

He was given a spacious apartment on the choice Aventine hill. Here he gave parties and once more became known as a desirable social contact. He found himself back in the fashionable restaurants of Parioli and the Via Veneto, less and less at the Trastevere trattoria. To his surprise Ralph joined him in his new life, indeed made him feel that his presence was part of the bargain. James El felt safer with him around---one never knew when a dirty trick or two might be needed.

He was now quite sure that Ralph had informed on him twenty years before. It explained why he was never short of money---and why the Questura hadn't booted him out of Italy as well. Had Ralph been in love with Laura? Something in Ralph's manner when he talked about her seemed to suggest a possible background there. Was that why he'd informed against James El, to get rid of him? And would he do the same ~~kind of thing~~ again, given a second chance, particularly if Laura came into their little circle? The Tarot cards supported this suggestion.

Well, Ralph had won the first round twenty years ago. But James El was going to win the second. In the old days, he now felt, he'd deserved to lose. In the old days Ralph had been his master. But now Ralph was going to be his servant.

3) 'James El's back in circulation'---it went round Rome among those old enough to remember his 'wild' days twenty years back, about which they now laughed. With a middle-aged spread, a large apartment and a cook from the Trento he was excellent company.

One evening, at a party composed largely of Christian Democrat people, he met Laura. Within seconds they were madly in love with each other again.

They dined alone at his place the following week and made love.

At a later party he met Marco Petrucci, her husband, a quiet man of rather stunning good looks, very masculine and steady.

James El inspected his account at the Banco di Roma each month and found it replenished on time. He bought a car and drove Laura out to Ostia Antica, Frascati, Palestrina, all the old places. Simultaneously he was going about his business of surveillance, often with Laura in his company---at rigged dinner parties, evenings at the Florida club. Daily he provided details of the minister Pietrafino's movements, and consigned them to a black plastic sack in a rubbish dump among the tenement blocks of Monte Mario.

Just before the two months of his assignment were up the minister was shot dead in his car on his way to the Quirinale. There were press photos of him hanging from the driver's seat.

James El, his face flushed with anger, ran to the phone and called Ralph. "Some people never will learn

of the past months to Monsignor Salvatore who looked very grave and for a moment terrified. He gave James El absolution and commended him for having secretly tried to save the pope "even though only against a quite imaginary plot produced by your own fevered mind at the time."

"For this too I give you absolution," he added.

James El felt childishly secure in Monsignor Salvatore's tiny library where plots and informing seemed entirely unreal.

He talked unguardedly to everyone as if he'd found an invisible new protection which would see him safe through everything. He went to church almost every day (St Peter's). People noticed a strange elation in him. He took Laura to the same restaurants as before, and to parties, with deliberate carelessness. No new instructions came from 'Mike'. The monthly instalments at the Banco di Roma ceased.

Meanwhile he and Laura pursued their secret plans for departure. There was the question of money. It would be impossible for her to take her sizable fortune out of Italy due to blocked-currency regulations. They decided to take as much cash as they could handle without arousing suspicion when withdrawing it from the banks, and to slip across the border north of Udine.

Not that he or she had real hopes that he would survive that long. One morning, unable to bear the silence and suspense any longer, he rushed out to make a call on Ralph. The apartment was closed up. Ralph's porter downstairs said he'd gone away suddenly. And the phone had been disconnected.

They timed their getaway attempt for December 13. No unpleasant calls came. No one seemed to be trailing them in the streets. The days passed in nerve-wracking boredom.

He kept making sure that Ralph wasn't back in town.

On the evening of December 12 they went to a party, wanting to behave as if nothing was about to happen. When they got back there was a phonecall from Ralph. James El's heart sank into his bowels.

"Think I'd deserted you?" Ralph said.

They met without Laura later that night at the Florida club and to James El's immense relief he found Ralph as distraught and clearly on the run as he himself was. They drank a lot of frascati. Ralph said he'd got himself into a bit of a fix and didn't know how to get out of it.

"I tried a bunk to Malta but it didn't work."

Then: "You've got to get away by latest tomorrow night. And take me with you."

"Take you?"

Ralph outlined his plan. At eight o'clock the following evening James El was to be at the church of Santa Lucia and wait there for him, kneeling in the tiny chapel of the Madonna on the south side of the apse. Ralph had chosen this church because tomorrow would be the saint's name day and the place would not only be open in the evening but plentifully illuminated with candles. It would be easy to merge

in with the crowd.

As for Laura, she was to wait for a car to pick her up at James El's apartment. It would arrive at about 7.45 pm the following evening. It would take her to the church of Santa Lucia, behind the Campo dei Fiori, and of course she had to be equipped for travelling. Neither of them, however, should arouse suspicion by taking suitcases.

If Ralph hadn't turned up by 8.15 James El and Laura were to go without him. They would be driven to the airport where tickets were already waiting for them. The driver of the car had received instructions. //

It was a clever plan and James El fell for it without a moment's hesitation. Ralph acted the part of a hunted and frightened man to perfection. He had not only James in his power but the woman he loved too. In fact, Ralph had strict orders that James El must be got rid of. His own survival depended on the success or otherwise of his mission.

8) Next evening the crowded church was brilliant with lighted candles and as James El stepped inside a feeling of extraordinary happiness came over him. As he took the holy water on the tips of his fingers and made the sign of the cross a sentence came into his mind with some clarity: 'And now you will meet the keeper of the southern gate.' Did it mean 'Mike' himself? or something unusually fortunate? He took it as a good omen.

He walked down the side-aisle to the little chapel of the madonna and knelt close to the altar. He found himself genuinely praying, his eyes closed. He stayed like this for at least five minutes. He heard a soft step behind him and guessed it to be Ralph. He felt a pricking sensation in the elbow and was just about to turn to find out what had happened when a great weakness came over him and he fell slowly sideways.

Not until the following day was he found, already dead by several hours.

It hadn't entered his head apparently that Michael, keeper of the southern gate, was also Lord of Death.

9) Laura waited in James El's apartment at the appointed time. There were two letters from James El for her, both marked 'To be opened later'.

A car was waiting downstairs with Ralph at the wheel.

"We'll have to be quick about this," he said and drove off at once.

After a time she realised they were driving towards the coast.

"What about James El?" she asked him.

"Something went wrong. Hopefully he's meeting

at the airport."

"What went wrong?" She was shivering.

"I'll tell you on the plane."

"Where are we going?"

"London."

He had air tickets ready. Only after take-off did he relax. He turned to her with a smile and said enigmatically, "Well, I wasn't worried for you but I was for me!"

At London airport two security men came forward at the passport desk and asked them to follow them. They went to a room behind the customs area. Ralph was placed under arrest and Laura advised to find a London hotel for a few days as she might be needed for questioning.

As they walked together in front of the security men Ralph told her in a normal voice, not at all shaken, "I knew somebody was trailing me---thank God it was the police!"

During the next few days Laura was interrogated several times. In the second interview they showed her a photograph of James El and asked her if she knew him. When she said yes they told her he'd been found dead in a Roman church.

She opened the two letters from James El. One contained the cash he'd drawn from his account. And the other was a copy of his will leaving her that part of his inheritance which he'd never been able to touch.

Perhaps he hadn't forgotten after all, as he walked into the church of Santa Lucia, that Michael keeper of the southern gate was also Lord of Death.

Length: 80-100.000 words.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

Until I see a full transcript of the report on John Paul 1's death which was put before the judicial authorities in Rome by the Civiltà Cristiana I cannot of course give exact details of the weaknesses in the security arrangements surrounding the pope, or the suspicious nature of certain circumstances relating to his death. I've been promised this transcript or a faithful verbal account when I return to Italy.

Thus the sample chapter above is imaginable rather than probable.

Also the theme of the unknown doctor who examined the pope on the day of his death (it is a fact that one did see him five hours or so before) either has to be ridded of the imputation that an injection was administered (~~as I've done here in the synopsis~~) or, if in fact an injection was administered, eliminated altogether from the narrative as a libel hazard.

Steel

man from the youth who'd left for Rome twenty years before. Unknown to his family and most of his friends he practised magic. He'd also become uncannily expert with the Tarot cards. It had helped him get the wiz-kid reputation in business. He could predict the future with enviable accuracy.

The cards told him that both Laura and Ralph were still in Rome.

2) In Rome he found a cheap room on a monthly basis in a hotel near the Pantheon. By now Rome had become Italy's crime-city No 2 after Milan. His favourite Trastevere trattoria was much as it had always been. He strolled in unannounced and walked straight to the old table. Ralph looked astonished to see his old friend but in five minutes it felt as if they'd never separated. He told Ralph he needed money---quick. He described his real estate adventures back in Virginia and asked him if anything might be going in or around Rome.

"Similar but not the same" Ralph told him with a funny look.

In a week a meeting was fixed up between James El and a Johnny Lucubrese at the Flora, downstairs in the bar. They strolled up to the Borghese Gardens and Lucubrese instructed him to wait for a phonecall that evening from a man called 'Mike', who would do all the talking. After another week he was to inspect his bank account at the Banco di Roma.

'Mike' did phone and made a series of what sounded commonplace and casual remarks about meeting in Genoa, visiting his country place etc. A week later James El's bank balance was mysteriously credited with a thousand dollars.

James El knew well enough that he was becoming involved in some form of espionage and found himself excited rather than frightened. The next few weeks were quiet. He received a further thousand dollars but no more phonecalls. He knew he was being trailed and observed. Ralph kept a pretty close line on him too, and was with him most nights of the week.

Laura had been traced. She was married but lived alone in the 'ghetto' area. Her husband was called Marco Petrucci and known to be rather wealthy. They'd been together five years but had separated, though they were good friends and went to the same parties. James El asked anxiously if there'd been children and to his relief was told no. Ralph handed him Laura's address across the table one evening.

James El avoided getting to know other women in this interim period. He didn't want complications when he came to know and once more court Laura. He remembered a brothel in Via Monserrato from the old days. With the abolition of brothels it had become a small hotel much like the one he was staying in at

The man at the other end spoke English with a slight Italian accent. "This is Mike. I'm glad to find you at home. How are you?"

"Fine."

"I'll be leaving for Genoa round two o'clock on Wednesday, so we could meet at the station. We only need a couple of minutes together. It'll be nice to see you again after so many years."

"Yes."

"I hope you'll be free to join me in about a month's time at my country place. I'll let you know."

"Fine."

The phone went dead. For the first time since his arrival James El felt like laughing. He drank a coffee at a little bar across the road and smiled to himself. They put a thousand bucks in your pocket for playing kid's games these days!

Well, well, he wasn't going to stop them.

2. Ralph professed himself completely mystified by the phonecall, and even by Johnny's behaviour. As for the sudden appearance of a thousand dollars in James El's account, he thought it amusing.

"Are you sure it wasn't a draft you'd arranged yourself?" he asked with an easy laugh.

James El knew well enough that he was becoming involved in a form of espionage. But his evening divinatory exercises, and the mediumistic messages he was getting with unfailing regularity, seemed to assure him that all was well: he would somehow keep his hands clean and emerge master of the situation after all. But more than this, he was ready to sacrifice anything to reach Laura. He believed that the work would be a perfect means to achieve this. And he was right.

Ralph explained what he 'thought' the work involved.

"They need a good front man for these operations, not that I know what the operations are. Probably something to do with real estate, since you've always

been involved in that." When James El looked sceptical he added, "I'm only guessing. You see your value is that you're a personality, you've got the right background, you know how to host people and influence them, you're well travelled---whoever these people are want you up front for some operation."

He knew Ralph was giving him real information.

"And what about the phonecall?" James El asked him again. "What did all that mean?"

"Ah there I can't help you."

And Ralph looked away.

The next few weeks were quiet. He received another thousand dollars but no more phonecalls. He knew he was being trailed and observed. Ralph kept a pretty close line on him too, and they were together most days of the week. Laura had been traced. She was married but living alone in the 'ghetto' area. Her husband was called Marco Petrucci and quite wealthy. They'd been together five years or more but were now separated, though still close friends and at all the same parties. James El asked anxiously if there'd been children. To his everlasting relief Ralph said "No." He slipped Laura's address across the table to him, and at that moment James El felt he would go to the gates of hell with Ralph for that service.

Every evening after that he made a point of passing through the little square where she lived and looking up at what he guessed to be her window. Standing below, he concentrated all his 'forces' on her, sometimes for an hour or more. In his hotel room he concentrated his magic on her too, primitive though his ceremonies had to be in the tiny room.

He avoided getting to know other women. He met several at the trattoria, friends of Ralph mostly, among them several attractive American girls, but he didn't make dates. He wanted no flies in the ointment when the time came for him to meet Laura. He remembered a brothel in the Via Monserrato from the old days where there had often been lunchtime queues of men from the nearby markets. Now, with the abolition of brothels, it had become a small hotel much like the one he was staying at near the Pantheon. You took a girl in from the street, or you booked one at the desk. James El preferred the latter way of doing things and found a sweet Neapolitan kid who curled softly all round him and worked him hard, so that he would stumble back to his own hotel feeling contentedly debauched as dawn came through. In this way sex desire was appeased, attachments avoided. He became one of her steady clients and sometimes he had her over at his own hotel. He was beginning to feel that the old Rome was still alive after all.

After a month like this Johnny met him in the gardens again and told him he must go to Switzerland the following day. He would fly to Zürich.

"Book a room at the Bau au Lac, do it by phone from your hotel lobby. Talk as loud as you like. When you get to Zürich take a taxi there direct from the airport. Walk into the lobby and through into the lounge. Order some coffee. Go to the hotel desk and look as if you're confirming your room: but instead you can invent a name and ask them if the gentleman has arrived yet. When you've drunk your coffee order a taxi at the desk and then go to the Hotel Excelsior where you'll find a room already booked in your name. By the way, travel light, just one piece of hand luggage. Stay in your room between six and seven every evening until a man knocks on your door and introduces himself with the following question: 'You are the American gentleman I met on the plane aren't you?'. Your answer will be, 'How nice of you to look me up. I'm just on my way out to dinner. Won't you join me?'"

"Isn't that rather corny dialogue?" James El asked, marvelling again at the childishness of it all.

"I didn't write it," Johnny said with a suggestion of disgust.

"And do we go out to dinner?"

"He'll take you along the lake towards Zollikon. I mean walking. It's quiet there."

"And what's he going to talk about?"

This time Johnny simply gave him a long hard look. "When he's told you everything you go back to your hotel and dine there. And you leave as early as possible the next morning, returning to Rome via Milan."

The man who came to see him in the Zürich hotel seemed to be Swiss. He talked in a mutter, as if he'd learned it all by heart. He explained the code of the 'Mike' phonecall James El had received, and taught him how proper names were formed. James El was astonished at the ingenuity. All had to be committed to memory, nothing must be on paper except a certain phone number. They strolled along the path by the lake for at least two hours. The man told him that he must wait at least an hour after each phonecall he received: if a confirming call had not come through within an hour he must get out of Rome at once and call the number which the man wrote down for him.

"If you call that number you'll be given another number, only you have to say who you are."

"Who am I?"

"The keeper of the southern gate."

"What?" He jumped out of his skin at this reference to one of the four 'gates' in the magic he practised. It was the one thing in his life no one knew a thing about! No one!

"Only in an emergency is that your name," the other man said.

"And who do I ask for?"

"Lord Michael."

"But that is the keeper of the southern gate!" James El shouted.

It was the other man's turn to look astonished. He was clearly doing no more than passing on instructions.

"He'll call himself Michael or Mike," the agent went on. "But if he refers to himself as Lord Michael it means you're in great danger, be very careful about being observed."

Only back in Rome did James El remember the sweet little Neapolitan girl asking about the gaudy robe she'd found in his wardrobe, and his paternal explanation of the 'magic circle' with its north, south, east and west each in the hands of a different archangel. Damned fool! From now on he'd got to be cleverer than that.

He knew that terrorist outfits operated without direct personal contact between Control and work groups, at least in Italy. This made it extremely difficult for the police to break them open. Those terrorists the police did catch genuinely knew nothing about their superiors or fellows. Often they didn't know what group they were working for until the newspapers told them after an operation, and even then they couldn't be certain. Of course there had to be contact men like Johnny to handle the recruits but they slipped anchor early in the game so that nothing could be pinned on them. As for where the money came from--- East or West---even the leaders sometimes didn't know that. Not even Lord Michael himself.

Ralph assured him that no terrorism was involved. It was some sort of 'protective' outfit. You kept a man under surveillance so that he could be protected against threatened kidnap or murder. Thus it was a sort of counter terrorism.

James El's first assignment was to observe, then get to know personally a minister by the name of Lucchino Pietrafinio. Mike gave him this name enclosed in a series of apparently chatty and harmless sentences which were in fact codes. Within a month James El must be on close personal terms with the minister, within two in a position of entire confidence, so that he might be invited to the man's house without fear. He was ordered to take an apartment on the choice Aventine Hill: he would sign the contract the following day, paying six months rent in advance. He would be receiving a special draft for this. The apartment was waiting for him. Here he must give parties and become known as a desirable social contact. As for his sex life, this was entirely his own affair, since he alone would be the sufferer

from any indiscretions. James El sat deciphering the coded sentences for days, as one phonecall followed another with fresh instructions. Each call was followed by a confirming one an hour later, as the Swiss agent had promised.

It wasn't a difficult assignment for a man of his background. He found himself back in the old restaurants in Parioli and along the Via Veneto--- and less and less at the Trastevere trattoria where he felt most at home. Ralph joined him in his new life, indeed he made him feel that his presence was part of the bargain. Certainly James El felt safer with him around: one never knew when one might want a dirty trick or two to save oneself.

James El's apartment was vast, its tall, arched reception room giving out on to the mellow walls of S. Abbadia. He soon had a steady stream of visitors.

Access to the minister Pietrafinio became easy. James El was back in circulation---it went round Rome, among all those old enough to remember his 'wild' days twenty years back, about which they now laughed. With a middle-aged spread, a cook from the Trento and a lot of anecdotes to tell James El was excellent company. One evening, at a party composed largely of DC people, he met Laura. It was difficult to hide their astonishment from the others but they both tried, perhaps because they knew what was going to happen later: her husband and his friends were there, and in Rome one had to be discreet even today. They found each other more attractive than before, they laughed a great deal, planned an evening alone together. Again he had the giddy sensation that the twenty years in between had been swallowed up and lost.

The two of them dined alone at his place the following week and made love afterwards. They were awake all night. At dawn they walked round the square to the terrace and watched as the sun began to light up the cupola of St Peter's in the valley, then trace the Tiber and the Farnese roofs. They were in love.

He didn't attempt to hide this from Ralph. One evening she joined them at Gino's. James El dismissed his suspicion that she and Ralph had had an affair from his mind. But a sense of discomfort remained.

At a later party he met Marco Petrucci, her husband, a genial quiet man with rather stunning good looks, very masculine and steady.

"You're a fool for leaving him," James El teased her.

"It was only a few months ago. Something suddenly snapped."

When he heard this James El felt both a tinge of regret that he'd hurt her in his magical concentrations to get rid of her man, and triumph that his powers had been adequate to the task.

3. Just before the two months of his assignment were up the minister he was trailing, Lucchino Pietrafino, was shot dead in his car on his way to the Quirinale. There were press photos of him hanging from the driver's seat. James El had provided detailed accounts of his daily movements in a series of reports, consigned to a black plastic sack in a rubbish dump among the tenement blocks of Monte Mario.

James El, his face swollen with anger, rushed to the phone and called Ralph. They met in the Piazza del Teatro Marcello, where in the old days you got the best coffee in Rome. Ralph almost ran towards him, red in the face, frowning, and grabbed his arm, pulling him towards the tiny bar.

"So the bastards got him after all!" he said.

"What bastards?" James El asked, marvelling at his cunning.

"Well, the ones we were protecting him against of course!"

"Protecting him?"

Ralph stopped and lowered his voice: "But did you never realise, I'm in with one of the protection groups? We tip people off when they're high in the lists! We tipped him off! Somebody was doing a beautiful trailing job for us---knew every movement---penetrated his home life---you see, people never will learn not to do the same things every day!"

That evening they dined alone outside Rome. When he got back to his apartment at two in the morning James El couldn't for the life of him say for certain that Ralph hadn't been spoofing. What was happening to his judgement? A hot flush of guilt suffused his face as he accused himself of Pietrafino's murder (a particularly nice man...). Yet what Ralph had said made a kind of sense. Since Ralph could in this way protect him against unpleasant feelings, he believed Ralph...

James El had a feeling that his apartment had been visited. He questioned the cook but drew a blank. One morning he was almost knocked down by a fast car along the narrow Via Pellegrino: but then the driver might have been a fugitive from some theft (it was the right kind of street for that).

He looked into his account at the Banco di Roma each month and found it replenished right on time. He bought a car at a big discount from one of his regular visitors, a car salesman from Turin, and drove Laura out to Ostia Antica, Frascati, Palestrina, and for weekends to Felice in Circeo, Sorrento, all

the old places. It was like coming back to life after a twenty-year anaesthesia. He was deliriously happy to find that Laura felt the same.

"Did you think of me at all in those years?" he asked.

"Only as part of a scene that couldn't be repeated. Something that went wrong, and which I didn't understand. You see I fell in love with you this time as if you were a new person."

"A completely new person?"

"Not really. Not quite new I suppose."

And with this she gave him to understand, in a woman's way, that the past twenty years had been a loss for her too.

They planned to get away. He knew a man back in the States, in Florida to be exact, who needed a partner. He told Laura about the difficulties he'd got himself into in the States but said he hoped the fuss had died down now.

"But why do you want to leave?" Laura asked him.

"I just don't feel good here like I used to."

She gave him a quiet look and he added, "Italy's changed so much."

This time, he told himself, he'd be in the States with a woman he felt it a privilege to be with, and who only had to speak in order to command his attention and thrill and excite him. Just her voice sent him wild with happiness. You couldn't have said that for Betty, though he had nothing against Betty. The thing with Laura was that his old feelings for her didn't abate however much sex they had.

Then came an unexpected phonecall from Michael. It was a new assignment. James El knew better than to answer back over the phone. The confirming phonecall came precisely an hour later. It found James El trembling violently. For his next assignment was Marco Petrucci, Laura's husband.

He spent the rest of the day decoding the message again and again to see if he'd made an error over the name. But, apart from the fact that he'd made no mistake, the identity-features he'd been given fitted Marco and no one else in Rome. He called at Ralph's flat at one in the morning and they strolled round and round the great Roman baths in the Piazza Farnese, talking in whispers. James El broke the most sacred rule of his new job, namely to reveal an assignment to living mortal. He could feel a tremor of white-hot terror go through Ralph as he did so. You could after all get killed just for knowing something you shouldn't know. In this world the matter of innocence counted for little. But James El quite deliberately burdened him with it. It turned Ralph into a fellow-conspirator with as much to lose as he had.

He urged Ralph to tell him what he knew of Laura's husband. A wealthy and influential man, close to high-ranking DC ministers---that he knew. But he was also known to have left-wing sympathies, and to have helped architect the famous compromesso storico or 'historical compromise' between the Christian Democrats and the communists which Aldo Moro and Pope Paul crowned with respectability. This was news.

"And whose side is he on now?" James El asked.

"His own. He's fighting for his survival like the rest of us."

There also seemed a possibility that Marco was involved, though at some distance, with forms of espionage. He made frequent unexplained visits to Switzerland: some said he was involved in certain financial operations which had a terrorist role.

"And all I can suggest," Ralph said in a frightened whisper, "is that once again you've been roped in to protect someone."

"Well," James El said quite loudly, "I hope he don't get protected like Lucchino Pietrafino was protected."

Ralph simply shrugged.

James El wanted to tip Laura off in some way, above all share his predicament with her, explain why he wouldn't be able to leave Italy just yet. He was jumpy, which she noticed at once. On his side he thought he saw something apprehensive in her eyes, especially when Ralph was with them.

He took the dangerous step of telling her to warn Marco to change his daily routines, and to continue varying them each day.

"Because nobody that busy should have a regular timetable," he said. "Of course it's only an opinion."

Next day he asked her casually, "Did you speak to Marco like I said?"

"He'd never do it. He'd laugh." And she gave him a sudden look: "He'd think I knew something."

He switched the subject at once, taking the hint.

"Yes, you're probably right."

Alone in bed that night he asked himself why he hadn't taken her lead and revealed the whole thing to her---taken her to that little fish restaurant along the coast near Civitavecchia and talked all the way in the unbugged safety of his car. Feeling cold while sweating profusely, he realised he was frightened to do that because she might betray him. What had he sunk to?

He obeyed instructions, and his account at the Banco di Roma continued to benefit. In the old days, when he'd entered the bank's domed foyer, with the sunlight glittering from the tall windows on to the brass grilles all round, he'd felt a strange elation. Now he felt distraught.

Marco Petrucci began coming to his apartment quite frequently. Clearly he knew about James El's affair with Laura and didn't seem to mind (he was living with another woman himself). He liked James El a lot. He invited him without Laura sometimes. They went 'hunting' together in the Pisan hills, though James El refused to fire at young wild boar which were so domesticated that they almost came up to you for a scratch. When they were alone together in one of the chalets, sipping Cointreau, in candle-light, he tried to tip Marco off but it didn't work.

"A man in your position should vary his daily routines."

"I'm not important enough for them, don't worry."

He gave James El a look that suggested he knew what he was doing. So James El felt absolved of responsibility from that time on. After all, if Marco was in some form of espionage he must take the cookie whichever way it crumbled...

Marco was in the habit of flying to Palermo on business in the company helicopter about once a month. One evening he told James El over the phone that he was going down there the following day. James El made sure not to include this piece of information in his report that same night.

The helicopter crashed with Marco in it. There was no explosion. The story going around was that the pilot had heart failure. It seemed that neither the police nor the medicos liked to investigate a thing like this too deeply. Marco was killed instantaneously.

The moment he got the news James El rushed in a panic to the phone to call Ralph. But he stopped and forced himself to wait. At this point you didn't make impulsive moves: things had got too dangerous. Laura came to him with the news that Marco had left her everything, his lawyers had just phoned her: the family would contest it but as she was still Marco's wife and they hadn't even legally separated the family hadn't a chance.

The look in her eyes told James El that she knew more than he thought. That night, strolling up and down a deserted lane outside Frascati, he told her everything. She said she'd had a 'brief and unpleasant' affair with Ralph some years back, and that indeed it had been Ralph who had attacked him most viciously behind his back when he was in trouble with the Questura. He'd invented all kinds of stories, such as certain cynical remarks made by James El about their love affair, which had corrupted her young judgement. They resolved not to show signs of having shared this information to Ralph.

ELI (L'Esercito della Liberazione Italiana, or the Italian liberation army) claimed the murder, as they had claimed that of Pietrafino. James El wanted

to kill Ralph but Laura calmed him down.

"He's far too dangerous to try and hurt," she told him.

She also told him that Ralph had reappeared in her life soon after she'd married Marco. This had aroused her suspicions at the time.

James El blamed himself bitterly for the deaths but persuaded himself that he was indeed part of some protective outfit.

And nothing could be pinned on him. The money kept flowing into the bank.

The following week ex-prime minister Moro was kidnapped. James El suddenly saw a design in it all: Pietrafino and Marco, both high up in the Christian Democrat hierarchy, had been among the negotiators of the famous 'historical compromise' of which Moro and the pope were said to be the authors. And one by one these men were to disappear.

In that case why hadn't he been put to watch Moro instead of those two relatively unimportant men? He would have been in an ideal position socially to do so. He'd frequently met Aldo Moro at receptions.

His blood went cold when he found out, doing one of his divinatory exercises one morning, that he had been marked out for bigger game even than the ex-prime minister.

He knew that if he tried to get this over to a police official or senior minister they would laugh at him. Only a few police forces round the world (Scotland Yard was one of them) worked with mediums.

4. The new instructions came on a grey morning of scirocco when all Rome was irritable and sallow-faced. He worked at the message all day and much of the night, and finally had to face the fact that he'd been given the pope as his third assignment.

In a moment he realised why he and not someone like Ralph was doing this work. Socially James El could penetrate any drawing room in the city, and he was frequently the guest of some Vatican minister, monsignor or cardinal.

The message emphasised that he was being called on not to watch pope Paul VI or any particular pope but the pope whoever he should happen to be.

His information must be most exact. He knew why this was. The pope rarely left the Vatican.

Anyone with the job of killing him would have to be an acknowledged employee at the Vatican or at Castel Gondolfo, even a Vatican citizen.

The pope's tastes in food, his eating times, his rising and retiring habits, the hours he spent in his library etc had to be provided and kept meticulously up to date.

James El heard rumours among journalists at the Florida club that there was a Red Brigades plan afoot to kidnap the pope. But Wadi Haddad, the PLO leader of the German-Palestinian terrorist network of which the Red Brigades were said to be a part, refused permission. The pope had been under close surveillance on and off for the past two years, ever since the raid on OPEC headquarters in Vienna. The first plan to kidnap the pope had been as early as 1975 after the seizure of the Berlin politician Peter Lorenz.

This made James El feel even more certain that he was in the 'protective' racket, called in to watch the pope only when his life was known to be in danger.

The Moro affair ended in May 1978 with the ex-prime minister's murder. It was a terrific shock in Rome.

James El's income was raised in the first days of June.

The time came for pope Paul VI to retire to his palace at Castel Gondolfo for the dog days, according to custom. James El had by now increased his visits to the Vatican, got nearer to the British minister, come to know various of the Swiss and Palatinate guard officers. His information on the pope was plentiful. Paul VI's had been a long reign and habits had established themselves firmly.

The summer was unusually hot and pleasant and James El spent a lot of time with Laura on the beaches at Fregene, like most of Rome's professional classes. Almost every day they drove out of the sun-baked, lead-poisoned city along the Via Aurelia, past those thick walls he was penetrating so efficiently.

Pope Paul VI had never evoked much personal warmth. James El remembered his coronation over twenty years before. Paul's austerity of manner had kept people at a distance. An up-to-date portrait of him was beginning to emerge. The pope felt rather fragile these days. Surprisingly, given his long experience, he was becoming increasingly shy. He made several references to his coming death. The Moro affair depressed him deeply.

Rumour said that it had become impossible to

kidnap the pope not only because of Haddad's disapproval but because of the physical difficulties of taking a man who rarely moved outside the Vatican walls. For this reason Moro had been substituted for him.

This thought too may have tortured the pope. After all Moro was perhaps his closest friend. Paul VI seemed to feel increasingly isolated, and played his favourite Vivaldi until late at night alone in his room.

One day at the beach James El heard that the pope was confined to his bed at Castel Gondolfo with arthrosis, an old complaint of his. He had suffered two bouts of influenza already this year. But his doctors felt no cause for anxiety.

After Moro's body was found in the back of a car the pope had been given two heart-stimulant injections.

Suddenly, on the afternoon of Sunday August 6, Vatican Radio announced that the pope was gravely ill.

A few hours later and the pope was dead. He died at 9.40 that evening, a matter of hours after the first announcement that something was wrong.

For James El it was a typical sudden death induced by clandestine injection or poison. To conceal such a murder in the case of an old man was doubly easy because no post mortem would be thought necessary. James El was surprised by how many people shared the hunch. Foreign correspondents were in the habit of saying that Romans saw a plot everywhere. But this was because there was a plot everywhere.

There was the telltale blood-clot. The pope was given intensive treatment, and oxygen, but the blood-clot on the lungs, or pulmonary edema, had complicated the matter fatally. His condition had suddenly 'worsened' in the afternoon but no one seemed to know for sure what had happened. Monsignor Pier Pastore described it as a 'cardiac crisis' and not an infatto, which would have been the right word for 'heart failure'. Monsignor Giuseppe Caprio, the pope's Under Secretary, said in a Vatican broadcast that he hadn't expected so quick an end.

The day after the pope's death the German magazine Der Spiegel (August 7 1978) published Hans Joachim Klein's account of the Red Brigades' plan to kidnap the pope. According to Klein, Wadi Haddad had said that no Arab country could officially let anyone run around free who had kidnapped a pope. It would have had to be a 'suicide' operation. So the plan had been dropped.

(The Germans, by the way, had previously claimed that they gave the Italian government due warning of 'something big coming up' before the Moro kidnapping. It was clear to James El that the Moro plan had indeed been substituted for the pope-plan and that this had got around through German defectors from the 'Carlos' network).

It became James El's growing conviction over the next few weeks that someone close to the pope was in the pay of a terrorist force. And from this time he was determined to devote his energies to protecting the pope by means of a surveillance so close that he would be able to isolate the killer.

He was also convinced that the killer would remain in the Vatican after the next election.

He decided not to tell even Laura of his decision: he was going to provide Control with meticulously false information.

He received a phone message from Mike to continue and if anything intensify his surveillance from the moment the next pope was elected.

The Conclave was a brief one. Pope John Paul 1 was elected on August 26, less than three weeks after the former pope's death.

James El at once closed a clever social net round pope John Paul 1, insinuating himself into Vatican receptions, press conferences and churchcat gatherings where one or more cardinals were present. His friends were amused. James El was going Catholic. Some said they'd always thought as much.

The church---yes, even the 'railway waiting-room' of St Peter's---was having an effect on him. Every day he walked in the quiet of the Vatican squares and gardens or hurried through the corridors overlooking the Belvedere courtyard on his way to the papal apartments or the Vatican library. Frequently he was at Vatican Radio, also behind the Vatican walls, or the Academy of Sciences a stone's throw away, remote from the noisy city outside, among priests and nuns and quaintly uniformed guards.

Scales, his most informative contact at the Florida club, said that James El was getting a funny look in his eye. Thus nobody thought it strange that James El should be avid for every scrap of papal gossip he could get.

Pope John Paul 1 dispensed with the papal tiara and said he would no longer use the sedia gestatoria or travelling throne of wood which made it possible for thousands to see him high above their shoulders,

though it was too practical to give up, as he found out on his first trip outside the Vatican. To balance the radical 'gimmicks' he declared that there could be no cooperation between the Church and communism.

James El went through further divinatory exercises and saw some disaster ahead.

There was an incident that seemed to him an evil potent. On September 6 Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, a senior of the Russian Orthodox church, collapsed and died during an audience with John Paul 1 at the age of only 49. That was a natural death. He'd had a serious heart condition for some time now.

Pope John Paul 1 was clearly upsetting the Curia as hard as he could. In front of the journalists he replaced the traditional royal 'we' with 'I'. At first the Curia insisted on issuing the texts of his speeches with the usual 'we' but finally had to give way. Also the pope entered and left audiences at a smart trot, in defiance of the tradition that a pope walks slowly and composedly. Cardinal Felice, acting dean of the Sacred College, was sent to see him to request that he 'curb' his behaviour.

James El found an appalling lack of security round the pope which he himself was trying to supply in a desperate attempt to save him. For he became more and more sure that this pope wouldn't last long. John Paul's only means of contact with the outside world once he'd gone to bed in the evening was a bell-push. The nearest duty aide was beyond calling distance. The chief papal physician, Professor Renato Buzzonetti, worked at a Roman hospital, not inside the Vatican, and could declare himself unavailable in an emergency.

It was impossible for James El to hide his assignment from Laura for long. They were at Vatican gatherings almost daily. She went pale when he told her in the car on the way to Fregene one afternoon.

"I'm one of those who know too much," he said. "Types like me don't last long."

Ralph contacted Laura secretly. He told her he had to see her at once on a matter connected with James El's welfare. They met without James El knowing in the sunken garden of Castel Sant' Angelo.

He told her that James El was falsifying surveillance information. He had slipped up badly on one piece of information, then on another. Ralph told

Laura, "You've got to get hold of the real information and feed it to us. I don't care how you do it." He added, "If you don't he'll be dead in a week, I can promise you that."

She did it. She got into James El's confidence and helped him falsify the intricate daily chart of papal movements, then she secretly consigned the true information to another 'garbage sphinx' behind Piazza Navona.

James El noticed how changed she was but put this down to her concern about him.

He became obsessive in his idea that the pope was soon to be murdered. He even began to see an American interest in the new pope's liquidation because of a remark made by Andrew Young, US ambassador to UNO, saying he thought the election of John Paul 1 was a mistake and that the pope should have been chosen out of third-world candidates.

James El winced whenever John Paul 1 put the Curia's backs up. At the Hall of the Consistory, addressing the 88 cardinals who were still in Rome, he abandoned the set speech which referred to the indebtedness of the entire Church to the Roman Curia, and casually said instead, "As soon as I had a little time, the first thing I did on becoming pope was to get hold of the Annuario Pontificio and study the organisation of the Holy See."

Also pope John Paul renominated Cardinal Jean Villot as Secretary of State despite Villot's bitter critics in the Curia. And, most important perhaps, he suddenly cut the 'bounty' given to members of the Curia on the election of a new pope by half, so that they got \$250 instead of \$500.

Who was James El working for? The Left or the Right, or both? Was he informing for an agency which supplied to the highest bidder irrespective of allegiance? He knew that no terrorist group could survive without massive support from a foreign power. One by one groups in various countries had disappeared from view--- the Baader-Meinhof people, the Japanese United Red Army, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the British Angry Brigade, even the bigger groups like the Tupamaros, the Weatherman and the Brazilian ALN. Was he working for an information unit which didn't require such support and need fear no extinction, because its findings were paid for by all sides? Was Ralph this agency?

"Une charge tres lourde," the pope confided to Jean Villot one day about his new office.

In the first week of the new pontificate an intense

discussion went on inside the Vatican about what the inauguration ceremony could be called if not 'coronation'. John Paul rejected even 'enthronement'.

The whole city was now talking about the 'censored pope'.

CHAPTER SAMPLE 2

He was sure it was going to happen tonight. He almost fell up the softly carpeted steps of the Florida club to hear the latest gossip.

He nodded to Scales, who was talking to a woman from Paris Match, and ordered a whisky.

No woman stayed with Scales the whole evening unless she was new to the club or, like Scales, a queer. After a few minutes Paris Match moved away to another date in the corner.

James El kept thinking of Laura and how they were meeting in an hour's time at Florio's, before going to a reception given by Monsignor Salvatore in the Borgia apartments.

He realised that Scales was already talking.

"He could be heard all the way down the corridor. They drove him to the point of no return."

"Heard all the way down the corridor?"

"He had a God Almighty row."

"Who?"

"The pope."

He picked Laura up without stopping for a drink and entered the Vatican by the Arch of the Bells. The Swiss guards hardly looked at him and he parked in the tiny Piazza Santa Marta.

The hot weather had broken and Rome was back to damp and chill. Thick low clouds overhead glowed with a kind of rosy ominousness.

Other guests were arriving, mostly in black, Rome's colour.

All the chandeliers were on in the Borgia apart-

ments and the babble of talk was loud. He left Laura in the care of one of poor Marco's closest cronies and walked to the lavatory.

It was within easy access of Raphael's Loggias. He'd worked it all out. He hurried along with the Belvedere courtyard below on his left, its many windows glittering. All at once he was looking down into the courtyard of San Tomaso. He had reached the papal apartments.

Here the real problem started. To get to the private apartments from here was considered impossible--- but only by those in charge of papal security.

He nodded to the guards in the Pontifical Hall and passed through the Hall of the Swiss Guards. Then came the Canton Hall with its friendly picket of Palatine guards, one of whom asked him the time. The Hall of Tapestries and the Hall of the Noble Guard were empty.

He was suddenly in the Tronetto or Small Throne Room. After that came the library where popes were said to spend most of their time. The hush and the attentive guard outside the door showed that indeed the pope was there.

He asked the guard in a whisper for the way to Monsignor Salvatore's quarters. The man showed considerable astonishment and wanted to detain him until an officer came out of the guard-room and recognised him.

"I'd give anything to see the pope's apartments now I'm here," James El whispered.

The officer looked round in silence.

"Come with me," he said.

They reached the pope's bedroom in a few moments and as he stood in the doorway he felt pity for a man who could enjoy so little privacy and was therefore the victim of the unforeseeable.

"Suppose somebody wanted to kill the pope tonight?"

The officer smiled and pointed to the window. "No way of access. And as for this way---" indicating

the corridor behind him---"we'd be on him in five seconds."

"Is that a bell-push?"

"Yes."

"Could the wire be cut?"

Together with the officer he traced the wire to its wall-fixture.

At that moment there was a movement of the guards outside. The pope was preparing to leave the library. They closed the bedroom door and sped along the corridor in the opposite direction.

He returned to the reception room flushed and nervous, knowing he had failed.

At six the next morning Scales called him up.

"There's trouble. They've just sent out for a doctor. It sounds bad."

James El dressed frantically and drove across to the Vatican but the Arch of the Bells was closed to all but medical personnel.

When he got back at about ten o'clock the first announcement was coming through. The pope was dead.

The first question in his mind was, 'Why did they delay announcing it for two hours?'

5. It was Friday, 29 September. Few could believe that John Paul 1, a manifestly healthy man of only 65, had died naturally. The pope's brother, in Australia at the time, told the press that the pope had recently had 'some bad feelings round the heart' but a medical check had found no cause for alarm. Father Rinaldo, in the pope's village of birth, said that as far as he knew the pope had never suffered from heart trouble. Monsignor Giuseppe Rosa, Apostolic Administrator in Venice, said he'd been received in audience only two days before and the pope had appeared in good health. The pope's physician, who had also seen him a few days before, had found him in normal health.

The official story was that he'd been found at 5.30 am by his private secretary Father Magee of Ireland. Father Magee had knocked on the pope's bedroom door and not getting a reply looked for him in his private chapel. No one was there either, so he returned to the bedroom and opened the door. The

light was on and the pope was in bed with The Imitation of Christ still in his hand. The pope's face was turned slightly towards the right and bore a smiling expression.

Doctors calculated that he'd had a massive heart attack at ten or eleven o'clock the previous evening (Thursday 28 September).

He had been pope 33 days.

In the week before the second Conclave there were two Red Brigades murders in Rome. Aldo Moro's will, extracted from him under torture and the promise of release, was published, revealing his horror at the indifference shown by his political party at his fate and his determination to leave the Christian Democrat party if he survived. It added to the general gloom.

By October 1 the Vatican was under considerable pressure to hold a post mortem. It was said that one doctor had examined the pope only five hours before his death and had reported him fit.

Why had emergency medical assistance been absent from the papal apartments?

The call for a post mortem came mainly from a right-wing Catholic group, Civiltà Cristiana, which asked for the 'true causes' of his death to be investigated.

Only one simple examination was carried out on the body. That was considered sufficient basis for the Vatican's claim that the pope had died after a heart attack from natural causes. The College of Cardinals announced that it had no intention of having the pope's body further examined.

Civiltà Cristiana furnished the Questura with a report summarising all the suspicious circumstances surrounding the pope's death.

Apparently the pope had prepared for bed at ten o'clock on Thursday evening. All that was officially said was that on being given the news that a left-wing Roman youth had that day been murdered he had replied, 'Even young people are killing each other now...'. These were said to be his last words. Which at once made James El wonder what had passed at that time: another row?

There were claims that the Vatican statement on the circumstances of the discovery of the pope's body was not correct. The pope had in fact been discovered by the nun who brought him coffee every morning. She had found his coffee untouched in his room and had then knocked on his bedroom door. Through the keyhole she saw him lying dead. She had called

Father Magee.

The Vatican denied this story.

Asked if they suspected foul play, Civiltà Cristiana announced, 'We have our information which we have placed in the hands of the judicial authorities.' Later its spokesman Dr Franco Antico said, "We aren't necessarily saying anything criminal happened. But there are many suspect facts and the situation isn't clear."

It took James El some time to get hold of this document. It supported in exact detail his earlier suspicions.

By October 8 rumours and gossip were still hot on the subject. All Rome got hold of the report in some form or another and embroidered it. Poison was the main suggestion. Suicide another, enforced suicide another.

Many people felt that prompt action on Thursday evening could have saved the pope but there had been a deliberate withdrawal of medical facilities.

And still nobody in the Vatican explained why it had taken them two hours after the doctors' final confirmation of the pope's death to announce it.

Cardinal Silvio Oddi told the press, "We know for certain that the death of John Paul 1 was because his heart ceased to beat due to natural causes."

No one doubted that his heart had ceased to beat or even that he'd had a heart attack, but certainty in the matter of 'natural causes' could hardly be established without an autopsy.

In fact an autopsy was hurriedly carried out--- or so it seems---a few hours before the pope's funeral. The doors of the basilica were suddenly closed and thousands of people waiting to file past the body were turned away. A group of men wearing white smocks were seen to enter the church. The Vatican refused to comment, and no statement on the subject was issued.

James El told Laura they must prepare to leave Italy. But the departure must be prepared carefully, otherwise it would 'invite murder'. She knew better than he did that this was true.

James El suddenly had himself received into the Church. He told her that during a visit to St Peter's one day he'd found a leaflet left on a pew by an American missionary group and part of it said, 'When you come up against a difficulty and there is confusion

and misunderstanding, go into your innermost sanctuary. Seek the presence of the gentle Christ, and ask what he would do in the circumstances in which you are placed.' This had relaxed him as nothing else in his life had done.

He confessed everything to Salvatore who looked very grave and for a moment terrified. The Monsignor gave him absolution and commended him for having secretly tried to save the pope 'even though against a quite imaginary plot inside your fevered mind at the time'.

"For this I give you absolution," he said.

James El felt childishly secure in Monsignor Salvatore's tiny library, seemingly thousands of miles away from the day-long traffic jams outside and the atmosphere of crime. Laura saw a kind of quiet elation growing in him.

He talked to everyone about how the pope had been murdered, taking no precautions with his speech.

Meanwhile he and Laura pursued their plan for secret departure. There was the question of money. It would be impossible for her to take her sizable fortune out of Italy because of the blocked-currency regulations. They decided to take as much cash as they could handle without arousing suspicion, and to slip across the border north of Udine. From Salzburg they would fly to Munich, then on to the States.

He was worried by Ralph's silence and one morning decided to call on him. The apartment was closed and the porter downstairs said that Ralph had gone away suddenly. The phone had been disconnected.

No new instructions came from Mike. One day James El went to the Banco di Roma and to his horror saw that his account had not been credited as usual.

He and Laura made several experimental trips to Udine for ski-ing, so that their getaway trip wouldn't look unusual when it happened. He felt he was being trailed and watched closely. He warned Laura to the utmost caution. They talked only trivialities except in the car or walking in open spaces.

Finally it was time to make the getaway attempt. They planned to leave for Udine the following day. They'd decided to take as little luggage as on their previous trips to Udine.

He made sure that Ralph was still not back in town. Laura was nervous and kept bursting into tears. In public they tried to behave normally and went to receptions and parties up to the last moment.

That night Ralph phoned. James El's heart sank into his bowels.

"Think I'd deserted you? What about dinner tonight?"

They met without Laura at Gino's and to his immense relief he found Ralph as distraught and clearly on the run as he himself was. They drank a lot of frascati. Ralph said he'd got himself into a bit of a fix and didn't know how to get out of it.

"I tried a bunk to Malta but it didn't work."

When they were sipping their coffee Ralph said quietly, "They think you'll try a bunk too---tomorrow-- is that true?"

James El simply shrugged, feeling a tremor of fear but only on Laura's account.

"You've got to get away tonight," Ralph added.

"And take me with you."

"Take you?"

"I've got it all worked out. There's no danger."

"Isn't it unwise talking here?"

"Shit man, I know every bugging device in the city---this is the only safe place within fifty miles! Why, did you think you were safe in a lonely lane outside Frascati?"

James El showed such astonishment that Ralph burst out laughing.

"They've got you by the short and curlies,"

Ralph went on. "Don't look so worried---they only trailed you there, they didn't pick up the conversation. All they needed for that was a bit of imagination."

Leaning forward Ralph told him what to do: "Go to that little church by the Santa Lucia market. Today's Santa Lucia, did you know that? So there'll be candles alight all over the church and lots of people. Go there straight from here. Go to the little chapel of the madonna at the side of the high altar, and kneel and start praying. Stay like that until I get there. I've got to organise the car. It'll be waiting outside with me and Laura in it. This is the number on the licence plate." He passed James El a scrap of paper. "If I haven't turned up by ten o'clock go without me, just you and Laura. She'll be sitting in the car alone, outside the church. You'll never hear from me again."

"I hope that doesn't happen," James El said in a moment of sentimentality.

"You hope?" He went on, "Get hold of Laura now. Tell her to go straight to your apartment and wait there. Can she get in?"

"No."

"Shit! You'll have to give her the keys before you go to church."

"All right."

"And tell her to bring all her money. What she drew out. You and I are going to need that."

As he rushed over to Laura's place James El went through several divinatory procedures, trying as best he could to concentrate while driving the car. He received the word 'ecstasy' many times, and thought this referred to the experience he and Laura would have once they were across the border. He didn't trust Ralph of course. But when he put questions about Ralph's reliability the answers were enigmatic: Ralph was a 'viper', which he knew, but he 'blocked the path'. What did that mean? Was he blocking the path of the organisation, stopping them from trailing them to the border? Anyway there was no way of avoiding Ralph's help at this point. He couldn't dare drive with Laura to Udine right now, without Ralph, though it occurred to him to risk it. Ralph knew far too much. Even now he was being trailed, he was sure. The chances were that Ralph had enclosed his plan inside some cover which was acceptable to the organisation: so Ralph meant safety. He became surer and surer of this as he drove along.

He told Laura what to do and gave her his keys. She begged him not to trust Ralph. There was a long tearful scene and at one point he agreed that it had to be one more of Ralph's dirty deals.

"But he's our only chance," he said. "They know far more about you and me than I thought possible. The one thing on our side is that he wants to get away himself. And that's why I told him all about my Marco assignment in the first place, in case a situation like this arose. I reckon he has to help us."

The crowded church was brilliant with lighted candles, hundreds of them on all sides, and as James El stepped inside a feeling of extraordinary happiness came over him. As he took the holy water on the tips of his fingers and made the sign of the cross a sentence came into his mind with some clarity: 'And now you meet the keeper of the southern gate.' What did it mean? He took it as a good omen and walked down the side-aisle to the little chapel. He knelt close to the madonna and found himself genuinely praying, his eyes closed. He stayed like this for at least five minutes. He heard a soft step behind him, much like those mysterious steps he had heard in his mind during his first days in Rome, and he guessed it to be Ralph. He remained where he was for a moment. He felt a pricking sensation at the elbow and was just about to turn to find out what had happened when he felt a great weakness and slowly fell sideways.

Not until the following day was he found, already dead for several hours. According to the priest who found him he had a quite unbelievable look of joy on his face.

It hadn't entered James El's mind, when that

sentence came to him on his entering the church, that Michael, keeper of the southern gate, was also the Lord of Death.

6. Laura waited in James El's apartment at the appointed time. There were two letters from him on the table, both marked 'To be opened later'.

The car was waiting downstairs with Ralph at the wheel.

"We'll have to be quick about this," he said and drove off at once.

After a time she realised they were driving towards the coast.

"What about James El?" she asked him.

"Something went wrong. Hopefully he's meeting us at the airport."

"What went wrong?" She was shivering.

"I'll tell you on the plane."

"Where are we going?"

"London. If the worst comes to the worst he'll meet us there. We worked out a whole lot of fall-back plans."

Ralph had air tickets ready. He was trembling, she noticed, which made her feel safer because it meant that he was genuinely on the run, as James El had said.

Only after take-off did he relax. He turned to her with a smile and said enigmatically, "Well, I wasn't worried for you but I was for me!"

At London airport two security men came forward at the passport desk and asked them to follow them. They went to a room behind the customs area. Ralph was placed under arrest and Laura advised to find a London hotel for several days as she would be needed for questioning.

As they walked together in front of the security men Ralph told her in a normal voice, not at all shaken, "I knew somebody was trailing us---thank God it was the police!" He added, "I'll get five years and by that time ELI and all its brothers and sisters won't exist. I hope."

Laura was interrogated at her hotel several times during the next few days. In the second interview, before either she or the police had mentioned James El, they showed her a photograph of him and asked if she knew him. When she said yes they told her he'd been found dead. And where.

She opened the two letters from James El. One contained the cash he'd drawn from his account, the other was a copy of his will leaving her his inheritance which he'd never been able to touch. It comprised in great part areas of land in Florida. The following week she flew there.

Perhaps he hadn't forgotten after all, as he walked into the church of Santa Lucia, that Michael keeper of the southern gate was also Lord of Death.

Length: 80-100.000 words.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

While the 'papal' sections above are brief in relation to the rest of the synopsis they will in fact comprise in the book itself the greater part of the narrative.

My references to James El's 'divinatory exercises' are vague because I haven't decided yet what form these will take. Possibly a Tarot card system.

This clairvoyant background---James El's virtual mania for divining the future---seems to me essential to motivation in this book because otherwise he has little apart from a suspicious frame of mind on which to build up his picture of the coming threat to John Paul 1's life and its timing.

It is also important that James El should have an obsessive or 'ecstatic' element about him so that his conviction that the two popes were murdered may be seen to be an aspect of this, thus protecting the book against seeming to make libellous and unfounded claims while it still purveys the rumours and discussions of the time.

Until I see a full transcript of the report on John Paul 1's death which was put before the judicial authorities in Rome by the Civiltà Cristiana I cannot of course give precise details of the suspicious circumstances of which James El becomes aware. I've been promised this transcript or a verbal account when I return to Italy.

could be another

11/10/1980
be compressed -
it will be very
just [unclear]

FOR DAVID

~~This is a potential~~
I think this is a potential DAY OF THE JACKAL, only revolving round the Vatican and ending not in a near-miss but the death of two popes, pope Paul VI and (after only thirty-three days of office) pope John Paul I. The author holds that there are remarkably convincing arguments to be drawn from rumours current at the time throughout Italy, and ~~in~~ from the Civiltà Cristiana's report which they submitted to the Italian ministry of the Interior on John Paul's sudden and unexpected death, urging on the Vatican whi a post mortem which was consistently refused until the very last moment, (if it were - fact book place).

You may already know some of Rowdon's books on Italy, ~~where he has lived most of his adult life.~~ He has ~~spent~~ lived most of his adult life in that country, eleven of them in Rome, with St Peters and just across the way. He has thus had a opportunity to witness the growth of terrorism in a country where not long ago even juvenile delinquency ~~He~~ has thus had an opportunity of witnessing the growth of terrorism in Italy from scratch.

His last book, Talking Pop, ~~is~~ a ~~book~~ a ~~series~~ ~~of~~ ~~communications~~, ~~can~~ published last year by Macmillan and received major (and expensive) serialisation in the Evening News.

To ~~say~~ know Rowbotham has
written what to look a King. His ~~total~~
hemorrhoid device has sold 24826 copies to date
in the British world market. His
The clairvoyant background is James B1 - his
virtual mania for diving diving the future -
is essential to motivation - this work because
otherwise he cannot build up his suspicions and
the conspiracy attempt on John Paul I's life and its
timing.

The hero of this work is paid for
information keeping the popes under surveillance he
ends by trying to save the life of John Paul I
as a set of more suspicious circumstances
begin to build up and during the short
33-day reign. ~~The theme is this~~
~~mixture of historical and real events.~~

[The 5th week
^ Ex-prime minister Moro was kidnapped.
James B1 saw the design in it all.

~~The theme~~ ^(this involves a subtle) ~~is this~~ mixture of
~~and~~ contemporary history and fiction reminiscent
of the Land of The Day of the Jackal.

→ Ian Bonn (Sept 1979), ^{THE TALKING DOGS,} ~~the~~ a
of animal communication, ~~and~~ we ~~are~~ give a
major (v expensive) service in THE
BURNING NEWS.