

*CLARE: WIFE, MOTHER, MISTRESS ... MURDERER?*

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MURDERER?**

James Flaherty



## **Chapter One: Clare realizes Her Marriage is Worthless.**

CLARE HAD LEARNED TO TUNE RICHARD OUT LONG AGO. She didn't hear his acid-tinged farewell, "I hope you're not planning a candlelit dinner for two, dear... I won't be there." She was vaguely aware of his detestable cologne as he passed through the room, something expensive, but gagging. Richard was rich, but his money wasn't enough to compensate for all his failings—petulant, nasty, and void of ethics or interest. She shuddered, his presence crowding her morning's peace. So, she banished him from her mind and concentrated on something beautiful. In this instance, it was a moment in Paris many years ago. She had been there for a modeling job. It was almost evening and she was wandering through the Tuileries, and in that blissful gathering of minutes that signal the end of day and the beginning of night, while the sun still washed the world with a rosy, golden tint, Paris glowed. Every building, every person, every tree was haloed in light. And whether it was a private trance, or the Gods simply amusing themselves, the city's sounds were muffled neath the sounds of birds. Busses, snarling trucks and raspy horns, became violins. She had been transfixed, not understanding why the moment had been given to her, but grateful for it. A psychologist friend had taught her that trick. Focus totally on something perfectly beautiful, something that thrills or elevates your senses, and by doing so you can block out the depressing, nonproductive influences in your life. The slamming door

forced her back to the ugly reality of Richard the Boring, Richard the Hateful, the arrogant, the despicable.

If Mary Elisabeth O’Brady Glickman, who preferred to be called Clare after a long-gone favorite grandmother from County Clare, so goes the family legend, felt angst, it didn’t show. She looked like a role model for every young woman who faced life with an imperfect nose, or unaligned teeth, or cornflake skin. She had unstudied blue/black hair that ignored the few premature threads of grey. Her face was a near flawless conference of features, with the kind of nose people paid large sums of money to plastic surgeons to duplicate. Her eyes, never evasive, were wide set, a chameleon blue/green. They invited intimacy. They made you think she was about to smile or laugh. Clare’s face was a perfect oval, except for the chin, which was chiseled at the tip, with nary a trace of excess skin tissue. And it all sat atop the true swan neck, a neck that cried out for kisses, or at least diamond and emerald necklaces.

Clare imagined Richard The Boring pulling out of the driveway in his Mercedes. Even that was boring, painted and upholstered in the wrong colors. She momentarily fantasized him slumping over the wheel freeing her from the legal ties that bind, leaving only the capital without any of the personal debt service—but best of all, leaving. She felt guilty and avaricious for thinking the thoughts and decided his money was the unimportant part—but ending her life with Richard would have great value. She spoke quietly, only to herself. “I didn’t know I was capable of hating this much.”

Angela, the Colombian maid, watched her mistress, and wondered, as much as she could understand the complexity of their relationship, what the beautiful mistress saw in the senor, who besides not being

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handsome, was obviously a bad hombre. The senora was a grand lady, who was important in big business, but also managed the home, and always found a moment to make Angela feel remembered and appreciated. She would say the rosary tonight, just for the senora.

**Chapter Two:  
At any given moment, Somewhere, Someone is  
about to Enter Your Life.**

WAKING UP WASN'T ONE OF GORDON'S STRONGEST SUITS. At least that's what he thought. So he lay there, knowing the alarm was just minutes from clamor. He also wondered why in hell he always woke up before the alarm. Was it self-imposed penance? Or was he just a harmless masochist who wanted to be fully alert when the blast came so he could revel in the pain? It was all too complicated a thought for 6:30 a.m. He suggested deep sleep to himself and laughed. He pretended to ignore the laughing and closed his eyes, breathed deeply and tried to return to the protectiveness of sleep. Fifteen minutes of pretend sleep passed when the alarm yelped its war cry with a special vengeance. Gordon fantasized he had the strength in his hand to crush it into eternal sleep.

He looked disapprovingly at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. "And who is to blame, asshole?" Needles of hot water and some lemon scented soap washed away whatever sins had plagued his slumber. He wondered if he had been out of line last night but decided not. There hadn't been anyone worth getting out of line with. Perhaps there was one scotch too many, and Gabriel forgive him, there was even a Sambuca or three. Ugh. Although he had trashed himself last night, the eyes seemed remarkably clear, the hair on the tongue would disappear with two cups of sub-humanly hot coffee, and the urge to succeed

would force his overly misused body into action. Despite a trifle too much debauching, the body wasn't bad. Forty-two years sat well on Gordon Zabriskie. Where most men had spare ties or those cutesy rolls they call love handles, he still had a couple of decently hard ridges in his torso. It was a good, masculine body, perfect when dressed, and well appreciated by women of all socioeconomic levels, undressed.

God, Mother Nature and the weathermen were smiling on New York City this morning. The morning's gold rays splashed over the city including the front of Gordon's unpretentious but agreeable apartment building in the East Seventies. Now coffeed, recovered, and cleansed of his unoriginal sins, Gordon was seated on a squashy sofa directing all his attention to a piece of paper in his hands. A ray of sun found the mirror over the mantle and scattered touches of gold around the room. Gordon was thinking about gold, too. Not the warming, poetic gold of the sun. He was concentrating on how to line his coffers with gold. He stared at the piece of paper. Frowned, and then smiled. Looked up at the ceiling and shook his head as though to clear his mind. He looked back at the paper--smiled again—and laughed out loud. "Holy Shit."

THE TODAY SHOW WEATHERMAN BUFFONED HIS WAY THROUGH THE WEATHER. A pleasant and easy way to start the morning of a day that probably wouldn't be so easy. Meredith Viera was no longer on the set, and Matt Lauer, Mr. White Bread, has been accused of sexual misconduct and fired? So, who's left, just a couple of those pretty Today Show Girls exchanging wholesome banter with the black weatherman? Is this just more of the Harvey Weinstein plague?

Clare heard the Dow Jones figure with some satisfaction. She made a couple of smart buys yesterday. Her clients had “green” reasons to be pleased with her.

“Hello, Sofa, it’s Clare”.

“I’m glad you’re not in this rathole this morning. You know that cocksucker on the other side of your cubicle? Well he smells like a Polish manure factory this morning... must have really got shitfaced last night... he reeks of hooch, and has the goddamn nerve to come in here and make insinuatn’ comments about how all us girls want nothin’ more out of life than to put out for him. I hope he fucks somebody with the clap.”

Clare laughed. “Sofa, you have such a sweet way of expressing yourself.” And in truth, Clare did like Sofa—Sofia was her real name—the total nothing New York background, mixed ethnics, a mouth like an open sewer, but protective of Clare, trustworthy as the Sphinx, and a razor-sharp secretary who somehow managed to assuage troubled clients, with milk-toast language, and could lie more believably than anyone Clare had ever known. “Thanks for the warning, Sofa love; I’ll bring some fragrant flowers so I don’t have to smell him. If there are any calls for me this morning, tell them I’m in a meeting out of the office and should be back by 11 a.m.—and I will make a point of being in by 11 a.m. See you then--ciao dear.”

The pulsing massage of the Jacuzzi whirlpool and peach scented English bath oil washed away her irritation with her husband and allowed Clare to concentrate on what’s ahead today. A meeting with Edward “Buzz” Collins, the “Buzz” an archetypical conservative lawyer. Bet he wears three-piece tailored pajamas, she smiled to herself—wakes up with combed hair. Buzz has been a

puzzle to Clare. She thought when he gave her all those bucks to invest he would probably make a play for her. But to date, it's been all high tech and no touch. Fine by her. Too dangerous to mix business and pleasure, especially naked pleasure. Besides it wasn't her style to sleep around. To date, she had \$8,500,000 plus or minus of Buzz Bucks at her disposal. They were both making a nice piece of change with those investments. Today, she wanted to introduce a risky investment, but with high stakes. She mentally rehearsed the coming meeting—what she'd say, what he'd hopefully answer. She conjured up Buzz's sweet, gentlemanly face, pursed her lips and kissed his forehead. "Thank you, Buzz, you are the #1 love of my business life."

GORDON ZABRISKIE WAS KISSING SOMETHING TOO--A piece of paper, flooded with figures and notations. "It's true," he announced to the empty room, "I can do it and there's no way anyone can trace it. I can buy and sell and make more money than Midas and nobody will be wiser." He jumped up in his excitement, caught his toe on the brass base of the coffee table, fell over sideways, and as he hit the end table muttered oh shit, smashing a lamp, an ashtray, a candy dish, bounced off the table and hit the hard hearth of the fireplace with a thump, face down. He lay still for a moment. Breathing? Unconscious? He turned over, slowly and then you heard it. He was laughing. Beyond pain, beyond caring, Gordon had seen his God—Mammon—and was prepared to strike a deal with him.

**Chapter Three:  
Business is Business. And when it's good, It's  
Better than Sex, Totally Satisfying.**

CLARE'S DAY HAD RUN SMOOTHLY. Buzz was too busy with his pressing business decisions of his own to dissect all hers. Besides, as he said, "I have no reason to be anything but pleased with the way you are managing my investments." Sofa had been right about her cubicle mate. He actually smelled. She left a bottle of Listerine mouthwash and Dentyne chewing gum on his desk. He didn't mention either item.

She was glad when the day ended and grateful that Richard wouldn't be home for dinner. She changed to some comfortable pleated slacks and a silk shirt, and though a bit tired, decided to add yet another piece of tedium to her day. She would write her son from her first marriage a letter addressing his too-old-to-have-those-problems. She sat down at the Empire desk and leaned back in the graceful French writing chair with the Kelly green subbed silk upholstery and the smooth rich walnut frame. She appreciated but didn't overly dwell on the surrounding décor. It was something she literally threw together devoting minimal time. It was handsome. Everyone thought a decorator did it—but it was all Clare. Mushroom walls and a pale Aubusson rug provided a backdrop for some museum quality art, as well as an unexpected collection of small African pieces. Her first husband had been good at something. They were artfully

displayed and lit within a dramatic armoire. The upholstered sitting pieces echoed some of the gentle yellows and apricots in the rug. The room was deceptive in its casualness. Clare knew it worked and that was all that mattered.

Even as Clare considered her letter, the handsome Edward, her first born, 20 years old, a gifted linguist, and a regular on the amateur tennis circuit, was pressed shirtless against chintz covered down cushions, getting a fairly intimate back rub, and not a bad one Edward thought, courtesy of his Advanced Comparative English Literature Professor, a plump, balding 39-year-old with a widely known penchant for young men. Not that Edward was a devoted homosexual; he was just making sure he aced Advanced Comparative English Literature. At this age and stage of his life, he didn't have much to contribute to the world, not because of his sexual detours in the guise of ambition, but because he was basically a nothing, a candidate for herpes, a lover only of self.

His mother knew it. She tried to summon up her true maternal feelings, her concerns. She brought up loving memories of his youth; of the infant nestled at her breast. She found his face in her mind and smiled at it. Then she frowned and wrote: "Dearest Edward..." crossed that out and started over. "Edward, you certainly are a whiney little number, aren't you? Don't you dare feign shock! I know all your trashy little tricks and some you haven't even played. I accept the blame for the role I played. But I do have hopes that somewhere in your handsome, lean body, there is a redeemable characteristic; a germ of sensibility; a standard of more than gutter behavior." Then she tore up the letter and made a mental note to write him later. Maybe primal therapy would work for him. He's just a redo of his father, except for the gay part, for "Daddy" was

a womanizer of international re-known. To Hell with both of them.

6 p.m., Richard will be at “the club”—hah—playing bridge or poker with himself until 11 at least. Time for a negroni. One double old-fashioned glass. A few rocks. Gin to here—no, a little more. Enough Campari to color a pale dusty rose. A splash of sweet Vermouth. Careful, not too much. A slice of orange. Deadly. Delicious. She put it on a silver tray and carried it to the coffee table in front of the sofa with the framed view of Manhattan’s 59<sup>th</sup> Street bridge. She took the drink, smiled at the invisible butler, and said, “Thank you so much. I know it’s rather déclassé for a woman to drink alone, but somehow, having this one perfect cocktail tonight seems completely appropriate. A toast? Certainly. Here’s to those who wish us well, all the rest can go to hell.” She smiled and took a well-deserved drink.

The much-maligned Richard the Tiresome had reached the club. Five bucks to the attendant, but then, instead of entering the front door, he skirted the border of hedges and went around to a side cabin. He rang. Twice short, one long, then twice short. The door opened, and he walked in. The members of his “special” club were already there...and already almost naked. They didn’t find Richard a bit tiresome—or boring.

**Chapter Four:**  
**“Well Mr. Simkin...” Gordon paused for dramatic effect. “I think you’re going to be mighty pleased with this news.”**

SIMKIN’S REACTION WAS THAT OF A MAN BEING TOLD THE TUMOR WAS BENIGN. He readied himself for news of an impending fortune. He sighed with pleasure; his eyes took on a new light. “Remember that small software company we bought so heavily?”

“Yes, yes, out in the Midwest. I was very doubtful.”

“Well, IBM just bought that company and the stock quadrupled in value and split three ways, which is giving you a return of about 178% on your investment.”

The newly crowned king of finance, John Paul Getty in his own time, stammered out heartfelt thanks. “I don’t know what to say. It’s wonderful. Can’t thank you enough.”

“Oh, hahahah, of course you can thank me—by being imaginative and letting me push you on to even greater heights. For example, I want to reinvest all your profits into these new stocks. Take a look at these companies. Let’s get going on making your portfolio grow.”

Momentarily stunned by the possible news of relapse, Mr. Simkin’s high was bobsledding down a treacherous mountain wall. “I, I don’t know...”

Gordon, like the powerful tennis players bears down at the net on a weak opponent, was closing in for the kill. “For example, this gas development company already has the wells, and I think we’re in for another shocker in the price and availability of foreign fuel. And this soft goods manufacturer has one of the hottest fad items in the Southwest this year, and now they’re going national with it. And this? Alliance Airlines is a combo of some biggies. I think they’re going to out-people People Express—remember People Express?”

Simkin left, worried about the new investments, reassured about the old investments, and Gordon mentally counted his profits. Some of those commissions were as big as the profits.

## Chapter Five:

**It was in St. Bart's, that chichi French sunspot  
a puddle jump from St. Martin's, that Clare  
realized that Richard the Petulant, was in  
truth, a genuine asshole.**

“RICHARD IS AN ASSHOLE”, she murmured to no one but the ever-present St. Bart's wind. “Truly an asshole. Why didn't I see that before I married him?” God, Clare, she chastised herself, you're a big girl, and you damn well should know better. You made this bed, but perhaps you should consider unmaking it before you really get hurt.

It seemed incredible that one couldn't enjoy the comforts of Richard's inheritance. But it was virtually impossible if it meant sharing one's life with Richard. St. Bart's was warm, and New York City was anything but in February. The days weren't that bad, driving around the tiny three by six-mile island in their Moki, that humpy little Australian jeep, eating over-rated food. Just because its French doesn't make it wonderful. But she did like their quarters. They were in El Sereno Beach Hotel, about 30 bedrooms, with waves lapping against the seawall, too much damn wind, but a fine dining room, and lovely whitewashed rooms, and a beautiful tiled pool surrounded by a Hollywood style deck with strips of tiny lights fanning out in all directions. It was pure escape and she was trying her damndest to enjoy it, except of course, when she was alone with Richard. When one is stuck with someone one does not love, how does one cope with the

situation? She mused the question. As a sex-maker, because they never made love just had sex, Richard was okay. Maybe even a trifle better than okay. But who cares. It would be fine if it was for one night only, but this is supposed to be forever and ever. Not in my lifetime she quipped to herself. Borrrring.

On cue, Richard appeared. “Did you like my kamikaze attack at dawn this morning, my passion flower?”

Clare resisted the urge to stick her finger in her mouth, a la Joan Rivers, and smile insipidly. “So romantic. Like getting reamed with a miniature Billy club without the benefit of K.Y.”

“It’s so rewarding being married to an old-fashioned girl—a girl with real values—a girl who understands sensitive relationships.”

“You should marry a nun.”

“And get into dirty habits?”

“An old, tacky joke.” Silence. The game wasn’t even interesting. There wasn’t a point to it.

“Excuse me, my darling. I didn’t want to start another day of needless banter with you, Clare. A quick change of subject. Why do I love this place and I can tell you think it’s a big crock?”

“You’re kind of like the nouveau moneyed French, Richard. You like to be where ‘zee beautiful people are.’ And the joint’s loaded with them, each more vacuous and more voracious than the next. To me they’re extraordinarily unimpressive. I have never seen so many unattractive uncovered bosoms—it boggles the eyeballs.”

“So glad we came here together...dear.”

“And wouldn’t you have fun here...without me, Richard darling. There’s more available stuff here than in your secretarial pool.”

“You are crude, aren’t you?”

“No, just honest. Besides, I know how much dirty talk excites you. Let’s go home early. I’d rather put up with the frigid crowdedness of Manhattan than pretend this is paradise.”

**Chapter Six:  
Gordon stood at the girl's bathroom mirror. He  
frowned. What is her name?**

MAYBE I CAN LEAVE BEFORE SHE GETS UP. The shower had revived him. As always, the disposable razor and foldable toothbrush in his briefcase had come in handy. A little hand or face soap was fine for shaving, and a shower would always substitute for a deodorant. She had been a lousy lay. Not really in the physical sense, but the sound effects were terrible, and suspiciously artificial. He thought he was pretty good, but his performance rarely prompted a new version of Aida. It was just too much and interfered with his enjoyment of sex. Fucking was best when people concentrated on the act itself instead of acting to make an impression on one's partner.

He examined his face in her three-way mirror. The famous square chin was still square and firm. The thick outburst of sandy colored hair was rich as ever. And those freckles that melted so many hearts kept the face in the innocent column. Where he got those two-tone brown/green eyes, he would never know. Both parents had sky blue eyes. Maybe his Presbyterian Mom had a truly exceptional relationship with the plumber. Was that the old joke about getting a pipe job? Gordon felt a moment of guilt thinking of his mother in a derogatory way. She always meant well. Although in truth, from the earliest age of reason, Gordon had considered her a complete ineffectual pain in the ass. He could never prove

it, and wouldn't try, but never thought his Father truly cared when Mom bit the dust.

Checking his expression yet again in the mirror, he smiled to himself, and thought as he had so many times, but for JFK's droopy eyes, I kind of look like him, except my hair is a bit lighter. And although the Prez reputedly had a great relationship with the ladies, he couldn't hold a candle to me. He sucked in his well-controlled gut, and thought, not bad Gordo, for 42, you're not getting older, you're just getting better. Too bad I don't know the royal family. I could be the crowning moment in their lives. He laughed at himself as he headed for the British Airways office to buy himself a business class ticket to London.

**Chapter Seven:  
The dinner party in Booterstown just outside  
of Dublin had been very dear.**

HOW INCREDIBLY MUSICAL AND ENDEARING WERE THE ACCENTS OF THE EDUCATED IRISH. Clare smiled lovingly thinking of the dialogue and participants in the evening. Billy Costelloe, that delightful old devil, 82 years old, and as grand and glorious a man as I've ever known, openly flirting with me. And the exquisite Shelia, his American born wife, as true an Irish aristocrat as could ever exist, just watching him and commenting. "It is so lovely for his blood pressure...and his memories. I think its sweet he still wants to ogle a little. Of course, I still care for him, the terrible old leprechaun. Land's sake, I'm from the American South you know, and Billy was a sexy devil. I loved him, correction, I love him so." Clare envied them both so much her eyes dampened. What greater reward to life could there be but to have someone who loved you more than tomorrow? My God, I must be getting old. I'm getting maudlin. Aaargh. London will wash out my brain, and hopefully give me a fresh infusion of civility.

THE NEW BRITISH AIRWAYS IN-FLIGHT SERVICE WAS SUPERB. Gordon felt cosseted and privileged, enjoying a decent champagne before takeoff, his personal TV turned to international news, and a superb dinner planned for the evening flight as well as some first run films. The wonderfully polite British Airways Captain came on and murmured courtesies to all, and enjoined everyone

to partake heartily of the Champagne, lightly teasing the peaches and cream complexion nannies/ stewardesses. Finally, one engine roared to life. Quite a few minutes went by and nothing else happened. After this prolonged silence, the perfectly dictioned captain spoke, "Engine #2 seems loathe to start." Fabulous, Gordon thought, he would put to shame all the American airline captains who were as the books on the astronauts suggested, "Trained with elocution lessons in Oklahoma." The flight seemed over almost too fast—4.8 hours--and besides dining nicely, Gordon had slept soundly for almost two hours. Gordon enjoyed the experience and concentrated on his fellow passengers. One of them, a movie director of some fame, was also famous for his interest in pre-teens. Gordon thought he was an aging fag, hiding behind an interesting kink. Heathrow was as always, unending. Too many white sheets. Too many miles to walk. But the ever-polite cab driver zigged and zagged him through a muddle of traffic to a hotel recommended by one of Gordon's clients.

The Athenaeum Hotel is on Piccadilly, opposite Green Park, centered between Knightsbridge where Harrods is, and Piccadilly Circus, the theatre district. Just 100 rooms and run like a private men's club. Very nice, and very appreciated by Gordon.

Alex, the unflappable concierge of the Athenaeum, rather liked yanks. Their easy, breezy style was a refreshing contrast to British reserve. This fellow, Zabriskie, Polish name, seemed well anchored, cocksure of himself, and probably a bit cheeky. If I were a betting man, Alex thought to himself, I'd wager five pounds Zabriskie wouldn't be sleeping alone tonight.

**Chapter Eight:  
The Heathrow customs officer looked at Clare  
and had one of his mini-fantasies.**

‘SHE WAS RICH, ARISTOCRATIC, WILDLY APPEALING, AND THOROUGHLY BORED WITH HER RICH, OVER-BEARING HUSBAND. She looks at me, thinks how appealing I look in my uniform, and how wonderful I’ll look out of uniform, drills me with her eyes, licks her lips, and says, You won’t find anything very interesting to report to customs, but this card has something I’d like you to memorize—my private phone number. And by the way, I’ll be alone all next week. The Chairman, my husband’s nickname, will be out of town all next week. All week—got it?’ Clare thought he’s either fallen into a coma or he thinks I’m Medusa and has turned to stone. Wake up, boy. She spoke. “Obviously, Sir, I’m a new arrival. And I didn’t have time to steal anything illegal from the U.S. to bring into the U.K. Also, I’m sure you can tell I’m not a druggie. So, can we move right along? I’m being met.” He swallowed the urge to clamp down on her but realized he wasn’t swimming through perfectly clear waters, so let her go.

As much as she loved London, Clare also loved leaving it, especially when her destination was country England. She rented a car and headed north, spending one night in the Shakespeare district, at Mallory Court, a splendid Georgian home where Clare enjoyed perhaps one of the best meals she’d ever had in her entire life. Better than the

best of New York. She drove on to the Lake District the next day, chuckling at the lack of English reserve on the highway. The she was, driving an easy 85 and an old coal truck would pass her as though she had stopped. 100 mph wasn't unusual. Amazing madness. Late that afternoon she arrived at Sharrow Bay Country House Hotel on Lake Ullswater. Those two delightful leprechauns, Francis and Brian, no longer young, but ever charming, were on hand. The cuisine was untouchably brilliant, the rooms charming, the scenery incredible, and the prevailing mood of one easy country sophistication.

GORDON LOATHED THE COUNTRY. He was coerced into going because it was his major client's major love and wanted to have a few days with Gordon away from the frenetic madness of New York. He chose the United Kingdom as the perfect retreat for the two of them. Gordon on the other hand didn't like the overly cluttered living rooms and would-be charming bedrooms lacking the pleasure of sophisticated urban living. No electric blankets, air-conditioning, room service, whirlpool tubs, or color TV, just the doubtful charms of the country. And surely if the chefs in London were so mediocre, one couldn't expect refined cuisine out in the sticks?

SHE WAS ALL HE COULD SEE WHEN HE ENTERED THE DINING ROOM OF SHARROW BAY. He mentally became part of a movie. The music was swelling, and the idle chatter of the other diners faded into the background. Nothing existed but the two of them.

Clare noticed him. Nothing happened. No stars sprinkled down from the sky. No chorus of heavenly song swept over her. She just thought, attractive, but who cares. Two men traveling together out in the country doesn't look that healthy to me.

He could barely get through dinner. During the pate' he was nibbling at her earlobes, melodying his hands up and down her body, telling her over and over what she meant to him. He drowned in her eyes during the soup course, hearing but not hearing the inconsequential drivel of his dinner companion. With the main course came the main course—he entered her and they fused their bodies into one sinewy silky muscle, pulling and pumping the other until the explosion washed over them. No outcries, no moans, just a deep intake of breath, neither believing the miracle of each other. Dessert was calm and quiet, laying there, gently touching one another, and looking at each other, almost afraid to speak, afraid of destroying the spiritual quality of the moment.

Later, he reflected on the dinner, Gordon thought, some meal. He alternated between having a giant erection, moist with pre-coital fluid, to a hollow scooped-out feeling inside, to trickles of perspiration running down his chest. He didn't remember what he ate. He hoped she knew that they had met ... and bonded.

She didn't. Clare retired to her room and read another brilliant novel by Kristin Hannah, NIGHTINGALE, a wrenching story of two French sisters, living and suffering through the German invasion of France. She found herself crying at some passages, read until 11:30 and fell into a calm, untroubled sleep, happy to be on her own. Being away from Richard was always a treat. She was up, exercised, bathed, coifed, and dressed by 6:45, down in the dining room having a pleasant good morning chat with innkeeper Brian, who was giving her his thoughts for a nice motor tour.

It was a lovely, loving day. With beautiful weather and a picnic lunch at your side there can't be a gentler or more

appealing day than motoring through the Lake District. Miles and miles of neat stone walls section off pasture fields and suddenly you round a curve and come upon long valley views, or a Swiss like setting that quite takes your breath away. Clare also enjoyed the fun of driving on a sliver of road on the left-hand side, while motor tour buses come roaring up the road toward her. She discovered her little car could almost climb a wall. The clamor of London was a distant memory. The Lake Country is what the Finger Lakes of New York are to the Empire State; what the tranquil lakes of the Ozarks are to bustling St. Louis; what Carmel and the Pacific Coast are to L.A.

Although she was concentrating on the driving and the scenery, Clare also used the day for reassessment. What are her options? What does she want to be when she grows up? Always a good question to ask oneself every year. Born Mary Elisabeth O'Brady in Forte Fort, Pennsylvania, she was raised in a proper middle-class Irish Catholic home. Daddy was a fairly important attorney when she was a kid, big fish in a small pond. Mom was rather hip for the period. Funny, Clare thought, she had never thought of her sweet little mother as hip until now. But indeed Margaret, called Maggie by everyone who knew her and loved her, was really on top of everything back in the 60's. She entertained well, took immaculate care of her home, her children, and even laid out the daily outfit for her color-blind husband, which kept him on the best dressed list among Forte Fort and Harrisburg business men for years.

She realized that much of her life is a reflection of her parents. They loved each other totally, no strings, no holding back. And perhaps that's what has driven Clare. She wants that kind of love. She remembered her Mom

running down the block at night to meet Dad. He didn't drive to work—preferred bussing with all the other attorneys so they could swap tales.

Clare was a good kid—not perfect—but nevertheless, a good kid, reasonably responsible, perfectly mannered in public, always totally feminine, and depending on her age either a complete piggo or a neatnik. Like most girls, about age 13 she decided her mother had lived long enough, and emotionally attacked her with a jackhammer. Mom showed her inner stuff—stayed calm, weathered the storm, actually cried only once after a particularly vicious onslaught—and eventually Clare returned to normal. Not hard to understand, she loved her father above all humans, and attributed qualities to him that only God could possess. As she achieved more maturity in her late college years, he slipped a little in her eyes, but she still loved him, if for nothing else, for the consistency of his love for his wife.

CLAIRE SMILED AT HER OWN MEMORIES. She hadn't been the epitome of virtue, a golden child with exquisite manners. No, she was a normal child with many of the normal kinks. At 15 she discovered the doubtful charms of pot and became heavily involved for about eight weeks, when unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, she had a bad experience with it, came out of it unscarred, but not unscared, and ripped the weed from her personal garden. Sex? All in all she had been rather circumspect. There was that boy when she was sixteen and a half. Her parents would have killed her. He was cute, trying to decide which sex he preferred, and trying both at every opportunity. She thought it was true love. Her parents wondered why she even dated him and would have been apoplectic had they known the extent of her involvement. When Clare found out he went to bed with a black boy the night after a date

with her, that did it. To make it worse, the black boy was a close friend of hers. There was a dramatic, “you have no real respect for me,” and he was banished to her private hall of ghosts.

Too beautiful, too lacking in self-discipline, college was basically a waste of her father’s money. Too many opportunities for intimate play, too little interest in classroom activities. For three years she bounced around to different schools, finding a new reason to transfer each year. She admitted it wasn’t the best use of her time, her parent’s money, or her mind and body. But one does grow up, and modeling gave her the opportunity to try New York.

She thought of her first husband, as always, with contempt, and tried to remember the positive aspects of that forced coupling. He had raped her. She was only 20; he was 39 and had money. He put her in a duplex on Sutton Place and ordered her to do something with herself. She followed his advice, but not as he had imagined. She became a stock broker. She studied French. She learned how to really dress properly—not for shock, not for enticement—but for show stopping presence. Her accent took on some European overtones, or perhaps the hint of an almost forgotten European education. She had a child and nanny by age 21. By 25 she was a classy, upscale New York woman who knew what she wanted and who she wanted to be.

Her husband continued his vile behavior, raping and buying women. One prostitute actually called to say his check had bounced and would she, Clare, give her his American Express number. She had a wonderful secret during this unhappy marriage. Old Henry. He was at least 75, very very rich and very very kind. He loved Clare the

way a man may love a favorite daughter. Physical sex was no longer an option. The joy of sitting across a candlelit dining table with her, to have a hug from her as she brought him a drink, was enough to make the last five years of his life enjoyable. Henry was, although she didn't identify him as such, her mentor. It was one of those unusual relationships, teacher and child, and employer and valued employee, a maestro and a gifted protégé, and it worked wonders for Clare. Besides opening her mind and eyes to the marvels of art and music and fine literature, it was Henry's observations that colored her every thought. She wished he were sitting by her now, enjoying the glories of the English countryside. As observant as she was, she knew he'd see much more. Behind the façade of civilized courtesy presented so flawlessly by the British, he would see the turmoil simmering from within.

**Chapter Nine:**  
**Gordon had a restless night. “Damn, I can’t get her out of my mind. God, I sound like a fragrance commercial.”**

THE YOUNG MAITRE’D, NIGEL, WAS OVERSEEING THE SEATING OF THE DINING ROOM. Gordon smiled at him, got the proper polite English response.

“Good morning, sir... I trust you slept well.”

“Very well, thank you. Last night at dinner...”

“Was everything all right, sir?” His sincere concern showed in his young face

“Oh, excellent. I believe I saw someone I met in the United States, or perhaps on the continent. An attractive woman, sitting over in that corner, wearing a dark, jeweled sweater...”

“Yes sir, you are referring to Mrs. Glickman.”

“Mrs. Glickman? Are you sure?”

“Yes sir, she’s the only single lady staying with the moment...and she was sitting over there last night.”

Mrs. Glickman, thought Gordon. She’s married, and Jewish? Funny thing, cookie, you don’t look it. And who gives a shit anyway...about the Jewish part. The married label may create a bigger problem.

“Well Gordon, my missus says we’d be nuts if we missed seeing the countryside. You know the original Alice in Wonderland was written around here. And there’s another historical village on the list—Troutbeck—wonder if they have fishing. The hotel people here have packed us a picnic lunch, so I’ll meet you down here in about 15 minutes. It’ll be a nice drive and will give us time to talk about all the companies you’re proposing for this coming year.

A hemorrhoidectomy would be easier. The man suffers from terminal dull. You could do a TV hospital medical series just using him as the sole subject: diarrhea of the mouth; he could be the ‘before’ in a before and after show on physical fitness; a growling digestive system for a food show. Stop it Gordon, you’re being cruel. He’s also good of heart, kind and generous, and besides being the source of much income in the coming year, who knows—maybe he’s a catalyst to bring you and Mrs. Glickman into each other’s hearts and arms.

Gordon believed in planning for his dreams. He even did it when he was a kid. Most kids live in pure fantasy worlds, but Gordon’s world always had a toehold in reality. Other kids talked about building tree houses that were grandiose and usually settled for that which was within their reach—an assemblage of unmatched planks nailed across two generous limbs. Up there, they planned heroic deeds that would land them on the front pages of the world.

But that’s what most kids did. Gordon, age 9, went to a local architect, and convinced him it would be exciting for an architect to design a workable, buildable tree house that would make the newspapers. He did—designed a fantasy tree house, then Gordon conned the local

lumberyard to donate lumber and a couple of adult helpers, and before long, there was Gordon, with the architect and the head of the lumber yard, on the front page of the second section. The headline said: A boy with a dream gets his castle in the sky.

GORDON STILL HAD A DREAM. TO DEVOUR MRS. GLICKMAN. To have a go at her. To touch and kiss every possible opening in her body. And what if the dream comes true and it's all just so-so? There would be other dreams, other tomorrows, other Mrs. Glickmans. Meanwhile, time to start planning.

“Coming Gordo? Our picnic lunch is ready, including some wine and beer, and I have a good map do we can't get too lost.”

Ready Gor...bring up that professional, reassuring smile. “Ready Arthur—sounds good to me.”

CELEBACY MAY NOT BE CONSIDERED HEALTHY, BUT GIVEN A DAY THIS LOVELY WITHOUT THE COMPLICATION OF COMPLICATED MEN, CLARE THOUGHT IT MIGHT JUST BE WORTH A TRY. On the other hand, her innate sense of femininity made her so appealing looking today as always, that celibacy now or forever seemed a remote notion. For her day in the country, Clare wore a soft plaid full skirt, with overlapping tones of mauve and gray, topped with a royal purple silk shirt, and mauve and gray paisley stole for the marginally cool English Lake District days. Her porcelain skin looked right at home with the dewdrop complexions of the younger English women, but her face belied her origins. The black hair, blue to green to blue eyes, and china fair skin remembered her Irish ancestry.

The really beautiful thing about Clare was her unawareness of her own beauty. She knew she was decent looking, but never spent tedious hours making love to her mirror or vice versa. What is, is. What will be, will be. But she did work at presenting the best possible version of herself. The weight never varied more than three pounds plus or minus. She kept the skin tone firm with regular exercise. The hair style was always au courant, never extreme. Her sense of style unerring, she leaned more toward softness than the sometimes more fashionable hard-edged looks of couture. She truly believed there was no excuse for not looking your very best—at all times.

Clare's voice had a special quality as well. It carried a promise of goodness to come. The tone always seemed to be on the verge of saying Thank You, yet she was able to modulate it to fit well in business meetings. There was a no-nonsense about her in business. No games, no leaning on her womanliness. No flirting—absolutely no flirting. She had a job to do for her clients, and she did it. And they respected her for it. So few people in the world had experienced her anger, you would be hard put to believe this gentle lady could go for the jugular. And she did it without yelling. No screaming. No tears—never tears. Just cool, calculating, every word chosen for its most devastating effect as she took someone down to the quick. Clare was no pushover. She was an extraordinary mélange of qualities—mental, emotional, romantic—all gold-plated with an instinct for survival.

GORDON HALF-LISTENED. ARTHUR, HIS TRAVELING COMPANION, SPOKE NONSTOP WITHOUT SAYING MUCH OF ANYTHING. "...and I tell you, Gordo, that night at the club, we got so skunked I swore I'd never look a bourbon old fashion in the eye again. And I didn't. For a whole 14 hours, hahahahah. I tell you, Gordo, that's a fun

crowd me and Ellie hang out with. And my buddies are damn smart. You know what I mean. They've made a lot of bucks...and hey, I bet I could get some of them interested in you." Gordon was listening now. If Arthur wanted to cross Gordo's palm—God, I hate that form of my name—I'll be right there, first in line, with a winning smile on my face.

Ah, money, thought Gordon. It can bring me everything I want. Or can it? They were driving through one of those picture book villages that have inspired poets and storytellers for generations—and then he saw her--the mysterious, the desirable, the delectable Mrs. Glickman, hypnotizing and stunning a couple of locals with her fabulous smile. She has them melting in her hand. Make me melt, Mrs. Glickman darling. Good Lord, Gordon, get a hold on yourself. He smiled inwardly, realizing he was acting like a proverbial schoolboy carrying a giant crush, hopelessly in love with the homecoming queen, fantasizing the consummation of their inescapable and hopefully unavoidable romance. He pulled the car over abruptly and said, "Let's stroll about this village".

"Oh, okay Gor, whatever you say. Pretty little town, reminds me of..."

Gordon cut off the sound of Arthur in his mind, concentrating instead on the sight of her, thinking if possible she's even more beautiful today than she was last night. As they passed her on the sidewalk, an intimate fragrance caressed him. He tried not to turn and look but couldn't resist and the motion of his head caught Clare's eye. It's the man from the restaurant she thought. And, he is attractive. Don't be stupid, Clare. Remember, you were considering celibacy not even an hour ago. She returned her concentration to the dear little couple standing in

front of her asking her about New York City where their daughter has recently moved to take a position as a hotel maid. Clare wrote down the girl's name and promised her parents she would call her when she returned and make sure the job and living conditions were acceptable for their child. When she continued to her car, she noticed, somewhat to her relief that the handsome stranger was no longer there.

That evening, back at the inn, Gordon found himself facing an unacceptable life situation...life without Mrs. Glickman. This is ridiculous. I don't even know her first name. I would sell my soul for a woman whose first name I don't even know. Innkeeper Bryan, never surprised by the above and undercover antics of his guests, wondered what was in the note Gordon asked him to deliver to Mrs. Glickman in the dining room that evening.