

## CHAPTER 16

Even with the heat full on in the house, they were still not comfortable so they read for a while and went to bed early. The next morning was Sunday and when he woke, Rhosa was sitting up in bed looking at an album of her photographs which she had told him she wanted to show him. “You’re looking thoughtful,” he said.

“Ever think that when we wake each morning we are different people?” Rhosa asked

“Go on, tell me what you mean by that,” he said, wondering what was going through her mind.

“We have left Saturday Jake and today there is a Sunday Jake.”

He looked quizzically at her and, sensing his confusion, she continued. “Each day we experience new things, we meet new people or we talk to friends we thought we knew and they say something which surprises us. We go to bed thinking about them and we have mind altering dreams and when we wake we are different. What would I be if my mother had not wanted to come to England to find a husband or if my grandmother had not been able to dance and earn a lot of money? Probably I’d be a gutter woman in Cairo like many of the friends I used to play with when I lived there will have become. You see what I mean – everything that happens to us changes us. Sometimes the change is only slight but sometimes it’s more dramatic like even my real name Sheana Zoros is a cipher. The Rhosa you have sitting up in bed beside you would never have existed if tiny events had not intervened.”

“Can’t say it’s something I’ve ever considered. Besides which, you are forgetting the brain architecture we were born

with.” He leaned over to her and ruffled her hair, “what made you think about it anyway; odd thing to say first thing in the morning.”

“I haven’t just thought it; it often occurs to me how variable we are. Perhaps it’s just that I woke in one of those early morning states of unreality, convinced I had left behind the Rhosa I put to bed and I would need to reconsider who I was. Sometimes I find I have to decide what I shall be this day. Will I be a nice Rhosa or difficult Rhosa.”

Momentarily, he wondered if he should bring her down to earth but, before he did, she was talking out her thoughts again.

“And if I’m right, up there must be filled with all our yester personalities which means there are getting on for twelve thousand different Rhosas somewhere out there. Each day brings a new one.”

“Going to be hellishly crowded then.” he said and with a laugh as he sat up in bed beside her. “I’m older than you so there are going to be thousands more of me jostling for space.”

“It isn’t just me who worries about it?” she said, sliding her hand beneath the bedclothes to hold his. “Have you read Kierkegaard on the difficulty of staying with any one person when that person would be different from day to day, he even broke off his engagement to a young woman because of it.”

“A bit like Plato.”

“Plato is someone I’ve almost ignored on that subject. What did he say?”

“He asked in *The Republic* how we could understand things like trees when they change from day to day.”

“That’s it, isn’t it?” she squeezed his hand excitedly. “Almost the same thing. What else did he say? Do tell me.”

“Some time since I read him but I seem to remember him saying something like things are like shadows.”

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“That’s amazing – that’s how I feel.” She looked around the room. “And it’s what I think about this house. There are shadows in the walls made from the lights of the flickering fires of past times. People who have lived here have left their memories behind and are still trying to reach us. They can’t all be trying though, there must be scores of people who have lived here, there would be a dreadful cacophony if they were all at it.”

“What about television and radio.”

“What do you mean?” Rhosa looked puzzled. “They wouldn’t have had television.”

Jake walked to the radio turned it on and bowed knowingly as an announcer’s started talking.

“Sorry Jake, I’ve lost you completely.”

For answer, he turned the tuner and a woman’s voice was speaking in French.

Rhosa shook her head. Expecting her to understand, Jake said nothing. When she stared at him with a look almost of irritation, he explained. “The air in this room is full of sound and music. I’ve just proved that; when I tune the radio I can pick up sounds from all around the world.”

“So?”

“What I am saying is that you and I happen to be tuned to the shadows of Jacob D’Arcy.”

“How clever you are, Jake.” Rhosa grinned. “Or perhaps we didn’t ‘happen’ to be tuned.”

“Now you need to explain.”

“Could it be that we are unique and Jacob left his memory for you and for me only. You remember how you felt when you first came here – almost as though the place had chosen you.”

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Jake pursed his lips and, after a moment, said. "I find that a bit..."

"Disturbing... frightening. Are those the words you wanted?"

"Well yes. I would have gone along with you logical positivists - if it can't be proven it isn't true. But this place certainly seems to be communicating with us. I keep having these dreams and... I've never said anything before but, when I first found that bible behind the bookcase," he stopped meditatively. "I had a sort of vision of a man and woman in mediaeval clothes. I was pretty tired and I put it down to being nothing more than a day dream. But this place is having an effect, you know. I'm sure I am a changed person since I got here."

With an effort, she said, "did Plato talk about people changing?"

"Can't recall that he did." he said.

"I must read *The Republic*." She squeezed his hand under the bedclothes. "I've never told anyone else about waking up as a different person every day. They'd probably think I was off my head."

"Isn't that one of your qualities?"

"Being off my head, you mean?" she laughed.

"No, I meant seeing things differently. Probably comes from your acting so many different parts." he said and then, as a thought struck him, added. "Or perhaps it's the other way round and you were born to be an actress."

"Probably," she said distantly. "No, what got me thinking was talking to a friend Katherine Crawley."

"You told me about her, how bright she was?"

"Yes. Remarkable mind, you can talk to her about any subject. We were thinking about self-knowledge; she says the mind is like an orchestra which we conduct. Sometimes it is

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dominated by the strings, sometimes the woodwind, sometimes the percussion and on good days, they all play in harmony.”

“Is she a psychologist then?”

“Don’t think so, she just perceptive. She seems to me to be a complete orchestra. Talk about art, psychology, media, the Bloomsbury set and their literature and she responds.”

“Bet you got onto your philosophy.”

“Mm,” Rhosa said, “Unfortunately she couldn’t stay long, I wanted to hear what she thought about Eastern philosophy and the intellectual games played by Brahmin priests.”

“Don’t think I know about that,” Jake frowned.

“Well, that’s because European man that you are, you only think about Western philosophers and they act as though Eastern thinkers were dabblers.” She looked out of the window at the trees and for a moment was distracted by their beauty. “Brahmin priests were not good on physical sport; their pleasure came from mental games. They would deny themselves food then have a yoga session and when physically tired, one of them would give his interpretation of god or life. The other priest would contradict. They would go on using ideas as table tennis balls until one of the priests was reduced to a state of mental emptiness and unable to respond. At that silent, wordless moment they knew they were in the presence of Brahmin, the sublime and ultimate reality and they would remain silent, allowing only the meditation of Brahmin to fill their minds.”

“What interests me are the different routes we use to survive.” Jake said as Rhosa started to leaf through her album of photographs. “What have you got there?”

She nodded. “This one, almost the first photograph I took in this city, I must have been twelve, I suppose. A tiny church spire of old London raises its finger above drab

concrete buildings. The power of photography is to freeze a moment forever. Another thing that intrigues me is how our origins and our experiences are written on our faces.” She turned a page and pointed at a photograph. “See this woman. I managed to get her with a long distance lens. Even if she had noticed me, she would have thought I was taking a picture of the building in the background. She was sitting alone when I saw her in Paris; I went there on a whim to get away from Jed. I guess she was a refugee. See her Slavic origins, and how her face tells you how her people have suffered? The residue of hardship in the eyes, the sadness, the yearning - they’re all there. I wanted to speak to her when she looked up as I walked past her and I did try but we had no common language. Made me wonder why we divide ourselves with language. So often it bars contact. That’s why I like taking photographs - she is still there – makes me want to talk to her every time I look at her face.” She passed the album to Jake. “She made me think about what defines us when I saw her stranded in an alien culture.”

“What do you mean ‘what defines us?’” Jake asked

“What makes us what we are? So many things form us, parents are the most obvious. Even now, I sometimes wake fearful that my stepfather will be standing over me, angry at something I’ve done or not done.

But it’s much more than parents. They had parents themselves who formed them who in turn were formed by their parents. We are shaped by our history.” She looked up at the ceiling as she leaned back on the pillows. “You and I don’t have a religion but our morality will have reached us by a circuitous route. It’s all there, parents, teachers, religion, culture. If I had been born by the birth accident not in Egypt but in Germany surrounded by their culture I would be so different from the Rhosa I am now?” She turned to look at Jake. “Am I me or am I a chiselled and polished version of the embryo which started

life in my mother's womb hanging like a fish on a hook permitted to thrash around a bit but not to get off the hook?"

Jake was thinking what to say when she took the album back and said.

"That woman was sad but look at this face," she turned a couple of pages and passed the album back to Jake. "That man; he was outside the theatre when we did 'King Lear' in Moscow. You see the open leather sack on his back. He would dance - such a pathetic dance which had all his sorrow in it - a sort of ballet but like nothing you've ever seen before. People would throw coins and he would leap to catch them in the open top of the sack. I tried to photograph him when he was leaping but the light was not good enough."

"I suppose, like the Slavic woman, you weren't able to speak to him?"

"No, when he heard me speaking English, he came over to me. I was so embarrassed when he bowed to me like I was someone important. He had good English, one of several languages and he spoke it with hardly an accent."

"Probably he thought it would encourage you to give him money."

"Don't be such a cynic, Jake; it wasn't like that at all. Look at his face - don't you see a majesty about it?"

"Don't know about 'majesty' but he certainly looks to be a man with character. What was he doing dancing in the streets?"

Rhosa looked at the photo intently. "This man's family had been wealthy. His grandfather was a count who had servants and a grand house. The revolution destroyed it all. Their home, a palace was burned to the ground by a mob. Gregory- that was his name was carried out as a baby in a basket covered with wet towels."

"You're sure he wasn't just spinning a story?"

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“With some people, you can tell, can’t you? No, this man was genuine. I took him for a drink in a bar; he told me about his life, so much suffering, it almost brought me to tears. I was so moved that I put into the bag on his back all that I had on me. I had been paid forty pounds for my performance that night. When I gave it to him, he cried. It was all I could do not to cry with him.”

“Did you think he might have been outside of the theatre because it was a place to meet English women who had money to give him?”

“You know what, Jake, it wouldn’t have mattered to me if he had. I would have paid forty pounds just to talk to him.” She took the album back to look at the photograph again. “You’ll never guess what he did with the money?”

“Booze I shouldn’t wonder, the Russians are great vodka drinkers.”

“Well you’re wrong. You know what he did? He asked me to go to dinner with him.”

“You accepted! Weren’t you afraid you’d get involved in something nasty?”

“It never crossed my mind. We arranged to meet at the Godunov restaurant. You haven’t been to Moscow but if you do you must go to this place, it’s near the Bolshoi Theatre, close to where I was staying at the Metropole Hotel – you must go there as well, steeped in history. People like Tolstoy, Rachmaninov and Chaliapin used to stay there. The Gudonov restaurant is magnificent, used to be a monastery; murals on the walls, carved wooden chairs and tables, that sort of thing. I got there a bit after him. When I walked in, he was sitting in the reception, dressed in a smart suit and looking like the Count he should have been.”

“So he was a conman after all, had a house where he would change into scruffy clothes to attract well off women.”

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“Don’t keep being such a cynic. The clothes were a bit crumpled and old fashioned but in the dim light they looked good. I suspect he had kept them as a reminder of his previous life. He had washed and trimmed his beard.” She turned the page of her album. “There’s a photograph taken by one of the diners for me. See the restaurant; it reminded me of photographs I’d seen of the Katarina Palace.”

Jake studied the scene - ornate rococo room with waiters hovering around with fixed ingratiating smiles. There at the table was Rhosa, looking very young and with the distinguished ‘Count’ Gregory sitting beside her.

“What age was he, Rhosa; he looks as though he is over seventy at a guess? Much older than you.”

“I would have been in my early twenties then. I never asked his age. I could have but it didn’t even occur to me. Thinking back it does seem odd but I was even more of a romantic then than I am now. I didn’t even think about the age difference. There was a dignity about him and, when I saw him in the dress suit, he looked like the cultured aristocrat he should have been.” She stopped as a thought struck her. “Interesting isn’t it that just the clothes changed him from beggar to aristocrat.” She shrugged, “Didn’t even notice the lined face which you can see in this photograph, I saw a man with a young mind, cultured and interesting. I was completely captivated, overcome by his charm. He called me his countess; don’t suppose that’ll ever happen again.

I saw him put a note in the head waiter’s hand and whisper in his ear. The waiter put it in his pocket without looking at it and beckoned to the other waiters obviously signalling them to look after us.”

Jake looked at the photograph. “Amazing transformation. I know what you mean, it’s hard to believe he was a beggar.”

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“An aristocrat at heart, though. That man was so cultured,” she said, “I had an unforgettable meal with him; we talked of ballet, Rachmaninoff, Tolstoy, Dickens and, of course, my Shakespeare as well as his particular interest, the Pre-Raphaelites. It felt that we talked the whole of literature and art. He told me about a man Sergei Shchukin whom his parents knew and who had bought so many of the French Impressionists that he was said to have the biggest collection in the world. He bought many of Matisse’s paintings and was probably responsible for making the painter well known. The collection was stolen by Lenin and then in 1941, packed up and put in cellars in Siberia. In 1953 there was an exhibition of thirty six of Picasso’s paintings. They had belonged to Shchukin, Count Gregory told me.” Rhosa, unable to speak stopped and wiped a tear from her eye with the back of her hand. “I learned so much in our short time together.

As a young man in 1914, his father had been at the state visit to Moscow of the Tsar and his family. The people worshipped Tsar Nicholas and thought that he could do almost everything for them: what he could not do, God would do. He and the Tsarina were there with their beautiful daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia followed by their ailing child Alexis being carried in the arms of a Cossack. The crowd were cheering as the Tsar walked by. When they reached the platform, an old man shakily walked forward and knelt down with a large roll of paper in his hand which he held up to the Tsar who ignored him. The strong arm men caught hold of the peasant and carried him off. The people around Gregory’s father whispered that the peasant would be taken to prison - the punishment for preparing a petition. People think that oppression started in the communist uprising of 1917 but it was always part of the Russian psyche Gregory told me.” Rhosa said, looking at the picture of the old man.

“Count Gregory had been conditioned to expect affluence but the life he was forced into was one of loneliness.

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When his family lost their wealth, all their supposed friends disappeared. The memories, suppressed for years poured out of him.” She turned the page to look at the first picture of Gregory. “Jake, this man who had been begging in rags a few hours before,” she hesitated, “captivated me that night.”

“You mean...?”

She nodded. “He came back to my hotel. I offered him my bath, you see. The first he had had for many years I suspect. When he had finished, he splashed cologne on his body and I gave him a pair of my pyjamas. Only then did I see how small he was; even my pyjamas looked big on him,” she smiled at her memory. “Unusual experience making love to someone in your own clothes.”

“I’ll bet it was,” Jake said, wondering why he was never shocked at anything Rhosa told him. “Odd though, that you should be so attracted to him physically when there was such a difference in age.”

“I’ve often thought that there is a ‘real’ in which convention governs and says this does not happen and there is a ‘dream-real’ in which all those conventions disappear and behaviour becomes free. It wasn’t physical so much as a feeling that his mind was entering mine, all his experience and suffering went through me. The lined face in this picture didn’t exist for me.” She looked at Jake and saw the shadow of consternation.

“It was before my husband had destroyed my ability to enjoy sex,” she said, to defuse what she suspected he was thinking. “I remember seeing Gregory leaning on his elbow, looking down at me as though I was an aristocrat of his class; Gregory told me he had found a woman who had never lived until that moment. I’d had a pretty full life but I remember thinking ‘tonight my life began.’ I looked up into his eyes and there was such love passing between us. As our bodies connected, I lived his life from his birth - as he grew to be a

man and then all the suffering of his lost destiny. The culture and the wealth he would have known had been torn from his family by the 1917 Revolution. His family had moved to England where they would have stayed if it had not been for their love of Russia and the promise by the Communists that they would have their old home back, could keep servants and be given a position in the Party. It was all lies though. The Party just wanted to make sure they could get their hands on all the family's money and imprisoned them for treason. All those things passed through my mind as I fell asleep."

With sadness in her voice, she continued. "That was the last time I saw him."

"Took the money and ran you mean?"

She punched him. "No he didn't, cynical Jake. He had spent the whole forty pounds on the meal and much more including a generous tip which he gave the head waiter before we ate. You should have seen the way they bowed to him. I had to smile to myself at the thought of how they would have behaved if they had known that a few hours before he was begging in the streets."

"What did you mean by 'the last time you saw him'?"

"He was not there when I woke the next morning so cold without him beside me. On the bedside table he had left more than forty pounds in roubles. The money he had spent on the meal was my forty pounds and he must have left all his life savings in those roubles. He left a book about his family, inside was a note, thanking me for the loan of the money and for being his countess for one night. I still have that book and his note. It goes wherever I go along with the photograph of you."

"But what happened to your aristocrat?"

She could not speak for several minutes as the memory flooded her mind. "It was terribly cold – even in bed in a heated hotel room it was difficult to get warm." Her voice quavered and she waited till she had recovered. "I couldn't

believe the earth could be as cold as it was that day. That morning when I was walking to the theatre, I saw people looking at a frost covered figure. They moved off as they saw me.” Rhosa’s body shook and Jake pulled her to him and she laid her head on his shoulder. When she could finally speak she said in a whisper, “it was him, still wearing the same suit but rigid and frozen.”

“What had happened?”

“In the note he left in my room, he said no night could be like the night we had had together and that his life was now complete. I don’t know what could have happened, perhaps he had slipped down in the street and the frost had killed him – or...,” she stopped to wipe her eyes, “I’ve been told that it is easy to end one’s life when it is so cold, you just lie down and hardly feel anything.” As she spoke she got out of bed went to the window and looking out, said. “So sad, Jay, that lovely man ending his life as nothing more than a shape in the snow,” she turned back from the window, wiping her eyes on her sleeve, “I need to think of something else. I’ll go and make us some breakfast.”

He was still looking at the photographs of Count Gregory and sensing her distress when she called from the kitchen. He put on his dressing gown and went down to find her in tears.

“What is it Rhosa?” he asked, going to her and putting his arms round her.

“That poor, poor man - no one mourned him. I managed after enormous effort to organize for him to be buried. You can’t imagine how anyone could get through the bureaucracy in Moscow who wasn’t of reasonable intelligence. I arranged for him to be buried still wearing the same suit he wore to the restaurant. After two days of trying, I met an official with a spark of humanity who told me that there was a

cemetery near the centre of the city where Gregory's family vault was."

"It would have been much easier if you had had a big wallet, I suspect."

She was unable to reply. Jake sat her down and after a while she had regained control and continued. "Apart from the people who were doing the burying, I was the only one at the funeral except for one solitary man who took a photograph as I watched the coffin being dropped into the vault, I assume he was a journalist. Can you imagine, in England, Gregory would probably have been a diplomat, a writer. I don't know – whatever - he would have made a success with a brain like his but he lies in that cold stone vault and no one knows he is there."

"Except for that man who photographed you."

"What do you mean?" She frowned.

"Did it not occur to you who he was?" Jake asked. "No doubt your details and your photograph are held in a police record somewhere. Have you been back to Russia since?"

"Twice and each time I've gone and put flowers on his grave."

"Did anyone see you?"

"Come on, Jacob – it's not like that nowadays, nobody would have..." she stopped in mid-sentence and put her hand to her mouth.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I just remembered – the last time I was in Moscow and went to his grave, there were two people I didn't know standing around. It was pouring with rain and as I walked to the vault, I suddenly knew I was not alone. As I stood beside Gregory's grave, there was a woman wearing a long trench coat standing nearby holding an umbrella. She seemed quite young but I couldn't be sure because she and the man she was with were

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wearing sunglasses. The day was grey - beginning to snow and I remember thinking at the time that it was strange to be wearing sunglasses. They did not look like mourners, I thought to speak to them but I have no Russian at all.”

She and Jake were sitting down at the breakfast bar and as they ate, looked out across the green outside. Normally words poured from her while he, the more silent, would listen to her. But today, even though he tried to rouse her interest in other things, she was abnormally quiet. She had cleared the breakfast things and was washing up while he dried the dishes before she spoke.

“Don’t mind telling you, Jake, I feel weird.” She put her hand over her mouth in nature’s way of holding back the reaction to vomit. “Could I possibly have a criminal record in Russia and be watched from the time I walked through customs at the airport? “

“It could have been that the man who you thought was being helpful in getting the vault opened for Gregory’s body reported you.” Jake said.

She finished the washing up, emptied the bowl and went to sit down. “I need to get out and wander round the common where only the trees watch me.”

“With your looks and your reputation as an actress, I don’t imagine you can go anywhere without there being people watching,” he said light-heartedly attempting to change her mood. “D’you want to go out on your own?”

“No, if you can break yourself away from your work, I’d like you to come with me but first I need to get myself clean, wash away this feeling in the shower.”

“Go and do it now, I’ll finish tidying up. As soon as you are ready, we can go for your walk.”

Before she went to the bathroom, she took his hands, wrapped them around her body and put her head on his

shoulder. When she looked up, she said with a tearful smile. "I needed someone stable like you, Jake, a man with a broad shoulder."

As they walked, a light breeze fluttered the leaves on the trees. The air seemed to have on it the scent of blossom even though it was still very cold. The walk took them nearly an hour and fetched up at his favourite pub 'The Rod of Iron' where they had danced together after a lapse of so many years. By the time they had sat down in the familiar surroundings and passed the time with the barman, Rhosa was nearly back to normal. As she drank a glass of her favourite burgundy, she looked around at the other people sitting at tables scattered around the room.

"I like coming to places like this," she said as her eyes wandered round the room. "It's full of people leading ordinary lives." As she spoke, a sports car drew up and from it jumped a middle aged man with hair carefully styled. The collar of his jacket was turned up. Between his lips was a part smoked cigarette which jutted out aggressively and pronounced him a 'go-getter'. Carefully and with a look of slight irritation, he ground it out as he stood in the doorway. Hanging from his shoulder was a leather briefcase. Jake had not seen him before but saw that he must have been a regular because as he sat down at a table, his eyes met those of the girl behind the bar who, without his asking, poured him a drink and took it to him. He nodded cursorily as he opened his brief case and with a frown of irritation and a shake of the head, started to read from a pile of papers and to write on a foolscap pad of paper.

"We all wear badges that tell people what we are, don't we Jake? See what badges that man wears," Rhosa said, lowering her voice.

"Mm," Jake nodded, "what do his badges say to you?"

"The same things they say to you, I should think. 'I am an important man, you can tell by the haste with which I came in and immediately started work. You can tell by the way I

walk. I have parked my expensive Jaguar sports car where you can all see it. When I drive it I smoke my cigarette which juts out like an erect penis I have no trouble with the opposite sex, they all love the way I look, the way I wear my clothes which are casually expensive. My hair style - guaranteed to attract females but I have so many that I am a little bored with them. I give my custom to this place because it is nearby but I am really too busy to stop work for long even on a Sunday when the rest of you are behaving in a leisurely manner, I am only here because I've had an exhausting morning and I need a drink'."

"You know, Rhosa, I'm aware of these things but only on a sub-conscious level. When someone points them out, you wonder why it wasn't obvious." Jake nodded his head. "That's your power; partly comes from acting I suppose and partly from having grown up in a different culture; makes you more aware and analytical of your adopted country."

The outer door was pushed open and about a dozen middle aged, seeming middle class men and women came in, anoraked in readiness for bad weather. Their heavy walking boots scratched the stone floor as they took seats, dragging chairs to the table they had selected and with hushed voices, decided who should sit next to whom.

Jake leaned close to Rhosa and said. "A lot of badges there."

With studiously averted gaze, she listened to their voices as they talked amongst themselves laughing constantly as convention demands when numbers of people group together.

"Office outing, I think. The big man with white hair is the boss, judging by the way they cluck round him and laugh every time he says anything mildly amusing."

The barmaid went over to them and they began to order sandwiches until the big man decided he would like a cooked meal whereupon several others changed their minds with, "that

sounds good, I think I'll join you," and had what he had ordered.

"Big-white-hair is casting his influence," Jake said quietly.

"Quite tribal, isn't it?" Rhosa observed, "you notice how the women are also deferential to the boss's wife. It's the youngest couple I feel sorry for, probably newcomers to the group; the wife is very attractive and you see the older men sneaking lascivious glances at her cleavage when their own wives are talking to the boss or his wife. The husband is sending messages to her to flirt with the boss but only mildly. On the surface you'd think they were a relaxed group of walkers - a loose-knit community but it's actually very structured."

He smiled at her comments and said, "I'm waiting for you to write your Harold Pinter play."

"If I ever write a play, it will be about Gregory, I keep thinking about him and the dreadful oppression he lived under for most of his life. You can't help wondering why we build these hierarchies." She took another drink of her wine while she collected her thoughts and then, looking over at the group, now free of their anoraks, said with a slight smile: "You see it in microcosm over there don't you; the false obeisance to big-white-hair." When she got up to go to the toilet, Jake idly watched the group, assigning positions in the hierarchy to the men and marvelling at the accuracy of Rhosa's analysis.

When Rhosa returned, she sat down and said, "Is man ever free, Jay? Didn't Karl Marx have an expression?"

"You mean Rousseau, don't you? His 'Social Contract', 'Man is born free but everywhere is in chains'."

She nodded. "That's what I mean," she said picking up her glass. "Why do we do it? We all want freedom above everything, but the State which is supposed to be our servant watches us and harnesses us."

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“I’ll have to introduce you to Haig Skarn, if his ideas become accepted and I think they will, we shall have real democracy,” he said, then realising that he was opening up one of her favourite topics, said “We ought to get back.” He sensed that they were close to one of her Socratic diatribes. “Quick drink in a pub before we have half an hour’s walk back if we go the long route isn’t the right time to discuss the mechanics of the State,” he said as he stood up and helped Rhosa into her coat, “but we will later.”

Rhosa remained quiet as they walked to the house. When they got back, she went into the kitchen to wash her hands as Jake lit the fire. While they watched the flames in the fire growing, Jake said. “You’re really thrown by this Russian thing, aren’t you?”

She nodded gravely, “I am, don’t mind telling you it has made me think just how much we are watched and how dominant the state is in our lives. Our governments are supposed to act for us but they become self-seeking and self-perpetuating entities. They preach so called ‘welfare of their people’ and take that as justification for oppression. As we walked back I was thinking about the terrible killing that took place in the French Revolution and then the Russian Revolution.”

“I noticed how quiet you were,” he said, “Yes, not difficult to see why every now and then the masses rise against authority. The way we are allowed to elect our politicians is all wrong. I had always known it but it was not until I met Haig Skarn that I woke up to it after I heard one of his speeches.”

“Tell me again what he is proposing.”

“It’s very simple. We are ready for democracy, we need democracy, we are told we have it but all we have is a ‘sham’, to use your word. Once every five years, we are allowed to vote for people whom we have little respect for and who act in their own best interests. Skarn says we should vote for policies not

for parties and those policies should be administered by people who are trained. Education by educators, manufacturing policy by manufacturers, health by trained medical people and these managers can be sacked if they don't perform. They will manage the business of the nation just as large companies are managed. When Haig delivers a speech, he gets a standing ovation, his language is so hypnotic."

"Take me to his next one, I'd love to hear him speak," Rhosa poked the fire and watched as the flames took hold and spread. "Language is amazing, isn't it? How empty life would be if we couldn't talk like we are now. You wonder what the mechanism is that causes words to come into our minds without our seeming to think. They grow like chemical reactions. Put thoughts together and they produce words. But if I stopped to think how I do it, I'd be lost. I make sentences which have a subject, a verb and an object and follow all the rules of grammar. I am just grateful that not only do we have the ability to make words in our heads; we also have the throat, the tongue and the vocal chords to make them form. Without them, the loneliness which curses us all would be unbearable. And we need words to make change happen. What would the French Revolution have been without words?"

You can understand why it started. But these revolutions, supposed to be for the good of people, always go too far; like this fire; it starts with a tiny flame and spreads to consume anything in its way," she threw another log into the flames and watched it become engulfed. "And once it gets hold, it spreads out of control.

I read an article in a magazine recently about the awful killing hundreds of years ago in the Vendee simply because the peasants tried to protect the priests who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Revolutionary Government. General Turreau was ordered to kill everyone he saw. One hundred and seventy thousand men, women and children were massacred

and Commander Carrier invented what he called systematic drowning,” she shuddered, “I find it hard to think about it even after so many years have passed.”

Jake nodded, “I read that article as well. Carrier tied women and their children together, floated them out on the Loire and sank the boats they were sitting in. He trampled children to death under the hooves of his horses. There was no justification for it – it’s what you were asking; is society more important than individuals?”

“If you ask is one individual more important than society then there is no argument but are one hundred a seventy thousand not people more important than the ideology of the French Revolution or the millions of blameless people slaughtered for the ‘better’ world of Communism?” The fire they were sitting in front of burst into flames and illuminated her face. Jake could see she was on the verge of tears again. “Jay, I am convinced this house has memories which we are picking up. When I am here, I find myself thinking about the cruelty of man.”

Jake decided that it was time to change the subject.

“I haven’t seen you reading much lately, Rhosa.”

She looked into the fire, leaned forward, picked up the poker, pushed the logs around and then said. “I sometimes think that I have read too much.”

“Too much, that’s impossible, reading always opens our minds.”

“Sometimes it does the opposite.” She shrugged. “Sometimes I think that I live too much with a reality which comes from literature so I’m often disappointed by what happens in real life.”

Jake debated with himself whether to reply but decided to change the subject yet again. “I think right now, you need some music in your life. You’ve got a break tomorrow evening

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before you go off on your tour.” When Rhosa nodded, he said. “Then I’ll take you to the Festival Hall, I’ve been given tickets. There is a Czech pianist, can’t remember his name, he’s playing the sort of music you like, the Chopin Revolutionary and Rachmaninoff’s Third. I’ll book us a meal in the restaurant I’ll try to get a table looking over the Thames.”

Rhosa got up and sat on his lap, putting her arm round his neck, laid her head on his chest. “Sounds divine,” she said sleepily. In a few moments she was asleep, breathing heavily. Jake carefully carried her up to bed. He looked down on the turbulent mind so peacefully asleep. She always slept fitfully and he knew she would wake later and change into her nightclothes so he left her to dream.