

The Amorous Adventures of Sarah

Running into Trouble



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*The Amorous Adventures of
Sarah:
Running into Trouble*

Emy Naso

Chapter One

Where Do I Go To, My Lovely?

The body looked beautiful. Turning and studying its shape and the way the hips moved was an experience that wasn't fully understood. If it moved this way then that, the provocative tilting of the head and the presentation of a glimpsed suggestive invitation was enough to fire imaginations. The more the delight was half-hidden, merely alluded to and then like a will-of-the-sexual-wisp, kept back from submission, the greater was the heightening of the erotic stimulation somewhere deep in the brain.

The streams of condensation ran down Sarah's skin, reflecting in her naked image in the steamy full-length mirror opposite the bath. Hands cupped her fulsome breasts, and she marveled at the wonder of nature and the ingenuity of genetic necessity. That so functional and motherly needs had become the object of deepest desires and dreams was a miracle of mind over sensibility. Those same hands ran down the wet body, Sarah marveling at the curves of the hips and the sensual delight of that prominently protruding rear, characteristic of the female form.

Songs had been written about the eyes, the hair, the lips and even the figure. Yet where was the tune, the lyrics that celebrated that ass, that essential prerequisite to the come-on, the harbinger of promise, the fulcrum around which the sensual walk and final surrender was centered. More ships had been launched in the war of sex because of a swaying rear and a rolling ass than were ever launched across the

Aegean to bring back an errant lady fled to Troy. Homer, you should be ashamed.

Dallying for a minute, the hands wandered to the secret garden, with its black triangle of well-tended shrubbery. This was exquisite to the touch and even more sensational to the heated thoughts. To enter or not to enter. Although the debate was moot, it was not long delayed.

Hands felt over the bulge of the pudenda and fingers spread out to become invaders of the moist valley and fiery cavern. The sensation made the body quiver and hastened the fingers into greater gratification.

Sarah Greene finished the exploration of her body and stepped out of the bath. At the moment it was the best type of relieving sex—men were too much trouble. Anyway, she needed to get her head together and could do without the complication. She didn't understand their fascination with her body, almost to the exclusion of any interest in her mind. It had always been the same ever since schooldays and now she was in her mid-twenties.

Rationalization of that age-old conundrum could wait. Along with sex, she had the big problem of money. Or the lack of it, to be precise. Ryan Richards had looked a good bet. Then the rich man had gotten himself arrested for company fraud and...well, that wasn't important. Sarah had been priming him as a sugar daddy and then the sexually drooling fool spoiled her plans.

So what now? She certainly couldn't stay in this expensive Edwardian house located in the smartest part of Campington. Sarah got dressed and decided when the going got tough, the foolish stayed around. She flicked on the television and watched a black and white movie. That man and woman were in it. The pair who were more famous for their offscreen romance than the films they starred in. What were their names?

It got to the scene where they were walking over some bridge by the sea and the unconvincing back projection was showing automobiles flashing behind them. Sarah was sure the same vehicle went past three times.

“This is so romantic,” the woman said.

“All those car fumes,” Sarah muttered.

“I could stay here forever with you,” her male lead replied.

In the middle of a bridge! Sarah shook her head in disbelief. Then suddenly she got up, turned the TV off and said to herself, “That’s it, girl. Get the hell out of here and go to the coast.”

Fifteen minutes later Sarah was strolling to her car with four cases packed, whistling a cheerful tune and posting an envelope with the keys to her rented house back to the letting agency.

It was six o’clock in the morning; the birds and the milk deliveryman were singing—one out of tune, the rest reasonably melodic. And she hadn’t got a clue where she was going.

Sarah Greene was getting the hell out of this situation and leaving behind two months unpaid rent, a couple of guys who thought they owned her, a half-empty fridge with an opened tin of rancid tuna and some memories she’d not be bothering to store away in her head. The past was a land best visited when the future was rosier.

Packing up her troubles in an old kit bag would only have been half right. Sarah preferred her travel cases to be somewhat better branded. The dark gypsy-eyed girl with the figure that had been her source of fun, fellows and fucking problems was on the move again. It was summer and the living was far from easy.

Chapter Two Where Am I?

Geography wasn't Sarah's strong point. She knew her way into trouble and had a highly tuned instinct for heading quickly out of it. After four hours in the car with the CD playing at full belt, ear-splitting volume, the lady of the crystal eyes hadn't got a clue where she was. All Sarah realized was she couldn't go any further. That wasn't an inner cry of despair. She stared out of the front window as she stopped the car and saw this great expanse of gray-blue stuff—called the sea.

She couldn't go east. West would only take her back from where she was running, and south and north was a long stretch of promenade. Sarah decided being somewhere in particular wasn't important. Being somewhere to enjoy a better life was. She parked the car and decided to check this place out.

Most cities only change in minor aspects from one season to the next. Seaside towns are like people with a traumatic identity crisis. Go there in the winter and the faded signs and salt-and-wind-damaged boarded shopfronts give the impression of someone on the skids. Arrive in the height of the summer and the lady has painted her face, spruced up her hair and become a gaudy, garish extravaganza of promised dreams.

This was the season of bright lights, crazy people and families trying to enjoy themselves. Sarah strolled along the main drive fronting the sea, dodging kids with candyfloss, raucous parties spilling out of the slot

machine arcades and the fellows down for the day from the big cities—and giving Sarah the glad eye. She'd put more sophisticated guys than these in their place and took the whistles of appreciation in her stride. And what a stride.

Swaying along by the sea, she gave the folk the full benefit of those gorgeous hips and casually worn blouse, with its oh-so-innocently undone three top buttons. She understood the game, she knew at least a dozen men watched and indulged their imaginations. With a you'll-be-lucky glance over her shoulder, Sarah did a little shimmy and turned sharply, but elegantly, right into an arcade wonderfully called Hot Tip Tavern. She smiled to herself and thought of a man she'd met in London about three years ago. "Scorching end" might have been a better description. She giggled.

"Glad to see such a pretty lady can laugh and still look gorgeous."

Sarah kept her gaze straight ahead. She'd learnt that smart-ass remarks like that usually came from guys with big mouths and shallow pockets.

"Dressed to kill with a look to murder for."

That was better than the average chat-up line. It might be worth a cursory response, even if it was a put-down.

"These are just a steal. You should see how I dress when I've really got homicide on my mind," she threw at her admirer. He didn't flinch and run scared at the lady's sharp tongue. As Sarah stared at him, he examined her with an insolent artful-dodger, head-inclined expression, which she found intriguing.

He wasn't in any obvious mold. Not a rakish lounge lizard; not a jack-the-lad type; nor a man who was dressed like a tailor's dummy with all the best gear, expensive accessories and the obvious intention to shed plenty of bullshit in an attempt to impress.

The man before her was late twenties—she guessed—lean; wearing the type of spectacles last seen on Buddy Holly; very fair, curly hair; and a raised lip he was probably borrowing from a character out of the Method School of Acting.

“You’re not from around here?”

Sarah batted her eyes to show the banality of the question. “No, I landed this morning after a three-light-year journey across the universe and just had to visit this fascinating amusement arcade—it’s on every extraterrestrial’s must-see list.”

He didn’t blink at her mockery. Sarah thawed slightly.

“Do you have a name?”

“Billy Fields.”

She noticed the cute way he did a little flourished bow when introducing himself. Self-deprecation got him brownie points.

“And you, interstellar lady?”

“Sarah Greene.”

“Well, Sarah, dazzling beauty of the firmament, fancy an early drink? There’s a little nifty bar just along the promenade.”

She weighed him up and decided she’d coped with plenty of men. He looked cheeky...but controllable.

“Beam me up, then.” Sarah grinned.

The Caesar’s Bar was fake at its most outrageous. Sarah picked up the cocktail list from a table as Billy chatted to everyone. Evidently he was well-known for something.

“What you having?” Billy asked, returning his attention to Sarah.

Her dark eyes flicked down the menu. *Augustus Special, Marcus Aurelius Bomber, Nero Firewater, Mark Anthony Nile Kicker*. Sarah smiled and decided whoever devised the list had a better understanding of booze

than of Roman Emperors. She debated about a clever remark on what Mark Anthony was doing in this list of Caesars. She thought better of it.

“Just a beer,” she said.

“Any particular brand?”

“How about a Caligula. I like drinking out of little boots.”

Billy did a double take of incomprehension.

“Forget it. Whatever they’ve got.” Sarah shrugged. Showing a knowledge of Latin nicknames was a step too far on a first meeting.

The bouncing Billy made his way to the bar, joking and saluting high-fives in every direction. The barmaid got a saucy mouthful of his banter and giggled at something he said. Smiling to every point of the compass, he got back to the table, put down two bottles of beer and pulled up a chair with surreptitious looks to all corners of the room.

“Expecting visitors?” Sarah asked sardonically.

He chuckled but chose to ignore the remark. “Ever done any modeling?” was his unexpected question.

“Not that old line. Next thing you’ll be saying is that you can get me into the movies.” Sarah huffed and sipped her beer.

“This isn’t a line. I’m a photographer. I’ve been looking for a girl like you.”

“I bet you have,” Sarah mockingly said.

“Look, babe, the moment you walked into the arcade I knew you would be right for this photo shoot. It’s for a promo.”

Sarah’s experience told her this might be a come-on. But her funds were low. Maybe he was genuine. “So what does it involve?” she tentatively said through another sip.

“Come along to my study and we’ll discuss it.”

Sarah finished her beer and tried to make this character out.

Chapter Three

What a Fool

It took ten minutes to walk from Caesar's Bar to Billy's studio. They got to an amusement arcade called Atlantic View. Sarah stopped and pouted her lips.

"Anything wrong, babe?" Billy asked, noticing her perplexed look.

"Geography ain't their strong point around here either, is it?" she disdainfully returned.

He raised an eyebrow in question.

"We're on the east coast, buddy. The Atlantic is over on the west. Even I know that, and I get lost in supermarket aisles."

Billy shrugged as if that was beyond his comprehension.

As they entered a side door and went up narrow wooden uncovered stairs, Sarah caught hold of Billy's coat. "Is this your studio?" The tone was skeptical.

"Home and work together." He cheerfully dismissed her quizzical question. "In here," Billy said as he opened a door leading out of the lounge.

Sarah saw that this was supposed to be the studio. Three flash lights with white and silver umbrellas stood at the back and side, fitted with barndoors and reflectors. The camera was a Hasselblad medium format. Sarah had once been a model and recognized that. At least Billy had all the right equipment.

At the end of the room were a stand and a few backdrop rolls of paper. One had been fitted and curled across the floor. Sarah wondered if everything had been set up anticipating her arrival. That was silly, of course. She'd only just met the guy. Perhaps he was genuine and had been looking for a model.

"Just two things," she tackled him straightaway. "What do I wear and how much?"

He remained silent, which—even for the short time she'd known him—was unusual. If he wasn't talking, he would be whistling or grinning, *loudly*.

"That assumes I wear something." She sensed his hesitancy.

"Now look, babe, it's up to you. What the agency needs is a real stunner for the front of their magazine that will lift the promo. You can do bikini, underwear or, if you want, topless." He stopped to gauge her reaction.

Sarah remained impassive. "I don't mind." She shrugged...and then quickly and firmly added, "Firstly, the money goes up as my clothes come off. Secondly, the fee is to photograph my body. It covers inspecting the goods...not testing them out." The last sentence was said with Sarah's most determined glare. Her eyes were hypnotic in play but commanding in seriousness.

"Let's try underwear." Billy nodded to say he understood. Sarah put her foot up on a chair and took a shoe off.

"You can change behind there." He pointed to an area with a drape across.

"You'll be seeing me soon, so why worry?" she replied and removed the other shoe.

Billy fiddled with the lights, taking readings for the flash and adjusting the aperture on the camera. Sarah unbuttoned her blouse, slid

down her skirt and sidled over to a mirror to check her make-up and hair. If Billy was watching as she leaned forward to focus, his interest wasn't obvious.

She turned and stood, letting him take in the effect of her body.

"Try a few poses," he suggested.

Sarah knew the tricks and cavorted in the usual angular model stances, making sure her cleavage was well thrust forward and her ass pertly stuck out.

"Red suits you," Billy enthused.

"Surprised you noticed the color. Most guys just see the underwear."

She pranced and posed for about an hour and a half; then Billy called a halt to check the lighting.

"I reckon we've got the shots we need." He broadly grinned.

"What, you don't want my bra off?" she said in a teasing voice.

"You're beautiful as you are," he flipped back.

Sarah stood, hands on hips and let her bottom lip slide up over the top one in a perplexed expression.

This was a first. Most guys would be salivating over the prospect of a peek at her boobs.

"I reckon it's time we hit the town," Billy put in.

"Sure," Sarah said and got dressed.

The night out didn't demand a long journey. Down the stairs and through the Atlantic View arcade to a club at the back took five minutes.

The noise was heavy. The air and alcohol fumes mixed with every brand of perfume on the market. It wasn't really Sarah's scene. Even though only in her mid-twenties, she felt slightly out of the loop.

Many of the girls were just that. They were the main element on the dance floor in their flimsy tops, short skirts or tight black trousers and

painted immobile faces. If this was enjoyment, the emotions seemed missing.

Sarah Greene and Billy Fields found a seat by the far bar and got in a couple of beers. The beat relentlessly thumped as dance and garage music reverberated around the club.

“I think you’ve got an admirer already,” Billy shouted in her ear above the cacophony of jungle rhythm.

Sarah followed his nodding head. Two men were leaning against a side bar, sipping drinks and endeavoring to show interest without losing their cool. Sarah was always amused by male antics. Sex seemed to be perpetually on their mind, yet they had to pretend a certain disinterest as if honesty would ruin their image. She looked down at her drink and decided to let them make a move. She was also conscious of Billy’s presence. He was a good-looking guy—not her sort, but she didn’t want to offend him. Men had such delicate egos.

“They’re both gorgeous,” Billy said and continued to stare at them. “Which one do you like?”

Sarah haughtily shrugged. Before she could say anything, Billy got up and was strolling over to the guys. She casually watched as he chatted and laughed with them. After a few minutes Billy came back and sat down.

“The dark-eyed one is Bolan. That’s his name, not an impediment,” Billy joked. “And the slim one with sandy hair is Meo. Real cute, isn’t he?”

Sarah took a sly look. Bolan was tasty.

“Well?” Billy nudged her arm.

“Well, what?”

“Don’t get all little Miss Goldilocks with me.” Billy tutted. “They’re after a night out...testing the beds and the porridge might come later.”

She stared over at Billy. He grinned in an engaging way. “Come on, Sarah. It could be fun. You have Bolan and leave the adorable Meo for me.” He chuckled and nudged her arm again in a playful way.

She shook her head and thought, *You fool, Sarah.*

Billy winked at her. “Yes, you’ve got it at last. Show your tits to me as much as you want, you saucy floozy, I prefer the boys.”

Chapter Four

Lies, Damn Lies and Russians

Seagulls were early risers, swooping along the sand and pecking at the food leftover by the humans. Before each beak full a quarrel ensued with at least twenty other claimants to the morsel of food. Sarah wasn't used to viewing the day at this time. She preferred it to be well aired before she got up.

The sun shone directly into the room as it rose in the east across a flat expanse of sea. She focused her eyes and memory but didn't recognize the bedroom. Somewhere in her mind she knew reason and sense were waiting to be found. Just at the moment all was confusion.

The lady of the sparkling eyes peeked over the top of the duvet and wondered how she could be in a double bed with mauve covers. What a color to greet you in the morning. Stretching her legs and wiggling her body she realized there was nothing between these hideous sheets and her warm skin. Sarah Greene was naked in someone's bed.

With an aching brain and sinking feeling in the stomach, she rolled over, sensing the presence of a larger-weight body on the other side of the bed. The figure was entirely submerged under the duvet. Sarah pushed out a leg and quickly came into contact with the body. The toes of her right foot tracked up the leg, feeling the thighs and then a rear. Both were naked.

She tentatively let her hand touch the back and shoulders. Still no clothes, just male skin.

She decided to confront the man, and sat up in bed, coughing to draw his attention away from the land of nod. It took four throat-clearing blasts and a jab in the ribs before the guy even began to stir. Slowly the torso moved, and like a porpoise coming up for air, a head pushed up from under the duvet.

“See, you didn’t get lucky either.” Billy grinned and ran his fingers through his tousled curly hair.

“What happened last night?” Sarah snapped angrily.

“Don’t get petulant with me, Miss.”

“Sorry, I’m just a bit lost.” Sarah tried to row away from aggression.

“If you lost anything last night, young lady, don’t look at me.”

Sarah weakly smiled at his humor. “Your memory might be better than mine, Billy. How did I get here...in this state of undress?”

He sat up and looked at her boobs, giving a mock gasp of horror at her boldness. “Do you remember Bolan and Meo?”

Sarah nodded impatiently as if she wasn’t that much of an idiot.

“Well, we had a good night at the Atlantic View club.”

She again indicated her frustration that he was telling her something she already knew.

“What about the cabaret?”

“No, I don’t remember that,” she said with a perplexed look.

“Didn’t think you did. Well, they had a sort of troop of exotic dancers. It got very lively with the drinks becoming ever more weird and large. You got up and did your own version of a Turkish Belly dance.” Billy paused to study Sarah’s reaction.

She sank her head in her hands and groaned.

“Then Bolan and Meo were dragged up on stage. The last I saw, Bolan was chasing off-stage after a little tarty number and that two-timing Meo was being carried away by a husky Cossack bitch.”

“And then?” Sarah hurried him along.

“I had no idea if you had a place to stay so I brought you back here.”

“And,” she prompted.

“This apartment is very small—only one bed—so I tucked you up next to me,” he said in a matter-of-fact way.

“And,” she continued.

He screwed up his twinkling big brown puppy eyes, then opened them wide. “Bolan doesn’t know what he missed.”

“I thought that didn’t appeal to you,” Sarah threw back.

“I’m a vegetarian as well, babe, but I still like looking at the cows in the field.”

Sarah roared with laughter and hit him with a pillow.

Not having got to bed until three in the morning, they started their day at mid-afternoon. Sarah took a shower, and Billy rustled up some scrambled eggs on very soggy toast. When he beamed and put it on the table, Sarah pushed the plate back across the table and stared up at him.

“Sharing a bed with you is fine, Billy. I’m not prepared to indulge your fantasy that you’re a cook. Let’s get out of here and find a decent café.”

Strolling along the promenade arm-in-arm with a fellow that wasn’t intent on getting her panties off was a new experience for Sarah. She liked having a good-looking guy with her. One who she could talk to as a friend. Every other man in her life who she’d tried to have as a buddy

thought that meant possession of her body. Something usually came between them—mainly her tits or his stiff cock.

“Over there,” Billy directed her, with a well-guided hand on her ass toward a café called Betty’s Best.

The lady who greeted them as they entered must have been the eponymous owner. She was broad, round, brassy of hair, jolly of nature and loquacious of tongue. If ever a woman was made to run a bawdy whorehouse, with an upright piano playing in reception and hot and cold running happy hookers in every bedroom, it was Betty.

“Full breakfast?” She welcomed Billy and kissed him on each cheek. This wasn’t an air embrace done in a churlish manner. She grabbed the man, hugged him to her bosom and then sent a search party in to give him oxygen. Sarah sat at a table and observed the scene.

“And for you, my darling?” Betty addressed Sarah.

“A bit late for breakfast?” Sarah queried.

Betty gave her an old-fashioned pitying look as if to wonder where Billy had found this posh bit of totty.

“Make it double egg and a few slices of bacon,” Sarah said, more to break the deadlock of the two women looking and weighing each other up.

Billy came over and sat with Sarah. There was a crash of exuberance from the kitchen, a smell of years of cooking oil, and shouts of orders mixed with confusion. Within a few minutes two plates were cheerfully slapped on their table by a young girl barely out of school, but almost completely out of her blouse and short skirt. Sarah had seen more material in a man’s handkerchief than was around the girl’s waist.

“Brown or red?” she chewed through a mouthful of gum.

“What?” Sarah stared up.

“Sauce,” Billy whispered to her.

The girl flicked hair out of her face and rolled her eyes to heaven.

“Not your sort of place?” Billy said and gave Sarah a feeble smile.

The lady of the mysterious eyes thought about a tactful answer. Her pondering was interrupted. Three men sat at their table, uninvited and by the look on their faces, with unfriendly intentions.

Sarah glared straight back at the man directly opposite her and sassily said, “Can’t the waiter find you a table?”

“I like a pretty woman with spirit,” the man gave back immediately.

“I like a man who knows when he’s not wanted,” she sparked at him.

Billy tugged Sarah’s hand under the table. He appeared agitated. “Don’t mind my friend, she’s only joking.”

Sarah opened her mouth to add spice to her next statement. Billy squeezed her hand even tighter. Something about his nervousness stayed her acerbic mouth.

“Excuse me if I come straight to the point,” the main man said with all the hidden charm of a crocodile with an impacted wisdom tooth. “Where would I find your companions, Mr. Lopez and Mr. Ferdinand?”

The silent pause that followed seemed to last forever instead of the ten seconds that elapsed. Sarah glanced at the men. The obvious head gorilla opposite her was the type of guy who could strut sitting down. He was broad, had black hair swept back with enough hair gel to grease a battleship and more gold on his hand than in an Amsterdam bullion trader’s vault. To his right was a true peabrain psychopath, with cruel eyes set close together and shoulders wide apart. On the left the view got interesting. Here was a swarthy Rudolph Valentino type. Eyes to die for and lips for which you could easily roll over and beg.

“Well?” the chief man reminded them of his question. It would have been simple and true to say she didn’t know the names he’d thrown her way. Something told Sarah to be careful. It was probably Billy’s sick look.

“Could you explain? The names are not totally familiar,” Billy prevaricated.

“Bolan and Meo,” the headman said. “Don’t get clever; we saw you with them last night.”

Dreamboat Eyes tried a softer approach. “All we need is an address. You might know them, but perhaps you’re not involved in their scam.”

There comes a time when sense tells you one thing and gut instinct makes you do something crazy. Billy had that feeling. “We’re investigating these two men,” he blithely said.

The face of the head honcho flickered and he looked at his two sidekicks. Sarah wanted to shout—she saw the deep fear in Billy’s expression and remained tight-lipped.

“You are not police,” the handsome hoodlum said with skepticism in his tone.

“No, private investigators,” Billy announced.

“Who is your client?” the headman asked.

“That would be betraying our professional ethics.”

“Whatever you are being paid, we will treble it.”

“We’ll get back to you on that one when me and my colleague have consulted.” Billy managed a confident smile. The three men again looked at each other, then got up and left the café.

Betty had been eavesdropping and before Sarah could say anything, the café owner bustled over and sat down.

“Don’t mess with those guys,” she sternly warned.

“Why?” Sarah asked.

“Around here they’re known as the Russian mafia. They’ve been in town for about a year and just about control everything that’s illegal and profitable. Don’t know if they’re exactly Russian or one of those Eastern European countries. All I do know is be careful...very careful.”

Billy nodded in agreement as if it confirmed his suspicions.

Betty collected their plates and walked back into the kitchen with much shaking of her head.

“Why did you tell them we were private investigators?” Sarah eventually got her question in.

“It struck me they thought we were friends of Bolan and Meo and weren’t going to believe our denials. I reckon they were going to take us quietly up some alley and keep on asking the same question...with certain unpleasant ways of getting the answer they wanted.”

Sarah didn’t have a silly small black moustache or a bowler hat but she felt like fiddling with a tie at her neck and muttering, “That’s a fine mess you’ve got us into.”

Chapter Five

Money Deal and Eastern Promise

“You’re not going, are you?” Billy sat on the sofa and watched Sarah pack her bags.

“So what do you want me to do? Stay around and wait for those thugs to discover we’re not private investigators?”

“Where are you running to?” Billy inclined his head, and those big, watery brown eyes made him look like an inquisitive puppy.

“I saw a sign for the overnight boat to The Hague. Maybe I’ll try my luck across the North Sea,” Sarah said with determined lips, throwing more clothes into a bag.

Billy tutted in a dismissive way. “Apart from tulips and round cheese, the main thing the Dutch have produced is Advocaat...and I’ve always thought it was a drink made from lawyers.”

Sarah did her best to keep a straight face. It couldn’t last; she sat back on the floor and a broad grin spread. “So what do you suggest?”

“My mother always said when the door says enter, just go in.”

“Full of useless sayings, was she?” Sarah shrugged.

“Listen, Miss Sophisticated, God couldn’t be everywhere, so he created mothers.”

That did it. Sarah collapsed in a heap of giggling froth. When she recovered, the dark liquid-eyed lady sat next to Billy on the sofa,

affectionately stroking his curly fair hair. “Okay, tell me what your mother would do.”

“Have you got any money, Sarah?”

“Nope.”

“Then why don’t we go with the flow, become private investigators and take the Russians’ money if they want to hire us.”

“And if they don’t?”

“Still might pay better than being a mediocre photographer and a beautiful lady without any immediate prospects.”

“What would we call it?”

“How about Greene Fields?” He smiled.

“Very droll.” Sarah sniggered...and started to unpack her bags.

Three days later the sign was up over the entrance to the stairs leading to Billy’s apartment. Sarah was surprised by how much enthusiasm her new partner put into the project. To her it was just a game to pass the time until something better came along. Billy spent all the time on the phone putting the word about and even arranged a small classified advert in the local paper, the *Malmouth Mercury*.

To Sarah’s even greater astonishment their first client was at this moment sitting in the studio—now converted to a makeshift office—boring Sarah with her matrimonial problems. Billy was taking copious notes and giving every appearance of taking the neurotic woman seriously.

Eventually she left and Sarah’s first question to Billy hit him. “How much?”

“We get paid on results.”

“Which means?”

“Get the evidence on her husband and a certain hostess in a promenade nightclub and we get a good payday and a bonus.”

“That deal stinks.” Sarah rolled her eyes. “Your generosity wouldn’t have anything to do with the client being very pretty?”

“No!” Billy protested. “Doesn’t do anything for me.”

Sarah shrugged and gave him a sideways look. “Remember, partner, beauty is only sin deep.” Then she grinned to herself and gave Billy a conciliatory hug. “Sorry, I forgot sweet lips and nice hips don’t have any effect on you.”

Billy gave her a wicked smirk back and flipped an answer, “Oh, really. Then you never saw this lovely man I met in London last year.”

Not much else happened for the rest of the day. As Billy was busy planning how he would stalk the errant husband, Sarah decided to get a little peace and space, so wandered along to the Atlantic View bar.

Malmouth was an unpretentious town, mainly a seaside resort for families, but since this slice of the travel market had decided to dedicate their lives to retail therapy, increasingly the simple arcades were being replaced by more serious punters. Sarah looked around and saw the blank faces of the gamblers and wondered why losing money had to be such a soulless and dour experience. She preferred her sins to have a higher pleasure element.

She stopped by an all-singing, all-dancing slot machine with flashing lights and promising, in emblazoned neon, to give you a chance to win the jackpot and change your life. The woman feeding the insatiable appetite of the mammon worshipper looked too late in life to make any drastic changes.

“Take a seat and bring me luck,” she clucked at Sarah without taking her eyes off the rolling, clicking symbols.

“What makes you think I can do that?” Sarah humored the woman.

“You’ve got the dark-eyed gypsy look,” the gaming fiend retorted. “Aren’t you supposed to have the gift of fortune telling? By the way, the name’s Lillian.”

“I can’t see anything in the future...and I’m too vain to wear spectacles,” Sarah joked.

The old lady stopped pulling the slot’s arm and tried to catch her breath. Sarah became alarmed in case the old biddy died on her.

“Don’t worry, dear. At my age, these spells come and go.”

“Shouldn’t you see a doctor?” Sarah asked with concern.

“Doctors. Doctors!” the woman croaked contemptuously. “I went to visit one before I came on this trip. He kept telling me he couldn’t turn the clock back. Silly old quack. I told him I hadn’t asked to be made young again. All I wanted was to go on getting older!”

Sarah was about to answer when a figure across the dancing lights caught hold of her attention. Strange how the brain can react independently of any conscious import or understanding of the thinking, rational mind, she mused.

Something male captured her interest. A tall, swarthy man walked from a doorway and stopped to talk to someone. The guy had a way of standing and moving at the same time, as if he could hear a distant dance tune and wanted to sidle up close to a lady. His hands were on his hips, then slid down his thighs and rested on that gorgeous rear. There was something sensual about their light touch of his body, and Sarah imagined them running over her skin. He was listening to the other man with a constant flickering of the eyes as if he found the world intriguing but the present conversation too boring to compel his total concentration. He was early thirties, yet childlike in his actions and mannerisms. A guy to smother and mother; a guy who looked too much

of a gadfly to capture. It was the handsome Russian hunk she'd seen earlier at Betty's Best.

Sarah knew her stuff. She idly strolled along an aisle and sauntered between the crowds. As she passed the two men, she turned her head suddenly to look at the gambling action on the roulette wheel. Her ruse was based on male radar. The sweeping motion of the head and swirling hair; the swish of the hips and ass; the whiff of a perfume, heavy with promise. These were the hidden signals she had waved provocatively. The bait lured the man as his thoughts turned to the scent of woman.

"Hello again," he called after the passing figure of Sarah.

She slowed...but didn't stop...and smiled at him. If you'd wanted to turn the smile and spin it into a sensual message, you could. If you'd taken it to be casual interest, then that was there as well. Ambiguity was such an aphrodisiac.

"Hi." There was just enough recognition to slightly raise his ego but enough hesitancy to keep him guessing.

"We met at a café along the promenade. You were with your partner from the investigating agency."

Sarah frowned as if the meeting and the man's face were coming back to her.

"Want a drink?" he said. She knew he had been hooked. Sarah nodded in a casual way, and they walked to the bar, sitting at two adjacent stalls.

"Found your men yet?" she began.

He looked puzzled and then realized she was referring to Bolan Lopez and Meo Ferdinand. He shook his head.

"You need professional help," she replied in a teasing tone. He put the drinks next to them and sat very close so his knees touched the side

of her thigh. Sarah made sure when she sat down her skirt rode up enough to display a good length of leg below the hemline.

“Do you have a name?” she continued, as he hadn’t taken her hint about help.

“Yuri Koskov.”

“Is that Russian?”

“Near enough.” He shrugged. “And yours?”

“Sarah, Sarah Greene,” she offered and didn’t think he was near enough. As Yuri stretched out a hand to pick up his drink, Sarah did the same so their fingers made contact and their legs rubbed together like two mating grasshoppers.

“I’m getting hot in here,” he gasped slightly. Sarah couldn’t help noticing—because she looked closely—that the bulge at his crotch was getting bigger. She was heating up as well, in places he couldn’t see but she bet he was imagining.

“Let’s get some fresh air,” Yuri suggested.

They strolled out of the club into the cool sea breeze and crossed the road onto the grass verge that fronted the sandy beach. The waves lapped at the damp sand and scattered shells on the high tide mark. The sound of the sea was slow. The noise of their hearts was loud and fast. Stepping onto the beach, Yuri held his hand out to Sarah. She accepted the ritual and put her hand in his.

They walked the fifty feet to the sea edge. A child’s abandoned spade floated at the breaking waves. Yuri picked it up and grinned at Sarah. He dug the spade into the wet sand and traced out her name. He added a heart and then put his own name under hers. She thought it a gorgeously innocent display and prelude to what she hoped would follow. He then wrote something she didn’t understand.

“What does it say?”

“It’s in my own language...it means you are a beautiful mermaid come to lure me away.” He moved to her and held her in his arms.

The kiss was long and in her head Sarah heard the calling of desire.

They walked along the sand until the beach huts ended and the bright lights of the arcades and casinos faded into the distant glow of thousands of worlds, flaming billions of light years away. The darkness enveloped them as Yuri took Sarah down onto the soft sand bed, and they explored the possibilities of this moment.

Chapter Six

Hit of the Month

His face tasted of warm linen as her mouth buried kisses into his cheeks. Sarah could feel Yuri's hands gently shaking her shoulders as she rolled over on her back to take her lover down to the depth of her passion. His hot insistent voice was telling her to look at him. With every ounce of the sizzling passion still burning in Sarah's body, she groaned for him to make love to her.

"Not now, sweetie. Look, look...look!"

Sarah focused on curly fair hair and a large pair of black-rimmed spectacles.

"What are you doing here?" she croaked through disappointment.

"That's a fine way to speak to your partner. Especially as I let you have the bed to yourself when you came home at some unearthly hour with a grin on your face like the queen cat who'd been sharing tom's cream."

"What time is it?" Sarah managed in her sleepy confusion.

"Nearly midday, young lady. So stop muttering for me to make love to you and look at this."

Sarah sat up in bed, shook her head, combed fingers through her hair and thought about pulling the covers up to discreetly cover her naked breasts...then decided Billy wasn't her lover boy.

"What's that you're waving at me?" She blearily yawned.

“Guess who’s been sent a fat check to take on a case?”

She looked dumb and scratched her ear.

“Proper Miss Grumps in the morning, aren’t we? Or should I say afternoon. Well, just take a look at that.”

“I can’t see,” she mumbled.

He took the letter and check back and rolled his eyes. “Vanity, young Sarah. Why don’t you wear spectacles to read? Anyway, it’s a letter instructing us to work for Andre Minski.”

Billy walked from the bedroom. Sarah wrapped the duvet around her silken glowing body and followed him into the kitchenette. “Who would that be?” she asked and stole a slice of crisp toast from a plate on the table.

“I guess he is the big cheese we met at the café. And leave my toast alone.”

“I’m hungry.”

“I’m not surprised after your gymnastics last night.”

“How do you know what I got up to?” she protested and sneaked a swig of Billy’s coffee.

“Quite simple, young Sarah. You talk in your sleep and even from my bed on the sofa I got a running replay. Anyway, it’s not a matter of what you got up to...it’s more like what the hunky Yuri got up to.”

She picked up the remains of the toast and threw it at him.

By eight o’clock that evening Sarah’s thick head from the night before had at last gone, and Billy suggested they celebrate their first assignment by going out and enjoying a top-notch meal.

“So what happened to that other client?” she asked through a mouthful of fruit cocktail served as the first course of their meal at the Golden Pander.

“Bit of a problem,” Billy replied in an evasive manner.

“Give out,” Sarah prompted, sensing some gossip.

“Well,” he began, giving her one of his dreamboat puppy watery-eyed looks, “I followed the errant husband and caught him in the act at a hotel on the edge of town.”

Sarah became interested and waited for the spicy bits of the tale. Billy took a breath and continued.

“He was romping with this big blonde as I knocked on their room door, pretending to be the service engineer checking out a fault on the TV set.”

“What happened?” Sarah was licking her lips, waiting for the juicy ending.

“I went into the room when the husband answered the door. The blonde was in the double bed. As I entered, the lady got up, minus the blonde wig...and she...or should I say *he*...gave me a wink.”

Sarah could hardly contain her laughter, attracting disapproving looks from other diners.

“It gets worse.” Billy looked distracted. “I went back to see our client to tell her diplomatically the nature of her husband’s dalliances and when I arrived at her house, the tarty lady answered the front door dressed in very little else than a modest smile and a fellow standing on the stairs behind her who was excited about something...and it wasn’t the décor. The last time I saw a guy that stiff was when my uncle Gregory fell into a cement mixer while reading a copy of *Playgirl Weekly*.”

By the end of the sweet course Sarah had just about stopped giggling. They left the restaurant arm-in-arm with disapproving glances from the waiter and huffy stares from the table guests around them.

Staggering up the wooden stairs to their apartment, Billy let Sarah go in first and fumbled to find the light switch. As his hand made contact, a

sledging impact sent him senseless across the room. He landed in a motionless bundle on the floor of the small hallway.

In front of Sarah stood a wide-grinning brute with black thinning hair, a large round gold ring in his left ear and very little friendliness on his face. His massive hand grabbed Sarah by the throat.

“You are Greene Fields?” he said with stuttering command of English...or any language at all.

“Sarah Greene,” she croaked, trying to assess the situation.

“Where are Lopez and Ferdinand?”

She fought for sense and an answer. “We are looking for them. Aren’t you working for Minski...?”

Her question was cut short by a slap around her face. To emphasize his impatience and demand for a simple answer, he ripped at her blouse so it fell away in shreds. His eyes at last gave a semblance of understanding. It was a look that horrified Sarah.

“Pretty lady could tell me what I want to know. But I prefer she makes me force her first.”

His gigantic hand spread over her left breast and she could feel he was trying to work out how her bra undid. His limited mechanical knowledge quickly gave way to animal lust and he tore her bra off. His acrid breath came close to her face as his right hand mauled at her naked boobs. With his bulk pinning her to the wall, his left hand gave up squeezing her throat. She shrieked silently. With callous indifference to the lady, he ripped the buttons off her skirt and forced it and her petticoat down over her hips.

Sarah struggled in vain as fingers felt into her crotch with her panties being pulled off. She looked at those evil eyes. They went into a spin and then closed.

Sarah stared down at the hulk crumpled on the floor. Billy was standing over him, trembling.

“What happened?” Sarah said, suppressing the tears.

“I hit him.”

She threw herself into Billy’s arms and said, “Some punch, my hero.”

He stepped back. “I used this.”

Sarah looked at the object in his hand. “A waffle maker?”

Billy grinned in fearful relief. “He probably thought I was dead or at least out cold. But I was only feigning. When he started on you, I got up, rushed into the kitchen and picked up the first heavy thing to hand.”

Sarah kissed Billy and he wrapped his coat around her.

“What do we do now?” Billy said, shaking as the ordeal began to dawn on him.

“Only one thing we can do.” Sarah sighed deeply.

“What’s that?”

“Go shopping in the morning and buy a new waffle maker.”

Billy was about to say something. Then he saw Sarah’s wickedly sardonic smile.

Chapter Seven

Who Are You Kidding?

The rope Billy found tucked at the back of a cupboard would have to do. He bound the wrists over and over and then decided to use what was left in securing the legs.

“Is that going to hold?” he asked Sarah.

“If he comes round and gets violent, hit him with the waffle maker again,” she said with a grin but didn’t feel too much sympathy for the ugly brute.

“Now what?” Billy looked at her with questioning eyes. “Shall I call the police?”

“Nope, reckon not, partner,” Sarah parodied a character out of a B-movie western. “You could get a long stretch for possessing a waffle maker without a license. And if they search the apartment and find the cache of food mixers under the bed...well, you’d be in *big trouble*.”

Billy got up from the floor and playfully chased her around the room. As he caught her by the sofa, they tumbled and fell in a childish mass. Sarah surfaced and kissed Billy on the cheek.

“Thanks again, partner, for...you know,” she said affectionately. He gave her a playful smack on her ass. Sarah squealed and gave a wide-eyed grin. “Into spanking, are you?”

“You’ve got a real nice rear.” Billy patted her ass again.

“Yours is not bad.” She pouted and reciprocated with a whack of his *derrière*.

Billy felt an excitement he tried to hide by standing up.

Sarah put her arms around his neck and whispered in his ear. “Don’t get bothered by it. If we ever get bored one evening, what would be nicer than two friends having a spanking session? I’m a bare-ass mistress myself.”

Billy kissed her and this time their lips met.

“Okay, let’s get back to the main problem,” he said with a self-conscious cough. “If we ain’t going to call the police, what do we do with the gorilla?”

“With an accent like his, it’s too much of a coincidence if he doesn’t belong to Minski. So let’s call our client and invite him to collect his property...and at the same time ask him what he’s playing at.”

“It’s gone midnight.”

“Somehow I doubt Minski and his boys are the sort to be in bed before the witching hour.”

Within fifteen minutes two long black limos pulled up at the end of the alley leading to their apartment front door. It took four hefty men to manhandle a groggy, trussed-up gorilla down the narrow stairs and into the back of one of the cars.

Two men remained in the apartment. One of them said, “Mr. Minski sends his compliments and asks if you could join him for a chat about your assignment,” giving Sarah and Bill an invitation that was hard to refuse.

“We’d absolutely adore that, wouldn’t we, Billy?” Sarah ironically replied.

He stared into the far distance.

“Come on, Billy, look at me when I’m lying to you.”

The journey only took two minutes. The car stopped outside the Alba Palace, a recently refurbished casino, which had quickly acquired the reputation of the “in” place to be. Just at the moment Billy wished he was part of the “out” crowd. Early morning interviews with taciturn clients like Andre Minski were not high on his list of fashionable pursuits.

Billy and Sarah were led across the gaming floor, with punters losing money, their shirts and their senses. A big guy was perched up on a stool by the blackjack table and was watching the dealer flip him a card. Sarah noticed the sweat rolling down the gambler’s face and wondered if his life was so vacuous that he had staked everything on the chance of one card adding up right for him.

At the very back of the casino they were ushered through a beige-covered swing door, down a dimly lit corridor, past two heavies standing guard outside a room and into the presence of Andre Minski. The boss man sat at a table, flanked on one side by a pile of cash and on the other side a brunette with more curves than a motor-racing circuit chicane. His eyes and hands were equally divided between filthy lucre and luscious thighs. Sarah judged that his pleasure in both was one of power.

“My dear Mr. Fields and the adorable Miss Greene. So pleased you could accept my invitation.”

The duo wondered if they’d had a choice. Sarah’s eyes lit up when she saw Yuri lounging in the corner. He gave her the kind of remembrance smile you’d have to keep undercover in a nunnery.

Minski became aware of the spark between them. “I hope our Mr. Koskov is not taking advantage of our business relationship,” he uttered

in a manner that was impossible to tell if humor was involved. “I insist my operatives are always honorable with money and women.”

Sarah couldn't resist a sassy response. “I had an aunt Daisy who said that honesty was the best policy and money isn't everything. Mind you, the old dear was wrong about other things too.”

If Minski's sense of humor was honed, he didn't smile. Sarah thought his fun cells were permanently turned off and his idea of laughter was based on sex and money.

“Can we discuss a certain gorilla? Sending him to our apartment wasn't a friendly act,” Billy said, surprising Sarah with his daring approach. Minski patted both the pile of money and the brunette. The money stayed put; the woman got up and walked out of the room. As she went with a sway of the hips, a rolling ass and a great deal showing of her cleavage, she left behind the strong aroma of expensive perfume and high-priced sexual favors.

“The gentleman who you refer to as a gorilla was not working on my instructions. Shall we say his freelance activities are at an end.” Minski's statement had a finality about it to suggest that was also the end of the matter. “More important is your progress in finding Lopez and Ferdinand. What do you have to report?”

“We're working on it,” Billy replied with more assurance than he felt.

Minski considered the reply. Sarah watched him and doubted there was too much gray matter to sift information. She wondered if he thought Botticelli was a cheese. His intellectual capacity was almost certainly confined to collecting money and women.

The conversation was cut short when a thin man entered the room. He was dressed in a long black coat, wore small silver-rimmed glasses and carried a stack of ledgers. Minski waved his hand to dismiss

everyone else as his attention span was limited and he now wanted to study the cashbooks.

“Look after our friends,” he called over his shoulder as the others left the room. Billy was in the hands of a jovial man who directed him toward the gaming tables. Yuri came up behind Sarah and kissed her neck.

“Shall we get some fresh air?” He snuggled his caresses into her jet hair.

“What’s with you and fresh air, mister? Most men get turned-on by heady perfume. With you, it’s get a whiff of seaside ozone and your thoughts turn to sex.”

She was right beside him as they strolled out of the dazzling lights into the stars twinkling for every lover in the world.

Chapter Eight Stars, Sand and Sex

Alba Palace became Promenade Pleasure became Sands Funhouse as the casino mile went unnoticed by Sarah and Yuri. After ten minutes even the dim lights of the pier were receding into the distance as they walked north along the road fronting the beach and eventually left behind all the amusements at the central promenade of Malmouth.

Yuri stepped onto the grass dunes and looked out toward the endless sea. In the summer the high tides never got within two hundred yards of the dunes. It was hard to image winter gales threatening the sea walls and low-lying café. The sand was ever shifting, moving quietly when everything else slept, a liquid, flowing appendage to the land.

The sand was dry and yielding. Yuri scuffed it into humped shapes as they walked silently farther into the dead quiet of the slightly undulating stretch of silicon softness. The long-tufted, silver Lyme grass waved gently, wild poppies seeded on the fringes of sand and brackish depressions. Ridges caused by erratic tides formed shallow lagoons with the distant lights from the town reflected in the water. Sarah bent down and took her shoes off. Yuri followed her example and they walked and splashed bare footsteps in the wet sand. Their shallow impressions were made and instantly dissolved, as if they and their lives had never existed.

At the sea Sarah turned to Yuri and kissed his cheek. “Can you swim?” she said, her eyes sparkling with erotic danger.

He nodded and understood the hidden question. They undressed and stood facing each other, openly admiring and taking joy in the nakedness of the night. Like two children they sauntered hand in hand into the anointing waves. Sarah was aware that Yuri's cock had become erect and was raised from its passive role into a lance of her desires. When they paddled up to their waists, Yuri launched himself forward, followed by Sarah.

They swam separately, and then like graceful dolphins came together and rolled around each other in salty-wet sensual somersaults, water and hands caressing bodies. Sarah adored the feel of Yuri's strong, broad chest and the way he responded as she let her hand touch and fondle his genitals. The stiffness in his cock became shell-hard pulses as her fingers felt its waiting power.

Strolling from the sea they came back to the lagoons. Yuri knelt before Sarah and licked her breast, her stomach and her loins. Her passionate desires instinctively made her push forward, part her legs and encourage his tongue to taste the salty dampness at the mouth of her vulva.

He stood and lifted her up. She wrapped her legs around his waist and waited for that delicious moment when his upright penis found her pussy—seeking a way to her gate. Yuri's strong hands held her buttocks firmly, and he penetrated deep into her vagina.

His movements were in sympathy to her needs and their combined silhouette, like standing lovers, was open to the creatures of the night. He held rigid as Sarah set the tempo, letting it be easy and keeping him one step away from sudden satisfaction. They both wanted the pleasure to be consummated in a long moan of desire rather than a quick groan of instant passion.

Sarah let go her hands around Yuri's neck and slipped to the sand. Taking hold of his waist she said, "Come down here with me."

As they rolled in a shallow lagoon, Sarah whispered to Yuri to lie still on his back and made him relax by licking down from his mouth, across his chest and teasing him with her tongue and lips on the fringe of his dark pubic hair. With her hand articulating his foreskin in the sensitivity of her art, she rose above his upright wand and sat firmly down on it, letting the eager erotic brute find its prey.

She rode him at will to demonstrate her command of the situation, his gyrating body causing little ripples to flow out from their carnal lust. Sarah took his hands and determinedly placed them over her pining breasts so her satisfaction could be heightened in all her sensitive zones. His upward strikes met her downward thrusts, sending seismic pulses through her and echoing up her spine to the deep regions of her brain.

Their love became a total submerging therapy for all the hurt of their individual pasts and in the final moments, two became one.

It took them forty minutes of hand, mouth and finger exploration to complete the act—and another hour nonchalantly walking along the beach to dry their bodies. Then they dressed and, without a word, went back to that world called reality.

Chapter Nine

The London Mob

Billy didn't have the energy to cook breakfast and the best Sarah could ever manage was unevenly burnt toast. As they both woke up with big appetites, the obvious solution was to stroll down to Betty's Best café.

"Win anything last night?" Sarah asked and yawned before Billy could answer.

"Nope. But then, who cares. I was given a bag of cash by Minski's minder to spend in the casino." He then looked at Sarah. "You must have hit the jackpot last night. You look dreadful."

"Thanks a million, pal."

"I just meant you looked shattered," Billy defended himself...then added, "Well, did you get lucky?"

She checked to make sure the people at the next table weren't listening, then smirked and replied, "He got a cherry; I got the rampant cock...and the third was a symbol I'd better not reveal. Not before you've eaten, anyway."

Betty called to them from the counter that their meals were ready. A slinky young waitress, wearing her uniform in a particularly unusual off-the-shoulder Lolita style and a skirt so short it was difficult not to have an opinion on the butterfly tattoo high up on her right thigh, condescendingly brought the two plates over. She had that bored, this-is-

only-a-day-job attitude and tried to do everything possible with truculent deportment to spoil her very attractive figure.

It was Sarah, almost ten years ago. The difference was Sarah at that age had a determined and steely attitude. This girl just had attitude. It was expressed in her sullen eyes, couldn't-care-less mannerism and the force with which she slammed down the plates on the table.

Betty watched the waitress, shook her head with one of those "kids today" tuts and smiled apologetically at Sarah and Billy.

When the breakfast was eaten and coffee served—this time by Betty, with a pleasant face—Billy stretched back to where the newspapers for the day were kept and picked out the local rag. He was about to get gossip-deep into the town news when a figure cast its shadow over them.

Billy looked around his newspaper. Sarah ignored the interruption. She had a lot of practice in deflecting men who thought they had a right to speak to her. And even more experience in putting them down when they wanted more than just words.

"Mr. Fields and Miss..." The interloper searched for a name. Sarah didn't help him out. "Detective Sergeant Ezzard."

"Is that a name or a weather forecast?" Sarah scornfully said without making eye contact.

He wasn't put off. "May I take a seat?"

"Take the table as well...but leave my coffee," Sarah continued in the dismissive tone.

Detective Sergeant Ezzard was a big man. If it hadn't been made politically incorrect to use an Anglo-Saxon expression like fat that would have been his description. Politically correct thought-police had now made it impossible to define the world. It was now one homogenized melting pot of weasel words.

This had never curtailed Sarah Greene. “Take two chairs if you need them.”

He shuffled about trying to maneuver his bulk into the space between the tables and the waiting chair.

She at last looked up and threw out, “Why don’t you get in sideways. Oh no, you don’t have a sideways.”

The policeman at last succumbed to the ribald comments and his face went red. Eventually he settled himself down and took out a folder.

Billy and Sarah sat waiting for his opening words of explanation.

“I’m investigating a matter of importance.”

Sarah refrained from suggesting she thought he was issuing free ride tickets for the funfair.

“Do either of you know a Mr. Andre Minski?”

Billy shook his head. Sarah said a plain, “No.”

“That’s strange. You were observed talking to him in this café some days ago.” He let that sink in and then said. “So I take it your original denial was untrue.”

Sarah couldn’t resist baiting pomposity. “Any idiot can tell the truth, but it takes a woman of genius to know how to lie convincingly.”

“I’m sure that’s very profound, Miss...” he again fished, but didn’t catch anything. “However, I would caution you about any involvement with these people. They are not your normal local lovable rogues. If you have any information on them, please come and talk to me.” With an attempt at solemn dignity, Detective Sergeant Ezzard rose from the chair like a mighty Moby Dick, waved a hand as if it were the dying farewell of his giant flipper and walked off into the streets of Malmouth—which became a little more crowded for his passing.

Sarah gave Billy a nod to say it was about time they left, called a cheerio to Betty, and got some air on the promenade after the baffling encounter with Ezzard.

Sarah eventually broke the silence of their stroll. “Do you think we have bitten off more than we can chew?”

“Sounds like an evening I had in London six months ago. You should have seen the guy...” Billy’s anecdote was cut short. A massive limo, pure white and sporting blackened windows, pulled up beside them. The rear door opened and two men got out.

“In the car...please.” The first man’s request was polite. It was backed up with what looked like a gun in the hands of his companion.

Billy and Sarah accepted the offer and slid in the backseat. The car sped off and after ten minutes came to a halt on the northern edge of town in the derelict part of the old docks.

It was impossible to tell who was in the front of the car as it had an opaque screen separating it from the back...if you could call it the back. Sarah and Billy were sandwiched between the two men. Also in the cavernous rear of the limo sat a young man. He was perched in front of them on a long fake fur-covered bench seat, surrounded by a TV, cocktail cabinet, icemaker and a bank of telephones, which would do credit to a successful broker’s office.

“Proper couple of social climbers, aren’t we?” The debonair young man had a pronounced London accent. Not genuine cockney but the ubiquitous so-called Estuary twang, which had spread from central London into the suburbs of the River Thames.

“First you get chummy with Mr. Minski...and then you cozy up to the pigs,” he continued. His speech was lazy, almost devoid of vowel sounds and packed with arrogance. Sarah had met the type many times before. He was handsome and knew it. Vain people looked in the reflection of

shop windows to see themselves. Men like this egotistical bastard checked to see if anybody was admiring them.

“Is there a point to abducting us?” Sarah took the aggressive route.

“Feisty and beautiful.” He sneered. “Could be interesting taming a tigress like you.” He leaned forward, took out a lethal-looking knife and traced the shape of Sarah’s breasts with its pointed tip. “Pain and sex are such a turn-on.”

Billy tried to divert the direction of this conversation and put in, “Is there any problem with our knowing these people?”

The suave guy turned his menacing stare from Sarah and eyeballed Billy. “Not as long as you remember who you should be pleasing.” With the last words he looked back to Sarah and grinned a predatory, well-groomed warning.

“And you would be?” Sarah asked with insolence in her voice.

“We have plenty of time to get to know each other, babe. But just at the moment it’s my boss, Arthur Trenton, who is sending you this message.” He kept the knife at her breasts and let his other hand stroke her thighs.

There was a guttural laugh from the two men in the back and a nod between them as they watched the young guy get to just below Sarah’s hemline and then let his hand disappear up toward her loins. He stopped inches from the top of her legs, caressed the swell of her pubic mound, laughed haughtily and withdrew his hand.

“If you two don’t realize whose side you should be on, next time I’ll show you how we punish young ladies.” He gave the other two thugs a disdainful nod...and Sarah and Billy were bundled out of the car and left sprawling around on the pitted tarmac as the car sped off.

They sat side by side in the deserted road. To hide the tension, Sarah said, "Have you any idea what's going on? There's more rival gangs involved in this case than a second-rate afternoon movie."

"What case is that then?" Billy responded in like mock humor.

"Search me." Sarah shrugged.

"That guy in the car very nearly did." Billy grinned and put his arm around her.

Chapter Ten

The Urban Snob

After the incident, they at first decided to walk back to town to have time to recover their calm. It seemed like a good idea, but with sore feet and bad memories and an hour gone, Billy used his mobile to summon a taxi.

When the duo arrived back at the apartment, they were in for another surprise. Standing outside the front door was a lady of veritable age. She was accompanied by an equally elderly gentleman and a very small, mongrel dog. As soon as Billy approached, the lady accosted him in a manner that suggested she thought he was the culprit who was stealing her washing from the backyard.

“Greene Fields?” she said very loudly. The lady talked at you, not to you.

“One half of that,” Billy said.

“And this lady?”

“The other half.”

“Can we help?” Sarah joined in.

“I’m not used to discussing my business in the street,” the lady snapped.

As that was a request to be asked in, Billy led the way, followed by the lady, the dog, the gentleman and finally Sarah. They went up the

steep side stairs to the apartment, the old man looking constantly in danger of falling back on Sarah.

Once in the apartment, the lady bustled through to their makeshift office, gave her nose a little more loft to show condescension, and called, "Titan."

The aged man momentarily moved, then either remembered his place in life or his name, and swayed back still. The dog trotted to sit by his mistress.

Billy decided to offer the couple chairs and then he and Sarah sat around to form a circle.

"I'm Mrs. Lewinson...and this is Mr. Lewinson," she barked, then suddenly commanded, "Sit."

Mr. Lewinson twitched at the voice, realized he was already sitting and relaxed as the dog obeyed. It was already clear that Mrs. Lewinson was top dog, Titan number two in the pack and old Mr. Lewinson a long way back in the bone-gnawing order.

"We are here in response to your advert," Mrs. Lewinson continued.

Billy had to think before recalling the small advert he'd put in the local paper about their detective agency.

Mrs. Lewinson opened her mouth to go on with her speech...then stopped and stared hard at Sarah. She leant forward and spoke softly. "Is it possible for you to button the top three buttons on your blouse, young lady?"

Sarah did a double take.

Mrs. Lewinson's gaze nervously flickered to her husband and back again to Sarah. "It's your...chest...you know," Mrs. Lewinson said even quieter.

"What's wrong with my breasts?" Sarah asked in amazement.

Mrs. Lewinson made a face like a scolded prune and waved her hand at Sarah. "Please keep your voice down. Words like that...or the sight of your ample cleavage...is enough to bring on the old trouble Mr. Lewinson is suffering with."

Billy began to ask.

Mrs. Lewinson got in first. "Heart, you know. The cost of private medicine is high enough without your...chest...inflaming his...passions."

Sarah carefully looked at Mr. Lewinson and wondered if he'd ever had a passion.

Mrs. Lewinson took Sarah's elbow and said confidentially, "Mr. Lewinson has nothing against your...breasts...but I can image he would like to."

To stop the ridiculous conversation from tipping over into farce, Sarah buttoned away the view, sat up straight and folded her arms. Mrs. Lewinson looked mollified and went on with her story.

"Do you know Wellesley Square?" she asked Billy. He nodded. "Then you will know it is a select part of town. The Duke of Wellington would have approved."

That remark went right over Billy's head and it showed on his face.

"Wellesley was the family name before the great soldier became a peer," Mrs. Lewinson explained in an irritated manner. Sarah thought Mrs. Lewinson could frighten even the Iron Duke.

The aged snob continued. "We want you to gather evidence against new neighbors that have recently moved in."

"Why?" Sarah rejoined the conversation, remembering to keep still in case any part of her anatomy moved, causing a heart attack in the senile old man sitting opposite her.

"So we can take it to the council and get them evicted," Mrs. Lewinson answered as if it was self-evident.

“What have they been doing?” Billy asked. There was a long silence when Mrs. Lewinson seemed to consult some higher authority, as her eyes were heavenward.

“Sex?” Sarah suggested.

“S...E...X,” Mrs. Lewinson stammered loudly before realizing her husband’s attention had returned from outer space. “We don’t do that sort of thing in Wellesley Square.”

Titan the dog looked up at his mistress and then at Sarah and his doleful expression seemed to say, you’d better believe her.

“No, no. It’s the parking and the noise...and they are...foreign.”

“Is that an offense?” Billy said incredulously.

“Of course parking and noise is an offense,” Mrs. Lewinson said impatiently.

“I meant being foreign.”

“No, it’s not. As long as you don’t come from another country,” Mrs. Lewinson said with a put-that-in-your-pipe-and-smoke-it look. Billy decided to let it pass.

Mrs. Lewinson gave them a file with a full dossier of nosy-parker observations—she called them “neighborhood records”—and a check for a month’s work. Sarah whistled to herself at the size of the old lady’s monetary determination.

The conversation ended and the old couple got up to leave. Mrs. Lewinson walked in front, Titan trotted after her and Mr. Lewinson walked a respectful five yards behind.

When Mr. Lewinson passed Sarah, she winked, kissed his cheek and made sure she brushed her breasts firmly against him. He didn’t have a heart attack. She hoped he had pleasant memories.

“I’m going to have a bath,” Sarah called to Billy after their clients had left. “Then you can take me out to dinner on the proceeds of that assignment.”

Twenty minutes later Sarah flounced into the bedroom, skimpy towel wrapped around her and was faced with a naked Billy.

He turned and grinned. “Sorry, I thought you’d be longer than that. I came in here to get changed.”

“Don’t apologize. It is your bedroom.” She shrugged and, just for the hell of it, threw her towel onto the floor and stood naked in front of the mirror, combing and drying her hair. She caught Billy looking at her and his embarrassment increased when she said, “Still like the ass?”

“I think I’d better leave...” he tried.

Sarah went over to him, pushed Billy back on the bed and before he could react and object, laid over his lap with her loins pressing against his cock and her rear directly in his sights.

“If you think I’m naughty, give me a spanking. I’m sure I deserve to be punished.”

Billy put his hand on Sarah’s raised and rounded cheeks and was fascinated how curved, soft and so perfectly enticing she looked from this view. As he contemplated nature’s ability to turn mundane necessity into mind-exploding imagination, his other hand rose, then slapped down hard on those pliant protruding delights.

“Jeez.” Sarah flexed and felt her slight bounce land on Billy’s loins. He wasn’t erect, but he was firm.

“Again?” he said softly. She nodded and he administered two more whacks.

Her ass went red and she puffed out her cheeks. The stinging sensation made her ache in her clitoris. The situation was new to her. Normally a spanking was at some man’s request and was always a

prelude to a seductive fuck. She knew Billy's inclinations weren't going to lead them to penetration...but she felt elated and aroused.

"Your turn," Billy said in a semi-whisper.

Sarah detected his excitement. She got up and then sat on the bed. Billy took up a position spread across her knee. His ass was as good as Sarah had ever seen.

His naked body didn't move. She took the initiative and spanked him three times.

"Harder," he moaned gently.

She smacked his compact, well-formed cheeks again and again, each time trying to make it more severe. After at least twenty wallops, her hand was sore. He panted and had his face buried in the duvet.

Sarah stroked his rear, licked her finger and ran the wet tip down from the top of his neck, along the spine and to the center of his ass. "Anything else you want, partner?" She panted slightly at the frisson.

Billy didn't answer. He rolled away from her lap and stayed flat out on the bed.

Sarah tucked herself close up to him, fitting into the contours of his body. There were tears in Billy's eyes. She held him and kissed his closed lids. As the noises of the outside world seeped into the room, the loving friends forgot about a meal and hugged for the night. All that passed between them was the dreams of their past.

Chapter Eleven

Ticket to Ride

There are days when you wished you'd gotten up earlier. It was ten o'clock and Billy sat on the edge of the bed with the contents of a large white envelope spread out. Sarah was curled up diagonally under the duvet with every indication that she'd decided to hibernate.

Billy had been up for an hour, showered and dressed. At twenty-nine he hadn't collected much baggage in life. What paper and celluloid memories he had were in this envelope.

There was a bundle of letters from a lover. The only one who had gotten to Billy. The guy was a "wow". Billy turned and smiled at the collection, and pictures came flooding back to him. Alan had been a male Sarah. Irreverent, a risk taker and...the image formed in Billy's mind.

Four years ago a holiday in Wales was coming to a beautiful end. "One last dash for freedom before the daily grind gets us down," was what Alan had said.

Billy saw his lover climb on ahead up in the mysterious mist of Cader Idris. It looked such a lovely day with the white clouds bouncing in off the Snowdonia ridges to the north.

Thirty minutes later the fog raked down the slopes, and Billy took over two hours to find his way back to the village below. The mountain rescue team spent all the next day searching for Alan as the weather closed in even more. They were all volunteers, men and women from the

farms and shops—faithful dogs—willingly putting their own lives in danger to find a stranger.

When the news came, Billy was expecting the worst. A portly policeman with a strong Welsh accent came to the Inn where they'd been staying. Of course, he didn't fully understand Billy's grief. Yes, his friend was dead, but how could he realize Alan was his lover, his soul mate, the one who accepted and cared for him. You don't expect a grown man to break down when told his "friend" was dead.

Perusing the letters was too much for Billy to take. Going through the pictures in his envelope was hell.

As he tucked it back in a black case, which had been kept on top of the wardrobe, a mop of black hair popped up from under the duvet, began to grin then noticed Billy's sad face.

"Two cures for a touch of the weepies. One is sex, and the other involves handcuffs, whipping cream and complete trust in your partner," Sarah said, watching to see if he responded.

"Straight sex is not my thing," he said self-deprecatingly. "If you can add chopped nuts to that cream, I'll go for it."

"Better still, what about a day at the funfair?" Sarah suggested and got up out of bed, stretched her naked body and scratched her ear.

"Shouldn't we be earning our fees by working on the case for Minski or the Lewinsons?" Billy said with a cocked head like a cheeky sparrow.

Sarah yawned and wriggled her ass. "Working means exercising your cleverest organ; fun means pleasing the most demanding one."

The funfair won.

Beach Wonderland had seen better days. Perhaps thirty years ago the families would come to Malmouth to enjoy a traditional vacation or day out. The innocent—some say boring—times were going. It was now themed-this and experience-of-that. The merry-go-round, shooting

galleries and sideshows were slightly old-fashioned. People still came, but not in the huge numbers they once did. This was not high-tech, interactive, state-of-the-art entertainment. It was candyfloss, girls squealing on the Ferris wheel, young men trying to impress with games of strength.

Sarah was a contradiction. Her sassy, upfront and gorgeous babe persona was in direct opposition to her country girl, tomboy, rough-and-tumble side. Both hid a sharp and intelligent mind.

The carousel was too tame so she dragged Billy onto the water chute, quickly followed by two rides on the roller coaster, immediately followed by Billy feeling sick. Sarah sat him down and then made it worse by devouring a bag of doughnuts in front of him.

“Let’s go on the ‘Tour of History’ over there,” she said and impelled him toward the pay booth. The ride was a leisurely affair, the six-seat coach trundling slowly along the rails, inside tunnels where tableaux were displayed to show history from Egypt to Greece to Rome—and with one large ignorant jump landed in The French Revolution and the British Empire.

Billy sat just behind Sarah in the carriage, which apart from the daffy detective duo was empty. As a dubious Alexander the Great, that well-known Greek from Macedonia, invaded the Persia capital, Sarah munched on a bag of popcorn and wondered why the conqueror’s army of the then-known world were sporting the emblem of the eagle. She assumed someone had decided to give the credit to Rome.

From the waxworks figures, four moving shadows appeared. Their dress did not match the period. Three were men in dark suits and the fourth, a lady of talent. Not the Alexandrian type, but striking enough to get noticed.

Two of the men were toting guns. Sarah and Billy realized all was not well in their own history.

Two men got in the seats behind Billy, the woman sat next to him and the third man slid beside Sarah. It was the good-looking, egotistical Londoner who had recently abducted them in the flashy limo.

“So what have we done wrong this time?” Sarah confronted the guy. “Supported the pike men against the Immortals?”

The remark went way past the man’s brain. He wouldn’t have answered anyway. This was not his show.

“Still no news on Lopez and Ferdinand?” The question came from the woman. She was a femme fatale platinum blonde who you expected to speak with a husky accent and talk about either being pleased to see her or having a gun in your pocket.

Instead she was as broad London and lacking in vowels as the guy sitting next to Sarah. The lady went in and out in places where ordinary women didn’t have places. This was an English Monroe—Marilyn, that is, not the doctrine.

“It’s only a few days,” Billy insisted—politely.

“Time is up,” the blonde chewed out. “These are the new plans. You go to Minski and tell him you have located Lopez and Ferdinand. You take him to an address that I will give you...and leave the rest to us.”

“And you are?” Sarah stared defiantly at the lady.

For a few moments the woman looked around her in disbelief. Being questioned wasn’t usual. “Sonny here said you were a sparky girl who needed defusing. For your interest, the name’s Irma Trenton. My dad is Arthur Trenton. In his absence what I say goes.”

“Then perhaps you would say what all this is about. If you have some sort of feud with Minski, that’s between you. We’re private investigators, not bait for you to lure this gang into some dark alley and then settle old

scores.” Sarah felt Sonny’s eyes light up with fascination that anybody had spoken to Miss Trenton in a hostile manner.

The boss lady looked angrily at one of the men in the backseat section. “Stop this bloody thing,” she bawled. He leapt from the slow-moving carriage, looked around the tunnel, picked up an old piece of wood and smashed it into the wire conduits running along the gallery walls. There was a flash, a shudder of the carriage...and then everything stopped and went silent. Only the illumination from the air vents in the ceiling fell on the group of six people.

Irma Trenton smiled and showed her perfect white pearly teeth. From the jacket of her trouser suit she produced a silver-handled revolver. It looked expensive. It looked lethal. She aimed it at Sarah’s head. “I could kill you right here. I prefer to hear your insolent mouth scream for death.”

Sarah saw the cold gray eyes of Irma Trenton take on a manic expression. The blonde boss’s mouth twisted from its pretty shape. It was no longer kissable.

“Do you know how I enjoy my sex?” The boss didn’t expect or want an answer. “Sonny wanted to have you. I will watch him humiliate you, and when you say the word, this gun will end the punishment.”

The blonde viper took out a wad of money and stuffed it down Sarah’s blouse. “Here, you tart. This will buy you for Sonny and me.”

Billy thought about moving. He sensed a gun behind him.

“But not here, Sarah. We have a house in London, which is furnished in such good taste. You will appreciate the décor whilst being a sex slave. If you’re good, I’ll leave your ordeal just to Sonny...if you protest, then there are others.” Her evil laugh was like sharp fingernails being run down a blackboard.

Sarah and Billy were hustled out of the carriage, and the party made their way to the ride exit. Out in the daylight, one of the men kept Billy and Sarah close to them. Both of the duo were aware of the guns hidden in coats.

Billy calculated the chances of making a run for it. Would the small crowd in the funfair prevent these lunatics from mowing them down?

The end of the stalls was thirty yards in front of them. Through the funfair entrance gates walked a wide, rotund police detective. With Ezzard were four uniformed policemen. Miss Trenton and her men froze.

There was a moment, which Billy later recalled, when he thought there was going to be a massacre as the police were almost certainly unarmed.

The London mob decided killing coppers was not worth it. They melted into the crowd. Detective Sergeant Ezzard looked at the woman and three men, then shrugged and held out a hand to Billy and Sarah.

“Mr. Billy Fields and Miss Sarah Greene. I have a warrant in regards to a murder enquiry. Can you please come with us to the police station?”

Chapter Twelve First at the Gates

Carrow Road Police Station was designed by an architect who must have hated someone. Either that or he was the only person outside of an asylum who believed post-modern nineteen-sixties austere concrete-faced buildings were nothing but a hideous joke. As the squad car pulled up outside the monstrosity, Sarah shook her head and wondered if the slit, minimal windows had been inspired by a disdain for sunlight or to stop the prisoners from jumping to their deaths. She found it hard to believe this brutalism was heir to anything. She'd seen better public lavatories in third-world countries.

Detective Sergeant Ezzard led the troop of policemen and the duo into the building and up to the elevator. When it arrived and he stepped in, Sarah studied the weight caution notice and saw it took a maximum of ten people. She wondered how many Ezzard counted as.

At the third floor they all got out, walking to the fourth door on the left. It was a mess. Sarah thought it was an appalling place to take your suspected high-class murderers. Petty criminals might ignore the pile of discarded coffee cups, stained tables and seats marked with cigarettes...but did they have no consideration for people of her caliber? Sarah kept the parody of thought inside her head. She doubted policemen had an absurd sense of humor.

Throughout the journey from the funfair to the station, Ezzard and company had kept tight-lipped about the charges. Now in the scruffy interview room, Sarah sat next to a policewoman; then came Billy, flanked by a policeman. Opposite them were Ezzard and another detective.

In order to comply with some ridiculous order to balance police sizes, Billy conjectured ironically to himself, the other detective was so small Billy felt like offering him a cushion so he could sit up to the table properly.

Ezzard shuffled papers in front of him. The elf-like policeman who would have made a perfect fit on a charm bracelet prepared himself to take notes. Either that or he was playing tic-tac-toe.

“This is a serious matter,” Ezzard began.

The detective next to him nodded. He either agreed or had just completed a diagonal line.

“Where were you between eleven o’clock last night and three in the morning of the following day?”

“Do you mean that collectively?” Billy asked in confusion.

Ezzard nodded.

“I was either spanking Billy’s naked ass or he was whacking my buttocks,” Sarah said, keeping a straight face.

“Do you have any corroborating evidence to support this alibi?” Ezzard asked.

“Would you prefer to see my ass or Billy’s?” Sarah said with a disingenuous smile on her face.

“You do realize we are investigating two murders?” Ezzard said with an attempt at a reprimand.

“Who’s dead?” Billy asked.

“Mr. and Mrs. Lewinson,” the elf policeman spoke up.

There was a long silence.

"I...we didn't appreciate," Billy said apologetically.

"How?" Sarah had lost her feisty tone.

"I'm afraid we can't reveal that. Suffice it to say it was not a pretty sight and I'd hate to go that way," Ezzard gravely said.

"Why do you think we had anything to do with it?" Sarah asked, not quite challengingly but with an edge to her voice.

"Your name was the last entry in their checkbook...and it was for a substantial amount."

"All the more reason we should wish them to stay alive," Billy offered. "Paydays like that are rare."

Paydays like that are unique, Sarah thought, but managed to stay quiet. Sardonic humor was out of place.

"Would you object to voluntarily giving us a sample of your blood and having your fingerprints taken?" Ezzard resumed the interrogation.

"Do we have a choice?" Billy queried.

"Of course," Ezzard replied. "You can offer them now or we'll hold you in a cell for six hours while we get a court order." He even managed a flicker of a smile at his implied witticism. Then he suddenly said, "That's all for now."

Everyone got up and walked out of the room. In the corridor Ezzard stopped, pondered and held his chin. "There is one more thing."

"Yes?" Sarah asked.

"Do you like dogs? There's a little mutt by the name of Titan in the yard and..."

Sarah grinned. "At least he can keep an eye on us as we seem to be suspects."

After giving the samples as requested, they left the building with relief...and with a dog on a leash.

“I wonder if there is an afterlife?” Billy asked as Sarah tried to pull Titan away from an amorous encounter with another dog.

“What a question on a day like this,” Sarah said, giving him a look as if he was crazy.

“It’s just that I hope Mr. and Mrs. Lewinson can see that Titan is being looked after.”

“I’ll tell you this.” Sarah wagged her finger at Billy. “Right at this moment Mrs. Lewinson is giving St. Peter hell if those pearly gates are not in tip-top condition.”

“Perhaps hell was an unfortunate word,” Billy mocked.

Chapter Thirteen

You Are My Prisoner

Why did you agree to take the dog?” Billy asked as he watched Sarah feed Titan with most of the toast he’d made for himself.

“Because his big brown eyes reminded me of you.” Sarah chuckled mischievously.

“So what do we do now?” Billy shrugged in a lost fashion.

“You stay here with Titan. I’ve got to go and see a man about kinky sex.”

“That’s no answer.” Billy looked peeved.

“No, and it ain’t going to be easy either.” Sarah frowned and left Billy as chief dog minder.

Early evening and Alba Palace only had a few fatigued gamblers desperately and sadly playing the slots. They were losers who clung to the idea that you could beat the odds. Neither sense nor mathematics would have persuaded them otherwise.

Sarah went up to one of the hostesses. She was a redhead who was probably high-heeling her last season as her age wasn’t just catching up to her, it had overtaken way before the finishing straight.

“Is Yuri about?” Sarah asked.

The look she got couldn’t kill—it couldn’t care less.

“Wait there. I’ll call him.” The hostess, who must have had the mostess at one time, picked up a house phone and chewed something

into the speaker. Then she sashayed like a pregnant duck over to Sarah and with all the charm of a kamikaze pilot slung a “He’ll be here in a minute” at her.

Sarah knew Yuri was a bad boy. He was no good, heading for prison as a young hoodlum. But hell, was he something else. That walk, those powerful thighs...and a body to sexually die for.

“Hi, Sarah. This is a surprise.”

Oh well, his conversation wasn’t anything to get excited about, she thought.

“Talking of surprises,” she simpered in her best-assumed baby doll accent, “how would you like to celebrate your birthday?”

“It isn’t till October.” He looked and sounded confused.

“Let’s start now and hope you’ll have the strength to blow out the candles.”

He still looked vague.

“Sex in the afternoon, lover boy.”

His simple male brain comprehended that.

“But not on the sand again. Ever had slave sex in a luxury hotel?”

Yuri just heard the word sex and followed his loins.

They strolled along North Parade, just beyond the pier. Sarah suggested the Balmoral Hotel was the sort of place that might have silk sheets and a Jacuzzi for an erotic session. They cut through Regent Street to reach the hotel. Yuri seemed to be staring around him.

“What’s up?” Sarah asked.

“Ever since I came to this country, it has amazed me that you have so much wealth, yet this graffiti is everywhere.” He stopped at a can-sprayed boldly written red daub on the side of a church wall. He read slowly to himself then shook his head. “Why do people write, ‘Fuck the Pope’ on this wall?”

Sarah rolled her eyes and replied, “Because they can’t be bothered to write, ‘Fuck the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.’”

He paused and screwed up his eyes. “That was a joke?”

She hurried him along and whispered, “I’ll give you something to smile about you do understand, when we get into our room.”

The Balmoral Hotel proudly displayed its five stars and some sort of a crossed knife and fork emblem awarded by a Frenchman who had probably never been near the place. The receptionist wore a well-polished company smile oozing “everything would be no problem”, especially as she wouldn’t be on duty if and when a complaint was received. She gave them the sort of disapproving look that could have won her absolution for the next two years.

Room 288 was on the second level. Sarah gasped at the cost for a single day’s hire. The price of sin should at least be related to the cost of living index.

Yuri had no sooner closed the door than he was grappling Sarah over toward the large king-size bed.

“Slow down, big boy. I want this to be something different. You be the slave first and I’ll be the mistress. Then you can be the master and I’ll do whatever you want.”

His hardness visibly grew inside those black, tailored trousers he wore. “What do I do?” he eagerly agreed.

“Take your shirt off first and then lie back on the bed.”

Yuri unbuttoned the shirt rapidly and she saw the center of his dark eyes widen in sensual anticipation.

Sarah took out two sets of handcuffs she had in a large bag and dangled them in front of Yuri. “Arms up and I’ll secure you to the back of the bed,” she encouraged and quickly manacled him.

Sarah let him wait and imagine, while she turned on the radio and tuned in some soft music. "I'll only be a minute," she said and kissed his lips. "Don't start without me." With this final verbal tease she skipped into the bathroom.

Four minutes and twenty seconds later she slid out and sidled across the room. Yuri's body went zing from his head to his toes and the electricity of desire vibrated along the length of his erection. Sarah wore her long black hair pulled back and tied in a single ponytail. Around her neck was a tight gold chain and her breasts were laced with gold thread to uplift them and make their presentation even more nakedly inviting. At her loins she wore a G-string of gold and silver weave only wide enough to cover her manicured pubic hair. It was pulled tightly into her crotch to emphasize the shape of her vulva. As she spun seductively around, Yuri could see the central cord of the G-string cutting into the crevice of her gorgeous ass.

Sarah knelt on the bed facing Yuri. With mischievousness in those sparkling eyes, she took his shoes and socks off and then tantalizingly, slowly unzipped her slave. She made the removal of his shorts a deliberately measured striptease and waited with half-opened, moist mouth for that deliciously pussy-pulsing moment when his cock was finally released and strung upright with its one eye seeking its purpose.

When he was naked, she took rope from her bag and tied his ankles to the bottom of the bed. Sarah walked up one side of the bed and down the other. Her eyes never took their attention from his magnificent penis. She passed by the foot of the bed, turning her back and, still looking over her shoulder, bent forward, pushing the flimsy cord of the G-string aside and displaying her velvet-edged vagina to him. His cock reacted as if it had discovered the nectar of her flower.

Sarah returned to sitting on the bed next to Yuri and let her hand wander over his thighs, then around the edge of his pubic hair, over his lower stomach and back again to gently caress his hot, hairy testicles. She calculatingly kept her touch inches away from his burning cock, all flaming red top and bulging with over-excited blood cells.

“Look, Yuri. I’ve given you some of the best performances of my sexual career. Perhaps not an Emmy nomination yet...but certainly enough for you to say thanks.” If he understood her way of speaking, his only reaction was in his groin. She decided to give him a taste and put her thumb and index finger expertly on his penis, working his inflamed foreskin up and down. “Tell me where Lopez and Ferdinand fit in...and what do you know about a London mob headed by a guy called Trenton?”

His breathing was heavy and a labor of her loving massage. “You’re playing with fire, Sarah, wanting to know about these people.”

“No, I’m playing with your cock, Yuri. And unless you confide in your mistress, the nearest your rod is going to get to pussy at home is a quick hand job and a vivid imagination. Don’t worry about me. I’m a prime suspect for murder and the police are keeping me under surveillance.” The last bit wasn’t true but she considered it might keep her and Billy from coming to any serious harm.

Sarah knelt up and slipped the G-string off. Then she crouched over him and, holding his stiff penis, she brushed its sweltering bulbous tip against the lips of her spicy clitoris. His body erotically went into a spasm of lust.

“It’s dangerous.” Yuri exhaled the words with effort in his state of desire.

“Sex is always dangerous...but such fun.” Sarah smirked.

“No, not sex,” he gasped. “You want to know so much.”

“Pussy’s waiting,” she said with her head at a saucy angle and her other hand rubbing her breasts and nipples.

“Lopez and Ferdinand were sent by the London gang to recover old man Trenton’s son,” Yuri began, thinking more of his cock and its needs than loyalty to Minski.

“Explain,” Sarah demanded.

“We kidnapped Benny Trenton to hold him as insurance against the good behavior of the London gang. Lopez and Ferdinand decided to play their own game. That’s why both Minski and Trenton are after them.”

“So why did Trenton get involved here in the first place?”

“Malmouth has become a lucrative town to control, now that casino money is up for grabs,” Yuri continued.

Sarah thought for a moment, then said mostly to herself, “No honor amongst thieves then.” Looking at Yuri she decided she’d had enough of playing private detective. Her body wanted what he wanted. A good fuck.

“Okay, Yuri, my pussy is going to smother that hurting cock of yours. Before my vagina gets too worked up, let me kiss your poor aching penis better.” As Sarah’s mouth sank onto Yuri’s hard flesh, he groaned at the enjoyment and frantically pumped to find relief.

Sarah wasn’t going to let him get away with pleasure that easily.

She finished the sausage sucking and mounted his cock into her soft saddle.

“Once around the track, big boy, then I’ll give you an hour to fully recover before it’s your turn to be master and do what you will with your helpless slave girl.”

Chapter Fourteen Strangers in the Square

“I’m home,” Sarah called as she turned the key in the door of the apartment.

Titan welcomed Sarah with tail-wagging enthusiasm. Billy muttered something from the depth of the kitchen, emerging with a harassed expression.

“I thought dogs were supposed to be relaxing. This one is more trouble than you. By the way, enjoy yourself?” he asked.

“It has not been all fun,” Sarah protested. Then she pictured what she had performed as a slave and didn’t believe her own statement.

“Look, I’ve got some news about this case.” Sarah changed the subject. She told Billy what Yuri had revealed—but not the circumstances of the revelation.

“If it wasn’t for the money we’ve been paid by Minski, I’d call it a day.” Billy shook his head and looked pensive.

Sarah roughed up his curly hair and kissed his cheek. “Feeling a bit down? Come and tell Sarah all about it.”

They sat in the kitchenette and drank coffee. Titan watched them intently, probably thinking about how to join in the conversation.

“So, why so sad?” Sarah asked.

“Who knows why poignant memories come back at certain times.” Billy weakly grinned.

“Anyone in particular?”

“His name was Alan. He was the first guy who made me feel good about myself. I met him in a pub in Cirencester, where we lived at the time.”

“Love at first sight?” Sarah sighed.

“More like laughter.” Billy smiled in remembrance. “I saw him looking at me all evening and just before closing time he struck up a conversation about cooking. I really fancied him and, perhaps it was the drink, but I blurted out I was gay. He had such lovely eyes and they sparkled as he said, ‘Have you been to the Eagle Head Pub?’ I shook my head. Alan said, ‘If you go into the men’s room someone has written on the wall, “My mother made me a homosexual.” And someone else has added, “If I give her the wool, will she make me one?”’ That was it. We ended up in hysterics and in his warm bed.”

“What happened to him?” Sarah stroked Billy’s hand.

He closed his eyes and said, “I’ve had an idea.”

She knew that was a signal to ask no more.

“Poor Mr. and Mrs. Lewinson paid us to investigate the goings on at Wellesley Square. Perhaps we should earn our money. And I get the feeling it isn’t unconnected with everything else around us.”

Sarah explained to Titan the situation; the little dog listened to every word. “We’ll be back soon Titan. If you get hungry, chew Billy’s shoes; they’ve got a much better flavor.”

The dog wasn’t having any of it. It jumped up and those big eyes won. Sarah cuddled Titan—and all three left the apartment.

They walked to Sarah’s car and she said, “Shall I drive?”

“I think it’s best.” Billy shrugged.

“Still feeling delicate?” Sarah said sympathetically.

“Nope. I haven’t got a driving license.”

Wellesley Square was in a late Victorian area of imposing four-story town houses, in subdued red brick and ornate Gothic revival frontages. Apart from the four upward levels they also had basements, which must have been for the servants' kitchens when the properties were built. Malmouth had been a major fishing port in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when vessels docked in their thousands and prosperous merchants built not just these elegant houses but rows of substantial warehouses along the bustling quays. By the nineteen-twenties the fish had been depleted and Malmouth declined until it was "re-discovered" as a seaside resort with its natural wide sand beaches and bracing air.

Sarah parked on a side street. They settled Titan in the backseat. He showed agitation at the return to his previous district. Perhaps the little fellow sensed the spirit of his past owners.

The Lewinsons' house was number five. It stood in a darkness of lamentation with a hedge of laurel to the front and mail overflowing from the letterbox. Death said nothing to everyday life. It went on regardless.

They climbed the ten steep stone steps and Sarah pushed at the door.

"It's locked," she muttered, not expecting any other result.

"Old ladies like Mrs. Lewinson always hide a spare key," Billy said and started searching under flowerpots and front mats. He saw Sarah staring at him. "Trust me. Obviously you never had a fussy old aunt."

He pushed the galvanized metal trashcan to one side and stifled a cry of "Got it!" He tried the key in the door and in they went. In respect to the late departed clients, they didn't search around. It was not this house they were interested in. Going to the kitchen at the rear the duo went out into a small courtyard and looked cautiously over the fence.

"That's the house Mrs. Lewinson said was where all the odd things were happening," Billy whispered.

“Weird noises and late night happenings’, I think she described it as,” Sarah said in agreement.

“You’re wearing your jeans,” Billy said in surprise.

“Why?”

“Climbing fences in a skirt can be undignified.” He winked.

A few minutes later they were standing in the next yard to the Lewinsons’ old house. Billy peered in the windows at the back. Sarah’s curiosity got the better of her. Having come this far she wasn’t going to be content.

She whistled at Billy. “Come on, slow coach. The back door is open.”

Carefully they entered the kitchen and in the dim evening light went through to the lounge and dining room.

“Obviously not used as a family residence,” Billy said as he observed the lack of everyday furniture. There were just a few chairs, two desks and lots of wooden packing cases.

“You don’t get many of these in family homes,” Sarah said and beckoned Billy to come and see. He followed her voice into a large room, which was once used as a second reception room when the house was for a rich merchant family. In the middle of the room was a massive printing machine.

Billy walked around it and made appreciative noises. “Being a photographer I worked for advertising agencies and designers. I often went to see my work used in brochures. This is a serious piece of equipment. I think it’s a six-color litho machine for quality print.”

“As in bank notes?” Sarah asked.

Billy turned. She had levered open one of the wooden cases and was hands deep in stacks of crisp, folding stuff. “Jeez,” Billy let out the flabbergasted cry.

“Money doesn’t grow on trees. It’s produced in Wellesley Square.”
Sarah blew out her cheeks.

Quickly they checked some of the other cases. There were pounds Sterling, American and Canadian dollars, Euros and Japanese yen.

“But no Russian rubles?”

They spun around. It was Sonny. He stood in the shadows, but the silhouette cast by the light from a street lamp shining through the window showed he was pointing a mean-looking automatic rifle in their direction.

Chapter Fifteen

Lethal Weapons Two

“I wondered where you two would lead me,” Sonny said as he walked out from the murkiness. “Looks like you’ve got a little goldmine going here.” He grinned in an unpleasant way, inclining his head to indicate the printing press.

“This is nothing to do with us,” Billy exclaimed and then wondered whether he should have revealed that to Sonny at this stage.

“Right...” Sonny pondered. “So whose is it? The Russians or the freelance outfit?”

“I don’t think they’re Russian,” Sarah put in for no other reason other than her intense dislike of this arrogant man.

Sonny’s face turned slowly toward her. “You really have too many opinions, young lady. Beautiful women should be seen but not heard. Unless it’s to moan in bed, begging to be serviced.” His wickedly handsome face distorted and Sarah was reminded to ask, in better circumstances, if he had a painted portrait of himself in the attic.

“While we wait and see who turns up to check if the ink has dried on their money, what shall we do?” Sonny sneered. “I’m bored of pointing this gun at both of you...hey, you with the spectacles, come over here.”

Billy went toward Sonny.

“Sit in that chair.”

Billy sat on an old wooden upright dining chair.

Sonny scrutinized the room. He alighted on the discarded thin metal wire, which had been used around the wooden packing cases. While keeping a wary eye on Sarah, he used the strips to bind Billy's wrists and legs together and then to the chair.

"Now there's just you to worry about," he snarled, pointing the automatic at Sarah. "Come over here."

Sarah glared at him.

Sonny lifted the rifle and placed the end of the barrel on Billy's temples. "It's not up for discussion. One more 'no' and your friend will have his brains decorating the walls."

Most of the respectful residents of Wellesley Square were in bed by an early hour. They still remembered Malmouth when it was a sleepy and slightly boring town. It was said of the place in the early nineteen-sixties that you couldn't even get a parachute to open after ten. Now it was brasher and like all modern life, no respecter of the older inhabitants. As this oasis of a bygone day settled down to slumber, the group at number five was playing a deadly game.

Sarah kept her eyes insolently on Sonny as she got near to him. She stopped two feet from the gangster and set her mouth defiantly. Sonny drummed his left hand fingers on the stubby rifle butt, keeping his right hand index finger hovering over the trigger.

"It might be a long wait tonight," he said and gave her a look from head to toe that reeked of sexuality. "How are we going to pass the time, babe?"

Sarah continued to outstare him.

"Is it going to be with or without your agreement?" He curled a lip as if he was imitating a superior, conceited look he'd seen in a movie.

"Get lost." Sarah spat the words.

Sonny laughed obnoxiously. He turned to the bound Billy and poked the barrel at his chest. "You and this bitch an item?"

"No," Billy said softly.

"Pity." Sonny chewed the sentiment. "It would have been interesting for you to watch while I screw your babe."

Billy struggled at his bonds and flinched as the thin wire cut into his skin.

Sonny looked at Sarah. "Get undressed, Miss...and prepare to meet your master." Sonny clicked the rifle trigger at the same time to make sure Sarah got the message.

She was in mental torment. Her instinct was to fight and scratch like a feral cat. In her mind was survival. In her heart was Billy's safety.

Sonny caught Sarah by the hand and pulled her close. His hand pawed the swell of her breasts. She felt sick as the man touched the naked skin at the tip of her bra.

The door opened. Sonny swung around, and two cracks of deadly bullets woke the peaceful night in Wellesley Square.

Sarah couldn't remember screaming...it must have been her loud piercing shrill which sounded in her head. She tried to think, tried to regain sense.

At her feet Sonny knelt with his hands trying to cover the bloodstain trickling from his shoulder. By the door, Yuri was crumpled in a heap, clutching his leg.

She ran to Yuri and put her arms around him.

"I'm okay," he muttered, obviously in pain.

"Sarah!" Billy's shout called her back. She went to him, untying the wire and helping him to regain the feeling in his arms.

"Thanks, darling. You'd better see to him now," Billy indicated Yuri. "I'll see if I can find something in the kitchen to dress his wounds."

Sarah went to Yuri again. “What are you doing here?” she asked for no other reason than something mundane to say and try to bring normality to a situation she didn’t understand.

At the same time she kicked away his gun, which had fallen on the impact of the bullet from Sonny’s rifle shot.

“Minski sent me here to collect some wooden packing cases.” He groaned.

“Those filled with money,” Sarah said.

“Money! What money?” Yuri looked surprised, catching his breath at the throbbing of the bullet in his leg. His eyes then widened and he tried to speak.

Sarah turned to follow the line. Sonny was getting to his feet and reaching for the rifle.

Sarah froze and watched as the gangster moved in slow motion for the rifle. From the kitchen came a vengeful angel, a wild banshee. It took all before it.

Sonny landed across the room with Billy in full cry.

The private eye, Mr. B. Fields, got up and walked to Sarah, shaking and trembling.

“Thanks, partner.” She held out her arms. “Is he harmless now?”

Billy nodded. “He won’t be around for awhile.”

“Why, what did you do?”

“I hit him.”

Something in the way he said “hit” made Sarah ask, “With what, Billy?”

“That kettle.” He pointed.

“First a waffle maker...and now a kettle.” Sarah grinned. “Does the army know about these lethal weapons of mass destruction?”

They would have fallen into each other's arms and giggled, but Yuri's groans brought them back to other problems. They got on either side of him and slowly helped him out of the house and to Sarah's car.

Back in their apartment, Billy dressed the wound, tucked Sarah and Yuri up in the double bed and fell heavily onto the sofa for a grateful sleep. Titan decided it was more discreet to sleep at the end of the bed and look the other way.

Chapter Sixteen

A Room With a View

For the first time since the lady with the most provocative deep black eyes started living at his apartment, Billy knocked on the bedroom door before going in. He took a faraway grunt as an invitation to enter and awkwardly twisted the door handle while balancing a tray, pushed open the door with his knee, and took in breakfast for two.

“Room service.” He grinned and put the coffee and toast on the floor.

He was about to exit when a pair of soft hands appeared from under the duvet and grabbed his arm. A muffled voice said, “Don’t go. Three in a bed has always been one of my favorite morning pastimes.”

The head followed and the face poked a tongue out at her partner. Sarah patted the bed and Billy sat on the edge.

“How is he?” Billy whispered.

“Delicious,” Sarah purred with a cheeky grin.

“I don’t mean...” Billy stopped and realized just in time he was being kindly mocked.

Yuri surfaced and looked groggy. Although women were not on Billy’s nightly menu, he could see how a lady of Sarah’s energy and curiosity could make any man look exhausted in the morning.

Sarah and Yuri sipped the coffee but declined the toast.

“Can I ask something?” Billy directed his gaze at Yuri. The handsome man nodded. “Didn’t you really know about all that money?”

“I was only told to collect the cases, not what was in them.”

“So why did you come into the house with a gun in your hand?”

“Mr. Minski gave me the key and said the house was empty. As I came in the front door, I heard voices. I’ve learnt the unexpected usually means big trouble.” Yuri’s face was honest and Billy gave him the benefit of the doubt...for the moment.

“This money,” Sarah butted in. “I was thinking about that last night...amongst other things.” She winked at Yuri. “That amount of counterfeit is not the sort of thing you wander into your local bank and deposit over-the-counter. So how do you spread it around?”

Billy looked interested. Yuri looked as if he didn’t quite follow.

Sarah continued. “The casinos have got high rollers coming in from all over the world. What a perfect way to distribute that funny money.”

“Brilliant!” Billy beamed. “And that explains why Lopez and Ferdinand were trying to muscle in.”

Yuri still looked circumspect.

“Don’t you go for that theory?” Sarah brought his attention back. Yuri hesitated and gave first Billy, then Sarah, a worried expression.

“Well, come on. What’s on your mind?” Sarah asked.

“It’s not the money,” Yuri began. “It’s you guys.”

Sarah and Billy waited for him to explain.

Yuri looked warily at Billy and halfheartedly asked, “Don’t you mind about me and Sarah?”

“In what way?” Billy said with a wrinkled brow.

“You’re her fellow, yet...” Yuri paused. Billy began to say something but Yuri interrupted. “I know she loves you. She’s said it often enough.”

Billy looked at Sarah, grinned and went red.

“It’s a different type of love, Yuri.” She sensed an embarrassment in both men so tried to move on, saying, “The moving finger writes; and having writ, moved on.”

“What?” Billy frowned.

“Omar Khayyam,” Sarah explained.

“That restaurant in Colbalt Street.” Billy gave a wide-eyed grin. Sarah hit him with a pillow.

Yuri shook his head and wondered what the sense of humor in this country was all about. They made fun of everybody and everything.

An hour later the hilarity and confidence of the early morning had evaporated. Billy sat by the window watching the crowds slowly test the day. Sarah was sitting by the kitchenette table scribbling notes in her diary and Yuri looked pensive. He wasn’t sure what to do. Ever since he’d arrived from his mother country, Andre Minski had been his benefactor. Back in the village in the mountains, the Minski family had guided and planned the destiny of the surrounding district. From invasions by Magyar horsemen, to Cossack raiders and then the storm troopers of the modern Huns, a Minski had told the peoples what to do. Was falling in love with this dark-eyed beauty allowed? Why couldn’t he do what he wanted?

Sarah pushed her diary away and made a mental note to go through the many years’ collection and edit out the seriously rude bits. “Well, you two look happy with life.” She got up and clapped her hands with an effort to appear positive. “I’ve had another idea.”

“Go on,” Billy warily said, knowing a Sarah Greene thought could lead anywhere.

“Whichever way you look at it, this is a bugger’s muddle. We seem to be piggy in the middle...and everyone is after the pork. What about trying to find this Benny Trenton?”

“What for?” Billy grimaced.

“One, it would get us in the good books of the London mob. Two, we would have a bargaining chip against the...” She was going to say Russian gang, but deferred for Yuri’s sake. “And three...well there is no three, except it would be fun.”

“Your idea of fun is not mine,” Billy said and shook his head. “My scheme involves a fast car and putting distance between us and the whole affair.”

“Does it include fighting your way past four angry men?” Yuri muttered from the window. The duo looked at him. He pointed down to the street.

Sarah and Billy went over, and two hearts sank.

Down in the street was a large four-wheel-drive vehicle. Four equally solid and big men had gotten out and were looking up at the apartment. They were certainly not there to invite the duo for a picnic.

“Fucking hell.” Billy groaned.

“Why Satan’s place should have all the sex at times like this is beyond me.” Sarah shrugged then added more firmly, “Is there a back way out of here?”

Billy’s senses returned. “Good thinking, partner.”

Sarah took Yuri’s hand and kissed his cheek. “What do you want to do? We could tie you up so when your friends arrive you can claim you were wounded and we brought you here. Or you could—”

“I’m coming with you,” Yuri replied.

“Are you sure? Think with your head, not just your adorable cock,” Sarah said and kept a straight face.

“I’m with you.” Yuri smiled.

“That’s the story of my life.” Sarah only half-joked. “The men who follow me to the ends of the earth haven’t got a clue how we’re going to afford the return fare.”

Billy dug her in the ribs. “Keep your philosophy for another time...if there is another time. Let’s get out of here. And quick.”

Chapter Seventeen

No Pain, No Gain

“Down there?” Sarah shouted back at Billy. She stared incredulously from the rear window of the kitchen at the drop to the flat roof of the adjoining building. “It must be bloody twenty feet. Is this your notion of a back way out? I’m not from a circus act. And neither is Titan.”

Billy took the jump and stood waiting to try and help break Sarah’s fall.

She thought about it, heard the front door being battered down, held her breath, cuddled Titan, and went for it. Gravity took its toll and she landed much more easily than she’d imagined. When Billy puffed out a complaint, Sarah realized he’d become her cushion. Titan thought it was a great game.

Staggering to his feet, Billy looked up and gulped. Yuri wasn’t reluctant to jump like Sarah...but he was considerably heavier. The injured man launched himself and to Billy’s amazement was remarkably agile, even with the wounded leg. They didn’t wait around. Five steps across the roof and they were metallically clattering down the fire escape.

At the bottom, Sarah led the way to her car, threw it into gear and accelerated up the road just as four figures appeared at their apartment kitchen window.

Sarah sped along the promenade road, turned right onto the major route out of town and then decided anyone following them would take

that direction. So burning screeching rubber, she obliquely turned right onto the winding coast road heading north.

Titan sat on the backseat and thought it was good fun. The Lewinsons never played like this.

“Any ideas?” Billy shouted anxiously at the same time as hanging on when the car took a sharp bend at the sort of speed not seen in these parts since the last low-flying military aircraft from the airbase at Walton got lost.

Sarah hadn't got a clue where she was going. All this was virgin territory to her. Billy decided to keep quiet and let Sarah get the aggression out of her system. That lasted for almost an hour. When she eventually pulled the speed back to a respectable level, Billy looked at a passing sign and saw the word Bilton.

“Pull in over there.” It was more of a suggestion than a command from Billy. They were within sight and sound of the sea, with the little village of Bilton nestling on the rise of the slope and the square-towered Norman church standing sentinel to the pebbledash houses. What trees that survived the fierce north-easterlies leaned away to the landward side, giving ample evidence of the harshness of winter storms.

Today the calm, warm breeze gave no reminder of those cruel days. Along the sand cliff was a chalet park for summer visitors, with freshly painted buildings and hoardings reflecting their garish holiday clothes back at a dazzling sun.

“We might be able to get lost in there,” Billy said.

The reception area of Haven Homes was bedlam. Children ran around with an assortment of sticky candies and half-eaten burgers in their hands and mouths. Their disinterested parents mooched amongst the racks of tatty gifts and leaflets for local attractions.

Maybe at the start of the season the place had been clean and welcoming, trying to present a smart face to the guests. Now, no effort was being made. It was a take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

A receptionist with an expression of studied indifference surveyed the scene with distaste, almost certainly disapproving of the ill-disciplined families. While her company uniform and hairdo remained immaculate, the caring, well-rehearsed training sessions in customer satisfaction had gone after the first flush of spring. What she thought of the great-unwashed public was carved in every fold of her thick makeup.

Sarah approached the desk. “Any accommodation for a few nights?” Sarah asked. It wasn’t a difficult question. It elicited a look of which Medusa would have been proud.

“Is that for three?” the dragon asked with very little interest in the reply.

Sarah made a show of counting the three friends, gave the battle-axe a sweet smile and said, “And you did that without a calculator.”

The receptionist’s face said, *Button it, lady, I’ve heard it all before*. Her mouth uttered, “We’ve got a single room unit. H26, opposite the toilet block.”

“Sounds like an offer we can’t refuse...or perhaps I should say smells like.”

Again, not a flicker from Old Wrinkle Face. When the archangel Michael announced the second coming, hers was the sort of sour expression that wouldn’t change.

“Pay in advance,” the receptionist said and dangled a key in front of Sarah like a warder in a prison camp.

The deal was struck; false names provided—one small dog conveniently overlooked—and the three of them were given the Haven Home official welcome pack. It consisted of three pages of rules and

regulations, vouchers for half-price laundry service and a highly cultivated cold shoulder from the lady with the powdered mask.

Unit H26 was an oblong off-white block of concrete, bland on all four sides, with a wooden and felt roof, one door and two windows. Inside it had a small single bed, a double not much bigger, a table and two chairs, a highchair and a washbasin that was too small to give a hamster a decent bath.

“At least it’s clean,” Billy said, trying to find something good to say.

Sarah shook her head. “Who’s going to use the highchair?”

Yuri sat wearily on the double bed, holding his leg in discomfort. Sarah went to him, realizing the bullet wound was giving him pain, and put her arms around the broad man.

Billy took the hint, coughed and said, “You two stay there. I’ll go for a wander and see if they have a decent takeout.”

Sarah smiled at Billy as he left and cradled Yuri’s head. “Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable?” She soothed and nibbled his ear.

His normally dangerous eyes were now dull and bleary, although he managed a knowing nod at her sensual suggestion.

“This is a situation where I try to think like my old dad,” Sarah started. Yuri looked up for explanation. “He led my mother a merry dance with his ducking and diving. There was always a scheme on the boil. Another way to make a buck without too much work. But when it came to a tight corner, he knew how to fight his way out. Charm with a steel lining was how mum described him. Mind you, he knew it himself. He always had this smashing saying. *Yea though I walk in the valley of death I shall fear no evil, for I am the biggest son of a bitch in the valley.*” Sarah giggled, remembering her dad.

Yuri forced a smile. The pain and cultural difference made it impossible for him to totally follow the humor.

“Do you know what the best analgesic is, Yuri?”

He shook his head. She kissed his mouth and let her tongue explore around the dimple on his chin, down his neck as she prepared its onward journey by unbuttoning his shirt. Her lip-smacking caresses got to his lower stomach and the outer black curly growth of his pubic zonal region.

“Feeling better?” She momentarily raised her head, smirking at him. Yuri’s breath was quickening.

Her fingers skillfully unbuckled his belt and top button of his trousers...then zip went the zing in her heart.

“Like the blue shorts.” She chuckled and ran her hand over his bulge.

His body twitched and a moan came from deep within his wide chest.

“Let me warm my hands,” Sarah said with a stifled short panting sound, working her hand down inside those tight blue shorts. She didn’t have to burrow far to feel the slightly moist, bulbous head of his erection. Sarah let her fingers tiptoe over the hot brute, delighting in its primitive response to the slightest touch. How easily men became aroused and had a single objective, spearheaded by this missile of sexual fulfillment, she thought.

Yuri stirred and tried to take the initiative. Sarah soothed him back to his prone position. “Leave this one to me,” she whispered in a tone of promise.

Slipping his shorts down over his hips, she studied the animal power of his cock as it found the freedom to test the air for the aroma of its prey. Sarah brought it to an upright stance, eased her skirt up and her

panties down, guiding Yuri's finger into the already damp entrance to her pussy.

His words spoke of his needs and his other hand grappled with her blouse and bra in his anxiety to consummate the passion within his loins. Not until his fingering had reached her tender trigger points inside her vagina did she make the final move. With her emotions and passions now coordinated, Sarah sat over his maleness and pushed down so it disappeared into her vagina.

The pain, the worries and all other unpleasant consciousness were fading as they screwed each other.

Outside, families took their pleasure in a sunny day. Inside, Sarah and Yuri took their gratification in a stiff cock and a wildly grasping pussy.

When Billy got back to the chalet, Yuri was asleep and Sarah rested exhausted by his side, both looking innocent and without the ferocious desire so recently spent from their bodies.

Chapter Eighteen

Don't Leave Me This Way

They'd eaten a sterile meal of burgers and chips, washed down with burnt-tasting coffee. Yuri dozed for a while then fell into a deeper sleep.

"I've got to get out of this rabbit hutch for a break," Sarah puffed. Billy nodded in agreement.

They made sure Yuri looked settled and Titan had gotten his instructions to stay, and then went for a walk around the Haven Homes site.

It was almost eleven o'clock. The music drifted in waves from the Club House as the tunes of yesteryear were belted out by a loud DJ. The revelers were trying to recapture an era when they remembered being happier. They were not better times, it was that the good stays in the mind and the bad is filtered out in order that the brain can forget the past.

Kids of all ages were allowed to stay up late and watch their parents acting silly. Here and there around the outside of the clubhouse were two types of groups. The smokers, banished from the interior, indulged their wicked weed habit in conclaves of ash, while teenage boys and girls discovered the brief magic of a holiday romance. Their shadowy wanderings were from first kisses to up-against-the-wall quickies.

Sarah and Billy turned away from the bright lights of the clubhouse entrance and walked toward the car park. A group of young teenagers

looked up to no good. Along with greasy skin, attitude and an inability to start the night's entertainment till at least ten-thirty in the evening, hormonal imbalances seemed to have brought a new genetic malfunction called vandalism. Today's society let its kids wreak havoc until they got into their mid-twenties, then it taxed them to hell so they could pay for the next generation to trash every monument, open space and public amenity.

In the far corner was another group skulking around. Billy imagined they were indulging in the age-old pointless pastime of breaking into cars. He looked closer and let out a gulp of agony. "Jeez, why didn't I think straight?"

"What's up, Billy," Sarah asked, puzzled at his outburst.

"Over there. Those four guys are checking the number plates of the cars...and they ain't no car park attendants."

Sarah screwed up her eyes and made a promise to forget vanity and get her eyes tested. "Who are they?"

"I reckon they are our friends we left at the apartment. They're checking out the registration of the vehicles. Once they get to your car, I'd place any money that they'll be marching into reception to find out where we are."

Five minutes later the duo were back at the chalet, waking Yuri and frantically helping him to get up.

"Just try to walk, Yuri. We'll explain why as we get out of here," Sarah said, encouraging him along and calling Titan to follow.

They managed to get to the edge of the camp with no plan what to do. That fact struck Sarah and she was about to stop and ask Billy. He had other matters on his mind.

"They're coming across over there," he whispered. "Quick, down onto the beach."

“Then what?” Sarah tensely asked.

“It might give us five minutes more to live...got any better ideas?” Billy glared at her.

With Yuri dragging his injured leg in an awkward and restricting way, they followed the spiral path down to the beach. The sea could be heard, braying and snorting as the tide rose under a gathering wind.

“If we walk along the sand, we’ll eventually clear the camp and, with any luck, find a path to the main road further down,” Billy pleaded for agreement.

Sarah obeyed, not knowing what else to say. Yuri grimaced and hobbled as best he could.

The lights from Haven Homes faded as they walked south. The manicured beach of Bilton was left behind and the sandy terrain became strewn with rocks and damaged breakwaters. More ominously, the night was turning decidedly angry with salt spray increasing and the lashing fingers of waves reaching closer to them.

With tiredness setting in, Billy was going to suggest they go back on the route they’d been following. As he stopped to talk to Sarah, he saw pinpricks of flashing lights in the distance behind them. “They’re following us,” he said, trying not to sound in a panic.

They battled on for another fifteen minutes. Yuri was getting slower, and Sarah felt the first rush of brine against her ankles. Even as she wondered what to do, the cruel sea unleashed a furious assault on the innocent. Stirring winds whipped storm-tossed waves as they collided offshore and absorbed energy from each other. The resulting release of kinetic power hit Sarah and sent her crashing against a row of iron stanchions. Titan yelped and ran off. She heard Billy gulping for air as sea flooded his lungs. Then a desperate noise assailed her hearing.

She fought to scream as Yuri's body was dashed against the rocks. Thrashing out, Sarah felt for human flesh and held on to Yuri's hand as they helplessly gave way to the onslaught. She sensed Billy clambering onto the boulders, which had been deposited at the lower cliff face to act as a sea defense against soil erosion. Time floated, and she lost touch with reality.

From the blackness of the demon sea, Sarah imagined she saw a light. Voices pierced the noise of the mounting waves, and she could make out the outline of a boat battling against nature to reach her. She felt as if a monster had been released from the seabed to strike the land and reclaim the children of the air.

The taste was of salt and iodine seaweed. The smell was of death. She cried into the cacophonous din and all around the yellow men shouted at her as they hauled her mind away from her body.

Chapter Nineteen I Shall Survive

The light hurt her eyes and a blurred figure insisted she answer. Sarah wanted to be left alone to sleep. In dreams it was safe, and the water could not penetrate her slumber.

“Wake up, Sarah,” the voice repeated. It said it over and over. At last the lady of the dark eyes gave way and tried hard to enter the world inhabited by the figure.

“Now sit up.”

Sarah let herself be propped up in the bed. The figure became a person in white and blue. “That’s better. Take it easy; the doctor will be back to see you soon.”

Sarah hazily thought of a nurse. Yes, this woman was a nurse.

“What are...?” Sarah started.

The figure in the crispy white starched uniform soothed away her attempts to speak. “Later, Sarah. For now you must rest. I’ve just got to take your temperature and pulse...then you can sleep again.”

The door opened and Billy walked in. Titan was there as well, jumping onto the bed. Billy smiled sweetly at Sarah, sat on the side of the bed and held her hand. Again she tried to form questions. He kissed her head and the smile was so good. Titan licked her face. The nurse fussed about at this canine intrusion.

“It’s fine now,” he said for some reason. “We were caught in the tide. The local lifeboat was launched and they pulled us from the rocks.”

Sarah stared and wondered why he had used such simple words of explanation. She may be exhausted but she wasn’t an idiot. A bolt of burning fire crashed straight for her heart.

Sarah sat up more and held her head in the formation of a terrifying thought. A single two-syllable scream rent her mind. “*Yuri.*”

The nurse held and patted her hand. Billy’s smile was even more inane. Sarah became hysterical. The door opened and the doctor rushed in. In her panic and horror fighting for control, he sedated Sarah. The nurse and Billy kept her still until she slipped into the gentle arms of unknowing sleep.

Sarah awoke five hours later. Billy was still sitting on her bed. She opened her eyes and saw that kind face of his. The tears flooded forth, and the duo held on tight to each other.

“Yuri?” was the one word.

“Sorry, babe. He disappeared in that storm. They’re searching...” Billy let the words die.

Sarah got up, even though Billy protested. She looked around the room, saw her clothes and said to him, “Are you coming?”

They had been in a nearby house, resting after the ordeal. When Sarah walked from the front door, she saw the sea and the cliff only a hundred yards away.

Billy caught up, took her hand and they went down a grassy path onto the beach. Titan stayed on the cliff as if he, in terror, remembered the ordeal.

The sea was now calm and looked in its docile flatness as if it could never bring harm to the people of the land. Sarah recalled the scene and

the tears began again. She sobbed over and over, softly calling, “Yuri, Yuri.”

They stood hand in hand for almost an hour. No words could comfort; no hurt could be eradicated. Time would have to flow and cover the wounds with other memories. Sarah ended her vigil, bent down and picked up a handful of sand. It trickled through her fingers as life had gone from Yuri. Was that all love had been? A few moments of space and then the sands of time, leaving no impression of human frailty.

For the rest of the day, Sarah and Billy sat in the house and played cards, remaining silent and letting the quiet heal. Late in the evening the rotund Detective Sergeant Ezzard arrived and, after an expression of sorrow, sat next to the duo, notebook poised.

“Sad business,” Ezzard started with a bland, obvious statement. “Did you know the deceased well?” he continued with little concession to any hurt Sarah might feel.

As the lady of the sparkling dark eyes remained taciturn, Billy answered, “We met him about a week ago.”

“Not close, then?” Ezzard shrugged.

Billy sensed the volcanic eruption and held Sarah’s hand tightly. “Is longevity a measure of intensity?” Billy asked Ezzard with an edge of aggression.

The detective caught the flavor and half-smiled to deflect criticism. “Seems to me, Lopez and Ferdinand might be a key to many answers in this case,” Ezzard mused out loud as he got up and stared out of the window.

“What about...?” Billy was going to bawl the name of Minski. This time it was Sarah who restrained the conversation.

“Why don’t you arrest them?” she calmly asked.

“No evidence, miss. Those two sit in their house at Canston and enjoy life...but we can’t do a thing about it.”

The rest of the discussion was inconsequential. Eventually Ezzard took his leave and waddled down the front path to the police car waiting for him.

“Insensitive bastard,” Billy muttered after him.

“Don’t be fooled by the bulk of the man,” Sarah quietly said. “He might be a rotund detective, but he is a nifty dancer in words.”

“Explain?” Billy looked puzzled.

Ezzard got into the car and took a final look back at the house with Sarah and Billy watching him from the window.

“Ezzard is a cunning detective, trying to give the impression he lumbers about not seeing other people’s emotions,” Sarah began. “He knows perfectly well what is going on. Why do you think he practically told us where Bolan and Meo were hanging out?”

Billy raised an eyebrow to silently ask the question.

“Because he saw we were close to...Yuri”—she swallowed hard to say the name—“and calculates we are going to pursue the matter.”

“For what purpose?” Billy asked.

“Ezzard mixes truth in with his plans. He probably doesn’t have any evidence, so he can’t arrest them. But if two amateur gumshoes go blundering in, they might stir up a hornet’s nest.”

“Clever,” Billy pondered. “So we’d better stay away.”

“Wouldn’t that be sensible?” Sarah said.

“Sure would,” Billy agreed.

“Then sod sense. Let’s go and kick ass,” Sarah said through gritted teeth. “You haven’t got a friend that likes dogs, have you, Billy?”

“Why?”

“I think this is one adventure too far for a canine investigator.”

On the way back they stopped at the café. After a chat Betty stood with Titan, waving them goodbye.

Chapter Twenty Radiating Light

The road was wide and straight, which was a mystery, as the small town of Canston didn't deserve a mention on the map, let alone a highway into the place. Although this was high summer, there were none of the caravan and chalet parks that littered the rest of the coast.

Sarah stopped the car on a fork in the road and surveyed the possibilities. "Reminds me of Rycastle on the south coast, which had about as much pizzazz as this place. Its only claim to fame was an historical one. It was said that in nine forty-eight the Vikings landed and were repelled by the men of Rycastle. So was I."

"That could explain a few things," Billy said, pointing to a sign. "Canston Nuclear Power Station, two miles. Well, there's your reason for the road system—all those trucks taking in uranium and bringing out toxic waste."

Sarah frowned and muttered, "The only fast-breeder that's safe is a rabbit."

Heading to the center of the town, the two got the impression of a ghost settlement where even the spooks had sold up and moved on. It was a one-industry town that kept itself to itself. Parking, they strolled along by a few shops until reaching The Angel Inn.

"Is that as in Angel of Death?" Sarah sarcastically threw out and went on in.

The hush of the pub was brought to a complete graveyard silence. No one had been talking, but some might have been thinking as Sarah and Billy entered. Even the anticipation of a brain cell ticking over came to a grinding halt. Sarah walked to the bar. The man behind it looked at her like she was from outer space. His left eye stared somewhere over her shoulder and the right one ticked and flicked as if it was connected to an intermittent electrical supply.

“Two pints of beer,” she ordered and gave him a smile and a wink that must have been the closest he’d gotten to sex since the outbreak of bubonic plague killed all the other males in thirteen twenty-seven.

“Straight glasses or with handles?” he asked.

Sarah ostentatiously turned and addressed Billy. “Have you any particular quirks you’d like to express an opinion about in public...and I’m talking beer glasses here, Billy, so no references to sexual positions with the friendly barman.”

Billy managed to keep from laughing and said, “A true man wouldn’t drink out of anything except a glass with handles.”

“There you have it.” She flashed another wanton smile at the cadaver behind the bar. “And just before you go, can I ask something special?” she added in an intimate whisper. His one focused eye lit up. “Seen any strangers in town? Big guy with tanned complexion, and a smaller man, slim, sandy hair.”

“Why are you looking for them?” the barman asked suspiciously.

“They are the father of my darling baby.” Sarah put on a simpering tone.

“Which one?” he slowly asked.

“Hell, how would I know? The tiny baby has got sandy hair, dark eyes...and the cutest smile, just like the car mechanic.”

This game between sassy, beautiful lady and idiot barman could have gone on all afternoon, entertaining the goggle-eyed customers in The Angel Inn. However, it was brought to an end when a voice called out, “I’m flattered you’ve come looking for me, Sarah.”

She turned and there was the handsome Bolan, with Meo at his side. He still looked gorgeous and had the sort of body movement that sent signals to any woman’s head and then radiated down to tickle her pussy. Sarah got the messages, but this time around she knew the waves carried dangerous elements.

“Darling.” She gave him her best wouldn’t-you-like-me look.

He walked over, kissed her hand in an exaggerated gesture and took up a pose he probably practiced to impress the ladies.

“This place is a bit out of your territory, babe.”

“Nowhere is too remote to come and find you, Bolan.” Sarah pouted but watched his eyes carefully to see how much of this syrup he bought. Before he could get in a question, she continued. “Anyway, last time you two ran out on us. Perhaps you’d like to find out what you missed.” That seemed to stimulate his interest and he shuffled in his stance. She noticed his groin tighten and enlarge.

“We’ve got a place along the coast. Do you and your friend want to join us for...?” He smiled wickedly at the unfinished suggestion and, turning to his colleague, said, “I think Meo would have a few ideas how to entertain Billy.”

There were lots of smiles and posturing grins as the four walked from the pub.

The duo left their car by The Angel Inn. Bolan drove a flashy and flamboyantly large four-wheel-drive vehicle, high and wide enough to herd elephants. Turning left at the town’s edge, the road became a lane skirting the low marshy land where the sea met the brackish water of a

slow-moving river. The land was flat and, because of the thin heath soil, very little use for farming. A few small fishing boats were beached up on the dunes, with lobster pots and nets strung out to dry.

The landscape was desolate, except for an incuriously sterile, white concrete building close to the shore. Sarah stared at it. Bolan, catching the direction of her interest, said, "That's Canston Nuclear Power Station. Don't know why but folk keep away from it. Still, Meo and me like the solitude."

Inside the modern alchemist's factory, unseen and unknowable atoms were being torn apart and even more infinitesimal particles of highly charged matter were dancing in crazy circles of power. For all humanity could see, these substances could have been from another world. Uncertainty meeting blind faith in order to feed the insatiable desire for energy.

Bolan swung the car up an even narrower lane. Before them was a low one-story house, painted in a faded marigold color and surrounded by a hedge of trimmed pyracantha. The spiky and thorny shrub gave the cottage a feeling of being under siege with its razor-edged living fence.

"Welcome to our retreat," Bolan announced as they got out of the car and walked up the white gravel drive.

Sarah wondered why they'd want to secrete themselves away in a place like this. She wondered, but was pretty sure of the answer.

Once in the hall, Meo played host and offered to take their topcoats. Sarah looked back at Bolan. He'd shut the solid front door and was turning a large key in the lock. As she watched, he put the key in his pocket, noticed her and grinned like a barracuda let loose amongst a shoal of helpless goldfish.

"Is that necessary?" she challenged.

“If you two cooperate and do exactly what you’re told, the answer is no.”

“And if we don’t?”

Bolan laughed and swaggered across the hall. “Did you hear that, Meo? The pretty lady thinks she has an option.” He stopped, pointed into a room to show the duo they should go that way, and waved a revolver at them to stifle any discussion.

Sarah began to wonder why her damn fool bravado had gotten them into another mess.

Chapter Twenty-One Treble Cross

Sarah guessed that Bolan and Meo had been in the house for about four days. The assumption was based on the amount of dirty cups, half-opened tins of ready meals, take-out wrappers and beer bottles discarded around the room. They wouldn't get any awards for good housekeeping.

"Now, let's cut the crap and tell me exactly why you came looking for us," Bolan said and slumped in an easy chair.

"Because of your magnetic appeal," Sarah smirked insolently.

Bolan Lopez forced a smile and got up. He went over to Sarah and held her chin tightly in his hand, the revolver in her stomach. "You are a beautiful woman. By the end of the day I could succumb to my worst nature and take advantage of a lady. But for the sake of this conversation it's not your pretty neck—or any other part of your anatomy—which is at risk. See that angelic face over there, topped with a mop of sandy hair? Don't be fooled. My friend Meo Ferdinand is a sadistic sexual predator. And if we don't get the answers we want, it will be Billy here who discovers the extent of Meo's twisted mind. Now, let's start again. Why are you involved in all of this?"

Sarah looked at Billy and reckoned his dignity and maybe life was worth playing this game straight.

"We're private investigators and we were hired by a Mr. and Mrs. Lewinson to look into activity in a neighboring property."

Lopez seemed to think and bit his bottom lip as he concentrated. “Then why are you pursuing us? I’ve never heard of these people...Lewis, Lenson...whatever.”

Sarah delicately tried thinking this through. She was extemporizing and needed this to sound plausible.

“Because they’re in with Minski.”

Sarah swung around and faced the voice. He was a man in his mid-twenties, below average height and with eyes set close together and mean-looking.

“You should have stayed out of sight, Benny.”

Benny shook his head in frustration. “And let you have all the fun.”

Sarah didn’t like the way he lasciviously stared at her when he said that.

The man named Benny closed the door, where he had been standing, and took a seat by the leftovers table. “Don’t look surprised, lady. I was at the Alba Palace and saw you two in a cozy chat with Andre Minski.” There was a silence as Billy and Sarah both tried to figure all this out. The man had arrogance written on his face and sewn on the pocket of his handmade silk shirt. He couldn’t keep quiet if he tried and had a lifelong fascination with himself, an occupation he believed everyone else shared.

“The name’s Benny Trenton.”

“Arthur Trenton’s son. Weren’t you kidnapped by Minski?” Billy let out in surprise.

Benny laughed derisively. “Listen, you idiots. The whole kidnap caper was a scam. Old man Trenton was the leader of one of the top gangs in London. He had a stroke six months ago. Nothing more than a shell now. I should have been the new boss...not that tart of a sister, Irma. For fuck’s sake, even Bolan here has had her.”

Lopez looked like he wanted to shut Benny up. The little Trenton guy was ranting in a demented way. The expression “crazy psychopath” came into Sarah’s mind.

“I ain’t going to be humiliated by my own sister,” Benny mouthed on. “The kidnap never happened. It was a put-up job between me and Minski. But then Lopez and Ferdinand turned up from the London scene...and we decided everyone was expendable.”

“You can’t trust anyone these days,” Sarah muttered.

Benny ignored her and took Sarah’s arm. He turned to Bolan and growled a command. “Get rid of him.” He was pointing at Billy. “This little bombshell is mine. I’ve been banged up here for days without a bit of soft flesh.”

Chapter Twenty-Two Run For Your Life

Sarah went for Benny Trenton like a feral cat, nails scratching at his eyes, and as she landed at his throat, a knee thudded into the softest part of his male pride. The little hoodlum was a conceited, bombastic punk when he was waving a revolver around. Trying to fend off the wrath of a hellcat, he became a screaming kid, bawling for someone...anyone...to get her away.

He rolled into a ball on the ground, with Sarah flaying punches at his face and biting his hands as he brought them up to protect himself. All she needed was a few more minutes, and the rat would have capitulated.

A crack of fire reverberated in her ears and plaster fell from the ceiling. She momentarily looked toward the sound. Meo was standing with a smoking gun in his hand. The hole in the ceiling still leaked debris where the bullet had gone through.

“The next one will make a mess of Billy’s guts,” Meo said with obvious relish.

Sarah slowly got up and stared at Meo, then Billy. Benny Trenton staggered to his feet. His eyes were wild, his mouth moving without words. He had the look of a maniac. A very sadistic maniac. His mouth frothing, he pulled open the cupboard, found some twine and shouted at Bolan to hold the girl and then ranted, “One move from this bitch and he is dead. Understand?”

Meo licked his lips and savored the prospect of disposing of Billy. With Bolan holding Sarah, Benny bound her wrists behind her, taking fiendish delight in pawing her breasts and thighs once she was hogtied. “Now take Billy outside and do whatever is necessary,” Benny ordered. Bolan merely shrugged, Meo chuckled callously. “And you, my tigress, are going to pay for your disrespect. By the time I’ve finished with you, you’ll be begging for forgiveness.”

The door of the house closed with an ominous, solid decisiveness. Sarah had two thoughts. Deep concern for Billy...and horror at her ordeal at the hands of this man.

Benny Trenton went up to Sarah as she stood bound and immobile. “Do you like sex?” He breathed heavily into her face. She remained dumb.

He cackled like a naughty child about to pull the wings off a helpless butterfly. “That would be too good for you at first. We’ll get around to that...when you have suffered.”

Benny ran his hand over Sarah’s neck and played with the buttons on her blouse. She forced a smile and he looked at her directly in the face. Sarah rolled moisture around her mouth, coiled her tongue and spat at Benny.

His hand raised and made a fist. Sarah flinched and closed her eyes. The unmistakable sound of bullet came from outside. The lady of the dark eyes felt a sick feeling...not for herself, but the fate of Billy. Then another shot, and another.

Benny made a move toward the door. It burst open and Meo staggered in, blood oozing from a shoulder wound.

“The Minski boys ambushed us.” His face was ashen and cut from the force he’d hit the door when trying to get in.

Benny rushed to a cupboard, took out an automatic machine gun, smashed the glass in the window and fired wildly. His volley was returned with a hail of bullets from outside.

As Benny and Meo fired in all directions, Sarah took cover as best she could in the far corner.

“Sarah.” The voice was soft...and from behind her.

She turned and saw Billy creeping around the door, which led out into the rear yard. With her hands still bound, she painfully crept over to the door, and as Benny and Meo tried to kill every living creature, she slipped out the back.

With sobbing and hysteria only just under control, Sarah let Billy untie her wrists. She threw her arms around him.

“Later,” he consoled her. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

Running, with heads and bodies ducking low, the duo made the edge of the yard, pushed through the hedge and up the lane. All the while the warfare sounded behind them.

At the end of the lane, Billy held his hand up and listened. “There’s a car coming.”

“It might be those mobsters.” Sarah choked back the memory of the ordeal.

“And it might be safety out of here,” Billy suggested optimistically.

The car came around the corner. Billy stepped out and waved his hands. The vehicle stopped. A face looked out the window. It was an old guy with a short white beard, little hair on his head and an annoyed expression.

“You trying to kill yourself, young man?” he bawled.

“Sorry,” Billy said in a conciliatory fashion. “My girlfriend is pregnant and we need to get to the doctors.” He pointed at Sarah.

“Get in.” The old man nodded. “I’m going to Canston. That any good to you?”

“Fine,” Billy said gratefully. “The Angel Inn would be okay.”

“Funny place to meet your doctor,” the white beard said, puzzled by Billy’s remark.

“No, that’s where we left our car,” Sarah offered in explanation.

“Then what’s a lady in your condition doing walking out here to this lonely spot?” the old man asked.

“I wanted my baby to listen to the sea,” Sarah said with an innocent expression.

The white beard changed gear with a loud clunk and looked over to Sarah’s stomach. “Strikes me the tiny baby has got remarkable hearing. When’s it due?”

“Next week.” Sarah still kept a deadpan face.

There was a few minutes silence. Then the old guy decided to continue into the absurd. “What do you want? A boy or girl?”

“A girl,” Sarah said.

“Let’s hope the baby has your color hair and not the sandy topknot of your husband.” The man chuckled.

“Oh, this isn’t my husband,” Sarah said with wide eyes. “We’re meeting my husband in Canston. As he wasn’t around at the conception, I thought he better be here for the birth.”

The car stopped outside of The Angel Inn. Sarah and Billy thanked the old guy, found their car and didn’t wait around anymore. They drove without a pause until they reached the outskirts of Malmouth.

Sarah pulled over on the side of the road by the old docks and sat back with a long, thankful sigh. “What happened back there?” she asked, still staring into the distance.

“Meo was about to send me to my Maker. A bullet sound blasted my brain. It took me a few seconds to realize I wasn’t dead. I took a dive, crawled out of the way as Meo and Bolan swapped gunfire with at least three attackers. I assumed they were the Minski mob. The rest you know.”

“I saw Meo. What happened to Bolan?” Sarah asked.

“Can’t say. I had other things on my mind.”

The duo sat looking across the derelict docks with the rusting cranes as a skyline.

“So what do we do now?” Sarah asked.

“Haven’t got a clue,” Billy puffed. “I used to think this was such a peaceful town.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Lady of the Night

It was late afternoon and the sun in the southwest slanted across the promenade, silhouetting the tall hotels and making elaborate shapes over the sand. Two children skipped and hopped between the shade and sun, playing an imaginary childlike game, which would have been incomprehensible to their parents—if they'd even bothered to listen to their offspring.

Sarah watched them and thought even though only in her middle twenties, it seemed a long time since she was so carefree. She recalled a day at the beach with her dad when she was about twelve years old. It had been six months since her mum and dad had split up. It wasn't that they didn't love each other, her dad told her. "Your mother says she can't live with me and can't live without me." He then grinned and gave one of his search-me shrugs.

Much as the day was full of exciting things—it always was with Dad—Sarah sensed something was different. They stopped at a first-class hotel and ordered the biggest ice cream possible. When Sarah went out with her mum, money was always spent wisely and carefully. Her dad threw it around as if it didn't matter. It probably didn't to him. He left so many debts a few more wouldn't matter.

The waiter smiled at the pretty dark-eyed girl who even at twelve could make any boy or man look and wish. Her dad was chatting to a

waitress. He had such a way with the ladies. Perhaps being a charmer was hereditary. Sarah watched him and detected a thinning of the hair and the veins in his brow were visible. She'd never noticed that before.

Six months later he died of cancer. She went to the funeral with her mum. The family gathered around the grave and Sarah wished they wouldn't look so solemn. Her dad would have made a joke and probably conned the vicar out of some money. They walked back to the cars. Sarah saw three well-dressed women standing respectfully at distances from the grave. She smiled to herself and thought dad would have been pleased that at least a few of his mistresses turned up to say goodbye.

"You okay?" Billy's voice brought her back from the past.

"I've made another decision," Sarah replied. Billy asked a why with his expression. "Betty's Best is just down the road. I'm hungry and I want to see Titan."

The welcome was warm and wet. The food was hot and greasy. Titan insisted that as he'd been left so long, he had to be allowed to eat some of their food. They tucked in and started to review the situation.

"Sense would say we are too deep into this mess, and we should cut our losses," Billy suggested as an opener, chewing through his second meat pie.

"I would agree...except for one thing," Sarah replied and fed Titan another slice of her toast.

"And that is?"

"Yuri. I reckon we owe it to him to see this through."

"That might be sentimental nonsense." Billy waited for the verbal onslaught from the feisty lady.

"I never said I was logical," Sarah said surprisingly quietly.

"I sense another plan," Billy said.

Sarah paid Betty for the meal, patted Titan and justified to him why he had to stay at the café for a while longer. The dog considered the humans and decided there was a good chance of lots of food with Betty—he agreed to stay.

“Full-frontal attack,” Sarah suddenly said as they walked toward the central pier.

“Go on,” Billy prompted her to say more.

“There’s no point in us sitting around, looking over our shoulders and waiting for Minski or the London mob to come and get us. Let’s walk into the tiger’s den at the Alba Palace and pull the big cat’s whiskers.”

Billy shrugged at her statement. “I’ll never understand the way the mind works.”

“If the human brain was simple enough for us to understand, we’d be so simple we couldn’t.” Sarah shrugged back. The argument—if that is what it was—came to an end.

The duo briefly stopped off at their apartment, showered and changed. Billy whistled at Sarah’s slinky tight red dress with a slit up to the thigh. “You look more like you’re going for a night on the town.”

“Just my normal battle clothes,” Sarah nonchalantly threw back at him.

By the time that they got to the Alba Palace, it was gone eleven o’clock. The crowds of casual gambling holidaymakers and more serious punters were in full swing, parting with their money and dulling their senses with beer and spirits. Sarah was again struck with the thought that reality is an illusion produced by alcoholic deficiency.

They strolled through the multitude of slots robbing the dupes at an easy pace, and then went into the casino area at the back where a more regular and systematic stealing of hard-earned cash was underway on the roulette and dice tables. To help the gamblers feel better about this

robbery, the casino management had put on a free stage show; and after a singer was treated to studied indifference by the audience, a dancing troop of scantily clad young ladies cavorted on. At least they got the attention of some of the jaded men.

Billy ordered two beers and the duo leaned on the bar.

“So what now?” Billy tried to shout above the din of the stage show.

“I’m not Beethoven.” Sarah frowned. Billy looked puzzled.

“Beethoven was so deaf he thought he was a painter,” Sarah said, tongue-in-cheek, and then added, “I did hear you without bawling in my ear. Anyway, I don’t have a master plan.”

Billy was about to protest by pulling a face when a voice cut across them.

“Can I buy you something stronger than that beer?”

Sarah turned and inwardly went “wow”. The guy was drop-dead gorgeous. She was about to respond when, to her chagrin, she saw that he was looking straight past her and smiling at Billy.

“Hey, I think your prince has arrived.” She winked at Billy. “I’ll leave you alone and see if I can find a frog.”

Sarah stopped at a phone booth and made a telephone call. Then she looked around, wandered seductively over to a tall red-haired man standing by a door and gave him a smile that could be used to keep him warm on a cold night. The action was not random. She remembered that when they had been taken here last time by Minski’s men, they’d gone through the door now guarded by the guy.

“Can’t go in there, lady.” It was a gentle rebuttal. No man liked to turn off a lady dressed to kill.

“I’m on the evening’s takeout order.” Sarah pouted and pretended to straighten her stockings so that the hunk got a free view of her upper thigh.

He may have been good-looking, but was at least one orange short of a jackpot. His expression showed a perplexed mind.

Sarah kissed the end of her finger and transferred the love token to his lips. "Andre has sent for me to entertain him," she simpered.

He still looked mystified.

"He's paid for my services." Sarah prodded him in the lower abdomen. Evidently that's where his brains were, because a bright look of comprehension came over his vacant, gorgeous face.

"Oh, right." He grinned. "Lucky Mr. Minski is what I say. Follow me, babe."

They reached the end of the corridor and the hunk of limited intelligence put his large hand on the door handle. Sarah took hold of it.

"Don't go in with me. I want to make a spectacular entrance to surprise Andre."

He grinned, and she could see his one-track mind working overtime.

"What you going to do, honey?" He licked his lips.

If it wasn't for his overriding fear of Minski, the guy would have hit on Sarah. She gave him a naughty giggle and whispered in his ear. "When you've gone, I'm going to strip off all my clothes, cover my body in strawberry jam, waltz in, and tell Andre to make a sandwich of me."

The hunky guy's eyes did a few rapid circles in their sockets and he had to wriggle around to get his stiffening erection into a comfortable position. As he strolled off up the corridor, he kept on shaking his head and muttering, "Strawberries, strawberries."

Sarah counted to ten, took her foolish courage in her hands...and burst into the room.

Andre Minski was sitting with his feet on a table, sipping a drink, eyes glued to a large TV monitor, which was running a porno video. He glanced over at Sarah, made a move toward a drawer in the table and

pulled out a gun. When the door closed and Minski realized Sarah was on her own, his demeanor relaxed.

“Hello, Sarah. Are you dressed like that for a social call...or have you come to ask me to be kind with you?”

Sarah eyed him and didn't like the vibes she was getting. But she was there for the sensations—good or bad.

Chapter Twenty-Four Riotous Behavior

The gang headman tapped his fingers on the table and let his eyes and imagination take in all of Sarah's body. He gave her a smirk and glanced over at the TV. A couple was performing a sex act, and the video was dubbed with absurd voice-overs.

"That turn you on?" He leered and scratched his crotch.

She didn't answer.

"Or are you into extreme bondage?" Minski sat up and tried to express sexual attraction. It came over as lascivious drooling.

"Yuri was more my type," Sarah spat the words at him.

"Pity about the guy." He shrugged. "But I'm alive and available." Minski grinned.

"Which brings me to the purpose of my visit," Sarah said, hoping to divert the conversation.

He looked faintly annoyed. He played with the gun and reluctantly said, "Okay, I'll buy it for awhile...then we get to how you can amuse me."

"When you hired us, what you said wasn't the total truth," she began.

He simply smiled as if a word like truth didn't have any meaning.

"You've got us into the middle of your feud...and we're suspects in a police murder enquiry. We want out."

“You’re a feisty little babe,” he contemptuously said. “But not so little in the right places. Why should I care what you think?”

“Because we know all about your racket with counterfeit money printing.”

Minski got up, turned the TV off—which was now showing two couples, a bath time and liberal use of cocoa butter—and walked over to Sarah.

“Let me tell you what I have in mind. And this is not an offer...it’s an order. If you can please me tonight, I might, just might, let you continue to walk around with that pretty face. Razor cuts can spoil beauty so quickly. If you don’t cooperate, I’ll turn you over to four of my boys and let them enjoy your body. It doesn’t matter if you keep them happy...tomorrow will be your last day.” He finished the threat and held her by the neck. His left hand went down her thigh, inside the split of her skirt and roughly stroked the silk of her panties.

“And the printing plates?” she choked through his grip.

He let go of her and stood back. “What plates?”

“The ones we took from the house in Wellesley Square...and are now with a reliable solicitor. He will have no choice but to follow our instructions and pass them on to the police if anything happens to us.”

“Printing plates are replaceable.” Minski sneered.

“I’m sure you’re right.” She continued the bluff. “But the police would have no problems linking you to the original plates and the samples of the counterfeit money we also borrowed from your property.”

Minski’s face lost its arrogant confidence. A trapped animal stops snarling and starts lashing out. He tried to kiss her, brutally mauling and wrestling her toward a sofa. She kicked out at his shins. As Minski uttered a foul oath, a rising noise of pandemonium broke in from the

casino. He stopped, listened and then rushed to the door. He looked up the corridor as people ran in all directions.

“This is your doing, isn’t it, you bitch?” he growled as he turned back to Sarah.

In the few moments he had been at the door she had learnt one trick from Billy. She swung her arm and caught Minski full on his large head. As he hit the deck, she kissed the coffee percolator and muttered, “Consider yourself lucky, you bastard; it could have been a waffle maker or a kettle.”

She rushed into the corridor, looked around, saw the fire alarm, and with the percolator still in her hand, smashed the glass. The siren wailed, adding to the general confusion in the casino. Sarah went back into Minski’s office and quickly ransacked his desk.

After a few minutes she cried triumphantly, punched the air and ran out.

As she gained the casino, police were everywhere. Punters ran around in circles, the half-naked showgirls screamed and a rotund detective by the name of Ezzard stood on a gaming table and tried to direct operations by shouting into a megaphone.

Sarah cast her gaze around, saw Billy in the corner with a handsome man, rushed over and theatrically said, “Sorry, mister, Billy’s wife wants him home.” The man looked shocked, betrayed and puzzled. Sarah smiled, grabbed Billy’s hand and headed off with him toward Minski’s office.

They scrambled over the prone body. Sarah said, “Don’t ask!” She broke open the window at the rear of his office, used a chair to climb out and urged Billy to hurry, saying, “Get your ass in gear.”

The window led into an alley. Sarah encouraged Billy to keep running. Once they were clear of the casino, she slowed to a walk.

Billy gasped and puffed out a question. “I know you’ll eventually tell me what is going on, but why not now?”

Sarah grinned and gave him her best sparkling smile. She held up a small package and skipped childlike in front of him. “Guess what I’ve got?” she teased.

“A bloody annoying way with you,” Billy grumbled.

“Okay, if you won’t play games, I’ll tell you,” she said and stopped walking. “This package contains all the serial notes of the counterfeit money and there are names against them. It’s my guess they are the couriers who were used to gamble money in the casino, win a big pot and then quite legitimately spread the cash around. Hey presto, a perfect method of laundering the fake stuff.”

“So they didn’t just filter it out through innocent punters?”

“That was one way,” Sarah said gleefully. “But when you remember how much money we saw at Wellesley Square, there had to be a more regular route into respectability.”

“Very clever...but how...?”

Sarah held up her hand to deflect his question. “I caused a riot and in the confusion got hold of this evidence.”

“And how exactly did you engineer this disturbance?”

“Just before I walked into Minski’s office, I rang Ezzard and told him there were lewd acts being committed at Alba Palace and the whole casino was being used as a brothel.”

“Why that story?” Billy asked.

“If I’d said illegal gambling or whatever, the police would have leisurely investigated and given Minski time to hide any evidence. Give the police the opportunity to raid a joint and uncover naked women in every room, and I reckoned they’d be all over the place like an outbreak of measles at a kid’s nursery.”

Billy hugged her. They arrived at Betty's apartment and, after an apology, settled down with Titan to tell the café owner what they'd been up to.

Chapter Twenty-Five London Encounter

The previous night had turned into unholy hours of the morning when the duo finally got back to their apartment. Billy sat on the end of the double bed tickling Titan's tummy. They were both exhausted and talk had been played out. Sarah was sitting by the dressing table, combing her long black hair, which for most of the time was elaborately curled and tied onto the top of her head. Now hanging loose, it reached down her back almost to her waist.

Titan nibbled playfully at Billy's fingers and tried to outstare his new master. Out of the corner of his eye Billy was aware that Sarah had gotten up and was slipping out of her slinky red dress. He patted Titan and muttered a good night to the lady with the jet-black eyes.

Sarah put her arms out and, standing in her white underwear, held Billy around the neck. "Hey, partner, you've given up your double bed for too long. You have it tonight."

"I'm fine on the sofa," he insisted.

Titan wagged his tail at this silly human exchange and made himself comfortable on one of the pillows.

"We'll compromise," Sarah said and kissed his forehead. "You have that side, and I'll rely on Titan to protect my honor."

Billy grinned at her remark. Before he could gallantly refuse the offer, Sarah stepped out of her bra and panties, rubbed her naked body against Billy and started to unbutton his shirt.

A few minutes later they were tucked up in the bed, Billy lying back, with Titan at his head and Sarah curled up with her head resting on Billy's arm, her stomach wriggling against his thigh.

"Did anybody tell you your cock was magnificent?" She giggled.

"Chance would be a fine thing recently," he huffed.

"Someone out there is going to be attracted to you." Sarah stroked his cheek.

"Don't you believe it." He sighed. "Gravity is a myth, the world sucks."

Sarah thought better of pursuing the conversation as Billy was obviously tired and feeling down. They slept and dreamed. It was almost midday before they awoke.

Cooking breakfast was too much of a hassle. Betty's Best was a short walk and offered a lazy way to greet the day.

"Is that two or three breakfasts?" Betty asked and gave Titan a cuddle as he greeted his surrogate mother.

When they'd demolished the meal, Billy tried reading a local newspaper but realized Sarah wanted to talk. She had this annoying habit of saying something when he was deep in a story and then when he didn't answer fully, pushing down the newspaper from the opposite side of the table. Eventually he gave up, folded the newspaper and looked at her sternly.

"Well?" he said.

"Well, what?"

"You're like one of these religious cult people that knocks on your door and won't take no for an answer." He grimaced.

“I hope not,” she objected. “Religion is humanity’s attempt at communicating with the weather.”

“Cut the sassy remarks and tell me what’s bugging you.”

She grinned at him like a little girl who had succeeded with Daddy and began, “By tomorrow we should be safe from Minski and his boys.”

“Why do you say that?”

“On the way here you recall I popped into the post office?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the package I posted was the evidence of Minski’s involvement in forgery.”

“Why did you post it?”

“I didn’t want any awkward questions from Ezzard. But when he opens his post, I reckon it will take about an hour for him to have Minski arrested...but that still leaves the Trenton mob.”

Billy buried his head in his hands, rubbed his face ruefully and sat back to wait for a Sarah Special Announcement.

“I have a plan.” She smiled innocently.

“Why am I not surprised?” Billy shook his head.

“It means going to London,” Sarah offered as if that was both compensation and explanation.

Billy decided not to argue.



The next morning they hugged and kissed Titan, waved goodbye to Betty and got a taxi to the railway station. It was a three-hour journey to London, and by eleven o’clock they’d arrived at Paddington, gone down the subway and alighted at Clapham Common on the Northern Line.

At the top of the escalator they handed in their ticket, walked up the final short flight of concrete stairs and came out opposite the common from where the station had gotten its name.

The district was a residential area, five miles from the center of London. In the late nineteenth century large houses had sprung up as the merchants and traders moved out to find salubrious homes to match their growing affluence. The area's prosperity didn't last long. The Great Depression of the twenties and thirties brought blight, and unlike other districts, it never quite recovered. It went plodding on and took a fearful aircraft bombing and battering during the war because of its close proximity to the important rail intersection at Clapham Junction. Then in the late sixties, the young and newly affluent rediscovered its convenience for central London. It was now gentrified and had an air of urbanity.

"I've kept quiet all the way here," Billy said as they stood looking across the flat common. "Are you going to tell me what all this is about?"

There was a café opposite. They negotiated the traffic, sat at an open-air table and ordered drinks.

"Do you remember when Irma Trenton and her followers threatened us on the ride at the funfair?"

Billy nodded.

Sarah continued. "The blonde witch contemptuously stuffed that money inside my bra. Must have given her some sort of vicarious thrill. Well, waste not, want not is my motto, so I kept the dosh. About two days later I went into a jewelers and was going to buy a bracelet. I handed over the money...and saw the assistant and the manager examining it. When they picked up the phone, I guessed it was phony, so I slipped quietly out."

“Is this leading somewhere?” Billy asked and admiringly watched a guy jog past.

Sarah gave him an exasperated look. “If Irma was passing funny money around, it was too much of a coincidence that she wasn’t involved with the scam. Which means she and Minski were in league together. Now how’s that going to sound if we tell her gang their revered leader is pulling a fast one?”

“What will it achieve?”

“We blackmail Irma,” Sarah said. “Leave us out of the warfare and vendetta or we tell old man Trenton his beloved daughter is consorting with the enemy.”

Billy had a think and then blurted out, “But that means Minski was double-crossing a double-cross. He was playing softball with both Benny and Irma and keeping the dealings from both of them.”

“Which is another reason why he hired us. Pretending to be concerned was a ruse to hide his duplicity.”

Billy gave her a look that suggested he wasn’t convinced. “There’s still one thing. Why are we here in Clapham?” he asked to indulge her.

Sarah grinned with her wide sensual mouth. “When we first got picked up by Bolan and Meo...and you were strutting your stuff on the dance floor, Bolan was playing footsie with me and like most men, couldn’t stop talking about himself. Apart from the riveting facts of his sexual conquests, inside leg measure and the pleasure he could bring any woman, the hunk talked about a snooker hall on Battersea Rise in Clapham. Seems he was a hustler at the place.”

“And on the strength of his rambling boasting, we are having a day out in suburban London?” Billy said and rolled his eyes.

The cute male jogger came past again and this time he smiled at Billy.

“You going to chase him or follow my hunch?” she teased.

“Don’t tempt me.” Billy shrugged in a resigned fashion.

Chapter Twenty-Six

This Will Be Your Monument

The walk across Clapham Common was a pleasant way to spend an hour. This was not a cultivated park but an area of open grass fields for recreation with the occasional coppice. In these summer months there were games of cricket going on and Sarah stopped and thought about her dad. He had loved the game. It was such a contradiction to his outward nature. Most of the time he was all action go-go. Cricket was gentle, rhythmic and moved to a pace incongruous in the fast action of the modern world.

They walked on past a miniature lake where small kids watched as their tiny sailing boats moved slowly in the light breeze of a balmy day. At the south of the common was an Anglican church built in the revival Gothic style, and like many things Victorian, the builders didn't know when to stop with the decoration and exuberance of belief. The road dipped down. At a crossroads the snooker hall was on the right.

They went in. The thought came into Sarah's head that this must be one of the last of the male bastions of bad habits and unhealthy living. The whole area was a mist of cigarette smoke and beer fumes. Young men stood around in poses of aggressive testosterone and old men sipped their drinks, bored with their memories. The only illuminations were the banks of lights above the snooker tables, giving the room a

muted feel of decadence. If it had been lit brightly, the stained wallpaper, shabby carpet and cobwebs in the corners would have been visible.

Sarah strolled up to the counter. A man looked at her as if he'd never seen a woman in the hall this early...and certainly one who wasn't on the game. He wore a black shirt, cream and gold double-breasted vest and a pale face, which hadn't seen the sun for many years.

"I'm looking for Sonny," Sarah asked.

"We serve beer and hire snooker tables. We don't sell information."

"What beer have you got?" Sarah asked.

"Wrenton's," he chewed back.

"Drinking Wrenton's beer is like making love in a boat. It's fucking close to water," she pitched to him.

From behind her a familiar laugh cut into the exchange. She turned.

"Sonny," Sarah exclaimed.

"Sarah...and just as sassy," he superciliously replied. His head flicked to indicate they should move away from the counter and sit in a cubicle of brown leather benches marked with cigarette burns.

"So now you've found me, what can I do for you?" His words had an ominously sexual tone.

"Sorry to prick your inflated opinion of yourself—if that is possible—but I want to talk to Irma Trenton."

Sonny let his gaze wander over her body. He sat up straight on the bench, not out of respect, but to look down Sarah's blouse. He suddenly got up and said, "What are you two waiting for? Follow me."

Sonny swaggered out with Sarah and Billy—four other men worryingly trailing two yards behind the group. In the street, the sun glared after the dim light of the hall. Sonny clicked his fingers at one of the men who immediately ran off. Two minutes later he came back, driving a flashy Rolls Royce car.

They got in. Billy muttered, “Looks like the wages of sin are worth considering.”

They were driven back through Clapham Common, along the Brixton High Road, an ethnic area with most of the inhabitants being Afro-Caribbean. Eventually they stopped outside a large stadium. The name rang a bell in Sarah’s memory. One of the silent men rushed from the front and opened the rear door for Sonny.

“Come in and meet Irma Trenton.” Sonny’s words were never neutral. This sounded more like a snarl.

As they went through a large wrought iron gate, Sarah tried to think where she’d seen the name. Up some stairs and then into a plush entertainment suite overlooking the playing area, it was then she recalled. “The Oval. This is a cricket ground. Didn’t imagine you to be into a game like this.”

Sonny just shrugged and poured himself a drink. “You two have become a nuisance,” he said and kicked the door shut. Two of the minders stood guard. “Even the idea of sex with you is not enough compensation to make it worth keeping you alive.”

Sonny talked as if he was rejecting an item of food on a menu, not condemning them to death. “See that stand over there? It’s being modernized. We’ve got the contract to carry out the work. All legitimate. This afternoon we’ll be pouring thousands of tons of concrete into the foundations.” Sonny paused and licked his lips. “That’s going to be your monument. It’ll be a good hundred years before they renovate the stand again...and there will be two bodies. Naked and with their throats cut.”

Billy felt his body tense, and he moved closer to Sarah. It was a futile gesture. He couldn’t protect her, or himself, from this lunatic.

“Do you have any final requests?” Sonny derisively laughed. “I know the boys here do.” He sniggered in a manic way and patted Sarah’s ass.

There was a growl from the two men at the door...then a rapping from outside. One of the men looked at Sonny. The knocking was more insistent. Then a voice called, "Open this bloody door. It's Irma Trenton here."

The blonde whirlwind of evil marched in, looked at Sarah and Billy, and furiously said, "What's going on, Sonny? Remember, I'm in charge. Don't get too big for your boots...or I'll have your legs cut off."

Sonny tried to smile but his face was a picture of resentment.

Sarah took her chance at Irma's arrival. "Just the lady. Can we have a private word?"

Sonny was about to protest. Irma cut him dead. "Get out and wait outside."

Sonny and the other men left with tails between their legs. Irma had more balls than all of them put together.

She slouched in a chair, opened her handbag and took out a revolver. "Just in case you have any ideas that this private chat is friendly."

Sarah sat opposite her. Billy remained standing.

"I tried to spend your money." Sarah smiled insolently at Irma. No reply. "It must have been made of rubber. It bounced like a rabbit in spring." Still no response. "Do you know what I think?" It was a rhetorical question. "I reckon you've been talking with the enemy. Perhaps even sleeping with them. Has Minski been dipping his wick in old man Trenton's little girl?"

That got a reaction. Irma narrowed her eyes and you could hear flesh being drawn back from razor claws.

Sarah may have looked like a privileged babe, but it hid an alley cat reaction. As Irma started to think about an attack, Sarah began the haymaker in the southwest, wound it around the north and landed it squarely due east.

Irma never saw it coming. Her head jolted back, her ample bosom flew up and the Trenton blonde hit the deck. There was no need to make the count. She wasn't going to beat the bell.

Sarah gave a satisfied sigh and leant down. She held Irma's face in her hands and looked her clear in the eyes. "Listen and listen carefully. One move against us...just one...and your little escapade with Minski will be front-page news here in South London."

Sarah exited the room, swept past Sonny and the gang heavies. Billy trotted proudly behind her. "If Miss Trenton wants a rematch, give me a call. I'm Miss Greene's manager." Billy smirked at Sonny.

One of the men tried to put an arm out to stop the duo. Irma shouted through a mouthful of blood, "Let them go."

Wise words, Sarah thought, as she imperiously left the scene.

Chapter Twenty-Seven Goodbye, My Gangster

It started to rain at six o'clock in the morning, the type that didn't get on with it, have a good downpour and then clear up. This was that annoying, frustrating drizzle that dripped from the sky like a leaking tap. If you ran fast enough and adopted a zigzag pattern, you might be able to dodge the intermittent cloud-tears.

Sarah was wrapped up against the damp, with Titan chasing from one flock of squawking seagulls to the next. Billy walked in front, picking up flat stones and sending them skimming across the docile waves. They were the only walkers on the beach, most sensible people having retreated to the arcades or shops. Titan explored every pile of seaweed and empty bag left by the previous day's holidaymakers.

After an hour they reached the wild dunes where the sand remained dry for almost the whole year as the shifting banks of shingle had built up in the winter tides and formed a protective breakwater. The incessant, banal, synthetic music from the funfair and amusements was a faint whisper in the wind.

They were almost two miles from the hurly-burly of the main promenade at Malmouth. There were no ice-cream stalls, hotdog vendors or raucous people. Only the throwaways of daily life blown in on the perpetual wind from the North Sea, or debris carried on the gently rolling

sea from passing ships as holidaymakers on boat trips threw their litter into what they saw as an endless sea.

Despite the rain, it was a sultry, warm day. Sarah felt the moisture soaking through her coat. She kicked off her shoes and threw the jacket down on the sand. Without a moment's hesitation, Sarah took off her blouse and skirt. Billy went on throwing stones into the waves. Finally, Sarah slipped her bra and panties off and splashed naked into the sea.

Women were not a big attraction for Billy, but he had to stand and admire the perfection of her shape. The way it had been constructed was worthy of an artistic prize.

When her gorgeous ass was half-covered by the lapping waves, she stopped, turned and called, "What's up, frightened the cold water will shrink it?"

Billy thought for a few seconds. Then he stripped off, plunged into the sea, splashed out to Sarah and hugged her. They held on to each other and let the salty swell wash away all the pain and fear of their ordeals. Titan sat by the edge of the sea and had his own canine thoughts about human behavior.

When the passion of their newfound friendship dissolved into laughter, they waded back to the shore and walked along the dunes. It stopped drizzling and the sun blazed, soon drying their dripping skin.

Along the coast was an old and now ruined round defense turret, built during the last war when fears of an invasion were at their height. It was only large enough for six soldiers to stand inside with rifles pointing out of oblong slits and face an enemy which never came. It was a resting place for Billy and Sarah to get dressed and then sit in the shade from the now scorching midday rays.

They sat in silence. In the distance a figure walked along the beach in a purposeful manner. As it got nearer, something about the gait reminded Sarah of someone. Then she muttered, "Oh no, it's Bolan."

The duo watched him approach. When he was twenty yards away, he raised both hands to signal a gesture of peace. Billy looked at Sarah, remembering her attraction to this man.

"I'll sit up on the rocks over there." He tried to smile and left them alone, calling Titan to follow him.

"I thought you'd be banged up in a prison by now," Sarah said as Bolan came closer.

"Why? I might be a naughty boy, but the police have the people they want for the serious crimes on their books."

"Like what?"

"Minski and his top boys are helping them with a major counterfeit bust."

"What about a certain murder?"

"That crazy boy Meo is being charged."

"And you, Bolan?"

"No evidence. So I got a warning and told to behave."

Sarah looked over at Billy who was kicking at the sand as he sat on the rocks one hundred yards farther up the beach. She made a note that at least they were out of Ezzard's thoughts for the Lewinsons' murder.

"So why are you here?" she asked.

"Because of you, babe."

"What does that mean?"

"I like you...a lot. I saw you romping around in the sea. It reminded me of how beautiful you are."

Sarah let him finish but didn't answer. She wanted him to say something definite.

“I’m sort of asking you to come away with me. Don’t deny you’re not tempted.” He licked his lips and waited for her reply.

“And am I supposed to forget the way you were part of serious threats to my safety...physical and sexual?”

“I wouldn’t have let anything happen to you, Sarah.” Bolan tried his best magnetic smile.

She let it pass, not seeing the point of disputing the matter. “You’re a gorgeous man, Bolan. Yes, I’m tempted.” Sarah paused and kissed him. She let Bolan hold her and return the caress. It was deeply passionate. Her desires tingled. She stepped back and held his hands with hers.

“Well?” He smiled at her.

“No,” she said so quietly he barely heard.

“Is it because of him?” Bolan looked toward Billy.

“Yes.”

“You love him?”

“Yes...but not in a way you’d understand. He’s my friend, my partner in business...and I reckon I’m going to give our odd relationship a chance.”

He opened his mouth to say something. Sarah kissed him again then moved away. “Don’t try, don’t say anything. See you, Bolan.” She turned and walked up the beach to Billy without once looking back.

“What did he want?” Billy casually asked.

“Wanted to know if I’d lost anything.”

“And have you?”

“My senses.” Sarah winked.

Strolling away, with Titan bouncing in their wake, Sarah thought that this brief time with Billy had taught her not to be so daft about men. Perhaps there was a time when she’d have forgiven the Bolan type.

Desire and a demanding vagina made her make some crazy decisions.
She hoped this was a new start.

Chapter Twenty-Eight Jackpot for a Crackpot

“So what do we do now?” Billy had asked the question in many ways in the last two hours since they’d met Bolan on the beach. The duo and Titan returned to their apartment, bought a fish and chip takeout on the way back and now sat on the floor, eating and trying to keep Titan from scoffing the lot.

“We could hit the town and see if we can pull,” Sarah said and poked her tongue out. “Bring them back here and have a foursome in the double bed.”

“I don’t mean that...and you know it.” Billy grinned but wanted a serious answer.

“I hate being serious.” Sarah grimaced and put on a petulant face. Billy began to speak. The doorbell rang.

“Just in time.” Sarah made a *phew* sound and went to the door.

A lady stood there...but only for a nanosecond.

Without an invitation she marched in. She was in her early seventies, dolled up to the nines, with more sparkling adornments than a Christmas tree. Her face was familiar under the layers of makeup.

“Don’t stare,” she flipped at Sarah. “You youngsters today always stare. In my day staring was a pastime only the rich indulged in. Now you can do it, even on welfare.”

“Sorry, I thought we’d met before,” Sarah hesitantly said.

“We have. Remember you sat by me in the casino to bring me luck?”

Sarah nodded as the image came back. The lady jumped into a belated introduction. “Mrs. Lillian Numan. Do you remember?”

“I’m Sarah, and this is Billy.”

“Yes, I know. I’ve been trying to track you down for the last week. Eventually, purely by luck, I was talking to the café owner at Betty’s Best, telling her this tale; and what do you think? She recognized my description of you. So now you know.”

Sarah shook her head and felt she’d missed something.

“Know what?” Billy joined in.

“You sound like my husband, young man. Always vague about everything. It never ceased to amaze me how we ever got past the wedding service, what with all that ‘I do’ business. Seemed a might too positive for him.”

Sarah was getting even more confused. “Is this call something to do with your husband?”

“Lord, no. Haven’t seen him for almost ten years. Mind you, even before that he was never at home. I used to say to my friend Ethel, ‘What is the difference between God and Lionel’—that’s his name—‘God is here and everywhere. Lionel is everywhere but here.’”

Between the miniscule pauses in Mrs. Numan’s string of words, Sarah jumped in and said, “Why are you here?”

“The money,” Mrs. Numan said as if it was perfectly clear.

“The money?” Sarah heard herself parrot the words.

“You brought me luck. I won the house jackpot. I’m rich. I’ve brought you a thank-you.” After all the waffling, the final explanation was crisp and terse. Mrs. Numan handed Sarah a check. Sarah’s wide black eyes opened even more.

“Don’t tell me you can’t take it, young lady.”

“No, I wasn’t going to do that!” Sarah smiled. Mrs. Numan grinned back.

A terrible thought went through Sarah’s mind. “When you won the jackpot, they didn’t pay you in cash, did they?”

Mrs. Numan gave Sarah a critical expression. “Astute young thing—as well as bringing luck. No, they tried to, but I took one look at the stuff and whispered to the cashier that I hadn’t seen such funny money in years. I demanded a certified money draft.”

“How did you recognize it so quickly?” Billy asked.

“I was a bank manager for forty years. Don’t look so surprised. When I retired, I’d had enough of being cautious with money—usually someone else’s. So I decided to go out and enjoy myself.”

“Are you sure about this?” Billy asked, looking at the check.

“I’ve got plenty enough left for my needs.” Mrs. Numan dismissed his polite question. “At my age I’m ready to meet my Maker.”

Sarah respectfully smiled but wondered if her Maker was prepared for the ordeal of meeting Mrs. Numan.

The redoubtable lady kissed them with a flourish and walked toward the door with a goodbye. She turned and her eyes glittered. “You never know, with all this money I might be able to get myself a toy-boy. Lionel used to say that the English made the best lovers. But then I reckon the Chinese make them smaller and cheaper.” With that she was gone. Even Titan looked exhausted by her whirlwind visit.

Billy held Sarah’s hand and said, “What are you going to do with the money?”

“Two things.”

“And they are?”

“I’m going to get Yuri a really nice headstone and have an inscription put on it. There’s a quotation I want from my favorite poet.”

Billy smiled and his expression indicated a question.

“It’s John Donne.” Sarah shrugged.

“And what are the words?”

“A memory of yesterday’s pleasure, a fear of tomorrow’s dangers.”

Billy hugged her. “You’re a caring and clever lady. And what’s the second thing?”

Sarah sat him down, got Titan to stop chewing her fingers and said seriously, “This ain’t a fortune, but I sort of like it here with you...and the agency, Greene Fields, is growing on me. I reckon this money will allow us a little time to get the business going...and for our friendship to develop.”

Billy snuffled and wiped away a few tears.

“Now don’t get all sentimental on me,” Sarah joked in defense. “This could be the start of something crazy.”

About the Author

Novelist, essayist and poet, Emy Naso's work ranges from beautiful love laments to erotic short stories and novellas, and full-length novels. Writing in many genres, Emy's distinctive voice covers humor, fantasy, contemporary, myths and historical work. Emy is a true Celt, born in the mountains of Wales, then living in London and finally on the remote coast of East Anglia.

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It sounded like a simple case. Find a woman's missing husband, and the jewels that disappeared with him. But nothing is ever simple for the duo that makes up Greene Fields detective agency. Soon Sarah and Billy have stumbled into an international human trafficking ring, and have made enemies at every turn.

In between the detective work, both Billy and Sarah may have met their true loves. Sarah's enamored with farmer/aspiring novelist Teron and Billy's besotted with journalist Guantone. Now they're just hoping they'll survive long enough to discover if the lust could turn into something more permanent.

Enjoy the following excerpt from *Mayhem for Two*:

Southtown was not the most desirable part of the district. At one time, the two towns of Malmouth and Lewinton were important ports, based on the nineteenth-century herring fishing industry. The fish were so fed up with being hauled in by the trillion that they got together—what few were left—and decided to swim away to more friendly waters. The dock areas had been in decline ever since and Lewinton with its predominance of old terrace houses for the workers had become run-down and seedy. And that was a generous description.

Malmoth, being a vacation resort with innocent slot arcades increasingly becoming heavy gambling casinos, had its share of the

growing sex trade. But it openly displayed them as shows and lap-dancing clubs. The Southtown area of Lewinton still peddled its raunchier amusements in back parlors and suggestive small adverts.

“Scandinavian massage, guaranteed to get you up straight away,” Sarah read out loud. “Experienced blonde will come to your home and do anything.” She chortled. “Wonder what she’s like with clearing a blocked sink?” she added sassily.

“And what about that one in the food store?”

“What one?” Billy frowned.

“Special cucumber sale. Sounds like an environmentally friendly dildo.” She laughed in a deep, rasping sound like cracking ice in whisky.

Billy lightheartedly clipped her head and looked around at the people staring at this smoldering beauty with the outrageous sense of humor. He was proud to be gay, but sometimes regretted not being able to enjoy her sexually. He imagined she was a barrel of awesome fun in bed and the best screw any man would ever get. Sarah was made to be sensual and rejoiced in this gift to life.

“Number twenty-seven is over there.” Billy signaled and stopped at the side of the road.

The offices of Rigby Jones were situated over a shop selling adult toys. Sarah gawked in the window and Billy dreaded what course and raucous comment she was cooking up.

“Hey, Billy,” she called. “If you wore that tight thong it could raise the pitch of your singing voice two octaves.”

He ignored her attempt at embarrassing him and pulled her toward the door marked *R. Jones Investigations*.

They climbed the narrow stairs, the footfalls echoing on the bare treads. At the first landing were three doors, a sales company that looked about as pyramid shaped as anything outside of the Valley of the Kings,

an insurance agent and then Rigby Jones. His was the only closed door. When Billy turned the handle he discovered it was also locked.

“Well, that’s it, then,” Sarah huffed in frustration.

“Just a minute,” Billy said. He took out a nail file from his top pocket and ran the point decisively in a semi-circle in one corner.

“What are you doing, Billy?”

“Just watch.”

He took out a handkerchief, wrapped it around his hand and tapped the glass sharply. It shattered into a thousand shards and splintered in a mass.

“Oh, wonderful,” Sarah sardonically said.

“Well, it worked in this movie I saw,” Billy crestfallenly replied.

“You really must stop watching those kid’s cartoons, Billy.”

A woman appeared from the sales company. “What’s going on?”

“Greene Fields repair service,” Sarah answered and flashed a card at her. “We had reports that the door had been vandalized.”

The woman looked disinterested and went back in her door.

“What was that you showed her, Sarah?”

“My credit card. Nobody reads anything these days.”

They walked into the offices of Rigby Jones. It was furnished in the throwaways of someone who didn’t have any taste when the items were new. Now they were passed their sell-by date they looked positively antediluvian. Or perhaps with the mold on the walls it was after the flood.

“Well, Rigby Jones and Elisha Heavenly certainly didn’t share a taste for fine antiques,” Sarah puffed. “You look around here and I’ll try the other room.”

She wandered into the inner office.

Billy called out, “What are we looking for?”

He heard an audible gulp and a subdued Sarah said, "I think I've found it."

Billy joined her and saw Sarah staring white-faced down at the floor behind a battered desk. He followed her gaze.

The face from the newspaper cutting was looking up, open-eyed. Rigby Jones had a short-handled knife sticking out of his chest.

A sensual cornucopia anthology from the Master of erotica.

Sensual Magic

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Enjoy the following excerpt from *Sensual Magic*:

“We are about to close the doors and commence ascent,” the mechanical voice of the computer said as Jey waited in the elevator. It took eleven seconds to reach its destination. The downward thrusting pressure countered the thumping of her heart as the short vertical journey took her, at last, to be with Reney, alone.

Walking from the elevator, her gaze met his. Hands extended, they greeted, looked and finally in the swift breath of a moment, fell into each other’s arms.

Standing back, her face a little flushed from the closeness of this man, her eyes taking in the breathtaking view across the river, the multitude of dazzling buildings and the flashing, twinkling lights of the interconnecting overhead passenger trains gliding silently through the air, held magically on their single track.

“Not as grand as the great headquarters of the Canaletto empire.” Reney smiled. Jey wondered at first if there was an irony in his remark. She saw from his expression he spoke what he saw as the truth.

“But my father’s building is out on the edge of the Metropolis at the new development. Here, you are at the center of this great city, its antecedence stretching back as far as time itself. Indeed, I have heard it told this building of the House of Montiff stands where once the ancient heart of the city first set up its government.”

She let go his hand and walked quickly over to the window. Leaning against the panel of glass, which seemed to be held invisibly in place without any upright structures, Jey watched the tiny figures of the crowd move along the embankment.

“Do you want to see more?” Reney asked, standing by her side, slipping his arm around her waist. She nodded, resting her head on his shoulder. He pressed a silvered panel embedded in the very fabric of the window, and suddenly the world far below became bigger.

Jey let out a little startled cry, like a bird found pecking at a morsel on the ground.

“Don’t be frightened.” Reney laughed softly. “It’s only a trick. The image is magnified.”

After a while she said, “Take it back to how it was. The world so small and far away made it seem we were alone.” Reney touched the panel, the view became normal. Silently he turned her to face him, her exquisite face looking up at him, her red hair almost unruly, sweeping back, deep in richest color, highlighted by the many hues from outside.

“It’s like I’ve known you all my life, Jey,” he said, moving to kiss her forehead, letting his second caress taste her wide mouth. Their bodies melted into each other, longings previously suppressed now at last released.

Words were spoken, so muted as to be nothing but the sounds of love. Jey felt his hands expressing passion over the curve of her rear, drawing her even tighter into his torso. She knew his fervor increased, as the hardness of his loin pressed into her. Fingers traced around her, palms seeking the swell of her breasts. His gentle hands sought more, undoing the clasp of her bra. It seemed so right to let him touch the nakedness of her skin.

For precious moments, he spread his desirous kisses between her mouth and breasts. Jey could only wonder at the fire in his soul, a blaze she knew would soon come to her and ask for the ultimate flame.

The time arrived. His hands roamed in love from the comfort of her rear, down to her thighs. With caresses becoming hotter, Reney let his fingers creep under the short tunic she wore and head toward the center of her craving.

Jey knew she could react to stop their sexual progress. She didn't want to. Neither did she wish their love to be consummated in a fumbling, shameful way. Giving and taking each other had to be complete.

Struggling with her shyness she whispered, "If you undress me can I do the same to you, Reney?" What did she enjoy more? Letting her man remove her clothing, sensing his pleasure in seeing her body, or the excitement as she undressed him, the sheer joy at touching his skin, watching as his cock became more erect, knowing his lustful anticipation was for her?

To see was exhilarating, to touch magic. His fingers found delight in all of her; she found the tactile gloriousness of his erection deeply gratifying. The pleasure was made even greater at the thought of their dance toward surrender. To her delight his game of love was more inventive than she could have imagined. Their naked bodies entwined as they stood by the window, his hand encouraging her to lift one leg. At

first she thought he only sought to open her clitoral lips so his finger could work harder at her delight.

Her throat gulped in gorgeous surprise as his cock tickled at her moistened gate, then penetrated into her vagina. Experiencing the thrill of sex in this position brought cries of ecstasy from Jey, and deeper groans of masculine raw power from Reney.

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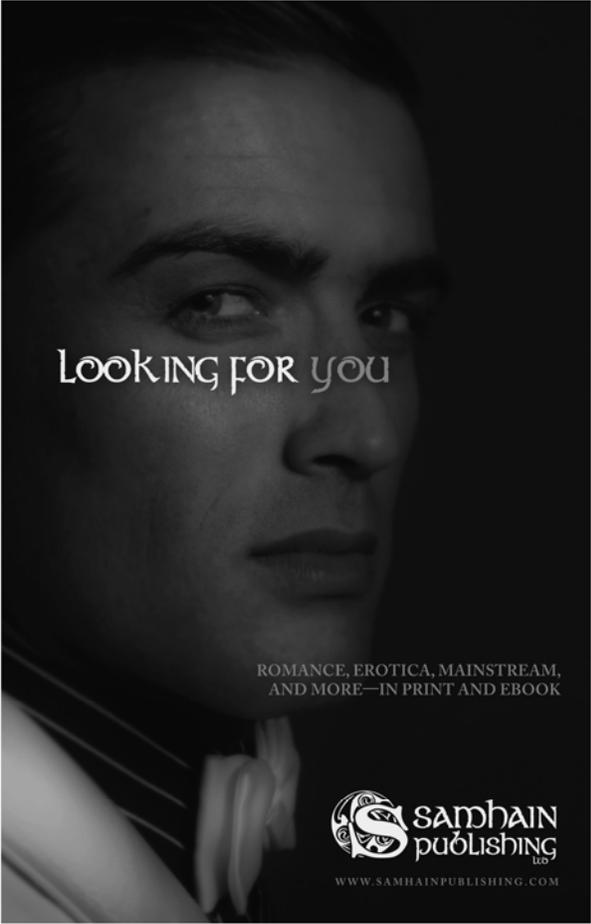
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