

3.

To celebrate the making of Bel Ami Saul Weinand threw a party on board the Queen Mary, lying in permanent dock in Long Beach Harbor. No one could tell why he chose a ship, and a British one at that, to announce the making of a film to take place on terra firma and in Paris. Some said it was because one of the stars was British.

The real fact was that he'd got a beneficial deal from the Queen's proprietors for the evening hire, though he still spent the best part of a quarter of a million dollars. To some extent this was justified by the advance publicity, though no one could dare to predict anything like a Jaws success. But there were TV cameras everywhere, the trade magazines ran excellent columns on it, and it gave the press a chance to meet the new international star Jamie Somerson.

Saul walked round looking like David O. Selznick half a century before, kissing the ladies on both cheeks, grabbing male hands, being photographed with Jamie, and only when he caught Dominic's eye did he feel what he was, a man in a helluva big debt. For if this one went down he'd never make another picture while his name was Weinand, and they both knew it.

Pauline drove Angela and Dominic down in the Buick. They were in a light mood, like a family on the spree. Angela chattered about her white-tie-and-tails idol of the Thirties, Jack Buchanan, whose ashes had been scattered from the Queen Mary and who'd made over fifty transatlantic crossings to appear in Broadway shows or films. She sang them his hit, 'And her mother came to tea' in a surprisingly sweet well-trained voice.

"All Jack's leading ladies fell in love with him."

"Looks like you got there too late," Dominic said.

"He probably wasn't my type," she replied with a mischievous glance. "He wasn't a hustler or killer."

"Come, come Angela," he said with a laugh, "you would always have turned him into one!"

Pauline drove them towards Pier J. on the harbour and they saw the huge ship before them, brilliant with lights in the dusk as if about to slip anchor for another voyage to Southampton.

The party started off with caviar and champagne in the Queen Mary Playhouse watching a revue imported from the Mayfair Music Hall in Santa Monica. The men were in tuxedos, the women in every stage of undress.

Angela wore the aquamarine gown from her commercial, with some pearls Dominic slipped round her neck just before leaving the apartment. She looked a dream. Pauline had an off-the-shoulders dress cut very low in front and transparent, revealing a remarkable body no one expected.

The title of the film had been changed to Ambition and the word was everywhere, on hats that were handed out (straw boaters for the men and cloche hats for the women), on vast tricolour ribbons slung across the ceiling, and all round the proscenium arch in the theatre.

One ribbon, broader than the others, featured the names of the stars—Jamie Somerson and Angela Bourne.

"You can't blame me for that," Dominic said, looking up. "You did it yourself."

TV cameras and hand-held lights followed her here and there, she was asked for comments on the coming film and made a few trite remarks which Saul's publicity department had advised her on beforehand. It was all a bit sickening.

The other producers, Greg Merrytown and Barry Kurtz, were there, keeping as close to Dominic as they could so as not to be seen to be part of the renegade Ambition production. For that matter, Saul kept close to him too.

She was astonished at Dominic's degree of magnetism for these men, the sheer composure that drew them to him. Yet he was perhaps the youngest of them, and not the wealthiest. Kurt was said to be at least twice as rich, Saul had an equal pull with the banks. But their eyes were full of questions. What did he really think of Saul's going it alone? Would Ambition make it at the box office? Above all

what did he think of Saul's whisking his own girlfriend into the Ambition production from under his nose?

And the 'killer' played on their anxiety with a little glitter of amusement in his eyes, or so it seemed to Angela. Sometimes she felt he must at the least have committed murder to have such a hold on people. He reduced these men to children before her eyes.

When Dominic had heard about her signing up with Saul he'd shrugged it off with, "She's learning fast huh?"

She hadn't dared to tell him herself. She'd got Everard to do it.

All Dominic said to her on the subject was, "Let's have a look at the contract." Then he'd sat down with her in the lounge and gone over it clause by clause, picking out the weaknesses.

Even when she told him that Pennace was directing he showed no sign of irritation.

Mostly he seemed to feel pride that she'd handled the matter without help. He was especially impressed by her having negotiated the veto-clause on the director. He got Everard to go over the scene at Saul Weinard's house again and again, and had a little laugh at Saul's expense.

But what was happening to the Ballet Russe series? Why was he so silent about it? He announced his intention of approaching Jamie for the male lead but didn't actually do it.

Every time she tried to bring the subject up something happened to distract him. It was very worrying. Pauline was no help. When Angela asked her why he was so reticent about his projects all she said was, "Well, that makes two of you doesn't it?"

But the Ballet Russe series wasn't the real worry. It was the fact that she was scared of her man. That implacable look in his eye just took her speech away. Even 'Caterina' failed to help her here.

The astonishing thing was that he did his best to dispel her fears.

"I want you to lose the idea that you can ever work against me," he told her on the morning of the Queen Mary party. "Any good you do for yourself is for my good too!"

She felt a tremor of apprehension just the same, even while he said these words. What lay behind his still manner? It was so difficult to see into his heart!

And the fear in her provoked a determination to fight it and be independent. Here Caterina did help. She egged her on. She made her feel at the Queen Mary party, for instance, that she deserved

all the attention that was being lavished on her. Dominic took her round among the guests. She met stars old and new, stars at the top of the market and stars at the bottom.

After the revue Jamie told her that the Bel Ami script had been revamped to turn her role, Clotilde, into the female lead, with Madeleine now playing second fiddle.

"What does Sonya feel about that?" she asked him.

"Oh I think she knows Dominic pretty well."

"Dominic? What's he got to do with it?"

"Obvious," Jamie said. "She'd be playing Madeleine in the series if he hadn't pulled it all down."

"Also," he said roughly, being a little drunk, "he and Sonya had it off once, so I guess she knows that side of him too."

To her surprise she felt no jealousy at the thought of Dominic and Sonya having been lovers. In fact she watched Sonya at the other end of the bar talking to Barry Kurtz and thought what good taste Dominic had.

The one person she didn't speak to all evening was Max Pennance. He was keeping well away from the Dominic faction, which meant keeping away from his own producer, Saul Weinand, too. Sonya could have kicked him.

Angela saw Dominic in a huddle with Saul and on the excuse of picking up a drink walked over to their table. To her bewilderment they were renegotiating her contract.

Dominic insisted on having her participation percentage raised, and on inserting a new clause giving her a handsome lot-out fee in the case of the film not being made or, having been made, not being distributed. A sale to television could not be considered 'distribution'.

"That's a must," he told Saul gravely, fixing him with a gaze that prompted Saul to look round for help from Kurtz and Merrytown who were at the other end of the hall.

The new clauses were typed out that evening on the Queen Mary, and signed over champagne in the captain's quarters. Jamie and Jill Rapinsky, who were at the bar together, wondered what was going on, but were never told. Everard Hope, usually the informant on these things, didn't know either.

* * *

The party also served the function of getting the shooting off to a vigorous and optimistic start two days later at the Burbank studios.

She really clicked with Jamie at rehearsals. They really 'gave' to each other. Max seemed pleased.

Shooting also coincided with some of the finest weather of the year—a high blue sky and cool breezes. The evenings were heavenly. Everybody felt it was an OK sign from providence.

It was sad, said Nick, Madeleine's bearded husband in the film, that the Guy de Maupassant book had been mangled and Sonya Steele screwed, but at least everyone was in work...

A slight shadow was cast on the first day's shooting when Saul was held for observation at the Hollywood Hills clinic. He'd gone there for his bi-monthly check-up. Recently he'd been complaining of an extra-systolic heart flutter.

He felt giddy and depressed but a few days on a ganglion-block drug set the blood pressure to rights. He was told to take it easy.

He sorely wanted to visit the studios—but Pennance was happy he didn't.

"He's a pain in the arse on the set," he said.

Things were going well. The first rushes had created more confidence among the distributors (who had a large stake in the film) than anything that had happened for, say, six months. People who'd said that 'another costume film' couldn't do much business were beginning to wonder if this wasn't another Gone with the Wind, with a prestige performance from Angela that would pull them in for generations. Jamie of course was the commercial pull. It was what they'd said about Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable. There was the right hum of excitement round the set.

As Jamie's last film continued to draw capacity audiences the world over everyone on the set, especially Pennance, began to realise he was worth his weight in gold. With this in mind two doctors instead of the one required by insurance policies were brought in to watch him.

A hand-held light, living up to its nickname of handbasher, fell within inches of Jamie's hand one afternoon when he was sitting by a table on the set being lit. Nobody knew what it was doing there—or why the sparks responsible had been carrying the thing around on a live lead. Anyway, Jamie was told to stay in his dressing room in future while the set was being lit. This meant getting him a stand-in just like in Hollywood in the old days.

All the fuss made about this suited Angela down to the ground. She kept a deliberately low profile, learning her lines quietly and keeping in touch with Dominic from her dressing-room phone. She seemed to have become the least of Pennance's problems.

She got to know Sonya Steele quite well, though it was uphill work in the first days. She urged Jamie to help her here. Partly she felt responsible for Sonya's having lost the lead but mostly she was disgusted by the way Pennance was treating her on the set. He did his best to make an embarrassing situation worse. He wouldn't let her interpret Madeleine in a new way consonant with the mangled script, which she wanted to. Her idea was to play down Madeleine's dominance over her dying husband, over ministers, over the young and penniless Georges du Roy, and substitute a fascinating kind of meekness which got its way by the sheer use of intelligence. Sonya was one of those undemonstrative actresses who as they work on their parts get bigger and bigger without anyone noticing it until the film is finished. But it seemed that Pennance wasn't having that.

Also she wasn't the type to burst into tears when a scene went wrong from her point of view. Angela wished she would.

"For God's sake," she said to her one day, "why don't you blow your top? Scare the shit out of him!"

This made Sonya her friend. Sometimes in breaks they worked together on Madeleine's scenes, finding points where she could insert an interpretation ^{Pennance} he would be too busy to notice. The fact was that he was frightened that if Madeleine shone he could be accused of defying Saul's ruling that Clotilde was the star. At home with Sonya he never even talked about the film.

"Do you still love him?" Angela ventured to ask her.

"Love him!" Sonya said. "I haven't loved a man since Dominic Latouchet!"

Angela was stunned and Sonya, no doubt expecting the reaction, even if she didn't calculate it, smiled. "Oh, I'm not in love with Dominic. I think he's a son of a bitch. I just mean what I say, I haven't loved a man since I loved him. And boy I certainly did love him!"

Angela took her to the Au Petit Café on Vine Street when they finished work, to get her to talk more.

"Is Dominic going to ruin my life?" she asked her as a lead-in, trying to make it sound like a joke.

"I think you might ruin him," Sonya said. "You're doing OK so far."

"How?"

"Well you're getting your own way. I never got my way with Dominic even on the eau de cologne I sprayed my own body with! Jewellery, clothes, the books I read, the quality of the coffee I drank, the question of the pill, the coil or the diaphragm—he decided the whole damn lot! And it was great for a time. Then I realised he was choosing everything for somebody else! Perhaps it was you! Anyway whoever it was hadn't happened to him yet and certainly wasn't me. For instance," she said before Angela could say anything, "the pearls you were wearing on the Queen Mary went on me first!"

Angela couldn't stop herself going pale.

"They looked terrible on me," Sonya went on. "In fact I thought he just didn't have the right touch with a woman. But I suppose I was wrong. I mean, take that dress you were wearing on the Queen Mary—that was real nice!"

"But he didn't give me that! It was from the commercial I did with Jamie!"

"I know," Sonya said. Then she laughed: "I'm sorry kid! You really didn't know he had that dress specially designed for you? The producers of that commercial are like his twin brothers! In fact he knew two days before even Jill Rapinsky that you were going to get the job!"

"He got me the job as well?"

"No but he got you the dress! They made him pay for it of course. And not even Jonathan Leane knew, so don't blame anybody on the set for not telling you. I only heard through a guy called Hal Barners, who's a San Diego banking man, one of Saul's investors on Ambition."

"Well," Angela said in a daze, "at least he didn't try the dress on you first!"

"Oh for Dominic anything he does is self-justifying, he's always been that way!"

"I heard he used to go to a lot of shrinks at one time—is that true?"

"Sure it's true! But partly it was a kind of hobby. He wanted to find out about himself, he knew he was going some place but he didn't know exactly where yet. And he was making a heap of gold as some kind of intreprenuer, you never knew quite what he was

up to. That was before he moved into films. He used to come on the set with me and that was how he learned about films and met everybody. Of course the more gold he made the more the boys tried to pull him into production. He got the usual cranks and phonies and he fell for some surrealist crap and lost fifty thousand bucks on a film nobody ever troubled to distribute. That taught him a lot and he started treating films as a business. That way he was sincere at least. I mean he just looked ridiculous with all those art people! It was difficult for a human dagger to look dreamy! Anyway the investments paid off, once he'd learned who and what to be ruthless with."

Angela fought the indignation rising in her—to speak out for Dominic, defend him. "And did he stop going to the shrinks?" she made herself say.

"Oh that only happened when he met Pauline. She was just about the biggest thing that ever happened to him——"

"Did they have an affair?"

"Are you kidding? Pauline goes in for gawky student types of forty or fifty. You'd be amazed if you saw them, which is why you never do! She keeps them under lock and key in lonely downtown pads and doesn't even give them her phone number."

"Anyway, why was she the biggest thing that happened in his life?"

"Well after she came along everything changed. The girls stopped. He used to have so many girls calling him up you weren't even jealous, they sort of annulled each other. And he developed this fantastic will. His close friends like me just couldn't believe it. He'd always made a lot of money but now he started making millions. And that was all Pauline's work. She got him into this reincarnational thing. Hey, that sounds quite interesting, don't you think so? Have you got yourself into it too?"

"In a small way." She wanted to press on with the investigation: "Did he always scare people?"

"Oh that's his eyes mostly."

"But did he always have that way of looking at people?"

"You mean like he's seeing right through you?"

"Yes!"

"That's a load of crap. His reactions are slow, that's all. I know a lot of guys who have that immutable stare, you get it smoking

dope, that is if you smoke hard enough and shoot up a little horse as well and sniff a pinch of coke from time to time! And our Dominic certainly did all of those things!"

Back at the apartment that evening Angela was tender and affectionate with him, as if to soothe the invisible wounds inflicted. He looked tired and this added to her sense of compassion, and a touch of guilt too, that by asking leading questions she'd got Sonya to spill more than was good for her to know.

Had Sonya been helped by Jamie in this—were they jointly trying to open her eyes about Dominic?

She told Dominic all the other news of the day, how Pennance was treating Sonya.

"You can never tell when directors are being tough for a purpose," he said. "Sonya's always given him a lot of trouble, it's her way of working. She never throws hysterics, she just grinds away at the part until you want to throw a pail of pig-swill over her and say oh for Christ's sake get out of here and have a good time! Did you know I had a scene going with Sonya once?"

She nearly jumped out of her chair. "Yes I heard something like that at the studio."

"That's what I like about your profession, you're all such sticklers for the truth!" He drew her into his arms and whispered, "What else did you hear about me?"

"That you had my dress designed for me on the commercial, that you tried those pearls on Sonya first, that you took a lot of dope at one time and had shrinks all over the west coast, and Pauline was the best thing that ever happened to you."

"It's true! It's all true!" he said. "Except for the pearls. I took them back when I saw they didn't suit her. They're still in a drawer somewhere. And the ones I gave you I bought on the day of the Queen Mary party. Wanna see the receipt?"

"Oh Dom, Dom!" She hugged and kissed him.

Later he wandered into the kitchen and said, "Now how the hell did they find out about that dress? There must be some weak security somewhere!"

"Sonya said a San Diego bank told her."

"Hal Berners, the son of a bitch! He overheard my phone call! Can you beat that? I'd call him up right now and tear a strip off him if he hadn't put his bank at my disposal for the Ballet Russe series!"

Then he said, "Look after Sonya. She's a great kid even if she can't tell the difference between one string of pearls and another."

Was this his way of saying he didn't ^{blame} Sonya for gossiping about him—or Angela for having listened?

Shooting on Ambition was going so well that her London agent Barbara Gleeson called to congratulate her.

"I'm hearing great things from Everard all the time," she said. "By the way, Angela, do you intend to return to London ever?"

The question took her by surprise. It wasn't one she wanted to hear at the moment; answering would cast a time-limit on her present happiness.

But something made her give Barbara a non-committal reply.

"Well," she said, "this film's got to be finished first, and then there's the Ballet Russe series, though I haven't signed a contract yet."

"The reason I ask is that there's going to be a Shaw revival and they're keen on having you for the female lead."

"What's the play?"

And before the word was out of Barbara's mouth she knew what it was going to be—Pygmalion! And it was the part she'd always dreamed about—Eliza!

"Reviving Pygmalion sounds crazy to me," Barbara said, "but everybody's keen and they're starting in Brighton and coming into town at the Apollo or Piccadilly. It's going to be a star cast. Rehearsals start in about two months."

It was the biggest theatre offer she'd ever had. She went to the lounge and poured herself a thoughtful drink.

Dominic was going through his business mail. "Any trouble?"

"Just my agent calling from London."

"Everything OK?"

"Yes. She heard how well the film was going."

It was one more thing she couldn't bring herself to tell him. The list was growing. She went and hugged him until he began to look at her curiously.

The attractions of playing Eliza were all the greater because, inside her, Caterina seemed to be saying yes to it—she identified with the brash yet vulnerable flower girl who learned to be a lady. And Angela knew she was born to play it.

She had a hard time suppressing her excitement.

Saul came down to the studios looking purple in the face and considerably thinner. He walked with a stick, which he said was for safety more than need.

"I'm glad you're with us Angela," he said cosily. "Max tells me your scenes are great. You and Jamie make a fine team!"

She'd seen the rushes of their scenes and couldn't deny they were good.

But the nerve-racking work was yet to come. She knew that everyone, especially Pennance, was afraid of her love-scenes with Jamie because of what had happened on the commercial, and that for this reason they'd been put at the bottom of the shooting list, to be done in the last days.

Every now and then, during a quite formal scene, it might be with Madeleine and her husband in the same room, Max would say to Jamie "Could you just take Angela's hand there, very quickly?" or "Suppose you steal a kiss just as you're passing through the door—after all you're that sort of guy aren't you?"

She knew this was to get her used to Jamie's touch in case the 'allergy' recurred. She couldn't say she minded the hand-squeezing or the odd kiss but still she had to steel herself for them, being as much afraid of a recurrence as everyone else was.

Max observed the slight recoil in her but told himself that it was fear of a relapse more than the 'allergy' itself, and he seemed to be right.

The designers of the film had made every effort to create a convincing bel époque background. A French adviser hung about the set at all times checking gestures and mannerisms—how to pour wine, drink it, kiss hands, bow, call a waiter, hail a cab, sit on a chaise longue.

Jamie was a native of New Jersey and had been to Europe once as a student, missing out Paris because his girlfriend was in Frankfurt. He wasn't, as Sonya said, the first actor that sprang to your mind when you heard the name Guy de Maupassant. But he had an instinctive approach to parts which compensated for the callowness, at least by the time it came to cut and edit. Angela enjoyed watching him develop his part as they exchanged lines in her dressing room. He had hardly any brain on his shoulders but this helped him. He quickly saw that Georges Duroy had combined two qualities in nearly all his thoughts and deeds—ruthlessness and elegance. One had never gone without the other.

He looked up from his script one day when Sonya was sitting with them and said, "You know who I'm basing my interpretation on don't you?"

"No," Angela said.

"Your boyfriend."

She was furious. "Listen I'm in love with that man! Duroy was a bastard, he'd have done anything to advance himself, how can you talk about Dominic in the same way?"

"Oh I'm not trying to hit Dominic. I'm just saying what everybody'd say. Only I say it to your face."

"I think you're just jealous," Sonya said.

He laughed coyly. "You can say that again!"

This was a conversation she didn't report to Dominic. Also, she felt she couldn't counter what Jamie had said. Dominic's will was implacable.

One day when she was waiting to be called on the set there was a knock on her dressing-room door. She turned and there to her astonishment was Dominic. He just put his head round the door and said, "Hullo", then was gone again.

"Dominic!" She rushed to the door and opened it. She went outside and looked everywhere.

"Have you seen Dominic?" she asked the assistant director.

"Dominic?" he said, blinking.

"Don't you know him?" She rushed away, jumping over cables and knocking into light stands.

She found Max Pennance in conference with the cameraman.

"Dominic knocked on my door, then completely disappeared!"

"Who? Dominic Latouche?"

"Yes!"

"Did you see Dominic?" he asked the cameraman.

"Not me."

"Listen," Max said, "there's a grips looks very much like him. Guy with dark features, same sort of nose. Are you sure it was Dominic?"

"Well of course I'm sure!"

She rang the apartment. No one was at home. So she rang Pauline.

"Do you know where Dominic is?"

"He's right here."

"But he was here at the studio not five minutes ago!"

"You must be seeing things. I'll pass you over."

Angela told him what had happened and he said, "Maybe it was somebody impersonating me. They do that kind of thing down there!"

She let it pass off as a joke—with Max Pennance too, but it scared her. Especially when the grips said to be like Dominic turned out to look nothing like him at all—and in any case he hadn't knocked on her door.

Between takes, all that day, she wandered round the stage looking for another Dominic-like individual but saw no one.

From the moment that man knocked on her door she felt slightly faint. It was a light sense of fever comparable to a pre-flu feeling.

But the day's shooting went OK. Jamie, noticing the difference in her, persuaded her to take a finger of whisky after the last scene of the day. She found herself thinking how unknown forces were perhaps beginning to act on her. Was it all this FM activity? It made her shiver, reach for the shawl she took to all dressing rooms.

She slept with Dominic that night, not in her room, so as to be sure that no 'ghost' of him would appear.

She delighted to touch him. They were awake half the night, talking and making love. She felt that by staying close to him those unknown forces would be exorcised.

"Something's not quite right with the old lady, huh?" he whispered just before they went to sleep.

"Oh it's probably the love scenes worrying me."

"They'll be OK. Trust daddy."

The next morning when she walked into the studio at around eight o'clock everybody was standing about as if work had been suspended. The lights on the set had been killed. The cameras were stacked dumbly by the wall. Her heart sank, it looked like a strike, a financial collapse, something awful.

Jill Hapinsky was there and came up to her quietly—"Saul Weinard's dead," she whispered. "Heart attack in the night."

They were all to attend the funeral the following Thursday. Max called a meeting and said he didn't know what the future held for the film. "Saul may have appointed an executor, I just don't know yet."

There were some suggestions that she should approach Dominic

to seek his production advice. They came in a veiled form from Nick, the actor playing Madeleine's husband, and from some of the crew. She took no notice.

The following day was the same, with everyone standing about. Then at ten o'clock Hal Berners arrived and talked to Pennance. He said the film was now in the hands of a small committee of men Saul would have approved of and work was to go on as if he was still alive.

In fact the distributors were pressing for work not only to be resumed but intensified. Two days of expensive studio time had already been lost.

They were also regretting the money lavished on the Queen Mary party. This was the reason for their hard line on the shooting schedule and the elaborate sets. They wanted to save. Max looked worried and said the sons of bitches would ruin the film just to get it on the market quick, since at this moment they would probably break even with anything that had Jamie Somerson's name on it.

Dominic had spent the previous evening at Saul's house with Greg Merrytown and Berners. It had been difficult to find a next of kin but in the end a brother in Pittsburg had been contacted and was now on his way to LA. With his permission Dominic embarked on the funeral arrangements.

The next day at the studio was one of rush and panic. Everyone was in everyone else's way. The steady concentration of the early work had been replaced with irritation and touchiness.

In a peculiar stampede which nobody could explain properly a lighting tower on the set started shaking and the 'brute' mounted at its head crashed to the ground and narrowly missed killing the chief photographer.

Angela heard the explosion in her dressing room and dared not go out. It was Sonya who came to tell her the news. The set had caught fire and was six foot deep in extinguisher foam.

"All this is great for the nerves," Sonya said, collapsing into a chair. "Are you sure you don't have whisky hidden somewhere?"

"Yes, sure."

"I wished I smoked or something. Max is getting impossible at home. Our phone's going all night. They're changing plans every five minutes. They started interfering with the title last night. And they wanted to know who the hell you were—Max told them to get in touch with Dominic about that, which seemed to settle their minds."

Jamie started putting his foot down. He refused to let idiot-boards be erected all over the set with his or Angela's lines on them just because the new schedule didn't allow them time to learn their parts. Word got to the money-men that he was getting bolshie, and they decided to cool the thing off: Pennance could return to the original shooting schedule. And the threatened cut-backs in the costumes budget wouldn't take place (especially as nearly all the costumes had been made).

But fresh trouble started when the entire production team elected to attend Saul's funeral and thus throw away another day of studio time. And once again the money-men withdrew.

The Queen Mary fling was the real source of their irritation. It was seen as a total financial calamity which originally they had thought Saul's private donation, and which wasn't worth a quarter of its weight in advance publicity. It was now blamed on Hal Berners, who'd been gulled by Saul's David O. Selznick manner into believing that the film was going to be a blockbuster whereas, said the distributors, it was just another damn costume picture, and French at that!

Everybody was sore, the original enthusiasm was waning, even Max Pennance wanted to get the film done and out of the way. He was once more feeling vulnerable—his chief patron had after all died and it looked as if ^{he} was again at Dominic Latouche's mercies.

Altogether, in a matter of two or three days, a great enterprise everyone had been talking about became a subject to avoid.

Jill Hepinsky was already calling Angela to get Dominic moving on the Ballet Russe series. But he was still very quiet about that. He was no longer waving a contract under Angela's nose. He hadn't called Evarard. And something in his eyes told her not to raise the subject.

He worked so hard at the funeral arrangements, and at trying to find out if Saul had left a will that when the day of the funeral came he looked ten years older. Angela rushed home from the studio to be with him. In the days that followed she fussed round him whenever she was free. One morning when Pauline had a heavy FM class she got time off from the studio and drove him round LA chasing up attorneys about the Saul Weinand estate.

Saul had indeed left a will. He died quite a rich man, Dominic said. Angela asked him who the beneficiar^yies of the will were and he smiled.

"Me," he said. "I'm the sole beneficiary. I can't believe it."

She stared at him: "You?"

He and Saul had never been close. True, he'd introduced Saul to film investment but Saul had had many other strings to his bow—a big stake in Chicago real estate, for one thing. And he never seemed really interested in films especially when his wife-to-be walked out on him.

"She left him flat in the middle of the night. No warning. Nothing wrong between them. He just woke up and found she wasn't there. Nobody knew where she disappeared to. He put it around that she'd been kidnapped or some crazy thing but everybody knew the kind of girl she was when he wasn't looking. I felt sorry for Saul, I was real fond of him and maybe he could feel that."

The brother from Pittsburg was naturally sore about the will, though Dominic pointed out, "You haven't seen your brother for close on thirty years so it's small wonder he didn't remember you."

When news of the will got about there was laughter, shock and quite a bit of cynical talk about Latouche having 'worked' it again. And now of course he was virtually the producer of Ambition without wanting to be.

But he declined to step forward and stop the distributors, in helpless collusion with Hal Berners, from making a mess of the production. He didn't visit the set. He didn't call Pennance. And he flung a dangerous glance at anyone who tried to bring the subject up in his presence.

People had crowded round him at the funeral. But it hadn't ^{taken} great intelligence to see that he was there to mourn a friend and nothing else.

The day before the funeral Angela bought herself a black outfit. She looked mournful about it. He kept glancing at her and saying quietly, "Why are you worried about death? Why should it make you sad?" And, "Saul was ready to go into another identity that's all. The Queen Mary party was his farewell fling. He didn't give a damn about films but he still wanted to be the old-style Hollywood producer, he even started coining some of Goldwyn's famous jokes. He knew the money he spent on that party would never come back, it was a kind of joke, the only daring thing he did in his life."

Word got around that Dominic was insisting on the banks fulfilling their obligations to the Saul Weinand estate by going through with Ambition. That was the story. So his stock suddenly went up.

People's nerves were frayed. Angela looked as tired as Dominic. She felt that death had stalked into their apartment, that Saul had virtually taken over their lives. Dominic always seemed to be in attorneys' offices, taking calls from various parts of the States

from Saul's former business associates, overseeing the estate's investment programmes, calling money in here and buying stock there.

"By the end of the day," he told her, "I might break even on all this but I'll have to be in luck. The two-timer!" He laughed. "Fancy swinging that one on me!"

In fact he was half a million richer for the Weinand Estate. He put the money into a new company called Weinand Productions which, since Angela's heart was in the theatre, would finance theatre. The question about that, Sonya said, was had he ever seen a play? Nobody believed the company was more than a tax-loss outfit.

The result of all this was that Angela became the centre of almost religious attention at the studio. Max treated her like a queen and a stand-in was looked for her too. After all, her man had saved the film or if this was too optimistic he was in a position to do so. Also Saul Weinand had shown, by leaving his estate to Dominic, that 'going it alone' on Ambition had made no difference to his belief in Dominic's rightness about everything.

Which helped the Latouche legend without helping the film, since people now started saying that Dominic would never have abandoned Bel Ami if he hadn't seen failure written all over it.

Even Pennance started feeling that Dominic's nose might be the most sensitive organ in LA. He hovered round Angela's dressing room, wanting to ask her lots of questions but not daring to, or being too proud to.

*

*

*

The time came for the shooting of the first love scene. In the book Clotilde is virtually undressed by Georges Duroy and Pennance wanted to keep it that way. For a moment Angela's breasts would be bare. She wasn't particularly squeamish about this, for herself, but she feared Dominic's reaction at sharing a view of her intimate regions with millions of others the world over. It didn't seem right when she belonged to one man so deeply. At least he should have a say in it and she hadn't even consulted him.

Sometimes when he touched her breasts she felt they were Catarina's and had remained unchanged in form through many lives, and, strangest thought of all, they had always been caressed by the 'same' man.

She sat and bit her lip for an hour while the set was being lit, sweating despite the air conditioning inside the bodice, corsets, strings and layers of silk which were later to be dismantled by Jamie's ardent fingers. She walked out there trembling like a leaf as if it was a first night in the theatre.

Max seemed to know her problem and approached the scene casually, as if it was something to be thrown away. For the umpteenth time Jamie rehearsed his way through the strings and hooks with hands trembling with desire. Max told him, once he had revealed her breasts, to 'spring back' and admire her from a yard or so's distance. This was going strictly by the book but it also avoided the chance of another allergic fit by Angela.

She saw that Jamie's hands actually were trembling and wondered if it was nervousness, love for her or bad acting. The cameras started rolling, Pennance's voice called "Action!" with deliberate composure and she and Jamie began their embrace. He went through the drill perfectly. Her eyes were closed and she could feel his fingers working on her clothes, peeling them off, while she showered kisses over his face.

She felt no bad reaction. The strings began to loosen, the bodice was suddenly free and all at once the upper part of her dress fell and revealed her naked above the waist. Triumphantly Pennance shouted "Cut!" and at once, with one of the nicest smiles he had ever given her, Jamie pulled the dress up again and closed her breasts from view.

They waited for Pennance's verdict. He was gazing at her thoughtfully from his chair, considering another take, but instead said, "OK, put that in the can, we can always come back to it if the rushes aren't right."

Jamie followed her to her dressing room and the costume came off while he sat there chattering. She found she wasn't in the least embarrassed to be down to her bra and panties in front of him—a sign that the awful allergy really had passed. Dominic—'daddy'—had been right.

"I'm not committing myself to another film until I know what's happening on this Venetian series," Jamie told her. "Do you know anything about that? I mean, is there a schedule yet?"

The dresser had just finished with her and she was putting on her dressing gown preparatory to taking her make-up off.

"What Venetian series?" she asked him.

"The one you wouldn't sign up for!"

"That's the Ballet Russe series. What's it got to do with Venice?"

"He wants to shoot it in Venice. He——"

"He? Who's he?" she asked impatiently.

"Dominic! Who else? He doesn't tell you a damn thing does he? Everybody on this set knows he's got a team of writers preparing a Venice script!"

"But why Venice?"

"That's where Diaghilev used to take his best dancers——Karsavina, Nijinsky, Pavlova. And he died there. And lots of things happened there by way of new ideas for the next seasons——for instance Nijinsky mapped out the first steps of L'Après Midi d'un Faune in the Piazza, did you know that?"

She laughed. "Did you read the script?"

"I read a breakdown."

Creasing her face she let this information slip into her mind non-committally. She attached no great significance to it at the time.

When she got home——she was to meet Dominic at the Century Plaza hotel——she looked at herself in the mirror and saw that a rash had appeared on her neck in the same place as before, on the day of the commercial.

She tried to powder it out but this only seemed to inflame it. There seemed nothing to do except wear a high collar or scarf.

When Dominic saw her she mentioned it and he said, "I'll kiss it better." As he leaned towards her and kissed the place it felt as if a red-hot flame had gone through her neck. She jumped.

"What the hell's the matter?"

"It hurts like mad!"

After a drink they called on Pauline who according to Dominic was very sensible in medical matters. She looked at the rash and said, "I don't think it's physical. What scenes did you do today?" Angela told her and she went on, "It's the old allergy. Isn't that obvious?"

"Yes but what do I do about it?"

"Well I could suggest a whole lot of things but I doubt if you'd listen to me," Pauline said.

"Couldn't you explain that a bit better?" Dominic asked her, softening the irritation.

"If you won't go deep in the FM regressions, if you insist on hovering about at the edge and holding everything in of course you'll get urgent distress signals every time another man touches you!"

"Just tell me what to do then!"

"I really am sick and tired of you—both of you!" Pauline suddenly said with tears in her eyes.

"Oh come on kid," Dominic said, putting his arm round her, "has your Ph.D with the eczema and halitosis left you?"

She laughed despite her tears—"You're dead right!"

"Well just you come along with us. We'll grab some chili dogs at Pink's, then find a disco. How about that?"

They had one of the ^{niciest} evenings ever. After a few drinks Pauline kept looking at Angela's rash. She put on big dark glasses like Jill Kapinsky's and made a burlesque doctor's act out of it. They ended up at the Palomino listening to country music and got back much too late from Angela's point of view—she had a very early call, for even more intimate scenes.

When she awoke next morning the first thing she did was look in the mirror. The rash was still there and appeared to have turned darker. Seeing it, she made a sudden rather malicious decision not to do any more FM if she could help it, as she was now convinced that it was the cause of her recent nervous upsets.

The make-up girl made a face when she saw the rash but was confident that it could be painted out. The doctor looked at it and said it was because of something she'd eaten, perhaps the chili dogs. He got on her nerves so much she nearly threw him out of the dressing room. When he suggested a few simple allergy tests she said smartly, "I've had every allergy test there is and this rash always comes just before I menstruate."

"Well I wish you'd said that before," he said in a kindly way. "Are you expecting menstruation now?"

"Yes I am," she said flatly, being in the middle of the month.

The lie got rid of him.

Today Penance wanted only one camera and the minimum of crew, a sure sign of something really 'heavy'. Jamie and Angela were to be naked, whispering intimate little nothings to each other, chuckling and giggling. The idea was to show Georges sexually happier with Clotilde than with any other woman of his life, including

the two women be married.

Pennance had told Jamie he didn't want any 'boob-biting' but on the other hand he did want to print whatever came out, meaning they should behave like two lovers in bed.

She felt lonely but not scared. She'd proved the previous day that she could do a love-scene and that was what counted.

But when her body was being made up it was found that the rash had spread down to her chest, narrowly avoiding her breasts, mostly along one side, almost to the thighs. She couldn't believe what she saw. It wasn't as dark as the rash on her neck.

The make-up department assembled round her. "What the hell can we do with this?"

"Whatever you do don't call that bloody doctor," she said between her teeth. "He'll hold us up for a month."

"But you're sick and this might be contagious!"

"Then call the director!"

Pennance's face was a picture of helpless panic when he saw what had happened. There were miniscule swellings under the skin, hundreds of them like tiny incipient sub-cubaceous cysts. It was going to be extremely difficult to hide it from the cameras though not impossible. The real question was whether the crew would wear working with an actress who ought clearly to be in hospital care and might, as the make-up people said, be contagious.

The day was saved by one of the dressers telling Pennance that the rash happened whenever Angela was about to menstruate. A great sigh of relief went up and Angela congratulated herself on her inventiveness.

The rash hurt every time anyone so much as put a hand near her. The slightest heat produced an intolerable raw ache.

"OK," Pennance said, "I think the best thing to do is occupy the doctor's attention elsewhere while we try and camouflage this."

Since everybody on the set was talking about the rash this was difficult. But the doctor seemed to get the message anyway and slipped off to check that Jamie's hand was OK after the handbasher accident quite three weeks before.

When Pennance spoke to him later he said, "I'm pretty sure it's nerves. She connects it with menstruation but in fact it's the tension caused by the menstruation. I think a shrink could handle

most of the diseases in this profession, don't you?"

"Why don't you tell her that?" Pennance said.

"Better tell her boyfriend, he knows every shrink in town and he could foot the bill."

The make-up department had a more difficult time than it had anticipated. When the lightest foam-cream touched ^{her} she started with pain. How was she going to bear lying in bed naked with the heat of Jamie's body on hers? Finally they brought in an electric fan and this served to keep her skin cool while the cream went on. Somebody pointed out that the cream was hardly medicinal and would if anything irritate the skin further, but he was hushed.

The cream was the base for a skin-coloured powder which—again hopefully—wouldn't run off on Jamie and stripe him like a clown.

While the girls worked on her she did various concentration exercises. She said pieces of the text over to herself, aloud. She exercised her throat. At one point she said, "Do you mind if I scream? It really would do me a lot of good. You'd better warn everybody."

The girls thought this a great joke but not surprising coming from an actress. The assistant director was told to warn everyone that if they heard a ghastly scream it was only Angela exercising her throat.

She did scream—and it was ghastly. Involuntarily one of the girls approached her and, bending to look in her eyes, said in a scared voice, "Are you OK honey?"

"Of course I'm OK!" But she wasn't. The scream had been real to a point she hadn't been able to foresee. It had emerged from her throat as if from another place—another time. It was her own scream, yet another woman's. It wasn't a scream of pain but one of grief—an unquenchable, tireless grief. She witnessed it with as much surprise as the girls did, though she said nothing.

Pennance dashed in with a look of alarm.

"Jesus Christ," he said, "I thought it was for real!"

Jamie was there too. He wasn't convinced by her light reply and gave her a quick concerned look.

There was the question of how, once the make-up was on, she

would walk to the set. She couldn't bear a dressing gown on her, and she could hardly leave the dressing room in a pair of panties. They devised a sort of screen of bath towels round her, held in place by the girls. Together they all walked out, an oddly Manchurian-looking group, taking short steps. The set had been screened off, and most of the crew had dispersed. Jamie was to be called at the last minute.

Next to Jamie's hot skin as the big problem was how she could bear the touch of the bedclothes. The miniscule swellings had become bigger, and this was giving anxiety because besides increasing the sensitivity it spoiled the make-up.

When Pennance saw her lower herself on to the bed with her face screwed up with pain he said, "Listen baby are you sure we shouldn't shoot this tomorrow?"

"Oh I couldn't go through all that again," she said. "Let's get it over with."

Reluctantly he sent for Jamie.

"You just have to be very careful kid," he told him. "It looks real bad."

Jamie handed over his dressing gown and stepped into the bed gingerly. Inch by inch, very slowly, he took up the sheet and edged himself under it while she waited rather tensed. It was proving hot under the lights and apart from the fact that this was making the powder form sweaty blotches it irritated the rash further.

"Listen I'm going to call action and then we want to get the damn thing over with quick OK?" Pennance said.

Jamie leaned up on his elbow, waiting to embrace her as the cameras started rolling.

Pennance's voice came again, "Action."

Jamie seemed to have worked out long before what he would do in order to save her distress. He began kissing her on the face as he lowered himself towards her. She almost cried out at the first contact. She writhed under him as the flaming sensation increased, her eyes tight closed. And quite suddenly, when they both thought there was a lot more to do, Pennance said "Cut".

Jamie was off her and in his dressing gown in a moment.

"That was great Jamie," Pennance said.

The make-up girls crowded round again with the towelling.

Everyone was expecting the actors to be called a second and maybe a third time for more takes but Pennance seemed to feel he could risk

printing this as he'd successfully done the previous day on a one-take, the rushes of which had proved OK.

"As a matter of fact," he said to his cameraman when Angela and Jamie were out of earshot, "my nerves couldn't take any more."

The rushes of this one turned out badly, a mess of uncoordinated movements with the sweat visibly pouring out of them both.

Pennance called a rehearsal for the two of them that night in his apartment, deciding that improvisation for this scene was out of the question and every move had to be planned and rehearsed. They finished at past three in the morning.

She was happy Dominic was already asleep when she got back. But what she saw in the bathroom mirror almost made her call out to him in terror. The rash had turned a deep purple, the tiny bumps had increased to the size of nickel pieces and it now seemed impossible that the cleverest make-up could hide what looked like boiling skin. It had even begun to invade her breasts. She saw the horror in her own eyes—and this doubled the horror of the thing itself because the eyes told her there was no hope. She stood there trembling. Sleep was out of the question. She sat down on a bath stool and was too stunned even to cry.

She'd become an unattractive woman. The possibility of this ever happening had simply never occurred to her in her life. So all she felt was shock, dumb and bewildered shock. And with it came an acute sense of self-disgust. She seemed to exude this boiling thing like a vapour.

She couldn't possibly face Dominic. With luck he'd still be asleep when she left in the morning.

She stared at herself again. The rash now seemed to have a life all its own. It held her prisoner. She felt it couldn't be dispersed any more—by refusing to do love scenes, by never touching Jamie again. There was something irrevocable about it, a verdict that once passed couldn't be retracted.

Passing Dominic's room on the way to bed she stopped, in a sudden wistfully sad mood, and listened for his breathing—as if this was all she would ever have of him again. And the closer she stood to the door the more agonising the rash became. It flared into seething action and became so intense that she had to step away.

She went to her bedroom and locked the door. She lay in darkness wide-awake until the alarm went at half-past six.

She was so exhausted by this useless vigil that she had no energy left to feel apprehension at the studio. She dozed while the girls made her up again. And her skin had become a mite used to the affliction.

This time Jamie came and watched her being prepared.

The skin was considerably darker than before, the sub-cebaceous swellings higher and broader.

Though the make-up was this time less painful it was also less effective. The undulations of the skin showed through and nothing, it seemed, could alter the angry discolouration.

When the girls had gone Jamie said quietly, "Do you mind if I try something?"

He leaned forward and simply laid his hand on one of her knees and left it there for a few seconds. She began to feel unusual heat there, then irritation. She wanted to recoil.

"You see?" he said. "It's the same as before—allergy to me!"

And already, pale as yet, there were the first traces of a rash where his hand had been, and tiny pustular extrusions.

"It isn't you personally!" she said.

"Oh I realise that."

"Anyway keep quiet about it, if they think the thing's permanent I'm finished in films!"

As a matter of fact, far from Jamie being the only man to cause the rash, she had learned that morning in the early hours that Dominic caused it most of all. Yet she slept with him, touched him! Was it something that emanated from him at a distance? Or was it, worst of all, something he was causing, from a distance, more or less at will? She was horrified less by the idea than the fact that she had thought it.

When they were on the set the cameraman told Pennance, "There's going to be a difference in her face."

"What do you mean?"

"Well the features have changed, dammit! Wanna look?"

Pennance lifted himself into the camera-seat and looked at the frame.

As he came down he asked, "What's happened Angela?" Then without waiting for a reply he muttered to his assistant, "See what make-up can do."

"And we'll have to kill some of the top lighting," he added.

When her face had been done she was recalled to the set for it to be relit. There was no possibility of her stand-in doing this since her face alone was the problem. Because of the heat from the lights her body-paint began to run. By the time they were ready to shoot the sheets of the bed were covered with paint and had to be renewed. Angela's trembling had become most noticeable. Her eyes were huge and bloodshot, her cheeks swollen.

She asked for a mirror but Pennance was against this. "Let's get the thing done," he said. He didn't want her to see just how bad it was. And he was hoping that the odd, twisted mask which had assumed control of her features was only temporary, perhaps the result of a bad light.

When the rushes were seen that night they were fine. Her face was largely hidden by Dominic's shoulders, and her breasts, as yet uninvaded, stood out for the rest of her. Obviously Pennance was going to get more 'boob-biting' as he called it than he'd bargained for. As Angela was only too happy that the scene was in the can, without giving a thought to the audit, he felt definitely pleased. His caution in the matter was due to fear of Dominic, who had ^{always} made it scarily clear to those he worked with that he wasn't in the porn-game, hard or soft.

"What for God's sake's wrong with you?" Dominic shouted the moment she got in the door that evening:

She rushed to him, crying.

"What have you done to your face?"

"It's horrible---!"

"You're going to bed! Come on!"

He all but dragged her to the bedroom. He wanted to look at the rash, having seen a glimpse of it on her shoulder, but she resisted him. He let go of her clothes and said quietly, "I'll just wait for you to undress then, OK?"

She obeyed him silently, took her clothes off in front of him until she was naked. His mouth fell open.

"You've got a first-class burn there for Christ sake! You should be in hospital!"

He dashed to the phone by her bed and she heard him calling somebody called Peckard.

"I don't give damn where he is, I don't care if he's operating, you get him over here in two minutes' flat or I'll come and throw you out of the fuckin' window!" He slammed the phone back.

She had her head buried in the pillows.

"What in the name of hell is it?" he went on asking, pacing up and down the room. "It's like some kind of tropical disease for Christ sake! And why didn't the studio call me? What about that ass-hole Pennance? Couldn't he have given me a call? Or Jamie Somerson, the guy who's supposed to be in love with you? I mean, what the hell! You could die in this condition!"

"I am dead, I feel dead," she moaned.

"Well," he said, pulling her on to her back again, "I've got news for you—you're staying alive!"

A call came and he grabbed the phone.

"Hi Reg, get your ass over here quick, it looks like something contagious!"

He slammed the phone back before there was a chance for the other man to reply.

Instead of a doctor arriving five minutes later there were two male nurses. An ambulance was waiting downstairs.

"Dr Packard's at the clinic waiting to admit her."

"OK!"

They got her downstairs on a stretcher and in less than ten minutes she was being wheeled, still crying, to the isolation wing of the Hollywood Hills clinic.

Dominic met Packard after his first rapid examination.

"It looks to me like a straight skin infection," the doctor said. "She tells me they've been shooting some semi-nude scenes and you'd be surprised what these powerful lamps can cause dermatologically."

"You've contradicted yourself already Reg," Dominic said. "Either it's a skin infection or it was caused by the lights, which is it?"

"Listen keep out of my hair will you? This lady's full of toxins Dom— so it could be the lights stirring up the toxins, it could be a whole bunch of things. I'll need her here at least three days. I'll give her a restful night and we'll quieten the skin down. I'll let you know something more definite tomorrow night OK?" Before he turned to go he added, "Oh I talked to the studio doctor and she told him it always happened when she gets the curse."

"What?"

"That's what I said. Needless to say, she hasn't got the curse. But I expect you know all about that," and he was away before Dominic

could say anything.

In any case Dominic was too angry to talk. He drove straight to Century Boulevard where Pennance had his apartment. Sonya opened the door.

"Hullo honey," he said, passing straight in. "I've come to kill your man. Is he around?"

"He's looking at rushes. What about a drink?"

They sat in the lounge together and Dominic told her the story. She gazed at him levelly the whole time.

The tips of his fingers twitched ever so slightly, and his blinking came unusually fast.

She said when he'd finished, "You're really angry huh? Now I don't want you pulling any heavy vibes on Max, OK? He probably did just what Angela asked him to do—and what I'd have asked him to do in the same circumstances—get on with the work!"

"With a rash that looks like a major burn—are you serious?"

"Listen, Angela's in a nervous state, I've been working with the kid so I know, I mean she had hysterics on that commercial didn't she? So this could be hysteric's too."

"Sonya, if that's hysterics so is every damn disease under the sun including cholera! Anyway," he added on his way to the door, "tell Max he'll be lucky to have her back on the set in a week."

"Oh boy that'll give Hal Berners a good night's rest!"

"Hal should worry! I'm administering the Weinand estate!"

"Great," Sonya said. "Then you can make me a promise—see that Ambition gets shot and shown."

"Ambition isn't one of my productions," Dominic growled without even looking at her, and a moment later he was in the lift.

* * *

A long sleep revived Angela and she woke to the gentle sound of the matron drawing the curtains and saying, "Good morning Miss Bourne."

It was a white, high-ceilinged room she'd hardly noticed the evening before in her state of fright. The windows gave on to a small park full of trees. She noticed that the matron wore a small glaze mask round her mouth.

"You're in isolation for a couple of days, Miss Bourne, so we'd like you to keep as quiet as possible."

"Does the studio know?"

"You don't have to worry about a thing. Mr Latouche is in touch with your agent all the time. He asked me to tell you that."

The rash had been painted the previous evening and the bumps had gone down. It no longer irritated. Since the antiseptic paint was brown she couldn't see if the colour had diminished too.

They came and took two grams of blood from her arm. Her blood pressure was measured, then temperature, heart-beat. Then the pillows were propped behind her and coffee with delicious freshly baked brioches appeared. The nurse told her that Miss Pauline Stromboli ^{had} dropped dead a few minutes before.

Angela's trunk was carried out. Reg Packard visited her in the afternoon. He was tall and thin-bodied, very dark and full of good cheer and exuberance, with his hands one of which met Angela's in a fearsome grip.

"Well you seem OK apart from the plague. Now just how did you manage to pick up the Black Death here in LA?"

He let out a laugh as he lit a cigarette.

"Is it going to leave marks?"

"No way."

Before he went he said in a different tone, "Known Dominic long?"

"No, not very. Why?"

"I thought maybe it was him who gave you the plague!"

And he strode out of the room, leaving her to wonder if it was meant as a joke or not.

She lay there for several minutes enjoying the silence and absence of pain. She was grateful too for the solitude but a worry she couldn't identify nagged at her. It took her an hour or more to remember that her face had changed. She became desperately anxious to see if it had returned to normal. Remembering the enlarged eyes and bulging cheeks she got up quickly and dizzily, hardly able to keep her balance, and went to the loo.

The face she saw was hardly recognisable as her own. The mouth was drawn down in an expression quite uncharacteristic of her. She stood still, feeling no hope that this new mask, shorn of charm and attraction, would ever leave her.

Every feature now was like a ham-fisted imitation of her earlier face—the eyes now so large as to be offensive, their sparkle a glaring unsympathetic light; the lips that had been so subtle and expressive before now passively thin with a trace of calculation foreign to her nature. The long neck had a pathetically irrelevant

look now as if confused to be supporting such a discordant assembly.

What had she done to chase Caterina away? She couldn't feel her inside any more. Was it because she'd acted in those love scenes? Surely it couldn't be that! She was an actress after all and Caterina had been so behind her in the negotiations for the film, and at the Queen Mary party, and in the first scenes shot for the film, which everyone said were brilliant.

It was almost as if both Caterina and Dominic (the previous-life Dominic!) were angry with her. Was that why Pauline wanted her to do more FM sessions—to unravel the fearful knot tied so long ago?

Or was Dominic himself causing it all, even without knowing it? She remembered how, standing outside his room in the dead of the night, her rash had suddenly become worse. Did he in his heart hate her for having struck out independently? Or was it the previous-life Dominic working inside him to haunt and distress her, because of some unforgotten thing when Caterina was alive?

She slumped back into bed, unable to think it out, and slept the morning away.

The allergy tests proved positive, there was no apparent physiological explanation for the epidermic eruption or the pain.

By agreement with Dominic—and without consulting Angela—the doctor kept her under mild sedation for several days more, to rest the nervous system, which was clearly the cause of the trouble.

Max Pennance was phoning Dominic every day for an idea as to when she'd be back, and he didn't always get a polite reply. Even when polite Dominic omitted to address him by name or say good bye when he hung up.

There was a long-distance call from Angela's mother to Dominic. Everard had asked Barbara Gleeson to keep ^{her} informed about the invalid. This was Dominic's idea. When they spoke together he was much intrigued by her voice! Pauline was watching him when he took the call. He wasn't experiencing pleasure, just curiosity, and perhaps a touch of suspicion.

He told Angela's mother quietly and courteously that she was fine, still under mild sedation to rest her nerves, but she'd be back at work in at most a week.

He also asked Barbara Gleeson to contact Angela's ex-boyfriend

Louis, which produced another long-distance call. Dominic's reaction here was quite different. He seemed delighted by the ardent, boyish voice at the other end and said, "Angela's been telling me lots about you Louis, I'm glad you called. She's fine, she just has to rest." Now tell me what you're working on."

Which Louis did—as if he'd known Dominic a lifetime.

Luckily for Louis, who was getting an Equity minimum salary, nobody knew he was phoning from the stage manager's office, otherwise it would have cost him a large part of the week's money.

Angela heard about all this when she was allowed to take calls (from 'next of kin' only, in this case Dominic and Pauline). She would so have appreciated his thoughtful care in ordinary circumstances but all she could think of was that having lost her own features, her attraction and inner grace, she'd lost him as well.

For how could a man's love survive the shock of not recognising his woman in almost any physical particular? The body wasn't everything of course but it was the outer sign and symbol of what you were inside! And she must have changed inside! And therefore his love was going to change too.

Also a certain nauseous horror of her own body had invaded her. It was a sort of biological disbelief that anyone could wish to touch her or be close to her. It was like the faint self-abhorrence sometimes felt in menstruation magnified a thousand times to a fever of physical self-rejection.

Dominic told her on the phone that her mother's voice had sounded familiar, as if they'd been connected in a past life.

But FM was a doomed and sad subject for her now. After all, its first-fruit Caterina had disappeared. And she told herself that if her relation with Dominic had been an 'ordinary' one she would have finished the film by now and been enjoying a healthy affair with him on the island.

Pauline had warned him about this some days before. "She can blame FM for just about everything. And a reaction's quite usual."

She gazed at him for some time, rather thoughtful: "How do you like the idea of Angela being naked on screen?"

"I don't."

"I thought you didn't. It could explain an awful lot couldn't it?"

"Just what I was thinking."

His fixed gaze showed her that whatever he was thinking he intended to keep to himself.

Work on Ambition had continued. Scenes which didn't involve Angela were shot. And Pennance thought it would be safe, now that Saul was dead and Dominic apparently indifferent or even hostile to the film, to go back a little on the idea of building Clotilde up into the star.

He took two scenes away from Angela and replaced them with new ones for Sonya. He also edited a lot of Angela's brilliant moments out of the film, explaining to the proxy-producers that it would save time and money and maybe save the film if Angela proved unfit to work again.

But time was lost just the same because one night, after working late on the script, Pennance left his apartment for a stroll and was set on by three hoodlums. They robbed him of the fifty bucks in his pocket and beat him up.

He was left moaning but conscious on the sidewalk. A police patrol car happened to pass and escorted him to hospital where they did an X-ray. There was no concussion but he was advised to take it easy for at least three days.

As if to deflate what dim enthusiasm the film still inspired Jamie called the day after to say he couldn't agree on the alterations Max was making on the script, especially as these had been ^{done} without Angela's knowledge or approval, and until those scenes were reinstated he wouldn't be coming to the studio.

The producers decided to put their foot down and told Max to go ahead with the revised script. They also issued Jamie's agent with a suspension warning. Jamie stayed at home just the same. That way another three days were lost. Then the producers climbed down—after Pennance had pointed out that he could edit Clotilde out of the film anyway, while still shooting her scenes.

* * *

Angela wanted her wide-brimmed summer hat. When she was out of isolation and in another room she called Pauline and asked her to look for it in her wardrobe.

Dominic was amused. "Are they giving a garden party down

there?" he asked.

"Listen," Pauline said, "would you let me handle her discharge from that clinic?"

"Why sure!"

"I don't want you near the place when she comes out OK?"

Everard was allowed (by Dominic) to call Angela once. He told her shooting would start on her last scenes just as soon as she came out, they'd be fifteen or more days behind schedule but that was as much due to 'other delays' (he didn't tell ^{her} about Jamie's, three-day strike or the reasons for it) as to her indisposal.

Also he'd discussed the Ballet Russe contract with Dominic and she'd have it waiting for her when she got home.

"It's a plum," he said (Everard trying to sound like a hospital matron was a real pain, she thought).

"OK," she replied, "we'll have a talk about what's really going on when I'm out."

"Jamie and the rest of the company are just dying to see you Angela—Max has been tearing his hair out at losing the most beautiful woman since Cleopatra."

"Cleopatra wasn't beautiful Everard."

Actually Max was sick of the film, sick of Sonya's nightly complaints about how her part had been 'lynched', and above all he was sick of hysterical British actresses. Nor could he enjoy Sonya's gratitude at Madeleine being reinstated as the film's star because he was scared she would blabber about it, so he shot the new scenes under cover of 'in case Angela can't work with us any more.' Even Jamie swallowed this one.

Pauline knew perfectly well why Angela needed the wide-brimmed hat when she saw her face on the morning she picked her up.

Angela was standing ready by her bed, her overnight bag already packed. Her head was lowered diffidently. Pauline didn't let herself look astonished. To tell the truth she had recognised her only with effort. Only the body still looked like Angela.

"Pauline I want to go straight to my room when I get back, I don't want to see anybody, even Dominic!"

"OK, OK, just take it easy."

Pauline had hired a driver so that she could sit in the back with Angela, who looked out of the window without pleasure, her face hidden in the shadow from the hat. She gripped Pauline's hand. That was a great comfort. She remembered Reg Packard's voice assuring her she was cured—his inept assumption that she was

an admiring audience. What a phoney scenario that was. She'd become biting, intolerant in her attitudes.

A shiver went through her at the thought that Dominic might be at the door. She didn't want to see the love disappear from his eyes the moment he saw her face. No, she couldn't bear that!

But also she felt a new terror towards him. The second night at the clinic she'd 'seen' him again. He had appeared briefly at her door, gazing at her for a moment and then leaving again without a word, just as he'd done that morning at the studio. She'd lain awake with her heart beating fast. Only when dawn came through did she begin sleeping, despite the sedation.

She made absurd enquiries among the nurses—had Mr Latouche visited the clinic in the night? was there a way of getting to her room without passing the night-nurse or reception downstairs? Matron was called and said softly, "I think you're under strain, we'll increase the dosage."

And then she realised, with distressing clarity, that she hadn't had the light on when she'd 'seen' him. So 'he' was unreal.

Then the nature of 'his' visits changed. He would appear at the window or stand close to the bed, without warning. And he would enunciate things with his lips which were the opposite of what actually emerged from his mouth. He would appear to be saying sweet things while horrible insults could be heard, in his voice, so loud that she was afraid the nurses would hear and come hurrying along to witness her shame.

It didn't occur to her to doubt that since she'd proved his first visit to be unreal these other ones were also. She knew it was him at her side, she could hear the swish of his trousers as he passed. And on each visit he did characteristic little things—like smiling suddenly and ceasing to smile as suddenly—and these weren't at all dreamlike, in fact they reassured her, each time, that this was an actual physical presence.

She would turn to speak to him, open her mouth to do so—but then the mouth would begin uttering harsh words which it wasn't enunciating and she would recoil in horror, and only then would she realise that this was another ghostly visit.

Even so, while belatedly aware that it must be an illusion, she was still afraid of his voice reaching the nurses' ears, though the words themselves were incomprehensible to her.

Sometimes 'he' would stop her on the way to the bathroom and she would scream. Luckily the nurses never heard her, otherwise they might have recommended her for psychiatric attention. But then it occurred to her that perhaps she didn't actually utter those screams and that they were of the same ghostly but convincing quality as Dominic's insults.

Or he would be leaning against the wall of the corridor as she passed, gazing at her with lowered eyes. Or she could see him behind a nurse who appeared unaware of his presence. Her first thought, even in the dead of the night, even in the darkness, was always that he mustn't see her face in its present condition, so she felt a momentary panic—she must hide, at all costs hide! She was sure the nurses saw her sudden recoil in bed—her panic-stricken rush back to the bathroom when, leaving it, she saw him a few feet away.

But perhaps these actions too were unsubstantial—as invisible as her screams were inaudible!

When they reached the apartment Pauline told her to stay in the car while she slipped into the entrance hall for a moment.

She called Dominic from the desk: "You'd better not see her right away," she told him. "Let me take her to her room and try and get her sorted out a bit first."

She escorted Angela from the car, holding her firmly because she was trembling with such violence. Angela's main concern seemed to be to keep her head down so that no one would see her. At first she refused to get into the lift.

"Why can't I stay at your place Pauline?"

"Come on, he isn't there!"

At the apartment door Pauline all but pushed her inside. Dominic had either slipped out or was hiding in the lounge.

But before Angela even had time to take her hat off he was there in the doorway, dressed in an V-necked sweater and jeans. She gazed at him in astonishment. How had she managed to believe for a moment that the other Dominic was real.

He was smiling, and the love didn't desert his eyes.

Taking her shoulders he whispered, "Had a tough time huh?"

She nodded, her head forward. The hat was half off her head and he threw it on to a chair with a curious final gesture. He kissed her on the neck, the cheeks, finally the lips. With each kiss she glanced sideways at him in disbelief. She was almost inclined to push him away in case he should taint himself. But

she couldn't let him go, partly out of fear that the other one would appear.

She clung to him, her face lowered.

He was gazing at her breasts and hips. "Your body hasn't suffered any."

Pauline cooked a light meal and they ate together in the kitchen. He brought out a bottle of champagne but she hardly touched her glass. She was mostly silent. She kept her chair close to his and took his hand frequently.

She was due to start work again early the following morning, at least that was Pennance's wish. But Dominic didn't like the idea.

"Are you sure you shouldn't ^{take} a week on the island first?" he asked her.

"No I want to get it done and finished."

"Up to you!"

He more or less put her to bed, she was so tired. She clung to him even as she fell asleep.

"I'd better not leave her tonight," he told Pauline. "Want to sleep here in case of complications?"

"OK."

"You take my room."

In fact Angela didn't wake all night. At seven he nudged her awake gently. He'd forgotten to draw the curtains and there was a splendidly golden autumnal sun outside.

"Time for work," he said in her ear. "Grab a shower and I'll get your coffee ready."

Her pallor made her eyes stand out even more strangely. She stood in front of the bathroom mirror and called him.

"How can I go to work like this?"

"You better had just the same, I called Pennance a minute ago. Anyway I think you're right, we want that film cut and out of the way."

He sat by her at the dressing table advising her on make-up. He chose a dress for her, the skin-tight black one.

He tried to make her look as familiarly herself as possible, so as to relax people's attention when they saw her, keep them off the face.

"And talk a lot, keep your face moving. Pennance is so stupid he wouldn't notice a thing anyway."

"What's happened to me Dominic?"

"You've been sick OK?"

He drove her to the studio.

"Call me if you need me. I'll be at Pauline's."

Far from not noticing that she'd changed Pennance saw it at once and said aloud: "Oh my God!"

They worked for three hours on the make-up and lighting to get her looking something like the Clotilde already shot. She sat there impassively. Jamie came to see her and hid his astonishment badly. She felt he was asking himself how on earth he'd ever managed to fall in love with her. This wasn't quite correct. He was simply looking for the person he'd fallen in love with but couldn't find her. Not only was her face changed to a quite stupifying extent, she seemed to him destitute of personality and magnetism.

That morning she thought she caught a glimpse of Dominic hurrying along at the far end of the stage, where only dim working lights were hanging.

Not that she could say if it was an actual physical presence or not—that is, whether she'd mistaken a real person for Dominic or simply 'seen' something, like in the dark.

She hurried back to her dressing room and asked Sonya to stay with her.

"We heard it was some kind of skin allergy," Sonya said.

"From the lights maybe."

"That's right."

"Well can you beat that?" Sonya said cynically.

There was a second bed-scene to be shot. She was again naked above the waist, and once more the crew was confined to a cameraman and a grips.

This time she and Jamie were to talk lying in each other's arms. There was thus much more occasion than before to see her face in close-up.

"She's just a different woman!" the cameraman hissed to Pennance.

"Let's shoot the thing and I'll do something in the cutting room."

"What? With her in full camera, and the back of his shoulders? How do you edit that?"

"I'm only trying to look on the bright side," Pennance said.

"You sure are!"

The scene was shot more for Angela's mental well-being than anything. There were eleven takes and each time their positions were changed, to their mutual irritation. Two of the last takes had Jamie's face in close-up and Angela in profile slightly out of frame. When Pennance saw the rushes later he chose one of these and Angela's scene became virtually Jamie's.

But the following day she was to be in a state of undress on a chaise longue, with Jamie leaning over her. And this time she had all the dialogue. Jamie was to be little more than a listening head.

Here Pennance tracked the camera round the chaise longue so that a sustained close-up of her was avoided, and whenever she came in frame he concentrated on her shoulders and half-nude breasts. He intended to cut even cuts so that little of her was seen, while post-synching her voice over.

On the other hand it ruined what Angela had to say, by diverting attention to her flesh, so again she was the sufferer professionally.

But like Jamie she was unaware of all this. She simply felt relief that the allergy hadn't made a reappearance. Her skin was clear, with a lively bloom from her days on the island, and every time the camera zoomed in to photograph her neck or bosom she felt gratified.

She noticed that Jamie didn't touch her with pleasure any more. This added to her sense of aversion towards her own body.

Just as they finished the chaise longue scene, on the fifth and last take, she had the giddy impression that it wasn't Jamie moving away from her, reaching for a dressing gown, but Dominic. She was certain for an instant that she saw Dominic's gold wristband on Jamie's arm.

She managed by closing her eyes to force away the ghostly image—so close and real to her. When she opened them again and looked at Jamie's wrist she saw that he had neither gold band nor wrist watch—naturally, as it was a costume film.

There was an atmosphere of gloom in the studio. The last scenes were shot without the usual raillery and fun and Angela didn't get any of those trifling but important compliments that come to an actress when the work is rolling.

Not a murmur had been heard from the new producers. They were, apparently, just waiting for the result, hoping to salvage a film they could maybe sell to television.

This news came to Angela through Sonya.

"Jamie's about the only one who doesn't know that Ambition isn't being scheduled for feature-film release any longer," Sonya told her.

It was the decision of the distributors, who naturally had the whiphand in the matter of how the film was going to be marketed. All Hal Berners and the banks could do was sit back and watch.

Dominic was being consulted all the time, Sonya went on. Didn't she know that? But all he did was agree with whatever they said, even when they contradicted themselves inside the same phonecall. Hal Berners had been her informant.

"In other words," she said, "your man doesn't give a fuck about the film. It's been a waste of time."

"Oh," Angela said, "we got paid."

Sonya was staggered at her indifference but put it down to sickness.

In fact Angela hardly listened. She had worries far graver than the fate of Ambition. She glanced repeatedly at her dressing room door to see if 'he' would knock. Only when she was with the real Dominic—physically close to him, touching him—did the anguish leave her. And even then she felt a growing fear that the 'other one' would find some way of invading the real Dominic, taking him over, removing her last source of sanity.

She refused to dine out in the evenings. An Al Bowly evening at F. Scott's failed to draw her. Her only concern in public was to hide her face. She hardly spoke at meals. At the studio she ordered coffee and sandwiches in her dressing room, never went to the canteen. Her shoulders were getting the rounded look of someone bitterly discouraged. She didn't prank with Dominic any more.

She hated to hear the apartment-door bell in case it was someone who might set eyes on her. Even Pauline's daily visits were a trial for her because her eyes sometimes ^wdelled on her thoughtfully.

She didn't mind Dominic gazing at her, since he was her last security and hope.

He told her, "I didn't fall in love with what you looked like, I fell in love with you."

But it didn't console her. Nothing from outside did. It seemed only the inner nightmare counted for her now. The food she ate had no taste. It was the same to her whether she was drinking water or champagne.

The question of her birthday, October 4th, came up. Dominic's original idea had been to take her to San Diego for a week, getting back around October 10th, hopefully for the first rehearsals on the Ballet Russe series.

One day, sitting with her after dinner, he said, "Is it OK about taking you to San Diego for your birthday?"

"Oh Dominic I couldn't possibly move from here—let me get over this crisis first!"

"What about a little celebration here then?"

"I don't want anything. Just you! I'm not budging from my room—I don't want presents—I don't want to know about myself!"

He went on arranging a little party in the apartment just the same. He even called Sonya and asked her to organise a few guests from Ambition.

Stories were flying round the studio about her mental state. Of course the crew had noticed her trembling, the involuntary glances of fear. And you just didn't get the old response from her. They couldn't believe their eyes. Jokes went round too—about Dominic and 'his deadly touche' etc.

"Ambition's another name for bad news," said the head of photography.

Dominic wasn't the killer for nothing, they said. He'd killed Saul, the film and now it was her turn. Didn't she look as if she'd been getting the kiss of death? But they didn't feel much sympathy for her.

As Sonya put it, "She was fooled. So was I but, Jesus, not to the point of getting myself destroyed!"

The most terrible thing happening to Angela was the fact that the 'other one' had imperceptibly and subtly become more important than the real one, stronger, and impervious to resistance.

* * *

The film was edited and ready for the previews. There was to be a party to celebrate—but Hal Berners visited LA and suddenly

Max Pennance was too busy on other projects to make a party possible any more. With Jamie too away in New York, also on a new project, there didn't seem much sense in it.

There were absurd delays in showing the production team the finished product. It was put around that the laboratory had further work to do on it, which no one believed.

Then the 'trunk' came out. The scenes involving Angela, shot after she'd left the clinic, were, despite Pennance's sincere efforts, a mess. They just wouldn't jell with the rest of the film. It didn't mean that the film was a write-off. It did mean it wouldn't make the feature-film circuits. On television you didn't see such a big picture so the question of jelling wasn't so important.

Dominic received the news without apparent feeling. The Saul Weiland estate would have to foot a large bill. Everyone, especially Greg Merrytown, was saying that in films you should follow Latouche's nose, not your own, and Ambition should never have been made.

Because of having had to cut round Angela's post-clinic scenes her part was now if anything smaller than Sonya's, therefore it was impossible to couple her name with Jamie's as the co-star. The problem was solved, commercially, by making it a 'Jamie Somerson film' in which he and he alone shone. In other words Pennance had agreed with the distributors that even Angela's earlier brilliant scenes should be curtailed. It left a footage problem but this was solved by incorporating more of the Number Two crew's location shots in Paris than had originally been intended.

All this news, reaching her over LA's bush telegraph, was only a further deadening blow for Angela, among many. But she expected it and even in a way condoned it. While the 'other' Dominic hovered, while her face belonged virtually to another and lesser creature, nothing in her life could or should go well.

Also she came to the conclusion that the 'other' Dominic had caused the changes in her face and the terrible rash in order to blot her out as an actress, because 'he' was unforgivingly jealous of her professional activities.

October 4th came and she was horrified to see the lounge set out for a party. Most of the Ambition company came—out of deference to Dominic, partly out of pity for her. She was brought into the room in a new loose-fitting pink dress which didn't really suit her, shape- or colour-wise. She entered rather like an invalid and

could hardly manage a smile for anyone. Jamie was still in New York. Everard and Jill Rapinsky sent presents round, with polite 'out of town tonight' notes. This they'd previously arranged with Dominic, who wasn't anxious that they should see Angela in her present uncastable state.

Pauline had arranged a magnificent buffet—cut meats, jellies, all kinds of bread, with massive bowls of salad. In the corner by the French books there was a special table for the cake. 'Happy Birthday Angela' was written across it in the same pink as Angela's dress. Champagne was popped and there were polite remarks.

Dominic took up a glass of champagne and, raising it, started the birthday song. Gradually everyone joined in, holding their glasses up while Angela stood still in the centre of the room. He was looking at her, smiling, not three feet from her, and she was horrified to hear emerging from his mouth, contradicting the movements of his lips—

Happy deathday to you,

Happy deathday to you,

Happy deathday dear Angela,

Happy deathday to you!

Nobody looked uneasy, they all had smiles on their faces, though most of them were a bit frigid. They didn't seem to understand the horror of what they were saying yet this terrible word 'deathday' was coming out all the time as if they thought it was the sweetest kind of anniversary joke. How hateful they all were, turning against ^{her} life this, with him leading the song! However could they have devised such a thing, planned it and mutually approved of it? Surely there was a limit to the horror human beings could impose on someone utterly defenceless!

The absurd thought occurred to her, in her panic, that even if this wasn't true, even if that word were her own awful error, they should still be aware of the horror she felt—she should still not tolerate it!

She screamed at them, "No! No! I don't want that song!"

There was such an instantaneous, shattered silence that the song seemed never to have happened. She ran out of the room.

In her bedroom she began crying but in a dry coughing way without tears, like someone after gross shock. As Dominic took hold of her she sort of collapsed on to him.

"What was that song?" she asked him.

"The song?" He didn't understand.

"What were you singing?"

"Why, Happy Birthday to You!"

"Happy birthday..." She clung to him, forcing the 'other' out of her mind, knowing she'd been deceived again. She was quivering all over. Someone enterprising in the lounge turned the canned music on.

Pauline helped her calm down. She made her take a brandy.

"I'll go look after the guests," Dominic said. "I mean get rid of 'em."

Back in the lounge he sat saying nothing, fixing the floor with his stare. Any attempt to enquire about Angela was rebutted with a quick glance.

He only spoke once, to Sonya.

"I know what you're thinking," he said.

Hal Barners and a San Francisco bank were sitting close to her.

"I said that kid was a star," he went on, "and I said I was going to show it to the world. I didn't say Saul Weinand or that asshole Max Pennance was going to show it to the world."

Max Pennance was hardly two yards behind him.

The statement seemed to put the final kiss of death on Ambition. At least that was how Greg Merrytown took it—and how it turned out. Some said that Dominic paid a large sum of money (from the Saul Weinand estate or not it wasn't known) to see that the film was never distributed.

The Ambition team, minus the two stars, did see a final cut but that was the only time anyone saw it, and Max Pennance believed that the cans had been destroyed.

The birthday party dispersed quickly, with the champagne and duck paté and salmon untouched.

Sitting with her in her room Pauline persuaded Angela at last to go on with the FM sessions. Angela had told her about the 'other' Dominic, hardly daring to speak, and this had provided Pauline with her chance.

"Don't you see," she said, "you can never get rid of these forces from the past until you find out who they are! Dominic tried hard enough so why don't you?"

"But is it from the past?" Angela asked wide-eyed.

"From your previous life—I'm certain of it!"

"Could it be Dominic, as he was before?"

"It could be. Why don't you find out?"

Pauline said to Dominic afterwards, "It was the softest FM sell of my life." But she kept quiet about what Angela had told her.

In fact she'd needed all her self-control not to show Angela the anxiety she felt about them both. Even she now believed that FM had unearthed forces perhaps too powerful for human beings to handle. She blamed Dominic for this—going too fast, too soon.

Pauline suddenly put her hand on Angela's brow, still sweating slightly from the earlier ordeal, and said, "Gee I feel sorry for you. You know sometimes I'm very thankful I haven't met my affinity."

The FM sessions were to take place every day, Dominic's in the morning, Angela's in the afternoon, in a joint effort to solve the mystery. They were to be 'make or break sessions', Pauline decided.

But they they failed to produce results. Angela wondered secretly if this was because she was still determined not to reveal Caterina. Even though Caterina had deserted her, she hoped for her return one day. And when Caterina did return she wanted no one in the world to know about her. She reasoned that Dominic had his strength, Pauline hers, so she too must be allowed her secret fount of power.

Again and again, during the sessions, Pauline asked her who the 'other' Dominic was but Angela couldn't tell her, even in the deepest hypnotic state. All she knew was that he sometimes 'got inside' Dominic and sometimes 'got outside'. It was very confusing. Sometimes, still under hypnosis, she gave way to anxiety that the 'other' would one day assume total control of the real Dominic.

Pauline used this anxiety to probe deeper.

"How can we prevent that happening?" she asked. "Is there something you did in the previous life, perhaps against the past-life Dominic, that we should know about?"

But since this concerned Caterina there was no response; Angela's mouth was tight shut.

One afternoon Angela almost shouted into the body-mike, "Why does he want to kill me?"

"Who?"

"Dominic!"

But again Pauline's efforts to follow it through failed. She

couldn't determine whether Angela was referring to Dominic in his present life or ⁱⁿ the former one.

His FM sessions, on the other hand, were fruitful. He 'remembered' her, Caterina, with increasing vividness. Angela listened with ~~apt~~ astonishment to the tape afterwards as he described the Venetian girl. It was exactly her! It was her own Caterina—to the life!

"Is this like the person you remember being?" Pauline asked her.

The elongated eyes, the fine hands, the gypsy look, the girlish love of fun, the freshness—it was all there!

But with a miserable sense of betrayal she told Pauline, "I don't know."

Pauline was perfectly aware that she wasn't cooperating, and constantly complained to Dominic about it.

"She must have a reason," he said.

Meanwhile the sessions went deeper and deeper. He kept seeing the figures 30/40, as pertaining to his previous life.

"I don't know if these are three men, three years, three units of a measurement. They keep flashing in front of me. The same with 40."

Also the soles of his feet began to feel raw, tender, painful.

"I can't walk; they're so sore. Maybe I've been walking long distances, ~~over~~ mountains. Maybe I escaped from some place. But all the time I feel Caterina's punishing me, it comes from her and yet it doesn't. I just can't get it straight."

Another time there were 'three dark men'.

"I'm not saying they're physically dark. They're dark forces. Hey it was them who really screwed me, they killed me, yes! I think Caterina tried to save me but also she was behind them, it's horrible. And they're still connected with her!"

"Do you mean they've reincarnated here?"

"Here or somewhere. They're not dark forces any more. They're sort of mild and protective, for Angela. But they'll become active again, and even dark, in order to separate me from Caterina—as they did before."

"You mean from Angela?"

"Yes."

In the next few days Angela became so frightened she couldn't sleep any more—even in his arms. She 'saw' him in the darkness

though he was lying next to her, hot, breathing. 'He' would stand by the latticed wardrobe doors watching them both. Sometimes 'he' would whisper insults—soft enough not to wake the real Dominic.

Only if she woke him would 'he' disappear. But during the day this was ineffective. 'He' would appear behind Dominic, wearing the very same clothes.

She decided not to talk about these new appearances. Pauline and Dominic were already convinced that the FM sessions were doing good, whereas she knew they had increased the momentum of 'his' visits (and accordingly she felt a sort of gleeful triumph over FM).

Sedation was once more advised (by the miracle healer Reg Packard) and she accepted it readily. She now began to see the 'other' through a nightmarish haze, at one remove from herself, which was better than at first remove.

But sedation didn't protect her against what was to come. Her worst fear was now realised. As Dominic lay sleeping in the middle of the night, breathing deeply, so close to her that she could feel his breath on her cheek, she opened her eyes and to her horror his eyes opened as well but underneath his eyelids, and they were the eyes of the 'other' one. And then in the most gruesome way lips behind, or perhaps inside, Dominic's own lips began to smile at her and utter insults very softly that were, as always before, incomprehensible while being strangely familiar.

She closed her eyes tight but this made no difference, ^{for} her own eyes, with which she saw 'him', were still open—behind her own eyelids!—just as 'his' were behind those of the real Dominic! Thus she would never be free of him, never be able to hide from him again!

She made a helpless cry that hardly had strength to emerge from her throat but Dominic heard it, or rather sensed it, and woke. She saw him stir but the eyes behind his eyes remained there gazing at her as he blinked awake, the 'other' lips continued talking softly, vilely behind Dominic's! And nothing changed when the real Dominic said, "Anything wrong honey?", when the real Dominic raised himself on his elbow to look at her more closely, when he kissed her on the shoulder, when he kissed her on the mouth, when he began hugging her—the 'other' one came closer and closer, 'he' kissed her shoulder and her lips, 'he' hugged her, 'he' was rubbing his nose consolingly on her face, oh 'he' was so much, so horribly there and so unknown to the real Dominic that she knew she could never

get away, never escape him even by escaping from this place, for the two Dominics that horribly imitated each other, so close to her, so cruel the one and so consoling the other, so venomously unforgiving the one, so tender the other, suffocated her, stopped her breathing, held her down, pushed her further and further into the bed!

She screamed again and again. He jumped up and put the lights on, shouting "Angela! What's wrong for Christ sake? Tell me what's wrong!"

But every time she looked at him the 'other' returned. She hid her eyes but he was still there!

"Take this, take this for Christ sake!" he shouted, holding tablets and a glass towards her.

After that she slept, almost at once. She lay stricken, splayed out like someone who'd been beaten unconscious.

During the day there were moments of respite. The real Dominic was so sanely, healthily there, sitting by the bed, and she would gaze at him tenderly.

But the nights brought back the same horror, ^{though} less shocking because Dominic made sure to be awake most of the time. The sedation was increased, but this time a nurse came to inject her and she slumped asleep at once. She lay in a state of semi-coma for several days.

Her thoughts remained uncannily clear, however, in the rare wakeful moments. Sleeping or half-sleeping she devised a plan that matured in wakefulness. It was a plan that could only be realised at an opportune time, and meanwhile must't be talked about.

It was as if she knew that the opportunity would present itself very soon. It did.

One morning—Dominic had slipped down to the garage for something—it was perhaps the first time they'd been physically separate for ten days—Sonya phoned.

"Are you OK?" Sonya asked.

Angela's voice trembled in reply and she couldn't hold back her tears.

"You've got to get out!" Sonya told her. "That man's notorious!"

Why this chance phonecall should have been her opportunity Angela didn't know, but it was. The remark came to her again and again in the dead of the night when she would wake, or half wake, before being tugged into sleep again by the evening injection.

Dominic had cut down his business activities to a minimum and apart from a half-hour chat each morning with Greg Merrytown, now ^(representative and) his voice in San Diego and San Francisco, he applied himself wholly to Angela's recovery.

Gradually the sedation was reduced, and it seemed that the nightmares had abated. In fact, something else was happening.

It wasn't that Angela cared about Dominic's being 'notorious', even if it was true. But she did now believe that the only way to rid herself of the 'other' one was to get back her health and sanity in her own familiar surroundings. The conclusion was, clear and unalterable, that she must leave ^{Dominic} him, and as quickly as possible.

It was this decision that made the nightmare abate, and 'his' visits become less frequent. The more she brooded on her plan to leave the more she saw the real Dominic, the less the 'other'.

And the more she regretted her decision and decided to stay with Dominic because he was her man and the only man she ever wanted the 'other's' visits returned to their former frequency and intensity.

She witnessed this quite coolly under the decreasing sedation. And she reeled between the two states of mind—wanting to stay and wanting to leave, and quickly deserting the one state for the other out of terror in one case and desperate love for Dominic in the other.

At two o'clock one morning the phone rang. Dominic was sleeping soundly, utterly exhausted.

It was Barbara Gleeson, in London. What had Angela decided about the Pygmalion production? The producers quite definitely wanted her. Casting had started and rehearsals would begin in about ten days.

"I'll let you know in a few hours," Angela told her and put the phone down quickly in case he should wake.

In the morning she told him she felt she was getting better. In fact, she said, she was strong enough to bear a whole day alone without him, so if he had business in San Diego... But in any case she'd appreciate a day alone, just to test her strength. Even Pauline mustn't call. What about a day next week?

He agreed, after giving her a strange look.

The day was arranged for the following Tuesday. He would leave early for San Diego and be back in time for dinner.

"I feel so much better," she told him on the Friday, "I think

"I'll take the car out, just drive round."

"OK."

She drove to the airport and got herself a ticket to London. She didn't want to do it through an agency in town in case they knew Dominic. Her next call was to a theatrical costumier's she'd been taken to on the day of the commercial, not far from Warner Brother's Burbank studios. She tried several wigs, finally chose a long blonde one.

* * *

With the wide-brimmed hat crammed over her wig, and large dark glasses on, she packed quickly. The plane was due to leave just before noon but she'd started getting ready as soon as Dominic had left the apartment. The 'other one' made no appearance. She felt almost free!

She took only a few things—an autumn coat, a few dresses it was easy to pack. Every few moments she wanted to cry at the thought of running away but it wasn't the real Dominic she was leaving, she knew that!

She trembled as she ran into the underground garage to get the Bentley, in case he or Pauline suddenly appeared. She knew she wouldn't have the strength to resist either of them if they insisted on her staying. She would have stayed happily—miserably—she didn't know any more! But no one stopped her.

As she drove the sweat prickled through her crude make-up. She didn't care how grotesque she looked. There were traffic jams ^{all the way.} If she lost the plane and had to wait for another Dominic would surely sense something and come chasing after her!

For the twentieth time, waiting in the traffic, she put her hand out and checked that she had her air ticket, passport and wallet.

She looked round at the other cars, suspicious that he was following her. Surely he had sensed something? He always did!

How she yearned to see him again! She couldn't believe what she was doing.

She got to the airport when they were boarding. She felt a tap on her arm and jumped with alarm but it was only the passport official pointing out that she'd left her passport on his desk.

She was too late to check her luggage in and would have to take it to the embarkation point herself. She rushed along.

Thankfully she only had a light suitcase and two small bags. The airport was atrociously hot. She saw her fellow-passengers turn down a corridor towards the embarkation point, ahead of her. But she was convinced she'd missed the plane or had got the flight-time wrong or had misconstrued the number of the aircraft. Or that Dominic and Pauline would be there at the embarkation point waiting for her.

But it was right plane. When she reached the barrier the small crowd of passengers bound for London was pressing forward in a leisurely way.

Once through the barrier, having checked her luggage in, she began running quite unnecessarily.

Even on board she didn't feel safe. She took a seat by the window so that she could see the airport buildings. She scanned the other passengers as they walked across the tarmac.

Her hands were quivering. She kept her wide-brimmed hat on, her head lowered.

A hostess's voice came over the intercom welcoming passengers aboard. Gradually the oncoming passengers ceased. There was the click of safety belts being attached. The hostesses came round, leisurely, smiling.

She heard the doors being slid home. The engines started their thunderous scream. She wanted to walk round the craft to see if he or Pauline were on board but the 'attach safety belts' sign was on.

The plane drew forward smoothly. In a few moments it was in the air.

4.

Barbara Gleeson had a rambling office with loud wooden floors in Covent Garden. Three secretaries were always slipping in and out with invoices, contracts, manuscripts or messages that had come through on the wrong phone. She herself was plump, spectacled, with an easy, relaxed nature which made it easy for her clients to believe that she was going to keep them in work for the rest of their lives.

Her list of actors and actresses, and a few directors, was small and select. Her throaty laugh was known to most of the managers, an encouraging sound. Her appearance at provincial theatres was a reasonably safe sign that a show would come into Town or that its unknown male or female lead was going to make top billing in the West End.

Something positive she either brought with her or symbolised in some way. She was greatly liked, treated virtually as a casting director by the television companies. And in the film business she was said to have (as Max Pannance had once remarked to Angela) 'the best stable in England.'

It was rubbish, since agents shared available talent fairly equally—but the important thing was that it was said.

She took Angela Bourne on because there was a lucky star hovering over her head. Perhaps it was just the way she held herself, her rather challenging glance—or was it the fact that she fell straight into work after leaving drama school and was never out of it for more than a few days?

Angela had 'actress due to go places' written all over her even as a girl. Almost you didn't have to see her perform. In fact this was how it happened with Barbara. She met Angela in the bar of the Yvonne Arnaud theatre and took her on on the spot, something she'd never done in her life.

Above all there was no one quite like Angela. Usually an agent could bundle his 'flesh' into types—"I have three of her, six or seven of him". But when Angela went for an interview she always left a distinct impression behind her, even if she didn't get the part.

For three years Barbara nursed her name with care, the Angela Bourne file very much up front among the 'specials'. But not even she, with twenty years of experience in the business, could have predicted the kind of break Angela got when she was offered the Bel Ami series, with a first-class ticket to the States and ^a suite full of roses waiting for her at the Beverley Hills hotel.

It was the sort of thing that happened in dreams and actors' autobiographies but not in real life. It happened rarely enough to her 'specials' who had major film-credits behind them. But it was somehow typical of Angela that it should happen to her.

Even after the first-class ticket had arrived Everard Hope, with whom Barbara had collaborated for eight years or more, had remained cynical about the outcome.

"It's OK looking at clips but then when you've got 'em in front of the cameras for the real thing you often find a piece of salt cod on your hands."

Then he met Angela at Los Angeles airport and changed his tune. Every time he called Barbara after that he had fresh news about 'that unbelievable kid you sent over'.

They'd had a nervous laugh about how Angela threw a cup of coffee over her director and how, whichever way you liked to look at it, she'd bought the Bel Ami series to a standstill because the producers didn't like the director any more.

"Even Jill Rapinsky's starting to treat her like a person," Everard said.

Angela was so clearly meant for the top that she made it in one jump. But there was a worrying feature here—the fact that she was having an affair with a producer who might well become, according to Everard, tomorrow's Hollywood mogul. It was unwise for an actress to try and win a foothold on the business side—at the top, anyway. Greta Garbo had done it and got herself badly mauled in the process.

Still, with a girl like Angela you never knew. Apparently this mini-mogul Latouche was having her for every meal and yelling for more (Everard again). She might do a sort of Callas thing and mix tragedy

with tycoons but it was a tightrope-act and nothing to save you if you slipped.

When Everard called one day to say Angela had 'done a bunk' Barbara's first thought had been that the big fall had come already. And unlike Garbo Angela would never get back on that rope because she hadn't made her name yet. Like a lot of kids she'd let a taste of power go to her head and she'd whizzed herself out of play by the age of twenty-six—all in, what, three months?

Everard didn't know what she'd done a bunk for, and Barbara thought it wise not to talk about Pygmalion just yet in case he should think she'd inveigled the girl away. She also hoped that Angela had been given leave to play Pygmalion by her mogul-lover, secretly, without even Everard knowing.

The hope vanished when she saw Angela walk through the door in a wide-brimmed summer hat, almost falling over the secretary who'd announced her. She was hardly recognisable. It was the face you get when an affair has collapsed, taking the furniture with it.

Barbara never lost time in coming to the point. They kissed and she held Angela affectionately by the shoulders for a moment, gazing at her.

"You've been quite ill, haven't you?" she said.

Angela nodded, her lips puckering up, and Barbara turned abruptly away, lowering her hands, in case the 'actress-waterworks' as she called them were turned on. She'd forgotten that Angela was quite a toughie.

"And what about the film you made?" she asked as they sat down.

"Was that OK?"

As Everard himself didn't know the final news about Ambition it was a good question. All he'd told her was that Saul Weinand's death had put a spanner in the works.

"I'd rather talk about the future," Angela said flatly. "God knows what's going to become of that film, I mean I looked completely different for all my really important scenes."

"Is Jill Rapinsky lining up anything new for you?"

"Not that I know of."

Barbara had a copy of Pygmalion for her with a note from Peter Langford, the director saying he was delighted she was going to play Eliza and recalling the work they'd once done together on another Shaw play, Heartbreak House, up at York.

In casting^{her} for Eliza Langford had of course taken into account her recent break in films. There had been picture-stories about Ambition in The Stage and the evening papers—those first telltale sniffings of the Fleet Street hounds which denoted future celebrity.

Angela had played Ellie Dunne in Heartbreak House and had astonished him by doing well in a role no one in his right mind would have cast her for. At that time she was a resident actress there, and the only one available. She was one of those actresses who drive themselves hard, are a little selfish with the other actors in the sense of not caring a fig about their problems, but give you results that are always a little more than you expected (or even wanted), and a little different too. He had privately registered Angela in his mind as an 'un-put-downable'.

But when he'd approached Barbara about her playing in Pygmalion he hadn't thought for a moment that Angela actually would leave Hollywood to act in an over-performed Shaw classic for a fraction of what she was earning there. He did it as a sort of 'you never know your luck' game. And simultaneously he contacted several other actresses.

To his astonishment Barbara rang him ten days later to say that Angela was already in England and what about a contract?

Her acceptance unnerved him. If he was to produce Pygmalion that fitted the commercial West End—that is, not too forthright, not too dynamic, and with plenty of stage business to distract the audience from the long speeches—Angela might prove to be, with her now notorious unpredictability, a decided pull in the direction of one of those brilliant productions the critics love to pan.

Angela wasn't really notorious—she was hardly known. But a little legend had grown up round her, first among her friends in the business, which had spread with the newspaper publicity—she was the mistress of a Hollywood tycoon, she'd become impossible to work with, she let out horrifying screams on the set, Hollywood directors were already terrified of her, she always wore black and had danced on night-club tables etc.

The Pygmalion cast were as nervous as Langford. Ian Berresfield who was playing Professor Higgins said that in fifteen years of theatre he'd learned a trick or two about how to slap down a tiresome leading lady, and if Angela Bourne thought that...

Barbara enjoyed all this. She liked her actresses to create fear.

Coffee came and Angela felt more relaxed. She gazed at the familiar framed theatre notices on Barbara's walls, and the daguerrotype photos of Beerbohm Tree and Gerald du Maurier. She enjoyed hearing the bustle of the street outside. It was dusk, though still afternoon, and lights were going up in the shops and offices. She hoped by concentrating on these things to bring her mind back to what it had been before she went

to LA—hopefully, to retrieve her sparkle and good looks.

But it wasn't outward sparkle she needed only. There was something missing inside. Ever since she'd arrived at London airport she'd listened for the stirrings of new life in her but heard nothing. She'd talked to her mother and Louis from her hotel, expecting to feel the old thrilling attachment, but it didn't happen. Perhaps it would when they saw each other!

Her mother had been very quiet over the phone and said simply, "This is all very sudden isn't it?"

Angela had told her about Pygmalion but it hadn't seemed to convince her as the reason for such a precipitate flight from Hollywood.

During her absence Louis had spent quite a few weekends with her mother and they'd become good friends. So a lot of theatre gossip about her had reached home.

She'd booked herself into a Kensington hotel instead of the suite at the Hilton everyone was no doubt expecting her to take. She did it in the hope that modest surroundings would spark off her old personality.

Sensual pleasure was now a thing almost unknown to her. She hardly ate—she was rarely hungry. It was the same with life generally—the appetite had gone.

Not even Pygmalion interested her, though she wouldn't have confessed that under torture. She needed to sleep, sleep! She felt heavy, slow, older far than her mother, who had answered her phonecall like an excited schoolgirl.

Barbara pulled open a drawer and laid a contract on the desk. Angela thought without interest that it was the Pygmalion contract—the usual Witney clauses that she knew by heart.

"This came over by the Universal Studios bag," Barbara said.

It was the contract for the Ballet Russe series.

Angela stared at it, touched it: "Was there a note with it?"

"No. Everard called me last night and said it's on the way and would you please sign this time."

"But how can I sign if I'm entering a long season in Pygmalion?"

"A lot can happen between now and the first night—you can't afford to risk losing a series! Better lose the play!"

"Have you read the contract?"

"Yes and so has Everard, obviously, and we both advise you to sign or else!"

"I'll take it away and look at it."

"Angela," Barbara said, leaning forward in the heavy noiseless way she had when an actor had to be brought abruptly to heel, "you must have

seen that contract a hundred times, you've been refusing to sign it for a month or more, now take this pen and sign the damned thing or you and I are going to part company, do you hear me?"

"OK."

She signed without giving the thing another glance. It was nice to be forced. It gave her—almost—a twinge of pleasure she hadn't felt for an age. And this was because she knew it was Dominic forcing her, not Barbara. She could feel him behind her. The air stood still for a moment. A wave of reassurance came from him—he was suddenly close to her! She could have hugged Barbara for being the conveyor of that silent message. He seemed to say that he was still looking after her, still watching over her, and that he'd taken her sudden departure with his customary coolness.

And she felt him now without the dreaded 'other' one. So far, here in London, she hadn't woken terrified in the middle of the night. No ghostly Dominics had passed her in the street. It was surely worth the journey and the separation to be free of that!

What Barbara didn't tell her was that Everard had asked her to keep him informed about everything that happened to the girl—where she lived, her apparent state of mind, her friends.

"What's it all in aid of?" Barbara had asked.

"I think the mini-mogul still wants her for breakfast," Everard said.

Barbara had gathered a few impressions about Latouche over the previous weeks—that he was jealous, that he watched Angela like a hawk, even that he'd put a spell on her.

She had wanted to ask Angela a few motherly questions about the affair. You were sometimes as an agent expected to. But this one was difficult. And she decided, as she usually did in difficult situations, to leave well alone. Her approach in work was much the same. She spent a lot of time speculating on action that might usefully be taken, projects that could be developed in conversation with managers, casting agents, directors. But at the end of the day she opted for prime minister Walpole's axiom two centuries back—'let sleeping dogs lie'.

It was Barbara's American connection that saved her. She had as close a contact on Broadway she ^{had} in Everard Hope, and with these two links much business could be done which involved little initiative on her part and no risks.

Her attitude to her clients was that she was there to swell a tide already going in their favour. That was why she'd taken Angela on—a heavy tide was already flowing.

But when Angela had left a phone-message for her two days ago saying she was back in London Barbara's first thought had been that the tide had ceased to flow in her favour and that this was why she'd taken Eliza in Pygmalion—a real musty project if ever there was one, though, since Ian Berresfield was one of her clients, and Peter Langford the director was unhappy with his present agent and might easily come over to her, she wouldn't have told this to a soul.

There was good money behind Pygmalion—a group of investors who obviously wanted to lose it—so there was no sense in Barbara pointing out that you just couldn't revive a play out of which two films and a stupendously successful musical had been squeezed! She had passed on Peter Langford's offer to Angela without imagining for a moment that the girl would be so dumb as to accept the role, or fail to see that the project stank.

Also she'd smelled disaster in Ambition and seen that Angela would be the one they'd blame for it.

She was ready to put Angela's file among about fifty others which might be described as the sleeping dogs (and bitches) of the agency list. But Everard had started phoning. The Ballet Russe contract with its commitment to a top star salary had arrived in the overnight bag from Universal Studios, and it was clear that Angela was the type who could burn her bridges and have them rebuilt for her in a matter of hours. The girl was a living marvel!

That was why Barbara insisted on her signing the Ballet Russe contract then and there. Without it Angela would have been no more a marvel than any other unknown actress in a doomed West End production.

* * *

She walked away from Barbara's office with the contract in her bag, the copy of Pygmalion and the letter from Peter Langford, but they had no meaning for her. She wandered round forlornly, took a coffee in Monmouth Street at a place with tall wooden partitions where she'd always gone before but it brought back no warmth by association, and the coffee was drunk before she'd really tasted it.

Back at the hotel she lay in the darkness staring at the ceiling, on which the lights from nearby Cromwell Road shed a blueish, sterile reflection.

That day, walking about, she'd sometimes felt like mocking the people round her. They were all so vital, so sparkling compared with her—hurrying hither and thither! What was all the energy for, the fuss? What directives were they all anxiously following? What was

urging them forward? So much seriousness—getting on to buses, rushing down into the Tube, calling taxis, kissing, saying hullo, eating, drinking—an endless wild electric phantasmagora of motions which she watched dully from her heavy, motionless corner of the world.

Her mother came to see her in the hotel. She prepared a nice tea for her, not the hotel's tea bags but a Chinese blend she knew Yvonne liked. She bought cakes at Bonne Bouche. She expected to be excited by the visit—she would tell her mother everything, as she'd always done, it would come bubbling out, nothing could stop it. But she must have changed drastically. She said hardly anything.

She could read her mother's thoughts. She saw money floating about all round Yvonne's head—and she knew that the dear darling creature, looking hardly ten years older than herself, exquisitely slim in that French way, was thinking that she'd got herself mixed up with rich and powerful people and had become hard.

She wanted to explain about Dominic. She saw him for a moment—suddenly merged into Yvonne's face, but he was looking particularly ruthless, fixed, remorseless, which made her wonder if that was how her mother saw him, a picture she'd culled from Louis' accounts.

Yvonne left almost without her noticing it. The thought came to her afterwards, 'What was that stranger doing here?' Only hours later did it occur to her that she hadn't so much as risen when her mother left the room, much less accompanied her down to the entrance lobby.

Her mother had said a little sadly, "Oh well, I'd better be off. Don't get up."

And she hadn't. She just sat staring in front of her, and Yvonne had given her a last worried glance before leaving.

The 'other' Dominic still didn't trouble her. She almost laughed with the pleasure of having been released from his terrifying clutches. She had lost her looks perhaps, her inner sparkle, but at least she didn't have to suffer that!

Barbara called her to say that she'd found a nice apartment in Belgravia for her—if she could afford the rent. The owner was an actress who was going to the Bahamas for three months.

She accepted at once. She had the money from the commercial she'd done with Jamie Somerson, plus the cancellation fee from the Bel Ami series. And she'd spent almost nothing of her retainer-salary while in LA. Almost before listening Barbara out she said, "It sounds nice, I think I'll like it."

She called at the Eaton Square address the following morning and

found a spacious flat with parquet floors and french windows looking out on to trees, and potted plants all over the place. It was the opposite of how she liked to furnish a flat—which was why she took it at once, hardly listening to the price of the rent.

She sat chatting with the owner, a quite well-known comedy actress who'd obviously found her sugar-daddy. They talked shop, exchanging names, and Angela experienced a sensation of lightness, as if watching everything from a great distance.

She noticed that people in her company behaved with much less vivacity than they'd done in the old days. Had she had such an electrifying effect on them? At all events, the electricity was dead now.

Very little charm came over from the other actress, though clearly she had big reserves of it. She was thinking all the time of how she could cut the interview short. Angela got the impression that she thought of her as an out-of-work actress with money. This produced no resentment in her, no rebellious determination to assert herself professionally. Who cared?

Her nights were terrible, despite ^{the fact} that the 'other' Dominic no longer visited her. She yearned, now, for the real Dominic. She was sleepless. And this further affected the ravages of her face. Her body was strangely unaffected. Its curves were as perfect as before, perhaps because of the desire that permeated her wakeful nights, almost as if he were invisibly caressing her from thousands of miles away.

She lay remembering their hours together, every movement and kiss. She'd become so used to him, his light hands that had sent unbearable messages deep into all her cells, hot and yet subtle in their touch. And his skin, his lips and tongue that seemed to touch her from the past, and put on her a kind of ecstatic dew. There was no relief from this yearning until dawn came and suddenly threw a black hood over her, for nine, ten hours—she slept ravenously, obliviously.

She moved into the flat from the hotel almost without knowing it. All she had was a suitcase and a couple of bags. She wore one dress indoors and one outdoors, and the autumn coat kept the chill out for the moment.

She walked round the apartment for hours, gazed out of the windows, sat in the various chairs. She remembered the busy details of her previous life in London—coffee with this person or that, endless phonecalls about jobs finished or jobs about to begin, an hour at the Dance Centre, a singing lesson, a visit to Samuel French's to buy a play-text, and if she wasn't working at the time, or was in rehearsal, someone might have got her a comp for an evening show, with supper afterwards at Joe Allen's.

The text of Pygmalion lay where she'd put it after unpacking. She didn't care if rehearsals were delayed a month—ten years—always.

In fact they began sooner than she expected. Every day she had to travel to a Methodist hall in Maide Vale. There was good news—the Royal at Brighton would be dark for two weeks before their opening, which meant that they could move there for rehearsals much sooner than usual, and thus get the feel of the stage. When they moved into Town, Langford said, he hoped to have 'a very tight show indeed'.

A malicious thought occurred to her that a show could hardly be 'tight' with the key-role missing. She doubted even her capacity to learn the lines. But no panic accompanied this doubt and she thought her indifference might be a passing mood and once they were beyond the readthrough stage, moving about, she would snap back into her old professional vigour.

There was only one actress her age in the cast, the girl playing Clara Eynsford-Hill. She was one of those people who are always flying off. After rehearsal she flew off to dinner. In breaks she flew off to make a phonecall. Angela began watching her like a curiosity. 'Clara' was never still for a minute.

Angela was very behind the others with her lines and couldn't do without the book for a single second.

In the third week the director gave her a worried look and said, "I hope you'll be able to put the book down soon Angie."

"Oh sure!" she said, with the slightest trace of a Californian accent that made the rest of the cast look up.

More and more as they worked on the text it seemed to her a superb idea to revive Pygmalion. The scenes were so gloriously, defiantly theatrical. It was impossible to squeeze Shaw's lovely text dry—a hundred hundred films and musicals couldn't do it!

She herself, as Eliza, had some superb little scenes of her own which most stage performances, on Shaw's advice, omitted. There was one where she was talking to a saucy taxi-driver, another where she was having the first bath of her life. Thankfully Langford wanted them in.

The sets were going to be ingenious and expensive, and somehow they would create a taxi and a real bath, even if it had to be done, Langford said, with lights and special sound effects.

Also her hotel scene, where Eliza says nothing but simply takes off her skirt and slips into bed, was to be included. People were going to see a brilliant play—a romance, as Shaw had called it, which two films and a musical had made them forget.

But she saw all this mentally. Not a tremor of excitement did she

feel—not a gasp of apprehensive hope that this part might land her at the top of her profession in a single night. Not a thought that at this moment she had her professional future in her hands.

In the fourth week she was still clinging to the book—while everyone else was line-perfect. Peter Langford looked distinctly worried.

At home she couldn't concentrate. She could have asked any of a dozen actor friends to come along and take her through the lines. It was an expected service in the profession. But she didn't contact a soul.

She kept putting off a meeting with Louis, who was now in Glasgow. He told her he was getting a week off—she let the week pass before phoning him again.

Ian Berresfield was failing to tap the Shavian magic as he'd always done before (in two previous Pygmalion productions). He was so preoccupied with his own part that the fact of his leading lady not learning her lines worried him less than it might otherwise.

Also he was the kind of actor who dwells on his own defects rather than other people's. On the face of it Angela was doing all the right things. She rarely dropped a cue, always knew her moves—a little mechanically perhaps—also she wasn't getting the comedy yet—but then lots of actresses only get there at the last minute.

In his heart of hearts Berresfield thought she wasn't getting the comedy because he wasn't providing the magic. He looked grim and lonely, a man of remarkable good looks—elegant but robust—quick and clever in style—ideal for Professor Higgins in every way.

He found Angela easy to work with—but really quite extraordinarily dull after all the stories he'd heard about her. And he found her decidedly plain, though she had quite a stunning body. He concluded—like everyone else in the cast—that her body was what had got her forward professionally.

Sometimes he wished she would fulfil some of those grim auguries that had gone the rounds before rehearsals started. At least it would have provided a bit of excitement. As it was the rehearsals were the most boring he'd ever experienced.

They moved down to Brighton and she shared a flat quite near the Front with 'Clara', who did her flying-off bit here too. Angela sat for seemingly hours alone in the poorly lit sitting room with its musty furniture, staring in front of her.

Barbara called her from time to time—she wondered why.

Angela thought the brisk sea-air would do her good and bring some

life back into her face but it did nothing of the sort.

She had a moment of anxiety when she reckoned up what she was paying for the Belgravia flat against what she had in the bank. If the play didn't do well it wouldn't be many weeks before she hit trouble. The Ballet Russe contract made no provision for an advance fee, since it was part of the 'French' parcel-deal made by Everard months before.

The morning after she'd made these calculations, before she went to rehearsal, Barbara called her to say, "There are a lot of dollars waiting for you here."

"Dollars?"

"They're the cancellation fee on Ambition. You seem to be living on cancellation fees! I've bad news there—the film won't be distributed." She now had the full story from Everard but wasn't going to pass it on. "And this cheque is because of a very unusual clause negotiated I believe on the Queen Mary!"

She made it all sound very high-up and important, even the Queen Mary, and Angela could hardly believe she'd been there herself.

She knew it was Dominic who'd cabled the money—who'd answered her anxieties of the day before. No message came with the dollars.

She was late for rehearsals but the work that day went like a dream. She only had to consult the book a handful of times, though each occasion did throw the rest of the cast dreadfully. She was getting unpopular. She stopped the action every few minutes and her entrances were dreaded. The three older women in the cast were thinking of giving her a straight talking-to, as Langford didn't seem to have the balls to do it.

He was one of those directors who, to put it at its most complimentary, direct with a loose hand. After blocking the moves early in the rehearsals he tended to let the actors find their own 'levels'. No one quite knew what he meant by levels but it was definitely a fact that under his loose hand order developed out of chaos if only because, after looking to him for guidance and failing to get it, an actor had to solve his problems for himself.

Usually a Langford show pulled together in the last few days of rehearsal or even during the previews. Once, the technical rehearsal on one of his shows had taken place on the morning of opening night, and the dress rehearsal three hours before curtain-rise. The show had run for three years.

Managers trusted him, the box office supported their trust, and since

Pygmalion rehearsals were without excitement—no tears, no panic, no gloomy prognostications—the cast as a last resort put all the faith it had left in him.

Three days before the first dress rehearsal Angela was still running across the stage to her book on the piano or coffee table and muttering "Sorry! Awfully sorry!" while everyone groaned. The pace of the performance was suffering dreadfully—in fact it couldn't achieve one. Ian Berresfield was desperate but still saw her distress as the result of his failure. Langford could do little but watch, which was all he did anyway. Sitting in the stalls he bit his lip and kept his fingers crossed.

She was getting more publicity than anyone else in the show. Almost every day a newspaper called her up or she was wanted for a press interview during lunch or morning break. There continued to be picture-stories about her in the big-circulation nationals. Advance booking in Brighton was encouraging.

The problem for Langford was that while public attention would be centred on Angela her performance was nothing like big enough to meet it. Clearly something was needed which maintained her as the play's centre without leaning too heavily on her acting abilities. One evening in London, taking a break from rehearsals and at dinner with one of the producers, he had a brainwave. Her bath-scene would save the show.

When he got back the following day he took her aside and asked her, "Would you be prepared to play your bath scene precisely as Shaw wrote it, that is completely naked for a few moments after Mrs Pearce tears the dressing gown off you?"

He expected her at least to look surprised but she didn't.

"Naked?" she asked, as if fogged about the meaning of the word.

"That's what I would like," he said. "I think it might be quite a knock-out."

She thought for a moment and then said, "OK".

"It's without a G-string, mind," he said.

"What about stage regulations—do they permit that?"

"We'll have to forget about stage regulations, it's only for a few seconds."

He couldn't believe his good luck. Whoever had told him that this was a difficult actress must have got his telegraph wires crossed. Then later he heard that on the Ambition film she'd stepped out of her clothes at the drop of a hat.

For a moment the audience would see Angela not only naked but dancing up and down with frustration as she screamed, just before a blackout.

This gave an extra dimension to the publicity. One national printed a half-column picture of Angela in the nude with the headline A BATH? NOT

BLOODY LIKELY!

It was all developing nicely towards a popular production which the connoisseurs would come to as well. Advance booking started at the Piccadilly in London, and this too looked healthy.

Two days before opening she was still not line-perfect, and rehearsals were still being held up by her lapses. The woman playing Mrs Pearce asked her if she'd like her to go through her lines with her after rehearsals, and Angela said, quite as if the idea had never occurred to her, "Oh that would be great!"

They sat up together until after two in the morning going through her scenes again and again. The basic trouble was that Angela felt no anxiety or panic. This would have provided the necessary spurt of nervous energy to force the lines into her head.

Her great scene at Mrs Higgins' flat, when she is shown off to the upper classes for the first time, was funny only by dint of Shaw's writing, not by anything provided by Angela. At the same time Langford saw with relief that she was settling into the part the more as she became line-confident. She gave Eliza a certain oafish quality which horrified him, but with luck the quality of the acting all round her would soften that, especially after Brighton was done. He'd seen actors get hold of a part in the third or fourth week of a pre-London tour.

But the production seemed to rest on so many imponderables that he was scared as never before in his career. The producers told him not to worry because they saw Angela from the point of view of the publicity about her. But Langford knew that a Pygmalion without an Eliza just wouldn't get across however much the papers talked about her.

To his vast relief two runthroughs of the play went without Angela dropping a single line or calling for prompt.

Quite unexpectedly, on the Sunday before the opening, a national, one of the heavies, came out with an important-sounding article on Shaw, the phonetic alphabet and Pygmalion, and featured rehearsal photos from the future Langford production. It was one of those intangible signs by which a major success is signalled. The cast began to perk up, though the pace in the runthroughs was getting slower and slower, and running times sometimes showed a twenty-minute difference, a bad sign. But this was put down to nerves.

The technical side became very tense and bolshie. There were well over a hundred lighting cues, and the sound-script had to be seen to be believed. There was hardly a moment in the play unpunctuated by a sound effect, music or voices over.

A full technical rehearsal didn't take place until two days before opening and resulted in a quarter of the sound-tape being removed. This

involved new cues and rushed late-night rehearsals of certain scenes. It all added to Langford's nervous burden.

On the day of the dress rehearsal (the first one) everybody seemed to be falling over everyone else—stagehands, lighting staff, actors. The technical side had been up all night. The highly elaborate stage machinery (there were complicated sliding sets that fitted into each other) had stuck. What with simulated bathrooms, Rolls Royces and taxis on stage it was a wonder the actors had time or silence enough to speak their lines.

But somehow the rehearsal happened. The intricate scene changes went without a hitch. And Angela became one part of a whole. Her failure to learn her lines quickly enough became historical, almost endearing compared with the catastrophes that loomed up now—as when a light-bar almost crashed to the stage and a backcloth showing the St Paul's portico came down in Mrs Higgins' drawing room, almost taking the flats with it.

In her few spare hours—mostly in the middle of the night—Angela sat by one of the windows in her flat staring at the narrow sea-resort street below. She could hear the waves in the distance. 'Clara' was always in bed by this time. Angela asked herself again and again what she'd done to her life to bring about this present state of numbed isolation, which human company only seemed to exacerbate.

Ian Berresfield chummed up with her in the ^a 1st days of the rehearsals. As neither of them liked pubs or heavy drinking they went to a local coffee house together or sat in the lounge of the sea-front hotel where he was staying. He found her dull, and she was well aware of this. In the long silences between them her mind would be on Dominic, picturing him as he drove the Bentley down to Long Harbour, or did an FM class with Pauline, or phoned Greg Merrytown. She wanted to talk—^b but only on one theme!

There was a tiny pub in the street below, under a lamplight, and she would watch its doors opening and closing surreptitiously long after closing time, as people continued to drink and sing and play snooker inside, under lowered lights. These illegal festivities looked and sounded strangely muffled and mimed. They interested her far more than Pygmalion. She would stare down at that pub for hours.

She hadn't even decided on her make-up. For the first dress rehearsal she slapped something on, hoping for the best. And such was the looseness of the director's hand, and the enormity of his other worries, that he didn't notice.

In fact luck hovered here as over many other aspects of the show—

her careless make-up gave her a certain grotesque, haunted yet comic look which suited Eliza Doolittle down to the ground.

She noticed how vast her face looked in the dressing-room mirror. But this suited the stage. She made a face at herself and was surprised at the larger-than-life burlesque effect.

When the day itself arrived the cast was aquiver with nerves, afraid that the laughs weren't going to come in the right places (or windfalls come in the wrong ones), yet dazzled and encouraged by all the advance publicity the show was getting. Their two weeks at Brighton were already booked out. Experienced pros living in the area said it looked like 'the typical Langford mess' that preceded a hit.

Berresfield developed a temperature and started going hoarse but said this always happened if he saw 'the sword of Damocles hanging in the flies'.

Really, all in all, the cast began to feel that the bad nerves were the best augury so far. Yet nothing seemed to happen on stage. The play went through without a hitch but it never took off. On the other hand an audience full of publicity-stimulated expectations might supply the missing magic. Perhaps this was one of those shows so impatient to reach a live audience that it refused to reveal itself in rehearsal.

And of course there was the popular notion that a bad dress rehearsal augured a good performance. In this case there were no fewer than three bad dress rehearsals.

The final one, on the afternoon of the show itself, went OK. That was all you could say about it. There was no technical trouble, except that the dimmer switches went wrong and a new lighting console had to be rushed down from London.

They finished an hour before the show was due to go up.

Angela thought she ought to lie down in her dressing room, not because she felt tired or nervous but because she'd always done that. She went through throat exercises, a few muscle-loosening routines.

Langford came round wishing everybody luck and smiling. She felt waves of bad nerves from the other dressing rooms, and wondered that people could take it all so seriously. Langford was impressed by her calm, though he agreed with Berresfield that she was a bit dumb.

There were telegrams from her mother, Louis and Barbara Gleeson who couldn't make it because of the opening of a new musical in Town.

Just after the knock on her door and a voice calling the half and wishing her good luck there were footsteps along the corridor and Fred, one of the stagedoor staff, came in with a huge bunch of roses. He

put them down on a coffee table and she picked out the card, which said 'Caterina, always', nothing more.

She burst into tears and Fred said, "Now that's no way to treat flowers!"

It was also no way to treat her make-up and she had to mask out the rivulets. There was another knock on her door—for the quarter. She could hear the murmur of the audience over the intercom, which should have sent a thrill of excited fear through her veins like chill air on bare skin but didn't.

Fred made a second appearance—gingerly this time as it was too close to curtain-up to disturb an actor. But a phonecall had come from America virtually giving him orders to deliver a cable that had arrived late. He'd meant to slip it into her mirror while she was on stage.

The cable said simply TONS AND TONS OF MERDE LET IT FALL FROM HEAVEN YOUR OWN DOMINIC.

*

*

*

At the end of the show champagne was popped but most of the company dashed home after a few sips. There was a ten o'clock call the next morning for director's notes and everyone wanted to sleep. Angela was among the first to leave. Ian Berresfield kissed her on both cheeks and said "Thank you darling". She didn't know if it had gone well or badly. They'd taken a lot of curtain calls but then it was first night.

It had been one of those remarkable evenings when the audience, the moment it sat down, seemed determined to witness a success irrespective of what happened on the stage. The very first words—Clara's "I'm getting chilled to the bone"—brought a laugh as if a collective decision had been taken to stamp every line of the play as potential farce. For the director it was worrying laughter because so loose-footed, taking little account of the text. The danger was, on these occasions, that the cast would begin taking little account of the text ^{and} start acting 'all over the shop', so that finally the onstage confusion reached the audience where in fact it had originated.

But tonight it didn't happen like that. Laughter continued to come in regular waves throughout the evening. The cast had the feeling that it had been swept up like a nervous child in strong adult arms.

It was the sort of evening that happens a handful of times, if that, in an actor's life. Ian Berresfield didn't know what had hit him—suddenly his movements, projection, business, worked like a dream. Langford in the circle began breathing the biggest sigh of relief in his career.

Not that the laughter was sustained. At points where it should

have been instantaneous it was a second or so too late. Even Angela's "Not bloody likely!" failed to get its rightful gushing assent. Langford put it down to first-night stiffness.

Angela's bath scene was enjoyed but no more. Her sudden nakedness evoked a surprised hush, followed at once by conscious self-readjustment in the form of laughter. There wasn't the delight Langford had hoped for.

But all these things could be handled before they moved into Town. He made more notes in his aisle-seat than on any other first night of his life. There was something about this production that defied analysis or prediction and he couldn't put his finger on it.

At one time he'd thought it was Angela. Her failure to learn her lines had seriously hindered the rehearsals. At times he'd felt like going to the producers and having her substituted but the lavish publicity she was getting made that impossible.

Now she fitted in well enough. In fact, line-wise, she was doing rather better than the others. 'Mrs Pearce' ghosted no fewer than four times and even Berresfield had to be prompted in a scene that had always gone with a swing at rehearsals.

Audience reception at the end was as enigmatic. There were generous curtain calls, the clapping was solid—but there was a vague sense of nothing very memorable having happened. The shell was there but not the nut. Mixing with the audience briefly in the foyer afterwards, as he always did, he got a positive impression. They'd enjoyed themselves. For once he couldn't say if he'd got a flop, a hit or a mild three-month run on his hands.

Angela walked home alone, Dominic's cable in her bag, one of his roses in her coat. She hated herself for those moments she'd stood on the stage naked, jumping up and down so that her breasts quivered, under about thirty lanterns and two spots.

It wasn't that she felt ashamed towards Dominic—just that she hated to reveal an unloved body.

But the second night she didn't mind so much, and by the third and fourth it became mechanical.

If the show didn't get better during its Brighton season it didn't get worse either, and nothing happened to stem the tide of publicity in her favour, or the advance bookings in London.

It soon became clear that her nude scene was pulling them in rather than any brilliance in the acting. Ian Berresfield had a definite following in the theatre but the Brighton reaction to his performance wasn't encouraging.

They all moved back to London on the Sunday morning after their last

two Saturday performances. The first preview in London was to take place the following evening, Monday, which everyone said was madness. First night would be on the following Thursday. A dress rehearsal took place at the Piccadilly the evening they arrived in Town, and adjustments to the moves, made necessary by the new stage, went on until two or three in the morning. There was another rehearsal the following afternoon, and the first preview took place at seven-thirty in the evening.

She was happy to be alone again in her flat. Once more she moved about from chair to chair aimlessly, yet with a curious sense of satisfaction which she couldn't account for. Her nights were more restful too, less tormented with desire for Dominic. It was as if she'd learned at last that, because their relation was no ordinary love, circumstances couldn't change it and they could never be separated. She felt him with her all the time, encouraging her. But he was unable (or perhaps unwilling?) to bring back her inner sparkle.

The weather became so mild and beautiful, with a clear autumn sun that made everything glitter and flash, that she took to walking for hours in Knightsbridge and Hyde Park.

She continued to sleep a lot, especially now that there were no morning rehearsals. She walked round the streets, her hands deep in her pockets, and only the day before first night did ~~she~~^{she} remember that she hadn't got her mother a seat for it. She raced round to the box office to see if there was anything going but the moment she entered the foyer she decided to leave it. If her mother rang she would tell her she wasn't proud of her performance. But Yvonne didn't ring. She seemed to know.

When she got back from the theatre that night there was a note on the mat. She bent quickly to snatch it up, feeling that it contained important news.

It said, 'I'm at the Connaught. Let's meet tomorrow. By the time you get this I shall have seen the show. Love, Pauline.'

She stared at the note, reread it again and again. Pauline was here! Pauline! She danced round the room. She kissed the note.

She called the Connaught at once but Pauline wasn't in.

On second thoughts Angela decided it was better to wait till tomorrow morning. She wanted to sit all alone in the meantime, thinking out why Pauline had come, daydreaming about the possibilities, wondering what the new plan was. She laughed to herself, cried, couldn't keep still.

Anyone in the Pygmalion cast, seeing her then, might have thought she was excited at the way the first night had gone. For her it had

passed like any other night. ^{But} / The reception had been if anything better than at Brighton, the laughter less foot-free. Tension had built up round her nude scene and when the dressing gown was whipped off her shoulders by Mrs Pearce there was that sudden electric rustle in the auditorium that denotes maximum excitement. Nobody in the cast could understand it. Nor could Langford. But that was how it was.

Ian Berresfield said grimly, "You don't have to act these days."

It was astonishing, he said, what inept publicity could do to the reception of one of the cleverest plays ever written.

The silliest people had come to her dressing room afterwards to congratulate her. She didn't know any of them. Even Langford came round looking bemused, as if duped by his own deception.

Ian Berresfield almost cut her. But he said to his wife afterwards, "It isn't really her fault, poor darling, she just can't act."

Angela got to bed about three, smiling to herself, serenely happy. She fought sleep, not wanting to lose this feeling. Then she slept until ten. A few minutes after she woke Pauline called.

"I saw the show," she said.

"I don't want you to say anything about it! I wasn't in it!" Angela told her.

"That's just what I was going to say!"

She deliberately didn't enquire after Dominic in case something was wrong. If Pauline kept quiet about him too it would be a sign that nothing had changed. She was excited like a young girl.

They were to meet for lunch and she chose bright colours to wear. It was still sunny and quite warm. As she left the flat to find a taxi she felt she hadn't been alive all these weeks, since leaving LA.

They met at Porter's in Covent Garden but there was a queue so they walked to the Market and ate at one of the delis, under the glass roof. Angela kept gazing at Pauline and clutching her hand.

"I can't believe you're here! Won't you come and stay with me for a few days? I've got a spare bedroom!"

"Are you crazy?" Pauline said. "He's expecting me back tonight! I mean, remember the man we're dealing with!"

"So he sent you?"

"As a matter of fact I suggested it and he jumped at the idea, so quick that I was on a plane inside two hours of the suggestion!"

Pauline was dressed nicely in a short-sleeved wool dress, thickly striped in primary colours. Her hair fell about her face in a way that inexplicably suggested happiness to Angela.

"And how about you?" Angela asked her. "Have you found another boyfriend?"

"Oh yes!" Pauline looked away shyly, half laughing. "I'm never without one for long. I get passed from one to the other—I mean, they all know each other!"

They had pastrami rolls and coffee. At one end of the Market a man was clowning with birds and a dog, and tap-dancing. The sound of his old record and tapping feet echoed under the roofs.

"I thought Dom was going to die when you left," Pauline said.

"Die?"

"Did you think he'd be happy?"

It was the first time Angela had really thought about that side of it, so deeply was she convinced that Dominic had the strength to bear anything.

"But Pauline I couldn't bear seeing that other Dominic all the time—!"

"Oh we both realised that. And he agreed that you had to go. In fact one day when I started criticising your behaviour he cut me off with 'It's the only way she could have done it'." She patted Angela's hand. "I'm not over here on a moral mission honey so don't get scared!" She broke off for a moment and sat up very straight, scrutinising Angela with slightly narrowed eyes. "Do you know I found out who the other Dominic is or rather was? ~~He~~ ^{Was} somebody Dominic's been hiding from me—just as you've been hiding Caterina!"

Something cautioned Angela—she thought perhaps it might be Caterina herself—not to say anything.

"Can you tell me what this other Dominic looked like?" Pauline went on. "Did he look the same as Dominic?"

"He looked exactly the same, except that he was a demon. His eyes gleamed and he said all those horrible things I couldn't understand while he looked as if he was talking sweetly. It wasn't like a dream, it was utterly real! It wasn't even ghostly. I could have sworn I saw an actual person standing there and only afterwards did I realise there couldn't have been."

"But he was standing there. He was real! Only he wasn't in the flesh. Dominic went through hell in about three FM sessions while I squeezed the truth out of him."

"What truth? That he wanted to harm me?"

"Listen Angela why don't you two stop making war on each other? Do you think you can play about with this kind of thing? Don't you see it's taken hundreds of lives to get you where you are now and you're both throwing it away!"

"But I couldn't stand it any more—I was sick! You saw it yourself!"

"Because you were making war on him!"

"Me?"

"First you made a separate deal with one of his own producers, then you made a film he didn't have a finger in although he was the man who got you over there, then you did those nude scenes—you did all these things without a thought, because you were an actress and thought you were the same person as you'd been the year before. And you weren't! Everything had altered and all you could talk about was your career! You'd found your affinity, which is something that happens in a hundred years! Most people don't even know it's possible. And you treat it like another love affair. Now either you're with your affinity or you die! There are no two ways. Are you two going to kill each other—because that's what you're going to do if you don't get together and agree on priorities!"

"But we are together. We've never had a quarrel. He didn't mind me doing the Ambition film, in fact he was proud of me."

"Of course he was! But don't you see you have other lives to cope with which may not see eye to eye with that? So Ambition fell to pieces! Nothing happened as either you or he wanted it to happen. You pulled it down by having that allergy every time Jamie Somerson touched you, and Dominic pulled it down by setting his demon free!"

"Was that the truth you squeezed out of him, about the demon?"

"It was he who pulled the film down, with your unconscious help, it was he who killed Saul Weinand and took away your good looks so you couldn't be an actress any more!"

"He killed Saul? What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about your other lives! Saul died, didn't he? The film collapsed soon afterwards. All kinds of unfortunate things happened—lights crashed to the ground, ^{Max} Pennance was beaten up. Let's admit that unfortunate things happen anyway but surely it's strange that as soon as Saul died the demon actually began appearing to you, which it had never done before!"

"But my allergy happened before!"

"That was the war you were making on yourself, on your own body! It was your own past calling out to you not to be a fool. You spend hundreds of lifetimes trying to get together with your affinity and you fritter it away—! Those former lives are active forces now Angela, and if we don't come to terms with them they get on top of us and make us repeat the old miseries, and I don't want that to happen!"

Pauline gazed around the Market for a few moments. Then she said quietly, "Angela, you behave like a child closing its eyes to the world outside. But don't you see the demon won't let you be anything under these circumstances, won't let you enjoy anything, he won't even let you have your own face!"

Angela nodded.

"A bomb falls in your life," Pauline went on, "and you treat it like a home-made fire-cracker."

"So Dominic has this demon in him?"

"Way back, I can't tell when, he practised alchemy and magic and he got trigger-happy. He was just so hungry for power over other people he started using the magic. It happens all the time. He could kill people just like that, give them horrible diseases, and he did. He was such a powerful and feared man that he dominated most of Dominic's subsequent lives. But the thing is Dominic doesn't seem to know he's there. He can work independently of Dominic. And this was how he could appear to you in the clinic and the studios and even when you were in bed with Dominic."

"Then he's still inside Dominic?"

"Oh sure! It accounts for Dominic's frequent ruthlessness. It explains the power he has over other people—over me! The demon taught him this many lives ago. Dominic can radiate fantastic psychic power when he wants to. But it isn't always good power. And so it hits back at him. Things start going wrong—his film projects fall through, you run away. Then he needs the demon as a protection. It's a kind of vicious circle. Now Dominic didn't like you playing in the nude scenes—he wasn't jealous either, he hardly gave the matter a thought—but the affinity in him was hurt by it, perplexed, and this was what triggered the demon off."

"Well then," Angela said, "it's the same as what we were talking about on Catalina Island. It means I either have to give up Dominic or give up acting."

"But you can't give up Dominic."

"Oh I can try!"

"You can kill yourself! Isn't that what you're doing now, bit by bit every day?"

"I suppose so," Angela said defiantly. "But I might prefer that to giving up my art."

"The art has given you up, it's happened already," Pauline said.

"You saw that in my performance last night?" Angela asked almost in a whisper.

"Yes."

"And what am I to do?"

"Either you stay with your affinity in perfect accord or you die."

"And how do I live while being in perfect accord with him—what do I do with my mind and training and all the interests I've had since I was a little girl? The stage means life for me, so living with my affinity means death for me too!"

"That was why Dominic became a producer, he saw it was the only way to hook you. Put in another way, he knew long before he met you who you were, and he was guided into the profession that would help you most. But you have to do the acting he wants you to do, in his way."

"Oh!"

"I thought that'd arouse a scream! I made it sound real bad, I know. But just think about it. What you won't understand is that your affinity wishes for you whatever you wish for yourself! What he wants is what you want, there can't be any other way between two affinities, because they're aspects of the same essence! It's because neither of you could really believe this that you started going separate ways. He should have given way over Max Pennance, not made war on him, everything bad started from there. That was because power-hunger took over, the demon was tapping him on the shoulder again."

"So you want me to return to LA?"

"Place has nothing to do with it. Nor has the question of whether you and Dominic are together. You can be six thousand miles away from each other but still make war on each other! Don't you see that the demon's working in both of you but he'd be completely powerless if you talked honestly and openly to each other and let your real identities come out."

"We've never done that," Angela said reflectively. "We've never had a real talk, not like lovers—about silly things or practical things. No arguments. They haven't been necessary. We could be together for hours and hours without saying a word—and then at the end it would feel as if we'd said whole books to each other!"

*

*

*

Pygmalion at the Piccadilly defied the popular notion that a second night is always a let-down. Angela's bath scene got such a spontaneous roar of approval that it had obviously been stamped in the public mind as the show's imprint or signature.

But the reviews hardly mentioned her. Some of them talked mildly

about Ian Berresfield or about former productions of Pygmalion when this or that actor had done memorably. But her name was attached firmly to the nude scene. There might have been a collective decision among the critics not to acknowledge her acting abilities in any degree.

Reading the Financial Times review she found herself hating Dominic for the first time. She let the paper fall to the floor and stared across at the french windows. It looked as if the demon had done his work well.

Congratulations poured in. Friends playing in rep out of Town called her up and said, "We must try and get up to see you Angie!" They had all heard it was awful. But publicity exercised its own spell, turned the most forthright of them into hypocrits.

Barbara Gleeson called to discuss the television offers that were coming in. Angela was invited to appear on the chat-show—rating, ten million. She was the 'not-bloody-likely girl'. She refused.

"But Angela, why?"

"Because I'm not interested."

Barbara didn't press her. After all here was a born star—one who apparently couldn't go wrong even when she was sick and unable to act and had lost her looks.

The box office was hot with activity from ten each morning. People could have walked a few yards down the street to the Windmill Theatre and seen a two-hour nude show for perhaps less money but the insertion of a five-second nude scene into a play by Bernard Shaw seemed to have captured a hidden market.

Angela persuaded Pauline to stay a few more days and got the spare bedroom ready for her. They sat up talking every night after the show. Dominic had to be given an account of these conversations the day after by phone—while Angela was at the theatre. She always knew whether he'd called, the moment she stepped in the door. Something lurked in the air, a subtle happiness.

But she never spoke to him herself. It would have been too much for them. They both knew this.

"He wants me to bury myself in Venetian history," Pauline told her one evening. "That's why he's letting me stay." She added, "Did you ever hear of a guy called Wooten or Wottin in British history?"

"No."

"He came up in one of my FM sessions with ^M Dominic. He's connected with your Venetian background. Only we can't tell when, or in what capacity. I'm going on the assumption that an Englishman resident in Venice must have been something important, possibly in the consular service."

Pauline got a temporary reader's ticket to the British Library and spent several mornings there reading up Venetian history. Angela realised she didn't want her to succeed. There was something about that 'Venetian background' that frightened her. She wanted to tell Dominic for God's sake to stop trying to dig up horrors from the past! But she'd said it often enough to him in the LA days. Then her concern died and a certain dumb, submerged curiosity took its place.

Pauline asked her one evening, "Do you want to see Dominic again?"

"Well of course I do! I'm not alive without him—didn't you say so yourself?"

Pauline gazed at her, smiling. "Do you realise he doesn't know that? I'll tell him tonight. Maybe he'll go out and eat something."

"He isn't eating?"

Pauline laughed. "Are you?"

"Not much!"

The following day she came back with news about the Englishman resident in Venice. A Sir Henry Wotton had been English ambassador in that city in the first years of the seventeenth century.

Pauline had come across his name in connection with something called 'the Spanish Plot' which took place in Venice in the year 1618. No one was certain that it had in fact been a Spanish plot, or what the plot was. At that time Spanish embassies were regarded as hotbeds of secret intrigue and were blamed for almost anything suspicious that happened.

Whatever the nature of the plot its exposure caused sudden horror and confusion in Venice. In the course of two or three nights between three and five hundred men—mostly Dutchmen, it was said—were strangled, drowned in the canals or hung in public view.

The Venetians themselves were dumbfounded. No one knew what it was all about, except that there had been a plot to overthrow the Venetian republic. The matter wasn't even discussed in the Senate. There were no official statements. Only foreigners like Sir Henry Wotton made reports about it and despatched them home; otherwise we wouldn't know about the plot to this day.

A French secret agent called Jacques Pierre revealed the plot. He had once been in the hire of the Duke of Osuna, at that time Viceroy of the Spanish state of Naples. But even Pierre didn't know exactly what plot he was revealing.

Only the 'Inquisitors' of Venice, three men appointed secretly as a permanent government agency to run the spies of the city and, it was said, to organise secret or political murders and then suppress information

about them, knew what plot or plots they were dealing with. Possibly the 'Ten' as they were called, another government agency of ten men with much the same function as the 'three' but fewer powers, were also in the know.

"Do you remember," Pauline asked her, "those numbers 3 and 10 coming up in Dominic's FM sessions? Well there they are as plain as your finger!"

Angela felt momentary horror—but not at the strangeness of that numerical connection as at the woe all this might unfold for herself and Dominic now, hundreds of years after the event. Something whispered to her that it was better if none of this was mentioned, thought about. But she found herself powerless either to speak or close her ears to what Pauline was saying.

The story went on. The three Inquisitors didn't have the conspirators arrested. They watched them quietly for ten months instead.

On the face of it the Duke of Osuna was plotting to overthrow the Venetian republic by mustering a small foreign army inside its territory. But the truth was that the Venetian government had made a secret deal with the Duke to overthrow Spanish power in Naples. The army was mustered inside Venice with the full awareness of the Three, maybe the Ten too.

This at least was the only interpretation of the confusing events which made sense. But why was a plot concerning the Duke of Osuna revealed by the French agent Jacques Pierre? It provided a cover story under which Venice could move three to five hundred French and Dutch soldiers into the city. Officially, if an official explanation was ever required (that is, if the Spanish found out), those troops were to protect the city against the Duke of Osuna.

Something did go wrong. No one outside the Three or the Ten could say what but it suddenly became necessary to get rid of every single foreigner who had entered the city in the Duke of Osuna's service—and quickly too.

Perhaps the Spanish embassy had got wind of it. Apart from being a great imperial power at that time Spain maintained a most elaborate international spy system which penetrated nearly all foreign governments. Open defiance of Spain was something no state, least of all the tiny Venetian republic, could afford. Between three and five hundred murders therefore had to be organised—and the incident had then to be so hushed up that not even later historians could do more than guess at the real story.

"Now do you remember Dominic complaining that the soles of his feet hurt in one of the FM sessions? He said he felt he'd been trekking miles, couldn't bear his feet to touch the ground any more. I think he was bastinadoed, in his Venetian life. The bastinado was the caning of the soles of the feet, a torture. And I also think that Dominic was one of the conspirators—one of the men, French or Dutch—who were moved into Venice and later removed!"

"He was French," Angela said, almost to herself.

There lay the connection she'd so far found missing—with their common French blood, and the French bias of his television series. It all fitted now and she realised with a heavy aching feeling at the pit of her stomach that in some way she and Dominic wouldn't survive this latest knowledge.

"I hate all this," she said very quietly. "You don't know what things you might be raising! You talk about me taking it all lightly but terrible memories should be laid asleep!"

"Even when they make your present life impossible?"

"But why can't we just live now?"

"Because you can't Angela," Pauline said. "You self-evidently and demonstratively can't! You're both in misery at this moment, you're separated and lonely and you can't get on with your work, you've lost your looks and virtually your profession and you ask me why you can't live now! Honestly!"

Angela nodded. "You may be right."

She could hardly get through the performance that evening. Running time was twelve minutes longer than usual and she was sure she was the reason.

When she got back to the flat she suddenly said to Pauline, "If you find out in your researches that I did something bad to Dominic in the previous life his demon's going to get to work again—you'll see!"

"It's just what we're trying to prevent."

Angela was restless, worried. "Why can't we live together like other people?" she repeated. "And forget what we did centuries ago?"

Pauline made a big sigh of impatience. "Because you're affinities!"

For a time Angela thought she should phone Dominic and beg him to give all this up. But she knew it was useless. She remembered the obsessive look in his eyes whenever she'd tried to cross him on that subject before. And to a point she could understand it—after all, FM had led him to her.

The next day Pauline told her that Dominic wanted her back at once.

She'd collected enough data.

*

*

*

About twenty days after Pauline had left Barbara Gleeson called her and said, "I think we'd better meet. It's quite important."

She wouldn't say over the phone what it was. They arranged to have lunch together at Rule's that same day.

They met at the entrance, arriving almost simultaneously, and sat downstairs over a drink waiting for a table.

"Well here's the news," Barbara said. "And don't ask me to help you make a decision because I refuse the responsibility. Your producers in Los Angeles have been in contact with me through Everard. They've also been in touch with the Pygmalion management. They want to buy you out of the Pygmalion contract."

"They could sue me out of it if they wanted to."

"I know."

"And why is this?" Angela asked.

"To start the Ballet Russes series. They want you in Venice as soon as possible."

"And you've no professional advice to give me?"

"Well," Barbara said, "the play's doing awfully well and TV offers are coming in thick and fast. It all depends on where you want to go, I mean career-wise—to the top here or the top in Hollywood. The possibilities in both cases are great!"

Which was tantamount to saying precisely nothing, the way Barbara intended it.

"I'll think it over," Angela said.

"No. They won't accept that. Either you make your decision today or they're going to crack down on you legally."

Angela took a sip of her drink and at that moment saw the waiter beckoning them upstairs to their table.

"I'll think it over," she said, getting up. And she wouldn't say another word about it throughout lunch.

She knew that the legal threat was one of Dominic's little jokes, she just knew it.

And of course next day Barbara called her, even more in awe of her than before, and said, "It's OK, you can think it over as long as you like as long as you're in Venice by the end of the month."

They laughed together.

The Pygmalion management had apparently asked a big sum for her release, confident that it would never be met. When they got an affirmative answer less than twelve hours later they thought it was a hoax.

Her mother suddenly turned up at the flat. It was in the middle of the afternoon and Angela was asleep. In a flurry, apologising for not having invited ^{her} to the first night, she threw on a dress and then got her tea.

When they were sitting down together Yvonne told her, "I've been to Paul about you."

Paul was Yvonne's hiroscoapist. They lived near each other and she went to him twice a year to have her chart read. It had always been something of a joke for Angela.

Unknown to anyone else Yvonne had been to him once before with questions about Angela. It had been several months before the Bel Ami offer. His picture of Angela's future had seemed so wild and improbable that she hadn't said a thing about it. He'd predicted stardom, a trip to Hollywood, one or perhaps two films, a stage success, a lot of money—all (and this was the most unlikely thing of all) in the space of three or four months.

And he'd added cryptically, "I'm not saying she's going to be fortunate or happy."

Paul's method was to examine the chart in detail but then to discard it and start talking. Some second force then seemed to take over, and it felt as if he was more or less repeating words that fell into his head. Indeed he often said that the charts were 'only something to look at, to start me off, like a crystal ball'.

On this latest visit Yvonne wanted to know about Angela's relationship with the producer Latouche, whom she'd heard about from Louis and spoken to on the phone in a state of inexplicable fear.

His reply was quick and simple: "The man is evil."

She asked him to say more but he refused. She went from him to the friend who'd first put her in touch with him and asked her, "What does it mean when Paul refuses to talk?"

"Well, he never says anything if he sees death" was the reply.

"And what did he say?" Angela asked her, pouring the tea rather shakily because she didn't want to hear.

"You know, Paul predicted your trip to Hollywood, and the film, and Pygmalion."

"Did he?"

"I didn't believe a word of it so I didn't tell you. When I went to him last week I asked about your producer friend."

"Oh do stop hedging mummy! What did he say?"

"He said he was evil and wouldn't say any more."

Angela leaned back with a laugh which shocked Yvonne. "Everybody says that! In fact he's known as the killer!"

"What are you doing with a killer then? Don't you see what harm it's done you? What's the good of having success if you aren't happy?"

"I didn't ask for success! It just happened! And I'm unhappy because I'm not with him; that's all."

"And why aren't you with him?" Yvonne asked her, slim and composed as she always was.

"Oh I can't go through all that!" Angela replied angrily. "I don't ask you all about your affairs because I know you wouldn't be able to talk about them. Things happen which we don't understand!"

"Of course they do. But that's why I'm talking to you. I think that while you might be unhappy now you'll be far unhappier in the end if you see him again."

"But I'm not looking for happiness any more than I am success! I just want to be with the person I belong to, that's all! It's very simple! And if you or Paul like to call that person evil then I suppose I must be too, but there's nothing I can do about it."

"Are you sure you're not looking for happiness?"

"Oh of course I am, but it can't happen without him. I didn't know what being alive was before I knew him, and when I'm not with him I'm dead, you can see it yourself."

"So what went wrong to make you run away?"

"How do you know I ran away? Did Paul tell you that too?"

"No. I just know. You couldn't stand it any more—perhaps you couldn't stand being so happy! Or perhaps you couldn't stand the evil."

Yvonne got no reply to that. They talked about the show, which she'd seen with a friend the previous week. Yvonne was always blunt in her criticisms. It was one of the reasons why Angela did so well at drama school.

"You acted as if you were understudying yourself just for the one evening," she said.

At home that evening Yvonne called Louis and urged him to come to London to help 'bring Angela to her senses'.

"Just present yourself at the flat," she said, "don't phone first."

He presented himself the following Sunday morning, having taken a night-train from Glasgow. Angela had just got up and seemed no more interested in him than she would a passing tradesman. She listened to his stories about the show he was in, knowing full well who had sent him. She prepared the kind of large breakfast he enjoyed, with masses of black coffee.

"I haven't seen Pygmalion yet," he said. "I heard you were great."

"Whoever said that's an idiot. Who was it?"

"Well perhaps it's just the impression I picked up from the papers."

"They hardly talked about me!" She laughed. "You actors are all the same! You lose your heads whenever you see somebody hit the jackpot—instead of finding out who you are and why you're doing the work you're doing, and what kind of jackpot you're after!"

"All I want to do is survive," Louis said quietly.

"You survive with what you are inside, not with bit-parts in bad rep productions," she said harshly.

She saws from the size of his stomach that he was drinking too much beer.

He found her stinging, unsympathetic, and he was glad to leave. She didn't even kiss him. And he wasn't able to say a word to her about Latouche or any other aspect of her private life. She had changed just as you would expect someone who'd hit success to change. But there was a deeper change as well, the opposite to what success usually produced. It was this that put him in awe of her. He became aware of his own weaknesses while with her, not hers. He felt a peculiar flutter of apprehension at the thought of making any enquiry into her private life. One look from her would have settled the issue.

He returned to Glasgow the same day. She cried after he'd left. She didn't like the way she'd treated him. He'd looked so fresh, so delightfully inexperienced. That was what they'd shared in the old days, the lack of experience.

And in less than five months she'd not only grown up but—to judge from his apprehensive glances at her—become a forbidding individual.

5.

Like many people through the ages Angela had found Venice a damp, smelly, slippery prison on her first visit. At low tide the canals became filthy ditches, at high they were lugubriously oily and dark. Fog descended on the roofs early in the evening, stinking of the chemical plants at Marghera. The palazzi looked derelict and abandoned, green with decay. The continuous passing of steps on the narrow calle outside her hotel-window depressed her. Voices boomed between the walls all night. In comparison she'd found Florence lively and full of colour and fun, with the best shops in the world.

This time, when she arrived at the Marco Polo airport, a taxi-launch was waiting for her a few steps from the customs shed, and her suitcases were whisked quickly away without inspection. She expected a production assistant or at least a member of the crew to meet her but instead a tall man in a yachting sweater stepped forward as she walked into the reception hall and said, "Signorina Angela Borna?" and pointed to the quai where the taxi was waiting.

It was a clear evening, chilly. She sat in the dimly lit cabin all alone, feeling a vague excitement, like the first stirring of the blood during convalescence. The boat kept a low knottage, steering between the wooden piles that marked the entrance lane into the city. She looked at these stout, sea-rotten staves, tied fast together in threes, and felt a strange familiarity with them. The lagoon lay soft and flat all round, and gradually the lights of Venice became clear among the shadows of towers and domes, as they drew near San Michele.

The man, outside at the wheel, didn't say a word all way. She knew she was going to a hotel but had forgotten the name.

She expected work to begin the following day, the boring read-throughs, the rehearsals, all that nonsense again! She only hoped that Pennance

wasn't the director on this one because it would only be the repetition of a terrible nightmare in new surroundings. But of course Dominic would never permit such a thing.

It had all gone so smoothly. She'd phoned Barbara Gleeson one afternoon—quite without knowing even a minute before that she was going to do so—and told her she would readily leave the Pygmalion production.

It had then been arranged that she should continue in her part for a further twenty-one days to allow time for another actress to take over her part.

The air ticket, together with the reservation-slip for her hotel, had arrived from Los Angeles via the Universal Studios bag a week before her last performance. The management had wanted to throw a party for her (to use as a hook for new press coverage) but she'd flatly refused. She and Berresfield sipped champagne perplexedly together at the end of the last show, and that had been that. She left the theatre on foot and walked all the way home.

The taxi gathered speed after San Michele and swept under the arches into the city, dropping speed again in the narrow canals, before emerging into the Grand Canal from the Arsenale. They went past tugs moored along the Riva degli ^eShiavoni, then came the lights from St Mark's Square and the Piazzetta, flashing on the water among files of black empty gondolas rising up and down on the slight wash.

She didn't know what emotions were going through her, only that it was almost too much. She knew now that she'd seen it all before—but not on a former visit in this present life! All the other memories came welling back. She was so hopelessly confused when the taxi-man pulled the cabin-doors open to help her up the slippery steps to the Gritti Palace entrance that he almost had to carry her up. She left her bag in the cabin—he was suddenly behind her with it in his hand, smiling paternally. She kept dabbing the tears away with her fingers like a child. Her cases were already in the apartment before she arrived. There were two bedrooms, a sitting room on the Grand Canal and even a kitchen.

She stood at her window gazing down at the canal as the vaporetti passed with their bubbly-sounding engines. There was no note from Dominic. She was surprised that even now none of the crew had contacted her—no production assistant, no director. Not a word at the desk downstairs as to when she would be needed next day or where. No flowers of welcome.

She remembered a restaurant nearby where she'd eaten with Louis—— it was like a baronial hall, with a massive fireplace. She hurried there after she'd changed, as it was late. It was crowded but they found her a table in the corner close to the fireplace, where logs blazed. It was much too hot but she was content.

Afterwards she strolled through the calli in the dead of night, listening to the echo of her steps and the howling of cats——through the Campo San Maurizio, along the Calle Larga XX11 Marzo to San Moisè, in the surprisingly dry cold air. There were groups of people here and there, their voices booming between the walls. She remembered from her visit with Louis that Venice never really went to sleep. Even in the hour before dawn you could see people talking together, or sprawled out on the café chairs. She heard laughter. There was the distant cough of a vaporetto, perhaps the last of the night, as it pulled in at the Giardinetti close to Harry's Bar, where she'd sat with Louis and an Italian actor who'd looked, she now recalled, a shade like Dominic. She went through all the scenes of her last visit in her mind, retouching them with her present feelings of familiarity, so that they became complete experiences for the first time.

She woke early next morning to ^a warm clear day. Light burst in from the Grand Canal and the first passenger boats of the day began passing each other and crossing from one bank to the other, and queuing to moor at the pontili. Venice's rush hour was just beginning and she couldn't wait to get outside.

She dressed quickly and went to a café she remembered on the spacious Campo Santo Stefano. She took a capuccino and a brioche standing at the bar like everyone else, sipping sleepily and gratefully, excited by the dense bitter-sweet taste of the coffee and the clean blinding sunlight outside and the subdued early-morning way everybody stood around, not quite awake yet.

She crossed the wooden Accademia bridge, staying on it for a while to watch the boats underneath. Then she walked to the Zattere where she took a second coffee, sitting down this time, close to a vaporetto station so that the exhaust drifted across the café tables in blue clouds every time one came in. She felt the sun on her face and was at once reminded of LA and Catalina Island. She drank the sunlight in after not feeling it for so long, and gazed across the water at the close-packed houses and humped bridges of the Giudecca. The shops were opening, their shutters sliding up with a sharp clattering noise.

She returned to the other side of the Canal slowly, looking at everything round her. She walked to the Square, which was still largely

deserted, then along the Riva degli Schiavoni to the Giardini. There she took a boat to the Lido. It was crowded with workers and she stood outside in the open air, swaying with the boat, feeling that soft musing detachment that travel inside Venice seems to induce even in its inhabitants.

The quay at the Lido was crowded and people were running for the buses. She walked down the main thoroughfare to the sea-front and stood looking at the Hotel des Bains where Thomas Mann had cited his Death in Venice and where Visconti had made his film. Louis had brought her here. The sea was sluggish, and there were few people about. The hotel was closed. She looked up at the balcony from which Aschenbach had watched the gypsies perform, when the plague was making its first ambiguous appearance, and remembered the mocking laughter of the harlequin in the film, the way he put out his tongue at the guests just before disappearing.

It was funny—she didn't feel Venice was a different place from the one she'd hated on her first visit. Perhaps disliking it was part of the experience of knowing it, perhaps too there was something remorseless in the city which one sensed the first time but quickly forgot when the beguilement began...

It was still a prison despite the gilding of the sun. How was it she could know that? But she felt she didn't mind being caught in this prison, didn't even mind going down into the sea with it, it was such a lovely gilded cage, on certain days, and even the rain and the mist whispered things to you. These thoughts surprised her, almost made her laugh.

There'd been no note at the hotel desk that morning, no sign of the existence of a Ballet Russe company, not a word from Dominic. She didn't care. She was in no hurry at all. She could wait, oh, days, weeks! She would gladly let winter pass into spring and spring into summer, waiting and wandering and gazing, still travelling from San Zaccharia to the Lido every day and back again, still strolling through the calli behind the Fenice Theatre, where Louis had made a sort of operational headquarters. Close to the theatre it stank under the arches of urine, the canals were full of plastic refuse and dead shell-fish encrusted with black oil, clinging to the canal walls. But she knew what the city was saying to her now. It was that the world didn't deserve Venice so Venice was like the harlequin putting its tongue out and slipping further and further down and its mosaics and domes were corroding and fragmenting in the chemical smog.

Sometimes when she stood on a bridge gazing down into the water she felt she was there in the water gazing up at herself and the mellow

stonework. It was a disturbing sensation.

The walking and the air gave her a great appetite and she returned to the Accademia to eat at Montin's, where she'd been with Louis and a group of Venice technicians. She sat in the courtyard behind with its gravel paths and remembered being told that Eleanora Duse and d'Annunzio had sat here talking for hours. She ordered her food without fuss, pointing to what she wanted. She seemed to know that San Pietro alla griglia was a fish filet and it was. She drank white wine mixed with mineral water so as not to get tipsy. Bits of Pygmalion kept floating into her mind—perhaps Dusa's ghost was hovering over the place, with thoughts of theatre. She was amused by Eliza Doolittle and realised only now how she should have played ^{her} what a triumph it would have been had she not been under a spell, had the demon not stolen her acting abilities! She felt that Dusa didn't blame her for abandoning her art for love.

The Eliza lines made her laugh. She was a little tipsy after all. How odd that the lines hadn't seemed funny at the time! It felt as if only her body had been in the play. She looked round the crowded courtyard. Other people were sitting at her table, equally absorbed in their own thoughts, obviously people who worked nearby and wanted to get away quickly. Was she coming to life again?

Close to her hotel, in a corner of the Campo Santa Maria del Giglio, a woman was selling roses cheaply. She bought three or four dozen and expected them to fall to pieces in her arms, at that price. But they didn't. She asked for vases at the hotel desk and some were sent up. She had an enjoyable time cutting and separating them and deciding where they should go. There were burgundy reds, Sonyas, tea-yellows. It felt as if Dominic had got them for her, or rather that he'd planted the woman down there at the corner.

She slept for two hours in the afternoon, realising how exhausted she was. She took another coffee in the Campo Santo Stefano. So life went on. She bought herself underwear along the Mercerie, and perfume in the Calle Larga XX11 Marzo. She wandered about, ate two hearty meals a day, lay on her bed for hours watching the subdued liquid flashes of light from the Grand Canal on the ceiling. It continued fine for days—chill and clear at night, then the radiant mornings.

She knew what had happened. She was Caterina again. She realised it suddenly walking past the cake-shop in the narrow calle leading from

Campo San Maurizio. Her walk became different, her eyes seemed to open further. And people actually began to look at her again.

* * *

Recently she'd got into the habit of never looking at herself in the mirror, except in her dressing room at the theatre. She never made up in the morning. At the hairdresser's she would keep her eyes lowered. She did all manner of things to prevent seeing her reflection in shop windows and polished surfaces.

Only when in the theatre did she look at herself boldly, before quickly hiding the day-mask with the evening one.

Now she ran back to her hotel and went to a massive gilt-framed mirror in the lounge. She saw before her a girl much younger than she felt inside. And—while her face seemed not to have greatly changed since London—and of course it could be her imagination—her new state of mind—yet perhaps there was something of Caterina's sparkle in her eyes. She left the lounge vowing not to look in a mirror that day or the day after but to let Caterina grow back into her body at her own pace.

That evening she walked in the calli between San Zaccharia and the Square, gazing at the shops, and passing through the Campo Santa Maria in Formosa she turned and recognised the palace behind her with two bridges leading to its doors, from long, long ago. Then the impression faded. But it was a definite memory, like all those early ones she'd had in LA.

Nor was the impression an isolated one. All that evening she continued to feel about the buildings round her, the tiny bridges, the campi with their fountains or statues, that she'd grown up among them and knew every stone. But the impression always faded quickly, it was nothing you could put your finger on. Almost—almost—she would remember playing ball at this or that corner. She could remember the different qualities of the light that fell on Venice, changing every moment, and the smells, the pigeons, the gulls. She could hear the deep flap of wind-shaken sails in the lagoon. She could hear horses' hoofs on the cobbles—but didn't know if there had ever been horses in the city. She heard her mother's voice—rather rich and vibrato—'Cater-i-na!', with a long, singing emphasis on the third syllable. It stirred confused feelings in her. That voice had come from windows, had echoed across courtyards, so safe, so certain—'Cater-i-na!' Oh there'd been such love between people in those times!

She remembered the torches that used to be carried in front of

people at night to light their way, naked flames that licked up into the darkness. Sometimes they were stuck in iron holders on the walls of the palaces to light a procession. Otherwise, when one looked out of the window at night, it was into a dark, dark pool of shadows with the lagoon and the sea even darker beyond. And such a silence that you felt you could float into it and be lost for ever.

The possibility that Dominic might not come, that there might be no film, hardly occurred to her except to make her smile at the thought. She almost felt she could conjure Dominic up at will, just an urgent message through the darkness would do it. But she was in no hurry to see him—in even less of a hurry to start work.

Just to check that she hadn't dreamed her commital to be in Venice within a day of her release from Pygmalion she went to the bank on the Calle Larga XX11 Marzo where Barbara Gleeson had told her to go and enquired if an account had been opened for her. It had. And money had been deposited, much more than the stipulated advance on earnings.

She drew out enough to buy herself a dress, having seen something nice on the Salizzada San Moisè. It was a simple knitted blouse and skirt, quite ordinary to look at except for the exquisite cut. Its simplicity was a thorough success. She tried it on and bought it without hesitation.

She wore it next morning when she took a boat to Torcello and lunched at Cipriani's. There was exhilarating light all round from the lagoon, boring into every corner of the tiny island while it slept in the water. There were only a few people in the restaurant, tourists like herself. She had the distinct impression, from the way the waiters hovered solicitously round her, that she really was shedding the dreadful mask she'd been wearing all these months.

It was a thrilling sensation—to evoke positive feelings in other people again! What suffering it had all been—she only realised it now—being locked in a body that wasn't truly her own.

In the peaceful restaurant, listening to children playing outside, she allowed her mind to dwell on the 'other' Dominic that had brought her so much harm. Let him dare to touch her here—in her home, her birthplace!

It was so pleasant sitting in her corner sipping wine and cracking crostini while the omelette she'd ordered was being cooked. The waiters treated her with a soothing mixture of familiarity and respect. They

didn't mouth their words carefully as if she were a foreigner but spoke casually, rapidly, and it seemed to her for a few giddy seconds that she could understand what they said while being quite unable to put it into words.

The vague warmth from the wintry sun, the silent lagoon outside, the murmur of voices from the kitchen, this was her world, much more so than it was ^{that of} the waiters, the cooks in the kitchen because she'd been one of the people who'd built it all, generations, centuries ago! Like all her family, like all Venetians rich and poor she'd love Venice with a desperate, rapturous fanaticism. Her brothers—and she herself if necessary—would have died at a moment's notice for the Serenissima! That was ^{how} Venetians had built up an empire of over two million people down the Adriatic as far as Cyprus and Crete, while they themselves hardly number ^{ed} more than a hundred and fifty thousand. This mad abandoned love gave them each the courage of a hundred men! Betraying Venice was so unthinkable to herself and her brothers that the thought even of its possibility never occurred to them. That was why there was hardly an instance of a Venetian betraying the Queen of the Adriatic in all the thousand and odd years of its history. And that love was in her mother's voice, the way she called her name, and in the silence of the lagoon, in the changing light and the bells in the evening as the sun went down, in the way the minarets shone in the first sun of the day and the gulls wheeled and the sky spread out above the city like a huge blinding dome!

When you returned to your birthplace after so many centuries away there were many, many things to examine closely and remember, so many associations and sights and sounds you'd quite forgotten and which now came back with a gasping tug at the heart.

No one had sent her a script. Barbara Gleeson hadn't even mentioned one. She remembered Jamie Somerson telling her that Dominic was employing a team of writers to prepare a 'Venetian' script. What had happened to it? She laughed—it was a ghost film—no crew, no dialogue, no actors! That fitted Venice ideally!

She worked out that her savings, and what was coming in from the ghost film, would keep her in style for at least a year, if not two. Every day she looked in a glass now. The sparkle was growing. Every day too little attentions were paid to her, in the hotel, in the street, which hinted to her that she might once more be an attractive woman.

*

*

*

The sun disappeared and it began raining—a slanting rain that bit into the skin, while the paving stones underfoot became ice-cold. She had to buy fur-lined boots. The clouds hung low over the roofs, enveloping them sometimes. The windows of her apartment rattled and the shutters swung. The Grand Canal showed tiny dirty waves as the boats heaved from one bank to the other. She stayed lying on her bed for hours. Not a phonecall. Every day she asked at the desk but there were no messages.

She'd left London without saying a word to her mother or Louis. Now she wrote her mother a little card saying she'd been bought out of the Pygmalion production because the Ballet Russe film was about to be shot.

Her mother would know it had something to do with Dominic, just the same—the 'evil man'. She laughed. How little people knew about evil—that it was a mask and you could get behind the mask if you tried as she'd done with Dominic. And, as a matter of fact, he'd behaved towards her like a redeeming angel. So where was the evil?

Thinking of the ghost film again she realised that no one had instructed her to take intensive dancing lessons. After all she was going to play one of the greatest dancers of all time. She could easily join one of the daily classes at the Fenice. But she didn't. She preferred to stroll through the narrow calli behind the theatre and catch echoes of soprano or tenor voices echoing over the roofs. She strolled to and fro along the Riva degli Schiavoni, watching the car-ferry entering the Giudecca Canal from the Lido.

The painters of Venetian scenes along the Riva had packed up shop, their easles were gone. There were no photographers, no pigeon-food vendors any more. She walked ^ebetween the tall columns on the Molo, gazing at the numberless gondolas bobbing up and down among their mooring poles. Something made her look up at the columns. On one there was a haloed figure with a lance in one hand and a shield in the other. The column opposite had the lion of St Mark. She didn't like the feeling between these columns—a shudder sent her away, no doubt a memory from long ago.

She walked in the deserted Giardinetti for a little while with its neat gravel paths which in summer were full of prams and playing children. She often had lunch at Harry's Bar, upstairs. Her face became quite known there and the waiters referred to her as 'l'americana'. She often had an aperitif there in the evening, choosing the same corner, but downstairs this time. One of the waiters tried to strike up a conversation with her one evening, no doubt intrigued by her always being

alone, but she rebuffed him with a look that was neither offensive nor flattered but what he might have expected from any Venetian woman, which he accepted totally.

She felt lighter every day. She had the impression that her face was already more delicate, thinner. Like most women she knew that the best mirror is the world outside, the way it looks at you and responds to you, and she read her growing resemblance to Caterina in this mirror every day, more and more.

Two weeks had passed. She began to think it was absurd to pay for a large hotel apartment when she could easily rent a room somewhere.

She talked to the hall porter.

"What about the bill?" she asked him.

"The bill?" He put his glasses on and drew a ledger out from behind the desk. He spent some time examining it, coolly turning the pages, then he nodded as if to confirm an earlier guess.

"It was booked for two months and paid for," he said.

"Who by?"

"Saul Weinand Productions, Los Angeles."

The prevalence of water—sea—canals began to oppress her and she decided to hire a car at the Piazzale Roma and drive round the countryside every day. She went to Iesolo and wandered along the deserted beach. She gazed across the Porto di Lido at the long pier, from Porto Sabbioni, remembering—quite as if she'd been told in this life—how the water of the lagoon could flow out of these narrow channels while being protected by them against the Adriatic tides.

She drove to Udine and spent the whole day enjoying the crowded streets, the arch-protected pavements, the sound of the traffic. She picked a clamorous, crowded restaurant to eat in and sat at a tiny table by a potted plant on her own. There were Venetian chandeliers and a marble bar running the length of one wall. The waiters dashed across the room shouting their orders. Bottles were uncorked, rolls thrown into baskets and whisked on to tables, dessert trollies wheeled frenziedly through the narrow free spaces between the tables.

The day was dark and still outside. She thought she'd felt a touch of spring that day, the lightest hint. It was already March. The sky would be changing soon. The Lido would come alive, the shops and cafés in Iesolo would open their shutters, she would buy herself summer outfits and new bikinis.

A waiter dashed to her table and asked in a busy voice, "Have you finished with the oil?", whisking it off the table almost before she'd

nodded. It was done with so much familiarity, as if she were a regular comer. It was another little sign that her true nationality was recognised.

After five or six days she returned the car and settled down in Venice again, strolling about the calli as before, frequenting her favourite restaurants, especially one called da Gino, behind San Zaccharia, quite hidden away in the corner of a campiello, where they did a delicious zuppa di pesce.

She saw La Traviata at La Fenice, and some ballet. The ballet stirred no interest in her for her future work. Nor did the gilt-and-plush theatre itself stir the least professional excitement. The sound of the audience—its rustling motion when something was particularly appreciated—meant nothing to her. She preferred in fact the night air outside, damp and misty. The paving stones were wet too, even if it hadn't rained, for deep underneath of course was the silt and freshwater streams on which the city was built. She walked miles in the dead of the night, oblivious to any dangers there might be to her person. She strolled and strolled, sometimes stopping at a late-night bar for a quick amaro or a sandwich. She adored the Venetian sandwiches, bulging with Russian salad or tunna fish or chopped eggs and ham. Since she liked only a dash of milk in her coffee, she had learned to ask for a caffè macchiato. Or she drank an ombra, a 'shadow', meaning a glass of white wine. People were getting to know her face and nod to her pleasantly. She felt no need of friends.

One evening, feeling tired, she returned to the Gritti Palace early, meaning to miss supper and go straight to bed after a shower. The phone rang. It was the first time it had done so.

The hotel operator said, "One moment please", and there was a pause.

Then she heard Dominic.

Her heart didn't beat fast. It was like speaking to him after only an hour away, she had the feeling she'd only left the LA apartment a moment before, under the blonde wig and the wide-brimmed hat. He seemed to feel the same.

"I'm in Rome," he said. "You OK?"

"Yes."

"Rested?"

"Yes."

"You like Venice?"

"Oh I love it Dom!"

He laughed, delighted at her tone.

"Hotel OK?" he asked. "Nothing wrong?"

They laughed together, shy suddenly.

"I'll be coming up to Venice tomorrow," he said. "Is there room in that apartment?"

"Lots!"

"OK. Listen," he said in a different tone, "that information Pauline brought back from London—did she tell you?—about Sir Henry Wotton? Well, everything started working after that! I mean, it fixed the epoch when we lived in Venice and do you know what?—in one of my FM classes way back on Catalina Island I told Pauline, when I was very deep under, that I thought your name was Caterina Foss, something like that. Do you know what your name really was?"

"No?" (Now her heart did begin to beat a little faster).

"It was Caterina Foscarini! And I know who your father was! One of these writers I've been employing on the Ballet Russe series put me in touch with a guy in Rome who knows more about Venetian history than all the professors rolled together. That's why I'm in Rome. It's amazing what he's finding out! He's got archives and old documents, he's Venice crazy; there's nothing he doesn't know even to the height of the clogs the women used to wear! He works in some ministry."

She'd never heard Dominic talk like this, so bubblingly. In a way it disturbed her. There was a looseness she'd never known in him before, just a hint of it.

"Anyway I'll see you tomorrow," he said. "Expect me in the evening."

The next day was very still, dark, though dry. Most of the shops had their lights on. She was excited to know more about her identity. Foscarini! She—almost—remembered it but then it was gone in a flash as always. She bought a guide to Venice and a map, meaning to find out where Palazzo Foscarini was, but she forgot to do so in her passion for walking the calli. She strolled through the narrow Mercerie and weaved her way through to the Campo San Luca near the Rialto. People bustled along on either side of her, their voices raised. There were groups of people standing in the coffee bars. Now and then a handcart was pushed past her, the boy making a whistle or calling out "Attenzione!"

She'd woken at six and taken a quick shower. She didn't want to miss a moment of her city before he came. She'd been waking earlier and earlier these days.

She felt she knew the rather singsong Venetian dialect—it had been more open in her day because there'd been more love between people. She remembered her mother calling her again, it had given her as a child a sense of security so deep that worry had been unknown to her. The previous

life had better than this one, even the tragedies had been thrilling, they'd produced action, grief, revenge but not the kind of haunted anxiety she'd known in this life, not the gnawing worry-worm! So when she heard that 'Cater-i-na!' again a sort of placid delight flooded through her cells, a sense of blessing.

She took lunch quietly in the hotel. There wasn't a breath of air outside. The sky hung dark and immobile close to the roofs. She felt that every change of the light taught her something new about Caterina, evoked an experience that defied words or images but took place inside her.

She wondered as she sat in the restaurant gazing across the Grand Canal at the crooked Palazzo Dario with its strange coloured discs in the facade, if Dominic had been Venetian too. Caterina seemed to be telling her no, he was a stranger, come from very far away, or at least far away for those days.

She smiled to herself, lingering over her lunch. In LA he'd been on home ground. Now she was on hers!

* * *

He didn't come that night. Nor did he phone. She ordered dinner in her room and left something for him in case he should arrive very late. By one in the morning she was tired. The sky was exceptionally clear and she could see the stars despite the glow from the city. She switched off the lights and sat ^agazing across the canal. The passenger boats ceased. She dozed. She expected him at any moment. It was his way—to be mysterious. She woke up with a start in the silence. It was past three and she went to bed, where she slept soundly until past eight in the morning.

There were no messages at the desk. No Signor Latouche had called from Rome.

When she returned from a long walk there was a note for her. It was from Dominic, hastily written and slipped into an envelope. It said, 'I know who you are. I'm in the Biblioteca Querini-Stampaglia. D.' Just that.

She asked the porter if there was a place called Querini-Stampaglia in Venice and he told her it was a library.

She wanted to laugh—he was so like a child with his discoveries!

She waited for him to come at lunchtime but there was no sign. She went to da Gino and ate lightly, returned to the hotel. Still no one.

In the afternoon she slept. No phonecall.

She ordered an 'American' coffee in the apartment and sipped it lying in bed. She was restless for the first time since her arrival. What had happened?

She still felt Caterina was trying to tell her something. But she couldn't decipher the words. The messages came in waves of feeling but all she got was a sense of urgency, nothing cogent.

She took to walking the calli again, gazing at the shops, but it was different now, she felt a certain pressure on her. Too much coffee was going to her head, the tips of her fingers trembled slightly, she felt nervous. If only he'd come!

When she got back to the apartment the phone rang. She rushed to it. A woman spoke. It was her mother, calling from London. She'd just got her card.

"You must be mad, going without telling me!" she said. "Didn't you absorb what I told you about Paul?"

Angela didn't understand. She was listening to her mother but thinking all the time, 'This isn't my real mother'.

"Mummy, stop worrying," she said mechanically. "I was contracted to come to Venice ages ago and I would have had to leave the Pygmalion show anyway."

"But Paul mentioned dangers——"

"Dangers for whom?"

"For you!"

"Oh there are always dangers!"

Yvonne persisted: "Couldn't I come to Venice Angela? I could get a week off. You need looking after, you know you do, you don't look fit!"

"I do now."

"And what about the film, have you started work on it?"

"Not yet."

"Are you rehearsing?"

"No."

"So what's happening?"

"I'm waiting for the crew to arrive."

"All alone?"

"Yes," Angela said, "all alone and loving it."

"But what did they want you in Venice so soon for? I can't understand! Isn't the director there?"

"No."

"Who is then?"

"Nobody! Just me."

"And what about Mr Latouche?"

"He's here but I haven't seen him yet. He came yesterday."

"Angela this isn't right! I'm coming to Venice whether you like it or not. I'll be there in the morning!"

And Yvonne put the receiver down without another word.

Well, Angela thought, she'll meet Dominic and see for herself. She'll probably fall in love with him too.

The stillness of the previous day continued. It was dark, not a breath of air. People were listless, it was unseasonably close—afoso, the hall porter had said several times, waving his hand in front of his mouth—'breathless'.

In the afternoon there was another note waiting for her. 'Meet me in the Campo Santa Margherita tomorrow morning, ten o'clock—Dom.'

"Where's the Campo Santa Margherita?" she asked the porter, though she had a map in her room.

"Oh that's easy."

He showed her on the desk-map—it was quite near the Accademia where she always walked.

"Go from the Accademia to the Campo San Barnabà," he told her.

"Turn left along the canal and cross the bridge by a barge full of fruit and vegetables, it's always there, you'll see it, and then walk straight on and you'll see Campo Santa Margherita at the end of that calle, on the left."

He was pointing the route out on the map as he spoke so that his words were a translation she could follow with ease. In those few moments, as he spoke to her in a rather clipped Venetian accent, she had more a sense of actually being Caterina than ever before. She thought that this was why she hadn't gone upstairs to look at her map but asked the porter—just to hear him speak, and listen as Caterina would have.

She also began to be aware of Dominic in the city, quite close by. Where was he staying? Why didn't he come to her at once?

She had her first restless night in Venice. It was full moon, with a vast haze round it. The clouds had suddenly lifted at sunset. Hopefully it would be a warm, bright day for their appointment.

But in the night the clouds drifted back again, the wind dropped, and once more it was dark, still, breathless, when dawn broke, with the sky leaden and immobile, hanging heavily over the roofs.

She woke very early and chose the woollen dress she'd bought on the Salizzada. She wore a scarf with it as she had a slight sore throat. She felt quite nervous, troubled. Was this the old apprehension stirring again?

Once more she was aware of Caterina trying to talk to her but somehow not getting through. She walked to her café on the Campo Santo Stefano and took her usual caffè macchiato with a brioche. She strolled round the square afterwards and went inside the church, Santo Stefano, six times reconsecrated because of bloodshed within its walls.

At a quarter to ten she walked over the Accademia bridge towards Santa Margherita.

* * *

She saw him in a small coffee bar by the door. He was eating a sandwich, seated, his legs crossed, gazing at the floor. He was dressed in jeans and a blue sweater with a silk scarf, no shirt.

She expected him to look a foreigner here but nothing of the sort. He might have been one of those good-looking young men who hang about the Venetian squares, taking time off from work, waiting to go on an afternoon shift.

The square of Santa Margherita has squat arch-windowed palaces and, during the day, vegetable stalls in the middle. Today the stalls were under canopies and because it was so dark some of them had their gas-torches alight. The way this light fell on the paving stones, despite it being day, fascinated ^{her} and she wanted to linger outside in the square. She wondered that she didn't want to run to him. She felt she knew this light from an event that happened ages ago—something important, thrilling, dangerous but she couldn't really tell if it had been in this life or a previous one.

She stood gazing at him from outside. There was no great elation in her from seeing him again, nothing she would have expected after such a long and painful separation. And he too seemed in an indifferent mood—no anxious glancing up to see if she'd come, no fidgetting.

The image of the coffee bar with its strip lighting and him sitting there dark, compact, composed, was much like something glimpsed vividly in a dream—with vagueness and sleep all round it, and not leading anywhere.

Suddenly he looked up. He'd seen her. She watched him go to the bar in a leisurely way and pay. Then he came out and they walked towards each other coolly.

When his eyes were close, two or three yards away, and she could see into those pupils with their fixed, darkly indomitable gaze, a shudder went through her which she couldn't recognise as one of unbelievable delight or terror. It made her put out her arms weakly and totter—he ran the last few steps and with a sudden cry lifted her clean off the

ground and started whirling her in a circle. Then for a moment he let go of her so that ^{she} fell, slipping through his fingers, but he caught her again before she touched the ground, making her catch her breath. They were both laughing and crying in one, quite silently.

"Oh Dom, Dom!" she kept saying, half-hiding her face.

They stood still for a time, just kissing and hugging.

"Come on," he said, "I wanna show you something!"

He drew her towards a corner of the square, his arm round her waist, and she determined in that moment never to leave him again, not for a single second if she could help it. Her body, her skin, her sense of touch, her voice, her sight were all working again!

"I've never liked St Mark's Square," he said. "That's why I wanted to meet you here—it's the biggest square in Venice after St Mark's—and it's always been a people's square. And maybe you were born here! You've no idea what I've been finding out!"

He gazed at her sideways as if really seeing her for the first time and said, "You've got your face back!"

"Have I?"

"That's why I left you alone," he said. "In your own city, you had to get back to your old life in your own way."

"Yes!"

They were in a tiny square, hardly more than a corner of the big one, and he pointed to the palace facing them. "That's where Marco Foscarini lived. He was doge of Venice. But I can't tell you yet if your father lived there."

"Who was my father?"

"He was Antonio Foscarini. He was strangled in the ducal prison for knowing an Englishwoman."

"What?"

"First of all do you remember this house? Look at it carefully. Do you remember anything?"

She gazed at the dark walls, rather sombre, and noticed as she'd noticed many times before in Venice a wooden structure at roof level which she always assumed was for hanging the washing out.

"What's that wooden platform?" she asked him.

"They call it an altana and the women used to sit up there for hours sunning their hair until it was blonde. They used to put straw hats on with the crowns cut out—they put their hair through the top so that it draped all over the brim, which also protected their faces against the sun."

Of course! That was why she remembered being blonde though

dark! That was why she'd heard her brothers and sisters clattering up wooden stairs behind her, and ^{Rat} ^{so} felt high up! She'd spent hours up there among the roof-tops—combing and recombining her long hair until it was a bright briny gold! That was why she remembered voices booming far below her, and handcarts clattering on the cobbles—in those days you could smell the sea—you felt it all round you—you lived in its light—you sensed its storms—and at roof level you didn't get the stench of the canals at low tide.

"No," she said. "I don't remember this house, I remember those wooden platforms—!"

"That figures because this house wasn't built until the seventeenth century, in your lifetime, so maybe there was another family house and this one was built just for the doge Marco."

As they walked away he told her, "Your father Antonio died during the night of April 20 1622. He had an affair with this Englishwoman Lady Arundel who was the wife of the Earl Marshal of England. You see how much I know?" He laughed. "They had summer houses quite near each other on the Brenta—that was where the whole of aristocratic Venice moved in the really hot months."

"But you said he was strangled?"

"In the ducal prison, yes. It was absolutely forbidden in Venice to know a foreigner. You couldn't entertain them in your home. Now and then, at a stretch, you could visit a foreign embassy in an official capacity. Otherwise the political security was so hot you hardly dared look at a foreigner. The government had spies everywhere. You never knew who was a spy. Well, a spy saw your father paying visits to Lady Arundel's house in Dolo and he did a frame-up. He denounced him to the Ten for plotting to overthrow the Venetian republic together with the Earl Marshal of England. Venice was very touchy at the time, there was a very tense and suspicious atmosphere because only four years before the Spanish Plot had happened. So your father was arrested and thrown into gaol and as usual with a nobleman who'd betrayed the republic he was strangled in the middle of the night with catgut, in the dark, garrotted. Do you remember me telling Pauline that the figures three and ten kept coming into my regressions?"

"Yes, she told me!"

"It was the three Inquisitors, they controlled all the spies on in the city and arranged private murders when necessary, and the Ten used to administer and finance the spying—they were the two government agencies, tougher than anything the CIA or FBI ever dreamed up, you can take it from me! Now do you remember me asking Pauline to find out about an English guy who lived in Venice, some name like Wotten, and

she found out it was Sir Henry Wotten?"

"Yes. He was English ambassador."

"Right! Well when Lady Arundel heard that her lover had been executed she went to Henry Wotten and told him she was going to see the doge himself and complain. He tried to persuade her not to, since the charge against Foscarini had been high treason and the Venetians didn't mess around on that subject. But she went to the doge. She told him that Foscarini had been completely innocent, and she told him they'd had an affair. And she demanded that the senate officially proclaim her innocent of any political motives in seeing Foscarini. Well the doge agreed! The senate did make an official proclamation. And one year later the spy who'd denounced your father confessed that his evidence had been false, and he too was arrested and executed. Your father's name was posthumously cleared and he was re-buried with full honours in the Frari, which is just over there, shall we go and look at his tomb?"

"No! I'm tired and I want to go back to the hotel and enjoy looking at you——"

"Is that all?"

But he was still excited with his discoveries as they strolled back over the bridge. "When this Roman guy started talking about Foscarini I nearly went wild! It was obvious, you were Caterina Foscarini. And I know a lot more. Oh a whole lot more!"

They walked through the tiny square of San Barnabà and along the winding calle that crossed the Rio Malpaga.

"Did you miss me all that time?" she asked him playfully.

"I was just sick, sick!"

"You too!"

"Everything fell to pieces," he said.

"What do you mean."

"Oh I'll tell you later."

As they walked down the other side of the Accademia bridge towards Campo Santo Stefano he suddenly said, "And they hung your father on the Molo after he'd been strangled—have you seen those tall columns?"

"Yes!" She didn't tell him what a strange constriction she'd felt when looking up at St Theodore with his lance and shield.

"I found out I had the soles of my feet caned!" he went on.

"Venice was very cruel in those days. That was a torture they call the bastinado."

"Yes, Pauline told me."

"And I too was hung between those columns on the Molo after I'd been strangled!"

"What?"

"Now you know why I didn't want to meet you in St Mark's Square!"

"Oh Dominic please let's talk about something else—let's just be together!"

"We are together and we're going to stay together and we're never going to have that misery we've been through again."

"No!"

Later, before they reached the hotel, she asked him, "What about the film?"

"That's one of the things that fell to pieces. Jamie Somerson did a good job there, he worked so damned hard to break me and he got there because I was concentrated on this FM stuff and didn't care about anything else."

"But whatever happened?"

"I had him almost signed up for this Ballet Russe series, he'd agreed on the terms, we'd shaken hands on it, then he went to Merrytown and Barry Kurtz and said he'd only go through with it if I dropped out of the production. Now I don't know if you realise this but Jamie's right at the top now, he's got the golden touch and every producer knows it. So the banks heard about it and started pulling out on me, even my man in San Francisco went cold, so Merrytown and Kurtz said OK to Jamie, and made a secret deal with me for a third of the takings just the same, in exchange for the old knowhow and advice. But I was out of the film industry. Max Pennance joined in the kill as you might expect, and I believe he's directing the series. Anyway, inside twenty-four hours I had no more to do with the film industry than Pauline or your mother." He turned to her. "Do you remember me saying in one of the FM regressions that the three inquisitors were alive today in another incarnation?"

"Yes."

"And I said they're sort of protecting you, but they were still dark forces, remember that? Well I know now who they are. And they're out to kill the relationship between you and me ^{one} ^{is} ^{dead}."

"Who are they?"

"Well one's Sonya Steele. That's obvious huh? She called you up a short time before you left LA and boasted afterwards all over town that it was she who'd brought you to ^{you} senses and made you quit. The second's your mother. She's doing all she can to stop us seeing each other, that right?"

"Yes. She says she'll be here tomorrow morning."

"She will? Just let her try and find us, that's all. And listen, the third inquisitor's the biggest surprise of all. It's Pauline!"

"Pauline? But she loves us both, she's done more for us to be together than anyone on the earth!"

"Well, I said they were all protectors in a sense. And so they are. After all I had a scene going once with Sonya—and Pauline got me into FM! But now's reckoning time and they're all showing their hands for real!"

"But what's Pauline done?"

"She didn't want me to come here, that's all. She even tried to block me psychically—and she's certainly very potent that way!"

She hugged ^{Rim} as they walked the last steps, trying to get his mind on other things.

"This is where I walked every morning," she told him as they passed the cakeshop in Calle del Spezier. "I didn't buy a single cake, I wanted to be nice and slim for you!" She asked him, "Why didn't you come to the hotel right away, when you got to Venice?"

"I had a lot of organising to do, I'll tell you about it tonight, it's a big surprise!"

"Oh!"

When they walked into the apartment it was ablaze with yellow roses—seemingly hundreds of them. They were everywhere. New vases had been brought in. It was like spots of sunshine everywhere in the dimness.

He watched her astonished ^{re}edation, smiling.

She clapped her hands, "Oh Dominic how do you do it?"

She put her arms round his shoulders and her lips on his and without moving from him said, "I don't care if you're in the film business or out of it or whether you're rich or poor, I belong to you and you belong to me and nobody's going to tear us apart!"

The darkness made everything outside, even the listless Canal, look indoors. The warmth produced an uncanny sense of exhilaration mixed with lethargy.

When they sank on to the bed and began making love they had the sensation of disappearing into a different lifetime, not quite a human one but an existence that didn't depend even on consciousness. His body had none of the taut muscular vigour of the LA days. It felt soft, even frail, as if terrible deprivations had been suffered. Really they weren't two people any more. They hardly moved. It was like being under some delicious hypnosis that lasted for hours, bathed in a splendid light. They continually opened their mouths in astonishment

but could make no cry. And when the climax came, after several hours, it was painful because it wrenched them out of that newly discovered existence which was beyond anything they'd guessed at before. They lay there wondering what was going to happen to them—because love like that couldn't be made more than once. It was beyond endurance. The whole apartment seemed to ring with it, blaze still with light.

Little by little as they lay there Venice returned to their consciousness—the sound of the vaporetti, a ship's horn from the Giudecca Canal, the hotel lift, the clatter of pans from the kitchen below.

It was mid-afternoon and they took a quick lunch downstairs, hardly speaking. Then they went back to the apartment and ordered coffee.

"You see it was no good in LA," he said. "Things fell to pieces instead of building up. You did all those nude scenes, you signed a contract with Saul Weinand for the whole of Hollywood to see—just about everything you did was against being together with me."

He said it very quietly.

"Do you blame me for that?"

"Which am I supposed to blame—Angela or Caetrina?"

"Oh we're the same person now!" she said with a laugh.

"But you didn't know her in LA like you know her now! And I didn't know myself like I know myself now! All that film stuff and the French series and seeing your clips and you coming over to LA, that was just a preparation and I took it for the real thing, so when I heard you were doing the nude scenes I felt bad, I thought how could you betray me like that?"

"But I was an actress Dominic!"

"You could have refused certain things, you were in a strong enough position." He smiled at her. "Do you notice how you don't talk about your career any more? The Ballet Russe series has fallen through as far as you're concerned—oh I forgot to tell you that Jamie Somerson asked for you to be replaced too—and your contract's dead, you left the London play for nothing but you're not complaining!"

"I'm at home now! I don't need anything else!"

"Are you sure?" he asked her.

"Of course I'm sure!"

"That you'll never need anything else?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because in this life we always need things," he said.

The vaporetti had their lights on now and these were reflected on the ceiling as they passed, moving in ripples.

"Who were you then, in the other life?" she asked him.

She hadn't really wanted to ask the question. It felt as if he'd planted it in her brain, so slight was the boundary between them now.

"I was Alphonse de Ligeaux," he said. "How do you like that? Comte Alphonse de Ligeaux! You remember it now don't you?"

She said nothing so he looked at her piercingly in the semi-darkness and repeated, "You do don't you?"

She nodded but didn't know if it was the truth. It was like hearing a forgotten cousin's name, and with it came a vague stirring of pleasure mixed with fear.

"You remember you suddenly started enjoying chocolate on Catalina Island?" he said.

"Yes."

"Well the Comte de Ligeaux first saw you in your convent, in the parlour where it was allowed to mix with visitors under the eye of the abbottess, who was usually an aristocratic woman who'd never fished a husband. The convent parlour was an accepted market for future brides. You were seventeen at the time. As I told you before, it was forbidden for Venetians to mix with foreigners but I came to your convent under your father's wing, and I was very close to some of the great families of the so-called Golden Book, including the doge's. And also I was one of the leaders of a very important conspiracy, a top secret Venetian plot. Now I think one drank chocolate in those convent parlours. Does that ring a bell too?"

"It seems to."

"If your father had known I was after you he would have had me strangled at once, or thrown into a canal. Venice was very strict at that time. As it was, both he and I were strangled, and possibly in the same prison cell..."

They went on sitting in the darkness. She ^{didn't} want to listen any more but felt powerless to stop him, or curb her own curiosity.

"This guy in Rome, the ministry official, he's amazing—all I gave him were the names Caterina Foss and Sir Henry Wotten and he pieced the whole damn thing together! He reckoned that 'Foss' had got to mean either Foscari, another top family of the time, or Foscari. On the Foscari family he drew a blank—there was no Caterina. But in the Foscari family he found you, he said, 'She was the same age as the century—she was seventeen the year before the Spanish Plot'. And in that year I met you." He stopped. "Pauline told you about the Spanish Plot?"

"Yes."

"It was no such thing! In Paris, where I came from, I had a lot

of Venetian contacts through the embassy and also because I was in the habit of coming to Venice at least twice a year. I was involved in a lot of unofficial diplomacy, being related to the great de Guise family. One of these contacts came to me in Paris with a proposition. I was to live in Venice for a time, be received as if Venetian—a terrific privilege at that time. And I was to build up a small army of mostly Dutch soldiers with the objective of removing Spanish rule from Naples. Being a de Guise I had no love of the Spanish. My grandparents told me of the ^{French} feud with Philip the Second. And now that Philip was dead and the Spanish empire ailing I thought it would be good policy to help the decline in one of the empire's most important principalities. Now the Duke of Osuna, at that time viceroy of Naples, was a friend of mine and as anxious to get rid of his masters as the deGuise~~s~~ were. He was our circus leader. The plot was financed partly by him, partly by Venice. I came to this city and settled down in a palazzo on the Grand Canal."

There was something in his manner she couldn't understand. It sounded as if he was arguing a case, trying to justify some action.

"I was here over a year," he said. "Then the Spanish got wind of the plot and the Venetian government got scared. It was politically obliged to remove all evidence of what had been going on. No fewer than five hundred men were murdered in the course of two or three nights and the lie was put about by that trinity of liars, the Three, that a plot to overthrow the Venetian republic had been uncovered. The leaders like myself who had only the day before been received into the houses of the Golden Nobility, against all historical precedent, were strangled in prison after being tortured, and phoney confessions, ^{were} wrung from us. And afterwards we were displayed hanging between the columns of the Molo as your father was four years later."

"And what about Caterina?" she asked him. "You haven't said anything about her!"

"We were going to run away together after my mission in Naples was over, you and I. We made love several times, God knows how because there was a spy every fifty yards in that city! We were in a state of terror most of the time but it was worthwhile. You became pregnant. At first I didn't tell you about the plot, I couldn't."

"Did you eventually?"

"Yes. Oh I was so much in love I couldn't keep anything from you!"

"And what happened to Caterina after you died?"

"She didn't live to have the child. She went to the ducal prison after she'd seen my body hanging on the Molo and bribed one of the guards to let her have the body. An hour before midnight she rowed a small boat down the canal running under the Bridge of Sighs, to a prison exit. My body was delivered to her and she rowed it far out into the lagoon, and then to the sea beyond, and she was never heard of again."

"Oh Dominic!"

They sat there thinking about it in the darkness.

She was suddenly restless. "Dominic, put the light on. Let's go out for a walk!"

"OK!"

The air was still oppressive. Outside she was happy to be close to other people again, in the lights from the shops, with the echo of voices and footsteps all round. They strolled along holding each other by the hand. At the cakeshop they ate several of those tiny custard pies the Venetians call budini.

He was still absorbed in his theme. "Do you know," he said, "that Roman guy even found the name of your convent? Your family chose it for your name—it was the convent of Santa Caterina. I was there yesterday but there's nothing much to it now, they've turned it into a school. You can see San Michele across the water, the cemetery."

On the way back she said to him, "And what's your surprise for tonight?"

"That was in my mind too. Listen, you go back to the hotel, I've got a few things to do, OK?"

She looked at him quickly. She didn't want him to leave—not for a single moment. But she said, "All right", rather sadly.

He chuckled and kissed her on the cheek. "Either you want a surprise or you don't!"

"Yes I do!"

It was quite dark now, though still not evening. She went back alone. For a time she stood and watched the pigeons settling down for the night in the niches of the San Moisè façade. Then she looked at the shops along the Salizzada.

The apartment was heavy with the scent of roses. As she walked in the phone rang, but since it couldn't be Dominic she didn't hurry.

It was Pauline, from LA.

"I've been wanting to phone you all day but I only got the all-clear just now," Pauline said.

"What do you mean, all clear?"

"Well Dominic was around before, is that right? And I only ^{got} the signal just this minute that you were alone."

"What do you mean, all clear?"

"Well Dominic was around before, is that right? And I only got the signal just this minute that you were alone."

"Don't you want to talk to him then?"

"It's you I want to talk to! Angela, you've got to leave Venice."

"Leave?"

"It's dangerous for you, you've got to believe me. Come to LA, go to London, do whatever you like but you must leave, and at once, before he comes back!"

"I can't do that! He's only just arrived!"

"But Angela he's not fit to be wandering around like this. He got real sick when you ran away and he hasn't recovered yet, you can take my word for it! He should be back here ^{under} hospital care but you try and tell him that! It's written everywhere—in the Tarot cards, your horoscope, it came out in his FM classes! Angela I'm having dreams about this—you two shouldn't be together at this moment and I've never been proved wrong yet, even Dominic would agree there!"

"Have you two had a quarrel?"

"Oh come on Angela, we're always quarrelling, what the hell's that got to do with it? Maybe I should just have stepped on a plane and come on over. But I didn't want to lose time! This is urgent—listen, couldn't you trust me just this once, little actress, and pick up your coat and an overnight bag and take a taxi to Rome airport—don't go near Venice airport because he'll follow you there! And then come to LA and I'll explain all about it. Now don't worry about if you can see him again, you'll be back with each other in a few days, so what do you lose?"

"But we've had such a lovely time together! He looks marvellous! If he was sick I'd know Pauline. He's been going on a lot about his discoveries in Rome but he was always obsessed that way!"

"Listen you're both hung up on your previous lives and it's bad Angela! I know it's easy for an outsider like me to talk but you should both be moving on to new lives, not hanging back in the past!"

"It's Dominic who keeps doing that, not me!"

"Isn't that just what I'm trying to tell you? He's got his head full of how bad they treated him and how he was murdered in his cell and how he can still feel the bow-string tighten round his neck and the gloved hand clamping itself round his mouth in the middle of the night, and how he fought for breath and everything went black! Oh God I've listened to it a hundred times! But it's not what FM's about Angela, he's missed the whole point—!"

"He hasn't told me any of that!"

"Oh there's probably a whole lot he hasn't told you yet. I wish to

God he'd never heard about this Roman guy—but I'm the fool for doing that research on Henry Wotten!"

"Pauline," Angela said quietly, "I can't leave him. I can't bear to be away from him a single moment now. We've waited all this time to be together, it's more than I could take physically. I think it's the same for him. We're in the city where we belong. I've never felt at home as I do here. I hardly know my mother any more, honestly, she's like a stranger to me—I feel I belong more here than anywhere else I've ever been in any incarnation!"

"OK," Pauline said patiently, "I'm not trying to bar you from Venice. But you could make an effort—just for me—come here and talk a bit, then you'll be ready to have a marvellous time with him! At the moment there's danger—for you both! Oh God what an effort it always takes to save somebody from himself!"

"Pauline I do trust you and I will try—!"

"To leave?"

"Yes!"

"Right now?"

"I'm going to try my hardest!"

"That's great! You'll never be sorry Angela."

"If I don't succeed that's too bad but I promise to try. So long as you can tell me it's not going to harm anything between me and Dom?"

"It's the only way Angela. You've got to get out of the danger, then you can be together later."

"But if he was so sick when I left before—he might committ suicide this time!"

"Leave him a note, OK? Tell him I called and you'll be with me in LA for a few days and you're coming back, you don't understand what I want etc. He'll chase you to the airport so that's why you've got to take a boat to the Piazzale Roma and persuade a taxi driver to take you to Rome. Have you got enough money?"

"Yes."

She sat thinking about it afterwards. Not for a moment did she consider leaving. There were things she couldn't tell Pauline. For instance that the sex they'd had that day had taken them out of the present world—it was therefore useless to talk about danger in the present world because the present world didn't count any more. How to explain that? How to explain that she and Dominic were one person now—and that physical separation, even for a few days, would kill them?

Most people never experienced this thing that he and she had—

most never even dreamed that such a thing was possible between two human beings. So they read danger in it. Of course. It was dangerous. Hadn't Pauline herself described this thing as a bomb, which she, Angela, was treating like a home-made firework?

This was what she told herself. She did try to consider leaving, as she'd promised. But the thought was gone no sooner than the effort was made.

So Dominic was right—Pauline was one of the 'inquisitors' who wanted to tear them apart!

She walked about the apartment settling the roses in their vases, taking away a few leaves to make them more comfortable, changing the water though it was fresh enough. Their scent reminded her of her suite at the Beverley Hills hotel—what a callow, ambitious youngster she'd been then—and how different from this composed Venetian woman looking after her roses!

The phone rang again and she was sure it was Pauline to ask her what she'd decided. But it was Dominic.

"This is going to take more time than I thought," he told her. "I shan't be through till around ten tonight. Listen, would you meet on the other side of Venice around half-past ten if I told you exactly where to come? Have you got a map there?"

She went and got the map she'd bought.

"Is all this in aid of the great surprise?" she asked him.

"Yeah!" He laughed. "Are you ready? You can take a taxi if you're feeling lazy but if you want to walk go to St Mark's Square, then along the Riva degli Schiavoni until you come to a sort of park, that's the Giardini. Do you see it there?"

"Yes."

"Now you walk right along by the Giardini with the lagoon on your right, OK?"

"OK."

"Looking more or less straight ahead, slightly to the right, you see the Lido on the other side of the water. Now at the end of the Giardini the path curls left for a few yards. Just keep going and you'll find a bridge that crosses over on to the island of Sant' Elena. Are you with me?"

"Yes."

"That's about half an hour's walk, maybe three-quarters with high heels."

"And what happens at the bridge?"

"You'll see me—I'll call out to you!"

"But why is this taking so long to prepare?" she asked him.

"Well, if it was LA it'd take me all of fifteen minutes but here I've got the language barrier!"

"I'll see you at half-past ten then."

"Cover yourself up, it gets misty at night."

"OK."

Busy evening sounds rose to the windows—people hurrying by in the square below, shop shutters lumbering down. She lay on the bed with the lights out until about half-past nine. She didn't feel like eating.

She slipped a coat on and went downstairs.

It was as warm as May but with a heaviness, a stillness that marked it as unhealthy. Yet she enjoyed the ailing weather. It made her feel pleasantly sleepy, it parched her already sore throat, which also had something uncannily pleasant about it.

She walked slowly. Most people were at dinner by this hour. She took the calli behind St Mark's and emerged on to the Riva degli Schiavoni at San Zaccharia. From many windows came the sound of dishes clattering together. A few people passed. Otherwise Venice had a deserted look.

She walked past a huge American cruiser anchored at the Arsenale. From the via Garibaldi came the sound of laughter and raised voices—she saw lights in the trattorie and bars. A few ^American sailors were leaning over the rails of the upper deck gazing down in silence, smoking.

Then came the gardens. Everything grew darker here. Across the water were the distant lights of the Lido and the casino. The path narrowed, at the edge of the lagoon, and here she was quite alone. The gulls soared and dipped silently in the air, making their cries.

She knew that when Dominic promised her a surprise it would be a real one, a beautiful one which she couldn't have thought up in a thousand years.

The path curled left at the end of the gardens just as he'd said. And ahead, among pine trees, lay the residential island of Sant' Elena.

She saw him just beyond the little bridge, on the other side of the canal that divided Venice from the island. He'd just stepped out of a rowing boat. It looked remarkably new. There were coats, blankets inside. They were going for a row in the lagoon! She was so excited she let out a cry before he'd seen her—and he turned round startled.

She ran over the bridge to the fondamenta where he was mooring the boat.

"Isn't it a beauty?" he said.

"It's lovely, Dom, lovely!"

They kissed each other.

"Do you know," he said, "I read somewhere that the best way to see the Lido was to take a gondola and cross the lagoon to it at night but I don't want a gondola—I want to do my own steering and it took about three days of mouth and money to convince this Bucintoro Club to let me have a licence for this thing so that one of their vaporette can run us down!"

He took her arm and led her away from the boat. "I can't take her out till eleven, so let's take a stroll. You feel OK? Warm enough?"

"Oh yes!"

They walked back over the bridge to the gardens and leaned against the wall overlooking the lagoon.

"It's so quiet," she said.

"You see, nobody could tear us away from each other after all, could they?"

"No!" She looked at him, wondering if he knew about Pauline's call in some way. But she said nothing about it because it seemed so unimportant to both of them.

"And now we're alone," he said, "I can tell you what really happened to me—how I was betrayed. I would have been strangled anyway—"

"Oh Dominic let's think about something else! It's such a lovely night!"

"You've got to listen to this. I've been waiting to tell you all this time and now you must listen because you can't go on in ignorance any more!"

"All right."

"It was you who betrayed me! It was Caterina, long before the Spanish got wind of any plot!"

She drew away from him. But with the unusual strength he could at times muster he held her close to him.

"You see, I had to tell Caterina about the plot, I couldn't hold it back any longer. That was my mistake. I had to explain why I'd be away for some time, perhaps months, and why I couldn't take you with me. I told you that something very secret was going on. I didn't mention Naples. I told you I was one of the leaders. I said that one day if you were very patient you'd receive a note at the convent telling you where to meet me and that then you must give up everything—family, possessions, everything so that we could flee to France. There was no chance, you see, of your family or the Venetian government agreeing to a patrician girl like Caterina marrying a foreigner."

She tried to pull him away from the wall, wanting to walk. But he went on, "Listen! You went back home—you couldn't get it out of

your head that I was never coming back and that I was plotting against the republic. You were a kid after all! But anybody else might have thought the same. Venice was full of rumours. People couldn't understand why there were so many foreigners in the city. They thought they were there to protect the city against a Spanish plot. Your brothers told you this in whispers. You knew I was a close friend of your father's, and received by some of the greatest families. You were sure that these people knew nothing about my plotting activities. Every day there were fresh rumours that the Spaniards were preparing to blow up the ducal palace and seize the doge. Well, we—I mean the Three and the Ten and leaders like myself—were spreading the rumours! So naturally you thought I must be connected with the Spanish Embassy in some way. Now Venice was everything to you, your life and blood and breath! It was more important than a lover. How could you stifle the Venetian blood in your veins? It ran so thick you were prepared to sacrifice your own life—your child's! All Venetians were like that! Venice was beyond all private interest for them and betraying the state was the crime you paid for with the worst tortures ever devised! So you went and told your brother, whose name was Paolo. You called him Paolino. You told him you'd heard something strange about his father's friend—you hid the real facts, about me being your future husband, about the child—and that was easy because for the moment all they wanted was to get me! Well, your brother went to your father, and your father went to someone he knew to be in contact with the Three. They didn't arrest me. They told him to go on entertaining me—outside his home of course—and meanwhile they watched me. That was their excuse. They intended to do nothing, certain that I would be in Naples within a few weeks. As it happened the Spanish got wind of the plot about ten days later. Do you realise they might have heard about it because of you? Do you see what reckless things you do sometimes, running away from your affinity, refusing the love it took whole lifetimes to achieve!"

"Dominic!"

"One of your brothers may have blabbered—the Spanish embassy had spies all over the city! So we were all arrested, murdered, thrown into the canals, the soles of our feet were caned until they burned away, we were strangled in our cells, slowly, the blood bursting in our heads, the breathing slowly stopped, struggling against the gloved hand in front and the tightening of the bow-string from behind—look—look! I've got it here! I've got the thing here!"

He pulled a long stout piece of cat-gut from his pocket.

"Do you see this? The Roman guy gave it to me—one of his most precious relics. It could be the string I was strangled with, do you realise that? Look at it Caterina, look at it!"

It was trembling in his fingers, hanging.

She began crying, struggling.

But then she remembered how she had rowed him far, far out on the lagoon and that she still knew the way, along the lanes marked out with piles on either side, past Porto Sabbioni to the open sea.

He put his arms round her and she knew almost thankfully that it had been for the last time, that afternoon.