

The Grey Space: Notions of Loss in Writing Real Lives

Critical thesis

&

The Sculptress

A work of creative non-fiction

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Abstract

This thesis in Creative and Critical Writing comprises two parts. The book, *The Sculptress*, is fictional interpretation of the life and work of the American artist and collector Mary Callery and her daughter, Caroline. It pivots around Callery's fractured relationship with Caroline, suggesting the trajectory which led to the suicide of Caroline at the age of forty. It aims to throw new light on Callery's considerable body of work, which has been overlooked by art history despite receiving critical acclaim. Set against fast-changing backdrop of European and American Modernism, it spans Callery's lifetime, from her birth in 1903 to her death in Paris in 1977.

The critical part of this thesis proposes that 'loss' is a central feature of writing creative non-fiction, and explores this with reference to the work of Naomi Wood and Julia Blackburn along with my own. Notions of loss emerged as the driving force behind my entire project: my own personal loss, loss of direction, loss of emotional, historical and factual truths. The ways in which Callery dealt with the 'grey spaces' in her own existence – that is to say, the distance between the two social poles she inhabited (avant-garde bohemia and old money, society New York), plus the grief she was unable to express about her daughter's death – became the governing theme of the book.

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Introduction

High up in the scrubland, there is a cemetery. You happen upon it at the exact midpoint on the road between Cadaques and Port Lligat, on the craggy peninsula of Cap de Creus in north east Spain. Bordered on all sides by curved white stuccoed walls, stark against the cloudless blue sky, it looks for all the world like the lacy tip of a giant, cresting wave.

Tucked away in the corner of the cemetery is a wooden cross. It is propped up behind a cube of white marble, which teeters awkwardly atop the knotted roots of a genuflecting weeping bottlebrush. The marble cube bears a name and two dates: Mary Callery (1903 – 1977.)

What led us to it I'll never know, but I want to imagine it was one of those synchronistic moments that biographers talk about, where their subject somehow finds them and demands to be written about. The wooden cross and its cumbrous cube of marble are where this story begins and ends.

*

I had never attempted to write a life. My compulsion to do so – my compulsion to exhume Mary Callery (1903 – 1977), from her final scrubland resting place – was rooted, much like that weeping bottlebrush, in isolated, rubbly terrain. My husband, Mark, had dropped dead suddenly just over a year before. He suffered a catastrophic heart arrhythmia one idle Saturday evening in February 2012 at the age of thirty-seven. Mark died; I was left to live, which at the time, felt like the hardest part. A raw, angry grey space opened up in my life and I needed desperately to fill it in order not to self-destruct. James W. Pennebaker and John F. Evans in their book *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal* suggest: “Immediately after a trauma, things often seem out of control and disconnected. One goal of expressive writing is to begin to put things together again.”¹ Words were, just as they always had been, the only escape I knew from pain and trauma, and the discipline required in researching and writing a life felt like my best shot at ‘putting things together again’.

Endings and beginnings. Whether the line between them is blurred or cleanly defined, the two exist in a state of codependency. The ending of two lives – those of Mark and

¹ James W Pennebaker and John Evans, *Expressive Writing Words that Heal*, (Idyll Arbor, Inc 2014) p17

Mary – precipitated the beginning of a fertile period of writing and research for me, but the line between them was indistinct. How did those endings inform this particular beginning? Where would I start in my quest to tell the story of a life? Was my motivation for wanting to do so important, or was the end result - my novel, *The Sculptress* – ultimately the only significant aim? As I interrogated my project and its motivations, a unifying motif emerged: loss.

By loss, I don't just mean personal loss as a motivating factor in embarking on a biographical project - that is to say, the need to entrench oneself in the life of another as an antidote to grief. I encompass within 'loss' that very writerly preoccupation of losing direction, and of subsequently finding it again through the eyes of a new subject. Then there's the inevitable and disconcerting loss of emotional and factual truths when researching and writing a real life, those 'grey spaces' that emerge simultaneously along with discovery, which can derail or liberate the project depending on the artistry of the author. And finally, the notion of disinterring a subject or story which has previously been 'lost' or ignored.

How does loss, then, in its broadest sense, impact on choice of subject and methods of research when writing biographically? How does it shape the finished narrative? What does it mean for the subject, and indeed the reader- is verisimilitude compromised? Does it matter? In the following sections, I will respond to these questions by exploring my own work along with that of two other biographical writers – Naomi Wood and Julia Blackburn. Wood's book, *Mrs Hemingway*, is a creative reimagining of the lives of the four wives of Ernest Hemingway, where Blackburn's *Threads: The Life of John Craske* is a biographical *mille feuille*, layering story upon story to build a previously untold life. Why and how did we each choose our subjects? How did we go about fashioning these individuals into convincing and authentic protagonists, how did we manage to revivify their physical environments when information about them was sparse (in the case of *Threads*, and my own book, *The Sculptress*) or their lives were overshadowed by the life of another, more prominent, figure (notably Ernest Hemingway in the case of his four wives in *Mrs Hemingway*). I will look at the ways in which each writer responded to notions of loss in life-writing differently, and how each used, to a greater or lesser extent, a hybridisation of fact and fiction as a counterforce to it.

Increasingly referred to as 'creative non-fiction', this hybridisation has gained traction as a discreet genre, distinct from biography in that its primary concern is not the

conveyance of fact but the dramatization of factual substance. It is distinct from fiction in that the reader understands that what they are experiencing is not a biography masquerading as a novel, but a dramatized biographical interpretation which interweaves fictional characters and events in order to advance the narrative. There is inevitably a mutuality of stylistic techniques between the three genres - in his book *Fictional Techniques and Factual Works*, William Siebenschuh writes: "As in a traditional novel, we are given a group of characters about whose fates we are made to care...and success depends on the effectiveness and credibility of (the author's) portraits of the central characters and the minor characters who people their lives." He goes on to say: '(The reader's) relation to the subject is, naturally, different from that in an ordinary biography because we are responding to dramatic art, not analysis or exposition.'²

This is not to say that creative non-fiction relies on dramatization as a substitute for exposition and analysis -rather, it adds an additional 'pillar' to what Jeffrey Meyers calls "the three pillars of the biography - research, correspondence, and interviews"³ - that of original creative invention. As a form of life-writing, it builds on what Linda Anderson describes in her book *Autobiography* as a trait of memoir, with a tendency to "avoid psychological depth and concentrate instead on external events of which their writers are merely observers."⁴ It is, therefore, a resolutely composite form, one which satisfies our human need for real-life human stories, but one which is written with the freedoms of a novelist's idiom.

In her book, *The Art of Fact*, Barbara Lounsberry describes creative non-fiction's constituent parts thus; "Verifiable subject matter and exhaustive research guarantee the nonfiction side (...); the narrative form and structure disclose the writer's artistry; and finally, its polished language reveals that the goal all along has been literature."⁵ What Lounsberry omits in this definition is an acknowledgement of the complex interpretations of 'truth' and 'fact' (and the loss thereof) in creative non-fiction - a subject matter may be verifiable, and exhaustive research may constitute some kind of 'guarantee', but 'facts' pertaining to the subject may be liable to superficiality and

² William Siebenschuh, *Fictional Techniques and Factual Works* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press Athens, 1983) p. 90

³ Jeffrey Meyer, Splendors and miseries of literary biography. *Virginia Quarterly Review: a national journal of literature and discussion* (68:4) Autumn 1992, p 683

⁴ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, (London: Routledge 2011) p 113.

⁵ Schueller, M, "The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction (review)." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 37 no. 2, 1991, pp. 349-350. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/mfs.0.0562

conjecture. I will discuss this in more detail in section 5 of this thesis, with a suggestion that the writer of creative non-fiction may provide more in the way of 'truth' about a subject by invention, rather than being obstructed by 'fact', and that loss is not always necessarily always the enemy of the biographer, but can be ultimately freeing. I will also question whether my original intention in writing *The Sculptress* – that is to say, the production of a work of creative non-fiction – was in fact what I ended up producing.

Further, I am interested in exploring what Lehman (2001) refers to in his essay *Mining A Rough Terrain: Weighing the Implications of Nonfiction* as 'the edge'⁶. Lehman proposes that 'the edge' is a confluence in creative non-fiction where which reader, subject, author and text meet; the brink on which the reader teeters when fact and fiction blur, and the project derails or succeeds. Specifically, my interest lies in the writer at this exact juncture; the requirement that she enables what Heyne (2001) refers to as 'a plausible blend of fact and invention to assume authoritative status (...) (and allows) the analogic truth of fiction to supply a gap in the record of verifiable truth.'⁷ This is the moment at which can we begin understand the creative opportunities and constraints of loss and, in turn, how individual writers might interpret them.

This notion of 'the edge' also helps us as writers of creative non-fiction to understand the status of our 'invented' (or at least 'embellished') characters and their worlds in relation to the real thing. Must the reader disassociate my Mary Callery from the 'real' Mary Callery because I have presented her within a textual construct born of my own sociocultural perspective, and indeed, as I will go on to discuss in section 5, from my personal need to write her story as an antidote to grief, or is my Mary authentic in her own right? Would my interpretation of her story have been different had I not lost my husband and been left a single mother? I ask whether, in writing the grey spaces, we, as writers, become necessarily inherent within our protagonist(s), their story, their environments, their histories, and if so, what impact does this have on truth and the reader's understanding of it? What does our narrative presence represent?

During its development, my book went from being a straight biography, to a work of creative non-fiction; a meditation on creative yearning, loss and motherhood, and how

⁶ Daniel W Lehman, *Mining A Rough Terrain: Weighing the Implications of Nonfiction* (NARRATIVE, Vol 9, No 3 October 2001, Ohio State University Press.) (accessed 16 Sept 2016)

⁷ Eric Heyne, *Where Fiction Meets Nonfiction: Mapping a Rough Terrain* (NARRATIVE, Vol 9, No 3 Oct 2001, Ohio State University Press) (accessed 16th Sept 2016)

Mary aligned herself with these opportunities and constraints. In section 5 I will explore how this change in approach came about, and consider how loss – that is to say the ‘grey spaces’ that cast a mottled shadow over my life at the time of researching and writing - changed the shape and style of the narrative.

2. Naomi Wood: Retrieving what is lost

“There’s no *one* thing that’s true. It’s all true.”⁸

In her thesis *What Was Lost: Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway*, Wood writes of how in *Mrs Hemingway*, “loss became a major governing theme (...): (Hemingway) lost wives, lost words in lost manuscripts, and finally lost his way with words in the 1950s.”⁹ These three interpretations of loss became the skeleton onto which she grafted the skin, veins and musculature of her novel. Her exploration of them resulted in ways to fill out the grey spaces, as well as helping her to find a structure for the narrative.

Take ‘lost words in lost manuscripts’ for example. Wood uses the infamous occasion when Hadley lost a suitcase full of Ernest’s original manuscripts to introduce an entirely invented character, the toadying book collector Harry Cuzzemano. Wood describes him thus: “An amalgamation of Hemingway fans, biographers, obsessives – and me, of course! I needed (Cuzzemano) because by the end of Hemingway’s life he’d estranged so many of his friends that my cast of characters between 1926 and 1961 had really dwindled, and I needed a linking character.”¹⁰

The first time we meet Cuzzemano is at a party at Villa America thrown by Sara and Gerald Murphy, introduced to us through the mistrustful eyes of Hadley. Wood is in full novelist mode here, freed from the limitations that go with a cast of already well-known characters, able to use this man with ‘teeth that wouldn’t look amiss in the gums of a fish’¹¹ to solve a multitude of potential narrative complications. Not only is Cuzzemano the ‘linking character’ whose motivation is ostensibly to find the lost manuscripts, he also underscores the social and cultural environment of the time - “Hadley wonders if he is queer or married or a bachelor. Paris is full of all three, often doing all three at the same time”¹² - and give us another layer of insight into Hemingway himself; “Hadley

⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom The Bell Tolls* (Arrow; New Ed edition 1994)

⁹ Wood, N (2014) *What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway* PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016)

¹⁰ Wood, N (2014) ‘Naomi Wood on blending fiction and non-fiction in *Mrs Hemingway*’ Interview with Naomi Wood. Interviewed by Michael Samuel for Ideas Tap, 15 July 2014

¹¹ Wood p 73

¹² Wood p 73

notices, as the man comes over to the table, that each step has a neat girlish bounce. She can see Ernest grimace – he has never been one for queers.”¹³

Intermingling invented characters with real ones is a useful means by which to colour the grey spaces and is used to similar effect by Liza Klausman in her biographical novel set in and around the same era as *Mrs Hemingway, Villa America*. In the book, one of Klausman’s preoccupations is the question of Gerald Murphy’s sexuality - he was widely suspected to be gay, despite being married to Sara - which she delineates by inventing a character and a storyline: “It was while reading (Amanda) Vaill’s account of the caviar and champagne party given in honour of Ernest Hemingway that the idea of the character of Owen Chambers was born,” she writes. “Vaill notes that the caviar had to be flown in from the Caspian Sea by a pilot, and it was in that small gap – an unknown pilot – that the fictional narrative began.”¹⁴

In Klausman’s version of events the fictitious Chambers ends up having a charged and passionate affair with Gerald, in what becomes one of the book’s central plotlines. Inventive license, therefore, allows her to sculpt a satisfying plot, without compromising an acknowledged ‘fact’ about Gerald . As Geoff Dyer puts it, “all that matters is that the reader can’t see the joins, that there is no textural change between reliable fabric and fabrication.”¹⁵

Wood perceives the third element of loss in the book to be ‘lost words’, and how Hemingway became ‘lost for words’ in later life. Her research revealed that the author “increasingly believed that he no longer had the talent to write –to his third wife (Martha Gellhorn) he said, ‘you’re the writer in the family now, Marty.’”¹⁶ Wood uses this quote as a basis for re-imagining the conversation that Gellhorn and Hemingway may have had at the moment of realization of the loss:

“I’m scared,” he says.

“Of what?”

¹³ Wood p70

¹⁴ Lisa Klausman, *Villa America*, (London: Picador 2015) p 464

¹⁵ Dyer, G (2015) ‘Based on a True Story’, the Guardian, 6 Dec. Available at URL:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/06/based-on-a-true-story--geoff-dyer-fine-line-between-fact-and-fiction-nonfiction> (Accessed 5/5/17)

¹⁶ Wood, N (2014) *What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway* PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016)

"I'm deadhouse." He gives her the crooked grin again but it has stopped working on her a long time ago. She remembers when he had nailed her with it at Sloppy Joe's.

"Don't be silly."

"I'm not. I tell you it would kill an ox this thing. This... (...)It used to be I could write. Now I have to drag the words up and even then they don't hit straight (...) I have a hole inside me big as a house, Marty. I'm scared."

"Of what?"

"Women or words. Who knows?"¹⁷

The plausibility of this scene plainly relies on elements of Barbara Lounsberry's recipe for creative non-fiction (those of verifiable subject matter, exhaustive research and authorial artistry). The word 'deadhouse' for example, is taken directly from Hemingway's own vernacular, gleaned from an archival letter. His use of the diminutive 'Marty' was undoubtedly used in one of the many love-letters Hemingway wrote to his four wives, which Wood found to be 'intriguing' and 'quite mushy with sentiment.'¹⁸ The reference to Sloppy Joe's is a casual nod to the Key West bar frequented by the author and his contemporaries at the time. And Wood's deliberate omission of a word signifying depression or metaphorical 'weight' after "*I tell you it would kill an ox this thing. This...*" foreshadows Hemingway's descent into depression and ultimately, his death.

All of these elements combine to an abundant depiction of an untold moment in the marriage of Hemingway and Gellhorn – a convincing blurring of fact and fiction; a perfect example of Daniel Lehman's contention that creative non-fiction engages an audience to 'read over the edge', that is to say, they read both 'inside and outside' the story. As Leonora Flis puts it, "they are drawn into the story not only by the lure of the narrative, but also by a direct or indirect knowledge of the events and people on which the narrative is based."¹⁹

The idea of loss as a governing facet of the genre is further strengthened by Wood's impetus for writing *Mrs Hemingway* - it came, she writes, from a desire "to bring to the fore the female voices that (had) been lost or at least sidelined by the hyper

¹⁷ Wood p 237

¹⁸ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

¹⁹ Leonora Flis, *Factual Fictions: Narrative truth and the contemporary American Documentary Novel*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne 2010) p 117

masculinized narrative of Hemingway's life."²⁰ Of course, there had been books about the Hemingway wives before. Wood says, "I was conscious that Bernice Kert's group biography *The Hemingway Women* was a very fine biography, which didn't need revising, and I thought a novel would open up a different kind of conversation. In a novel you can show and explore certain aspects of a life in fiction that one can't necessarily do within the empirical limits of biography."²¹ There was also already a work of creative non-fiction written in the first person from the perspective of Hemingway's first wife Hadley Richardson - Paula McLain's critically-acclaimed *The Paris Wife*, which was published in 2011; it came out when Wood had already begun researching her book.

David Lodge writes: "When two novelists take the life of the same historical person or persons as their subject, the possibility of duplication is much more real, the element of competition between the two novels becomes more specific and overt, and the stakes are higher. Biographers are familiar with this danger, and live in dread of finding that someone else is working on the same subject as themselves."²² Creative non-fiction can mitigate this eventuality. No two interpretations of a well-known subject can ever be the same if they are based on a fictional reimagining by an individual writer, for they are projected through inherently different experiential prisms. The grey spaces and the creativity they spark will vary with each approach. Wood says her aim with *Mrs Hemingway* was firmly to "disrupt the homogenous reading of Hemingway's first marriage as the only one of lasting importance"²³ by giving voice to the other three women as well as Hadley, which would reveal them in a way hitherto not explored: interacting in relation to each other, intimately, with Hemingway the husband, not Hemingway the writer, and revealing their inner motivations.

Notions of loss, it seems, were a motivating factor in Wood's decision to write creative non-fiction as opposed to literary biography. After all, the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography does not make room for those suppositious stories which are lost in the grey space, even if they are founded in a grain of truth. And these 'lost' stories are tantalising precisely because they are untold. They run the risk of remaining lost if they

²⁰ Wood, N (2013) *What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway* PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016)

²¹ Wood, N (2014) 'Naomi Wood on blending fiction and non-fiction in *Mrs Hemingway*' Interview with Naomi Wood. Interviewed by Michael Samuel for Ideas Tap, 15 July 2014

²² Lodge, D (2006) 'The Author's Curse', *the Guardian*, 20th May. Available at URL:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview2> (Accessed 14/1/2017)

²³ Wood, N (2013) *What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway* PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016)

don't find a writer intent enough on reviving, or reimagining, them. Wood talks of the 'helpfulness' of grey spaces²⁴ in the process of reimagination. Indeed, she says that she was 'constantly looking for those moments where the women met each other'²⁵ as a way to understand their story and to explore what she describes as "Hemingway's 'triangular desire', where husband, wife and mistress each 'occupy the angles' of such a triangle, and where desire was always mediated 'according to Another'."²⁶ This theory is also used to structure the book – the women's stories segue chronologically into each other, and there is always an overlap in the respective sections where each woman meets the wife that precedes them.

In writing *Mrs Hemingway* she wanted to 'see a lion in a frilly home (...) a desire to see what public men are like privately in what is traditionally a woman's domain.'²⁷ Despite his heavily-scrutinised life, Hemingway is rarely seen in this context. He is most often conveyed – and conveys himself – as what Wood describes as 'a slightly silly masculine figure.' The story of the lion in the frilly home that Wood so longs to tell is only aided in its telling by the grey space it occupies. The grey space allows her to use what she knows to be true (the historical and social framework, Hemingway's use of language and that of the women, their relationships with family and friends) to make creative assumptions which are both plausible and satisfying to the reader. In this scene for example, we see a tender, unsure Ernest in an early encounter with Hadley:

When the party ended Ernest walked her out onto the sidewalk(...) Ernest stood shyly with his hands in his pockets.

"That's a fine cape you have on," she said, tugging his collar.

Ernest looked rather bashful. "Women say that." (...) "Can I walk you home?"

"You could, but you've already done it. I'm staying here tonight."

He slipped an arm around her and kissed her. It was more chaste than she had imagined, just the press of his lips on hers.²⁸

²⁴ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Wood, N (2013) *What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway* PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016), acknowledging Girard's theory of the triangle of desire

²⁷ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

²⁸ Naomi Wood, *Mrs Hemingway*, (Picador, Main Market Ed: 2014) p 59

The 'lion' is undoubtedly replaced by a much meeker beast here. And the novel is intercut with many more examples of a domesticated Nesto, from scenes with his son, Bumby – 'Ernest lifts him up and moves his face along his child's face. Bumby shies away from the bristles of his mustache'²⁹ - to raw, intimate moments with Fife – 'They stand close. He puts one hand between her legs in the feathered dress. "I remember this dress, Fifey. You killed me with this dress." He goes up farther. She smiles at him; he smiles back.'³⁰

These moments are captivating because they offer up a new and unexpected reading of Hemingway. We become willing accomplices in the interpretive account because of Wood's authorial conviction, which she possesses as a result of what she describes as 'over-research.'³¹ This demonstrably includes historical records, archival scrutiny and creative supposition, but she also finds clues in Hemingway's own work. "Hemingway's life is easily mapped onto Harry (Street's) in the 'fugue' section of 'Snows of Kilimanjaro,'" she writes. "Harry's apartment is the Hemingway's 1920 apartment above the Bal Musette on the rue Cardinal Lemoine. Harry's study is Hemingway's on 'the rue Mouffetard' ... Paris was a place of productivity and success for Harry. And surely the same goes for Hemingway: unloved in Key West, looking back at a time when there had been uniform critical adoration from Paris....the memory of a half-a-Hadley tilts the 'Snows' yet more autobiographically...Harry is stuck in a loveless marriage..."³²

She goes on to say, "Snows is a moment of autobiographical prolepsis...I always think it should have been composed at the end of Hemingway's life. It is so full of the things – money, liquor, laziness – that would go on to waste him in the 40s and 50s that it seems it should be a retrospective narrative."³³ In a sense, it is Wood who writes the retrospective narrative, using her version of Hemingway as a backdrop to the stories of his wives. "As I was writing I got to like him more, he became more sympathetic. In fact, male readers thought I was too nice to him. But I saw how the women flourished after being with him - they got a lot out of the marriages despite being treated badly."³⁴

²⁹ Ibid P 63

³⁰ Ibid pp 109-110

³¹ Wood, N (2014) 'Naomi Wood on blending fiction and non-fiction in Mrs Hemingway' Interview with Naomi Wood. Interviewed by Michael Samuel for Ideas Tap, 15 July 2014

³² Wood, N (2013) What Was Lost: The Manuscripts and the Meaning of Loss in the Work of Ernest Hemingway PhD, University of East Anglia (Accessed 16/6/2016)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

Wood is inevitably inherent within the narrative. She is the conduit through which the characters speak, act, react. She dictates the time, the place, the moments in which we see them interrelate, and these are certainly different to those which other writers – or indeed, the protagonists themselves - may have chosen. “You try to camouflage yourself out of the narrative,” Wood says, “but the style is yours - their thoughts are made from my thoughts. Some of the experience in the narrative is mine. The characters were sculpted from people in my life – from relationships. I took that coinage and put it in the book.”³⁵ What, then, of verisimilitude? In engaging with what is essentially a textual construct rather than a historical subject, is authenticity for the reader therefore compromised?

“I am not anxious about authenticity,” Wood says. “It’s more about the story telling - trying to be as factually correct as possible while knowing authenticity was unachievable. Who knows what the women were really like?” She adds: “Authenticity is a sham. There is no duplicable authenticity. Fiction has to go in there.”³⁶

The seamless fusion of novelistic and non-fiction conventions is key to the success of *Mrs Hemingway* and to the success of the genre as a whole. Of Boswell’s *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Siebenschuh writes: “We are seldom conscious that these kinds of connections are being made for us. Because his best art conceals itself, we do not imagine we are experiencing a biographer’s comment.”³⁷ This is consummately achieved by Wood, and is the ultimate aim of anyone writing in the genre.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Siebenschuh, p 83

3. Julia Blackburn: Thread-bare: The Life of John Craske

“This is a story that seems to belong here.”³⁸

In many ways, Julia Blackburn’s approach to her subjects is the antithesis of Wood’s. Where Wood sought a new angle on one of the most written-about men in history, a man of whom she was a ‘big fan’³⁹, whose voice she wanted to imagine ‘over coffee and breakfast with his wife, rather than the publicized He-man Hemingway who was busy telling you how to skin a lion,’⁴⁰ Blackburn ‘chooses subjects trapped in dire straits: Napoleon on St Helena, Daisy Bates in Australian’s desert, Billy Holliday in racist USA and Goya in his deaf old age.’⁴¹

Evidently these subjects are well-worn, but her motivation to write about them doesn’t come from a position of reverence; she doesn’t have a burning wish to hear them speak. Rather, they present themselves to her, unbidden, without an obvious angle or narrative arc to pursue. In *The Emperor’s Last Island*, for example, she writes of how ‘with Napoleon under the ground, surrounded by mahogany and tin, stone and earth, I find myself for the first time since starting this story, pausing to wonder why I have chosen to trail behind the final years of this particular man’s life. I have never, as far as I can tell, had any special interest in Napoleon...’⁴²

In fact, it is the Emperor’s last island itself, St Helena, which provides the creative trigger for Blackburn. The ‘jagged and mountainous’⁴³ landmass, ten and a half miles by six, a ‘dot in the middle of the South Atlantic’⁴⁴ is as much the subject of the book as Napoleon. It is the very ‘idea of a man like Napoleon trapped on an island like St Helena’⁴⁵ which haunts her, and compels her to take the sixteen day journey from England to visit it. Though she is reconstructing the events of those last years he spent on the island, her concern is not about filling the grey spaces, at least, not initially. After all, historical and archival evidence is abundant and precise; (‘In April 1820 Napoleon presented the Orderly Officer with a gift of some vegetables grown in his garden: green beans and

³⁸ Julia Blackburn, *Threads, The Delicate Life of John Craske*, (London: Jonathan Cape 2015) p.30

³⁹ Kalb, D (2014) Deborah Kalb Books, Naomi Wood Q & A, 26th June 2014 Available at URL: deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/q-with-author-naomi-wood.html (accessed 13/8/16)

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Carty, P, (2015) ‘An outsider’s love of the sea’ the Independent, 11th April. Available at URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/threads-the-delicate-life-of-john-craske-by-julia-blackburn-book-review-an-outsiders-love-of-the-sea-10168843.html> (Accessed 6/1/17)

⁴² Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor’s Last Island* (London: Minerva, 1994) p 194

⁴³ Ibid p 7

⁴⁴ Ibid p 5

⁴⁵ Ibid p 1

white beans. Lowe was informed about this gift and it upset him a great deal because if the white beans were meant to represent the Napoleonic line and the green ones were the French Bourbon kings, then what message was his prisoner trying to communicate?)⁴⁶

The grey spaces, when they occur, are filled with Blackburn's own meticulously-reported observations, and it is these that become the anatomy of the book. They take the reader deep into a world of imagination, and then bring us out again into the cool, analytic voice of the biographer. As both participant and analyst, Blackburn becomes bound – emotionally, physically, psychologically - to her subject and in becoming so provides a new reading of them.

Her first encounter with John Craske is documented in *Threads* thus:

'It was Emily who said, 'What about John Craske?'

I'd never heard of him.

'He was from here,' she said, 'East Anglia. Sheringham, on the coast, although he moved inland later.

'He was a fisherman who became a painter and embroiderer,' she said. 'I think he's much better than Alfred Wallis (...) Wallis was taken up by Hepworth and Nicholson and all the St Ives lot, but Craske's been ignored.'⁴⁷

For Blackburn, the fact of being ignored is precisely what draws her to Craske; the challenge of bringing him back to life, the lure of telling a story as yet untold. During the course of the research and the writing of the book, Blackburn's beloved husband Herman eventually dies from one of the 'many small defects his body had accumulated' over many years.⁴⁸ This propels her into complete immersion into her subject, ('You must work. Only work will get you through,' Herman had told her in the face of his own demise.)⁴⁹ Immersion was a way of filling the grey space which opened up following his death, and Craske's elusiveness could only have been an advantage to this; the more complex the challenge, the further she was able to plunge herself into it as a way of making sense of her grief. 'I learn from the process of writing,' she says, 'I learn about

⁴⁶ Ibid p 141

⁴⁷ Julia Blackburn, *Threads*, (London: Jonathan Cape 2015), p 5

⁴⁸ Ibid p 277

⁴⁹ Ibid p 277

the people I am focused on and about the predicament of their own situation. I sometimes feel that I can only access my own thoughts, my own nature, through the process of putting the words down.’⁵⁰

This does not mean that she was without doubts about the focus of her work. In *Threads* she writes; ‘I did sometimes worry about my choice of Craske as a subject, at this moment in my life. There I was writing about a man who was not well; a man who was being cared for by his wife (...) but then again, every book I have written has been deeply subjective and I have grown accustomed to the overlap between my own life and the imagined life of a stranger.’⁵¹ Referring to Laura Craske taking care of her sick husband John at the same time as Blackburn is taking care of Herman, she says, ‘I am never aware of parallels with real life and the book. They always run alongside each other...but then parallels suddenly became evident...’⁵²

I see similarities with my motivation to exhume Mary here, from the point of view of the antidote to grief, the surprising parallels I uncovered with my own life and Mary’s, and the challenge of writing the life of an ostensibly ‘lost’ subject, which I shall discuss in the following section. In research terms though, Craske poses similar problems to Mary, in that not much is written about him or survives in galleries – (most of Callery’s artistic output is stored under tarpaulins or atop dusty shelves in her great-nephew’s workshop on Long Island.) I share in Blackburn’s frustration when she says that ‘the subject keeps on vanishing. Evidence of (Craske’s) absence is everywhere...’⁵³

But why have subjects such as Craske and Mary Callery been hitherto ‘lost’ or ‘ignored’? Is it because they are somehow less compelling? Is it a simple question of marketability? (Though stories of unknown lives are not automatically eschewed by readers – the success of a novel such as *Girl With A Pearl Earring*, for example, is testament to the intrigue of an untold life.)

⁵⁰ Ibid p 275

⁵¹ Ibid p 234

⁵² Blackburn, J. (2015) Discussion between Julia Blackburn and William Fiennes [NCLA event]. Newcastle University. 26 November.

⁵³ Ibid

Are subjects lost, then, or is it the case that more obscure subjects, those who haven't been 'done'⁵⁴, as Meyers puts it, or who are known only within a limited sphere of consciousness, present themselves to the potential biographer as opposed to being sought out? Further, do they present themselves to one writer rather than another depending on the writer's willingness and desire to accept what Richard Holmes calls a biographical '*tabula rasa*'⁵⁵ and delve into their grey spaces (which are inevitably much greyer and more spacious than those of an already 'discovered' life.)

Alexander Masters has made a specialty of writing 'lost' lives. His subjects - Stuart Shorter, Simon Norton and latterly the 'unknown' writer of a pile of discarded diaries, whose identity is revealed to the reader in 'real time' as Masters himself pieces it together - all come unbidden. After they meet on the same homelessness campaign, Stuart Shorter (an 'ex-homeless, ex-junkie psychopath'⁵⁶) decides Masters is the one to tell his life story. He tells Masters, "Alexander, sort it out - you're the writer. I just done the living."⁵⁷ Masters obliges with the biography *Stuart: A Life Backwards*.

Simon Norton, the 'genius' of the book *Simon: The Genius In My Basement*, lives in the flat below Masters and is a far more uncooperative subject than Shorter. So uncooperative, in fact, that within the first seven pages, Simon has removed himself from the project entirely, telling Masters:

"Your representation of me as interesting is inaccurate. I feel ashamed by it."⁵⁸

(Masters cries, 'Simon's refused to enter the book! He is a Minus Norton.')

⁵⁹

The 'unknown' diarist of Masters' book *A Life Discarded* presents him/herself literally on his doorstep - a friend of Masters finds the 148 diaries in a skip and unloads them on the author in the hope that they might turn out to be an interesting project. In the book, Masters takes us with him as he conducts his detective work, proposing colour options for the grey spaces based on the evidence he uncovers along the way.

⁵⁴ Meyers, p683

⁵⁵ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Harperpress New Ed 2012) p 135

⁵⁶ Alexander Masters, *Stuart a Life Backwards*, (London: Harper Perennial 2006) p 1

⁵⁷ *Ibid* p 0

⁵⁸ Alexander Masters, *Simon The Genius in my Basement* (London: Fourth Estate 2012) p 7

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

A Life Discarded is highly original in that despite having the opportunity to find out the identity of his diarist early on ('vile 'information' kept popping up – clues about new ways to discover the writer's identity that threatened to destroy everything'⁶⁰) Masters chooses not to, as the idea of maintaining 'I's' anonymity to the last page has, for Masters, all the allure of a 'Gothic short story.'⁶¹

But why is Master's 'I' so compelling, when a whole section of his/her diaries are taken over with ways to prepare a cauliflower? In the same way, how does Blackburn succeed in making the story of the unknown, largely undocumented John Craske, a man who 'was a fisherman who became a fishmonger who became an invalid'⁶² one whose pages we want to keep turning?

It comes down to the writer themselves. Both Blackburn and Masters are governed by passionate devotion to their subjects, even though their stories may turn out to be ill-fated or consist of nothing but cauliflower preparations. As Blackburn puts it, 'I suppose the trick is to trust the process and to not mind when you reach a cul de sac of one sort or another and to not get in the way when things seem to be going well, even though you don't know where they are heading.'⁶³ The mystery of Craske's illness, for example, remains unresolved at the end of the book, but it is not for the want of Blackburn trying: at one point she even consults a medical specialist about what Craske's symptoms may have meant. She therefore fills that particular grey space with the urgency of her own investigative task, which leads the reader to accept the mystery as remaining uncracked.

This devotion to subject translates onto the page through the authority and passion of the authorial voice, and the reader cannot help but be wooed by it – after all, the writer is conveying nothing but the truth as they see it, even if the truth reveals nothing, and there is a raw seduction in this fact alone. If they deemed it worthwhile to bind themselves to their subject, surely it must be worthwhile for the reader to bind themselves to the subject too? In a sense the reader gets two biographies for the price of one, as we are given exponential, vivid insights into both the subject and the writer – glimmers of Blackburn's relationships with Herman, her daughter and old friends, as

⁶⁰ Alexander Masters, *A Life Discarded*, (London: Fourth estate 2016) p73

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² *Threads* p 2

⁶³ *Threads* p 21

well as her lively interactions with the people who assist with piecing together Craske's life. As Peter Carty (2015) writes, 'as (Blackburn) unpicks the threads of Craske's life, she reveals a tangled skein of her own.'⁶⁴

The presence of Blackburn in the narrative presence is not accepted without criticism though. Carty writes that 'there are longeurs, but on the whole Blackburn is an engaging enough raconteur and her digressions – covering topics ranging from Einstein to the Elephant Man - do sometimes help to recreate Craske and his world. The problem is that Blackburn's extended minutiae come at the expense of a more penetrating and lengthy analysis of Craske's visionary art. This is a major omission in the book.'⁶⁵ This appraisal presupposes that Blackburn's aim was a Craske biography and the lack of 'penetrating and lengthy analysis' translates into a failure to achieve this aim. But *Threads*, like her other books, is something an existential pursuit; the subject and its inherent research digressions *are* the thing, the 'aim' is obsolete. 'My whole life blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction,' Blackburn says. 'Categories are irrelevant.'⁶⁶

In *Simon, The Genius in My Basement*, Masters asks, 'wouldn't all biographies be better if they gave up trying to fix the person they're writing about, and confined themselves to his glints and reflections – not a biography of Simon, but of the perception of Simon? What is a biography, anyway? A platter of gossip and titbits. It's up to the readers to mix these components together in whatever way they find most entertaining and instructive.'⁶⁷ This is another advantage of taking up an unknown subject – well-documented subjects have inevitably had myriad perceptions bestowed upon them, from myriad biographers and commentators. The unknown subject has but one.

This brings me back to my earlier proposition that obscure or non-traditional subjects find their own biographer, as opposed to being actively sought-out. Such subjects make specific demands of their biographer which not all writers (understandably) are prepared to succumb to: firstly, a willingness to invest time, effort (and often money) in

⁶⁴ Carty, P (2015), 'An Outsiders love of the Sea', the Independent 11th April. Available at URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/threads-the-delicate-life-of-john-craske-by-julia-blackburn-book-review-an-outsiders-love-of-the-sea-10168843.html> (Accessed 10/1/2017)

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Blackburn, J (1999) 'The Books Interview: Journeys Across the Border' Interview with Julia Blackburn. Interviewed by Sara Wheeler for the Independent 30th Jan. Available at URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/the-books-interview-journeys-across-the-border-1077144.html> (Accessed 16/11/16)

⁶⁷ Simon: p.8

protracted and frequently unfruitful investigations; secondly, recognition of the fact that their toils may not result in anything except an unsold manuscript; thirdly an acceptance that there may be no obvious colour with which to fill a particular grey space. This biographer is typified by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in this description of an individual working within a specific field or 'domain'; 'For most people, domains are primarily ways to make a living. We choose nursing or plumbing, medicine or business admin because of our ability and the chances of getting a well-paying job.

But there are individuals who choose certain domains because of a powerful calling to do so. For them, the match is so perfect that acting within the rules of the domain is rewarding in itself; they would keep doing it even if not paid just for the sake of doing the activity.'⁶⁸

Blackburn's decision to revivify Craske epitomizes this kind of creative compulsion – he comes to inhabit her and she is powerless not to pursue him; his story becomes fundamental to the telling of hers, and vice versa. Chapter 25, entitled Not Getting in The Way, for example, opens with a snippet from her notebook, dated September 2012.

Something about the shift from consciousness to unconsciousness within the structure of the book. Maybe my voice when Craske is in a coma, or is that too complicated or too simple?⁶⁹

By falling in step with the undulations of Craske's life to the point where her voice and his become one, Blackburn suggests a new angle on filling the grey spaces; an immersive research experience permits the biographer to begin to think and live as their subject. In chapter 24 Blackburn describes how she and Herman stay at the Watch House on Blakeney estuary so that they might get an idea of what it felt like for Craske 'going out with the ebb and in with the flow' in his fishing boat. A 'small, neglected, but still rather official-looking red-brick building' with 'no running water' or electricity, and 'rattling window frames and precarious beds,'⁷⁰ the Watch House provides the perfect location for creative immersion into Craske's psyche. Her experience within it is translated into an episode of pure imagination two chapters later, depicting Craske and his wife in a moment of domesticity:

⁶⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi , *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (London: Harper Collins 1996) p 37

⁶⁹ *Threads* p 137

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 131

‘(John) gazed around the tiny front room. Laura had put up curtains made from cut-off bits of sail, to keep out the worst of the cold. A few lumps of coal were burning in the grate, alongside a white length of driftwood which they fed towards the flame, inch by inch.’⁷¹

Blackburn lingers in these descriptions, imagining the intuitive way in which Craske goes about his daily tasks, how he paints his boat ‘without thinking about it, just holding the knowledge of it in his mind, balancing his feet against the tilt of the deck, leaning into the force of the wind’.⁷² This portrayal perfectly mirrors how Blackburn is able to manipulate her material as a result of total immersion. The relationship she has built up with Craske and Laura - one of near familial familiarity - allows her to paint her characters with the same unfettered, easy fluency as Craske paints his boat, and these are the moments when the reader feels her most at one with her subject.

I have mentioned many parallels between Blackburn’s and my own research process, including its synchronicity with our respective real lives, but one moment in particular stands out as especially contemporaneous, a turning point, as it were, in our understanding of our protagonists and our ability to fill the grey spaces in their lives. At one point in *Threads*, Blackburn uncovers a letter. It is written by Craske – the first of his she has seen – and immediately her relationship with him is transported to another level:

“I pick up the neatly addressed envelope with almost reverential care. I pull out the neatly folded sheet of paper it contains and spread it out on the table before me. Now at last I can examine how this elusive and long-since dead man shapes his letters, chooses his words and strings them together one with the next. And with that I can begin to understand something of how he thought, how he saw things and what sort of a person it was who inhabited his frail but resilient body (...) John Craske the fisherman whispering insight and revelation over the gap of time that divides us.”⁷³

I related to the reverence – holding letters between my fingers that had belonged to Mary, that she herself had held, the thin, time-worn paper so delicate and apt to disintegrate, taking its secrets with it. Discovering the epistolary archive was quite a moment in my own research, but to finally hear Caroline’s voice leaping from the page,

⁷¹ *Threads*, p 143

⁷² *ibid* p 143

⁷³ *ibid*, p 19

her wild, angry script bearing testament to her state of mind was the point at which I understood that my book would take a different shape. Caroline didn't so much whisper insight and revelation over the gap of time that divided us, she roared it, demanding to be heard:

(In response to a stinging letter from Mary about the discovery of the affair she was having with a college professor) 'You say I have disgraced you – all right, but you needn't worry, you won't have to bear any of my shame – I'll have it all and I'll accept it. I'll come down to the ranch as you requested, you'll go off to Black Mountain and you won't have to have anything to do with me anymore, so you needn't worry about having a daughter in New York who has 'broken faith with you'. (...) Despite all this mess, I love you very much, even if it's not reciprocated.' ⁷⁴

Siebenschuh talks of the importance of epistolary evidence in filling in the grey spaces. "Letters," he says, "make a strong visual and psychological impression"⁷⁵, but not just as a narrative device. Blackburn uses excerpts from them to frame chapters, and I use them as one way of presenting Mary and Caroline's relationship, but there is a more visceral authorial response to letters which doesn't involve using them directly in the text. In his book *The Missing Ink*, Philip Hensher says, "Handwriting is what registers our individuality, and the mark which our culture has made on us. (...). It has been seen as the unknowing key to our souls and our innermost nature. It has been regarded as a sign of our health as a society, of our intelligence, and as an object of simplicity, grace, fantasy and beauty in its own right."⁷⁶ The meaning which we, as researchers, are able to pull out from the handwriting itself – from its shapes, its flourishes – gives us a unique insight into our subjects, in a broad sense – i.e. their background, education – but also their mindset at a particular moment in time.

Sara Wheeler (1999) writes of Blackburn of how '(her) writing takes off when she leaves her notes behind and lets her imagination take over.'⁷⁷ Journaling, as Blackburn does prolifically, holds together her writing process, and indeed shapes it when it comes to

⁷⁴ Private correspondence from Caroline Coudert to Mary Callery 1946

⁷⁵ Siebenschuh, p 48

⁷⁶ Philip Hensher, *The Missing Ink: How Handwriting made Us Who We Are*, (London: Macmillan, Main Market Edition 2013) p8

⁷⁷ Blackburn, J (1999) 'The Books Interview: Journeys Across the Border' Interview with Julia Blackburn. Interviewed by Sara Wheeler for the Independent 30th Jan. Available at URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/the-books-interview-journeys-across-the-border-1077144.html> (Accessed 16/11/16)

Threads; several chapters are framed by musings from her notebook. Hers was 'haphazard research', which she 'trusted in the universe to sort it out.'⁷⁸ But as she tells Wheeler, "You get to the end of the research and say, right, now we're ready to begin. It's making the material your own that counts."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Blackburn, J. (2015) Discussion between Julia Blackburn and William Fiennes [NCLA event]. Newcastle University. 26 November.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* p77

4. The Sculptress: Paris, New York, Cadaques

“When you set out to write about her, you feel she would not have liked what you are doing and would not have liked you either.”⁸⁰

Hermione Lee’s instinct about Willa Cather in her book *A Life Saved Up*

In his book *Footsteps*, Richard Holmes writes: “A biographer often has to work, not with a *tabula rasa*, but with a powerfully received image of his subject, already unconsciously formed from the mass of previous work in the field...”⁸¹ But despite being highly regarded as a sculptor and having an address book full of twentieth century art and literary luminaries whom she counted among her closest friends, as far as documented social and art history goes, Mary Callery was largely left behind. If not quite a *tabula rasa*, my subject was only visible in snatches as an artist; old exhibition pamphlets from a small number of her shows, the odd mention in books such as Marika Herkovic’s *American Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s*, an oversize art book dedicated to her work entitled *Mary Callery, Sculpture*. A few pieces of public art of hers still remain in view – the sculpture of Three Birds in Flight which soars above the foyer of the Regional Enterprise Tower in Pittsburgh; Fables of La Fontaine on East 12th Street in Manhattan; the untitled sculpture which clings, like a steel crustacean, to the proscenium of New York’s Metropolitan Opera House. But this artistic legacy gives a biographer little about the personality or life of the person behind it.

Jeffrey Meyers writes, “there are significant differences between writing a fresh biography and following in the footsteps of a predecessor. Instead of reworking familiar material there is the excitement of new discoveries and the gratifying possession of knowledge that no one else will have until you reveal it.”⁸² This was part of both the appeal and the frustration of Mary as a subject; from the documentary exiguity to the nondescript nature of her final resting place, this was a woman who, I initially concluded, lived her life with a crabby repudiation of prospective legacy-writers or biographers. Perhaps she didn’t wish to be exhumed at all. Yet to my mind, her life story was bigger than she was, and it yearned to be told.

⁸⁰ Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up* (London: Virago, 1989), pp.

⁸¹ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps* (London: HarperPress, New Ed edition, 2012), p 135

⁸² Meyers p 683

Mary the artist was of secondary interest to me. The more I uncovered about her, the more I wanted to know about the woman whom Wallace Harrison described as “the most elegant and beautiful woman he had ever met (she was) in a green dress, wearing an emerald the size of your fist,”⁸³ a woman who ‘embodied both of the social poles that (Philip) Johnson was drawn to: cultured old money and avant-garde creativity.’⁸⁴ This woman was a lauded sculptor, a prolific collector of art, (at one point she had the largest collection of Picasso paintings in America), intimately connected to the greatest artists of the era, with whom she sometimes shared her atelier in Paris (Matisse, in a letter to Mary from 1940, describes the light therein as ‘si caressante’⁸⁵). Mary was a lover to, amongst others, Mies van der Rohe and Fernand Léger; a muse to Philip Johnson and Georgia O’Keeffe. Yet she had slipped into one of history’s grey spaces, and retrieving her meant crafting an intricate net which started in Paris, then on to New York and Long Island, then finally back to Cadaques.

The convolution of the research task ahead and the relative obscurity and seeming intransigence of the subject leads to a query about my ‘choice’ (if indeed it was a choice) of Mary Callery, and the creative impulses of biographers when selecting subjects for their books. Meyers writes that ‘since nearly all promising subjects have either been ‘done’ or are apparently ‘taken’, it is both tempting and intriguing to write the life of a figure who has never been done before.’⁸⁶ He goes on, “There is also the pleasure of telling an entirely new story instead of searching for what has not been done in previous lives. There is a crucial difference between depending on the work of earlier scholars for the essential facts and framework of the life and establishing them yourself for the very first time.”⁸⁷

I had not considered researching a life and retelling it creatively as a way to navigate grief - it came upon me, extemporaneously, as unknown subjects are wont to do. As Blackburn, whose husband died during the writing of *Threads*, says, ‘my life and the life of the book happened at the same time.’⁸⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes, ‘who starts

⁸³ Frank D Welch, *Philip Johnson and Texas*, (Texas: Univ of Texas Press 2000) p 22

⁸⁴ Welch, p 23

⁸⁵ Private correspondence from Henri Matisse to Mary Callery, circa 1940.

⁸⁶ Meyers p 669.

⁸⁷ Meyers, p 671

⁸⁸ Blackburn, J. (2015) Discussion between Julia Blackburn and William Fiennes [NCLA event]. Newcastle University. 26 November

the creative process? Not necessarily the person.⁸⁹ It was my mother, in fact, who triggered the creative process on this occasion, by finding Mary first. On a trip to Cadaques we stumbled across the white stucco-walled cemetery, and like Masters' friend with the diaries and the skip, she happened across the first and only clue about the woman whose life I would become the first writer ever to explore.



Fig 1. Callery grave

Why was a woman with a (we assumed British) name buried in a very traditional Spanish cemetery, high up in the scrubland between Cadaques and Port Lligat? Why was there no formal headstone, only a rotting wooden cross bearing the name 'Mary', propped haphazardly behind a large cube of marble, the surface of which gave away little more information except for a surname and two dates: 1903 - 1977? And why was the cube of marble sitting so awkwardly on top of teeming tree roots in rubbly terrain, wedged between the wall and the trunk of a weeping bottlebrush, when all the other grave sites were so well delineated and refined? This was an investigation where the grey spaces were huger and more abundant than any biographical information, where there was not even a rudimentary scaffold on which to begin weaving a story.

An internet search on Mary Callery generated little, but enough on which to gain a tiny toe-hold. She had been a sculptress and a collector of art, an American from a wealthy Pittsburgh family who grew up in New York. She had lived for a time in Paris, which is

⁸⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.46

where my search for her would start. As the scope of the research task began to reveal itself, I realised that reviving Mary was not just an exercise in distraction. The fact that she had been 'lost' as a biographical subject became a source of aggravation to me. I found I wanted to redefine Mary's reputation as an artist in her own right - a talented one, whose work deserved more of the recognition she so bitterly desired. But the most surprising revelation was the direction the book would take; the focus-shift from one story (that of my passage through Mary's life and work) to a two-stranded narrative about a mother and daughter's relationship which ultimately ends in tragedy. For inevitably, Mary's daughter Caroline would expose herself to me, a figure mysteriously absent from almost every available archive and whose desperate fate was entirely undocumented.

This new direction became clear while I was researching in Long Island, having access to Mary's personal archive and an opportunity to colour some of the grey spaces by reading through her extensive correspondence, photographs and personal effects. Meyers writes how "an untapped archive is certainly desirable if not essential when writing the first life of a subject which can also be pieced together from many different sources."⁹⁰ Mary's archive was both untapped and essential to my research, and held the trigger for the book's new direction - a piece of evidence which shed new light on my subject. I will expand on this later, but through the discovery, Mary's own grief and its manifestations became my focal point of interest.

But back to Paris, and the start of my research. I was intent on the approaches of Blackburn and Holmes, that is to say, incorporating the life of the subject with the journey of the research and the researcher. In the light of the paucity of information about my subject, it struck me as a good way to introduce her and to go about filling the grey spaces - a real-time detective story, where the reader follows in each footstep and sensory revelation as it presents itself to the writer. In *The Emperor's Last Island*, Blackburn travels to St Helena in order to imagine Napoleon's final years, using the long journey by land, air and sea as a loom onto which she weaves historical detail and her own observations and suppositions. Forty pages from the end of the book, she writes;

'I still know very little about Napoleon before he came to St Helena, but while writing the chapters that are so far completed, I have grown accustomed to his presence, so that it

⁹⁰ Meyers, p 672

seems as if I have often encountered him sitting inert in a darkened room, or have seen him like some ancient, speechless relative, walking cautiously through his garden.’⁹¹

This is a key moment - the subject suddenly becomes three dimensional, revealing traits and mannerisms which are unique to, and can only exist because of, the relationship that his researcher has tirelessly built up with him. This is the instance of original invention which defines creative non-fiction from biography – the moment where the biographer basks in the freedom of the novelist which allows her to make bold, synesthetic statements about the life of her subject which otherwise wouldn’t have been on offer. “This,” writes Siebenschuh, “is one of the senses in which literary art can be shown to have liberated (auto)biographical truths, not just represented them attractively.”⁹² In this way, he describes ‘art as liberation, leading to inner discovery.’⁹³

I found out from French public records that Mary had several residences in Paris over the course of her life. I visited all of them, starting in the wealthy suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt.

PARIS

21 Rue du Belvedere

‘Biography is a costly, laborious, exasperating and sometimes profitless task, which can only be sustained by a demonic devotion to the subject’⁹⁴ - Meyer

I took a bus out to Boulogne-Billancourt in search of rue du Belvedere where, according to town hall records, Mary had lived when she first moved to Paris in 1930. At this stage I wasn’t sure which of the art deco houses had been Mary’s (I found this out later, when her address was revealed in letters in the archive). I guessed at the one I suspected may have been hers – several had been designed by Le Corbusier, which, knowing Mary’s modernist aesthetic, narrowed it down – and I opted for the one with that had the biggest windows which would have afforded her the most light with which to work. Turned out, my instinct was correct.

⁹¹ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor’s Last Island* (London: Minerva, 1994) p 195

⁹² Siebenschuh, p 52

⁹³ Siebenschuh, p.53

⁹⁴ Meyers p 696



Fig 2: 21 rue du Belvedere (middle)

I wandered up and down the street photographing every house and trying to gain a foothold on the place which might later translate into part of a narrative. A sleek, chic enclave, I concluded, very much appropriate for a moneyed American divorcee fresh off the boat from New York. In the event, 21 rue du Belvedere didn't colour much of the final draft. Based on its place in the chronology, I used it to represent something of a safe haven for the very young Caroline on her first visit to Paris, the city to whom she felt she had lost her mother. In this scene, Caroline is tagging along with Mary and Zervos on a trip to meet Picasso:

"The car drove them from Brasserie Lipp, over the Pont Alexandre III with its flying golden horses and bronze nymphs, to number 21 Rue La Boetie. Caroline pressed her face against the window and looked up at the sandstone building with its immense wrought iron portail and upper floor windows, thrown wide open despite the December chill. She felt tired, suddenly, and wanted to go back to Rue du Belvedere and curl up in her little room, with its thick woolen blankets and the soft fur stole that Mother had allowed her to sleep with."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ The Sculptress, p 15

33 Quai Voltaire



Fig. 3: 33 Quai Voltaire

Mary's apartment on the prestigious Quai Voltaire consisted of the entire uppermost floor of the residence at number 33. It overlooked an inner courtyard, and also had views directly over the Seine to the Louvre. From Mary's window, I figured she would probably have been eyeball to eyeball with La Joconde. Though I wasn't able to get into the apartment itself, I blagged my way in through the heavy 'portail' – which, incidentally, would be reimagined as the 'portail' leading to Picasso's enclave in the above extract– and I was able to get a look up at the rectangle of soupy Parisian sky that Mary would have seen as she crossed the courtyard to the entrance.

The concierge (possibly original) was evident only by the sound of the television blaring from behind the plastic bead curtain and a line of cacti on the sill outside. I peered in through the glass of the entrance door and saw the beginnings of a tightly curled stairwell.

'Vous cherchez?'

The concierge, encased in her cardigan like an old armadillo, emerged from behind the bead curtain, sniffing at the air like a mole for the first time since hibernation. She had no recollection of Madame Callery, nor was she remotely interested in the erstwhile

resident (though, she said, there was a famous concert pianist currently occupying the first floor.)

I would learn later that Quai Voltaire was another of Mary's early residences, a bequest from her lover, Carlo, which she would ulcerate over selling many years later. It was a place familiar to Caroline on her visits both as a child and a grown woman; a place visited by her boyfriends, who came, according to one of Caroline's missives, to drink expensive French brandy and seek Mary's approval. When I began writing the book, I looked over photographs I had taken inside the courtyard and imagined it to be filled with the sound of the two women's warring voices and the concierge shaking her fist at the sky six floors below.

29 Place du Marché St-Honoré

Mary's apartment at 29 Place du Marché St -Honoré had, I found out later, an enormous fully-stocked bar, its walls were casually decorated with original paintings by the likes of Modigliani, Picasso and Braque. Sculptures by Arp and Calder gathered dust in its hallways. Now flanked by an American Apparel store and overlooking an immense glass structure housing, amongst other things, a fire station and shops, the apartment would originally have given directly onto the market place. Again Mary occupied the entire uppermost floor, which again gave a dual aspect over the front and the interior courtyard of the building.



Fig 4: 29 Place du Marché St Honoré

I discovered through interviews with her great nephew that this had been one of Mary's favourite residences, one she bought when she was first liberated from her marriage to Republican Congressman Frederic Coudert in mid-1930. It was hardly surprising – the apartment was nestled in one of the smartest parts of Paris, a short walk from Place Vendome and Avenue de l'Opera, and had ample space in which to work and to entertain. In the novel, I amalgamated elements I had seen at Quai Voltaire - the grumpy concierge, the bead curtain, the curling staircase - with anecdotal evidence from the Long Island archive, to reimagine a scene between Caroline and one of her early beaux, Mark:

"Caroline was the sole resident at Mother's apartment on Place du Marché, so had access to an exceptionally chic pied-a-terre right in the centre of town. (After all, who else her age occupied the top floor of a building in Paris, an apartment whose walls were laden with original artworks, and furnished with a fully stocked bar?)

She can still hear the rattle of the concierge's bead curtain now, like the warning knell of a snake, from the first night she took Mark back to the apartment.

"Bonsoir, Madame Jullien!" she had shouted at the shadow behind the quivering beads, and they'd disappeared up the curling staircase in peals of hysterical laughter. "I hate these Parisian concierges," she told him as she opened the door. "Terminally miserable and so goddamn rude."

He grabbed her by the waist and pinned her against the wall. "Are you and I going to be goddamn rude together?"

"Yes!" she said, giggling. "I could be rude..."

"You're a swell girl Caroline. I'm so glad we met." He kissed her deeply on the lips, a Rhett and Scarlett kiss, and she fell for it and thought at that moment she might be in love.

They had sex, right there in the middle of the hallway, beneath Picasso's Seated Woman and one of Modigliani's sleeping nudes. Mark spent the next few hours walking around the place naked, like it was his own private gallery, drinking Mary's brandy and asking Caroline about her mother's 'startling' art collection."⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The Sculptress p 124

Here, and elsewhere in the book where a grey space loomed, I took my own assumptions, a series of uncorroborated narrations and a set of loosely accepted universal truths, and spun them into a novelistic yarn, which at the same time asks to be read as historically and factually accurate statement. Might the reader feel cheated, or compromised? Claude Levi-Strauss (1967), quoted in Siebenschuh, contested that ‘virtually all historical writing is interpretation encoded in language that in some ways is closer to poetic than to genuinely scientific discourse. Truly objective historical facts do not exist.’⁹⁷

Villa D’Alesia

Guillaume and Benedicte Charlatte⁹⁸ were about to sit down to lunch when I knocked at the door – a slice of pâté was sitting on a saucer in the middle of the dining table next to half a bottle of red wine and two small tumblers. Number 37 Villa d’Alesia looked like a disused warehouse – heavy double doors painted fern green with dusty blacked-out awning windows above. A doorbell and the tiny name plaque above it were the only indicators of it being occupied.



Fig 5: 37 Villa d’Alesia

Villa d’Alesia is in Paris’ 14th arrondissement, and curls between Rue d’Alesia and Rue des Plantes like a river meander. Window boxes line the street, each bursting with crocus, pansies and winter jasmine. Bougainvillea vines cascade down the sides of houses. When Mary had her studio here there was nothing but fields, but now traffic roars around the mighty Boulevard Peripherique and the city oozes out for miles beyond. Artists still have their ateliers along this road (next door to number 37 a

⁹⁷ Siebenschuh, p 105

⁹⁸ Not real names

sculpting workshop was taking place, under the same beamed roof that Picasso had worked) and it maintains an air of serious creative industry.

Guillaume and Benedicte invited me in and began animatedly talking about the atelier's previous owner *Madame Callery*. Mary had sold the workshop to Benedicte's father, (a renowned glass-maker) in 1956, and Mary had thrown everything in with the sale – an inventory signed and dated by Mary lists, among other things, a corbeille (dustbin), lit bleu (blue bed) lampe de lit (bedside lamp) and armoire italien (Italian wardrobe). (I discovered that this was a gesture typical of Mary. She was generous with her wealth and her possessions, from buying art in order to support the artist to bequeathing her studio in Cadaques to the daughter of her friend just because she liked it. This notion of acquiring then sloughing off possessions seemed to be a feature of her character, that of the desire to eschew sentimentality and heritage at every move).

The 'armoire Italian' was still there, though now placed across the front door of the atelier (access was now gained to the property via a side door). It was the first palpable evidence of Mary I had come across, an item which might still hold a trace of her DNA, in a crevice, perhaps, or on a hinge. I photographed it, and asked if I might run a finger down it. Benedicte seemed to appreciate the reverence and agreed.



Fig 6: Interior, 37 Villa d'Alesia

I had seen photographs of Matisse painting in the atelier –in a letter dated 1939, he wrote to Mary to thank her for letting him use it, expressing how it 'enchanted' him with its 'lumiere belle claire et moelleuse'. Fernand Léger and Picasso both worked there too,

no doubt also seduced by its 'soft, beautifully clear light'. In comparing the grainy photographs of Matisse sketching his nude beneath the pitched zenithal window, it was clear that the atelier had not changed a great deal. Benedicte explained how they had made small improvements in order to accommodate family life, ('on a aggrandi un peu...'), but they had kept the essence.

"Après tout, c'est historique."

The original front door led straight into this main room of the atelier, but it was now blocked by the heavy walnut armoire and an immense ficus in order to create a private lounge. Dusty cream drapes hung shut over the vast rectangular windows and a crystal chandelier turned slowly in the light. A staircase curled around two walls, leading up to a balcony with white painted balustrades.



Fig 7: Interior, staircase, Villa d'Alesia

Stepping into the rooms my subject had once inhabited, I began to feel the presence Blackburn refers to: I imagined her moving around, a larger-than-life American woman in the tiny, oddly-configured space, agile sculptor's hands moving up and down the curved wooden balustrade which had also been smoothed under the palm of Matisse, Picasso, Fernand Léger... I imagined her working at night to the sound of the pistons of the neighbouring print works, since long-gone, then climbing the stairs, heavy-footed, weary with work, and settling beneath the green canvas awning she had, Bernadette told me, pinned on the ceiling herself in order to stop the rain from coming in.

The atelier on Villa d'Alesia was the last of Mary's residences I visited (and the word 'residences' is accurate, as one got the impression that she never truly called anywhere 'home') and, as it turned out, was the one which would reveal the most about its erstwhile inhabitant. Its relatively untouched state coupled with the supporting evidence that I had (such as the Matisse letters, the photographs, the private tour and the paperwork supplied by the Charlattes, as well as letters from the personal archive which I was still, at this point, yet to read), meant that I was able to construct an accurate reading of an important period in Mary's life. I use it as a backdrop to Mary's creative and sexual awakening, in particular to her relationship with Milanese art collector Carlo Frua d'Angelo:

"Carlo had been here, in her atelier on Villa d'Alesia, and they'd made love downstairs where the dust sparkled through the zenithal window, on the staircase which curled around the wall, and here, on this bed, with the tap-tap-tap of leaking rainwater on the floorboards. He liked it here best, he told her, because unlike Rue du Belvedere or her apartment at 29 Place du Marche, this didn't have the vestiges of a marriage and a divorce in its walls; old money didn't drip from its ceilings or cover its floors.

"Besides," he told her, "Picasso and Matisse sometimes work next door. I won't have far to go to reserve a painting."

Mary's atelier, at the far end, is the most spacious. It is attached to a printing works whose machines clatter like steam trains day and night. Mary likes the clattering – when she is working, she falls into the rhythm of the pistons and at night, she finds comfort in them, her noisy neighbors. But most of all, Mary loves what the atelier represents. It is space and time to spend with her sculptures, an inviolable, private place where she can hone, experiment, learn, understand. Ever since that moment in Pablo's sculpture stable at Bois-Geloup where her fingers had tingled at the possibilities that lay within it, she had longed for a Villa d'Alesia..."⁹⁹

Mary had by no means revealed a fully conceived version of herself to me but our relationship was developing with every day I spent on her trail in Paris. At this point, Caroline was still lost in the shadows, an almost insignificant adjunct to the main attraction. I was aware of her existence from a cursory mention on the internet as part of a biographical summary of Mary, but she was the single biggest grey space I had to

⁹⁹ The Sculptress, pp. 72 - 73

encounter, and I skirted my way around her like a walker might navigate a flooded lake. I was still intent on the meta-approach to biographical writing I had so admired in Blackburn and Holmes. In my notebook, I was still present in the narrative, documenting Mary's life within the context of my own:

I find it hard to leave my daughter for a day. How could Mary have left hers in another continent while she pursued her artistic vision in Europe? What were her motivations and what are mine?

Maybe my commitment to this approach was partly to do with needing a conduit for unravelling my grief, and partly to do with a fear that information on my subject's life outside art was so sparse that I would have nothing to write about. But I was beginning to feel creative constraints. I wanted to hear Mary speak, overhear her conversations, watch her hands working a lump of clay. How, though, could I imagine and write these things with enough plausibility? I had the 'verifiable subject matter' determined by Lownsberry, and was on track to achieving 'exhaustive research', but what of the authorial artistry which Wood achieves so well? It was my trip to visit Mary's private archive on Long Island where I found my turning point, a revelation which would set the book on an entirely different course.

Long Island and New York

The archive is a set of boxes and artifacts rescued from Mary's estate by her great-nephew George. An artist himself and a favourite nephew of Mary, George spoke of this woman whose life had consumed my own for so many months with such casual intimacy that I was forced to reassess every assumption I had made about her. She became almost *tabula rasa* anew. Recollections of Mary directly from a living source had hitherto been the missing 'third pillar'¹⁰⁰ of my biographical research, and to paraphrase Meyers (1992) in his essay *Splendors and Misereries of Literary Biography*, they enabled me to clarify for the first time the crucial mysteries of Mary's life: her family background, her marriages, her friendships, her relationship with -and the fate of - Caroline, her medical history...¹⁰¹

In the time I spent with George, he dispelled myths (Mary never actually married Carlo Frua d'Angelo, despite the announcement I had found in the New York Times – Carlo's

¹⁰⁰ Meyers, pg. 683

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

family would not recognise an American divorcee), he furnished me with expressions directly from Mary's mouth ("Where's lunch?" was apparently a common utterance), and offered up a vivid palette of colour with which to fill my grey spaces in the form of anecdotes about time spent with Mary. On one occasion, Mary asked George to help her prepare some paintings to sell to the famous New York art dealer Harold Diamond:

George: She handed me a drawing and I can't remember who the artist was and she said here, take this George for helping me. Harold Diamond said I'll sell that for you, so I said OK and I handed it to him. About 3 months later he sent me a cheque for \$5000. And then that was twice my yearly income. It changed my life so significantly I can't tell you...

In the book, I interpreted this encounter thus:

She holds a small picture up and appraises it if it were a dress from Saks. Handing it to George she says, "Start with this one. If you can get it out, you can keep it. A gift from me for all your help. But I'll have the frame, I rather like it." She sends air kisses up to him and resumes what she is doing.

George looks at his Aunt Mary as if she were half-crazed. He is familiar with her impulsive ways (in Cadaques he noticed her habit of giving things away to the first person who showed an interest them – money, paintings, clothing, even her studio, which she said she would bequeath to the Harndens' daughter Marina just because she said she liked it). But this is the second painting she has given him. He can't help but feel a little embarrassed.

Diamond sidles up to George and glimpses the painting. "If you want, I can sell that for you. I'm guessing a student like you could do with the money, and that thing there will set you up in paintbrushes for life."

George looks at Mary and she shrugs. "Go ahead, it's yours to do what you want with it. But don't forget, I want the frame."

(...)

Diamond leaves with a long inventory and George's small unframed Calder for which he anticipates he will get in excess of \$5000. George has just watched him write out a check for Mary to the tune of \$250,000. When the door closes behind Diamond, Mary places the check in the drawer of the buffet and takes out a bottle of brandy.

“There’s an expression in French, Georgie. Arrete de gober des mouches.” Mary lights up a cigarette and fixes them each a brandy and seltzer. “Literally translated, it means stop swallowing flies. Ergo, pick your jaw up off the floor.”

George laughs and takes the brandy. “Christ Aunt Mary, did I count the zeros right?”

“Cheri, that’s not even the half of it. Diamond would shit his pants if he saw what I have overseas. There wasn’t a hell of a lot of any significance in what he took. Don’t forget, I’ve been a collector for many years.” She winks at him and sits down.¹⁰²

The Saks reference was authentic – she mentions the shop in correspondence with Caroline – and George told me brandy and seltzer was one of Mary’s drinks. Her letters to Picasso demonstrated her full conversancy in French and I discovered that Mary was not averse to profanity, so I permitted her the ‘shit’. (Wood avails herself of a similar lexical discovery: “Balls! When we first met, you said we should go to war,” Martha Gellhorn tells Hemingway on page 216 – ‘Balls’ being a favourite expression of Gellhorn’s from her correspondence.)¹⁰³

George and his wife Susan pulled off the extraordinary and managed to get me a lunch date with a member of the Colony Club in New York. This lady was a friend of George’s mother, and she was kind enough to show me round this much-vaunted, exclusive Ladies Only Club. Mary had never been a member, but nonetheless was a regular guest, sometimes staying two or three weeks in one of the upper floor bedrooms when she returned for a visit from Europe. (According to George she stayed there so that she could avoid housework). This was my opportunity for an insight into the ‘old money’ New York that I had only seen through books such as Wharton’s *House of Mirth* and in Fitzgerald; part of Mary’s struggle, especially as a young woman, was the fact that she straddled both bohemia and staunch tradition (and found she suited both).

My journey into the city was a research goldmine in itself - picket-fenced Bridgehampton, with its immaculate lawns and cherry trees fizzing with blossom. Shop signs swinging from miniature wooden gibbets and hollow-cheeked women strutting between the boutiques, their shopping bags fanning out along their forearms like sets of brightly-coloured, shiny feathers. We changed driver at Water Mill, giving my eyes chance to linger on the wooden slat-fronted houses and shops which lined the route. The

¹⁰² The Sculptress, p 189-190

¹⁰³ Wood, p 216

stark, almost clinical purity of these Hampton settlements seemed to be in direct conflict with the ramshackle simplicity of Mary's atelier in Villa d'Alesia, and her apartment on Quai Voltaire overlooking the Seine, with its facade that was scarred by great fingers of pollution. I wondered if half the attraction of this new life in Europe, surrounded by impoverished artists and writers, was that it provided an escape from the sculpted beauty of The Hamptons.

The Colony Club occupied the west corner of 62nd and Park. It was a red-brick, colonnade-fronted building, with three grand arched windows which looked down like raised eyebrows upon the street below. A flag bearing the Club's insignia, two interlinked 'Cs', fluttered understatedly on its pole. 'Yes, this is the place,' it seemed to say. 'Members only.' A blue, scalloped edge awning jutted out onto the pavement from the entrance door, through which a suited, brass-buttoned doorman peered. The grand central atrium was decorated with rococo mirrors, vast paintings, chandeliers and gold-leaved detail, and I could hear my heels clacking brazenly on the gleaming parquet floor.



Fig 8: Colony Club

I asked if I could see one of the bedrooms but they were out of bounds to visitors. However, we would tour the rest of the building, which had changed little in its hundred year history. But first, in a move typical of Mary: lunch. We took the tiny, walnut-panelled lift up to the third floor and were greeted by a line of waiters (all men) who showed us to our table. In the centre of the guest dining room was a circular table with a display of cherry blossom weaving skyward from vast silver urn. Arranged around the urn was a selection of desserts. Key lime pie, alcohol-steeped fruits, crème brulee, peach cake. Tea and coffee steeped in silver pots.

My guide told me that members must be nominated, the nomination must then be seconded, after which five letters of recommendation must be sought. Prospective members would be interrogated – what was their background? Who was their husband? Did they have existing connections within the club? Whilst Mary wasn't herself a member, women within her family were, and an antecedent had been Club President. Caroline also mentions staying at the Colony Club in letters to Mary. It isn't clear why Mary was never officially part of the Club. I can only speculate that because she had chosen to live predominantly abroad, she somehow didn't qualify.

The accessible parts of the Club spread over three floors and a basement. We went into the member's dining room, the one Mary would doubtless have eaten in. The ceiling fresco showed birds of paradise with vivid tail feathers which curled around the walls, and the lightshades were gilded birdcages. The fresco had recently been touched up, but the design hadn't changed in a hundred years. Merlot-coloured rugs from Pakistan formed a patchwork on the parquet floors and the facets of the central chandelier glimmered in the light from the arched windows.

A play-reading workshop was just finishing in one of the meeting rooms, and my guide stopped to introduce me to a tiny, birdlike woman with tight grey curls and sparkling eyes. I missed her name, but my guide leaned in when she'd gone and said:

“Her nephew is a certain George W Bush.”

On the first floor landing was a door with a sign on it which read: Writing Room. Inside, a low-ceilinged room with a bow-window which overlooked an alleyway, and two highly polished writing desks. A brass sign was propped up in the corner. *Quiet Room. Text only.* I sat at one of the desks and imagined Mary in here, writing letters from this desk to Picasso and Léger and her friends in Europe during the war. She returned here from Paris in 1940 after her stint driving ambulances during the war, giving the Club as her address in a letter to Picasso dated 29th May:

‘Je n'ai pas plus tenir le coup toute seule, alors je pars, j'ai le coeur lourd, beaucoup de tristesse, je pense a vous et a Dora. Si vous etes trop paresseux de m'ecrire peut-etre Dora m'enverra de temps en temps une ligne...’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ I couldn't take it anymore so I'm leaving with a heavy heart, much sadness. I think of you and of Dora. If you are too lazy to write to me, perhaps Dora will send me a note every now and again...(My translation). Private correspondence from Mary Callery to Picasso, 29 May 1940

Clearly dejected and reluctant to return to New York, her decision to reside at the Club as opposed to in her own apartment on East 68th Street must have been in part based on the notion of it being a 'haven' where every whim was provided for, its sumptuous furnishings a welcome respite from the monochrome of war.

The visit to the Colony Club provided a multi-coloured snapshot into a world I had previously only been able to imagine, and as such flooded that particular grey space with creative opportunities. Throughout *The Sculptress* we see Mary several times at the Colony Club, 'with its clacking of heels on polished herring bone floors, the scent of its elaborate flower displays (today, calla lilies); the sound of a dance class in the ballroom or voices from the play-reading group echoing around the oak-panelled walls.'¹⁰⁵ We see her walk into the members' dining room, which 'is alive with the sound of ladies talking - a chirruping which seems to reflect the birds of paradise fresco overhead. She sees Abby Rockefeller dining with her cousin Margaret in the corner and thinks better of sitting down to eat...'¹⁰⁶ We also see Caroline there, swimming laps in its basement spa, while the great and good of New York society wives gossip about her relationship with the married Professor Barinov on the poolside:

"Of course, Mrs Barinov is mortified, but she wouldn't say anything to Mr Barinov." She zigzagged the nail file back and forth like a violinist playing Rimsky-Korsakov.

The pink turbans nodded. "What would be the point? Not as if it hasn't happened before."

"Par for the course with that one, I'm afraid," said the other. "And she knows it. Just as well to keep her mouth shut so she doesn't have to call herself a divorcee."

Caroline reached the end of the pool and couldn't help a loud and indignant exhalation. It ricocheted around the faux-Grecian fixtures.¹⁰⁷

My insight into this private and privileged world was fleeting, yet it was also vivid and multi-sensorial; tasting the food beneath the shiny silver cloches, touching the upholstery in the lounge, seeing the layout of the dining room, feeling the heat of the basement spa on my face. This experiential evidence yielded a basis for the sort of

¹⁰⁵ *The Sculptress*, p 121

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* p. 121

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* p 67

divergent thinking that was required for an authentic reimagining of the Callery women's world.

*

Mary's letters were meticulously archived and stored in flip-top boxes with plastic labels embossed with '*Personal Letters*'. They were, inevitably, rarely written in her hand. They offered several versions of Mary – mother, lover, artist, friend. As a mother, correspondence tells us she was 'sometimes (...) so frightfully hard'¹⁰⁸ impossible to 'get near'¹⁰⁹. As a friend, she is 'a special human being...a particularly kindly, understanding human being'¹¹⁰. A letter from art critic Henry McBride describes her work as 'witty and knowledgeable in a way everyone must see,'¹¹¹ and for her lover Mies van der Rohe, being away from her is 'hard to take'.¹¹²

Her own voice is heard only in letters that I acquired from the Picasso museum in Paris, correspondence dating between 1940 and 1949, which reveal a deferential, almost vulnerable Mary, expressing her regret at having to leave Paris without seeing him, and imploring the great man to call her 'Mary' rather than the more formal 'Mrs Callery':

29 Novembre

Cher Picasso,

Je suis triste de partir sans vous voir. Il me semble que je vous ai pas vu du tout. Mais je pense a vous avec le meme affection et meme admiration et j'espere a ma prochaine visite d'avoir meilleure chance –

Mary

¹⁰⁸ Private correspondence from Caroline Coudert to Mary Callery, circa 1949

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Letter from Georgia O'Keeffe to Maria Chabot, March 27, 1944, cited in Barbara Buhler Lines and Ann Paden, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O'Keeffe Correspondence 1941 - 1949* (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) p. 183

¹¹¹ Private correspondence from Henry McBride to Mary Callery, March 25, 1955

¹¹² Private correspondence from Mies van der Rohe to Mary Callery, circa 1954.

Le 10 Aout –

Cher Picasso –

Je vous remercie beaucoup beaucoup pour la belle journee d’hier. Ca m’a fait enormement de bien – (...)

Est ce necessaire que vous et Dora m’appelle Mme Callery? Ne trouvez vous pas que ‘Mary’ serait beaucoup plus gentil?!

This one-sided epistolary data points to a character of intense complexity, and provides a scaffold for creative supposition. It reveals a Mary that is not evidenced anywhere else, which enabled me to chip away the public façade and imagine her breaking down in front of Helen Clay Frick in the Colony Club, for example, and to write her in the following scene which takes place at Caroline’s funeral:

“She feels the tears rising, not from her eyes, it seems, but from the very core of her being. It is an anomalous sensation, one that she doesn’t seem to have a defense against. “...Zermatt was...” she begins, but it is too late; for the first time, her poise is beaten, overpowered by the savage tragedy of her lost girl.

From deep inside, Mary lets out a howl – taut, animalistic – a tenor so shocking to her that she feels oddly distanced from herself. Indeed, as the tears begin to fall, it is as if her body, her own armature, is disintegrating.

Carlo grabs her, props her up, she hears his voice but for a moment she can’t make out the words he is shouting. Then he swings into view, a purplish, tormented face up close to her own, and she reaches for him, arms extending like a child to its mother. Carlo pulls her close and she clings to him, as if years of pent-up grief could be expunged by his shoulder.”¹¹³

Siebenschuh notes that, in the writing of biographical works, “...letters, along with important anecdotes acknowledged to be from other sources, ratify the dramatic art,”¹¹⁴ and the discovery of the Picasso letters together with George’s narratives allowed such ratification to take place within *The Sculptress*.

¹¹³ The Sculptress p 164

¹¹⁴ Siebenschuh, p . 92

On the final morning of my research, I took my place at Mary's desk for the last time and looked out over the blossom and the firs to the tufted spinifex on the dunes beyond. The sky was Valium blue, but a storm was gathering over the ocean. In a photograph taken in her dotage, Mary wears an expensive, wide-lapelled overcoat, tortoiseshell-rimmed sunglasses and a long gold necklace reminiscent of Mayoral chains of office. Her hair (dyed the colour of rust, but flecked through with grey) is held at each side by a comb, causing an effect on the top of newly risen bread. What would she have thought of me, looking out on her view from her desk? Sitting here with my magnifying glass, reading through her life in this way? I looked out and felt nothing. Still, I can't imagine she would have approved.

Susan placed a box on the desk in front of me. Amid the various post office stamps and crossed out addresses, written in Mary's now familiar insouciant scrawl, the words: *Caroline's letters*. Caroline had been faceless until this trip, known to me by only two facts: she had had three husbands and she had committed suicide aged 41. The letters contained within the box were ghosts. Some were type-written, others in a variety of hands – all Caroline's, but subject, it seemed, to her moods; sometimes snaking around every available space on the paper (notably when she is excited, upbeat, positive), other times spiking like a heart monitor, reflecting anguish or defeat. Other times the handwriting seemed to conform to invisible lines and margins on the page. Letters from her younger years at boarding school contain script which is barely recognisable as that of the older Caroline – an 'e' written like a number 3 in reverse, for example, with the rest of the lettering taut and well-placed. In the few years approaching her death, the writing unravels like wool from loose knitting, the tails of descending letters looping to encircle letters on the line below. Conversely, Mary's remains the same over the years; self-contained, upright, and occasionally verging on illegibility – a metaphor for the woman herself.

Some began with Dear Mom (missives from the teenage years), then Dearest Mother, or a curt Dear Mother for those times when mother and daughter were clearly at war. And there were hundreds of them, spanning three decades of what was revealed to be an uneasy and wavering life. As with all her correspondence, Mary had organised Caroline's letters in date order. The weight of three decades and only a day to read through them sat heavily on my shoulders. I accepted Susan's offer of coffee (she made it tooth-stainingly strong), and looked at the box.

It felt like intrusion, what I was about to do. Prising open the lid on a relationship which was perhaps best left unexamined. But Mary had kept the letters (all but those from Caroline's last year, 1966 – these were conspicuously absent). She had wanted them to be read. I lifted them out and placed them on the desk. Each sheet of paper was thin as ageing skin. I fanned through them with my thumb, sizing up the task. As I did so, a tiny envelope dropped out from the pile.



Fig 9: Caroline - Remember

On the front, Mary's writing again: *CCC's hair*. Caroline Coudert Callery. Inside, a leaf of blue paper, folded, and two small square photographs: the first, a sepia shot of Caroline seated with a scarf tied around her head, a clump of curls poking out by way of a fringe. The second was a black and white studio shot, a smiling Caroline with her hair scraped into a chignon, black shirt unbuttoned casually at the neck.

I unfolded the blue paper. There it was - the curl of cornflake-coloured hair. It was stapled to the paper, underneath the word 'REMEMBER'. Caroline's DNA. She was tangible and yet seemed further away. I ran the tip of my finger around the curl and looked at it for a long time. Discovering that Mary had kept this, that she had stapled it to a piece of paper and placed it in an envelope with two photographs in which her daughter looked beautiful and at peace (interestingly not snapshots – they were both posed), made me believe that she had indeed suffered the agony of bereavement but in a very private way. Outwardly, she was stoic (George's word). The suicide wasn't entirely unexpected - Caroline was very troubled - but even so, just as when an elderly relative dies, the pain of the loss is not diminished.

But inside, Mary must have been in turmoil. She must have questioned herself, her behaviour as a mother over the years. She may have reread the letters in which Caroline's pain is manifest:

Sometimes you are so frightfully hard, and I can't get near you (...) Your letter also was so frightfully hard – you say I have disgraced you – alright, but you needn't worry, you won't have to bear any of my shame – I'll have it all and I'll accept it. You won't have to have anything to do with me anymore. The world is such a horrid place – such an impossible place to live... (undated)

And those where the sentiments are tragically prescient:

You know if anything happened between you and me I would be utterly lost (...) I am the first to admit that something is distinctly wrong with me – I shall continue my solitary and lonely existence + probably jump into the Seine or some such thing in the near future (...) Mother forgive me for being the way I am – I guess I'm just a rotten lot. (August 13, 1951)

On second thoughts, maybe she wouldn't have reread the letters; too stark a collection of evidence to contemplate in the aftermath of the death. Instead she left them, the ghosts in the box, for someone else to read and to attempt to decode her grief.

This is how the discovery of the curl was translated into the book:

"(...)Mary had been airborne over the ocean while arrangements were being made for Caroline's funeral; Fritz had told her, "We'll see to the remains."

The remains. The barbaric language of the business of death. But Mary's remainder is soft, its movement fluid. There is nothing barbaric about a caramel-colored curl. Mary lifts it from its box and places it onto a piece of blue note paper with the word 'Remember' in bold gilded type across the top. She secures it with wire and folds the paper in half. In pencil she writes: CCC's Hair.

Alongside it in a matching blue envelope, she places two photographs. The first a sepia shot of Caroline at the ranch, her hair wrapped up in a scarf, brown curls bubbling out over her brow. Taken around 1948, Mary thinks, fresh from Columbia with that beastly business with the professor firmly in her wake. The second is Caroline in black and white, a studio shot in which she looks gay and so pretty. She seals the envelope and again writes CCC's hair, this time in blue, looping script. She reaches for the sherry and empties the bottle into her glass."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ The Sculptress p 108-9

Happening across the curl was the pivotal moment in my research. It brought to mind my own lock of keepsake hair; the one I cut from my dead husband's head as he lay in his coffin in the funeral home. How I'd placed it inside the small plastic box they provided and carried it home in my palm like a wounded mouse. A last part of him, preserved. Tangible, yet so far away. It is strange what a single lock of hair comes to represent. My husband died suddenly – like Caroline – so there was no time for contemplation or goodbye. His body immediately became just that – a body. We had him burned. So there is ash, there are clothes; there are his footprints in shoes, and the lock of his hair. But it is the latter which brings the most pain, as it is the only part which remains of the living being. I refrain from looking at it, or caressing it in the way I did Caroline's.

Finding the curl opened up a new angle on Mary, and in turn, a whole new narrative, which emerged from, as Holmes puts it in *Sidetracks*, a “mysterious biographical pathway.”¹¹⁶ Caroline had presented her multi-faceted, complex self and she had bewitched me too. This entire quest had gone from a desire to resurrect an American sculptress who had been overlooked by historical record, to a study of motherhood, daughterhood and ambition, of disappointments and loss. This new approach was undoubtedly a response to where I was in the process of my own grief – the curl raised stark questions about love, creativity and death, and I had found an outlet through which to explore them.

Cadaques

The first thing of note about Cadaques is the difficulty with which one reaches it. The road - the only land access route, in fact – begins in Port de Roses and trails riotously around the mountainsides until finally it drops into the bay. This is why they came, I scrawled in my notebook, because of the light, yes, and because of the climate, but also because of the remoteness – anyone coming to Cadaques is enveloped by it for a season and doesn't leave; a dreamy notion for any artist.

I had learned from George that Mary liked to drive fast. I could imagine her just landed from New York, tearing up these hairpin bends with half an eye on the road from behind huge Chanel sunglasses, anxious to return to her atelier by the harbour and the artistic whirl of Cadaques. Dropping down into the town, she would pass the main square where

¹¹⁶ Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks*, (London: Harper Collins 2000)(p. ix)

Dali would be sitting on a bench allowing the pigeons to feed directly from his hand, and Duchamp would be playing chess outside the bar Meliton while his wife, Mary's best friend, Teeny looked on. She would pull up on the steep ramp outside her harbour side atelier, peer in the window briefly before walking the few paces beyond it down the Carrer de s'Embut to her house, where Rosita the maid would have prepared the fire.

What a difference this trip compared to my beginnings in Paris, where I had only a handful of photographs and a few suppositions on which my imagination could feed. Here, I spoke to Mary's postman, her hairdresser, relatives of the friends she used to socialise with – her companions were mostly, remarkably, still alive and in situ. One simple query in the bookshop as to whether anyone remembered Madame Callery led to a flurry of insights, most of which found their way into the novel.

Every detail in the following extract is lifted from their recollections, from the name of the restaurant Mary liked to dine at, the name of its patron, to the 'Bullshot' she was famed for drinking (made from beef bouillon and vodka) and the fact that expats liked to eat earlier than their Catalonian counterparts. The topographical embellishments are observations from my notebook – notably the glowing seabirds, which I watched with awe each evening from the balcony of my tiny apartment, imagining that Mary perhaps once did the same from hers:

"They took the route along the edge of the bay towards the restaurant, opting to walk despite the freezing wind. Most restaurants had closed for the season, or else hadn't yet opened for service. Mary chose El Barroco for this reason – the French patron, André, understood that his expat customers liked to eat much earlier than their Catalonian counterparts and opened at 12 noon every day.

They were the only diners, but Mary liked it that way. She couldn't trust Caroline not to have one of her tantrums, and embarrass her again

"Bring us two bullshots to start with, André, por favor," Mary says.

Mary lit up a cigarette and considered her daughter. At twenty-five she still had the cherubic-cheeks of babyhood. Perhaps they were part of the reason she still permitted herself to behave like child. Caroline, perusing the menu, suddenly looked up and caught her mother's gaze. Paranoia from a heavy night's drinking plus the unexpected attention from Mary's gray eyes caused blood to rush to her face.

Mary watched the blush, spreading like shame across those cherubic cheeks, and a horrifying compulsion to smack it out of them rose in her gut. Quickly, she moved her gaze out through the vast sea-salted window to where the gulls swooped and glowed above the bay.”¹¹⁷

The cemetery high above Cadaques has no shelter from the *Tramuntana*, and does indeed seem to be imbued with the ‘seeds of madness’ that are fabled to be carried by that savage wind. It is a maze of wall tombs, statues, trees, all set against the furious blues and whites of the sky and sea. Mary’s final resting place is remarkable precisely because it is, at first glance, unremarkable. Other graves in cemetery at Saint Baldiri church are well-tended and delineated, some crowned with serene marble figures, other scattered with fragments of pretty coloured glass. Each headstone testifies proudly to its deceased namesake and each is caressed by the fluttering fingers of a nearby weeping bottlebrush. Mary’s looks untended and forgotten in comparison.

Fig 10: Meeting Mary



It turns out this was not actually the case. Mary’s final resting place was as she had willed it. Her ashes (placed in the ground by George) occupied a small patch of earth in the place she came to call home. The grave was tended by friends who were still in Cadaques, they talked about the cross (she didn’t want fuss) and the marble slab (crafted by renowned Catalonian architect and sculptor Xavier Corbero).

¹¹⁷ The Sculptress, p. 90

Far from being forgotten, Mary was well-remembered in the village, vividly portrayed by those who knew her – a handsome, unmistakably American whirlwind, an Auntie Mame figure¹¹⁸, replete with flowing scarves and always at least one dog on a leash. She was generous, flighty, statuesque, a 'bonne viveuse' whose memory – for those who are willing to listen for it - resonates loudly around the rocky bay of Cadaques.

¹¹⁸ George's comparison

5: The Grey Space: Creativity, Loss and Truth

“At some point you have to decide that you have accumulated enough raw data to work with, and begin writing.”¹¹⁹ – David Lodge

In his treatise entitled ‘*The Ecstasy of Truth*’ the film-maker Werner Herzog argues that facts offer ultimately an ‘accountant’s truth’¹²⁰, whereas deep, or ‘ecstatic’ truth, which is “mysterious and elusive”¹²¹, “can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization”¹²². It is, Herzog contests, the only way to truly illuminate a documentable subject. This notion of a fugacious truth appeals to me, as I believe that we, as writers of creative non-fiction, are in a unique position to achieve it and that loss, viewed broadly, offers us a way in. But how do we do it? In the previous sections I have catechized specific examples in the work of Wood and Blackburn to demonstrate how they use loss to elucidate aspects of their subjects. But in order to answer the question fully, I want to look more broadly at how the elements of biographical research – from the initial discovery and the process of tracking, to the grey spaces, the amassing of research and the duplicity of documented fact and fiction – work together to achieve it.

Discovery and Tracking

Naomi Wood says, “I had quite an amazing itinerary, travelling to the South of France, Paris, Chicago, Key West and Havana. By the time I did the travelling, the plot was already laid out, so it wasn’t so much a question of translating the material into narrative, it was more about getting the atmosphere right and picking up on some of the details that could only be found in situ.”¹²³ My own schedule was equally circuitous, but the plot of *The Sculptress* was by no means laid out by the time I came to embark on it. In fact, returning to the UK with three notebooks full of detail, as well as photographs and letters, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of research I had banked.

¹¹⁹ Lodge, D, (2006) *The Author’s Curse*, the Guardian, Saturday 20th May. Available at URL:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview2> (Accessed 04/04/17)

¹²⁰ Herzog, W (1999) ‘Herzog’s Minnesota Declaration: Defining Ecstatic Truth’ Interview with Werner Herzog. Interviewed by Roger Ebert, 30 April. Available at URL: <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/herzogs-minnesota-declaration-defining-ecstatic-truth> (Accessed 18/04/17)

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Kalb, D (2014) Deborah Kalb Books, Naomi Wood Q & A, 26th June 2014 Available at URL:

deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/q-with-author-naomi-wood.html (accessed 13/8/16)

Was it possible, I asked myself, that I might run the risk of jeopardizing the credibility of the entire project by miring it in 'over-research'? After all, everybody I spoke to, every cutting I read, every gallery pamphlet and every piece of correspondence I trawled through offered a different interpretation of the two women. Who could possibly say whose was right? And where would I start in extrapolating the interesting facts from the not so interesting ones, and at the same time, fashioning a compelling narrative worthy of my protagonists? In his book *Creativity*, Csikszentmihalyi quotes the inventor Jacob Rabinow talking of the importance of having 'junk ideas' in the creative process, even if a proportion of them will ultimately be discarded. "You must," Rabinow says, "have the ability to get rid of the trash you think of. You cannot only think of good ideas."¹²⁴ Only in collecting and then *losing* information can the best material surface and be developed. I had collected any scrap of colour I could from any source in order to build up a rounded portrait of my protagonists; even when accounts clashed or were at odds or made no sense, I had noted them down assiduously. The sort of 'scalpel' work' befitting Hemingway himself needed to follow - the notion of rendering a story from what has been sliced away. Loss, once again, was about to play a key role in the project - I had found Mary and Caroline, now I needed to lose parts of them again in order to free the truth.

In deciding which elements of my 'over-research' to include, it was important to return to the original approach to the book, and my determination to adhere stylistically to the work of Blackburn and Holmes. The latter's books, including *Footsteps* and *Sidetracks*, wooed me not only because they incorporated the researcher's journey into the retelling of the subject themselves, (and in doing so seemed to reveal some of those greater human truths we all seek), but by the fact that this very approach provided a way around the biographical difficulties I faced pertaining to supposition and conjecture.

For example in *Sidetracks*, in the section entitled *Letters from Paris*, Holmes is living in that wonderful city, pounding the same pavements as the subjects whom he elegantly scatters through the narrative - amongst others we find Prevert in the Bird Market, Camus at the Flore, Voltaire immortalized pretty much everywhere around the city. Holmes manages to interweave multiple biographical skeins: those of the various literary and philosophy luminaries, that of himself and his partner, Rose Tremain, and that of Paris itself:

¹²⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, p 49

“The flower market becomes a bird market, with hundreds of nightingales, minahs, parrots, finches, and budgerigars, all perched in little wooden cages, waiting anxiously to be bought, bright-eyed and frantic. (...) Some of the Japanese nightingales are already paired, in wire boxes marked ‘couples inseperables’. I’m not sure what Jacques Prevert - the most amiable, ironic, and freedom-loving of writers - would have made of it: ‘un seul oiseau en cage / La liberte est en deuil’. He himself got through two wives, and several girlfriends, as well as the screenplays of ‘Le Quai des Brumes’ and ‘Les Enfants du Paradis’ ...¹²⁵

Holmes’ vibrant and seductive passage tells the story of the birds, of the poet Prevert and of himself, but as I began to unpack the heft of my research, I realized that this approach, so masterfully achieved by Holmes and Blackburn, was not the approach I needed after all. I was trying to achieve a *vision* of Mary, to give the reader an imaginative possession of her and Caroline, to hear just their voices (as far as is possible) untainted by mine. Incorporating my research journey and its sidetracks were not synchronic with this aim. My portrait of Mary, Caroline and the worlds they inhabited was always going to be limited by the perimeters of my own understanding and there was much I didn’t fully understand - facets of Mary’s character and that of Caroline which were beyond my competence. Quite apart from differences in culture, background and class, I had no knowledge of what it is to sculpt art, of the savagery of divorce, no knowledge of what it must be to suffer suicidal ideation or alcoholism.

Lehman proposes that by deciding to engage in a nonfictional narrative, “the author implicates herself as both the creator of and a character in the text.” My interpretation of the grey spaces was based on empathy, comprehensive research and attention to details, and ‘educated’ guesswork, but ultimately it would always be tempered by my own social paradigm, my own circumstances, and as such, I would always be present to some degree in the narrative. Holmes articulates this very particular phenomenon in the introduction to *Sidetracks*. He describes a kind of premonition, whereby as a young journalist he subconsciously ‘collected’ biographical subjects - Thomas Chatterton, Walpole, Johnson, Shelley - and they, together with his own sense of isolation and dislocation with the world, (a ‘Romantic sensibility’)¹²⁶, came together in an essay which would be published in Cornhill Magazine. Rereading the essay in later life, he observes:

¹²⁵ Holmes, *Sidetracks*, p 335

¹²⁶ Holmes, *Sidetracks* pg 4

“I can clearly catch a young man’s voice, impatient and unreasonable with the adult world (Walpole, Johnson), which holds back a fuller understanding. But whose is the voice?”¹²⁷

Clearly Holmes sees and hears himself reflected in his choice of subjects which supports the earlier notion that biographical subjects somehow present themselves to the biographer as opposed to vice versa. He goes on to say:

“Empathy is the most powerful, the most necessary, and the most deceptive, of all biographical emotions. It is instructive to look back on it, subtly at work, throwing both light and shadow into city streets which were already for me partly real, and partly imagined.”¹²⁸

Empathy, then, that is to say, the immersion of the writer into the life of their subject to the point where they begin to see the world as the subject does, is an important tool with which to hew at least a basic level of *truth* from a biographical subject. (We saw earlier how Blackburn uses it so brilliantly in *Threads*.) My depiction of Caroline, for example, needed careful empathic consideration. Her alcoholism and the reasons for her suicide are based on my surmisals, grounded in evidence I found in letters and from anecdotes. I wanted to understand more about her motivations in particular reference to my own knowledge of death - why would someone willingly take their own life when others so desperately want to preserve theirs? Why was Caroline’s behaviour so pathologically destructive and erratic? The more I began to read and understand about grief, the easier it was to get a foothold on Caroline’s.

In her oration about grief for the 2014 PEN World Voices Festival, Judith Butler says: “We know the contours of this terrible circle; destroying to stop the unbearable grief, to bring an end to the unbearable only to then redouble that loss by destroying again. Perhaps that destructive act is a way of announcing that what is unbearable is now someone else’s problem, not mine. ‘Here, you take this unbearable thing. Now it belongs to you.’ Perhaps the wager is that this I, in destroying, suddenly become pure action, finally rid of passivity and injurability.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Butler, J (2014) ‘On The Edge: Grief’ 8 May. Available at URL: <https://pen.org/on-the-edge-grief/> (Accessed 22/03/17)

The temptation to pass the burden of grief on is strong – for grief is weighty and painful, and takes work and a lot of support to lift. An individual trying to deal with the weight alone is unlikely to succeed. Caroline did not have this support. Her selection of husbands and lovers did not provide it, nor, really, did her family (due, I think, to a lack of understanding of her condition rather than a dereliction of duty. The one person who did seem to understand her and offer support was Frederic Coudert’s mother, Grandmother Coudert, whose death in 1962 devastated Caroline and was perhaps the beginning of her downward trajectory to suicide four years later. In a letter to Mary, she writes:

‘Yesterday, Grandmother Coudert died – it simply broke my heart. I don’t know how or why – I had dinner with her the night before I left NYC and she seemed fine. (...) Of course, she was very old but I never thought she’d go – I loved her so much and have been in tears all day.)¹³⁰

While I did not - and still do not - fully understand the complexities of suicide ideation, I did understand the destructive potential of grief and trauma, and Butler’s articulation helped me to write Caroline’s final scene, where she becomes at last active instead of passive and takes charge of her inner turmoil. Writing it, I felt a very strong sense of her release – after all, I had been on a long and emotional journey with her to this point. In fact, I found myself tearful when she finally took the leap, but I had come to understand why she needed to do it:

“She climbs onto the sill and curls her toes around it, looking out. The moon swims above her, a silver dollar fish, high and bright. Beneath, the route to the courtyard: a cool, dark tunnel, echoing with hushed voices and the unfettered dreams of those sleeping within it.

And as she peers down, she feels a weight lifting. She hasn’t realized until this moment how heavy it has been, or how long she has been carrying it. The weight will be handed on to someone else now, she knows. It has to be, in order for her to be free. Lightness engulfs her and she feels herself beginning to float.

For the first time in her life, Caroline is happy.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Personal correspondence from Caroline Coudert to Mary Callery, 1962

¹³¹ The Sculptress p 202

In fact, the more I found out about her through her letters, the more kinship and affection I felt for Caroline. Her undiagnosed mental health issues (which I believe to have included severe hypochondriasis and anxiety through to manic depression) had sewn up her fate. I was of course mindful of the potential for trickery in letters. In her book *The Trip to Echo Spring*, Olivia Laing notes that letters are ‘written for an even more specific audience, and only rarely give a neutral sense of the whole person.’¹³² But ultimately, I had no other version of Caroline. The hundreds of missives she sent to Mary over her short lifetime were pretty much the only surviving documentation testifying to her existence. Through them, reliable witness or not, she painted a vivid picture of the woman and her motivations.

Mary’s motivations were less accessible to me – perhaps because I rarely saw anything written in her voice except for the Picasso letters mentioned earlier and an almost elegiac piece about him she wrote for *Art News* in March 1942 entitled ‘*The Last Time I Saw Picasso*’¹³³ (some of the detail of which is used to fill a grey space in the book. The following extract is reimagined from Mary’s own description of Picasso’s workshop in Bois-Geloup:

“The chateau stood in seclusion, fifty kilometres north of Paris. The surrounding parkland was seeded with his sculptures; they seemed to grow from the earth like strange and exotic plants. Mary remembered the excitement of that day, standing in the stable he had reserved for sculpting, running a finger down one of the white, plaster figures which would one day become a bronze. The light in that stable, seeping in through a narrow, horizontal window, seemed to slice through the dust.”)

Mary was kaleidoscopic character of whom I could not get a single clear image. Viewed through Caroline’s prism, she was hard-faced, impossible to reach, an unattainable standard to live up to; other testimonies see her differently. Her close friend – rumoured lover at one stage – Georgia O’Keeffe wrote of her as ‘a special human being...a particularly kindly, understanding human being’¹³⁴, where Harry Mathews describes her as ‘my mother’s closest friend, beautiful, smart, temperamental.’¹³⁵

¹³² Olivia Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring*, (London: Canongate 2014) p. 80.

¹³³ Callery, M. “The Last Time I Saw Picasso.” *ARTnews* 41, no. 2 (March 1–14, 1942): 23 and 36.

¹³⁴ Private correspondence from O’Keeffe to Marie Chabot, 1952.

¹³⁵ Harry Mathews, *The Case of the Persevering Maltese: Collected Essays*, (Normal Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press 2003) p 91.

For my own part, it was her relationship with Caroline which raised the most questions, predominantly because of my own situation – of being a single, widowed mother of a young daughter around whom my world revolved; why – or how - could Mary leave a four year old child on the other side of a vast ocean in order to pursue an artistic imperative in Europe? Why did she employ the likes of her friends Christian Zervos and Robert and Celeste Wallis to act as guardians when Caroline was in a fit of pique? Why had she not taken seriously the thinly-veiled pleas for help in the letters and been concerned that her daughter was on a ruinous path? I could only find clues in Mary's upbringing and the cultural and social conventions of the time, and make the assumption that Mary was stymied by them, that her world view did not include - or could not understand - a daughter who was clearly mentally ill.

The possibility that Mary was so driven by the siren call of creativity and art that she didn't *want* to acknowledge Caroline and her issues was, initially, not one I considered. The very thought was anathema to me, and not an aspect of Mary's character I wanted to imagine. My Mary was a determined woman, a furiously talented artist, a gifted curator of avant-garde work, but also a mother who found herself to be ahead of her time. My Mary loved Caroline and wanted nothing more than for her to be happy. But is my interpretation a response primarily to my own needs than an accurate image? Is a wholly more unsympathetic Mary – certainly from the perspective of motherhood and her commitment to it – closer to the truth?

I have to accept the fact that my creative process was affected by my own deep, unresolved grief, and by the nature of my savage loss; indeed, it was driven and shaped by it and therefore my approach to the material was inevitably going to originate from this point. As my immersion into the archive went on, I began to suspect that Mary's creative life was of far more importance to her than Caroline – indeed that Caroline represented more of a hindrance to her in every aspect of her life. It occurred to me as I was writing that Caroline's death may have had a freeing effect on Mary too. The burden of Caroline's neediness, of her unpredictability, was, if the letters are to be believed, challenging for Mary. Caroline, in relieving herself of the burden of living, may have afforded Mary the same liberation.

Structure and Composition

In the end, what emerged with *The Sculptress* was a compositional narrative, the literary equivalent of a Schwitters collage; a selection of ingredients collated, cut up, mixed around and reassembled to produce something new, akin to Tristan Tzara's technique for writing a Dadaist poem:

Take a newspaper.

Take a pair of scissors.

Choose an article that's as long as you intend your poem to be.

Cut out the article.

Then carefully cut out each of the words composing the article and put them all in a bag.

Shake gently.

Then take out each cut-out word, one after the other.

Copy them conscientiously in the order they left the bag.

The poem will be like you.

And there you are—an infinitely original writer with a delightful sensibility, even if misunderstood by common folk.¹³⁶

While not quite as arbitrary as this, my approach to the research did follow a similar principle. In a sense it had to, as Mary had no biographical forebears, hers was an unwritten history, and as such offered no obvious framework on which to hang the narrative. And I had grey spaces – hundreds of them - which added to the need for a composite or 'patchworking' approach to cover the cracks. The result in *The Sculptress* was a 'wave' motion structure which works to create a cumulative, multi-layered portrayal of Mary, and mimics the continual back and forth across the ocean which divided the two sides of her personality – European Modernism and bohemia and the Old New York of her upbringing.

Wood's structure, which, as mentioned earlier, she said, took inspiration from Girard's 'triangle of desire', does not provide such a multi-layered portrayal of her characters but it highlights what she deemed as the important thing which was the inter-relationship between the four women and their individual relationships with Hemingway. Blackburn's structure appears to be much more unsystematic – at one point she prefaces a section about the discovery of a little auk with, "This is a story which

¹³⁶ Dada L'Exposition, (Paris : Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2005) p 20

seems to belong here,” as if she’d written it in isolation and at the last minute sought a place to shoehorn it in. But this approach brilliantly reflects the haphazard nature of Craske’s legacy and therefore works as a way to present her subject.

The penultimate line in Tzara’s instruction - “The poem will be like you”- brings forth again the concept that the author is always somehow present in a composite text, no matter how and from where the source material is harvested and subsequently presented. David Lodge embraces this notion with glee, describing the moment he realised that he was researching Henry James at the same time, and at the exact same geographical location, as two other biographers while writing his book, *Author, Author*: “I became - we all became, Colm Tóibín, Michiel Heyns and I - characters in a Jamesian plot. Consider, for example, that comical convergence in the sanctum of Lamb House of three writers all secreting works-in-progress about its distinguished former owner. Could anything be more Jamesian?”¹³⁷ This links back to the moment discussed in section 4, where Blackburn’s life and the life of her subject became momentarily indistinct, that moment where divergent creative thinking occurs. On this basis, biographer inherence within their subject is, it seems, both an inevitability and an advantage to the mining of Herzog’s deep truth.

Grey spaces

Often, historical ‘fact’ (that is to say, documented news events) provided a useful backdrop to the fictionalized elements of the book and helped me to compose the narrative. During Caroline’s time at Columbia University, for example, fellow student, David Kammerer, was brutally murdered by Lucien Carr. Though highly unfortunate for Kammerer, the gruesome event provided a great of opportunity to authenticate Caroline reflections about her affair with Professor Barinov:

‘What was it that had been so scandalous about it all? It seemed so long ago now, times had changed, it was hard to tell. Surely more scandalous had been the Lucien Carr affair, the ripples of which were still being felt across campus, even a year later. Carr had murdered another student for Christ’s sake, dumped his body in the Hudson River, but evidently, for the tittle-tattlers of old New York, this was less of a crime than sleeping

¹³⁷Lodge, D (2006) ‘The Author’s Curse’, the Guardian, 20th May. Available at URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview2> (Accessed 14/1/2017)

with a married, well-connected University professor who was about to be appointed dean.'

This casual reference to Kammerer's murder, which Caroline would undoubtedly have been aware of when it happened, helps the reader to suspend their disbelief and believe totally in the authorial voice – fiction, as it were, corroborated by a scaffold of fact.

In this way, I was able to use some of the many stories of expatriates in Paris during the Nazi occupation to colour what I knew of Mary's involvement in the war effort (her role as an ambulance driver working out of the American hospital in Neuilly). In his excellent book *Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation*, for example, Charles Glass describes the occasion when Josephine Baker visited the hospital to entertain the wounded troops. "The soldiers, in pyjamas and many in wheelchairs, toasted her beside a Christmas tree,"¹³⁸ he writes. Mary would have been around, and perhaps, I imagined, even present at this performance; how could I use it to my advantage in the book?

'Gathered round the tree, bandaged, bloodied limbs propped up all over the place, the entire institution it seemed had turned out to see La Perle Noire. She sang Je M'en Fou and C'est Lui, and gyrated in a dress made of lightning flashes. Mary couldn't take eyes off her legs, the way they moved, flexible as India rubber and honed like a sculpture. Years later, she would use those legs and their fluent grace in her work.'

Whether this was true or not didn't seem to matter. Mary's stretched figural sculptures did bring to mind the lithe, fluid movement of a dancer's legs, and it didn't seem beyond the realms of possibility that those particular legs may have been Baker's. Like *Threads* and *Mrs Hemingway*, *The Sculptress* is based in, but not reliant on, a mastery of facts. I felt an obligation to capture characters correctly, yet as it became clear that they were part of a work of creative non-fiction rather than straight biography and therefore interpretative, the compromise of certain biographical truths became less of an issue. Wood grappled with the same sense of obligation in the writing of *Mrs Hemingway* in what she describes as 'the constant pushing and pulling between fact and fiction.'¹³⁹ 'There was,' she says, 'a fair amount of emotional wrangling in terms of the things I

¹³⁸ Charles Glass, *Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation*, (London: Harperpress 2009) p72

¹³⁹ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

wanted to talk about – characters having sex, talking vulgar etc. I asked myself, how do I feel about this, measure for measure? I kept bearing in mind, you can't libel the dead.'¹⁴⁰

Take the subject of Caroline's death, for example. In my book, she commits suicide by jumping from her apartment window in Texas – alone, in debt, with only her faithful cat Harold for company. George confirmed that Caroline actually jumped from an apartment in New York. How would adherence to the facts have changed story I wanted to tell? Firstly, I wanted to distance my Caroline from what she knew best, that is to say, the city of New York and all her friends and family within and around it. She had been inwardly displaced all her life, and by exiling her to Texas, I was able to emphasise her isolation and sense of despair.

Secondly, I had read about Texas, and heard the reputation that went before it. In his memoir *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, Steinbeck writes: "When I started this narrative, I knew that sooner or later I would have to go to Texas and I dreaded it. I could have bypassed Texas as easily as a space traveler can avoid the Milky Way. It sticks its big old Panhandle up north and it slops and slouches along the Rio Grande. Once you are in Texas it seems to take forever to get out, and some people never make it."¹⁴¹ And Justin Cronin writes this in his novel *The Passage*: "Special Agent Brad Wolgast hated Texas. He hated everything about it. [...] He hated the billboards and the freeways and the faceless subdivisions and the Texas flag, which flew over everything, always as big as a circus tent; he hated the giant pickup trucks everybody drove, no matter that gas was thirteen bucks a gallon and the world was slowly seaming itself to death like a package of peas in a microwave."¹⁴²

These descriptions, along with others I had heard and read, conveyed the sense of claustrophobia I needed as a precipitative factor in Caroline's death – a sense that she was alone in a closed and repressive landscape. I knew her to be working in San Antonio around the time of her death, so the notion of her committing suicide there was not entirely beyond the realms of authenticity. Did the narrative lose anything by this blatant factual disavowal? In order to completely ratify the version of Caroline – and her relationship with Mary – that I wanted to deliver, staging her death in Texas seemed

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, (London: Mandarin 1990) p225

¹⁴² Justin Cronin, *The Passage*, (London: Orion 2011) p 42

justifiable. Further, it supports Herzog's notion that hostility to fact can lead to deeper truth, and therefore enrich, rather than detract from, documentary narratives.

I was forced, by the very exiguity of fact, to suppose how Mary might have reacted to Caroline's death. There were few clues in Mary's archive. There were the letters of condolence from her many esteemed artist friends. And there was the curl with the photographs, clipped to the notepaper which read 'REMEMBER'. Viewed in isolation, this evidence provides little with which to build a narrative. Seen as part of a much broader empirical framework which included not only Mary's experiences but also my own understanding of loss and grief, it was possible to make assumptions about how she may have felt.

George had described her as 'stoic'. I had read about and walked around the environments in which she had grown up and subsequently lived as an adult. I knew the friends she kept, the aesthetic she admired. I had scrutinized her personal archive and seen intimate photographs, such as a series of honeymoon shots of her sunbathing nude with Carlo. I had tasted the kinds of food she ate, knew which books she read. I also knew the agony of loss. After a period of such immersive research, the assumption I made about Mary's reaction to Caroline's was that Mary would have, on the surface at least, padlocked her grief deep within and carried on. I allowed her two transgressions. First, at Caroline's funeral, when she is in the car with Carlo:

"From deep inside, Mary lets out a howl – taut, animalistic – a tenor so shocking to her that she feels oddly distanced from herself. Indeed, as the tears begin to fall, it is as if her body, her own armature, is disintegrating."¹⁴³

It is momentary, one paragraph, cut short by the leather-clad knuckles of her friend Ellen Harrison rapping at the car window. The second is at the point of Mary's death, when I believe it may be conceivable that she had a fleeting surge of maternity:

"She closes her eyes and she sees Caroline. This time, the girl is looking directly at her, smiling and beckoning her toward the failing light."¹⁴⁴

This latter extract in which Caroline beckons Mary towards death is undoubtedly driven by these two motivators; as a bereaved mother myself, I wanted to imagine this mother-

¹⁴³ The Sculptress, p 165

¹⁴⁴ Ibid p. 269

daughter conciliation, as much for Caroline as for Mary. I *wanted* it for them both – for Caroline because she had yearned for it for so long and for Mary because she never seemed able to show or feel it.

It is not difficult to see how and why a writer transposes a blueprint of their own experiences onto the life of their subject and how the stories we choose to tell of them change accordingly. After all, we can learn a great deal about ourselves and the human condition through the examination of a life of another. Linda Anderson in her book *Autobiography* describes this in relation to Margaret Drabble's memoir *The Pattern in the Carpet*. 'Weaving her aunt's story into the memoir is, thus, both a tribute to her aunt, a recognition of her individuality and uniqueness, and the discovery of herself, 'framed' within her aunt's story. She recognises herself – and reveals herself to the reader – through the story of another.'¹⁴⁵

Through Mary and Caroline, I was able to examine my grief, as well as my own relationship with my daughter and my mother – both of which had changed immeasurably since my husband's death. I had reverted to child, both in my own eyes and those of my mother, and my tiny daughter took on the role of nurturer and protector as she bore witness my raw grief. This chaotic triumvirate became the starting point for the writing of *The Sculptress* and it's fair to say that had I come to Mary from a different place in my life, I would have produced a substantively different book. Would I have found her at all in different circumstances though? I go back to the earlier contention that subjects find their biographer and not vice versa, (what Holmes calls 'that illogical feeling'¹⁴⁶) and a somewhat fanciful notion that Mary presented herself to me because she knew I needed a distraction.

'Distraction' could also be construed as 'motivation', and I have talked about the broad concept of loss as a motivating factor for anyone embarking on a biographical pursuit. Geoff Dyer talks about this in the opening paragraphs of his hilarious book *Out of Sheer Rage*, in which he sets out to write a biography of D.H. Lawrence. His motivation for starting the project is based in what he calls 'psychological disarray'¹⁴⁷ – a loss of writerly confidence and direction resulting in introspection and anxiety. The book was,

¹⁴⁵ Anderson pp 118-119

¹⁴⁶ Holmes, Sidetracks, p4

¹⁴⁷ Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage*, (London: Canongate 2012) p. 1

he says, 'conceived as a distraction.'¹⁴⁸ He sums up: 'If, I said to myself, if I can apply myself to a sober – I can remember saying that word 'sober' to myself, over and over, until it acquired a hysterical, near-demented, ring - if I can apply myself to a sober academic study of DH Lawrence then that will force me to pull myself together.'¹⁴⁹ And while Dyer didn't finish the biography he thought he was going to write, what he produces reveals more about Lawrence, and in turn, himself, than he could have hoped to achieve in a dry, academic study.

His pilgrimage to Paris, Rome, Mexico and New Mexico, focusing on Lawrence's letters and the similarities he realizes between himself and Lawrence, help him to discover the man – both Lawrence and the one inside himself. In tracking Lawrence in the manner of a meandering literary troubadour, Dyer circumnavigates his own introspection and concludes; "What Lawrence's life demonstrates so powerfully is that actually it takes a daily effort to be free. To be free is not the result of a moment's decisive action but a project to be constantly renewed. More than anything else, freedom requires tenaciousness (...) Freedom is always precarious."¹⁵⁰ Dyer's motivation (or initial lack of motivation, as the case may be) for writing shapes the book into a sort-of-study of Lawrence, via the sidetracks of his own self-discovery. He starts from a position of loss and concludes having made significant biographical, and autobiographical, gains.

In his essay *Definitions of Creativity*, A J Cropley states: "Many studies have confirmed that motivation plays an important role in creativity. In addition to interest and curiosity, creative individuals are also affected by cognitive motives which derive from their knowledge, especially from recognition of gaps in existing knowledge (incompleteness) a drive to round out recently emerging knowledge (development) and identification of contradictions in accepted knowledge (conflict / discrepancy)."¹⁵¹ I opened this section by stating that the writer of creative non-fiction was uniquely placed to explore real-lives, to unearth Herzog's 'deep truth' which permits true enlightenment in respect of documentable real-life subjects. Cropley's description of the interplay between motivation and creativity fits perfectly with the process of a creative non-fiction writer: 'Incompleteness' is typified by the grey spaces, 'development' is the

¹⁴⁸ ibid

¹⁴⁹ ibid

¹⁵⁰ Dyer p 141

¹⁵¹ A J Cropley, *Definitions of Creativity*, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, (Elsevier Inc 2011)

colouring-in and the 'conflict / discrepancy' is the navigation of supposition, anecdote and conjecture.

Cropley goes on to say: "The creation of novelty requires not only appropriate thinking and personality, but also the desire or at least the readiness to diverge, take risks, defy conventional opinion or expose oneself to the possibility of being wrong. In other words, appropriate motivation."¹⁵² This 'appropriate motivation', in the case of both writers and their biographical subjects, can be seen as being 'loss', in the broad sense I have referred to it in this thesis.

The writer of creative non-fiction comes closest to drawing out the 'deep' and 'elusive' truth about a biographical subject precisely because of their commitment to not view either truth or fact as absolutes. Blackburn and Wood both challenge 'literary biography' by using the creativity born of this commitment in different ways. Blackburn uses it to revive a man whose life has had no previous interpretation or scrutiny by absorbing elements of his life into her own, appropriating him for herself, as it were. Wood takes well-documented characters and pulls the untold stories and voices from the cracks in evidence that already exist. Blackburn's *Craske* is pieced together from 'little scraps of evidence (...) shuffled from one pile of papers to the next, from one folder to another, and many of them have since been thrown away or casually mislaid.'¹⁵³ In *Mrs Hemingway*, Wood says she "constantly pushes and pulls between fiction and fact"¹⁵⁴ in order to finally alight on a story which is neither.

A rejection of factual obstruction together with the inexorable loss of appropriated 'truths' that occurs when researching a life – the grey spaces - provide the creative non-fiction writer with their own, individual *tabula rasa* when relating to a subject, even if, as in the case of Wood, the subject already occupies well-trodden ground. For me and Blackburn, for whom there is no precedent subject-wise on which to build, this commitment becomes even more about what Cropley describes as a "readiness to diverge, take risks, defy conventional opinion or expose oneself to the possibility of being wrong."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Threads p. 3

¹⁵⁴ Wood, N (2017) Interview with Naomi Wood, interviewed by Lucie Brownlee 27th January 2017

¹⁵⁵ Cropley, p 64

A subject finds its writer, and the latter's interpretation of the former's life is just one of myriad potential interpretations. Granted the freedoms of a novelist and unfettered by the tyranny of rigid factual accuracy, the writer is able to take their immersive research and reimagine the life of their subject in a way which otherwise would have been unavailable to them. As we have seen in *The Sculptress* and the work of Blackburn and Wood, the writer is then legitimately placed to invent characters, events and reactions to enable a plausible creative retelling.

Throughout this thesis I have described my intent as being to write a narrative which plays around at the point of confluence of fact / fiction / reader / writer – a work of creative non-fiction which is distinct from a novel, despite using novelistic conventions. I have resisted the designation 'novel' for *The Sculptress*, as it does not feel sufficient enough to cover the complex interpretations of truth and fact (and loss thereof) that I have wrangled with throughout the research and writing process. It presupposes an entirely fictitious narrative, and this sits uncomfortably on the biographical bedrock of the book.

However, it must be acknowledged that the term 'creative non-fiction' is a slippery one here. In its broadest interpretation, it is fact-based writing which incorporates elements from many other genres, including a necessarily autobiographical element – the subject is translated for the reader through the experiential prism of their researcher. As I have said, the factual content of *The Sculptress* is liable to superficiality and conjecture. I have elaborated, enhanced, and imagined, but always with the intention of remaining faithful to the known facts about Mary's life. The result is a narrative which is constantly shifting between fact and fiction. There is, therefore, a stark tension in the terminologies. I recognize that, in the end, I have come close to writing a novel, but assert that I haven't - quite. The book teeters on 'the edge', which is where I think it belongs.

I am not alone in my resistance. Duncan Brown, in the exegesis he co-authored with Antjie Krog entitled *Creative Non-Fiction: A Conversation* (2011), observes how the writer and academic Adam Ashforth shares my misgivings in relation to his own book *Madumo: A Man Bewitched*. Brown writes, "Despite his extensive use of fictional techniques (in particular narration, dialogue and shifting focalisation) Ashforth seems insistent that *Madumo* should not be considered a novel (...) As readers we may question Ashforth's portrayal of the man he calls *Madumo* and his suffering, or we may even dispute the significance of his story or the relationship between Ashforth and

Madumo, but we cannot – in terms of the conventions of the genre – deny the existence of the man or the fact of his suffering: we are forced to engage with Madumo (...) without the option of dismissing him as a problematic fictional construct (...) Ashforth seems to find in the shifting, ambiguous and yet also demarcated space of creative non-fiction new possibilities for narration and identification."¹⁵⁶

It is these new possibilities which make the genre so exciting and unique for both writer and reader of creative non-fiction. They confer an importance and an urgency upon the subject which would not be so well-conceived in fiction. Krog describes it as 'removing the escape clause for the reader'¹⁵⁷ - and this is why the distinction should be maintained.

Siebenschuh writes, "In biography the opposite of fact is not always fiction, and the opposite of historical truth is not necessarily a lie... things are left out, but are admitted in some form or another. So therefore, not concealed."¹⁵⁸ 'Loss', in all its connotations, is the central motivation in all this, and therefore *liberates* truths because it stimulates creativity. Colour and light are found in loss – if we are brave enough to embrace it and look for them.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, Duncan and Krog, Antjie, (2011) Creative Non-fiction: A conversation. 23:1 57-70, DOI: 10.1080/1013929X.2011.572345

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*

¹⁵⁸ Siebenschuh, p. 184

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Fig 5: _____ (2012) *37 Villa d'Alesia, Paris*.

Fig 6: _____ (2012) *Interior, 37 Villa d'Alesia*.

Fig 7: _____ (2012) *Interior, staircase, 37 Villa d'Alesia*.

Fig 8: _____ (2013) *Colony Club, New York*.

Fig 9: Mary Callery Archive, *Caroline Coudert, 'Remember'*

The Sculptress

PROLOGUE

San Antonio, Texas, November 8th 1966

Evidence in the room suggests an accident.

Two empty bottles of Johnny Walker Red Label and an ashtray overflowing with Winston butts near the open window, thin lace drapes shivering gently in the breeze. A jazz record still spins on the turntable, though the saxophone has long since stopped playing. There are photographs and letters; hundreds of them. Some are ripped into pieces and strewn about the floor like ash, others remain intact, thrown in a box. A haphazard history.

And there is a cat. Wide-eyed and skittish, grey tabby with a gold rhinestone collar. His tag reads *Harold*.

“Here kitty,” an officer says, hunkering down to get a look at him, but Harold leaps in a sideways gesture and disappears beneath the couch.

“We have anything on the next of kin?”

“Mother is some kind of artist living overseas. The father was in the New York senate and lives out in Oyster Bay.”

The officer picks up one of the letters in gloved fingers. It is written on ship’s paper, an Italian passenger liner named *Leonardo da Vinci*, and is thin as old skin. His eyes skim over it.

...NYC is quite fun on weekends at the moment. The Wallis’ are renting a large yacht for the summer on which I have a standing invitation - so I will probably vary weekends between Oyster Bay and the yacht...

“Nice life if you can get it,” he says and drops the letter back on the floor. “Rich kid overdose?”

“Hard to say. No note, no signs of a scuffle. The state of the place though, she didn’t seem too rich to me.” He looks around the room and sees a box of pills on the buffet. Phanodorm. “Barbiturates. But there are still plenty left in the box.”

Above the pills, on the wall, his eyes alight on a painting. It’s a god-ugly looking thing, a woman, he guesses, though not like any human female he’s ever seen. He thinks he might recognise it from somewhere, but he can’t make out the signature. He makes a last attempt to coax the cat out from under the couch, but all he can make out are two lidless and iridescent eyes.

“Come on,” he says to his colleague. “We’d better make the call to the Senator.”

Tongues muster.

Perhaps she had over-reached when stopping the cat from jumping out? Or fallen asleep in her favorite seat by the window, woozy with whisky and Phanodorm, and tipped backwards out onto the courtyard below? Either way, Caroline Callery Coudert, the daughter of eminent lawyer and former New York Republican congressman Frederic ‘Fritz’ Rene Coudert and his ex-wife, the sculptor Mary Callery, had not committed suicide.

Besides, she fell to her death in Texas. The New York papers wouldn’t even pick it up.

CAROLINE:

June 1930

The ocean liner was a huge black-sided vessel studded with dinner-plate rivets embossed with the word OLYMPIC on her bow. Inside it was wood and glass and gold, and there was a room with palm trees and filigree panels where she remembered drinking ice tea. Her mother had taken this same liner to Europe two months ago, unable to resist the lure of creative Paris a moment longer. Now Caroline was finally going to join her.

Papa was in Europe too: they'd both left her for this far-off place called Paris, from where The Postcards arrived with faltering frequency – the last one had been a week ago, a picture of a spidery Tower together with her mother's equally spidery scrawl.

Dearest Carolina,

I'm working so hard my fingers tingle, but Paris is such tremendous fun! When you get here, we can visit the Eiffel Tower (pictured over). Have a safe crossing.

Lazarick and Gigolo send big sloppy licks and I send my love. We miss you.

Mother

Mother talked of the dogs, but never of Papa. His postcards came once a fortnight, written by his secretary and stamped Sincerely, FR Coudert Jnr, then in parentheses beneath "(Papa)". He too missed her, his secretary wrote. He too wished her a safe crossing, and told her they could visit the Eiffel Tower when she arrived.

Mother had left New York in a shroud of Guerlain and hushed voices, barely stopping to smudge her daughter's lips with a kiss before heading for the docks. Caroline had overheard her and Papa in the months before, their voices muted behind the heavy black walnut drawing room door:

"You want to leave your child and your life here in order to go gallivanting around Paris in pursuit of some ridiculous artistic notion, and you expect me to support you in that?"

“This is a question of artistic imperative, not some frivolous ‘notion’. I can’t stay here anymore, knowing what possibilities lie there for me on the other side of the ocean. I am suffocated.”

“Don’t talk stage rot, Mary! You talk as if you don’t have a good life here.”

“Don’t you see, I have no choice? I don’t expect you to understand Fritz, you haven’t the least idea of what it is to feel passion. You don’t have a creative bone in your body.”

“It has nothing to do with passion. It has to do with being honorable, choosing a course and seeing it through. If you do this, Mary, it’s the end of our marriage. I will not be humiliated in this way.” Papa’s heavy footsteps thudded towards the door and Caroline ran up the stairs, back to the sanctuary of her bedroom before he saw her.

She’d gone on a chilly April night. Caroline remembered the sound of the heavy door closing at Grandmother and Grandpapa Coudert’s apartment on East Fifty-Sixth Street, and then nothing but the tick-tocking of Grandpapa’s big brass wall clock echoing through the hall.

Tacit grief had hit the household, but about what, Caroline wasn’t sure. She had been told not to ask. At night, Caroline looked out of the window of her room at 56th Street, watching for her mother’s long-legged, forceful stride along the sidewalk. If she pressed her cheek to the window she could just see the lights of Park Avenue twinkling with the arrival of dusk.

The ocean crossing was long. Seven days of nothing but sea and sky and boring luncheons with dreary old men who collected crumbs in their waistcoats. Even Uncle George, who was accompanying her and Grandmother Callery on the trip, and who was normally such raucous fun, could not sustain her attention for a week. She ran up and down the deck when the sea roiled, and Grandmother Callery told the nanny to bring her in. She watched ever-changing, lacy patterns in the waves and waited and waited for land to appear. Even when it did, it was still a long way to Paris and her mother, but the solid earth under her tiny, leather-soled sandals led the way to the face she had yearned to see.

And then at last – Paris. But the memory Caroline held dear in her mind was not of the Eiffel Tower; it was of 21 rue du Belvedere and Mother waving at her from behind its huge plate glass window. She was holding Lazarick under her armpit, and she

moved his paw in a floppy salutation. Mother ran down to greet them and Caroline jumped into her arms, but Grandmother Callery stayed in the taxi while the concierge helped the driver with the luggage.

“My dearest girl, how I’ve missed you!” Mother cried, spinning Caroline around in the middle of the street. She smelled of cigarettes and Guerlain, and a hint of something which may have been sweat. Mary grabbed George by the neck and pulled him in and he laughed.

“Hello Mary,” he said, kissing her cheek.

“You must be exhausted, all of you. Come along inside for some tea. Or something stronger, perhaps, Georgie?”

George winked, then Grandmother Callery shouted from inside the taxi: “We’d probably be best getting along to our accommodation first. I’m awfully tired.”

Mary planted Caroline on the sidewalk and leaned into where her mother sat. “Hello Mother dear. You’ve had a long journey. Won’t you stay at least one night with Caroline and me?”

Julia’s milky blue eyes stared forward. “Is it done?” she asked.

Mary straightened up and pulled a cigarette packet from her pocket. “I’m not certain what you’re referring to Mother.”

Julia banged her fist on the leather upholstery. “You know darned well what I’m referring to. I want to know, is my daughter now a divorcee?”

Mary lit a cigarette – a Gauloise, befitting Loutchansky and her new art student friends – and blew the smoke out through her nose. “Yes.”

Julia looked at her daughter for the first time. “Is Fritz still in Paris?” Mary nodded. Julia looked back at the road ahead and indicated to the driver. “You smoke like a man,” she said, and the cab pulled away. All Caroline saw was the back of her Grandmother’s sable hat disappearing down the road.

“Oh curses to her, huh, Carolina?” Mary said, and led her daughter into the house by the hand. She passed her brother at the gate, surrounded by Vuitton trunks and cases. “Looks like you missed your ride, George. You’ll have to come in now and help me finish this bottle of Scotch.”

MARY:

Northern Spain, November, 1966

Death comes to Cadaques in a telegram. Just ashore from an afternoon of chess on her boat, Mary finds it propped up on the mantel in the hallway of her house in Caller de L'Embut. It has come from the office of Fritz Coudert in New York. The dazzling after-glow of dry martinis and two consecutive checkmates instantly clouds over: a telegram from her ex-husband can only mean bad news.

Mary opens it with an uneasy flick of the letter opener.

URGENT STOP CALL WHEN YOU GET THIS STOP FRITZ

She places a hand on the mantel to steady herself. Caroline.

Slowly, she climbs the stairs to the first floor and fixes herself a drink before picking up the telephone. Mary knows before Fritz utters the words. Nevertheless, they reach her ear like cold imposters.

Caroline is dead.

Mary takes a mouthful of Scotch. The ice cubes rattle against the glass – the hand that holds it is shaking.

“Mary? Do you have someone with you..?”

Another mouthful of Scotch. This time, she drains it. “No.”

The line crackles in the silence. “She fell from a window.” Fritz’s voice trembles on the end of the wire, though Mary can’t be sure that it’s not just the delay and the echo on this wretched telephone.

“Fell or jumped?”

“Don’t start that over the wire Mary. I’m in the middle of a campaign here...”

Fuck you, Fritz says a voice in her head, fuck you and your goddamn campaign, but she knows him well enough, if she says it out loud he’ll put the receiver down and probably hold a funeral without her.

“I’ll get a flight...where is she now?”

“She’s still in Texas but I’m having her brought back to Oyster Bay.”

Brought back to Oyster Bay! As if she had ever belonged there! Tears spike Mary’s eyes – the first since she received the telegram – but she brushes them away with the back of her hand.

“I’ll book on the next available flight.”

“Good. Well I’ll see you when you get here. And Mary...I’m sorry for your loss.”

She replaces the receiver and walks unsteadily across the room. The stairs spiral out beneath her like segments of an orange. She is suddenly unable to navigate them – drunk with Scotch and disbelief. She lowers herself onto the top step and closes her eyes.

A train journey. She is almost seven years old, and the journey is from Pittsburgh to New York. The sound of the wheels on the rails is percussive as a heartbeat. Mary Kenna Callery, she writes, in bold, looping script, in the condensation on the train’s thick glass and Mother tells her to stop being so vulgar and to wipe it off. Mary sees herself reflected; hair in neat rolls, the outline of her features in negative. Not for her, Pittsburgh, with its burnished river and its heavy sky piped like frosting from the chimneys. In her head, she is another Mary – Mary Pickford – en route to Broadway and the dazzle of the New York stage.

Through the window she sees mountains, rivers and folds in sheared-off rock, and she feels boredom right through into the sharp bones of her backside, but Mother won’t tolerate impatience, even in girls who are almost seven years old who are imagining themselves as Mary Pickford. They drink tea from silver pots served by black men in bow ties and Mary kicks at the shins of her little brother George under the cherry-wood table, while their mother looks out of the window with that striated expression that Mary will realize years later is born of deep worry for her papa.

“Jim is working too hard,” she has overheard her mother say to Grandmother Welch, “I do believe this oil venture will kill him.”

And Grandmother Welch, memorably striated herself, replies, “Julia dearest, the soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. Along with his bank balance sheet.” She sips tea from gold-rimmed china and adds: “Do stop worrying dear or it’ll be you who ends up in an early grave.”

Mary doesn’t understand any of it, as she listens from her vantage on the stairs. Oil, banking, leather, these are all words associated with her papa and the Great Callery Name, and besides, her mother is always worried about something or other so Mary sees it as her role not to be.

Mary sees Papa rarely during the lighter months. She and George along with their half-brothers and sister are to stay in Pittsburgh with Mother until the weather turns too cold for golf, and then Papa summons them to New York. He likes them to be together for Thanksgiving, for the holiday season, so he can display them like birds, all trussed up in iridescent plumage, to his well-to-do colleagues and those dreadful people from the front pews at the church.

It is only she, George and their half-brother Francis left who go to New York. Her elder brothers, John, William and Charles are young men; they stay in Pittsburgh to work at Papa’s bank, and their sister Marcella stays home to care for Grandmother Welch.

The train pulls into Penn Station, exhales noisily and disgorges its passengers onto the concourse. Now the metronomic rhythm of wheels has finally stopped, Mary believes her own heart may have stopped too. George and Francis are hanging out of the window looking for Papa, and Julia tells them to hurry along now, and not to keep Papa waiting.

He stands beneath the station clock as they’d arranged, wearing a heavy woolen overcoat and a new hat from Knox. At fifty-three he’s over twenty years Julia’s senior, handsome, though his eyes betray a deep sadness. He glances at his fob watch then up at the station clock before turning towards the voices shouting; “Papa! Papa!”

James Callery opens his arms and pulls all three children to his chest, kissing their heads from beneath his big, M-shaped mustache. The mustache is smiling but the eyes are pewter-dull.

“You look tired, Jim,” Julia says, cupping a gloved hand round his cheek.

James removes Julia's hand and takes up Francis's. He shakes it, two firm downward strokes. "How's my boy?" But Francis doesn't answer, his cheeks flush and he looks down at the box containing his toy soldiers. "Nothing to say for yourself?"

Julia steps in, "Leave it Jim..."

"How old is he now? Eleven? Twelve?"

"He's twelve," says Mary. "And I'm nearly seven."

James picks up his daughter. "You got so big. And so pretty, Mary." James looks at his wife for the first time in six months. "Like your mother."

Julia's cheeks flush – he still has the power to do it, even after ten years of marriage. The porter arrives with the trunk marked 'Callery: Pitts/NYC' and Julia says; "It's freezing, Jim, shall we go?"

New York buildings alter the light; what remains of the late afternoon sun is blotted out by screens of stone, brick and glass.

"Can we stop for candied cherries, Papa?" Mary pleads, knowing that he seldom refuses her anything, especially after long periods spent apart.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bag. "I already did," he says, handing her the fruits. She beams and links her arm tightly into his.

They take the hansom to the Plaza, the brand-new hotel on Central Park, their residence for the winter. Earlier in the year Lord Kitchener had been a guest, Papa tells them. Diamonds seem to rain from the ceilings in the Plaza, and everything, staff and guests included, has a patina of gold.

Mary and her brothers play hare and hounds around the sumptuously-carpeted corridors until the man in the white gloves and waistcoat tells them that Mr and Mrs Vanderbilt are on their way up from the Champagne Porch they will not take kindly to children running about the halls. They skulk back to their suite and Francis says: "Who cares about the goddamn Vanderbilts?" and Mary feels thrilled at being party to Francis cursing.

Later, Papa takes them all out, past the glittering lights of Fifth Avenue to Grenfeld's for steak. The department store windows are filled with finery and furs, and Mary opens her eyes as wide as they'll go so she doesn't miss anything. After dessert, Papa

smooths his mustache and tells them he has an announcement. They will be moving from Pittsburgh, he tells them. Mary's heart flips over in her chest: no more endless, rattling train journeys, every day spent with Papa...

"Francis, you're enrolled at Browning. Mary, you'll attend Spence. Of course, George is too young, so for now he'll stay in Pittsburgh with Mother." Jim says, and Julia's fist tightens under the tablecloth. She feels her eyes prickle and Mary looks at her.

"Mother isn't staying with us?" she asks.

"No."

"I want to dearest, of course, but what with Grandmother Welch and George..."

"Will we live at the hotel?" Francis asks, brightly.

James' face softens. "Much more exciting than that," he says, leaning in so far that Mary can see the individual bristles in his mustache. "You'll be boarders."

"What does that mean?" Mary asks.

"It means we have to live at school," replies Francis, throwing his fork down on his plate.

"Now then Francis..." begins Julia, but James interjects.

"Don't be petulant with me, boy. Have you any idea of the cost of the education I'm giving you? You'll start in the New Year and that's that." He stands up and pushes his hat down on his head. He looks at his wife. "Where have his manners gone since I left Pittsburgh?"

Julia watches her husband cross the restaurant and exit onto the sidewalk. She sees him on the other side of the plate glass window as he lights up a cigarette and exchanges a few words with a passer-by. Francis watches too, wanting to curse again, but fearful that the word might get carried to his father's ear on the wind. He repeats it over and over in his head *goddamn, goddamn, GODDAMN* until he can't be sure whether it's still contained within his brain or has spilled out into the chatter of the restaurant.

Mary finishes her steak and places her knife and fork neatly on her plate. She thinks of Manhattan, of exuberant furs and of Mary Pickford.

CAROLINE:

San Antonio, Texas, November 7th 1966

11:11pm

She dropped the needle onto the record and staggered backwards into her chair. The cat Harold watched from the arm of the opposite couch, vexed paws folded one over the other. He was waiting for her to settle so that he could resume his seat on her lap. She closed one eye, trying to focus on directing whisky into the tumbler.

Boom, boom! The opening drumbeat pounded from the phonograph's speakers, then the sound of Sidney Bechet's saxophone playing *Bonjour Paris* began its slow swagger around the room. It drew Caroline out of her chair like a snake charmer, and, bottle in one hand, glass in the other, she began moving around in her bare feet. The glass slipped but she didn't seem to notice, her hand curled into a 'c' shape as if it were still there. It smashed when it hit the tiled floor and Harold startled and fled, but Caroline was under the saxophone's spell. She didn't feel the glass ripping the skin on the underside of her feet, or the warm blood oozing between her toes.

Bonjour Paris. Her mother used to play this track over and over in her apartment overlooking the Seine. Played it so loud it seemed to occupy the place, a living presence, with a heartbeat, in the room. More than once the concierge, that neurotic crane-fly of a woman Madame Bethune, would bang on the door with her stick, shouting *Trop fort, c'est trop fort!* and Mother would take a languorous drag on her cigarette and shout, *Ouais, ouais Madame Bethune, je baisse!* but with no intention of turning it down.

Paris. It came to her in dreams. Caroline wondered if she would ever see it again. That first Christmas in the City of Lights, 1930, delivered fresh from the boat, hair curled into thick lamb's tails and pinned with a yellow bow. How old would she have been, five? Six? Maybe older. It used to matter to her (all those evenings in her twenties, gin-soaked, screaming at Mother for leaving her so young) but now, slinking through the shadows to Bechet's saxophone, Caroline couldn't have cared less. Mother did what she needed to do, Caroline understood that now.

The City of Light they called it. But back then, Caroline thought it stank. It was the sewers, or maybe the river. Or the food they fed their little yappy dogs, digested and deposited in neat little piles all over the sidewalks. Even in winter, the smell hovered in the air like fury. Steam rose from the sidewalks there, just like it did in New York, but that was all Paris had in common with her home town. That place and all its people were an ocean away, and whenever she thought about it, her heart ached.

“Be good and be sure to say your prayers,” Grandmother Callery had told her when she left on the boat back to New York. Grandmother’s eyes were hot with tears, but she said it was steam from the boat making them glassy.

Caroline had prayed for a while after Grandmother left, but Papa and Mother carried on living apart so she figured God wasn’t listening and gave up. Caroline wrote to New York as often as she could, on paper so thin it made the ink blotch.

The day she knew she’d lost her mother to Paris, Caroline was sitting on the terrace of Brasserie Lipp, drinking apple juice through a straw, trying her best not to be bothersome. Mother was talking about art to a man named Christian Zervos. All Mother did was talk about art to grey-haired men with eyebrows like barley ears. They all looked at Mother as if they were love-struck, like she was Clara Bow, and she twinkled before them, twisting her pearls or the diamond on her finger in that kittenish way of hers. Zervos was saying:

“Yvonne and I started Cahiers D’Art with a vision, which has remained consistent since its inception: a unique and quality voice for the artistic and literary community here in Paris. I’d rather it folded than compromise the quality by introducing advertising.”

Mother lit a cigarette and pointed a manicured fingernail at her glass. Zervos flagged the waiter and ordered another two whiskies and soda.

“Then accept my offer, Zervos.”

Zervos wiped his forehead with a white handkerchief. “I don’t say this to flatter you, but you must know how people think of you Meric? You are one of the most selfless, most generous people in Paris...”

This ‘Meric’ was new since she’d arrived in Paris. Caroline had heard her telling Grandmother Callery that it was so she wouldn’t be immediately recognisable as a

woman, and therefore would stand half a chance of being taken seriously in the art world. Grandmother Callery had shaken her head and made an appeal to the good Lord above for something or other – exactly what, Caroline hadn't heard.

The waiter arrived with the whiskies, and Zervos turned to Caroline. "My dearest child, would you like another...what is it you are drinking?"

Zervos said 'shyld' instead of 'child' and it made her want to giggle. Mother nudged her. "Dearest, I asked you not to be bothersome. Zervos is asking what you would like to drink. Another juice, Zervos dear, that will do."

Zervos leaned in and raised his barley ears. "How about a little gateau? Une friandise?"

Caroline nodded – she had seen the glass cake cabinet inside the brasserie, bulging with brightly-colored treasures – but Mother shook her head. "No, no, another juice will be fine..." but Zervos winked at Caroline and indicated for the waiter to bring a *délice*.

"So. As I am widely known as Most Selfless, Most Generous person in Paris, are you going to help me keep up that glorious sobriquet and accept my offer, for Christ's sake?" Mother sipped her whisky, leaving a red lipstick mark on the side of the glass. Zervos bowed his head.

"You would really finance Cahiers?"

At that moment, the cake arrived. A jewel, shining on the plate before them. Mother looked at Zervos. She smiled. "Only for you."

"Hmmm. And anyone else who needed money." Zervos took her hand and kissed it lightly. "I – both Yvonne and I - are indebted to you. And I will begin to pay off our debt right now by buying the drinks. And then, we'll take a little trip across the river to see a friend of mine, whom I know will be as enchanted by you as the rest of Paris is."

The car drove them from Brasserie Lipp, over the Pont Alexandre III with its flying golden horses and bronze nymphs, to number 21 Rue La Boetie. Caroline pressed her face against the window and looked up at the sandstone building with its immense wrought iron portail and upper floor windows, thrown wide open despite the December chill. She felt tired, suddenly, and wanted to go back to Rue du Belvedere

and curl up in her little room, with its thick woolen blankets and the soft fur stole that Mother had allowed her to sleep with.

“Mother...” she began, but Mother’s grey eyes were elsewhere, they darted from Zervos to number 21, electrified, it seemed, by their arrival at this place.

“Are we really going to meet him?” Mother said.

“Oui. He’s not expecting us, but he’s always entertaining a crowd.”

They climbed out of the car and stood before the portail, and Zervos rang the bell. Caroline felt that despite herself and her mother’s firm instruction, she might have been en route to becoming bothersome. Her feet twitched and the tiredness which had overcome her turned to irritability. “Mother...”

“Quiet, dearest. We’re about to meet a most exciting artist. Possibly the most exciting artist in the world!”

The concierge, a crumpled vision in red socks, slippers and a heavy-knit brown jumper, shuffled forth and said: “Oui?”

“M. Picasso nous attend,” Zervos said, and the vision raised her eyebrows. She let them in without question – this M. Picasso had all manner of guests, morning and night (afternoons tended to be quieter – the odd giddy-faced girl, perhaps, otherwise the concierge believed Monsieur was either painting or sleeping.) Caroline climbed the snail-shell staircase in the slipstream of Mother’s perfume until they arrived at a large door. Some artist, Caroline thought; the paint on the door was peeling off in long strips. She pushed her finger into a fat blister of paint and Mother gave her hand a sharp smack.

The door was opened by a wiry streak of a man who looked at Caroline and Mother wearily before seeing Zervos. A small smile spread beneath his long, crooked beak.

“Zervos! Quel plaisir!”

“Sabartes! Bonjour! He is at home?”

“Come in.”

They entered into a sort of ante-room full of exotic birds squawking and clucking in wicker cages, intersown with foliage and green plants. The birds and the plants were

arranged like a kind of botanic orchestra in front of one of the vast open windows, with the larger, showier birds at the back, partially obscured by great fans of fern and palm, and the more proletarian birds (two doves and a ghastly-looking raven) at the front among spiny aloe vera. Caroline stared at them and they seemed to stare back, following her with their furtive mistrustful eyes.

Sabartes (who looked, Caroline thought, like he could be a relative of the raven) led them through into a second room, this time full of musical instruments laid out haphazardly on the worn-velvet furniture. Guitars and mandolins lounged like women in strapped corsets, and in one corner, a piano with half the keys missing. Then piles of photographs, journals, a straw hat, several pairs of shoes. Caroline took her mother's hand, fearful, suddenly, of this fusty old trove and its as yet unseen curator. But Mother was transported, she looked about hungrily, awaiting the moment the great conjurer was revealed.

They heard voices. Male voices, in languages layered one on top of the other. Caroline recognized a little French and a little Spanish from the house staff they had in New York, but these men gibbered like the birds in the ante-room. Sabartes opened the door with a slight bow and they peered in. Eight or nine people swarmed about, their attention and gibbering directed at a little man in old brown slacks tied at the waist with rope and eyes like two cold stones.

"Picasso!" said Zervos, moving towards the little man in anticipation of one of those sessions of cheek-tennis the French seemed to play instead of just saying hello.

Picasso looked directly at Mother.

"American?"

"Yes." She towered above him, even in the flats she was wearing.

"Enchanté." Picasso took Mother's hand, with its fingers stacked with diamonds and the emerald the size of a fist. He kissed it, but didn't let it go.

Caroline watched her mother; she had watched this interplay many times before, but something in Mother's demeanor was different. Mother secured an errant lock of hair behind her ear and lowered her gaze.

"I'm a great fan of your work," Mother said.

This pleased Picasso. He led her away, barely acknowledging Zervos, and Caroline began to wonder whether the little man could see her at all. Zervos placed a hairy-knuckled paw on Caroline's shoulder and squeezed it lightly. Caroline watched as her mother disappeared into yet another room. Her eyes were frantic and wide, a pup awaiting the return of its owner.

Finally Mother re-emerged. She was a pink-cheeked whirligig, silk scarf flying.

"Zervos, oh Zervos, I have just acquired three of the most wonderful paintings!"

The little man was behind her, a brown-toothed grin spread wide across his face. "Mme Callery is a most discerning buyer," he said. "She picked out three of my very best pieces."

"I have no doubts that she did," Zervos replied. "And paid over the odds for them too."

"Nonsense..." Mother said, tussling with her silk scarf.

"Madame Callery is indeed a generous patron of the arts, I can see that," Picasso said. "I insist you join me for an excursion next week? My chauffeur will pick you up and take us into the country."

Mother paused and smiled: "Your reputation goes before you M. Picasso. But hell, why not?"

Picasso said "Bravo!" but Zervos was shaking his head.

"I don't know how you do it Pablo. Please look after Madame Callery, she is a very dear friend."

"Oh stop fussing Zervos," said Mother. "We're going for a drive in the country, not getting wed. I should be delighted to see you next week." Mother allowed the little man to kiss her hand once again before breezing out of the room without a backward glance.

MARY

Northern Spain, November 9th, 1966

She lies on the bed in her house in Cadaques looking out through the glass doors over the rooftops to the hillside beyond. Her arms are by her sides, the soft white fur throw clutched in two tightly balled fists. Yul Brynner, Kirk Douglas. James Mason and that consumptive girlfriend of his; all have lain on this bed. Mary sometimes rents it out over summers when she's working in Paris. Only tourists come to Cadaques in the summer. Tourists, and Hollywood stars working in the area on a movie.

Caroline too has lain in this bed. Christmas 1950, the first they'd spent together for so many years. Caroline had arrived from Paris, overweight and in love again. They'd lit the fire and drunk gin and whisky and entered the usual warzone of words. It had started with questions about Caroline's work – the girl didn't seem to know what she wanted to do with her life except flit about and fall in love with the first man to give her any attention. She was twenty-five years old for chrissake, at that age Mary was working under Loutchansky in Paris, collecting art.

"It's a good job, Mother, with decent prospects," Caroline had told her of the post she had just taken at the American Embassy in Paris.

"I'm sure it is. But I simply don't understand why you would spend three years studying art at Columbia only to end up...well, in an office."

"We both know that what happened there pretty much did for me in the years that followed..."

Mary shuffled in her chair. "Well what's wrong with sticking to one course and following it through to the end? You jump from job to job, hating each one. Someday, people will stop hiring you."

"I don't have your money Mother, I can't just decide to be an artist and buy myself an atelier in Paris. Most artists barely earn a dime. "

"It's not about money or ateliers in Paris."

"What is it about then? Status?"

“If you need money, contact Charlie and have him sell some of the shares I gave you.”

“So it is about money?”

“No. But if the reason you are not pursuing an artistic future is because of money then I will help you out. And your father will.”

“He wouldn’t help me if I were living in the gutter.”

Mary rolled her eyes.

Caroline continued, “He told me he could not help me financially because of his ‘other two children’. I am not considered to be ‘part of the children’. It is sick making!”

“Your father...well, he’s an asshole.”

Caroline banged her fist on the arm of the chair. “Don’t you start that, Mother. It’s always the same. I go to him and the shit flies, I come to you and it flies the other way. I don’t know where I am with either of you.”

“You started the shit flying...”

“What, by being born?” Caroline throws her gin down her throat and reaches for the bottle.

“Oh please. Don’t give me that crap again. It’s so boring.”

“So I bore you now?”

“You’re impossible when you’re in this mood, Caroline. You’re drunk. You’re directionless. And you got fat.” Mary swallows hard. If it were possible to retract words, she would have done it. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

Caroline’s face glistens with tears and she throws her mother a hateful look. “I am five-feet seven inches tall and weigh 147 pounds. Is that a problem for you Mother?”

“Oh Jeez, I’ve had it. We’ll talk in the morning when we’ve both sobered up.”

“Yeah, that’s right Mother dearest. Leave when the conversation gets hot. The fact is, if you were broke then you would have been faced with years of doing shit jobs that you hated just to feed the cats!”

Mary stands up and kisses her daughter lightly on the forehead. “Don’t drink all the gin dear.”

She left the room and cologne lingered where she had stood.

Next morning Mary woke early and lay awhile, listening to the familiar sounds of the house. The ‘tak-tak’ of rock thrushes squabbling in the deep-silled, cube-shaped windows. The creak of timber beams. Somewhere, two floors below, the housemaid Rosita preparing breakfast. Then, an unfamiliar sound; the heavy exhalations of Caroline in deep slumber coming from the room next door.

She pulled the heavy blanket off the bed and wrapped herself in it, before heading down the spiral staircase to the living room. The gin bottle was empty on the table, alongside a box of Phanodorm from her medicine cabinet (two tablets gone). She threw the bottle in the trash and placed the pills in a drawer to spare them both the indignity of the evidence.

Mary arranged herself at the table on the balcony and had Rosita bring her a pot of strong coffee. Between the bars of the white iron railing she could see the bell tower of Esglesia de Santa Maria pointing like a bony finger up at the sky. Soon the bells would begin their strident clang and the devotees would rise up like the undead, all heading for the church door and redemption.

It was the festive season, but Mary felt far from joyful. Having Caroline around both lifted her up and brought her down. It had always been the same, right back to when Caroline was a small girl. Whenever the child was in her care she felt a huge burden, a physical weight. She believed she loved her, but sometimes, secretly, Mary couldn’t be sure. What did maternal love feel like anyways? Was it always straightforward and unconditional? Perhaps this was this every mother’s lot: or was it something unique to her relationship with her daughter? The church blazed white in the light of a brittle winter sun, and Mary gazed at it as if hoping for divine intervention.

Caroline surfaced late, hooded owlet eyes avoiding her mother’s disapproval. She wore one of Mary’s robes, and hugged it round herself self-consciously as she came down the stairs. She hadn’t looked at herself in the mirror this morning, but she could feel how the gin had bloated her. A heavy alcohol-induced night sweat had caused her hair to flatten to her head. She ruffled it up before presenting herself to Mother.

“There’s coffee in the pot. Rosita has left some pastries too,” Mary said from behind her copy of the New York Times. It was days old, but still Mary liked to read it. She held out for the obituaries, hoping they might one day feature someone she hated from Long Island.

Caroline responded with a grunt. A sort of teenaged insolence overcame her at times like these – hung-over and desperate to punish her mother – and she found it impossible to keep it in check.

“I thought we might take the boat to Morocco,” Mary went on. “Spend New Year in Tinzhir. I know a splendid little place there – used to be a favorite haunt of Carlo and mine.”

Caroline poured herself a cup of coffee and sat alongside Mary at the table on the balcony. “Carlo? Have you seen him lately?”

“ – No. Not lately. I understand he is well and happy though, which is all I can hope for him.”

“I believe he’ll always be in love with Mary Callery, so can he ever be truly happy?”

“Nonsense. Besides, that is none of my business. Or yours, for that matter.”

“I had dinner with him at the Voltaire not long ago. We decided that you were a wonderful woman. He said ‘she is still fascinating as ever’. It must be hard for him. We are really his family...”

“Carlo is terribly sweet and I care for him a great deal. But dear, don’t go ascribing any of your romantic notions to him and me now.”

Caroline wrapped her hands around her coffee cup. “It’s freezing out here.”

Mary folded her newspaper. “Open your Christmas gift. You’ll be happy with it.”

“You got me a gift?”

“Bien sûr ma chère.”

“Somehow I figured you might be done with Christmas gifts for me.”

“I don’t know why you would think that. Go ahead, open it.”

Caroline fetched the gift - wrapped, no doubt by Rosita, in gold paper with curled gold trims – and opened it. She held it up in front of her with two hands. “Mother...”

“If you don’t like it, I can change it. But I liked the tones in the fur. It’s muskrat.”

Caroline stood up and whisked the coat around her shoulders. “It’s darling,” she squealed, “I love, love, love it!”

The unfortunate muskrat had served to thaw relations, and Caroline’s humor returned. “I think Tinhirir would be wonderful Mother,” she said, twirling in the coat like a model from Vogue. “If it’s a favorite of you and Carlo, it must be some place.” She kissed her mother on the cheek and Mary felt herself recoil. Old New York still ran through her like a gray vein through white marble. She stood up and threw her newspaper on the table.

“Excellent. We’ll leave tomorrow. The question now is, where’s lunch?”

“Somewhere befitting a muskrat coat...” Caroline admired herself in the mirror.

They took the route along the edge of the bay towards the restaurant, opting to walk despite the freezing wind. Most restaurants had closed for the season, or else hadn’t yet opened for service. Mary chose El Barroco for this reason – the French patron, André, understood that his expat customers liked to eat much earlier than their Catalonian counterparts and opened at 12 noon every day.

They were the only diners, but Mary liked it that way. She couldn’t trust Caroline not to have one of her tantrums, and embarrass her again

“Bring us two bullshots to start with, André, por favor,” Mary said.

Mary lit up a cigarette and considered her daughter. At twenty-five she still had the cherubic-cheeks of babyhood. Perhaps they were part of the reason she still permitted herself to behave like child. Caroline, perusing the menu, suddenly looked up and caught her mother’s gaze. Paranoia from a heavy night’s drinking plus the unexpected attention from Mary’s gray eyes caused blood to rush to her face.

Mary watched the blush, spreading like shame across those cherubic cheeks, and a horrifying compulsion to smack it out of them rose in her gut. Quickly, she moved her gaze out through the vast sea-salted window to where the gulls swooped and glowed above the bay.

Mary pulls herself up and reaches underneath the bed. She brings out a framed portrait of Caroline as a child. It is a quaint-looking likeness, drawn in brown and white charcoals. Mary never liked it and had never displayed it, but it was gifted to her by an old family friend on Caroline's second birthday and she didn't have the heart to throw it out.

She traces a finger around the apple-cheeks and remembers that expression she has on her face – the beatific half-smile which compelled folk to comment on how darling she was, but which always seemed to Mary to be hiding something.

MARY

NEW YORK, 1910

It is 1910 and Mary is sitting in the vast, white-colonnaded auditorium of the Spence School in New York, trying to focus on the words of the puff-sleeved, sallow-cheeked vision standing on the stage before her:

“My dear girls, here at Spence our motto is: “Not for school but for life we learn.” Our aim as educators and as an institution is to awaken and to keep ever alert the faculty of wonder in the human soul.”

Miss Clara B Spence, Head of School, looks out at twelve pairs of eyes. She is searching for those that ignite at her words. Mary Callery, front row, centre: newly-arrived from Pittsburgh yet curiously urbane. Her eyes are positively aglow.

“With this in mind, the common requisites of a young womanhood spent at Spence are human feeling, a sense of humor and the spirit of intellectual and moral adventure. I am delighted to welcome you here, and I wish each of you luck at the start of your own adventure.” Applause, initiated by the line of teaching staff assembled at the back of the hall, and Miss Spence exits the stage in a crackle of black crinoline.

Mary’s arrival at Spence the previous evening had been unexceptional but for two things. She was the only boarder to be seen into her new accommodation by her papa’s chauffeur and she was the only seven year old arrival who didn’t shed a single tear when their chaperone left.

“Your father wishes he could be here, Mary, but when business calls he has to answer. He’s anxious to know you’re settled, so I’ll let him know.” Frank shuffled in the doorway.

“Thank you Frank. You can go now.”

Mary looked around the quarters she would be sharing with three other boarders. Their names were printed neatly on a sign on the door:

- Mary E. Burchell (Manhattan)
- Ellen T. Milton (Huntington)
- Kate P. Jennings (Oyster Bay)

And then her own name, followed by her unromantic provenance: Mary K Callery (Pittsburgh). Mary took a pencil and drew a thick line through the word Pittsburgh, and replaced it with ‘Manhattan’. She had been born in New York after all, so it wasn’t a falsehood.

Four girls, four white iron bedsteads, four white dressing tables, four white closets. Mary chose the bed nearest the window – it looked out over the street and into the windows of the opposite brownstones with their zigzagged fire escapes. Mary couldn’t help herself from throwing her luggage down and jumping up and down on the bed. She was still jumping up and down on the bed when Mary E Burchell appeared in the doorway, together with her parents and a trunk.

“Hello,” said Mary B.

Mary C stopped jumping. “Hello.”

“Pleased to meet you. I’m Mary.”

Mary C stepped off the bed and put out her hand. “Pleased to meet you too, I’m Mary!”

“Two Marys huh?” said Mary E Burchell’s papa, dragging the trunk into the bedroom. “Double the trouble.” He winked and one side of his thick mustache moved upwards as if being pulled by a length of thread.

Ellen T. Milton arrived then, red-nosed and myopic, followed closely behind by Kate P. Jennings, a dark-haired beauty with unkempt, circumflex eyebrows and her mother whose throat was swagged with a collection of ethnic baubles.

“Be good, girls!” Mother Jennings trilled as she left the room, to which Kate replied, “Not if I can help it!”, but only when her mother was out of earshot.

Once parents had gone, tears had been staunched and food hampers had been plundered, the girls sat together on Mary B’s bed and reflected on what was to come at Spence.

“My papa says Spence will make ladies of us all,” said Mary B.

“I don’t want to be a lady,” said Mary, moving to the dresser. “I want to be Mary Pickford.”

Kate giggled. “Is Mary Pickford not a lady?”

“What is a lady, anyways? I’ve got four brothers and I don’t see a difference in any one of us.” Mary lifted her sweater from the back of the dresser chair and swept its arms around her throat. “One day I’m going to wear chinchilla, and fox, and otter and...muskrat. I’ll have a hat and a fella to match.”

“You’re going to marry a muskrat?”

“Marcella, my sister, she says all men are muskrats. So I guess, yes.”

Mary B lay back on the bed and said through tears: “I miss my sister. She’s three years old, goes by the name of Rosalind. I didn’t think much of her at home, but now I’m away...” Mary lifted the sweater from around her shoulders and laced it around Mary B’s neck, a woolen hug.

“My brother George is four. He had to stay in Pittsburgh. I kind of miss him too.”

They slept together on their first night at Spence. Four girls on a single white iron bedstead, ladies-in-waiting, each dreaming of what tomorrow may hold.

With morning comes Clara Spence, followed by a tour of the school. Their guide, the twelfth grade class president, is a gazelle of a girl called Diana Suitor-Parsons, whose blonde hair forms a delicious frill around her forehead quite unlike anything Mary has seen before. Mary instantly wants to be Diana Suitor-Parsons (perhaps even more than she wants to be Mary Pickford, she privately concedes). And Diana Suitor-Parsons has more than her frilly bangs to commend her.

She introduces them to the chemistry laboratory with its flames and flasks, the gymnasium where girls are fencing, the theatre, still warm from a rehearsal of Ol’ King Cole, the library, the reading room, and then, finally: the art studio.

Damp plaster, a whiff of iron filings, excelsior, paint, the sound of fingers working above a reverent silence. Mary fills her lungs with it until her head goes woozy. A line of sculptures awaits the kiln on the far window ledge – intricate, amateur, pocked with finger-marks.

“When do we come in here?” Mary asks Diana Sutor-Parsons, and Diana Sutor-Parsons simply smiles and says all in good time, and instantly Mary no longer wants to be Diana Sutor-Parsons, or Mary Pickford, all she desires is to plunge her fingers into that damp plaster and mould it into something wonderful. And five years later, she does.

Her creation is a bear cub made of clay: it stands upright on stubby hind legs, the effect of fur achieved with delicate incisions of a knife. Fingerprints are smoothed out with the flat edge of a palette, and the eyes are two glass beads she’d found in her mother’s jewelry box. She moulds it round the armature, clay warm like butter between her fingers.

The bear cub is for her papa. The last time he had telephoned he had asked her what she liked best at school and she’d told him arithmetic in order to please him, but really she loved to use her hands to create shapes and objects; the sort of things which her mother wouldn’t stand to have in the house.

There were other things before the bear cub of course – structures which fell apart or wouldn’t work, or which simply didn’t look right, even with a wash of color. She has worked up to this moment though, and when the bear cub emerges from the kiln she can barely believe it is her own creation.

She lifts it out and carries it as if it were a wounded mouse to the desk of Miss Sondergaard, who looks at it, then up at her. Miss Sondergaard beams.

“It’s a triumph, dear Mary. I congratulate you. You are a talent indeed.”

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, NOVEMBER 7th, 1966

11:48pm

Harold the cat returned tentatively to the room. The din from the phonograph had been stopped awhile, and now he searched for his owner. Ears twitched. A paw was raised from the ground and kept there, momentarily. Eyes darted like pinballs. Then he saw her, slumped on the floor in the corner. She swayed rhythmically even though there was no music. Harold approached; his highly-tuned senses had picked up the metallic tang of blood. He sniffed her foot, paused, then walked away.

“Harold, come to Mama...Honeykit...” she said, holding her arms out to him without raising her head. In her mind, she was back in New York; 1940, far from Mother, wishing she could straddle the ocean with a single stride and be in two places at once. Papa was married again, to Paula, and he had two more children, Paula and Fredrick – her half-brother and sister.

They were in the drawing room of the apartment at 102 Fifth Avenue, eating soup served by Magda from a vast silver tureen. Little Paula was banging her spoon on the table and Magda was trying to stop her, but soup was splashing over the chair back and onto the wall behind. It was all Caroline could do to stop giggling.

Christina, the nurse maid, swooped in and spirited little Paula away, and Papa carried on talking about the war and the election and how Roosevelt was making history by running for a third term, and Caroline pretended to listen and understand when all she could think about is the movie they’d seen last night and how she wished she could have been Eleanor Powell being twirled in that dress by Fred Astaire.

She was fifteen years old and in New York for the weekend. During the week she boarded at the Garrison Forest school in Baltimore, but she didn’t want to take her mind back to that place, not now, not ever – the school report stamped through with the word FAILED and her Papa’s taut voice on the telephone to Mrs Offutt were footprints which still followed her to this day.

This weekend was her birthday, and she was being spoiled more than usual. In her notepad, she wrote an inventory of what she had received so far: two dresses (one blue, one white), a big, white hat which she was certain Mother would adore, a set of golf clubs from Grandmother Callery, an enormous compact stuffed full of cosmetics from Grandparents Coudert and from Papa a silver ring with two pearls embedded in it.

Mother had sent through two small paintings – one by Picasso, one by Miró – (though if she were being absolutely honest, and she would NEVER repeat this to Mother, she was not so keen on the Picasso). This afternoon, Paula was taking her shopping on Fifth Avenue – she had seen a darling little dress in Saks – then tonight they were going to see Maurice Evans in *Richard II*.

New York by day was as much fun as New York by night, and she missed it terribly when she was in her shared bedroom in Baltimore. New York made Caroline think of Mother. She fretted for her more than usual because of the war in Europe, and the fact that Mother was driving ambulances back and forth from Angouleme to the American hospital in Neuilly.

Last week Mother had sent Caroline a photograph of herself in her uniform. She was standing next to an ambulance with a group of other women and her dog, Gigolo. A woman Caroline didn't recognise was holding Gigolo up so that he stood on his hind legs. *Gigger hates that*, Caroline thought: he likes cuddles and beef steak cut into squares, not being made to perform like a monkey. She wondered that Mother has allowed the woman to treat him so.

"Your mother should get the hell out of there," Papa was saying. "All American citizens should. We have no business being involved in a goddamn war in Europe."

Caroline lowered her spoon and looked at Papa. "Will Mother be OK?"

"Oh sure she will dear," Paula said, shooting a look at Papa. "She'll be back in New York before you know it."

Papa indicated to Magda that he wanted more wine. "I know Mary. She sees it as some kind of moral duty for artists and writers to show leadership in moments of national crisis. But really, she would do best to ditch her morals and her Communist boyfriends and return home."

“Jesus Christ Fritz, can we talk about something else? Caroline doesn’t need to hear your isolationist theories right now. Besides, we have shopping to do, right Caro?”

“I’m not talking about isolationism. I’m talking about warped intellectualism.” His face was red and veined like a blood orange. He took up the bottle of wine himself and filled his glass to the brim.

“Thank you Magda. Please tell Marguerite the soup was delicious,” Paula said, nodding at the maid and rising from the table. She took Caroline’s hand. “Come on Caroline dear. Let’s go to Saks.”

MARY
NEW YORK, 1923

Julia Callery is fussing like a bird. Her daughter is making her debut in exactly one hour at the Waldorf Astoria yet seems to be showing no urgency to leave.

“Mary Kenna Callery, the cab is waiting outside and we’ve got to get all that taffeta inside it as well as you!”

Mary appears at the top of the staircase in an ankle-length, white, shot silk dress, which swings about as she moves. “I’m not wearing the taffeta Mother, so there’s no need to rush.” She strides down the stairs. She knows this last minute change will send her mother into apoplexy, but it is too late to do anything about it.

Julia puts her hand to her throat. “Not wearing the taffeta? Whyever not?”

“It was ridiculous. I felt like a glass of eggnog.” Mary takes a cigarette out of her purse and fits it into a long black holder.

“We’ve had the taffeta planned for weeks though – everyone will be wearing taffeta!”

“Which is precisely why I shan’t be. Live a little, Mother.” Mary lights the cigarette and checks herself in the mirror. Her newly-bobbed hair sits in neat waves beneath a feather and gem-incrusted headband. Her mouth is a slash of Rubinstein Tahitian Pink which, the lady in Saks told her, complements her grey eyes beautifully.

Julia turns to the maid. “Were you in on this, Francine?” Francine shakes her head and skulks off into the kitchen. “How on earth are you going to keep the attention of Frederick Coudert Junior with an attitude and a hemline like that? Well, I guess it’s too late now. Just wait until your father sees you. It’s a wonder he’ll walk with you across the stage...”

Mary has moved outside, too familiar with her mother’s outmoded diatribes to listen. Inside the cab, three faces peep out from beneath a flurry of white taffeta. Her old

roommates, Mary B, Kate and Ellen. Kate lowers the window and wolf-whistles. They all screech in excitement as the chauffeur comes to open the door for Mary.

“Girls, please!” Julia shouts, “You are debutantes, not a bunch of sailors. Behave with some decorum, for Goodness sake.”

“Goodbye, Mother!” The door closes behind Mary and she pulls a hip flask full of whisky from her purse. She topped it up from Papa’s private stash early this morning while the house still slept, but she can’t be sure that snitch Francine didn’t see her. “Jesus Christ, who’d have thought taffeta could cause such a scandal?” Mary takes a swig from the flask and passes it along. “Oh, you all look magnificent in yours, by the way!”

They laugh and Kate says: “I’ll say! Here’s to Prohibition and wealthy bachelors,” and slugs back the liquor as if it were raspberry cordial.

Mary says, “Prohibition? What Prohibition?” and a smile breaks across her face. “And as for wealthy bachelors, I couldn’t care a fig. They can chase me till dawn but I shan’t be caught.” She watches the lights of Manhattan receding through the rear view mirror, all the way to Fifth Avenue.

When she first met Fritz, he was Frederick Jr: not plain Frederick and definitely not Fred. He was introduced to her at a dinner party by the hostess, that tiresome acquaintance of Mother’s, Mrs Thaw. He wore wire-rimmed spectacles which he pushed up and down the bridge of his nose with an almost obsessive regularity: they cured, he told Mary, an astigmatism inherited from a long line of blurry-eyed Couderts. Without them, everything is shrouded in a light mist.

“Coudert?” Mary asked. “As in the lawyers, Coudert?”

“That’s right. It’s French. We’re French, in fact.”

Now, Mary looks around the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria at all the other debutantes and their escorts. She appears to have found the only European among them.

“So you a lawyer then, Frederick Jr?” She pulls her silver cigarette case from her purse, and Fritz responds with the gesture of a light.

“I just got admitted to the Bar, so I’ve only just started practising. But I want to go into politics. Matter of fact, I’m volunteering at the Manhattan GOP headquarters.”

“You want to infiltrate the Ohio Gang huh?” Mary places her cigarette holder in the corner of her mouth and sucks. She watches Frederick Jr watching the smoke unfurl from between her Tahitian Pink lips.

“Not so much. I’m working on the Peterson campaign. It’s hard, but tremendously rewarding work.” Mary smiles. Words Papa and Mother would approve of. “How about you, Mary? What do you hope to do?”

“I’m an artist. A sculptor. Actually, yes, I sculpt.” It was the first time she had committed herself out loud to being part of the artistic fraternity – it was lofty terminology reserved for an elite who existed in her mind and in her textbooks. “I’m enrolled at the Arts Students League, but my dream is to have my own exhibition at Buchholz.” She adjusts the bracelet around her white silk-gloved wrist.

“What kinds of things do you sculpt?”

“Traditional, fairly representational stuff, I guess. I’m interested in the art coming out of Europe right now though. That’s exciting.”

“Can’t say I understand it myself. Picasso, who’s the other guy? Matisse? Their paintings don’t look like anyone *I’ve* ever seen.”

“You’ve never seen the women in Europe then?”

Frederick Jnr ponders this seriously for a moment, then sees a Tahitian Pink smile breaking out over Mary’s face. “Oh. You’re joking right?”

Mary nods. “Right.”

He laughs. “That’s funny. You’re funny. And you have a pretty smile.”

“Thank you. Are you going to ask me to dance then, Frederick Jnr?”

“If you would do me the honour, I would be delighted. Will you dance with me?”

“I will. But only after I’ve powdered my nose.” She glides off to the ladies room, passing her mother and Papa who watch from the sidelines. James Callery nods at Frederick Jr. The Couderts are a fine, wealthy family and James knows his flighty

daughter could do worse. Perhaps he might be the one to divert her from this ridiculous artistic course she is set on.

Mary returns from the restroom and hooks her arm into Frederick Jr's. The whisky she has just topped herself up with from the hipflask in her purse has taken the stuffy edges off her suitor, and she has decided she rather likes him. He is handsome, in an intellectual kind of way. He is taller than her, which is an advantage, given her five foot eight frame. He is of exotic European extraction. And he has money, which is all a good debutante is supposed to look for in a man.

She wonders how her friends have fared in this market of prize flesh and money, and she seeks them out in the crowd. Ellen Milton is already dancing on the arm of her beau, the young architect Wallace Harrison, her heavily-lacquered coiffe remaining stiff in spite of her twirls. By the cocktail bar stands Mary Burchell, lapping up the attention of Edward Mathews, a friend of Wallace Harrison. And there is Kate Jennings, flanked by two besotted slick-haired suitors, characteristically disinterested in both of them. Mary can't help but feel, as she enters the dance floor on the arm of Mr Frederick Coudert Jr, that she may well have snagged herself the most eligible bachelor in the room.

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, NOVEMBER 8th, 1966

12:06AM

Raking her fingers through Honeykit's fur, she was reminded of a coat she once owned. It was made of muskrat, lined in silk, in rich brown tones that changed each time she moved. Mother had presented it to her one Christmas in Cadaques and told her to insure it for \$800. She wore it every day that winter, even indoors with nothing but a silk nightdress and thick socks beneath. In Tinhirir, where she and Mother had opted to spend their first New Year together, it served as a blanket: they were both so sick with the flu that neither of them saw 1950 turn into '51.

What had happened to that muskrat coat? Perhaps she'd lost it in her divorce from Simon Boosey: it was the sort of thing his mother would have pushed for. They didn't have luxuries like that in England and his mother, having no originality or fashion sense of her own, was the kind of covetous witch who would parade it around the shops of Surrey as if she'd bought it herself.

What else had she lost in her divorces – aside from self-confidence and a belief in the existence of true love? When it all ended with Gustav, she was left with nothing. After costs, alimony, moving and taxes, she entered her subsequent marriage with Simon with a closet of clothes and a few paintings. No wonder his mother hated her so much. What was it she called her? Lewd and selfish. ?

"Moonstruck" was how Mother had described her relationship with Gustav Bard. Perhaps this was accurate, but at the time she had felt safe even possibly happy at the prospect of being his wife. Sure, the courtship had been short – two months, only seeing each other every other weekend – but they had known each other platonically for six months prior. Plus, after the debacle with Mark, and how close she came to marrying *him* and all his complexes, there had been no doubt in Caroline's mind that Gustav was the one.

Of course, physically he wasn't Mother's type. Mother liked her men to be smaller than herself, generally balding, the type who would sit around discussing art over a bottle of brandy. Who was Mother's beau when Caroline married Gustav? Léger,

perhaps, or it may have been Mies van der Rohe. (Both of them, knowing Mother.) Mother's men merged, overlapped, although Caroline was fond of them all.

Gustav was not good looking. He was what people might refer to as 'distinguished'. 6 foot 2, dark haired. And, of course, Jewish, which was a strike against him from the start as far as Pa was concerned. But he was very brilliant, wise, loved and knew music the way Caroline did. She recalled one of their first dates, at the Philharmonic in Berlin. How she had fretted over which eau de cologne to wear, how much kohl pencil to use, how to wear her hair! She had no girlfriends in Berlin – all the Americans she knew were seedy government foreign service types, with wives who were all so goddamn 'Hausfrauish' they'd probably never had a decent fuck in their lives – so as ever she relied on her cat, dear Binker, to tell her how she looked.

"Am I done, Binks?" she asked, parading in front of him as he lay curled up on the chair. Binker lifted his head sleepily, looked at her and yawned. "I'll take that as a yes."

Gustav had been so uptight on that first date, starched just like his shirt and overly courteous. He had refused to let her do anything – open the car door, close the car door, light her own cigarettes – to the point where Caroline felt convinced that if he could pee for her to spare her the bother, he would.

"Gustav, please, relax. You're making me nervous."

"You must know, I am very fond of you Caroline."

"Yes...well Bill has been telling me for the past six months that you're the only man in the world who can handle me!"

Gustav smiled. "I have one thing to thank my esteemed colleague for then, at least." He looked at her, sitting in the car alongside him and reached for her cheek but then thought better of it. "You've had your heart broken before..."

Caroline put a cigarette to her lips and he went to light it, but she batted his hand away and lit it herself. She shifted her body to face him. "Listen, Gustav. It's true, I have made some ridiculous decisions in the past based on an idea of love which didn't exist. But I know you won't break my heart again. We are both practical, even-headed people. We have to take the chance." Gustav nodded. "Now," she went on, "For chrissake, just kiss me." She grabbed the back of his head and pulled him toward her

face; he responded, mouth tight as a clam shell as it met hers, gradually opening and allowing her in.

He proposed two months later, on New Year's Eve at the top of a ski run in Zermatt. She accepted immediately, and spent the entire descent wondering how the hell she was going to announce it to Mother and Papa.

*

January 13th 1952

Mother dear,

There is something I want to tell you. Gustav asked me to marry him. I knew he would and had very carefully thought over all the pros and cons. Well, to make a long story short, I accepted. I love him, Mother, and I think I will be happy. Is there ever any guarantee – no, but I think everything is for us.

Gustav has a very important job in Berlin. I am trying to get transferred there as I want to continue working and he fully appreciates that I am not a 'stay-at-home wife' and thank heaven he doesn't want me to be. It takes about a month for the US government to give him permission to marry, so we should be able to get married mid-February. Gustav has arranged for us to take over a suite at the Hotel Steinplatz in Berlin at first while things settle down and until we can find more permanent lodgings.

I should tell you a bit more about him. He is 41, Austrian from Vienna, now a US citizen, earns a salary of \$8,500 a year plus rental of house, maid etc free, which comes to about \$15,000 a year and an income which he has from real estate in America. He says that we must live completely on his salary and that my salary is mine to do as I please with. We figure we can save about \$5000 a year on his salary alone!

Mother darling, please keep your fingers crossed for me so that nothing goes wrong. I have become so fatalistic. I believe this time that I have found the guy I have been looking for and nothing must happen to destroy it.

I have written Papa with the news, but a rather more timid version than this!

I miss you, Mother. With all my love, and a loving nuzzle from Binker.

January 24, 1952

168 East 68th street, NYC

Dearest Caroline,

I read your letter dated Jan 13th with consternation. While it is nice to read that you seemingly so happy and in love, I am worried. We have been here before, have we not? I haven't even met your Gustav yet (is this perhaps intentional?) It seems frightfully soon to be announcing marriage. Except for the Jewish part, I don't know anything about him, his family. Is he at least good-looking?!

If you are determined to go ahead, then I am sad that I will not be able to be there to offer you some moral support – I have a show at a gallery in Boston in March, then a show at the Met, plus my exhibition at Curt's place to prepare for (22 pieces!) Marriage ceremonies are so funereal though – perhaps we are best to wait until you are hitched and we can celebrate without the ceremony!

Do you need anything? I have a darling little tea set I could ship over – Limoges porcelain, cream with gold rim belonging to Grandmother Callery. How about bed sheets? Napkins? These are the things I believe one needs these days to keep house...

Have you heard from your father yet? Who else knows?

I worry for you dearest, and I implore you to count to 10 before diving into this. But can only take your word for it when you say you know what you are doing. At least now I may have a hope of having a grandchild one day?!

Love to you and Binker (I hope he's not jealous, old Binks?)

Mother (Piet sends licks to you and a growl to Binks)

February 1st, 1952

Caroline,

We have not replied before now as we have been unsure of how to respond to your news, which came very much out of the blue last month. You include no information about your future husband, except to say that he is an 'Austrian refugee who has become American'. We have drawn our own conclusions from this, as I suppose you meant us to.

The very least you could do is to come home and talk this matter over with us, despite the pressure you are doubtless under to avoid this. If you are determined to go ahead without the slightest regard for us, then we can only conclude that you have made up your mind to go it entirely alone, which I deeply regret for our sake as well as yours.

Father and Paula

*

Caroline refolded the letters, their creases worn thin, and put them back in the box beneath the chair.

“ ‘Without the slightest regard for us’ ,” she rehearsed. “When did you show the slightest regard for me, Pa dear?” She scooped Harold into her arms and held him to her stomach. “And as for children Mother, no amount of persuasion in this world would have induced me to have a child. I’d rather have killed myself first.” Harold thrashed but she pinned him in tight. “Besides, why in hell would I want a child when I have you, Honeykit?” she whispered, nuzzling her nose into his soft, dappled fur.

MARY

1923

New York Times, Monday, June 19th 1923

F. R. COUDERT JR. TO WED DEBUTANTE; Young New York Lawyer to marry Miss Mary Kenna Callery of Pittsburgh.

Mr and Mrs James Dawson Callery announced last night that Mr Coudert Jr. will be their guest at the Virginia Hot Springs, where the two will marry Saturday...

The church oak beams creak in the lewd heat. Six months after they waltzed on the dance floor of the Waldorf Astoria, Mary finds herself standing at the front of Sacred Heart church about to become Mrs Frederick Rene Coudert Jr. She wears a cream silk gown with forty cream silk buttons running down her back, and a veil of French lace which froths down her back and over her face. The veil will soon be lifted by her new spouse, he will kiss her lips (still Rubinstein, this time Hawaiian Peach) and they will set off on their honeymoon, a weekend in Key West, before returning to their new life together in Manhattan.

Mother and Papa Callery had wept with joy when Mary and her ‘Fritz’ announced the engagement at a party on the North Shore back in March. They drank champagne and Papa handed Fritz and his father one of his fat Por Larranaga cigars.

“To our daughter, the wife of the future Republican candidate for New York county, and our new son-in-law Fritz!” James announced, and Callery glasses met with Coudert glasses in an uproarious round of clinking.

Fritz bowed his head deferentially, “I’ve only just graduated, Sir. The candidacy is a ways off yet...”

But Coudert Senior put his hand on his son’s shoulder. “We’re mighty proud of you, Fritz, for all you have achieved. But Jim is right. No point dreaming about things – the key to success is already being there in your mind.”

Mary took up her place beside her fiancé and took a sip of champagne. “Oh don’t let’s talk business now. Can’t we just enjoy the moment?”

Ellen Milton (soon to be Mrs Wallace ‘Wally’ Harrison) was present, along with Mary Burchell (soon to be Mrs Edward ‘Eddie’ Mathews) and Kate Jennings, alone, wearing a pair of Paul Poiret-inspired harem pants and smoking a cheroot.

“I don’t care for men,” Kate told Mary later as they sat on the porch drinking whisky, watching the stars spill out over the ocean. “Or women, before you ask. Relationships bore me. Even the thought of having to consider someone else makes me feel like I’m...suffocating in corsets and cage crinolines. Besides which, I wouldn’t know where to start with keeping house...Not that I’m not pleased for you, dearest,” she added with a grin.

Mary glanced through the window at her beau on the other side, who was talking animatedly with Papa and Coudert Snr about politics, no doubt, and where President Harding was going to take us all next. “Fritz is good for me. He’s a solid fellow with good connections. And besides, he doesn’t seek to stifle my ambitions. He knows I want to continue with my sculpture and he is supportive of it.”

“Supportive of it ...for now?”

“Kate Jennings, if I didn’t know you better I’d think you were being provocative...” Mary took a long drag on her cigarette and flicked the ash over the side of the porch.

“Me? No dearest. Never. I just can’t help remembering the gay times we had at Spence..”

“And the not-so-gay times. We were nearly expelled, if you remember.” The two looked at each other and threw their heads back in laughter.

“Flooding the science laboratory was entirely your doing, Mrs Coudert.”

Mary feigned outrage and shook her head at Kate. “It was either that or watch the place go up in flames thanks to you and your inability to use a Bunsen burner.”

“I was showing off. There is a distinct and crucial difference!”

“Whatever, we nearly caused Miss Spence a heart attack. That’s not even counting all the other tricks. Remember Ellen and the mouse?”

“Ha! The poor dear nearly died of fright. That was cruel of us, thinking about it, but Ellen makes it so damn easy...”

“We were bad girls. But it was so much fun!”

“Clara Spence died earlier this year. Can you believe it? I thought she would live forever. Dear old Clara Spence. “Not for school, but for life we learn!”” Kate rehearsed, waving her cigarette like a conductor’s baton.

“But in reality, it’s for marriage we learn, right?” Mary looked out at the wavering sky. “Look at me. Look at our esteemed friends with their beaux. What are we doing, Kate?”

Kate patted her friend’s leg. “About to start on the biggest adventure of your lives. Don’t change, Mrs Coudert. Grow.”

“I intend to.” Mary took Kate’s hand and turned to her. “And for your information, dearest, it’s Mrs *Callery* Coudert. Don’t ever forget that.”

**

Gold roses tied with pink ribbon are the only decorative nod at the ceremony, they bloom over the altar and out of vases at either side of the entrance. Mary would have preferred a smooth, less whimsical bloom like a lily, but Mother Coudert told her that lilies were funereal.

“And besides, gold roses are traditional.”

“Isn’t it sometimes refreshing to buck tradition though, Mother?”

“In matters of matrimony, tradition is not to be ‘bucked’. Oh my dear, what on earth are they teaching you at that arts league? You do have some funny notions!”

Aside from the roses, Mary’s simple aesthetic is spoiled only by the press representatives who have gathered at the back of the church. She recognises a photographer from the Herald, and that squat, cigar-chewing reporter from the Tribune. She gives them a nod as she enters the church, but when she arrives at the altar, Fritz’s top lip is taut and he is blinking frantically behind his glasses.

She knows this expression by now, it is not nerves but an anxiety born of a desire to please and do well, like a schoolboy before his teacher. Mary isn’t certain whether it is

the occasion or the press, or both, which have set him on edge, but she finds it discomfoting and most unattractive.

“It’s OK, dear,” she whispers and he affects a smile without looking at her.

The beams creak, providing a chorus for the vows, in a ceremony which will later be reported in the Tribune as ‘tastefully understated’ with an ‘attractive bride’. The couple leave the church to Mendelssohn under a rain of colored confetti, and as the press contingent leaves, Mary watches her husband visibly unwind like a fishing reel. He takes her hand and kisses her on the lips.

“You look mighty fine, Mrs Coudert.”

“Thank you, Mr Coudert. As do you.”

A weekend honeymoon at Key West is spent locating Cuban rum in the shadow of temperance and making the sort of apologetic love of two people who have only just discovered sex and each other’s bodies. It is tempered by the prospect of going home to New York so soon, back to a starched apartment on Fifth Avenue (from the Coudert portfolio, donated as a wedding gift).

Mary has plans for her new abode. Out with the flouncy drapes, the dark portraits of centuries of dead relatives, in with clean lines, and an altogether more European influence. But Mother Coudert also has plans; in fact, while her son and his new wife honeymoon, she is having a whole suite of antique black walnut furniture installed, walls papered by William Morris (the Daisy design, a fresh, whimsical bloom to welcome them into their marriage), and all the floors carpeted, in the style befitting New York’s newest society couple.

CAROLINE

SALZBURG, 1952

She married Gustav Bard in Salzburg on the first day of spring, 1952. The sky was clear, the sun was crisp and the first shoots of bougainvillea poked out from the tumbling vines in the garden of Charles and Julia Demney. Charles was a stout-waisted New Jersey expat working with Gustav at the Embassy. He rolled a cigar around his mouth constantly, he thought it gave him gravitas, but somehow his face wasn't characterful enough to carry it off.

Julia, pronounced 'Yulia', was the least 'hausfrauish' of the wives. At least she drank occasionally, and, Caroline noted from the orangey patches between her fingers, smoked. Julia had been helping Caroline with her German for several months, and when the engagement was announced she had *insisted* that the Demneys be allowed to host the wedding *bei uns*.

"Consider it our gift to you and Gustav," she had told Caroline.

The ceremony was quick, upbeat, as un-funereal as Caroline could make it. God forbid she had to write Mother and tell her otherwise. Caroline wore a simple champagne-colored suit overlaid with lace, a pair of gold stud earrings and a pin by Sandy Calder that Mother had sent. The pin was really too large for the suit, but wearing it on her breast made her feel closer to Mother on this most momentous of days.

Gustav wore a gray suit, his hair gleaming with lacquer and ridged where the comb tines had trailed through it. He smiled when he saw her and stroked her hand tenderly as the marriage vows were read.

"It feels so strange being a 'Mrs'," Caroline told Gustav afterwards, as they sat with their friends and a few invited guests under the vast pagoda in the Demney's garden. "I can hardly say it!"

"Mrs Bard!" said Gustav, equally bemused by the novelty of his wife.

"I truly am happy as a lark, dearest. It feels too good to be true."

“It is true though, so let yourself be happy. Soon we will be in Berlin together and I promise, I will find you the house of your dreams Caroline.”

Caroline squeezed his hand and felt, for the first time, his wedding band against her skin. Charles Demney summoned more champagne and they all toasted the happy couple. Bill Worm, Gustav’s subordinate after the war, raised his glass and shouted; “Bravo! I always said Gustav was the only one to tame you, Caroline!”

“To handle me, you said Bill! Am I in need of taming too?”

“She can remain untamed,” said Gustav.

“You say that now...” Bill drained his champagne and winked at Caroline.

Caroline smiled back but she was annoyed by Bill’s inference. She had had her moments of unruliness, but who hadn’t? She was grown now, in love, preparing to settle down with a wonderful man. Why did people seem intent on blighting her happiness before it had even begun?

She thought about Pa and Paula. She hadn’t heard from them since his terse letter back in February. Mother had said he would calm down, but so far he showed no signs of relenting. Perhaps he had thought she wouldn’t go ahead with it, but his attitude had only made her want to marry right away. *Screw them*, she had told Binker as she prepared herself to become Mrs Bard. *He never cared for my welfare before, what makes him think he can pretend to care for it now?*

Still, when she thought about the gifts she and Gustav had already received – the envelopes stuffed with money from Mary and Eddie Mathews, Ellen and Wally Harrison, linen from her dear friend Nancy, a beautiful Matisse lithograph from Carlo – not to mention the countless letters from other friends asking what they would like, she couldn’t rid her mind of the bitter fact that she had had no such gesture from any of the Couderts.

She suddenly had a violent need for her mother. It came over her like sickness, and she leaned over to Julia Demney and whispered:

“Dearest, would you mind if I used your telephone?”

“Everything is OK?” Julia asked.

“Yes, I just...” Caroline looked around the table at the handful of guests who had come to see her and Gustav on their way. All his friends; now hers. “I just need to speak to my mother...” She spoke breathlessly, her throat closing around the word ‘mother’.

Julia led her indoors and showed her to the telephone. Caroline thanked her and waited for her to go back outdoors before calling the operator. She listened to the familiar clicks and whirs that had become the prologue to her relationship with her mother. Caroline pictured the phone that was about to start ringing in the house on East 68th Street, Manhattan. It sat between a vase of flowers (peonies, Mother’s favorites) and an overflowing ashtray, on the black console table designed by Breuer.

In her mind, Caroline roamed the house; oak-paneled walls with their hidden closets (inside, she knew, Mother kept linens and blankets, everyday unromantic spoils of a household out of sight of everyone but Puma, the maid.) Two Van der Rohe armchairs sitting either side of the glass Van der Rohe coffee table, five bent wood chairs around a Knoll dining table.

And four massive canvases presiding over it all, a Glarner, Picasso’s *Woman with Rooster*, an early Léger, and in the corner, by the window, always part-obscured by a curtain, Picasso’s *La Baignade*, whose looming male figure on the horizon always gave Caroline the creeps.

She wandered into Mother’s bedroom and saw a white fur throw, lying across the bed like fresh snowfall. The shelves above were a rowdy collection of sculptures, all shoving each other to be noticed. Mother’s work predominated; studies, mainly, for larger works: *Pyramid*, *Equilbrist*, a dog in clay from her *Young Diana II*, but in amongst them Caroline recalled an Arp, a couple of Henri Laurens’ *Sirènes* and an early Giacometti.

On the nearside wall was the small, framed Mondrian...

“There is no connection, Ma’am,” came a voice. It jolted her out of the house, out of Manhattan, over the ocean and back to the foyer of the Demney house in Saltzburg, Germany. “Please try later.”

The line went dead. Caroline grasped the receiver in a white-hot fist and listened to the silence on the other end. When the tears had passed, she placed it back in its cradle and stepped back outside into the lemony March afternoon.

“Here comes the bride!” shouted Bill Worm. A round of applause. Caroline smiled.

“Did you speak with your mother?” Julia asked as she sat back down.

“No connection. Atmospheric disturbances or some such thing I should imagine.” She picked up her champagne and drained it in one. “No matter. I’ll try again another time.”

“To love!” shouted Charles Demney out of the side of his cigar. “To Caroline and Gustav! And to the happiest of futures!”

MARY

NORTHERN SPAIN, NOVEMBER 1966

In her house in Cadaques, Mary looks into the closet in her bedroom and forgets, momentarily, what she opened it for.

“Yes. Suitcase,” she says. “Where the hell does Pepita keep them these days?” She rummages behind hat boxes and bags and finds a Vuitton trunk tucked at the back. The effort of exhuming it leaves her catching her breath on the bed. Now, what to pack? She could call Pepita, but she can’t be bothered with the babble which follows in her wake. Her clothes seem to hang limply before her, reflecting her mood.

She calls her old friend Nelly van Doesburg who lives round the corner with her dogs. Nelly knows her almost as well as she knows herself. They met in Paris when Modernism was tearing through Europe like rage, before the war swung in and hurled them all in different directions. But it was grief, not Modernism, which brought them together.

Nelly had lost her Theo the previous year, Mary had just divorced Fritz, and they found each other through mutual friends over late brandies at the Jockey Club. Piet Mondrian, well-aged by that point yet still fleet of foot, had asked Mary to dance. Mary accepted and stunned the entire crowd by somehow keeping up with Mondrian’s singular interpretation of the tango.

“He’ll declare love to you now, you watch,” Nelly told her when she finally sat down.

“He can declare anything,” she replied. “He’s Piet Mondrian for god’s sake! Besides, I could do with a little male attention. It feels as though it’s been a while...”

“I know what you mean,” Nelly shouted to be heard over the music. “I may be a widow but I’m still a woman.”

Cigarette smoke was stacked like strata in the room, and peering through it Mary noticed her new acquaintance properly for the first time. “I’ll drink to that. I’m Mary Callery. Glad to meet you.”

“I know who you are,” replied Nelly. “And I’m glad to meet you too.”

Mary is relieved to hear Nelly's voice on the other end of the phone. "Dearest, could you come over? Are you busy?"

Nelly is midway through lunch. She puts her knife down and dabs her mouth with a napkin. "What's wrong Mary? I can hear something in your voice."

"I just need you, dear..." Mary feels abstracted from herself, like one of Pablo's paintings.

Nelly shoos a fly from the slab of paté she is eating and places a saucer over it. "I'll be right there."

She arrives at Mary's house carrying the bottle of red wine she has been drinking with lunch, the cork hastily plugged in the top. Something in Mary's face has changed. It looks palsied, but by what hell Nelly cannot guess.

Mary falters momentarily when she sees her old friend. "Caroline's dead, Nelly. Oh god, Caroline is dead!"

Nelly is struck by the vision of Caroline, a muddy blonde, sitting on Mary's boat, drinking a Martini and wearing sunglasses shaped like twisted teardrops. The vision is no more than a few months old. How could what Mary was telling her be true?

"Fritz called," Mary goes on. "She fell from a window." Mary looks at Nelly squarely in the eyes, but neither woman says anything. Nelly goes to the kitchen and takes two glasses from the shelf. She empties the bottle of wine into them and hands one to Mary.

"For the first time in my life, I can't find the words to say to you, Mary."

"I don't expect any, because there are none. The funeral is in New York. I leave tomorrow."

In the silence, Nelly begins to pack clothes into the Vuitton trunk.

CAROLINE

BERLIN, 1952

Hotel Steinplatz

Berlin

March 25th, 1952

Dearest M,

Well, wedding was lovely – not at all funereal! I tried to telephone you afterwards, but there was no connection. I do wish you could have been there, but I understand your commitments. How are the preparations coming on for your show at Curt Valentin's? Which pieces will you be including? Young Diana, I assume, and Orpheus? What about Perhaps? I adore Young Diana (the dog, as a study of darling Piet, is a total success.)

Gustav and I went to Hamburg for the weekend. It's a fine place and gay. G wrote you a note from there, which I enclose. He does so want to get to know you Mother. He's more interested in pleasing you than he is me! (Perhaps he knows that pleasing me means pleasing you!)

Mother, re. my will – I would like to change it – leaving everything to you and in the event that you should die before I do, I would want it to go to Gustav and not to the Chase Bank or anything else. I would also in that case want him to be executor – along with Charlie. But let's hope no-one dies!

Needless to say, we still have no house! But I love this hotel, so am quite satisfied. We are going to hear the Philharmonic tonight – Beethoven festival is going on now.

Write me soon, still to the Steinplatz

Give my love to Curt. And much, much love to you.

ME

Caroline ran her tongue along the seam of the envelope and sealed it tight. She wished she could post herself to Mother, along with the letter. She was happy as a lark in Berlin, of course, but that didn't stop her heart from occasionally yearning for home.

Home. For Caroline, it was Manhattan, although Paris would always run through her veins. Berlin...was clean. And for that she was thankful, for who would want to live in squalor, especially after the atrocities of the war. Anyway, home, she was beginning to realize, was where Mother was, even though she knew Mother almost certainly didn't feel the same.

"Ultimately, we are all alone. You must find your own way in life, Caroline," Mother had told her once. (So she'd gone to New Mexico, to Ghost Ranch, where she'd spent her time avoiding cowboys lest she be the subject of another scandal like the one she was escaping from in New York...)

Enough. She couldn't think about that now. Thoughts like that were part of a past which she had now shed by marrying her darling Gustav. She left the letter for Mother with the concierge and, as Gustav was working, she decided to take a walk. From the hotel she cut a trail through the Tiergarten and walked until she found herself at the Reichstag building – or what remained of it. War had decimated its regal dome, leaving a charred steel frame like a giant cobweb in its place.

The smell of sizzling bratwurst rose from the stall of a nearby street vendor. She bought one and sat on the grassland opposite the Reichstag to eat it. Looking around, she concluded that while Berlin may have been clean, it was also painted in a palette of grays. The people were gray (especially the women, which secretly made her feel less threatened than she did in Paris). Even the Spring sky was gray. Perhaps it merely reflected the land below. Her mood, though, was not gray. And if ever she felt it dampening, she only needed to remind herself of how lucky she was to have Gustav.

Tonight they would go to the Philharmonic and hear Beethoven. It struck her that she had not laid her fingers on the keys of a piano since she left New York. She had reached a reasonable level, and could play *Moonlight Sonata* with some style – as witnessed by guests of Papa and Paula at many an excruciating drunken party, when she had been wheeled out to perform. Perhaps she ought to ask Gustav if they could buy a piano so she might play again?

Finishing the bratwurst, she mused on how life, from now on, could only get better. Furthermore, she wouldn't let anything, or anyone, destroy her happiness.

MARY

NEW YORK, 1924

Mary has just arrived home from class at the Arts Students League in New York when she sees the letter. She knows what news lies inside, but she hopes that by not opening the envelope, she may stop it from being true.

In the end, Fritz opens it – a flick of the letter opener and her life changes forever.

“Dr Grossman says you’re due June 23rd. Our wedding anniversary! How about that?”

“How about that?” Mary replies.

“You’re to make an appointment with your gynaecologist. This is fine news, right?”

“Right.”

Fritz kisses her on the top of her head and heads for his study, carrying a clutch of other correspondence. He stops in the doorway. “Anything I can have Marguerite get you?”

Mary shakes her head. “But Fritz?” He looks at her over the top of his spectacles. “I can still continue with my studies, right?”

“Sure.” And then; “Although why you would want to be among all that clay and dust is beyond me. You have to take care of yourself now, Mary. And of our son.” He leaves her, stricken on the chaise longue.

All that clay and dust is like oxygen, she wants to tell him. Just like your goddamn speeches and meetings. Without it, I can’t breathe, and neither can our...child.

She opens her purse and brings out her smoking paraphernalia. She slips a cigarette into the holder and lights it, then draws its smoke into her lungs.

“Besides,” she says into the empty room. “What makes you so goddamn sure it’s a boy?”

Next day in class, her tutor Edward McCartan is talking about his sculpture entitled Diana. It is one of Mary’s favorites – the lean, modern fluidity of the dog alongside the robust mythical nymph is a juxtaposition which appeals to her. McCartan is

explaining how he achieved the effects of muscular tension and the strong bodylines in the piece, and why it earned him the Medal of Honor from the Concord Art Association.

Mary watches him as he talks about his Diana as if she were a cherished child. She thinks about her own child, as yet just a ball of cells, but growing inexorably within her with each passing day. She had planned to inform McCartan about her pregnancy, but sitting here listening to him now she feels she can't. Not yet, not until it is irrefutable.

McCartan had told Mary she was an 'intelligent' sculptor, with 'wit and flair'. Out of all the students on the course, she, he had declared, was the one to watch. The challenge for her now, he said, was to 'distil' the singular aspects of her personality into everything she created. Only then would her work transcend the status of 'object', and take on an emotional life.

She fears that this wit and flair, this sculptural intelligence, will somehow be compromised by the news, that McCartan will regret his praise and realize that she is, after all, just another society wife.

Privately, she damns the child inside her. It is so predictable, is it not, this course she has found herself on? All over New York State, her contemporaries have entered the same phase in their marriages. Over in Peconic Bay, Ellen and Wally Harrison already have one child and are expecting a second. (And boy doesn't Ellen like to tell everyone about it! She scatters her pearls of parenting wisdom liberally as if she is the first human ever to have given birth. This latest news about Mary will send her into a frenzy!)

Mary and Eddie Mathews are in Wainscott, trying, after a recent miscarriage, to conceive. (Miscarriage too being one of Ellen's specialist subjects. Mary ought to take iron supplements, apparently.) Conversations about babies and their associated appurtenances bore her rigid, yet she knows that once the news is out, from the Colony Club to this classroom in the Arts Students League, she will become defined by the contents of her womb.

McCartan finishes speaking, and invites his students to consider his words in relation to the model they have been tasked to sculpt – a human figure, with a focus on the main muscle groups. The armatures were made in a previous session, now it is the

time to work the clay on to them. Chatter rises in the room, but as Mary turns the armature in her fingers, she hears nothing but her own thoughts about the figure she is about to create.

How will an extended arm impact on the representation of muscular tension? Should she perhaps bend it instead, so that the biceps are more readily seen? She consults an image of the human arm in her anatomy book. An arm extended downwards shows the deltoid muscle in pleasing relief. But bent, the muscle is foreshortened, and therefore provides an interesting change in perspective. So, one arm bent, one arm straight, then? She manipulates the armature until the metal is warm between her fingers and the figure is satisfactorily posed.

She begins by building thin layers of clay around the armature until the figure is bulky yet vaguely recognisable as a human form. She then uses various lengths and thicknesses of lumber to flatten and hone, creating the body's gentle undulations. Then to the rake tool, to create depth and perspective, using her sculptor's eye to continually gauge and correct proportion.

What aspects of herself could she distil within this study in order to give it that emotional life McCartan spoke of? This had been his challenge to her, and as she works the clay, it comes to her - she feels herself become the figure, as if its taut and complex muscular structure were an extension of her own.

She stands back from her work at the end of the session, incomplete though it is, and feels exhausted and elated. She has left imperceptible fragments of herself in the sculpture; in fingerprints, in shed skin, but also emotional fragments which cannot be quantified. They are delicious secrets she shares with the clay. As she packs up her tools, it occurs to her that for the first time since the news of her pregnancy, she hasn't given the child inside her a second thought.

Mary and Fritz eat at home that evening; an occurrence usually reserved for when they have guests. Mary would prefer to have dined out, wishing for the sounds of gay chatter to shield her from the reality of her condition. But Fritz has already instructed Marguerite to prepare steak and have the new Swiss maid open up the dining room.

Over dinner, Fritz announces that he has told his parents the good news. Mary chews her steak slowly, delaying the need for a response. She swallows, the meat seeming to lodge in her throat. She takes a sip of wine and smiles at her husband.

“I’m seeing Mother on the weekend. I’ll wait to tell her then.” Mary has already imagined Julia Callery’s response. Julia has grandchildren already, but they are those of poor dead Marcella, James Callery’s first wife. Although she has never admitted it, she feels this distance intensely. But a child of Mary’s will be her first *real* grandchild, and Mary knows it will be loved above all other.

“Well I would imagine news might reach her before then dear. Surely it would be better coming from you sooner rather than later?”

Mary nods. She looks out, past Mrs Coudert’s statue of Proserpine on the sill, through the vast plate window and onto the opposite buildings on Fifth Avenue. The tears that sting her eyes, Mary tells Fritz, are due to hormones. According to Ellen Harrison, acute emotional surges are to be expected in pregnancy. They won’t, she has been heard to say, last forever.

CAROLINE
BERLIN, 1952

Gustav stood at the window of their suite in the Steinplatz Hotel in Berlin and looked out over the square. A freezing winter had ravaged the trees, giving the whole place a desolate look. Inside, his wife of almost a year was pacing the carpet behind him. “Problem is, dearest, is that we’ve been living in this fucking hotel since we got married, and frankly, my cat doesn’t like it,” she was saying. “He needs space to roam, and so do I.”

She had been goading him for a reaction for over half an hour, but he wasn’t about to give it. The life he was providing here was fit for a queen; who else among their friends could boast diamond chandeliers and their own butler service, not to mention access to a newly-opened basement bar, patronized by the likes of Günter Grass and Brigitte Bardot? Sure it wasn’t their own home, but in this period of professional flux, it was the very best he could do. She ought to be a little more grateful.

“Are you listening, husband?” Caroline staggered towards him, waving a depleted bottle of cognac above her head like a cheerleader with a pom-pom. He turned just in time as she lunged at him. He wrenched the bottle from her. “For God’s sake Caroline, you’ve drunk nearly the whole bottle!”

“*For Gott’s sake!*” she said, mocking his clipped accent. “*For Gott’s sake*, I do believe I have!”

“You’re a disgrace. You’re an alcoholic. You need help.”

“Hmmm. Can we talk about it, Gustav? Can we, like, analyse my fucking drinking problem for hours and hours and hours, like we do every single issue in our goddamn marriage?”

There was a bang on the wall from a neighboring room. “You want to come in here and do that?” Caroline shouted through the partition. “Yeah, come over and you can talk about it with Gustav for hours and hours and hours..!”

Gustav dragged her away by the wrist and she giggled like a little girl. “Go on, Gustav,” she said, “Pin me to the bed and fuck me like you mean it.”

“You’re beastly drunk. Vulgar...”

“I mean it Gustav. I’m tired of making sweet, passionless love. Be a man for *Gott’s* sake.” She laughed again and for a moment she thought he might hit her, but instead he released her wrist, walked steadily into the bathroom and closed the door. “Hmmm, I thought so,” she shouted after him, but he didn’t respond.

Binker, his eyes two massive black orbs, watched her from the bed. She flopped in alongside him and he started to purr. “Sorry you had to see Mommy and Daddy fighting like that. Mommy loves you Binks.” The cat yawned and settled his head into her neck.

When she woke, dusk was creeping in through the open curtains. Gustav was gone, in his place, a note of three words:

Downstairs for dinner.

Her mouth was dry. Her head throbbed. She reached for the glass of water by the bed and drank from it until the last drop dribbled onto her tongue. Binker stretched flamboyantly and stood up, mewling to go out. Caroline attached his leash and led him towards the door.

“Come on then Binks, let’s go find Daddy.”

They padded down the hallway towards the elevator. The cat was used to these excursions, yet still startled at each new sound. The elevator opened to reveal the elderly Mr and Mrs Blum, both of them crooked with rheumatism.

“Guten Abend, Herr Binker,” Mrs Blum said, just as Caroline knew she would.

Caroline meowed, “Guten Abend, Frau Blum,” through the corner of her mouth and they all chuckled and went their separate ways, content that the daily ritual had been observed.

She saw him in the restaurant, sitting, predictably, in the corner table, away from the babble of other diners. He was removing the skin from a fillet of fish with the precision of a pathologist. She watched him for a moment, still woozy with booze, and it crossed her mind that he wasn’t all that bad really. She could have done a lot

worse. Like Mark, for example, the loser she almost married. Gustav loved her, despite all her faults. She moved towards him and he looked up at her from his fish skin, then dropped his gaze to her feet and started shaking his head.

“Caroline...” he put the cutlery down and stood up, “Caroline, you have no shoes on, you simply can’t let them see you in here with no shoes on...” and he began bustling her back out of the restaurant.

“Gustav, darling, I’m sorry...” she was saying, the cat dragging behind her on its leash.

“That’s all right, dear, now just you go back upstairs and I’ll fix you up with some supper.”

“Binker needs to pee...”

“Yes, dear, that’s all right, I’ll take him, you hurry along now and I’ll be right there.”

He pushed her gently into the elevator and sent her on her way to the seventh floor and the safety of their suite. Dusk had swallowed the room now, and she turned on all the lights before her fears took hold. Darkness made her somehow more lonely than usual – it had always had the same effect, right from when she was a small child.

She lay on the bed and stared at the Artex on the ceiling, yellowed by cigarette smoke and years of guests. She closed one eye, trying to focus on the pattern. Gustav may not have been the most exciting of men, but there’s no doubting he cared about her. Her thoughts turned to Mark, beastly Mark, and she was reminded of the nausea which swept through her guts with each mention of his name.

She was young – twenty-five at most - and already being wooed by Paris when she met him, but she was also terribly lonesome for home. Mother was in New York exhibiting for the first time at Buchholz, enamored of Mies Van der Rohe, radiating effortlessly all over Manhattan. It was only natural Caroline would get swept up by the tall, dark New York expat Mark and his tales of late nights with artists in the Marais. He straddled both worlds, and Mother, she thought, would be impressed by his knowledge of the art world.

Besides, it was not that long after the war, everyone was caught up in a mood of hedonism. Caroline was the sole resident at Mother’s apartment on Place du Marché, so had access to an exceptionally chic pied-a-terre right in the centre of town. (After

all, who else her age occupied the top floor of a building in Paris, an apartment whose walls were laden with original artworks, and furnished with a fully stocked bar?)

She can still hear the rattle of the concierge's bead curtain now, like the warning knell of a snake, from the first night she took Mark back to the apartment.

"Bonsoir, Madame Jullien!" she had shouted at the shadow behind the quivering beads, and they'd disappeared up the curling staircase in peals of hysterical laughter. "I hate these Parisian concierges," she told him as she opened the door. "Terminally miserable and so goddamn rude."

He grabbed her by the waist and pinned her against the wall. "Are you and I going to be goddamn rude together?"

"Yes!" she said, giggling. "I could be rude..."

"You're a swell girl Caroline. I'm so glad we met." He kissed her deeply on the lips, a Rhett and Scarlett kiss, and she fell for it and thought at that moment she might be in love.

They had sex, right there in the middle of the hallway, beneath Picasso's Seated Woman and one of Modigliani's sleeping nudes. Mark spent the next few hours walking around the place naked, like it was his own private gallery, drinking Mary's brandy and asking Caroline about her mother's 'startling' art collection. They talked through until dawn, when he leapt up and said; "Do you smoke?"

"Marijuana?"

"Yeah...I can get some. You want some?"

"...sure..."

He kissed her again and began pulling on his clothes. "I love that we have this place to hide away in. I'll be gone an hour. Why don't you go and get the bed warm?"

She'd smoked pot once, at Columbia, and hated it. It left her with nothing but a dull headache that sat behind her eyes for days. Liquor had always been her vice, but if it pleased Mark she would share some with him. It had been a while – since The Scandal at Columbia, in fact – that she'd felt entirely comfortable with a man. He returned as he said he would, with a small bag of marijuana and a vastly changed demeanour.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It’s...well, I bumped into my ex-girl while I was out. She’s trouble, Pauline, I just...I just wish I hadn’t seen her.”

Caroline ran a finger across his forehead. “Did she break your heart?”

“Hell no. I broke hers. But I can’t shake her off. Everywhere I go, she’s there.” He began rolling a cigarette, and seeded it lightly with the weed. He took a long, deep drag and she watched him relax. He handed her the joint with a kiss. “I’m sorry honey. Let’s not spare her another thought.”

Three months, a marriage proposal and an engagement party later, Mark told her it wasn’t going to work. He was still in love with Pauline and they were going to give it another go. Caroline threw the ring into the Seine, and watched it recede into the depths like a silver fish.

Mother,

Regarding my marriage – it is all over. You can imagine how I feel. I’m sorry for the anguish I have caused you over this matter. If anything happened between you and me, I would be utterly lost. I guess we all rebel against our parents!?! I wish it didn’t have to be that way.

I am the first to admit that something is distinctly wrong with me and I shall continue my solitary and lonely existence and probably jump into the Seine or some such thing in the near future.

Mother, forgive me for being the way I am – I guess I’m just a rotten lot.

Much love,

Caroline

Gustav arrived back at the suite, followed closely by the cat and a bellboy carrying a tray covered with a silver cloche. The cat pushed in ahead of them and Gustav instructed the bellboy to put the tray down on the table. He handed him a note and the bellboy left.

“I ordered you some toast and eggs. And a pot of strong coffee.” He didn’t look at her as he unclipped his cufflinks and placed them on the dresser.

“I apologise for earlier, Gustav. It was just the drink...”

“It’s always just the drink.”

“I’m so terribly lonesome here in Berlin.”

“You say this, you always say this, but I do not understand. Why are you lonesome? You are surrounded by people who love you, not least I. We have some great friends here. You have your cat.” She wished she would hear some fire in his voice, but he never spoke in anything but a measured tone.

“I miss my mother ...”

“Your mother! All I hear about is your mother! Let’s go to New York then. I’ll pack up work and we’ll go.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Gustav...”

“You know, you’re like a child. And there comes a time when every child has to leave its mother. I am your family now.”

She caught sight of herself for the first time in the mirror above the dresser. Her face was crumpled from where it had lain heavily on the pillow; dried rivulets of mascara had begun to crack on her cheeks.

“You’re right, of course,” she said, watching the child in the mirror pretending to be grown-up. “I’m sorry. I’ll change, Gustav. I promise.”

“Gut, mein Schatz,” he said, and kissed her lightly on the cheek. “Now, supper.”

She stabbed her fork into the eggs and started to eat.

MARY

Northern Spain, November 1966

Cadaques under a cloudless November sky. The two friends sit on the balcony of Mary's bedroom, waiting for her driver, Alexandro, to arrive to take her to the airport. The last of the gin is shared between two cut glass tumblers. They look out at the buildings before them, arranged like bones uncovered in an archaeological dig.

"We came to Cadaques for the light. Magritte, Miró, Duchamp. Even Pablo came once or twice." Mary says. "We were like moths to a flame. You can see why, looking at it from here."

Nelly nods. "The light and the parties. We've had some gay times here, that's for sure. Remember the costume party at the Staempfli's last year?"

"Barbara Curtis tearing about the cobbles dressed up as Molly b'Damned, scaring all the locals with her bosoms. I blame those seeds of madness carried by the wind, rendering us all temporarily insane."

Nelly laughs. "It's a wonder we haven't all been blackballed. Though they would never do that to you, Mary. You're far too urbane for that."

Mary smiles at her friend. "And I am far too generous with my tips... Dearest, when I die – and I don't much care when that time is – but when it happens, see to it that my ashes are brought here."

Nelly places her hand on Mary's. "Don't get maudlin..."

"Nonsense. We need to talk about death. I certainly don't want to end up in some cemetery in Pittsburgh, or alongside Fritz in goddamn Oyster Bay. I want to be up there, in the cemetery at Saint Baldiri, where the light is. Plant a tree on me and be done with it." The doorbell sounds. "That'll be Alexandro with the car."

"I wish I could go with you. I'll be there in spirit. Give my love to Caroline..." Nelly's voice tapers off. She staunches the tears with a last slug of gin.

Sentimentality is one aspect of the European psyche that Mary has never truly understood or embraced. She places an arm around her friend and kisses her lightly on the forehead. "I'll call when I can. Take care, dearest." The dog, Filou, pads over to her from where he's been toasting his belly by the log burner. "Oh darling Flou-Flou!" Mary bends down and the animal looks at her sulkily from beneath fuzzy black bangs. "Nelly will look after you while I'm gone, won't you Nelly?" She kisses his muzzle and he places a heavy paw on her forearm. It is a tactic that has worked in the past to secure him a place on a trip he wasn't otherwise destined for.

"Not this time, dearest. Mommy will be back soon."

The Vuitton trunk is loaded into the car, along with three rolled up Picasso canvases that Mary is taking back to New York to sell. Shock and the agonising wait for a flight back to New York had propelled her into a period of feverish decision-making, and these Picasso canvases were a casualty. She'd never particularly liked them (they were of Françoise Gilot, arch enemy of her good friend Dora Maar) and now seemed as good a time as any to get rid of them. Besides, she had just commissioned her friend, the architect Peter Harnden, to design her another house and studio in Cadaques and she needed the money.

As the car winds through the hills out of Cadaques, Mary lowers her sunglasses and allows her eye lids to drop. She thinks of the gay times in Paris, when as a young artist she'd become friends with Picasso and Dora, and he'd teased her about her work because she didn't have the courage to show it to him.

"Well, what have you done today? A seascape?" he would ask over a late whisky, and Mary would feel herself dissolving under his twinkling, mischievous gaze. And then he would become serious and say, "Don't work with a model. What do you need a model for? Don't you know that a human body has a head, two arms and two legs? You should do men, for you will understand them better. Men understand women better."

Mary, fresh from the atelier of Loutchansky, freshly divorced and still working to emulate McCartan and Maillol, looked at him in horror, fearing she would never fully understand his approach to art, let alone have a hope of employing his methods in her own work.

She thinks back to that ‘date’ they had – one single date, the week after they’d met in his garret on Rue la Boetie – and can’t stop a smile curling around her mouth. His chauffeur, Marcel, had picked her and her little dog, Gigolo, up and delivered them to Picasso. The painter told her she didn’t suit the dress she was wearing (the pattern was too fussy, he said, the style too girlish for a woman like Mary). The dog however, he said, was pleasingly unkempt.

“Whereas you’ve made such an effort yourself,” Mary replied, peevishly. Picasso shrugged his shoulders and pulled on a thin beige overcoat and a battered hat picked from a pile in the corner of the workshop.

“Vamos!” he shouted, climbing in the back of the car leaving Marcel to help Mary.

“So, where are you taking us?” she asked, settling Gigolo on her knee.

“I’m taking you to my chateau at Bois-Geloup. I want to show you my atelier de sculpture. You might learn something.”

The chateau stood in seclusion, fifty kilometres north of Paris. The surrounding parkland was seeded with his sculptures; they seemed to grow from the earth like strange and exotic plants. Mary remembered the excitement of that day, standing in the stable he had reserved for sculpting, running a finger down one of the white, plaster figures which would one day become a bronze. The light in that stable, seeping in through a narrow, horizontal window, seemed to slice through the dust.

Then she felt his hands on her breasts; him cupping them without permission, as if it were his right to fondle them, before wordlessly moving on to the next distraction. So nonchalant was this act that afterwards Mary wondered if she had imagined it. It was the sole advance he made toward her that day, and once it was done, once the tour of his empire was complete, the date, for him, was over. He had Marcel drop them all – dog included – back at Closerie de Lilas, where they fell in with Picasso’s usual crowd and talked about art into the night.

Where had Caroline been that day? She was there, in Paris, Mary is sure of it. Yes, Julia and George had brought her over the week before. Perhaps she’d stayed with Fritz, or otherwise Mary had left her with Julia. A nub of unease ignites in Mary’s gut. Where *had* Caroline been that day? Flattery and the prospect of an audience with Picasso had erased the child entirely from her consciousness.

She opens her eyes and examines the landscape. She is flying from Perpignan – the only flight she could get short notice – and as the car approaches the French border, Mary sees the customs officials. She places a hand on the rolled canvases, hoping the cab will be waved through. A squat official bangs his baton on the hood of the car.

“Ouvrez, s’il vous plait.”

Shit, Mary mutters under her breath.

Alexandro steps out of the car and opens the trunk. He places a cigarette on his bottom lip and lights it. The official glances into the car.

“Vous allez ou Madame?”

“A l’aéroport de Perpignan. Je retourne aux Etats Unis.”

« Americaine ? »

Mary rolls her eyes behind her sunglasses. “Oui.”

The official prods the end of the canvases with a stubby finger. “What is it?”

“Oh, those are rugs,” says Mary. “I’m taking them home as gifts.”

“Rugs?” The official prods more vigorously.

Mary takes a cigarette from her purse and lights it. “Oui. Des tapis, monsieur. Vous savez?”

The official shrugs and taps his baton on the front of the car again. He waves them through and Mary blows a plume of smoke out of the window. She can’t hold back a smirk. Dear Picasso! What would he say if he knew his paintings had been taken for rugs!

She tips Alexandro a decent amount of sous to take her belongings – including Picasso’s rugs – into the airport, and he replies with a bright “Gràcies, Señora Callery”, cigarette still bobbing on his bottom lip. Alone now, and waiting, she allows herself a terrifying thought: soon she’ll be flying over the Atlantic Ocean, back to Fritz, the Couderts, and the devastating reality that her only child is lost forever.

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, NOVEMBER 1966

12.32AM

“Change the record for me, Honeykit,” said Caroline, holding the cat’s face eye-to-eye with to her own. “More Bechet. How about Si Tu Vois Ma Mère? That would be a fitting choice, huh?”

Harold blinked at her.

“Hey! If *you* see Ma Mère, dear Harold, tell her I love her. OK?” She staggered to her feet and found the album, and threw it casually onto the turntable. Fists stacked one on top of the other, she mimicked Bechet’s sax.

Professor Barinov. She needed a blast of Bechet to think about that one. The Scandal that wasn’t a scandal, but which briefly ruined her life at Columbia as well as her parents’ reputation, apparently. It had started as these things always do – a student falls for a teacher, and the feeling, over a bottle of London Dry Gin, is revealed to be mutual.

What was it that had been so scandalous about it all? It seemed so long ago now, times had changed, it was hard to tell. Surely more scandalous had been the Lucien Carr affair, the ripples of which were still being felt across campus, even a year later. Carr had murdered another student for Christ’s sake, dumped his body in the Hudson River, but evidently, for the tittle-tattlers of old New York, this was less of a crime than sleeping with a married, well-connected University professor who was about to be appointed dean.

Was it that she was living under Mother’s roof on East 68th Street when it happened that brought such shame? Mother was away in Abiquiu, staying and working at Ghost Ranch with Georgia O’Keefe, what did she care about who was fucking who in her house? Papa was in the New York Senate, but she believed he cared so little for her at that point he wasn’t a consideration.

Professor Barinov taught art history, with a particular interest in photography. Caroline, in her first year and eager to impress, told him that her mother was friends with Man Ray. Indeed, Mother had been photographed by him. In fact, Mother was a keen photographer herself as well as being a sculptress with ateliers in Europe.

“I have a photograph of Picasso she took with her Rolleiflex. Picasso is sitting on a wall, holding Mother’s dog, Gigger. She developed it herself, in her studio in Paris.”

“Well that’s all very interesting, but what about you Caroline? Aside from your mother, what stirs you up about art, photography?”

She looked at him. “Art has always been there. Talking about it, making it, acquiring it. It feels as much part of me as blood and bone. I’ve never given much thought to any wider motivation.”

Barinov brought out a photograph and handed it to her. “Tell me about this picture.”

It was a black and white shot of an oak tree on an open plain, silhouetted against a battered sky, its branches weighed down with snow. “Is it Ansel Adams?” she asked.

“Tell me about the picture. Does it move you? Leave you cold?”

She looks at it for a while. “It’s beautiful. It reminds me of me. But not because of its beauty...”

He touched her face. “But you are beautiful.”

It was the first time she’d heard herself described in such terms. Most men just told her she looked like her mother. The compliment made her uneasy.

“Is it Adams?”

“No. It’s Barinov.”

He was older, married. But the latter had long since fizzled into something resembling convenience, he said. His wife was a ‘fine’ woman, happy as long as she could lunch twice a week and play rummy at the Colony Club with her cronies. But any physical relations between them had ended long ago and now they simply existed together in their apartment on Fifth Avenue, their conversations limited to muted requests to pass the salt.

Barinov was taller than Caroline, hazel eyes, a nose pocked and reddened by whisky. He was very brilliant, and she believed with all her heart that she was in love with him, and he with her. At first, they hid it; stealing kisses in lecture halls, in his office on campus. He photographed her in Mother’s apartment, first with her cat, then alone, then in the nude (how she’d laughed when she first stood before him without

the safety of clothing. “How are my tits?” she’d asked, looking down at the assets she’d always hated. “As perfect as I’d imagined,” he’d replied. “You’re beautiful, Caroline. Every part of you.” She’d laughed again and said, “You’re so full of shit, Professor!”)

Then, they grew bold. They went for walks in Central Park, stopped to listen to street musicians in Washington Square, their fingers loosely interlinked in case they needed to quickly pull apart. They sought out obscure restaurants and dimly-lit bars on the Lower East Side where they could sit alongside each other without fear of being seen.

The first time she knew something was amiss, she was swimming laps in the Colony Club spa. Two women, hair turbaned in pink towels, were having manicures done poolside. The beautician, (whom Caroline believed to be secretly an employee of the CIA) was talking about a Mrs Vladimir Barinov, member of the Club and regular manicure client.

“Of course, Mrs Barinov is mortified, but she wouldn’t say anything to Mr Barinov.” She zigzagged the nail file back and forth like a violinist playing Rimsky-Korsakov.

The pink turbans nodded. “What would be the point? Not as if it hasn’t happened before.”

“Par for the course with that one, I’m afraid,” said the other. “And she knows it. Just as well to keep her mouth shut so she doesn’t have to call herself a divorcee.”

Caroline reached the end of the pool and couldn’t help a loud and indignant exhalation. It ricocheted around the faux-Grecian fixtures.

The three women turned to look at the figure in the water. “I’m sorry?” said the beautician, nail file held aloft.

“Oh my Lord, that’s her,” whispered one of the pink turbans. “Mary Callery’s daughter.”

Caroline pulled herself out of the water, retrieved her towel from the lounge and scurried into the changing room. She dried herself in the narrow wooden cubicle, hoping that when she walked out, there would be no further talk of a student and Professor Vladimir Barinov. The letter arrived from Mother two days later.

Caroline,

I am so angry I can barely write this letter. The details of this sordid little affair have reached me here in New Mexico via several means, not least from the President of the Colony Club (who assures me that my welcome there is not compromised by your ghastly humiliation of me.)

Why on earth did you not tell me? By not doing so, you have disgraced me and the Callery name, not to mention that of your father. We could have worked through it, talked about it; I understand the lure of art and passion. But to carry on like this with a married man of his stature, knowing full well you would be under the gaze of the whole of Manhattan and beyond – well, how on earth did you think you'd get away with it?

How long has it been going on? When (and where??) was it consummated? You probably think you're in love, but god knows, he's not!

I feel impotent, being here, and fear for the next catastrophe. You have broken faith with me and I cannot begin to express my disappointment in you. I leave presently for my teaching post at Black Mountain College, but it will be with a heavy heart.

It pains me, but I am going to have to ask that you move out of the apartment. While I am not there to contain things, I must distance myself from this as far as possible – as, incidentally, must you. This ends now. You will come down and replace me at Ghost Ranch. Georgia awaits your arrival, you can help out on the farm. God knows, you might even learn something.

You know well enough that it takes a lifetime to build a reputation but a second to destroy it. I trust you'll learn from this and your behaviour at the ranch will be impeccable. Find enclosed a plane ticket.

I hardly look forward to it, but I'll see you then.

Mother

Caroline read the letter in a trembling rage. Her instinct was to run the five blocks to Vladimir's apartment, run up the stairwell, throw open the huge glass drawing-room windows and shout out to whichever small corner of Manhattan hadn't heard about the affair yet. How dare Mother, whom, increasingly, she never saw, send such supercilious bile in a goddamn letter! Moreover, most of it was bullshit.

She poured herself a large Scotch and drank it neat. She reread Mother's letter twice, laying it flat on the table so her hands wouldn't make it shake. She poured herself another Scotch, sat down at Mother's writing desk and picked up the pen.

Mother,

I am so flabbergasted by your letter I hardly know where to begin. I guess I'll start with the thing that hurt me the most on rereading it. You have assumed many things without even asking me – is it more important what people tell you about vicious, gossipy stories that circulate, or what I myself tell you? I don't know what you have been told, so I can't defend myself and tell you what actually happened! But it certainly wasn't 'sordid' or awful in any way.

Anyway, I wouldn't call YOU exactly the soul of morality – but I am not condemning you because I know you are in love. Believe it or not, but I fell actually very much in love and so did HE. Neither of us meant it to happen – I was quite happy and contented, leading a perfectly normal life when it all began, this God awful mess. I guess I must be crazy, really crazy, and he too.

You say I have disgraced you – all right, but you needn't worry, you won't have to bear any of my shame – I'll have it all and I'll accept it. I'll come down to the ranch as you requested, you'll go off to Black Mountain and you won't have to have anything to do with me anymore, so you needn't worry about having a daughter in New York who has 'broken faith with you'.

That's about all. Let me know about moving out, what you want me to do etc. And don't worry, I shan't disgrace your great name at the ranch.

Despite all this mess, I love you very much, even if it's not reciprocated.

ME

*

She left for Ghost Ranch two days later. By the time she returned to Columbia, Old New York had moved onto the next scandal. Professor Vladimir Barinov had accepted a position overseas and she never heard from him again.

MARY

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1966

Sunlight sweeps through the plane cabin and the descent begins into New York. She looks down at the earth below – seen from here it is brown, one dimensional, like the surface of a crackle glazed pot. Crackle glaze. Crackle pot. Crack-pot. Caroline.

Was she crazy, or just eccentric? Had Mary herself made her like that? Many times she'd blamed herself for the 'way Caroline was'. But doesn't there come a time in life when one has to take responsibility for oneself? There had always been distance between them, emotional as well as physical. But Mary fretted for her, and, without her knowledge, recruited a series of 'guardians' to watch out for her wherever she went.

Christian Zervos had been one such guardian in Paris. She recalls an exchange of letters they'd had, in which Mary, frustrated, no doubt, by her daughter's latest disaster, had suggested to him that Caroline might be in need of psychiatric assessment.

"...There is a fault in her behavior that destroys everything," Zervos had written back. "...she seems unable to maintain a relationship with a man; after a very short time they have had enough of her and they tell her, brutally...she has none of your allure when it comes to attracting and keeping men.

She is very closed, not to mention stubborn. But despite it all, I refuse to believe she is a bad person. She has something negative in her disposition, but it isn't malice. Sincerely, Mary, she loves you very much and is very, very proud of you."

Had Mary ever felt proud of her daughter in return? In recent years, her work with Katzman Associates had seen Caroline designing color schemes for some of the most prestigious buildings in New York, as well as embassies in Europe. But it had always been so 'flou' with Caroline. She had come to this career by accident rather than through passionate resolve. As Zervos once wrote: "She is full of good intentions...but she feels lost when faced with responsibility."

It was this vapidness that Mary couldn't abide. Sure, she'd been a slow starter herself – it had taken her many years to fully understand her chosen medium and imbue her

sculptures with an emotional life – but at least she had chosen a road (or it had chosen her) and stuck with it. Caroline, it seemed, had given up on everything she ever started.

As the plane loses height and upstate New York comes into relief, Mary can't help but wonder how much the city – the place of her upbringing and formative life - has to answer for. She was hard on Caroline, couldn't bear the depressions, the negativity, the constant need for reassurance, but Mary's inability to understand these behaviors was part of her physiology. Certainly, everybody gets the blues. But this notion of 'depression' was anathema to her; she didn't see the point in it or need for it. Caroline, it seemed to Mary, inhabited it, wallowed in it, lapped up the pills and the placations with gusto.

As for Mary, even those dark days of divorce and recriminations, when everyone – her parents, the Couderts, the whole of goddamn New York were against her - there was always... hope. Remember Villa d'Alesia, Paris, with its bursting window boxes and cascading bougainvillea, curling like a river meander between Rue d'Alesia and Rue des Plantes?

Mary is alone inside number 37, surrounded by the sight and smell of damp clay. She is attaching swathes of tarpaulin to the ceiling above her bed; a measure to keep rain out and warmth in. She'll only be staying over here infrequently after all, perhaps on the nights Carlo is away, or when she desires to work late on a sculpture.

It is the first time in her life she has had space of her own, no servants, no child and no husband, just odd pieces of furniture and a table on which to sculpt. Julia Callery would have been horrified if she could see what her daughter had bought with the inheritance from Jim, just two months dead (a heart attack which Julia is certain was precipitated by Mary's divorce.)

Tarpaulins attached, Mary hooks her hammer back into her belt and considers her new sleeping quarters. Basic, but it is luxury that money can't buy. She throws herself on the bed and feels the springs of its iron frame yield to her weight. The previous night these same springs yielded to two bodies – hers and that of Carlo Frua de Angeli, a Milanese fine art collector whom she'd met at a gathering of Ecole de Paris folk a month ago and with whom she is now entirely in love.

Carlo is everything Fritz Coudert isn't – except for the money, for Carlo has riches from textiles and artworks – and Mary wants to be near him, as if being near him will somehow lead to an absorption of his knowledge and passion for Modernist art. Carlo knows Picasso, é, Matisse, all the greats, their names roll off his tongue as casually as if he were dictating a shopping list.

“I saw Duchamp last night,” he would tell her. “He’s collaborating on a book about some rare chess move or other. I’m convinced there would be an appetite for his return to art, but he admitted that he is a ‘victim of chess’. He likes that it can’t be commercialized. Sees it as the purest form of art. Which is all very well, but no use to me.”

Carlo had been here, in her atelier on Villa d’Alesia, and they’d made love downstairs where the dust sparkled through the zenithal window, on the staircase which curled around the wall, and here, on this bed, with the tap-tap-tap of leaking rainwater on the floorboards. He liked it here best, he told her, because unlike Rue du Belvedere or her apartment at 29 Place du Marche, this didn’t have the vestiges of a marriage and a divorce in its walls; old money didn’t drip from its ceilings or cover its floors.

“Besides,” he told her, “Picasso and Matisse sometimes work next door. I won’t have far to go to reserve a painting.”

Mary’s atelier, at the far end, is the most spacious. It is attached to a printing works whose machines clatter like steam trains day and night. Mary likes the clattering – when she is working, she falls into the rhythm of the pistons and at night, she finds comfort in them, her noisy neighbors. But most of all, Mary loves what the atelier represents. It is space and time to spend with her sculptures, an inviolable, private place where she can hone, experiment, learn, understand. Ever since that moment in Pablo’s sculpture stable at Bois-Geloup where her fingers had tingled at the possibilities that lay within it, she had longed for a Villa d’Alesia.

Like Carlo, Villa d’Alesia remains a beautiful lithograph. Mary was hopelessly in love with them both. One summer dawn three years after they met, in the dying hours of one of her studio parties, full of liquor and light-headed with love, Carlo ‘proposed’ with a ring he’d fashioned from a length of wire from her atelier floor. She accepted with the proviso that they must consummate the marriage then and there, under the triangular-prism window and the light of the high Parisian moon. Somewhere, she

still has the wedding announcement that Julia Callery had placed in the New York Times:

TO BE WED IN PARIS TODAY

Mrs Mary C. Coudert to be Bride of Carlo Frua Dangeli

PITTSBURGH, May 10 – Mrs Dawson Callery announced tonight that her daughter, Mrs. Mary Callery Coudert of New York City would be married in Paris tomorrow to Carlo Frua Dangeli of Milan....

She'd never told her mother that the reason they had married in Paris was because, being an American divorcee, Carlo's Catholic parents wouldn't permit him to marry her in Italy. The scandal might well have been the end of her.

And besides, secretly, the implication of deviancy rather pleased her. She played up to it in fact, calling herself Meric instead of Mary and referring to herself as Carlo's 'lady friend' whenever being introduced.

"Mary!" Carlo would say, eyes and 'r' rolling simultaneously. "Do you know how this sounds?"

"I know precisely how it sounds. I rather like it. I'll be your Paris wife."

He took her to Portofino for their honeymoon, where they swam in jagged coves and photographed each other naked on the rocks.

Caroline, she recalled, had joined them after a few days in Portofino, nine-years old and even then prone to melancholy. At the time, Mary had passed it off as some kind of hormonal change – the girl complained constantly of cramps, of aches and pains, and that general ennui that females of that age seem to carry about with them.

Carlo was a good man. More of a father than Fritz ever was, Mary always thought. Even when they'd parted ways in 1936, a somber but mutual termination, she was deeply grateful for having known him. For Mary, the atelier at Alesia was always synonymous with Carlo. When she finally sold it in 1956, she left all the furnishings – from an Italian walnut armoire right down to the bathroom garbage can - to the artist who bought it. They each contained a bit of Carlo and she couldn't bear to look at them.

CAROLINE

GHOST RANCH, ABIQUIU, 1945

The sound of the Chevrolet's tires on the gravel outside the ranch was like torrential rain. The car stopped, but Caroline made no move to get out.

"Ma'am, this is it. Ghost Ranch."

She looked at the house with its spongy-looking adobe walls. It was like a troglodyte dwelling, she thought, and half expected Mother to emerge having shrunk two feet.

"Ma'am?"

"I know. How much do I owe you?"

"Forty bucks." She caught his eye through the rear view mirror. She checked her purse – a twenty and a handful of change.

"I'll be right back," she said.

Georgia appeared in the doorway, head wrapped in a blue muslin scarf, inscrutable expression on her face. A modern cave-woman. She watched Caroline approach. The skin around her eyes softened and wrinkled, and she held her arms out.

"Darling Carolina! How good it is to see you again."

Caroline thought tears might come if she allowed Georgia to hug her, so she took the two hands being offered and squeezed them tightly in her own. "And you, Georgia. I regret the circumstances though..."

"Oh, now then, let's not start with that. What's done is done, it cannot be changed. But it can be ministered to, and you're in the best place for that. Look!" Georgia took Caroline by the shoulders and turned her body towards the mountain. Its mood was blue – having words, it seemed, with a quarrelsome sky.

The driver placed Caroline's trunk alongside her and waited for his money. She turned to Georgia. "I've got twenty bucks – I hoped Mother might give me the rest. Just until I can get some more, that is..."

“Don’t worry dear. You go ahead inside, I’ll see to this.”

Caroline trundled her belongings into the house, and paused in the hallway as if, like an animal, she might track Mother’s whereabouts by her scent. But all she could smell were the pine cones burning in the hearth.

“Mother?” she shouted.

“Oh – she left, dear. Didn’t she tell you?” Georgia was behind her in the doorway, a silhouette against the light.

“She left for Black Mountain already? But I thought her class didn’t start until the beginning of August?”

“She left for New York.”

“New York? But I just came from there!”

“She had a few things she wanted to iron out...”

She felt her lips begin to tremble and feared she might not be able to control them. “I can’t believe she would leave before seeing me, before giving me a chance to explain. Does she really have that much contempt for me?”

“She was pretty upset. But you know your mother. She’s a proud woman, she wants to make sure everything is right, up there...”

“...what about making sure everything is right with me? New York’s sensibilities are clearly more important to her...”

“Don’t talk that way, Caroline. Your mother loves you very much and you know it.”

“Do I? Do I really?”

“Come and sit on the veranda and I’ll fix you a drink..”

Her hands were trembling now, she could hear her heart pounding in her ears. She let Georgia lead her through the hall and out onto the veranda, where she sat heavily in one of the bent wood rocking chairs. She looked at the view – sweeping folds of rock and their ever-changing palette – but saw nothing but the colors of her own rage.

Georgia set a bottle of whisky on the table and two glasses filled with ice.

“Talk to me. What happened with this Professor?”

Caroline felt herself soften at the mention of Vladimir. She wished he were there with her in the anonymity of the New Mexico plains. She looked out to the horizon – a rambling silvery-pink line on every side – and she felt bound in by it, trapped in such a horrid, impossible world.

“We are all such little people,” she said, taking a sip of whisky. “And yet, our own troubles seem to come out so large and one person’s mistake seems to make so much difference.”

“You are right – but our troubles make surprisingly little difference to others in the long run. Mistakes are forgotten. In general, people are frightfully inward looking. They care only for themselves, and the way they are perceived by others.”

Caroline’s eyes were still fixed on the thread of the horizon. “I know I am not important, Georgia, and I care very little what happens to me now, or at any time, as I know it will be for the worst. I seem to be a very unhappy person and a no-good one at that. I cause so much unhappiness to others.”

Georgia suppressed a smile with a mouthful of whisky. “You’re still so young, Caroline. And you speak in the dramatic language of youth. You are important to your mother. To me. To the many others who surround you. And we all care what happens to you. Why do you think your mother is in New York right now? It is not for her benefit, but for yours. She is smoothing things out so that you can return without the sound of clacking tongues, so that you can get on with your life there, return to college...”

“Selfless Mary. That is how she is known.”

“For that is how she is. You’ll never know how much she does for you. As children, we never see the sacrifices our parents make.”

Caroline paused for a moment, about to protest, but thought better of it. Perhaps Georgia was right. Parental sacrifice was something she had no idea about, but perhaps no-one could until they had children of their own. In that case, Caroline knew she might as well forget about ever hoping to understand.

“Thanks Georgia.” She smiled and raised her glass to her host.

“That’s what I was waiting for – that smile. I want you to relax and have fun whilst you’re here. Just stay away from cowboys, OK?” Both women laughed and Georgia topped up the glasses. “Now,” she said, standing up and holding out her hand to Caroline. “Come and see what your brilliant mother has been working on whilst she’s been here.”

Georgia led her to the studio at the back of the house. She pulled the heavy drapes from the windows, each one releasing a tornado of white dust into the sunlight. A wooden stool balanced in the centre of a rusting wheelbarrow, and alongside it, a plinth displaying a sculpture of Georgia’s head in plaster.

“As you can see, the model’s chair was somewhat rustic.” She pointed at the wheelbarrow. “It was the only way we could achieve the height she needed.” She ran a finger along the profile of the sculpture. “It’s me, of course, but nonetheless I think it’s rather wonderful, don’t you?”

Caroline moved toward the plinth, and noticed footprints in the dust around it. The shadows of Mother’s boots. She walked around the sculpture, looking for evidence of fingerprints in the plaster. She spied a thumb print and looked closely at its whorls.

“It is wonderful, indeed,” Caroline replied. “Made all the more so by the fact that it is you.”

They stood awhile under a weight of heat and silence. The last evening before Mary left for New York, after the final sitting for the head, she and Georgia had lain alongside each other on the flat roof of the ranch house under a colossal black New Mexico sky, stars bobbing on the surface of their gin and tonics.

“Tomorrow you’ll be flying high up there, and I shall miss you everywhere. I shall sleep on this roof and it will be cold,” Georgia had told Mary.

“And I shall miss you. But I’ll be back dear – and in the meantime, I’ll write you when I can.”

“How about we go and finish that bottle of whisky?” Caroline was saying.

It took Georgia a moment to assimilate the words. “Oh...yes,” she replied. “Good idea.” She hooked the drapes back up at the window, transfixed by the memory of Mary and a faint, lingering smell of eau de cologne.

MARY

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE, SUMMER 1945

The bus bound for Black Mountain pulls out of Charlotte just after 4pm. Mary looks around, wondering which of her fellow passengers might be her students. When her friend Josef Albers had asked her if she would teach a summer session at Black Mountain, she had agreed at once. But that was back in April, and the summer session had seemed a long way off. Now, she is beginning to feel jittery.

It can't be a lack of preparation that has placed her *sur les nerfs*— on the contrary, she had sent an outline of her lesson plans to Albers as early as May:

Introduction: Highlights in sculpture of the past

Class problems: Combination and unification of basic forms. Opposing planes. Volume and line in space.

She had received nothing back from Albers except a note saying that it was 'one of the College's principles to leave it to the teacher what and how he teaches.' As for supplies, she had bought the plaster from Ettl and had it shipped herself. It was extravagant to send plaster from New York, she had funded it out of her own pocket, but the quality had to be right. Albers had organized wire for armatures, excelsior, lumber and tools, so on that score, nothing more could be done.

Two things trouble her though, each of them a challenge to her customary poise. Firstly, there is the teaching itself. Learning is what she does best, acquiring knowledge, not imparting it. She has always felt like something of a late starter with her craft, not really hitting her stride until she returned from Europe in 1940. Yet here she is, just a year after her inaugural show at Buchholz, preparing to lead a summer session with a dozen students, some of whom, Albers had warned her, were art teachers themselves and the holders of 'often very fixed ideas'. What did this mean? Was it her job to unfix them?

Furthermore, her stint follows directly that of one of her old Paris acquaintances, Ossip Zadkine. She had been keen to meet with him in New York to discuss how they might dovetail their sessions, but Zadkine had thought it not worthwhile. "Do what

pleases you, Madame, and you will please the students,” he had written to her. Will she be compared with him though? Will they find her somewhat lacking?

The other thing which bothers her, of course, is this latest episode with Caroline, and she curses the child inwardly for causing her this additional anxiety. Instead of preparing herself mentally for Black Mountain, she had spent all of the last week in New York pouring cold water onto the heat of what Caroline had left behind. Quite apart from the fact that she had been obliged to cut her visit to Georgia’s short in order to do it.

She recalls with a flinch the luncheon she had undertaken at the Colony Club just two days ago, with the Club President, Dorothea Draper and other ladies of the members board.

“My ex-husband and I are united in our deep embarrassment,” she had told them, knowing very well that self-effacement was the only tactic to employ in circumstances such as these. “I’m sure you’ll appreciate how difficult it is for me to maintain an eye on Caroline from the distances I am obliged to keep because of my work. She is young and naïve and I am afraid these facts have contributed to her undoing.”

Mrs Draper took a mouthful of poached oyster and chewed it slowly. “Indeed Mrs Callery, and we are all susceptible to the whims of our offspring, are we not, ladies?” A murmur of knowing assent bubbled around the table. “However, as you know, membership to the Club is exclusive for a reason. We do not want press representatives lurking about the sidewalks with their flashbulbs waiting to accost every lady who walks over the threshold.”

Mary dabbed the side of her mouth with a napkin. “I fully understand, Mrs Draper, which is why I sent Caroline to New Mexico without delay. I absolutely subscribe to the exclusivity of the Club and, indeed, greatly enjoy its benefits. I only hope that you can see beyond this, and take my word that anything of this sort will ever happen again.”

Gold jangled around slim, tanned wrists. “Mrs Callery, I am sure I speak for the other ladies when I say we value your patronage, and that of your other family members. Now that Caroline is, as you say, out of the way for a while, and the Professor in question is considering his options, I think it is fair to assume that the whole thing will have blown over in no time....”

Mary knew that Mrs Draper's influence was such that the rest of New York society would soon come to the same assumption. Her stomach stopped its sickening lurch and she quickly took the opportunity to finish her oysters.

"You are most understanding, Mrs Draper, ladies," she had said, indicating to the waiter. "Now, I insist upon picking up the tab."

Back on the bus, rage builds up beneath her skin. Silly damned girl, risking everything Mary had carefully constructed. She had no appreciation of how hard it was, maintaining a foot in two worlds and keeping each of them happy! There was seemingly no desire to appreciate it either - never any goddamn gratitude for the education and in-roads, no vision or focus as to where they might take her. She claimed an interest in music, art, languages, yet was totally lost when it came to translating these things into a career. She had once described herself to Mary as a 'rotten lot'. Right now, Mary is tempted to agree.

The College car is waiting when the bus finally rumbles into the station, at the wheel a wiry man with heavily-pomaded hair and a look of harried diplomacy. He extends a thin hand and Mary shakes it.

"Glad to meet you, Mrs Callery. I am William R. Wunsch, we have corresponded regarding the publicity of your course. We have all been looking forward with genuine eagerness to your stay. Let me take your bag. You must be tired. Have you come from New York this morning?"

"Thank you, Mr Wunsch. I am delighted to be here. I am a little tired, yes. Is it far to the College?"

Wunsch has loaded her bags into the trunk and is opening the passenger door for her. "Oh, we're just a couple of miles up the track. Not far away. But far away enough." He smiles and she gets in, relieved.

The route to the College takes them up a section of dirt road, parched, pot-holed with tufts of sun-bleached grass. The car lists like a turbulent plane and she hears Wunsch muttering about the suspension.

"Summer school is taught on the Lake Eden campus," Wunsch tells her. "It's beautiful down there, but some of the buildings are ripe for condemnation. It's a shame, but funding is such an issue for us. Incidentally, thank you for your financial

contribution, Mrs Callery. Sponsors normally give up to \$100, so your check was most generous.”

“I am passionate about what you are doing at Black Mountain, Mr Wunsch and feel honoured to be teaching here this summer. Any facility that spreads the good word of Modernism over here has to be supported. There is still resistance, as you well know.”

Wunsch nods, leaning forward in his seat, squinting myopically through the windshield. The campus building swings into view through a colonnade of pine trees, perched on the edge of the lake with the majesty of a swan. It is layered like a precision baked cake, but as they get closer, Mary notes drapes hanging limply in blackened windows and the fingers of dirt that streak the once-stark white concrete walls. An errant chicken zig-zags about in front of the car and Wunsch waves his hand at it uselessly. Mary sees the rest of its brood idly pecking at the grass on the verge.

“Mr and Mrs Albers have requested to see you, but I imagine you’ll want to get freshened up?” Wunsch lets the clutch go and they cruise down the final section of track.

“Oh no! I simply must see them!” She knows that the friendly faces of her two old friends will assuage any feelings of anxiety she still has.

He duly drops her outside their dwelling – a simple room in amongst those of students and other faculty members – and Mary sees Anni through the window. Her head is bent forth over a square of cloth and all Mary can see are her thick black curls tethered beneath a white head scarf and fingers moving deftly over the cloth. She knocks lightly on the door and Anni looks up, and, seeing her friend, she puts her tool down and runs to the door.

“Mary! It is such a delight to see you!” She takes Mary’s hand and cups it with hers.

“And you, Anni, and you!”

“Come in, Josef will be back any moment.” Despite 12 years in the States, Anni’s accent is thick. It sounds deliciously out of place here in the middle of the Great Craggy Mountains of North Carolina. Mary is reminded of her days in Paris, where cultures and nationalities came together in a terrific cymbal crash of creativity and wonder. With that thought, anxiety turns to excitement, for here at Black Mountain

she anticipates the sound of that cymbal crash again. Anni puts the pot on to boil and indicates for Mary to sit down.

“I am the last to arrive?” Mary asks, taking her cigarette case from her purse. “I took the airplane in the end, as I had some last minute business to attend to in New York.”

“Oh not at all. Walter is still in Mexico, we expect him the day after tomorrow. Motherwell is teaching out east, he will arrive at the end of the week. Most of the others are here though. You missed such a fun night last night though Mary! The students put on a revue for the staff, very tongue-in-cheek, all about the staff, it was very gay. We barely got a wink of sleep and I’m hellish hungover. You would have loved it.”

At that moment, Josef arrives, grayer than Mary remembered but still with the same intelligence and warmth in his eyes.

“Mrs Callery, Mrs Callery, I’m so pleased you are here with us. How was your journey?”

“It was fine, thank you – but would you call me Mary, it seems so formal after all this time to be Mrs Callery!”

Albers laughs and takes the cup Anni is offering him. “Indeed, Mary it is. And how are you feeling about teaching here with us?”

“I feel much less trepidation now than I did a few hours ago.”

“Why trepidation?”

She takes a cup of tea from Anni. “I’m not sure what kind of educator I will be.”

“But this is not education as you know it, Mary,” says Anni. “The idea is that every person here will be educated, not just the students. I sat in on an architecture class the other day and came out with new perspectives.”

“Students ‘passing’ or ‘failing’ is not our benchmark of success,” Josef says. “This work at Black Mountain must directly or indirectly state some growth in your mind and in your looking at education; these are our only indicators of success.”

Mary retires to her lodging later that evening with a renewed sense of vigour. She looks over her class list: fifteen students, among them a Robert Rauschenberg and a

Jasper Johns. Her first class begins in two days, and in the meantime she will spend time acquainting herself with the air in this oddly special place. She thinks briefly of her daughter, 1500 miles away on a ranch in Abiquiu. The sense of obligation which has hung over her since the Scandal erupted slowly begins to fade.

MARY

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1966

The first thing she sees when she comes through customs in New York is the threadbare pate of Wally Harrison. She'd recognise it anywhere, not only because she'd spent hours studying it for a sculpture in 1954, but because she knows it of old. It had been part of her life since the debutante's ball at the Waldorf in 1923 when she had watched him woo her friend Ellen Milton. And here it was now, at JFK Airport, assigned to the much grimmer task of collecting her for a funeral.

He sees her immediately –Liberty silks flowing as she walks, hair impeccably coiffed. At sixty-three she still emits an elusive glow which, were it bottled, would be bought by women the world over.

“Darling...” He holds his arms out to her.

“Goddamn it, Wally, don't, I'll dissolve if you come near me.” Without looking at him, she searches for her cigarettes in her purse, pulling them out clumsily along with a load of other possessions which scatter over the floor. “Shit...”

Wally bends down to collect them – passport, dollar bills, a hand-mirror, now cracked – and she lights the cigarette, not even pausing to find the holder.

“Where in the hell is Ellen?” she asks, looking about the concourse for her friend.

“I left her at the Givenchy counter, we weren't expecting you through so soon.”

At that moment, Ellen comes hurrying towards them. “I'm so sorry Mary, that damn woman at Givenchy trying to sell me a bunch of stuff with free this and a complimentary that, I couldn't get away even though I saw that you'd landed...anyway. I'm rambling, let me look at you.”

Mary hates this tradition Ellen has of 'looking her over' as if she is some kid returning from a month at camp. “I'm fine, dear,” Mary says, “Come on, let's get out of here, airports make me crazy.”

Ellen takes her arm and they walk to the car, Wally trundling behind with the Vuitton trunk and an armful of rolled Picasso ‘rugs’.

“Now then, we insist that you stay with us in Huntington tonight, dearest, the thought of you alone on East 68th street is indecent...”

“Ellen, I spend practically my whole life alone these days, besides, if I’m in need of company I can go to the Colony Club...”

“...and furthermore that ghastly Rabbi is bound to accost you and try to get you to sell the house again so that he can turn more of that block into a synagogue, and frankly, you can do without it.”

“I am actually considering selling to him, Ellen. Caroline herself suggested it four years ago, I should have trusted her intuition and done it then.” A wave of grief rolls over her at the mention of the name. “...Anyway. Do let’s not talk about this now, I fear I might just make a terrible fool out of myself if we carry on.”

Ellen says: “Oh dear...” and bundles her into the waiting car. “Do hurry up Wally!”

The car pulls out and Mary closes her eyes, as much to shut Ellen out as an attempt to stymie the grief. Thinking of her house on E68th and the Rabbi, she drifts back four years. 1962, Mary can see the date on Caroline’s letters, hundreds of them, some typed, some handwritten, all of them bloated with anxiety and gloom. She received them almost daily at her apartment in Place du Marche and duly, she worried, but she was so far away and Paris was uneasy in its relations with Aéia – 15 people killed in the riots for god’s sake! -plus her work was so consuming...

Added to which, there was always something with the girl – fever, cramps, lip sores, head sores, nervous episodes, not to mention the cocktail of pep-me-up / slow-me-down pills and alcohol she existed on. Mary figured she was just perpetually hung-over.

Yet again, she’d called up a ‘guardian’, this time her friend the physician Robert Wallis and his wife Celeste to keep an eye on Caroline in New York. Their guidance had seemed to have an effect – Caroline had stopped drinking, lost 11 lbs, quit the pep-me-up pills, started exercising. She had also, Mary recalled, had her first make-up lesson under Celeste Wallis’ influence. (“*To put on the eye-lid pencil, you must put a base on the eyelid first,*” she had written in one letter. “*I do think the heavier line is*

better with a Rubinstein or Revlon pencil. Only put it over half of the lid – use no mascara on bottom lashes and no pencil. Also make eyebrows faked and bushy...”
How Mary had howled when she read it!)

But the clues were there. They'd always been there. Mary knows it. It is easy not to see them though when one doesn't want to, no matter how explicit they are.

*

Hotel Guatemala-Biltmore

Guatamala City

Central America

Oct 29, 1962

Dearest Mother,

Had so hoped there would be a letter from you here after all these weeks – but nothing – so don't ever accuse me of not writing!

Tonight, I have just about had it – yesterday, Grandmother Coudert died – it simply broke my heart. I don't know how or why – I had dinner with her the night before I left NYC and she seemed fine. She was quite deaf but had her facilities. She had knitted the prettiest bedjacket for me, so that I would not be cold in the mountains and I have actually worn it all along thinking of her. Of course, she was very old but I never thought she'd go – I loved her so much and have been in tears all day.

I must say, I am really getting scared of cables down here – they only announce DEATH. I did think today how lucky Pa and his brothers have been to have their mother for so long – I have a mother, but I never see her and she is never there – but at least I know she is living and that is the most important thing, I guess.

It is funny how my father and my beloved cousin George have become so important - perhaps because they are here and we see so much of each other. But Father won't last long – he is trying too hard to go. That day will be abysmal.

Forgive the misery in this letter. I am just more and more aware of all those I love going – and me being left totally alone.

Mary removes her reading glasses, folds the letter and hands it to Ellen.

“Read it for yourself,” she says. She takes up her martini, drains it in a mouthful and lights up one cigarette directly from the tip of another.

Ellen looks at it but doesn't unfold the paper. “Why on earth would you bring this with you? Are you set on torturing yourself?”

“I have kept all her letters over the years. Every last one. I figured I'd bring a few to reread. I wanted to be near her, I guess, after so many years spent apart.”

“And you choose this one to reread?”

Mary smiles but her eyes are without joy. “I selected at random. Bad choice.”

“What in the hell was she doing in Guatemala?”

“Working. Color consultant on some mall or other. She was a damn fine interior designer. *Was*. How can I be talking about her in the past tense?”

“It's hellish, Mary, I can't imagine your pain.”

Mary doesn't wish to contemplate her pain, much less have Ellen Harrison reimagining it. Her eyes alight on one of her own sculptures, hanging, as if suspended in thin air, on the wall. It is *Dancers*, the piece she had cast in bronze especially for her friends in 1944. She gets up and crosses the checker-board floor for a closer look.

“Léger and I did a version of this together back in '43. My sculpture was in white plaster, his background a conflict of colors. Intentional dissonance. We had fun together, playing around with that concept.”

“You had fun playing around together, period!” Ellen is behind her now, resting her chin on her shoulder. “Wally and I have always loved this piece. It follows the curve of the wall so beautifully. And of course, it was made by you, dearest.”

Mary moves slightly and Ellen lifts her chin. Mary whispers: “Dear Fernand. Another one, dead. There's Ozenfant, and Arp. Both gone this year. And now, my Carolina.” She turns to her friend, noting for the first time the blueness of her eyes. “Are mothers and daughters intentionally dissonant too, Ellen? Or was that just me and mine?”

Ellen thinks of her relationship with her own daughter. They have the occasional dissention, but nothing compared to the warfare of Mary and Caroline. She takes

Mary's hand and squeezes it. "Come along dearest. Sit down and let's finish that bottle of gin."

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS.

1:02AM

November 1966 was unseasonably warm in Texas. That morning the mercury had hit 101 F, and the heat had barely abated even with the arrival of dusk. Caroline liked the heat in Texas, its subtropical stickiness, the way it coated her lungs when she breathed it in. She liked the way everything surrendered to it; animals hid, bitumen popped, even the air trembled.

The windows of her apartment were à l'espagnole, open on the latch, just as Mother taught her how to do in Paris to allow air and the smells of the market in. But Texas didn't smell like Paris, Texas was heat and oil fields, everything was loose-limbed, slow-paced but somehow out of breath. She undid the latch and flung back the windows; she could see nothing of the town she had gambled in last night, just a moon-licked section of courtyard wall and, far below, the silver trim of a neighbor's motorbike.

Bechet's sax soared, and almost immediately a voice echoed out from the darkness; "CAN IT!" but Caroline hadn't the energy to shout back. Instead, she trumpeted through her fists, "Bbb-bbb-BBB—bb -bbbbb!" then retreated to find more drink. She founds another bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label, a spoil from her conquest last night, what was his name? Harry? Larry? He'd brought liquor, at least, more than most of 'em do. He had a mustache, that much she remembered, but then, Jesus, they all had one down here, must have been some kind of State law. She unscrewed the cap and took a swig direct from the bottle.

Last night she'd lost 200 bucks at the casino, but Harry / Larry had fronted her 200 more in return for a fuck. She still lost. Looked like she'd be cashing in the last of Mommy's shares, and after that there remained nothing much except that god-awful Picasso drawing of the bull ring which would no doubt see her through til' Spring. She thought of all the other paintings she had been given, then sold and squandered the proceeds of. Paintings she wouldn't dare confess to Mother that she'd traded in – if ever Mother asked, they were stored at the Chase Bank for safe-keeping. Simon

Boosey, the man who became her second husband, sold one and bought a Mercedes Convertible with the money. Caroline remembered trying to justify that one to Mother:

“But Mom, you have a Mercedes Convertible! What’s the problem?”

“Yes but Jesus Christ Caroline, I can afford it!”

Simon Boosey. How was it that she remembered his mother more clearly than she remembered him? That taut, disapproving face the night she and Simon announced they were moving in together. Christmas, 1955, cocktails at Donohues on the Upper East Side. Ma and Pa Boosey over from England, ostensibly on vacation but really on a reconnaissance to see how their youngest son was managing the New York side of their music publishing business.

Mother would have howled, Caroline thought, if she had seen Ma Boosey that night, flaunting her ankles in a mauve knitted ensemble straight out of the 1930’s. Perhaps she should have known right then that marriage to Simon wouldn’t have a chance in hell of working out. Ma Boosey had looked at Caroline, hanging on the arm of her son wearing a synch-waisted dress from Bergdorf Goodman, as if she were a cockroach in kitten heels.

“So this is Caroline?” she said with a smile as thin as British rain.

“This is she!” Simon replied, lacing his arm around Caroline’s waist. “My flitter-mouse! Isn’t she splendid?”

Pa Boosey, perpetually worn-out looking with grey hair like a scribble on top of his head, looked at her. “Quite.”

“And what do you do?” Ma Boosey asked, a flatulent expression unfolding across her face.

“Caroline works at Knoll, don’t you flitter-mouse?”

Caroline nodded eagerly. “Corporate offices, mainly. It’s a relatively new direction for the company and I’m one of a team of designers who...”

Ma Boosey turned a derisive shoulder toward the pianist and said, “Is that Rachmaninoff, Leslie?”

Pa Boosey let out a cough of cigar smoke. “An approximation of, I suppose, yes.”

Simon placed a hand on Caroline’s knee and squeezed it. “We should take Mother and Father to see the Christmas tree at the Rockefeller Center. It’s quite something. Caroline’s mother is close friends with one of the architects who built the Center, isn’t she flitter-mouse?”

“Wallace Harrison, yes. His wife, Ellen, went to school with my mother at Spence.”

Ma Boosey raised an eyebrow, but Caroline couldn’t read whether it signalled interest or contempt. Later in the evening after more cocktails, Caroline loosened up.

“Come dance with me, Mr Boosey! Or may I call you Leslie?” she shouted, pulling him to his feet. She twirled around him, her skirt billowing as it caught the breeze. When the music stopped, she kissed him on the cheek, leaving Revlon lips imprinted on his skin. Ma Boosey wiped it off with a spit-moistened handkerchief.

Oblivious, Caroline said, “Who’s for more cocktails?” and without waiting for a reply pointed to Simon. “Boo? How about another round? Or what say we share a bottle of whisky? Yes, whisky, that would be fun! Go buy a bottle!”

Ma Boosey said quickly; “I have no fondness for whisky. Besides, we should be going. Simon dear, you should be too – work in the morning.”

Caroline moved in beside her beau and whispered, “Boo. Maybe it’s not such a good idea to tell your parents about us moving in together. At least wait until my divorce from Gustav is through...”

“Nonsense! We should be proud, flitter-mouse. I love you and my parents will too.” He kissed her on the nose and turned to his parents. “Mother, father. Caroline and I have some great news.” Simon pulled her in front of him and placed a firm hand on each of her shoulders. “I have asked Caroline to move into my apartment and she had agreed.”

Ma Boosey’s face went the shade of an overripe fig. She looked over at her husband who cleared his throat and said: “Well. This is some news. How long have you known each other? Five minutes?”

“It’s not a case of time, Sir. We are in love.”

“In love? You’ve barely had time to be in lust.”

Ma Boosey had placed her hand on top of her husband's. "Now, now, let's not quarrel. It's neither the time nor the place. I think it would be wise if we all headed home and talked about this another time."

Caroline recalled watching the mauve knitted ensemble disappearing beneath a thick black overcoat and the heavy gaits of two Boosey Seniors thundering out of the bar.

"They liked you," Simon told Caroline after they'd gone. Caroline burst out laughing. "Seriously! The thing is, New York has had me for three years. They're worried now it's got me forever." He kissed her firmly on the lips and ordered a bottle of whisky from the waiter.

Two days later, Simon received a letter from his UK-bound parents. Caroline didn't read it all – the first paragraph told her everything she needed to know.

...You are 29 years old, Simon, with the music world at your fingertips. We fear that in getting involved with this older divorcee you risk losing everything you have worked for. Furthermore, she seemed to me to be a rather lewd individual, clearly used to spending all her money on herself. We implore you to think before embarking on a course we may all regret...

Tears pricked her eyes and Simon took the letter from her and threw it in the trash.

"She's made some pretty stinky assumptions based on one night," Caroline said, giving in to the tears. "Am I really that bad?"

"You're wonderful, flitter-mouse," Simon replied, pulling her head into his chest. "Once they get to know you, they'll see it too."

Caroline didn't reply, but inwardly, she vowed she would make no attempt to see them again. In fact, the sooner she and Simon were married, the better. The ill-dressed, sour-faced bitch would have no claim whatsoever on him then.

MARY

HUNTINGTON, LONG ISLAND, NOVEMBER 1966

Mary looks into the mirror. A woman looks back at her, but Mary is not convinced the woman is her. Out of the window of her room at the Harrison's home in Huntington she sees a cream Ford convertible pulling into the driveway. The roof is drawn back despite the November chill, and through the windshield she sees the solemn faces of Eddie and Mary B Mathews.

Dear Mary B! How she's missed her! Last time they saw each other was February the previous year, on the closing night of Mary's exhibition at Knoedler's in New York. Mary had hosted a party at her studio on East 68th Street – a crowd of more than forty arrived, friends, art dealers, critics and members of the press – and Mary had glimpsed her friend just long enough to exchange kisses and a sardonic reflection on how old they were all getting for this kind of thing.

“Nonsense!” Mary B had told her. “You are effervescent as ever you were. Long may it continue!”

Mary had responded by raising a toast to ‘absent friends’, “Most notably tonight, I think we'll all agree, dear Curt Valentin, whom we know would have not only curated this whole damned exhibition single-handedly, but would have drunk me dry with equal gusto. To Curt – and all those dear to us that we have lost.”

Eddie and Mary B get out of the car and she watches as Ellen runs out to greet them. She hears muted voices, hesitant footsteps on the gravel, and a burst of cigarette smoke floats up past her window. What conciliations will Ellen be spouting now? How will the Mathews be instructed to behave towards her? She slips on her shoes and pads down the stairs to the hallway. Wally sees her from where he is sitting reading the Times by the fire.

“How are you bearing up?”

“Oh Jesus, Wally. Don’t ask me shit like that. I have absolutely no idea. I just want this day over with.” She sits by him and puts her head in her hands. “Sorry. This whole thing is just...insane.”

“I know honey. Shall I fix you a drink?”

“Is it too early for a whisky?”

He looks at her and without answering goes to his liquor cabinet and pours them each a large Scotch. The Mathews enter stage left, bustling extras unsure of their next line. Mary B approaches, lips quivering.

“I’m just so sorry dearest. We tried to get here sooner, but we were in Connecticut when we got the dreadful news...”

“How is the project coming along over there in Hartford, Eddie?” Mary asks, taking her whisky from Wally and lighting up a cigarette.

Eddie looks at her, eyes wide behind his round, black spectacles. He glances at his wife then says, “Um...good, thanks...look Mary...how are you?”

“Whisky?” Wally asks, and Ellen glances at her wristwatch.

“Er. Sure.”

“It’s all the people I can’t bear the thought of,” says Mary to no-one in particular. “All the unified grief. I can’t remember the last time I was unified with Fritz in anything.”

“We’re all here to support you,” says Mary B. “You have no obligation to anyone.”

“Is Carlo coming?” Ellen asks.

“His daughter contacted me and said he was too ill to attend. Wretched illness and death. Makes you wonder what it’s all for.”

“How about Mies? Have you heard from him? And Zervos? What about Morrie Werner?”

“Ellen, dearest, do stop, please. It’s to be a small affair. Fritz wanted it that way, not too much fuss.” A stiff silence follows. Then: “Besides, this is about Caroline, not an identity parade of my ex-lovers!”

Fritz looks old, she thinks. Sagged by the weight of this latest campaign no doubt, and also, she wagers, the burden of a wife like Paula. She can't help but feel sorry for him. His other daughter, 'little' Paula, has been ill, she knows – some blood disorder, if she recalls from one of Caroline's letters. The four of them – Fritz, Paula and their offspring – stand at the entrance to the church.

“Jesus Christ, they're like the horsemen of the apocalypse. I can't go in there yet,” she whispers to Mary B.

“Then let's not.” Mary B squeezes her arm tightly.

Her brothers George and Francis, are huddled at one side of the path, comforting their niece, Marcella - the widow, as Caroline used to call her – who is inconsolable. These might be the first tears Marcella has shed since her husband died 6 years ago. God knows, she couldn't cry at the time. Marcella's son George, whom Mary has only recently seen when he visited her in Cadaques, stands slightly apart, musing, perhaps, on his wayward cousin. They played together as kids, he and Caroline. An artist himself, Mary always thought that if she'd had a son, he would have been like George. She is relieved to see them all, and they greet her with the sort of veneration people always lavish on the bereaved. She kisses each of them on the cheek, thanking them so much for coming and wishing only for it all to be over.

Caroline arrives in a coffin of oak. High-gloss finish, polished brass handles, a simple plaque on the lid testifying to her identity. The sight of the box, measured to the exact proportions of her daughter's body, provokes a sudden wave of nausea in Mary, so violent she thinks she might actually be sick. She brings a hand to her mouth, swallowing the sensation away.

The last coffin she had seen was that of her mother, Julia, back in 1942. She recalls the utter void she felt when watching it being lowered in the cold, hard cemetery earth, abutted by a host of other dead souls all of whom, bar her father, were strangers. What kind of way was that to honor a life? She had sworn that she would never attend another funeral – ghastly, over-sentimental affairs, a warped custom which seemed to her to be so forced and unnatural. Yet here she stood, watching the body of her child being carried into church and laid out on a marble plinth like some kind of art exhibit.

Mary hasn't seen the body. Fritz had formally identified it, but given the manner of death, the coroner had suggested she may wish to remember her daughter as she was.

"Would you do me a favor and cut me a lock of her hair?" Mary had asked.

A single blonde curl was returned to her in a tiny plastic box. The last tangible piece of Caroline's DNA, tied neatly at one end with a length of white thread. Mary looks at the curl now. It is in an envelope in her purse, a perfectly-formed, caramel-colored 'C'. She isn't listening to the service. She can't look at the coffin. She searches for something to focus her attention on away from the curl, and her eyes fall on Fritz. He looks more like Caroline today than he ever did. The same sad eyes; the plaintive slash of a mouth.

He is watching proceedings as if they are a motion being passed in the Senate. There is no doubt now in Mary's mind that Caroline was right when she said he was drinking himself to death. He is a beaten man. Last year's campaign supporting William Buckley had taken whatever remained out of him – and Mary knew from experience what it was to be on the campaign trail, especially an unsuccessful one.

In 1929, six years married with a three year old child in tow, she had been forced to play the committed Republican wife during his candidacy for New York county district attorney. She had canvassed votes, attended meetings, spoken at fundraisers.

"And when you become the District Attorney's wife, dear, you can forget all about that artistic nonsense," her mother-in-law had told her as they sat in the Coudert drawing room making blue and white crepe rosettes for the campaign. "Although, those hands will come in mighty useful when it comes to making more of these!" She waved a rosette at Mary and threw her head back, revealing a horseshoe of grotesque yellow teeth.

"I won't be giving up my 'artistic nonsense', Mother," Mary replied. "On the contrary, I intend to accompany Fritz to the Coudert offices in Paris next year and continue my studies there. I have been accepted to work under Jacques Loutchansky. You know Jacques Loutchansky? The sculptor?"

Mother Coudert placed the concertina of crepe paper she was working on onto the table and looked at her daughter-in-law. "My dear, I'll remind you that you are both a wife and a mother now. How can you expect to pursue these ridiculous flights of

fancy? Most women in this town would give their right arms to be the wife of Frederick Coudert Junior.”

Mary felt her cheeks smarting. “I am not most women, Mrs Coudert. And that is precisely why your son married me.” She excused herself and hurried to the bathroom, whereupon she vomited neatly into the pan. She wiped her mouth, pinched her cheeks and returned to the kitchen. “If you’ll excuse me, I need to find my husband,” she said.

Mary always sensed that Mother Coudert blamed her when Fritz lost the candidacy. No amount of rosettes or lobster mousse receptions could make up for the fact that Mary’s devotion to the cause had been hampered by clay and dust. Back in the church, Mary feels relieved that old mother Coudert isn’t there to witness this. Caroline was the only good thing Mary produced as far as she was concerned and no doubt she would be blamed for the loss of her too.

The service ends and the coffin leaves to ‘The Lark Ascending’ by Vaughan Williams. Mary pulls her otter coat high around her ears attempting to block it out. *Happy as a lark*, that was how Caroline used to describe herself wasn’t it? Happy as that duplicitous symbol of both lovers’ observances and of the passage from life into death. Mary saw through it then as she does now.

She follows, out into the dull November afternoon and then, the sight of Carlo, just arrived in the back of a car. She hasn’t seen him since her show at Curt’s gallery over ten years ago but he never seems to change. Her heart sinks deep into her chest, as if she might finally allow herself to submit to the pain of Caroline’s loss now he is here to take her weight. He beckons her over and she starts toward him, but Fritz moves into her frame of vision. “It might be appropriate for us to walk to the graveside together for the interment, Mary.”

Mary looks at him coldly. “I’m not coming to the graveside, Fritz. Seeing my daughter arrive in a coffin is one thing, but watching her being lowered into the ground is quite another.”

Paula appears behind Fritz and gives Mary a searching look. “Is there a problem?”

“It’s all right dear, I’m sorting it. Run along now, people are waiting.”

“I won’t detain you any longer Fritz,” Mary says. “As far as I’m concerned I’ve seen enough. Give my thanks to the priest.”

She kisses him on the cheek, remembering when he used to smell of Jicky instead of stale Scotch. He moves away, towards Paula and the gaping hole in the ground which is about to receive his daughter.

Carlo. She heads towards the car and the driver opens the door for her to get in. She is about to protest, but then she sees Carlo’s face, distorted into a mask of grief. He has been crying, but isn’t now, thank god, instead he is purple and paunched, though that may be whatever illness is afflicting him. He’s balder, his remaining grey hairs wafting like crane-fly legs in the breeze.

Mary slides in alongside him and kisses him on both cheeks.

“Thank you for coming, dear. I know you haven’t been up to it...”

“Mary, I am dumbstruck with grief. Why? Why did she do it? I saw her not six months ago. She seemed to be doing so well, about to start working in Texas, photographing a book about famous people and their cats or some such thing.”

“It was an accident Carlo, dear. Let’s not talk about it here...” She lowers her sunglasses and glances out of the window. In the distance, she can make out the mourners, huddled around the hole. Is she in yet, Mary wonders, are they throwing earth on her and sealing her in forever?

Carlo pulls a white cotton handkerchief from his pocket and dabs his eyes. “I’m sorry, you must be overwhelmed, and have so many other people to speak with. I just had to come Mary. She was like a daughter to me, even though when you and I were together she played hell in order for us to be apart. She felt more like a daughter to me when we *had* parted...how did that work?”

“She was a frightfully contrary creature. But you were the nearest to a father she had for a long time Carlo. She listened to you, took your advice on things.”

“I can’t help remembering her as a little girl. Six years old, sitting alongside you on the terrasse of some café or other, sucking juice through a straw while you...you were charming everyone just by being you. She wore her hair in waves, like yours, but on a child it looked more cute than alluring.”

Mary smiles. “That goddamn hair. Tough, Callery hair, I couldn’t for the life of me work out what to do with it for the best.”

“It was the first time we met, you and I, a coup de foudre , on my part at least. You were too much in love with Paris to have room for anyone else.”

“But I did love you, Carlo.”

Carlo pats her knee. “I know, I know. But you loved Paris, you loved art more, no?”

Mary takes the gold cigarette case out from beneath her furs and flips the lid. She offers it to Carlo but he shakes his head. She takes a cigarette and allows him to light it for her. In the silence that falls between them, she considers his statement. If only Carlo knew what she had been running away from in those days. She couldn’t wait to leave America, a place that was dying, for Europe, a place that was just waking up. To escape captivity in old New York and taste freedom in Paris.

“I loved Paris, I loved art, but I loved you too, Carlo. You taught me about Modernism. You changed the direction of my own practice as a sculptor. You showed me how to collect and truly appreciate art...”

She thinks he might start crying again, that ghastly European affliction, but instead he blows his nose noisily and goes on: “Do you remember when we took Caroline skiing in Zermatt? 1934, Christmas. You wore Dior and I thought you were the most sophisticated creature I’d ever seen! And dear Caroline tried so hard to emulate you, always following behind in your tracks...do you remember Mary?”

“Jesus Carlo, I remember the skiing, vaguely, but not the Dior. I felt far from sophisticated in those days. All those Parisian women, so compact and effortlessly chic. There was me, over-coiffed Callery hair and always towering above everyone it seemed. I wore flats all the time just so people didn’t think I was being superior!”

Carlo laughs and takes up her hand in his. “But do you remember Caroline, Mary? I know you. And I know you’re putting a brave face on this. Dearest, you are with me now, you must know you can let it go..?”

Mary pulls her hand away gently. “Was it really 1934 we were in Zermatt, Carlo? You have a better memory than me.”

“Mary...”

She feels the tears rising, not from her eyes, it seems, but from the very core of her being. It is an anomalous sensation, one that she doesn't seem to have a defense against. "...Zermatt was..." she begins, but it is too late; for the first time, her poise is beaten, overpowered by the savage tragedy of her lost girl.

From deep inside, Mary lets out a howl – taut, animalistic – a tenor so shocking to her that she feels oddly distanced from herself. Indeed, as the tears begin to fall, it is as if her body, her own armature, is disintegrating.

Carlo grabs her, props her up, she hears his voice but for a moment she can't make out the words he is shouting. Then he swings into view, a purplish, tormented face up close to her own, and she reaches for him, arms extending like a child to its mother. Carlo pulls her close and she clings to him, as if years of pent-up grief could be expunged by his shoulder.

Leather-clad knuckles rap against the window. Ellen Harrison, all silvery fur and black feathers. Her breath condenses on the cold glass. "Everything alright dearest?"

Mary pulls herself away from Carlo, taking the handkerchief from his top pocket and patting her eyes with it. Carlo winds down the window and cigarette smoke escapes from the car in a dense, hurried cloud. "If you'll excuse us, we're just reminiscing," he tells her. Ellen peers into the car at Mary and gives Carlo a searching glance.

"Oh." Ellen nods at him. "Hello Carlo. Terrible affair, all this. Hard to know what to say, but it is... swell to see you." Her cheeks flush. She pauses then says to Mary: "Well don't be too long dear, it's freezing out here."

Outside, a final car rolls out of the church yard, leaving just Carlo's and that of the Harrisons. Mary leans in to kiss him on the cheek but he turns and catches her lips with his. They hold it there, soft, longing; longer than they should. They are old now, but she believes she can still taste Paris on him.

"I've missed you, Mary," he says.

"And I you, dearest." She goes to get out of the car then turns to him. "She always wanted to be someone else, didn't she? Never content to be just Caroline. Maybe that was her problem, in the end."

The road back to Huntington and the Harrisons' is so familiar she could close her eyes and recognise each pothole. In the back of the car, with Ellen twittering in her

ear, Mary looks out at the winter-stripped cherry trees and replays Carlo's words. *She played hell in order for us to be apart.* A line from one of Caroline's letters jumps out at her, twenty years dormant but suddenly there in her head:

"I've ruined things for you with my beastly jealousy, only because I wanted so much to have you to myself."

Mary closes her eyes and counts potholes. In thirty minutes, they'll be home.

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, 1956

New York, 1956

Feb 29th

Dearest Mother:

I am at a loss as to how to begin this letter. But here goes: I have decided to marry Simon. Have thought the matter over very carefully in the past few months during which I have seen him noon and night and have recently spent a week's vacation with him skiing in New Hampshire. I wish so that I could tell you about it in person rather than through letters where I do not express myself half as well. And I wish you had been here so that I could have told you the whole sequence of events. In any case, I love him very much and he loves me and I think we have a great deal to build on. I am frightfully lucky.

I think I have already written you all the details on Simon. He is 29, looks younger, is considerably wiser; tremendous vitality; excellent at his job, very one-tracked in that he 'knows where he is going'; very English-looking in, I think, a handsome way, but, thank God, he has lived out of England so long that he is not stodgy; a strong determined character and yet a tremendous gentleness and kindness and most important, completely nice.

Oh Mother, I feel so completely out of touch with you as you have only written about twice since you left. I do not know what kind of life you live over there in Paris. I am not sure what car you have. I don't know what has happened with the sale of Villa d'Alesia – you must be so terribly sad to see it go after all these years?

I found myself on East 12th Street the other day, alone and thinking of you. A couple of kids were climbing on your Fables of Fontaine sculpture there. I couldn't help but stop and talk to them, pointing out each story, showing them the fox and the crow,

the frog and the bull...I told them that my glorious Mother had made it especially for them and they said, "Your mom must be so cool!"

Anyway. There is a lot more to say, but I'm not sure what! In any case, I am the happiest female in the world. And I cannot help comparing it often to my marriage to Gustav. Even before it, I was unhappy and would never have done it if I had not felt that I should, since I had told everyone! Perhaps it is good to have had the experience of one – because one is then sure that unless it's terrific, one never wants to do it again – and also, one learns a hell of a lot.

With much love to you,

Caroline

She married Simon three months later in Yonkers, with Simon's old room-mate and his girl as witnesses. She held peonies, Mother's favorites, in an anxious fist. Petals detached themselves and fluttered behind her in the wind as she walked. Her legs trembled; how much more nervous she felt this time! Testament to her strength of feeling, no doubt, and her dogged hope that this time, it would work.

Once again she consulted dear Binker on her outfit – the old boy was arthritic now and could barely muster a meowl through his few remaining teeth – but nonetheless, they agreed on a cream Chanel wide-legged pant suit with a tipped hat and no veil. Her make-up was by Rubinstein at Saks, peach cheeks and peach lips, faked-up eyebrows and a dash of black Kohl. Her hair, she loved – if only Mother could have seen it! – styled by Mr Kenneth into a sea of Marilyn-inspired waves.

The Booseys had made some excuse about the crippling cost of another overseas flight and couldn't make it. Caroline knew that they had continued their campaign of disapproval right up until the day of the wedding, though Simon protected her from it. She had found the letters – sent at a rate of one per day – tucked under the mattress of the bed, presumably awaiting a moment for discreet disposal.

Mother, inevitably, was absent, on a trip around the South of France, then on to Sicily, then Greece with her friend Nelly van Doesburg. In truth, Caroline suspected she was returned from the trip, holed up in the Meliton in Cadaques drinking Bullshots with her cronies, no doubt complaining about her daughter's latest escapade. Wherever she was, she had not responded to Caroline's latest letter which outlined the date and time of the nuptials.

“Relationships at a distance are always difficult flutter-mouse,” Simon told her. “Don’t go drawing any conclusions about her silence. Why don’t you cable her?”

“I wouldn’t know *where* to cable her. That’s the point, Boo. Put a point in the map and hope for the best.”

Simon put his arms around her and kissed her on the nose. “We are both orphaned by the ocean. But come now, don’t let it ruin our day.”

“I shan’t, dearest. Nothing could. I am as happy as a lark. I never knew one could be so happy, in fact! I just wish you could meet her. She truly is a special person, and I just know she’d be in love with you.”

“Listen. I may go to Europe for a couple of weeks over the summer on business. How about I stop in Paris and arrange to meet her there? Would that make you happy?”

“You make me happy,” she replied. “You are all I need. Let’s just get married.”

The veranda of Papa Coudert’s house had been festooned with white and pink swags, and balloons with their names on which bobbed about on the breeze. Paula, Papa’s wife, had insisted that the couple have their reception there, and had organized the event as if it were one of her husband’s fundraisers. She scurried around, fueled by champagne, nerves and pep-pills, starting conversations with people but unable to sustain them for longer than a few moments.

“What’s with Paula?” Simon whispered. “She’s even nuttier than usual.”

Caroline laughed. “Look around at the guests. Morrie Werner for a start – madly in love with Mother, apt to go directly from here to his typewriter and file a report of the event to send to her in Paris. Then there’s the Callery contingent. Paula’s totally intimidated.”

“Why offer to host it then?”

“Why do you think? Point-scoring of course.”

“Against whom?”

Caroline looked at him and he raised his eyebrows as if to say, ‘Ohhh!’

Paula began rounding guests up, clapping her hands and throwing caustic looks at the serving staff. “Come along now everyone,” she was saying, “Supper is served!”

“It’s worse than the goddamn army,” Morrie said, pulling a chair out for Caroline and Caroline laughed. “You look so pretty, Caroline. Boy do you remind me of your...” Simon took the chair from Morrie and pulled it out the rest of the way. “Thanks Morrie, I’ve got it.”

They ate Oyster Bay clams and cream sauce, jellied salmon and lobster all washed down with champagne, and as Caroline looked around her at the dear guests who had turned out to see her wed, she felt she may well have been the luckiest creature alive. (Luckier still if she had had any word from Mother; a lurch of anxiety for Mother suddenly gripped her guts – what if she was ill – or dead? - but Caroline swilled it away with a flute-full of champagne. She knew the grapevine for bad news traveled much quicker than the one for good. If anything had befallen Mother, she would have heard about it well before now.)

“You want to try calling her again flitter-mouse?” Simon said, placing his hand over that of his bride.

She scooped his face into her hands, secretly delighted by the fact that he seemed able to read her very thoughts – proof, if any more were needed, that they were made for each other. “No Boo. No! What? I’m not even thinking about her. Besides, I’m sure she’ll be in touch soon.”

*

May 11th 1956

Dear Mother,

A week married, and still no news. I wonder if you hate me for marrying, or if you just don’t know about it. I would have cabled, but I didn’t know where to cable to. We’ve just returned from the Catskills, three days recovering from the all the excitement and bureaucracy (I’m officially Mrs Simon Boosey now, thank god.)

We stayed in Woodstock, it was so lovely, all the trees were such wonderful colors. The only marring feature was that it was so damp that I got my damned sinus pains to an extreme point last night. Have not had them since Paris!

Lassitude is what I feel when I think about your lack of contact. Please write soon.

We both send our love,

ME

Caroline and Simon were sitting with their fingers intertwined on the couch in Mary and Eddie Mathews' apartment. Figaro was playing over the Metropolitan broadcast and they were all drinking vodka gimlets. Simon was telling them all about Boosey Hawkes and its impressive catalogue of signings, notably Stravinsky who was currently flirting with twelve-tone serialism, which, of course, was terribly exciting.

“There’s Richard Strauss too, of course, whom we are delighted to have acquired. It’s an exciting time for us. I’m going to Europe soon, hopefully with my flutter-mouse here, with a view to expansion.”

Caroline looked at her husband admiringly and squeezed his hand.

“You two are simply darling!” Mary said. “Aren’t they Eddie?”

“Absolutely!” Eddie replied.

Later, Mary took Caroline to show her the new rug she had just had shipped from Morocco for the bedroom, but Caroline knew it to be an excuse for the men to talk and for her to catch up on gossip. Mary handed Caroline a cigarette and they perched alongside each other on the edge of the bed.

“I like Simon immensely, dearest. So much more suited to you than that Jew.”

“You mean Gustav?” Caroline looked at Mary and laughed.

“Yes! Or *Mr Bard* as your mother used to call him.”

“We would never have worked. I was so lonesome in Berlin, I wanted so much to be married, it wouldn’t have much mattered who the man was. But by the end we were even vacationing apart – he went to the mountains for rest and clear air, whereas I stayed in the city and partied. I never loved Gustav, I realize that now. It took meeting Simon for me to see it.”

“And furthermore, I don’t have a moment’s doubt that your mother will love your new husband,” Mary told her.

“She was pretty harsh when I told her Simon and I were marrying. She told me I always ‘make so many problems’ and that I would not be happier if I married. I simply don’t agree. We are both the types who would be happier, he perhaps even more than I.”

“Your mother’s main concern is you and your welfare. Any overtures she may make are only ever in your interest, even though they may come across as harsh. She is a modern woman in every sense, but old New York runs deep. Don’t ever think she is uncaring.”

“I only wish I would hear from her soon. I’m trying not to worry but I haven’t heard a thing since before we married.”

“You know your mother, dearest. She’ll be gallivanting cross-country some place, but rest assured, she’ll be in touch as soon as she can.”

May 14th, 1956

Dearest Mother,

I was very sad to get your extremely cold and impersonal letter today, especially after waiting so long for it. You make it sound as if I didn’t give you the least warning and certainly as if you are not happy for me. I am really awfully sorry – I tried so hard to tell you all about it in detail and pretty much asked you to come back. It seems as though everything I do is wrong as far as you’re concerned – no matter how hard I try.

We leave for Cuba tomorrow, so you won’t hear from me for two weeks. Simon is then travelling on to England on business and would like very much to meet with you. I hope this gives us enough space for you to have warmed up and have decided you are happy for us.

I miss you,

Caroline. (And Simon)

MARY

NEW YORK, November 1966

On mantels in the hallways of each of Mary's residences, letters are piled. Those which have arrived in Cadaques will remain unopened for another two weeks, until finally Mary returns. At one of two addresses in Paris lie messages from the Zervos', from Hans Richter, from Maurice and Tanya Grosman. There may be one in there from Dora Maar but nothing, Mary knows, from Picasso. She doubts the news has even reached him down there in Antibes.

A handful sit in the house on East 68th Street, neatly arranged in size order by Sweetie the maid. Mary pours herself a glass of sherry and takes up her letter opener.

...It startles me so that I have little or nothing to say except that I think of you sadly... – Georgia O'K

...Darling Meric...Partake of each day and know the indescribable resilience of the human spirit... Bob and Elodie Osborn.

...my heart aches for you and for sweet Caroline...Sandy Calder

...I send nothing but love and sincere condolences – Marguerite Arp

And from Mies, no words, but a simple charcoal line sketch of a woman and child standing apart, reaching out for one another across a sparse and bruised skyscape.

Words and images are arranged on notecards of sympathy before her, but it will be months before she is able to see them with any clarity. For now, she slices envelopes, unfurls letters, opens cards, and the messages within spill out and seep away like gin on the rocks.

She counts forty-eight letters in all, not to mention the jungle of dying blooms clogging the hallway. She ties the letters with a length of blue ribbon and places them in a drawer to be filed. Reaching for her purse, she takes out the plastic box containing the lock of hair. No-one knows about it except for the coroner. Mary had

been airborne over the ocean while arrangements were being made for Caroline's funeral; Fritz had told her, "We'll see to the remains."

The remains. The barbaric language of the business of death. But Mary's remainder is soft, its movement fluid. There is nothing barbaric about a caramel-colored curl. Mary lifts it from its box and places it onto a piece of blue note paper with the word 'Remember' in bold gilded type across the top. She secures it with wire and folds the paper in half. In pencil she writes: CCC's Hair.

Alongside it in a matching blue envelope, she places two photographs. The first a sepia shot of Caroline at the ranch, her hair wrapped up in a scarf, brown curls bubbling out over her brow. Taken around 1948, Mary thinks, fresh from Columbia with that beastly business with the professor firmly in her wake. The second is Caroline in black and white, a studio shot in which she looks gay and so pretty. She seals the envelope and again writes CCC's hair, this time in blue, looping script. She reaches for the sherry and empties the bottle into her glass.

Mary B arrives, let in by the street vendor on the corner of East 68th and 3rd who is also unofficial concierge. The Candyman, Mary calls him. She trusts him with her life.

"You started without me, then," she says, indicating the sherry bottle. "I'll assume there's more." She smiles and throws her coat over the back of the chair.

"Take your pick. Gin, whisky...there's a fine bottle of port there. A gift from Blanchette Rockefeller in return for one of my sculptures, believe it or not. I was saving it for a special occasion. Does this count?"

Mary B helps herself to a glass from the cabinet. "I'll fix myself a martini. Martini always reminds me of you."

Mary slips the blue envelope inside her purse and moves from her writing desk to the couch. "I have no maid today, sorry. And no olives. In fact, I'm thinking about checking into the Colony Club for what remains of my stay."

"I can do martini without a maid or olives, but the Colony Club sounds like a good idea dearest. You want a martini?"

"...Sure."

Mary B mixes the martinis and hands one to her friend. "How was today?"

“Better than yesterday. I didn’t bury my child today.”

“Did you bury her yesterday?”

“In my mind, yes. I don’t know what Fritz has done with her...”

“Don’t you want to know?”

“No.”

Life floats in through the window. Street hawkers, motor cars, the old guy on the opposite corner who keeps stray cats on leashes and plays Jailhouse Rock on a loop. Mary listens: an ever-changing soundscape which conversely, never changes. She has listened to it since she first bought the house and set up her studio here way back in the late 30s. It has been background noise to her sculptures – many of her early pieces, Acrobats, Song of the Desert, her busts of young Harry Mathews, of Anna, of Sally – all imbued with the echoes of the Upper East Side.

Caroline had urged her to sell. Perhaps now was the time. She could invest the money in that rambling old place north of Paris in Villiers-sous-Grez, next door to the Duchamps, with views of golden rape fields. Yes, and Marcel could fix her up with one of those wooden sun shades he makes every year for Teeny, ‘an original Duchamp’ as he called it, attached to the back of the house.

She had plenty of places to stay should she ever need to come back to New York, not least the Colony Club or the Westbury Hotel. (Although perhaps not the Westbury, after the last time she stayed there. Convalescing after breaking her leg with a sculpture and not wishing to hear the continual banging of work being done at the Synagogue next door, she had decamped to the Westbury for some peace and quiet. Her entire jewelry collection, including a priceless and highly sentimental pin designed for her by Calder, were stolen from her room, no doubt by that recalcitrant maid. The jewelry was never recovered, and even to this day, thinking about it was painful.)

Whatever summers that were left to her could be divided between Cadaques, Paris and Villiers. She feels herself becoming wistful; a grave and self-indulgent condition probably born of grief and getting old. Enough.

She turns to Mary B and says: “We need to have a studio party.”

Mary B looks at her incredulously. “A studio party? Why?”

“It’s what we do, isn’t it?”

“Who in god’s name would you invite to a party?”

“There’s you two old ducks. Ellen and Wally. Jesus, Manhattan used to be full of people wanting to come to my studio parties. Don’t tell me there’s no-one left?”

“There are lots of people left, but I just don’t know why you suddenly feel the urge for a party.”

“Well it beats sitting here playing bezique with you!” Mary B howls with laughter. “I throw a fine studio party, you have to admit. I’ll have a look through my address book, get the gang together.”

“Remember that New Years’ party you threw at the Barn?”

“Barely...But that’s the sign of a good party, right?”

“Ha! True. All I recall was Philip Johnson storming outside in a gin-rage and kicking the side of the Barn because he knew it was Mies who had designed it for you, then realizing he was getting nowhere so came in again and carried on drinking.”

“Really? I knew Philip had the hots for Mies of course, but I wasn’t aware of that particular incident. What an ass!” Mary shakes her head. “Did I ever tell you about the New Year I spent with Philip at his place in New Canaan?”

“Oh holy shit Mary, you’re not going to tell me you slept with him?”

It’s Mary’s turn to laugh now, deep and husky. “Chance would have been a fine thing. I wasn’t his type...”

New Year’s Eve, 1948. The Glass House wasn’t finished, but Johnson proudly invited her as his first guest, probably to get back at Mies but of course, Mies didn’t care. Indeed, he told her to go along with his blessing and take notes. *It is an extraordinary place, she wrote him, with no distinction between outside and in. The snows are heavy, so during the day the place is soaked in dazzling white light, and at night the snow lies there outside like a kind of seething presence, malevolent somehow. It is delicious!*

“The kitchen, dining and sleeping areas were all in the same room, we barely moved during my entire stay,” Mary says.

“Well if you didn’t sleep with him, what did you do?”

“We drank Martinis and talked. He liked the idea of a female friend who’d sit with him and drink. We played chess, drank some more. And I did sleep with him. Snuggled up like two seal pups in his platonic bed.”

Mary B raises an eyebrow. “You beat all, Mary. No-one would believe the half of it.”

“What the hell is truth anyway?” Mary drains the Martini and pulls herself up off the couch for another. “It happened, but all I have are my memories to prove it. Yellowed, feathery memories at that. Maybe it didn’t happen. Sometimes I wonder if half of the things I’ve done in my life did; or if they did, what they counted for, in the end.”

“Why would you say that?”

Mary pours a deep pool of gin into the bottom of her glass, tops it up with vermouth and brings it to her lips. “Did you want another dearest? I’ve lost my manners all of a sudden...”

Mary B shakes her head, but Mary insists; “Drink up, dear, come on, I despise being at odds with the pace. It’s so *inamical*.”

Mary B hands Mary her glass and pulls out her cigarette case. “Why would you say that? Not the part about being *inamical* – the part about your life. Why would you be in any doubt?”

“It sometimes seems I have spent my life supporting the dreams of others, buying their work so that they might themselves succeed. I wonder why I myself have not been championed in the same way.”

“That’s simply not true Mary. Your work may not have found the audience of Picasso or Sandy Calder or Léger or all of those other men you supported, financially or otherwise. But don’t forget dearest; you are a woman. And being a woman really is a curse when one has ambitions beyond parish luncheons and the latest suit from Saks. So really, what you have achieved is remarkable.”

“And what of being a mother? Isn’t that part of being a woman too? I was a lousy one of those....” She drops heavily onto the couch. Mary B shuffles along towards her but Mary stiffens and she stops.

“You were the best you could be,” Mary B tells her. “Hell, who knows what makes a good mother? There’s no handbook.”

“Caroline asked me once why Fritz and I had bothered having a child. It was in the midst of some argument or other, so I took it as angry rhetoric. What would I have answered though?”

The women sit under a weight of dense silence, with only the sound of two cigarettes being intermittently sucked and inhaled. They’ve known each other long enough for silences to be tolerable, but this one is hard to endure. A memory enters Mary’s head and won’t budge; she is heavily pregnant, sitting by the fire in the apartment on Fifth Avenue eating nothing but oranges, and glaring at Fritz while throwing peels resentfully into the flames.

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, NOVEMBER 1966

1:45am

Had the record finished? She hadn't noticed. She was in the bathroom now, staring at a face in the glass. It was her face, she believed, but Johnny Walker had distorted it. Surely she was prettier than this? According to the glass, her nose was fat, much fatter than usual (god she'd always hated that nose). Her hair was parched as prairie grass. The eye liner she had so carefully painted over her lids last night, (flicking delicately up at the corner like Mademoiselle magazine told her she ought to) had smudged to create the effect of two smoky holes.

'Money, caviar, and diamonds; intelligence, amiability and wit; ambition, success and charm.'

She'd read that once, or perhaps overheard it in a restroom somewhere, and now it was typed out and stuck above her bathroom mirror, and she was rehearsing it to herself as she tried to wipe the paint from her eyes. It was an adage for life – or perhaps an adage for her mother's life. God knows, she'd tried to live by it herself but as far as she could tell she'd fallen at every fence.

For a start, what was there to say about money? Being born into it isn't the same as having earned it yourself. Wealthy forebears are more of a curse than anything else – people assume you have money because of them and when you claim you have none, no-one believes you. 'Run to the bank of Mother and Papa,' Simon had told her when the divorce was at the height of its spitefulness, but Papa, she knew, wouldn't give her a cent, and Mother had been so generous in the past what with paintings and possessions, how could she now approach her and say what she really needed was cold, hard cash?

She'd never been good with money, always reliant on the advice of others, which usually turned out to be bad. Stocks and shares were a plague, every job she took seemed to end in her being fired and the work she was doing now, photography, which she loved, paid peanuts. But money wasn't just about purchase power. It stood for all kinds of things, and this was the part Caroline could never work out.

As for caviar, diamonds and the rest of it, Mother always recognized them as symbiotic and worked them to her advantage, even though deep down, Caroline believed she hated all they stood for. Diamonds had edges, each side refracting the light in a slightly different way to the next. In life, one had to be multidimensional and iridescent like a diamond in order to succeed. Mother had been inculcated with this knowledge at a young age (did they teach that sort of stuff at Spence?)

Caroline would watch her different faces emerge at parties, luncheons, openings, the vernissages. She made whomever she was talking to feel as if they were the most important person in the world, whilst retaining a tantalizing aura of superiority. The result? She always got what she wanted. When dear Wally Harrison was appointed to the board of trustees at MOMA in 1939, she was still in Paris. On her return in July the following year, she wasted no time in getting herself an invitation to a dinner in the museum penthouse.

“The war in Europe has left me all out of shape,” she told him and Ellen over cocktails one evening. “I feel so very out of touch with things here. I’ve yet to even visit MOMA since it moved to midtown. How is the new building, Wally?”

“Oh my!” Ellen interjected. “The gala opening was quite something, wasn’t it Wally? You’ve never seen so many diamonds in your life. And what a building Mary. You simply must see it. Wally, how about getting Mary on the guest list for the Trustees dinner? It’s next week, would you be able to make it Mary?”

“Well I’m not sure...”

“It would be so much more fun if you were there. Mrs Resor was at the last one, jeez she’s so goddamn full of herself that woman but makes out she’s a saint by her random acts of philanthropy...” Ellen rearranged herself on her seat, trying to shake off, it seemed, any trace of Mrs Resor. Mary stifled a smirk with a slug of Scotch. She liked Helen Resor. The woman had chutzpah; a quality which, when manifest in a female, left some folk bristling.

“Well, what does Wally think?” Mary asked.

Wally looked at her from beneath hefty eyebrows. “I think it’s a grand idea, Mary. I’ll have you added to the guest list.”

The director of MOMA at that time was Alfred H. Barr, and Mary knew he would be at the dinner.

“Mr Barr?” The fingers of her gloved hand each glistened with a different Paris-bought jewel, the centerpiece being a sapphire like a scarab beetle on the knuckle of her middle finger.

Barr turned, saw the hand and then his eye tracked up the arm to the woman it belonged to. He wasn’t unlike Papa to look at, Caroline had often thought, an intelligent, calm face with a scaffold of spectacles on the end of his nose.

“My dear Mrs Callery...”

“Oh do call me Meric.”

“I had thought you to be still in Paris, how delighted I am to see you here in one piece! You look mesmerizing.” He took her hand and kissed it lightly. “Terrible what’s happening over there in Europe. How is our dear friend Picasso?”

“Well, we worry for him every day of course, but I don’t imagine we’ll hear from him any time soon. How was the exhibition of his work back in January?”

“Oh my dear, it was extraordinary. Thousands of visitors every day, we had to rearrange the entire building to accommodate them, and the monster that is Guernica of course. Thank you once again for the pieces you contributed.”

“It was my pleasure. I could have jumped back on the boat with you to Manhattan when you came to Paris to collect them last year. What an exhibition it must have been.”

“Second only to the Van Gogh in terms of visitors, but that was only because the Van Gogh ran for longer. Picasso truly is a great man.”

“I have such admiration for you and your commitment to Modernism, Mr Barr – the Van Gogh exhibition must surely be credited as the stimulus for the current interest in contemporary art in New York?” She took a sip of champagne.

Barr smiled. “What of you, now you have returned to us for a while Mrs Callery? Are we to finally see some of your own work on this side of the pond?”

“Modernism is still such a European thing. I had an exhibition at the Salon des Tuileries in Paris, but I’m not sure what they’d make of it here. I’d love to exhibit in New York of course. Finding a gallery in which to do though...”

Barr looked about the crowd and his eyes landed on a rubbery-faced fellow in the corner. A cigarette bounced around on the lower of the man’s bicycle-tyre lips as he debated vigorously with another guest. “Curt!” Barr shouted, beckoning him forth. “Curt come over here and say hello to Mrs Callery.”

Curt duly shambled over, amply drunk on free champagne, still with the cigarette (more ash than cigarette now) stuck to his lip. He took one look at Mary and bowed long and low like a courtier, strands of pomaded hair sweeping the floor.

“Mrs Callery! It is wonderful to see you again. I wonder if you even remember lowly old me...”

Mary laughed. “Please call me Meric. And you are Curt Valentin of Buchholz.” She turned to Barr, who winked at her.

Valentin put himself the right way up and took her hand. “Please call me Curt. And firstly, I thank you for giving me an excuse to leave the company of that frightful bore over there. I didn’t catch his name...”

“Isn’t that the Swedish minister?”

“Probably. Anyway, *Meric*. You’re far more of a foreign dignitary as far as I’m concerned. How on earth is life in Paris?”

Mary grew contemplative, picturing her beloved city and only imagining what was happening there now. “Paris was – is – wonderful. Everyone was terribly frightened by the end. They advised us to leave in December, but many of us couldn’t bear to go. Picasso is still there of course...”

Curt nodded but didn’t seem to be listening. “Please, and on this I insist, will you agree to present your first exhibition with me at Buchholz? I’ve heard so much about your work – old man Zervos never stops talking about Meric Callery. Whenever it may be, I want Meric Callery’s first opening in America to be with me.”

Mary placed a hand flat against her breast. “I’m overwhelmed, Mr Valentin...”

“...Curt.”

“.. and of course I would be honored.”

“Take my card. Call me when you want to go for lunch. And make it sometime this week. I think you and I are going to get along famously.”

Mary placed the card in her purse, satisfied she had got what she came for. She loved ‘temperamental’ Manhattan types like Curt Valentin. There was no chance of ending up in bed with one of them, and they were almost always creatively motivated, frightfully well-connected and impeccably turned out.

Caroline wiped the eyeliner away, leaving nothing but two gray eyes looking back at her through the mirror. Who the hell was *Meric* anyhow? Whoever she was, Caroline didn’t care for her – after all, as far as she saw it, Meric stole her mother.

MARY

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1966

A trawl through her contact book reveals a depressing wake of death and decrepitude. Who is left to attend a party here if she were to host one? Morrie is still about and relatively sprightly. Were Maurice and Tanya still in New York she wondered? Her niece, Marcella, is over in Wainscott, but she's not been the same since her Constantine died. Her great-nephew George is always good for a party, but why in the hell would he want to hang out with an old bird like her?

Maybe the party is not such a good idea after all. Besides, she's tired of always being the one to decimate her drinks cabinet for the hangovers of others. She closes her contact book. There will be no party. All she wants now is to board a flight back east to Europe and Cadaques, with its white, recuperative light.

The next available flight goes in three days. She makes a final visit before leaving, to the new Metropolitan Opera House to see the commission she made for the proscenium arch. It will be the first time she has seen the piece in situ, and she feels trepidation, especially given the reception it received. (The Car Crash was one of the kinder aliases conferred upon it by the press.)

Manhattan never changes except for the traffic, which seems to have increased since she was last here a year ago. In the cab, they pass the Westbury Hotel (she shudders at the memory of the jewellery theft) and the Plaza, where she lived as a girl with Papa all those years ago and has returned as a woman so many times since. She recognises the doorman, she thinks, the same old duck from years ago, crippled from years of bowing to guests. How must it be to walk the same stretch of sidewalk day in day out until, ultimately, you're pretty much under it?

They arrive at Lincoln Square and Mary takes a moment to take in the Opera House. It is Wally's design of course, stark and minimalist, built from travertine marble with five great looping windows like alien eyes that seem to watch over the complex. Within it, an auditorium, presided over by a sculpture wrought by her own hands and

transported halfway round the world from her studio in northern Spain. She tips the driver and walks uneasily through the drizzle towards the entrance.

Rudolf Bing, the General Manager, emerges from a side room and greets her with a kiss to each cheek. He is like Manhattan, he never changes. Always the same dark ruff of hair around an otherwise bald head, same self-effacing demeanour belying a forceful intellect.

“You look radiant, Meric. I am so delighted you have come. And under such sad circumstances too...I am so terribly sorry for your loss. I can’t believe Caroline was standing in this very lobby not two months ago for the opening of the new building...”

Mary bows her head and thanks him. “The whole building is breath-taking Rudy,” she says, looking around at the lobby. The staircases wind upwards like taffy ribbons round a pulling machine, toward a constellation of glittering starburst chandeliers. Marc Chagall, her old friend from her École de Paris days, designed the two murals on the south and north walls and she marvels at them, each a feat of composition and construction.

“...I’m only sorry you weren’t able to make opening night yourself.” He swallows and his Adam’s apple bobs up and down visibly in his throat. “But you’re right, every aspect of it is breath-taking. Not least the sculpture over the proscenium arch. Come see.”

The first thing she sees is the gold damask grand drape with its scalloped pelmet, leading into the gold scalloped ceiling overhead. It takes her a moment to assimilate her sculpture, yet there it is, clinging to the top of the arch like a colossal bronze crustacean. She puts her hand over her mouth to conceal a smile. The piece that has occupied her every waking moment since Wally Harrison and the board commissioned it all those months ago. *It is perfect, she thinks, and it is mine!*

Bing leaves her, and she moves slowly about the empty auditorium, looking at her creation from every angle. How do the people in the orchestra see it? The man at the back of the grand tier? The woman watching from the side box? How about the child looking up at it from the family seats?

Suddenly a thought hits her, knocking her down into one of the seats with its force: How had her own child seen it, two months ago on opening night? Mother’s grand

triumph. Caroline had written her appraisal in a letter but in the excitement, how much of the appraisal had Mary taken in?

'I know it is supposed to be abstract' she'd written, 'but I see a bouquet of exotic tendrils bursting out from the arch...a sort of industrial sea urchin, perhaps, certainly something otherworldly...whatever, it is (another) extraordinary piece, by (perpetually) extraordinary you..'

Dazed, she grabs the back of the seat and tries to stand up. A voice shouts, "You OK, lady?" a stage hand or technician, lurking, as they do, in a dark corner somewhere. She peers out but sees no one, and shouts back, "Yes, yes, I'm fine thank you." Again she pulls herself up, this time her legs hold and she moves fast, out of the auditorium and into the twinkling light of the lobby.

Once again, Bing greets her and she thanks him for allowing her in to see the sculpture at short notice. "It's quite a different thing to see it when it's framing a performance, Meric. Please call next time you're in town, I insist that you be my guest at a show."

Despite the rain she'll walk back she thinks. With rain, the air clears in Manhattan, revealing another layer of smells: fresher though no less polluted with cab fumes and coal fires. She needs this fresher air to clear her mind of damaging thoughts, to blast out its murky recesses. She strides across Central Park, crossing onto Fifth, whereupon the rain grows dark and heavy. Head down, she emerges further down Park Avenue than she had intended – a block from the Colony Club, in fact. She sees the club's flag flapping and hurries towards it, beneath the awning, out of the rain.

The concierge, George, peers out through the tiny window in the door. He opens it wide and says, "Well hello again Mrs Callery. You look like a weary traveller in need of shelter from the storm."

At that moment she feels she may cry but her reserve is well-rehearsed; "Indeed George. I would like to check in for a couple of nights, if there is a room."

Despite the awning, George ushers her in beneath a large black umbrella. Yet another fixture of Manhattan – the Colony Club, with its clacking of heels on polished herring bone floors, the scent of its elaborate flower displays (today, calla lilies); the sound of a dance class in the ballroom or voices from the play-reading group echoing around the oak-panelled walls.

George takes out the guest register, runs his finger down the list of names and hands her the key to room 106. “Your usual,” he tells her, with a smile.

She has no luggage, no bags, just the contents of her purse and the damp clothes on her back.

“Room 106,” she tells the bellhop in the elevator, and then, “In fact, no. I’ll stop in at the dining room. God knows I’m ravenous.” She laughs at this admission. He beams at her from beneath the peak of his cap.

The members’ dining room is alive with the sound of ladies talking - a chirruping which seems to reflect the birds of paradise fresco overhead. She sees Abby Rockefeller dining with her cousin Margaret in the corner and thinks better of sitting down to eat. She can’t cope with pleasantries, god knows she needs a Scotch and a silent room in which to catch up on correspondence (she ought to write Nelly and owes a million letters to those who thought to send condolences.)

Back in the elevator, she asks the bellhop to bring her a sandwich – anything will do, she is hungry but has no appetite – and a bottle of whisky. She closes the door of her room and folds herself up, fully dressed, in fresh, starched sheets. She lies there, looking at the flock patterned wallcovering, wondering if this might be the last time she ever comes back to New York and the Colony Club and room 106.

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, 1960

At first, Simon loved the parties. What English man from the Home Counties wouldn't? Breezing around Oyster Bay drinking cocktails on the Harrisons' sail boat, Saturday night dances at the Seawanhaka Corinthian club, not to mention all the dinners and receptions in Manhattan. You didn't get that in Surrey.

And hosting parties too. Any excuse would do – the 'installation of the air conditioning unit' party. The 'end of winter' party. The 'Caroline gets fired from Knoll' party. (She'd been especially drunk at this last one and had told all the guests, who happened to be predominantly Simon's friends from Boosey Hawkes, that they were 'leeches' and to 'get the fuck out of our apartment'. To this day she had no recollection of this, only the puce-faced testimony of Simon and that deleterious sensation deep in her guts every time she thought about it.)

But as time went on, she felt him tightening the circle around her, eliminating those people and events which played on his inferiority complex. It started with colleagues and friends, especially those new to the scene from the offices of Life and DFB - clients from her job at Knoedler's art gallery.

"Dinner with the Life crowd *again* this weekend flutter-mouse?" he'd say from behind his paper. "Gets a little boring, don't you think?"

"But we only just met them. Seems a little ungracious to turn down invitations to parties at this stage. Besides, I'm trying to build relationships here Boo, to convince Zervos he did the right thing in recommending me to Knoedlers."

"It's not as if we're short of friends..." He took a tense sip from his Scotch.

"Well no – but isn't it always nice to make new friends?" She could feel irritation climbing up her flesh like tiny spiders, but staunched it as best she could. Simon could be so small-minded sometimes. Exactly like his goddamn mother.

"Depends on the friends. They're terribly showy, that lot, with their Rolex watches and black pearl tie-pins. That Jane woman you work with, what a nit!"

“They’re good people, Boo. And Jane’s become a good friend.”

“Yes but they’re *your* friends. I always feel like such an outcast at these things. Maybe it’s the fact that I’m British they don’t like.” He shook his paper and turned a page. She wanted to rip the goddamn thing out of his hands and force him to have a proper conversation instead of hiding behind a wall of newsprint.

“That’s crazy. They’ve been nothing other than welcoming to us both.” She forced herself to go over to where he was sitting and run a hand through his hair. “Come on hon, I think you’re being a little paranoid.” She kissed his forehead and said lightly, “So, talking of dinner, how about we go for steak at Delmonico’s tonight?”

He shrugged an agreement and she gratefully took this to be the end of the discussion. But as time went on, his disapproval spread.

“Drinks with the Couderts again, huh?” he began.

“What’s wrong with the Couderts?”

“Nothing, nothing. It’s just non-stop cocktail parties with you people. It’s a wonder you haven’t all got cirrhosis of the liver.”

Caroline laughed but she felt skewered by the comment. Friends, she was used to, but this was the first time he had made inferences about her family. She eyed him warily. There was plenty she could say about old Ethel and Leslie Boosey, but she chose to hold her tongue. No chance of them getting cirrhosis, she felt like saying. One sherry and Ethel is done. Rather die of cirrhosis than of piety and unutterable boredom.

But if it had to be pinpointed, the demise of her marriage to Simon had begun with babies. More precisely, her abject refusal to have any.

“You knew this when we got married though, Boo,” she pleaded. “I’d rather die than have a child.”

Simon’s eyes hardened. “You talk of children as if they were some kind of disease. It’s inhuman the way you go on.”

“I can’t help it. I’m sorry, I realize that this is not what a woman is supposed to be...”

“Damned right it’s not. Wouldn’t you even consider it?”

Caroline took a cigarette from her case and lit it. How could she tell him that whenever saw a baby she felt nothing but revulsion? “Look around you Simon. We have a fabulous apartment, good friends, a steady income...”

“That’s what it’s all about for you, isn’t it? Keeping up appearances...”

“That’s so unfair. None of those things are important to me, it has always been about finding love and happiness. And I thought we had that, Boo...”

Simon softened momentarily, piqued, perhaps, by her notions of romanticism. He moved towards her and held her by her arms. “Let’s quit renting and buy a place of our own in Long Island City. I couldn’t afford much, but as you say, as long as we have each other, who cares? We could live on a project on the waterfront, frugally without all these...modern accoutrements.”

He wafted a flippant hand around the apartment, at walls and mantels which sagged with Mother’s gifts of modern art. “In fact,” he went on, “We could sell all of these paintings and sculptures and probably have enough to buy a place outright. I mean this one – (he pointed a finger at a piece entitled ‘Involute’; a coiling, seductive piece in cork relief, with a dedication ‘*To Mary Callery August 1945*’). I ask you Caroline, would we really miss this if it were gone?”

Caroline’s eyes filled with tears, but somehow not a single one dropped. “I would...”

She loved that piece. It was an early Albers, full of hope for the future possibilities of art and print-making. Something about its looping lines made her joyful. “And furthermore, it’s dedicated to my mother...”

Simon, inebriated by a small measure of whisky and a large measure of self-aggrandisement, went on; “And do you really need all those furs and trinkets your mother has given you over the years? We have insurance payments coming out of our ears for them, what’s the point if all they’re doing is sitting in a closet being eaten by moths?”

She drew hard on her cigarette, giving herself time in the long inhalation to find her counter-argument. She realized she had none. “The furs, you can sell, the trinkets too, I guess. But the artwork...Simon, she has collected these pieces for years and for good reason. She didn’t give me them to be used for collateral on an apartment.”

He sniffed. “Well what else are they good for? They’re fucking dreadful if you ask me. This one here for example. Our child, if we had one, could do better.” He took the piece off the wall and looked at it. A rudimentary drawing of a girl drawn in pencil, cut out and now, mounted on brown paper.

“Picasso drew that for me!” Caroline cried. “Pablo fucking Picasso!” In Paris, drinking yet another juice on yet another café terrace, he had sketched it to avert her boredom and disillusionment with the whole scenario. “It may seem basic to you, but it has the hand of genius in it, and moreover he drew it *for me!*”

Simon threw a glance at her to see if she was properly crying. It seemed she was. He moved back towards her, a slow swagger which took him via the liquor cabinet to top up his whisky. He slung an arm around her shoulder. “Caroline, flitter-mouse. Don’t get so aggravated. I’m making suggestions which are beneficial to our future together, nothing more. I don’t ever want to upset you. We’ll keep the goddamn paintings if they mean that much to you. But all I’m saying is that I don’t wish to live in some kind of modern ‘show’ apartment with some modern ‘show’ wife.”

She sobbed into his shoulder, telling herself that this was indeed a wonderful and sensitive man she had married, but knowing, deep in her soul, that he would sell her mother’s legacy in a shot given half the chance. He’d already sold the worth of a Mercedes convertible without her consent. She needed to protect the rest with her life.

They shambled on as husband and wife through winter into spring. When the end came, the agonizing denouement to their short-lived play of marriage, she begged for reconciliation. How could she face Mother with news of another divorce, not to mention giving any measure of satisfaction to Ethel Boosey? She would do anything he asked – sell the paintings, dress in the way he thought was becoming of an Long Island City project wife, succumb to his views on friendship (that they should only be his). He was a crushing bore, but this, she understood, was a woman’s lot; and she’d already had a stab at it with the Jew. Failure with Mr Boosey was not an option.

“I want a divorce,” she thought she heard him say. But surely this couldn’t be right.

“We’ll work it out,” she pleaded, “We love each other, don’t we?”

“You heard me. I said I want a divorce. I can’t go on like this Caroline. Truth is, I don’t love you anymore.” He eased the wedding band off his finger and placed it on

the mantel. "I'm leaving for England next week, my lawyer will be in touch with you about arrangements. I'm sorry."

He made for the door of the apartment but she ran ahead of him and blocked it. "Don't leave Simon, please, I'll do anything.."

"It's useless..."

"Who is she? Hmm? You must be running off to someone's bed, I know you Simon, you wouldn't spend a cent on a hotel room."

"Move out of the way."

"It's clear you married the wrong person from the beginning," she went on, yielding as he shoved her to one side. Calmly, he undid the latch, not looking at her as she ranted. "It was never me you wanted was it, oh no, I was merely a symbol representing a woman. Anyone would have done, as long as she had no drive or ambition of her own."

He pushed past her, out into the cold landing and she watched his head disappearing down the stairwell. She ran back into the apartment and threw open the windows which gave onto the street. A gust of noise swept in, motor car horns, street vendors, the wasp-like hum of city life. She saw him below, crossing East 74th street, heading toward Madison. Rushing to the mantel, she grabbed the ring he had laid there and returned to the window with it balled up in a furious fist.

"You might as well take this with you!" she yelled, and threw it as hard as she could. "No doubt you'll need it when you ask the next fool to marry you." She neither saw where the band landed, nor cared to know. She paused to see if Simon would turn round; he proceeded towards Madison without a second look.

MARY

1960

“There is a divorce and an outbreak of measles in every family,” Mary B. Mathews is saying. “I don’t know why you’re getting so snippy about it.”

Mary C and her oldest friend are sitting on the terrace of the American Club in Paris, drinking cocktails and watching a group of men larking about on the bank of the river. They are dressed as horses, each with an equine head made of paper attached to the front of his trousers. Ordinarily, Mary would be hooting at such drollery. Today she is in receipt of Caroline’s letter, and from behind massive tortoiseshell shades, irritation twitches in her gray eyes.

“Horse’s heads aside, those guys are no end of asses,” she says, tapping cigarette ash onto the grass beside her. “What in hell are they doing?”

Mary B ignores her. “And, I’ll add that you yourself were divorced. Twice, in fact. Remember the ruckus that caused at the time.”

Mary closes her eyes, feeling the early August sun against fatigued lids. Must she remember that ‘ruckus’ as her friend had so quaintly called it? Or be reminded of it, more to the point. It was bad enough at the time. ‘Paris’ had corrupted her. ‘Loutchansky and the École de Paris’ had corrupted her. ‘Sculpture’ itself had corrupted her. No-one seemed willing to accept – or understand – that, au contraire, these were the very things that had diverted her from corruption of the spirit, corruption of her personal freedom.

She never should have married Fritz, but at the time, the breath of expectation blew around her like a squall. What else was she to do, especially considering all the money that had been dispensed on her education? Even still, Mother Coudert’s face when Mary announced the news that she was filing for divorce, looms up behind her eyelids. Mother Coudert’s mouth had dropped open with shock, revealing a set of bottom teeth which seemed to sprout haphazardly from gums like tombs in an ancient graveyard.

“Wherever has this foolish talk come from?” she had asked. “Do you need more staff is that it? A new governess for Caroline? No-one said being a wife was easy dear, but divorce is an awful strong word to use out of the blue...”

“It has nothing to do with staff. It’s the ‘being a wife’ part I struggle with. And it’s not out of the blue. I have been contemplating this for some time and it is not a decision I have taken lightly.”

Then the face had become elongated and doleful like a Modigliani portrait, determined to dissuade Mary from this temporary madness.

“Now dear, think rationally. Think of all you stand to lose. Think of your reputation. If nothing else, think of the child.”

But Mary *was* thinking rationally. Of all the things she stood to lose, her mind was the thing most apt to go first. As for the welfare of her child, she knew herself what it was to grow up in a household where the dining table was never laid except for when there were guests, where the drawing room drapes were kept closed in order to prevent sunlight from bleaching the god-awful portraits of miserable-looking descendants on the wall, and she sure as hell didn’t want any of it for her child.

Besides, by now, she had discovered the world of art and all of its delicious, shady crevices. She had bought her first studio on East 53rd street, established herself within a group of dedicated and talented artist friends from the Arts Students League and beyond. The ambitions of her Republican-fusion candidate husband were as interesting to her as paint wash. Poor Fritz, by allowing her to indulge her passions, had inadvertently put an end to his marriage.

Two months after she announced it to her family and close friends, Mary Callery Coudert set off for Paris aboard the MS Augustus in search of her divorce papers. The headline in the New York Times screamed:

MRS F.R. COUDERT JR OFF TO SEEK DIVORCE

Incompatibility given as grounds as Wife of Lawyer Sails for Paris

HER PLAN A SURPRISE

She Had Actively Aided Husband in Race for District Attorney – To Have Art Studio in France.

Collective familial fury boiled over the ocean, but Mary blocked it all out with thoughts of the unimpeded creative future that awaited her on the other side of the globe.

“You can ignore me all you like, but you know it to be true.” Mary Mathews’ voice crashes in to remind her of her whereabouts.

Mary opens her eyes. The horsemen have cantered off somewhere; a pair of swans paddle about mid-river, dipping long necks into still water without causing a single ripple.

“Where’d the horses go?” Mary asks.

“They bolted.”

Mary looks at her oldest friend and smiles. She reaches over and places her hand over Mary’s. “I’m not ignoring you dearest. The thing is, I thought – hoped - Caroline may have learned her lesson after the escape from Mr Bard. To divorce once is careless, to divorce twice, well...I’m not sure what it says about a person.”

“Does it have to say anything? You were divorced twice, were you not?”

“Technically, we weren’t married, Carlo and I. It was only really valid in Paris, which doesn’t really count.”

“You loved him enough to want to marry him though. There were no lessons learned there...”

Was there something inherently wrong with Caroline, or was the issue with her? Should she have quelled her own ambition in order to raise Caroline in the way of her forebears? She never wanted that for herself, or for her daughter. On the contrary, she wanted so much to be a role model to her, an example of how it can be done, of how women can fulfil their potential and make their mark on the world. But in the end, maybe Caroline would have been happier if...

“She lives in your shadow, dear,” Mary B says. “She wants desperately to be her own person, but at the end of the day, she is the only child of a talented mother. If only she’d find her own way instead of doggedly following yours...”

“I only ever wanted her to be her own person though. She has always been prone to view life negatively, and to rush into situations, like marriage, without counting to 10. This is all so familiar to me, I wonder that I am so worried. But I am.”

“She’ll work it out, Mary. She did the last time, she will now. When does she fly to Mexico to sign the papers?”

“Not until October.”

This also worries Mary. Despite the ‘separation agreement’ her lawyer has negotiated, Mary knows what her daughter is like. She’ll fall into any arms that open up to her. And those Booseys will be looking out for any indiscretion until everything is finalized to avoid paying even the most meagre of expenses.

Mary thinks back to a lunch she had at Chez Allard with them a year or so ago in Paris; they were nice enough but my god she’d never encountered people so obsessed with money. Penny-pinching right down to the last franc. Mary could have sworn they counted up the pits from the side plates after the *canard aux olives* and divided the check based on who’d eaten most.

She takes a mouthful of her vodka tonic and leans in towards her friend. “And I dispute old ‘Boo’ walking away from the marriage with that Mercedes convertible too by the way – technically its mine, considering they sold one of my paintings to pay for it. One of Pablo’s bullring pictures. Can you believe it?”

Mary Mathews shakes her head. “You gave them the painting and it was their decision. There is nothing you can do about it, you’d do best to forget it. When are you planning to see her next?”

“I am considering flying over to New York in September for a few days. God knows, I need to see her and the situation for myself. I have also suggested that I accompany her to Mexico to sign the divorce papers but have yet to hear her response. She’s talking of using the opportunity to take a trip to Guatemala to visit Tikal and the Mayan ruins. Some kind of solo pilgrimage, ‘communing with nature’ and what have you, to ‘take the pain out of the divorce’. But I can’t help wondering if this too is a bad idea. After all, a vulnerable, newly-single woman with a taste for destructive relationships probably shouldn’t be roaming alone in Central America.”

“It’s her life though Mary. If it’s what she needs to do...Need I remind you of what you did when you returned to New York after your divorce went through?”

Mary looks at her friend. “Whose side are you on for Chrissakes Mary?”

“I’m not on anyone’s side. I love you and I love your daughter. I just want you to see that she’s not terribly different from you...”

“Well that’s where you’re wrong. I don’t see myself in her at all.”

“Not even in the Alfred Stieglitz affair?”

Mary’s face reddens. “I was well divorced by that stage. And it was hardly an ‘affair’. He was an old man for Chrissake.” She sucks crossly on her cigarette even though it has long since burned out. She looks at her friend. “It’s not a sin to sleep with someone is it?”

“I’m not one to judge...”

“You sound very judgmental to me.”

Mary B can’t disguise a smirk, even by drawing on a cigarette.

“Look at you! I’ve never known you so supercilious!” Mary’s voice has gone shrill now, and the redness has spread across her throat in blotches like a fever. “Georgia knows about it anyway, it was during a time when they were estranged...”

“Oh calm down dearest, you’re blowing this out of all proportion. I am smiling because I am reminded of our Spence days when we would deny every episode of high jinks...”

“...and furthermore, if it weren’t for the fact that I slept with Alfred Stieglitz, I would never have even *met* Georgia, which would have impoverished my life considerably.”

Indignant eyelids closed once again behind violet tinted sunglasses. How dare her friend compare Mary’s motivations with those of Caroline? The girl was driven by neediness, seeming to swing between euphoria and depression with nothing in between. Any liaisons Mary had with men – or women for that matter – were the product of something much more egalitarian.

Georgia...the name breezes into the conversation as if carried on a warm Chinook wind. Mary B knows nothing of what she shared with Georgia; no-one does. It is

Mary's secret, one which she keeps for herself like a beautiful dream. They met at Stieglitz's gallery in New York - he was very ill by this point, spending much of his time in a small cot at the back of the gallery recuperating from the latest angina attack. How she had come to be there, Mary doesn't remember - what is important is that the two women found each other that late January afternoon in 1944, and how they talked and walked through the city long after Stieglitz retired and the gallery closed, barely feeling the snow as it burned through their boots.

"You are 40 years old but you are tired like I am tired," Georgia told her that night. "Come stay with me at my ranch in Santa Fe. I don't have staff, but I can offer my garden, the mountains, the purple skies to facilitate your stay...12 years in Paris have caught up with you; the ranch is your peace."

Mary thinks of long, hot nights they spent together on the roof the ranch at Santa Fe, too hot to sleep but too sleepy to move... how Georgia had taken Mary's face in her hands as if it were a flower from one of her paintings and stroked her cheek with the side of her delicate forefinger.

It lasted two weeks. Mary flew back to New York and an overstrung Curt Valentin to prepare for her first show at Buchholz. If it weren't for the fact that she returned to the ranch the following summer to make a sculpture of Georgia's head, she might not have believed it ever happened.

CAROLINE

CENTRAL AMERICA, October 24th 1960

The plane was a white twin-prop carrying fourteen passengers and a foul-breathed miniature dachshund named Baguette. The pilot had just informed them that their flight time to Flores would be about an hour, after which a transfer would be arranged for passage into Tikal. He then shut off the intercom and emerged from behind the curtain divider carrying a silver coffee pot and a jug of warm milk.

Baguette's owner, a short-legged, foul-breathed human, barked; "Who in hell is driving the plane?"

"The plane flies itself, Madame," the pilot replied. "Coffee?"

Caroline looked out over the wing at the whirring propeller. A bird could bring it down, she thought. Fly into the blades and send all fourteen passengers, a pilot and a dachshund with halitosis plummeting into the jungle canopy below. They wouldn't survive. And their bodies would be so desiccated and half-devoured that if the rescue teams ever did chance upon them, they would be unrecognisable as the people who were sitting here now, reading papers, talking to their neighbor, or clutching the armrests of seats in blind panic.

Her nerves were shot – she had taken her slow-the-heart pill and a phanodorm already today, along with two fingers of whisky straight up in the airport at Guatemala – but it wasn't the flight that was causing the anxiety. On the contrary, the noise of the engines, being suspended in the air with that sense of the sheer futility of existence that flying brings, had a calming effect on her neuroses. Caroline rather liked the thought of being helpless in the face of death. Any technical hitch could mean the end of them in an instant. A romantic death, she thought. Leaving the ruins of a marriage to see ruins of an altogether more edifying kind, and then – poof! Gone. At least she would die happy.

Mother had written to say she would go with her to Mexico for the divorce if she desired, but Caroline knew it was Mother's way of making sure she didn't jump in the sack with the first vaquero she met. She had come to New York in September on a similar mission – ostensibly to comfort her daughter, but really to limit opportunities

for indiscretion. They'd walked around Manhattan for five days like Steinbeck's Lennie and George, bickering, mostly, but there had been warm moments: like the night before Mother left when they ate seafood at The Plaza, just the two of them in a corner of the restaurant, and Mother told her all about the time she spent there as a child, running about the corridors with her brother Francis.

"It wasn't the same when I returned as a grown woman," she told Caroline. "I had to resist the urge to play tag, and go up and down in the elevator just to feel gravity in my boots. Plus, my papa had died by then and the place was filled with him." Caroline thought she saw a glaze of tears over Mother's eyes, but Mother wiped them and cursed the pickled herring for its tartness.

Mexico, Caroline thought, would have been exactly the same scenario, and she needed to take control. She was a grown woman herself now, 34 years old and capable of clearing up her own mistakes. Besides, Mother hated her when she wasn't the gayest of creatures, which didn't leave her much space to be herself. And as for indiscretions - too late Mother. The divorce was effective the first day she arrived in Mexico and that very night she had gotten smashed on tequilas and slept with the barman.

(It wasn't as if Simon was exactly the soul of circumspection, incidentally. Her lawyer had told her that he had the definite impression that Simon, being in a great rush for the divorce, was planning to marry again. Good luck to the next flutter-mouse!)

An hour later, they bounced onto the runway at Flores. The dachshund and its owner leapt out of the plane first, the latter muttering that she'd be returning to Guatemala by goddamn canoe rather than go up in that thing again. The tarmac wobbled in the heat and Caroline closed her eyes for a moment before climbing down the steps onto it. She breathed tropical air deep into her lungs, hoping for some kind of spiritual purge. Walking towards the terminal, she was overtaken by the striding pilot, who doffed his cap to her and wished her a safe trip.

She never dreamed she would be doing this so soon – it had always been there, a glowing ambition at the back of her mind – but Simon was always so fixated with bills and living frugally, she had assumed it was one ambition she would never fulfill. The heat instantly felt curative and she was determined that a few days spent alone would give her nervous system a chance to recuperate.

She also hoped that the altitude would curtail her appetite, both for food and for booze. She had gotten much too fat and unattractive these last months (another thing to thank her ex-husband for). Added to this, she had found herself drinking earlier and earlier in the day, just to alleviate the ferocity of the hangovers from the day before. One Martini at this height was the equivalent of three, and in heat like this she never felt hungry, so there were reasons to feel positive, she thought. Stepping into the terminal, she felt a lightness despite the heat.

Sixty kilometers later, the ruins of Tikal were spread out before her, complete in their incompleteness. A temple, like some Neolithic mammoth with its grey bricks and long trunk of a staircase, rose up through the foliage. She had an urge to climb it, to place her feet where ancient feet had gone before, to breathe the air above the canopy of trees. She wanted to feel small, to prove to herself that she and her problems were insignificant in the grander scheme of the world's history.

The guide, Luis, approached her. His skin had the color and forbearance of redwood bark, eyes bright as two pennies. He was of indeterminable age; this was partly to do with his face, but also his spryness, leaping about as he did with all the delight of a child. Round his waist was a thick leather belt on which knives and survival tools hung like charms. He unhooked his water canister and offered it to her.

"It is humid," he said. "You must drink."

She held up her own canister and smiled. "Thank you, I have one." She unscrewed the lid and took a drink, as if to win his approval. Luis nodded and sat down on the earth beside her.

"You travel alone?"

She nodded. "Yup. Just me."

"What do you think of Tikal?"

She took another sip of water. "It's peaceful. I love the jungle. I spent some time in Yucatan a few years back and made a decision I had to see Tikal. I am in need of the tranquility..."

"Where do you go next?"

“I want to see Chichicastenago, maybe spend a couple of days at Lake Atitlan. Then onto Copan.”

“Girl like you isn’t married?”

She caught his eye and immediately looked away into the distance. It must be the Mayan way, she thought, but how impudent! How was she to respond to a question like that? She hadn’t the energy to respond – her solitude over the past couple of days had brought with it a weariness which she couldn’t shake. It wasn’t an unpleasant weariness either. She liked it. It was as if honey, with all its unguency and sweetness, had taken the place of blood in her veins.

“No.” She went to stand up but Luis placed a hand on her shoulder.

“It is I that shall go. Excuse my intrusion – I like to make sure my guests are OK, but see that you are in private contemplation.” He was up and off before she could counter him.

She watched him, buzzing around other members of the tour, and felt an overriding sense of affront. Her ‘private contemplation’ had been entirely fractured by his intrusion, but it wasn’t this fact which galled her. It was his assumption that because she was a woman travelling alone she must have been in need of a husband. That she was somehow suspicious because she wasn’t cowering under the shelter of marriage. And in turn, it had left her as the arbiter of the frantic internal dialogue which now raged inside her head. Why should she have to make excuses or apologies for herself?

The loneliness one felt with friends in the city was stark when compared to the lack of loneliness one felt all alone in the jungle. But Luis had planted a seed of doubt in her mind. Maybe this trip was as ridiculous as she suddenly felt. Maybe she should return to New York immediately, cancel her vacation leave and go back to work. Were people back there laughing at her? She pictured them sipping their after-work cocktails at Sherry’s, the air full of the former Mrs Boosey and her divorce-funded trip to the jungle.

She needed to intercept this train of thought before it went any further. Already, it had fomented anxiety deep in her gut and that warm honey feeling had solidified and turned cold. She got up and walked quickly towards Luis and the rest of the group. He was telling them about some building or other, but she didn’t hear what he was saying. Desperately she tried to focus on his words, but it was as if they were being

scrambled the second they hit her brain. She needed a drink, oh god she needed a drink! She had brought a bottle of gin for this eventuality, but it was in her bag in the truck. Listen, listen, she told herself.

“The limestone used in construction is local and was quarried on-site,” Luis was saying. “The area we stand in now has been rebuilt many times during its history and is the largest ceremonial complex on the site...”

She looked around her, hoping her eyes might distract her thoughts. But she knew she was gone. Just one drink was all it would take to restore her and she had to have it now. She prepared an excuse so Luis would allow her back to the truck and slowly raised her hand.

MARY

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 1966

“Caroline didn’t state a final resting place in her will, so we took the decision to put her in alongside my mother.” Fritz clears his throat. Why his ex-wife was making a fuss about this now was beyond his comprehension. Indeed, she'd left the cemetery last week without so much as a second look.

On the other side of the city in the Colony Club, Mary opens her mouth and enacts a silent scream into the telephone receiver. She breathes, attempting to restore calm and evenness to her vocal chords before responding. “Well, it was frightfully presumptuous, that’s all I’m saying, Fritz. I would have appreciated a conversation about it before the decision was made. She was a Callery as well as a Coudert after all.”

Fritz is in senator mode. “I appreciate what you’re saying Mary, but with due respect, a decision had to be made and we weren’t certain where to contact you. And at the time, you didn’t seem too bothered either way...”

“For god’s sake Fritz, I was – am – in shock. And I was overseas. How on earth was I supposed to be capable of making a decision?”

“Which is what I’m trying to say. She was very close to my mother, it seemed right that they should be together.”

“I guarantee Caroline would not have wanted to be left to rot in Queens County.” Mary lights up a cigarette and blows a furious torrent of smoke high into the air.

A screen of silence descends between them. This is so typical of her ex-husband, she thinks, no goddamn imagination. This is so typical of his ex-wife, he thinks, creating drama all the way. His secretary brings him a letter to sign and he points at his whisky glass for a refill.

“We’ve reached stalemate, Mary. I’m sorry you are not happy, but is there any way of being happy in a situation like this? What would you have preferred?”

“I would have preferred not to have to think about this at all, Fritz. I’d rather still have an impossible goddamn daughter whom I never understood...” A fissure opens in her voice and she swallows to close it up. She drags on her cigarette. “If she’d been cremated at least it would have bought us time to think. Burial is so goddamn barbaric.”

“More-so than burning a body? On the contrary, I find it quite comforting...”

Staunch equilibrium, that is what did it for her in the end with Fritz, there were never any highs or lows, just middle-of-the-road trudging. How in the hell could any aspect of this be comforting, least of all the thought of a beloved body decomposing slowly in the ground? But what was done could not be undone. The decision had been made and her final resting place was just that – final. Caroline was in a grave, and Mary felt sure she’d be turning in it from now to eternity.

“Look Fritz, I leave the day after tomorrow. I’m not sure when I’ll be back in the US. I’m contactable at all the usual addresses, although I envision I’ll be in Cadaques until the spring. Just keep me in the loop with any further...developments.”

She places the receiver in its cradle. Grief threatens to manifest again, noisily, she has no doubt. She holds on to her mouth lest it escape in a sob or something equally indecorous.

“Everything all right, Mrs Callery?” It’s a voice she recognises from Colony Club luncheons over the years.

“Fine thank you, Mrs Frick. How do you do?”

Helen Clay Frick moves towards her and extends a cold, liver-spotted hand of consolation. “I’m so terribly sorry for your loss. I know something of what it is to lose a child...of the unique nature of the grief. You have my deepest sympathies.”

Mary takes the hand and shakes it in a single downward movement. “I am very grateful to you, Mrs Frick.”

Helen nods. “Might I use the telephone, if you’re finished of course...?”

Mary stands and thinks for one appalling moment that her legs might give way under her. She grasps the telephone console and Helen Clay Frick moves in behind her in readiness for a fall.

“Are you sure you’re all right, Mrs Callery? Can I call for a glass of water..?”

“I’ll be fine, thank you, Mrs Frick. I broke my leg a couple of years back, it’s never been right since...thank you again.” Her legs are still trembling as she walks to the elevator. Behind the door of room 106, she takes a phanodorm pill from the bottle on the dresser and throws it into her mouth, swallowing it down without water.

Bad news travels like a noxious gas. It seeps up through the sidewalk grilles, clings to the backs of city rats. People sniff it out, too, eager to offer sympathy wherever they can. Mary can’t wait to get back to the anonymity of Cadaques; gossip has no currency there - people talk, but it’s not worth a sou. Here, your reputation depends on it.

Her head throbs. She wants to feel clay between her fingers, to work it up until she is able to control it like a sorceress. Something about her old medium comforts her in a way that nothing else can. She wants dust beneath her fingernails, then to scrape it out with the blunt tip of a tool. If she closes her eyes, she can just make out the smell of wet clay and freshly-cut lumber.

She steadies herself, gathers up her belongings and leaves the room. Bypassing the elevator, she hurries down four sets of stairs, past portraits of ex-Club presidents, vast silver urns filled with flowers, the letter-writing room on the second floor landing, down to the lobby where George is straightening his bow tie in the gilt-rimmed mirror. Mrs Cecil Clayborne is pretending to check the pigeonholes for mail, a ritual she undertakes on a near hourly basis lest she miss any snippet of overheard gossip.

“Off anywhere nice, Mrs Callery?” George asks, holding the door open for Mary. She glances at Mrs Clayborne, whose study of the pigeonholes has taken on forensic proportions.

“I’m going to see my therapist if you must know George. And I won’t be back.” You can have that one for free, Mrs Clayborne she says to herself. Striding out into the bustle of Fifth Avenue, she can almost hear the tongues in the members’ lounge flapping like fish dying on a boat deck.

She marches to East 68th street back to her house, and goes directly into the room she has kept as a studio for more years than she cares to remember. Clay dust glitters in the sunlight as she throws back the drapes. Instantly, she is calm. She sits on her

stool by the window overlooking the courtyard - for it is here she gets the best angle for the light - and runs her hands over the work bench before her. It is tired, this bench, is lined like she is lined. It started life as a cypress tree in the garden of her barn in Huntington; it was Mies who decided it should be felled and used in the making of a surface on which to sculpt, and it was he who designed and built it, and it was he who made love to her on it, while it was she who joked that it would not be strong enough to hold their weights...

She reaches for the bag of casting plaster beneath the table and pulls it between her legs. It is heavy, mostly unused. These days she is exploring steel and brass, but soft white clay powder still occasions excitement within her. She opens the bag and sinks splayed fingers into it. It is cool, and when she removes it, her hand is gloved in dust.

The Belgian blue oilstone (an early gift from Léger) is moistened; her sculpting toolbox is opened. A trove of chisels, knives, pallettes...paraphernalia which has been used to hone some of her finest work: The Young Diana, Orpheus, the O'Keefe head. She rubs the blade of the knife across the surface of the oilstone in a mesmeric swirling rhythm. Steel on stone being manipulated by powdery, oil-slickened fingers. Satisfied, she places it on the cypress bench and takes the next tool from the box.

In all, she sharpens twenty-four tools. She polishes wooden handles with a damp cloth, dries each one and lays them back in their worn velvet nooks. She clears her mind of death, and loss, and thinks only of the tribal beauty of her tools and the potential for creation which lies within each one. It is early evening now and the light casts a neon band across the drapes which hang as protection around the walls. Her shoulders ache and placing the final item inside, she closes the lid on the box.

In the drawing room, the maid has laid the fire. With the box in one hand, Mary kneels down lights it. Immediately it draws, blue-green flames lashing wildly up the chimney. Minutes later, when green has given way to yellow, she places the box atop the flames. At first, they seem unsure, seeming to dance around its lacquered edges rather than embrace it as fuel. But by-and-by, as she knew they eventually would, they consume it. All that remains in the grate when light has gone are twenty-four blackened steel blades amid a pile of papery ash.

CAROLINE

TEXAS, 1966

She cringed when she thought about it now. 1961, barely returned from the rainforest, the ink on the divorce papers still wet, definitely NOT on the hunt for another beau, but somehow, he found her. It was Papa's fault really, or more likely Paula's, carting her around cocktail parties like some kind of exhibit.

Men like a vulnerable female and Caroline must have been exuding pathos from every pore. The party was at the Donald Mixsell's in Southampton. Virginia Mixsell was an old chum of Mother's from her Loutchansky days, and somehow she was still in touch with Papa. She was one of only a handful of Mother's friends who didn't view Papa as some kind of stiff. Maybe it was his politics she liked. Whatever the connection, Caroline found herself at Virginia's garden party, listening to her dashing new acquaintance, a Mr Philip Adams, whilst trying desperately to stop her heels from sinking into the ground.

"I've worked all over, but I'm a North Shore boy at heart," Philip was saying. "I'm in Chicago at the moment, curating a Hopper retrospective."

Almost inaudibly she says, "Hopper? My mother was never a fan..." She uproots her feet again, praying she might somehow land her heel on something other than acquiescent earth. (Though the chances of that on the immaculate Mixsell lawn was nothing short of an impossibility.)

"I'm not keen on Hopper myself," Philip goes on. "His art, that is - he personally is a super fellow...Anyway, enough of my jawing. What do you do, Mrs Boosey?"

Mrs Boosey. The name jars. She hasn't yet rid herself of it, professionally at least, a measure to limit the tongue mustering around Manhattan. But it indicates that she is taken, in the possession of man, and that is a strait jacket she doesn't wish to be seen in. "Oh call me Caroline, please!" Her cheeks flush and she flutters Rubinstein lashes at him. She recognizes the look he returns her – head cocked to one side slightly, posed in intrigue – and she knows he is on the point of being hooked.

“So, I work as a colorist at Katzmann’s Associates. They’re an architect’s firm in town...”

“Oh really? So what do you ‘color’? Aside from this party, that is.” He took two flutes of champagne from the silver tray of a passing waiter and handed her one.

“That’s a line if ever I heard one!” Good, earnest flirtation was something she hadn’t engaged in for a long while. Simon had always been so straight. His idea of flirting was the attribution of ridiculous pet names. (*Flitter mouse*. Just the thought of it made her want to throw up. Her rejoinder – *Boo* – was a diminutive of his name and therefore just about defensible, she figured.)

Philip Adams smiled. “I try,” he said. And then added, “But usually I fail.”

They smiled at each other and took simultaneous sips from their champagne. She noticed her hand shaking slightly and hoped he hadn’t noticed.

“OK, it was a lame line. But it’s true. This get together would be dull without you here.”

“We’ve barely been talking five minutes, I can’t imagine how you have reached that conclusion so soon.” Fishing for compliments, she knew, but the reply came as she’d expected.

“I wasn’t referring to your conversation. Although I like that too.”

Oblivious to all the eyes that looked on from the terrace, Caroline threw her head back and laughed again. “I’m flattered, Mr Adams, truly I am. But I hardly think I’m the most attractive creature here. Look around.”

He leaned in conspiratorially and she felt his warm breath on her ear. “There are many attractive creatures, but none have your radiance.”

Radiance. What was the word in French? *Rayonnement*. She had heard it used so often about her mother, by artists and lovesick suitors. Even women used it to describe her; that intangible quality which made everyone turn to look when she entered a room. Caroline had always wished for it, but she feared she merely languished in the shadows between the rays. Yet here was Philip Adams, with his mid-west tan and his eyes like Paul Newman, telling her she possessed it too!

Paula skittered towards them in her new wedgeling heels (a preposterously dull choice of footwear, yet perhaps well-advised given the ground) and linked her arm into Caroline's. "Hey kids, sorry to break up the party but our driver is waiting."

"But jeez Paula, we only just got here." Caroline heard herself revert to child mode, but her disappointment couldn't be disguised.

"I know honey, but your father has a big day tomorrow and we have to get back to the city." She gave Philip a sharp look, of the type she would only permit herself to bestow upon a man after a few glasses of champagne.

"I'm thirty-four years old for Christ's sake. Since when did my father's diary dictate mine?"

Paula tightened her grip on Caroline's arm – was this hostile or merely a crutch for a drunk? Caroline couldn't tell – and said; "Since you became a divorcee for the second time, dear. Now come on."

Fury and humiliation converged on Caroline's face, but Philip saw it and said quickly to Paula, "Ma'am, if I may be so bold, I am going back to the city tonight, I would be more than willing to share my driver with Caroline. I can see that she is returned safely to wherever she needs to be."

Paula glared at him, but Caroline picked up what he had thrown her. "Well isn't that nice Paula? Thank you Mr Adams, I would be delighted."

Paula slid her arm from Caroline's. "I'll let your father know." She leaned in and belched an acrid-scented warning in Caroline's ear: "No more indiscretions though, hmm? Don't humiliate Papa any more than you have done already."

Caroline felt a sting of tears in her eyes and dug newly-manicured nails into the flesh of her hands to halt the flow. She watched Paula staggering off up the lawn towards the weary ear of Papa, but she didn't wait to see his reaction.

She turned to Philip and felt defiance throbbing in her breast. "We could always go back to my place," she said. "Really give them something to talk about."

*

Her apartment on East 74th Street, having been recently cleared of all Simon's belongings, looked decidedly sparse. The paintings on the walls gave the place a

certain amenity, but with only one life in it now where there had once been two, Caroline couldn't help but feel sad whenever she opened the door and stepped into the dark, unoccupied vestibule.

Having no staff to prepare a welcome, she found herself in the kitchen frantically scouring the cupboards for a glass without a frill of oily lipstick marks around its rim. She only needed one for her guest – a quick swill under the faucet and she would make do with the one from last night – but all she could find was a single champagne flute which was no receptacle for whisky.

“All OK in there?” Philip shouted through from the drawing room, idly flicking through a copy of Life magazine he had found on the coffee table.

“Sure, just coming. Make yourself at home. I apologise but I haven't got round to laying the fire, I've been staying at my father's place.”

When she walked into the room, he was loading kindling onto the grate. He turned and smiled up at her then returned to his task, and she felt tears again spring to her eyes. Such a protective and manly gesture! And here was she, pretending to feel so empowered. She watched his hairy forearms, revealed by rolled-back shirt sleeves, how they flexed as he stacked the wood.

Lust stirred in her, fuelled, no doubt, by the champagne she had consumed at the Mixsell's. Aside from the barman in Mexico City, she hadn't slept with another man for four years (and she was so drunk in Mexico she couldn't remember it, so it didn't count, right?) She poured him two fingers of whisky and sat on the couch, slowly letting the shoe slip from her foot as he conjured the fire.

*

Mother,

I know you'll think this madness – I think it madness myself – but I have met someone and quite simply I am head-over-heels in love! Four years of gradually becoming numb to it, I never thought I'd have a chance at feeling love again. But this time, and this truly is the first time I've felt it, I believe it was pretty much 'at first sight'!

His name is Philip Adams and he is an art curator. He works all over the globe (Paris next month – I told him to visit you before he did anything else!), right now

he is in Chicago working at the museum of contemporary art. We see each other every other weekend, and Mother, we have fun, another word which has been long-missing from my lexicon. Perhaps most importantly, he originates from the North Shore – yes, a through-and-through American so no labyrinth of cultural differences to negotiate!

I know this probably appears to you to be ‘too soon’ after Simon, or something like a ‘rebound’, but rest assured I have no designs on marrying him (yet!) and neither does he – he is far too wise for that, having been married himself. We are quite simply enjoying each other and loving being ‘in love’!

When are you back in NYC Mother? I do so miss you, as do all your friends here. I had dinner with Morrie last week, aside from his gambling debts, he talked of little else but you. (You haven’t been bailing him out again have you? He must owe you a fortune.)

All my love (Wurstie sends a purr!)

Caroline.

MARY

NEW YORK, November 1966

Mary folds the letter and places it back in her file. Head-over-heels in love? If she had a franc for every time she heard her daughter saying those words in relation to a man, she'd have no need to keep selling paintings. She shakes her head. *Head-over-heels*. Such a childish and clichéd term. But that was Caroline in relationships – childish and clichéd. Those noisome pet-names she and Boosey had for each other for a start. How she hated being in their company because of them!

Mary thinks of her own past relationships. First there was Fritz of course, then Carlo (although, she is slow to admit, even to herself, there may have been one or two in between.) Then there was Picasso, dear, infuriating, shitbag Picasso, who had held her breasts that day at the chateau and consequently held her in his thrall ever since. It wasn't that she longed for a relationship with him – god forbid, the way he treated poor Dora, and the string of women that followed – but there was always the suggestion of sex when he was around her, which, when coupled with his genius, was as sweetly intoxicating as sloe gin.

Inevitably, perhaps, came other artistic dalliances, like the on-off liaisons with Fernand Léger during a period of collaboration, and Amédée Ozenfant who sent her love notes in elaborately hand-decorated envelopes. Nothing has the sexual allure of talent and new-found freedom, and in the decade following the war those two elements came together at raucous and seemingly endless parties with predictable results.

But what of Georgia, whose allure seemed grounded in peace rather than in fireworks? Though Mary wasn't in love with Georgia the way Georgia was with her, she still found her talent attractive. Perhaps in another lifetime things may have been different, but as it was, in the heat of a New Mexico summer as war in Europe was approaching its end, they teetered on the blurry edge between friends and lovers. Mary threw off New York and gave herself to it.

Unlike with the others, there had been no formal ending to her relationship with Georgia, no jagged edges or land mines to negotiate on the way out. In '61, at a

Callery retrospective at Knoedler's in New York; a small, black-scarfed head moved serenely between sculptures, a benign will'o-the-wisp, barely noticeable among the crowd. Then, she was gone.

And in between all of them came Mies...

She taps a cigarette out of a gold case and lights it. She needs it to think about dear Mies. Carlo, she has always felt, was her soulmate, but was Mies the one about whom she was 'head-over-heels'?

The first thing she noticed about him when they were introduced in the dining room of SS Majestic in 1937 was his eyebrows. Like brown paint, straight out of a tube. She told him so, later, and he laughed, calling himself her warrior in war paint. He was nervous back then, it was his first trip to the States, in the company of the Stanley B Resors, on the cusp of an enforced new life. With his nerves and his staccato English, punctuated always by a puff on an enormous cigar, Mary found him utterly mesmerizing.

"You talk to me about your admiration for Bauhaus, Mrs Callery, but I recall the day Lloyd Wright's portfolio arrived in Behren's atelier. Work there stopped for a day while we looked at it. It was unlike anything any of us had seen before. It put me on the track I am still on now. Perhaps it was the beginning of the end for me, in Germany at least..." He puffed on his cigar and the swagged skin beneath his eyes seemed heavier in an instant.

"You must have been terribly sad to close the faculty, Mr Van der Rohe. It was such pioneering work you were overseeing there." Mary resisted the instinct to place a hand on his.

"Not 'German' enough though, apparently. Let's see what Wyoming makes of me." He smiled without happiness and turned his attentions to Mary. "And what about you? I understand you have made quite an impact in Paris among the great and the good."

Mary threw her head back and laughed, and Mies couldn't help but notice her long, graceful neck with its single string of pearls. She was beautiful, this he knew, he had already been told, but she emitted another quality, one which eluded many other women in his entourage; quiet self-assurance.

“I’ve a passion for European Modernism and I pay good money to artists for it. That’s probably where the impact comes from...” Mary finished her cigarette and immediately lit up another. “In terms of my work, I’m working out my own style. It’s taking me a while to emerge from traditionalist influences, but I’m getting there. Like you, I’m searching for new horizons, I suppose.”

Mies smiled. “And what might be on these new horizons? In terms of your work, of course.”

She leaned in and held his gaze for a moment. “Color.” She whispered it, as if it were a profane word. “Lack of it impoverishes modern sculpture. The Greeks used it, the Egyptians used it. But modern sculpture has eliminated it.” Her grey eyes danced. Suddenly aware of the rest of the dining room, she retreated back into her chair. “Does the prospect of color compromise your own aesthetic, Mr Van der Rohe?”

“No, not necessarily,” he replied. “I believe that elaborate artistic ornamentation is redundant, but this doesn’t have to exclude color. How do you propose to reintroduce it?”

She touched the pearls around her throat self-consciously, as if she had just realized he’d been looking at them. “I’m working on it.”

A handful of years later, after the atrocities of the war had loosened their grip on the collective consciousness and folk allowed themselves to regale in life again, Mary found herself on the veranda of Wally and Ellen Harrison’s Huntington home drinking Martinis on a Mies van der Rohe ‘Barcelona’ chair, alongside the man who had designed it. She’d been sleeping with him on and off for months, despite him being in a relationship with that Marx woman (although by this point she had eschewed drinking and become distinctly less interesting.)

Ellen Harrison, ever scrounging for a scrap of tittle-tattle to illuminate her own dull existence, caught up with Mary in the bathroom later in the evening. “How long are you two going to sit there pretending nothing is going on?” Plumping her cheeks in the mirror, she added. “Everyone at this party knows you know.”

Mary glared at her, applied a fresh lick of Rubinstein lip tint and marched back to the veranda, whereupon she took Mies’ face in her hands and kissed him passionately on the lips. A drunken roar went up among the guests, and Mies pulled her down onto his lap and into his wide bear-like hold, where she stayed all night until dawn.

She loved him for that. And when they finally called it quits some years later, she never forgot the feeling she had that night, of warmth and security, excitement and love. How fun life had been then, those years of abandonment, sluiced in booze and ‘indecorousness’ as her mother would have put it. Nights often ran into days, but these assaults on the nervous system piqued creativity and it was undoubtedly Mary’s most prolific decade. Everything she had worked towards suddenly seemed to make sense, burst forth and come together.

Moreover, people gravitated towards her during that time, as if being near her would somehow bring them closer to greatness; her connections stretched far and wide, and she was generous in her introductions. She was the conduit between Mies and Picasso for example, when the latter had the grand plan of building a gallery to house Guernica.

As far as she can recall though, none of her experiences left her in paroxysms of despair of the type suffered by Caroline, yet this seemed to be the fate of the girl each and every time. Was it simply a question of bad choices, or was there something deeper, more pathological at play? Mary had seen her daughter dumped at the roadside so many times she can only assume she must have liked it there.

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, 1961

“It was your glasses I liked that day at the Mixsell’s,” Philip Adams was saying to her from the opposite end of the bathtub. “They made you look cute and intellectual, which are qualities I like in a woman.”

Islands of bath foam floated between them, but Caroline made no attempt to cover her nakedness with them. She had put on weight, she knew, but unlike Simon who mocked her chubbiness (‘Has my Flitter-mouse been nibbling at the cheese again?’), Philip rejoiced in her curves.

“My glasses?” Caroline stared at him in mock affront. “You are seriously telling me that my glasses attracted you to me more than any other feature?”

He nudged her breast with his foot. “Not more than any other feature, no. But I liked them all the same.”

“I could put them on now but they might steam up.”

He posed his face like a magazine model. “Because I’m so cute, right?”

She laughed, raising herself slightly to give him a glimpse of her water-slicked torso. “Yeah, right.”

“Caroline, come to Paris with me next week. I simply can’t bear the thought of leaving New York without you.”

She deflated back into the tub and looked at him. “Must you mention it? I can’t bear the thought of it either, but you know why I can’t darling...”

“Because you have to work in a job you hate, for a guy you hate. Yes, I know...”

“Don’t be like that Philip. We’ve had six wonderful days together, don’t ruin them because of something that hasn’t even happened yet.”

“I just always want to be with you. I’m tired of living apart. It’s no good me being in Chicago and you here. I’m troubled constantly by the thought of you leaving me.”

“Why on earth would I do that?”

“Why on earth wouldn’t you? You’ve met my family, you must see what a failure I am in relation to the rest of them. They are all so devout in their Ministerial duties, yet here am I, a divorcee with none of their scholarliness or appeal.”

“You’re feeling very sorry for yourself. If you’re looking for reassurance, then hear this, Mr Adams. You are funny, intelligent and sensitive amongst many other things, all of which make you a most attractive man. I feel most blessed to have you in my life. And moreover, Mother loves you, which is praise indeed. She asks about you all the time since our dinner together last month at the Westbury.”

Philip’s mouth pinched into a tight smile. “Then quit your job, come with me to Paris, we can get married, have a baby and that can be an end to it.”

She tensed and suddenly the water felt chill around her. “You’re joking, right?”

He sat up and pulled her towards him. “For the moment, yes. I guess I’m just ratty about leaving.” He kissed her on the nose. “Haven’t you noticed, we get on blissfully until the point at which we have to leave each other, and then the quarrels begin? Perhaps I’ll cancel Paris?”

“Darling, no. You must go. We’re both tense, that’s all. In three weeks’ time you’ll be back, and I’ll call you while you’re away.”

“Call me? You could fly over for the price of a call!”

“\$9 for three minutes if I call at night – that gives us long enough to say how much we love each other, right?!”

He glanced down at her nakedness. “What say we get out of the tub and I’ll dry you off?”

She looked at him and wordlessly stood up, watching his eyes as they followed the droplets of bath water trickling down her body. She stepped out, barely feeling the chill of the corridor, and left him a foamy trail to her bed.

Paris, Nov 1961

Darling Caroline,

I write from my lonely hotel room from which, if I stand on tip-toes, I can just about make out the top of the Eiffel Tower. (They cover every inch of the room in wallpaper over here, the doors, the ceiling, a swirling orange pattern which makes my head hurt. Or maybe that's just the whisky.)

Needless to say, I miss you. I have found myself outside 29 Place du Marche a few times, just needing to feel you close. Your mother is staying at Quai Voltaire at the moment – I saw her for drinks last night, hence the bad head. Boy, she can drink! We talked so freely though, I really do feel much relieved.

We discussed it and have decided that much of my insecurity comes from an inner conflict. On the one hand, I feel very American, very Puritanistic. But then, I have none of the devotion to the mission of my family; I am carrying on in a 'love-affair' with you as opposed to a marriage. Your mother helped me to see things differently, more clearly.

She is much more open-minded and liberalistic than my own brood. And by that I don't just mean atheist! She helped me to see that what we have is a 'marriage' of sorts and that we all have the right to lead individual and independent lives, free of guilt or duty about what went before. More importantly, she took the time to talk it through. She is a wonderful human being, no wonder you talk of her in the terms you do.

If you can spare another \$9 for three minutes, I would love to hear your voice again. But if not, I look forward to seeing you in two weeks.

All my love,

Philip

p.s. Your mother says she got your letter about spending Christmas together, but regrettably she has made other plans. Looks like you got in too late! But if we wanted to come together some time in the New Year, she would happily welcome us. Food for thought?

It was difficult for Caroline to believe, on rereading that letter, that less than four months later, their blissful ‘marriage’ could have fallen apart in quite such an ugly fashion. As far as she was concerned, she did everything right – she submitted to his requests for an ‘individualistic’ life (for him, that meant anything but a life on a Levittown-style ‘project’, too reminiscent of his family home, no doubt), to his desire for a child (yes, she had even agreed, in principle, to give him a child, if it was what he really wanted, despite the revulsion she felt at the prospect.) She might even have given up work for him for a chance at happiness after Simon.

The only thing she did wrong was this: following Mother’s invitation, she had gone to Paris alone in the New Year. The invitation was extended to them both, but her desire to spend time with her mother had turned into an obsessive need. The thought of sharing that time, precious and infrequent as it was, with anyone, even Philip, inflamed the jealous streak within her. She would be gone two weeks – that’s all – and she would call him often despite the cost.

“I just don’t understand why you would wish to go alone,” he had said over dinner one night. “You must be ashamed of me – or else think very little of me.”

“You know that not to be true! Darling, I love you more than anything, but I haven’t seen Mother for so long, not on my own terms. My heart yearns for her almost as much as it does for you when we’re apart.”

“You say you love me more than anything, but not as much as you love Mother, huh? I guess no-one will breach that bond, not even me.”

“Oh Phippie, come on! Every relationship is different; you can’t compare yourself to my mother! Quit measuring your worth against everyone else.”

He had leaned in to her through the gloom of the restaurant and took her hand. “The thing is...and I hadn’t wanted to tell you this as I had hoped against all hope that it might not be true...”

Her flesh had turned cold with fear. “What? What is it? Tell me this instant!”

“It’s my throat condition Caroline. I’ve been given two years.” His eyes were glazed and red like cocktail cherries.

“Two years to *live*?” She’d found it difficult to disguise the incredulity in her voice. “But isn’t it intermittent, this throat problem? How can it suddenly be a terminal condition?”

“It’s not sudden, for god’s sake. I’ve feared it for a while. I have been protecting you by not saying anything. But now you see why every moment with you is so precious, why I fret over every departure.”

She had held him, closer and tighter than ever before, trembling into his shoulder in disbelief about what he had just shared. But the next morning brought daylight and clarity. Something didn’t make sense.

“How about a second opinion on this throat condition? Doctor Jacobs is my physician and I trust him with my life. Why not let him have a look?”

He had shrugged and agreed to an appointment, moping the entirety of the following week until Jacobs confirmed what Caroline had suspected. Acute laryngitis. An anti-bacterial tincture taken twice daily for two weeks would spare him from impending death.

“I didn’t want you to go to Paris,” Philip had told her sulkily when they left Jacobs’ office. “I guess I thought you might take pity on me and stay.”

“By telling me you were dying for god’s sake? Was there any need to be so frightfully melodramatic?”

“I love you though.”

“And I you, but Jesus, Philip. You had me half scared out of my wits. But I do love that you love me so much that you’d rather have me believe you were dying than take a trip overseas!”

“So, you’re still going then? To Paris?”

She had kissed him on the nose and said; “I’ll call you every day, even if I have to sell all my stocks to fund it!”

MARY

NEW YORK, November 1966

The cab takes her past the plate glass windows of Knoedler's on 57th Street. She had exhibited there just last year – a retrospective of some of her earlier work; an unforgettable voice leaps into her head with all its trademark wryness:

“Meric dear! Exhibiting with the competition again I see! Old Charlie Henschel will never love you like I do, but you knew that already...”

Dear Curt Valentin. Dead twelve years, yet still there in her head as vital as if he were sitting opposite her over lunch. What would he have to say about all this, she wonders. She pictures him, his puffy hyperthyroidic eyes sodden with grief:

“Oh dearest Meric! Not beautiful, beguiling Caroline...why would she do this? Now I can think only of you and your broken heart and wonder how on earth I will go about fixing it...”

Then he would take her hand and stroke it, as if the act of stroking would somehow mend her, or at least remove some of the pain. She recalls one of their many lunches together at Sherry's and the thought sends a current of warmth through her veins, as if he were some kind of heating system. He seemed to have an ability to calm her in a way that few others could.

He had already consumed half a bottle of good Claret before she arrived. His hair, thinning desperately by then but still providing some coverage, kept falling across his face and she thought he cut a comical figure in his shabby brown suit.

Curt was the kind of individual to whom Mary took instantly. Disarmingly honest (one of the first things he said to her was “I shan't call you Mrs Callery because it is so stuffily old New York! It will be Meric and nothing else!”); clearly queer, which removed all complication from the relationship. He bade her sit down and ordered another bottle of red from the waiter.

“Now then,” he said. “I want to know all about you and life in Paris. Is it truly awful over there?” Buttering a bread roll, he proffered his ear as if she were about to impart the secrets of the universe.

“They are doing heroic work at the American Hospital. Truly, Curt, heroic. I stayed as long as I could, but it got too much for me, on my own...”

A vision of the Hospital lurched unsteadily into her head; she was driving towards it in her ambulance, returning from the latest trip to Angouleme, through an eerie vacuum of silence and calm. Lawns around it were impeccable, ancient trees wavered in the breeze. Flowerbeds were awash with spring blooms, their scent filling the air. There was little to hint at the shadow of Nazi oppression at the Hospital; no sentries guarding the gates, no-one checking who enters or leaves. But it was there, nonetheless; the Germans had their Neuilly headquarters directly opposite the main gate.

“I guess we never quite believed Paris would fall,” she murmured, taking a sip of wine and accepting Curt’s offer of a cigarette. “One of our fleet was hit by French friendly-fire and injured a French soldier. Dr Jackson, the director, a brilliant physician and a good friend of mine, had to amputate his leg in the dark. By the end, ambulance volunteers were going missing though. As I left, Jackson’s sole aim was to stop the hospital from getting into German hands...”

“You were heroic too though Meric. I’m surprised you stayed as long as you did.”

“Oh! But it was always a phony war– *une drôle de guerre* the Parisians called it. There was no question of me leaving in ’39 when it was first suggested. Besides, we had some fun. There were so many nationalities there, pulling together, professionals and volunteers.”

A smirk broke across her face as she thought of the Russian nurses who brought caviar and vodka along with them in their bags. She and the other ambulance volunteers used to laugh and say that “they were very sympathetic to the wounded.” Marriage proposals were not unheard of and there were probably a good few babies. She thought of Christmas when Josephine Baker had come and performed for them. She’d arrived at the Hospital in a long woolen coat and a knitted hat which fastened beneath her chin like a bathing cap.

Gathered round the tree, bandaged, bloodied limbs propped up all over the place, the entire institution it seemed had turned out to see *La Perle Noire*. She sang *Je M’en Fou* and *C’est Lui*, and gyrated in a dress made of lightning flashes. Mary couldn’t take eyes off her legs, the way they moved, flexible as India rubber and honed like a

sculpture. Years later, she would use those legs and their fluent grace in her work. But in the startling evanescence of that moment, you could have forgotten the war was happening at all.

“But liberalism, democracy, the ideals we all stood for and were trying to protect – for me, they felt increasingly meaningless at the sight of child refugees, stricken and confused, wandering through city which was having its soul ripped out before our eyes. Back here, in the oasis of the Colony Club, it’s easy to dismiss it as Europe’s problem, to maintain this isolationist stance. But we desperately need to be involved.”

Curt handed her the handkerchief from his pocket. “God, I’m sorry Curt. Tears are frightfully crass, especially in public. This is what happens when I talk about it. I’ve kind of shut it off. It’s fortunate, I guess, that hardly anyone asks.”

Curt smiled and gave her a moment to compose herself. Then he said conspiratorially; “So, tell me about the devil on Grands Augustins then.”

Mary laughed. “He is indeed a devil. Do you know, I’ve written to him so many times and never had a single reply? Of course, he’s had the war to blame for his lack of correspondence, but I know for a fact that my letters will be piled up behind his front door with all the others. It’s how he deals with mail.” She took a sip of wine and lit up another cigarette. “But do you know, so great is his need for order that if so much as a single envelope is moved he gets profoundly upset. I witnessed it for myself. It’s the same if a hat is moved, or a pair of shoes from a stack in the corner. He gets away with such eccentricity of course, because he’s Picasso.”

Curt nodded enthusiastically. “I know what you mean. I’m working hard on the Guernica book at present, almost as hard as the devil himself I could swear, and I get nothing from Paris. Both he and Zervos play funny tricks, I am almost ready to give it up completely. I won’t though of course, because, as you say, he’s Picasso.”

“When do you anticipate it will be finished?”

Curt shrugged. “No time soon. It is an ongoing labor of love. Or so I keep telling myself.” He took a bite of the bread roll and crumbs rolled down into the creases of his waistcoat.

“I worry about him though, over there in that dear, stricken Paris,” Mary said.

She thought back to the last time she had seen him; scurrying about in the bowels of his apartment on Boulevard des Italiens, unearthing treasures that no-one above ground had yet seen. He had an entire subterranean corridor to himself with rooms leading off it, all stuffed full of undreamed-of paintings and drawings hidden away from those pestilent Nazi eyes. This vision of him – a grey-haired mole, blind and defiant in his tunnel – hung behind her eyes like grief. Mary took a long drag on her cigarette, willing herself not to start crying again.

Who would have believed that they would see *'les couleurs'* lowered in favour of the swastika above the Arc de Triomphe or hear the march of jack-boots on deserted Parisian boulevards? And dear Picasso there still...even the thought of it was too much to bear.

A waiter arrived at the table. "Meric, dearest, we haven't even paused for breath to look at the menu, might I be so bold as to make a recommendation?" Curt smoothed a weft of gingery hair and looked at her beseechingly.

Mary welcomed the interjection. The pressure of a decision from a lunchtime menu at Sherry's may well have sent her over the edge at that moment. "Please do so."

Curt turned to the waiter. "We'll start with two Tom Collins'. Then, after fifteen minutes, bring us two further Tom Collins'. Fifteen minutes after that, we'll take two starters of whatever is recommended by the chef, followed by two entrecotes – rare – and a bottle of the usual." He folded his menu and handed it to the waiter.

"Very good sir," the waiter replied, taking his menu and that of Mary and disappearing into the kitchen.

"But anyway, enough about Picasso and Paris," Curt said, sensing Mary's rawness. "Tell me about you. What can I expect from your first show at Buchholz?"

She watched him pour wine into her glass and leaned forward on her elbows. "I'm working on a number of pieces," she began. "I have just completed a bronze entitled 'Horse', which is painted by Léger. It stands around 50 inches high and has one of its forelegs raised. A nod to more traditional equestrian statues, but without all the Renaissance frills. I think you'll like it."

"I'm certain I'll like it." He leaned in closer, the breadcrumbs enfolding themselves in the tweed of his suit. "What else?"

“There’s a head in terracotta. It’s probably going to be called just ‘Head’, but I’m worried it looks a bit strange at the moment.”

“How so, strange?”

“Just technically, I’m not sure it works.”

“You should see the piece I just got from Moore. It too is a “Head”, done in stone. Talk about strange. But it bewitched me the instant I saw it. I couldn’t sleep for a week! You should call and see it.”

“Oh dearest, you know my feelings about Moore. I couldn’t imagine anything worse than calling in to see it.”

The first two Tom Collins were delivered to the table with an obsequious flourish.

“You are awful, Meric,” Curt said with a smile. “But that’s why I love you.”

As her cab swings round into the airport, Mary pictures Curt’s smile; his teeth stained and uneven in gray gums. His heart stopped suddenly, in Italy, ten years after her first exhibition at Buchholz. How she wishes she could speak with him now. That’s the thing about sudden death, she thinks. It interrupts all narratives without so much of a thought for all the things left unsaid.

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, 1962

She returned from Paris, melancholic after leaving Mother at the airport, but gay at the prospect of seeing Philip again. She'd brought him expensive cologne and a beautiful silk scarf from a boutique on the Left Bank. They'd spoken only once while she was away – she'd tried to call more than that but each time she found him out, or on his way out. But as she arrived home, he told her he was leaving for Chicago the following day. It was scheduled, he told her, she must have forgotten - a work commitment he simply could not postpone.

Kissing her lightly on the lips, he told her he'd call when he could. She didn't cry when he got into the cab bound for the airport; she saved that for later, when she was curled up on the couch with Wurstie, half a bottle of Scotch gone, trying to focus on Rilke's Letters and not the cursed cramps which were doubling up her guts, or the pain of his unanticipated departure.

He'd be back in exactly nineteen days, he told her, and when she looked at the cross on the calendar all she could see were the vast empty boxes of days which preceded it. She felt his departure like an illness, another affliction to add to the catalogue. She poured herself another whisky, noticing how much of it had gone. "Hang it!" she muttered, vowing to herself that once this bottle was gone she'd go on the wagon.

Casting Rilke to one side, she took up her notepaper (a wad of ship's writing paper left over from a trip overseas) and wrote:

Darling Philip,

You've been gone only a few hours and already it feels like an eternity. I feel mortally depressed whenever you leave, which is probably not helped by this lone drinking. It puts one on crying jags that must be partly caused by liquor.

I wondered if I should come to you – god knows I hate my work, I'm sure I could find something out west. I have come home to nothing but the cat, I have nothing to stay here for. Aside from Jane, I have no friends to speak of, Mother is in Paris as

always, Papa – well, Papa is a consideration I guess, but he has Paula and his other family. I wish only to be with you, to talk as we talk, and never to have to be apart again!!!

Anyway, I know I shouldn't write you in this frame of mind. But let me know what you think about me moving to Chicago.

All my love

Caroline.

Three days passed and finally a letter in the mailbox. But it was stamped 'Air Mail' from Paris and the address was written in Mother's familiar scrawl. Caroline believed there must be some mistake – was there a problem with mail coming to Manhattan from the midwest? There had to be a reason for his silence. She tried to remember the contents of her last letter to him, but it was written in a fog of Scotch and posted the same evening before she had the opportunity for a sober review.

Wurstie weaved his way around her feet and she picked him up and placed him on her lap. She opened the letter from Mother, scanning it half-heartedly. Paris had settled down since the riots, Mother reported, although three potential assassins had been arrested in the plot to kill De Gaulle. She was considering selling the apartment at Quai Voltaire, but she did so love the view and it had been Carlo's bequest to her so the decision wasn't one she would take lightly. She was heading to Cadaques soon for a short visit; she would be contactable at an address at Caller Santa Maria. How was the job, she enquired, and what of the application to the Brooklyn Museum? (Would she consider a similar job in a museum in Milan? Mother had a connection there who would see her if she would be amenable?)

If only Mother were there, in safety and in person for once, instead of living another existence overseas. Caroline resented the ocean, that great rolling gulf which had always parted them. Why had Mother always placed it between them? She had no desire to answer to words on a piece of airmail paper. She folded Mother's letter and placed it underneath a bottle of gin on the buffet. Holding the bottle in her hand, she considered how a nip of liquor might take the edge off the goddamn cramps that had plagued her since Philip left.

Reaching for a glass, her eyes fell on the Picasso painting that was propped up against the wall, behind the Calder on the buffet. It was just back from the framers, set in

white linen in a gold frame, and it struck her that she hadn't appreciated how marvellous it looked until that moment. She peered at it closely, seeking Pablo, and by consequence, Mother, in its brushstrokes.

Day 13. She knew this because she had assiduously marked it off on the calendar that morning. Since the first missive, she had sent three more and had received no reply to any of them. She checked the news bulletins daily in case there had been an accident. But deep down, she knew; she could recognise the stench of a rotting relationship a mile off.

He was due back in New York in 6 days. Maybe he'd show up at her door with flowers and an excuse. Until then, she'd keep her head down. Meet clients, try to focus on work (she had a trip to Arkansas in two weeks, to meet with architects about the interior design of a new shopping mall, which would be a colossal bore but at least it'd take her out of Manhattan.)

Day 19. The flowers and the excuse didn't materialize. She had to face it. He was not coming back.

...Simply nothing, Mother. It is still so unbelievable that he could treat me as if I didn't exist and trample me like a worm! God knows, I don't deserve it. I didn't go looking for him – he found me. How sad to have such an unclean and thoroughly unfriendly break. I don't understand it!

It really has left me with such a lack of confidence and profound hurt. I doubt whether I will ever get over it, but I shall try to learn to put on a front that smiles occasionally...

Let me know your summer plans Mother. I've been thinking about San Francisco as a travel destination – would you like to go with me? We might even take in Hawaii while we're at it. Anyway, as I say, let me know...

Love to Flou-Flou from Wurstie. And love from me to you.

She posted the letter and looked at the weeks ahead. Up until February they had been punctuated by Philip's visits, each of which she viewed as a milestone to happiness. Now all that remained were blank days and work trips. Even a weekend to Pa's place in Oyster Bay was out of the question since her half-sister Paula and her ghastly

husband were currently holed up there with their two screaming children while they waited to move into their new house.

Philip Adams had screwed her over well and good. So that, she resolved, was the end of men. She had her cats, a clutch of friends at work, a Mother she never saw but at least responded to letters occasionally. Perhaps this was her lot in life. Pouring herself a champagne glass full to the brim with whisky, she told herself it could be worse.

MARY

NEW YORK back to CADAQUES, November 1966

It is not that she is unsympathetic to her daughter's predicament. Philip Adams had seemed like a nice enough fellow (full of complexes, evidently, but that was seemingly how Caroline liked her beaux.) His current behaviour was regrettable and, after the discussion she had held with him over drinks just a few months ago in Paris, Mary found it frankly surprising. Yes, he'd been drunk, at one point tearful (how ghastly that had been), but he'd remained steadfast in his declarations of love for her daughter.

"She understands me like no-one else," he'd said from behind a haze of Scotch on the rocks. "I only wish I were worthy of her affections. It's always the same with me, women profess love only to unearth my weaknesses and desert me..."

"Come now, man. Get a grip of yourself," she had told him. "We are all human and we all have weaknesses. What makes you and yours so goddamn special?"

He had looked at her from beneath a pain-laden brow, awaiting, it seemed, a sudden rush of motherly affection with a retraction of the last comment. But it didn't come. In fact, she had averted her attention from him completely, instead choosing to inspect her recent manicure, noting a minuscule speck of dust caught in the varnish. She would mention it to her beautician next time she visited.

As for unfriendly breaks? Her divorce from Fritz was one such example. The hostility had come from all sides, even her own.

"You're the only Callery ever to divorce!" her father had told her, in a tone which could have been mistaken for some kind of skewed pride.

"Then I am the only Callery who is honest," she had replied. She half expected him to raise his hand to her, but instead he turned the color of a blood-orange, glared at his wife and left the room.

"Please, Mary," Julia Callery had implored. "Think hard before you take this course of action. It is impossible to undo, once it's done."

“Once what is done, Mother? The divorce, or the headline?”

Mary also understands what it is to yearn for someone - the feeling that clocks are turning backwards when they're absent, only for the hours to unravel the moment they return. Like Philip Adams, Mies lived in Chicago, working at the Institute and maintaining his office there. Mary knows the tyranny of the lovers' commute and the coldness of blank writing paper.

Mary to Mies: *Everywhere I look around this city, I see you. Not just in the buildings you have had a hand in creating, but in the sidewalks we have walked together, the artwork we have admired, the sheets in which we have made love.*

I miss you when I'm with people, I miss you when I am without them. The dog misses you. Caroline misses you. Even Sweetie asked how Mr Mies was when she cleared the ashtray of your cigar...

I love you,

Your Mary

Mies to Mary: *After coming back from NY, Chicago was gray and boring. And still it is. It is a good thing that I am quite busy, otherwise it is hard to take.*

Darling, it is still a long time till I will see you. Three weeks ago tomorrow I left NY. It seems to me much longer. And it will take six more weeks before we can see each other again. But then it is summer and we can spend our days up-coast, or at the Barn, or travel - how about Mexico?

I am lonesome in the evenings. I don't want to see people. If only I could read. But I can't since I lost my glasses. You see, I am more and more crippled.

Good-bye darling. Don't forget I love you.

Your Mies

All of these things, Mary understands. They are part of life, part of love. But somehow, Caroline's woes always seem worse, more entangled than most. The barbs cut deeper and more dramatically, yet she relentlessly pursues them. Seeks them out even, as though her life depends on it.

**

Sunlight dances on the tips of the waves as the car begins the descent into Cadaques, spreading like the tail of a golden peacock out from the bay. Somewhere down there, Nelly is waiting for her with a glass of cold white wine and dearest Flou-Flou, who'll pee himself with excitement at her return and bring her a gift - a slipper or a shoe, anything he can find at ground level. (Once he brought her a sculpture by Arp which she kept by the fireside. His teeth marks can still be seen in the metal.)

Mary is worn thin, but feels glad to be back. Peter Harnden will have completed the design work on her new studio which means she can get started on a new sculpture soon. She has an idea she's been toying with, a free-standing structure made from twisted bronze and aluminum, and a variety of 'found' materials.

Cadaques is a chalk drawing, Cubist in its composition, set against a milk-blue sky. Seabirds glow above the rooftops and Mary hears the distant sound of church bells, or is it the clank of goats in the hills? Sail boats bob on the water, ever grander as each year passes. When she first came here back in the late 30's there were mainly fishing boats, multi-colored fleets scudding in and out with the tide.

Mary too had had boats in the bay over the years, modest whalers to her most recent acquisition – a thirty foot weekender motor boat named 'The Abiquiu Lady'. How she loves that boat; to unhook her from the side of the bay and head off alone, out of the port, into the capricious sea, where she can open her up and speed like a Valkyrie around the hidden coves of the Cap de Creus.

She shudders when she recalls the fate of the vessel which preceded the Abiquiu Lady though. Closing her eyes and resting her head on the back seat of the car, she pictures it in her mind's eye: 'The Carolina'. She was a thirteen foot whaler, shark-white with lacquered walnut fittings. Seats of Spanish leather, dyed mulberry to hide the wine stains. A leather bench ran along the back of the boat, big enough to seat three and a case of champagne, and a mulberry awning fanned out overhead to protect against the delirium of the sun.

There were five of them on the whaler that day; Mary, her great-nephew George, fresh-faced from New York in search of creative inspiration, Peter and Missie Harnden, and some young artist from Barcelona who had come to Cadaques looking for Dali.

“Oh you’ll see Señor Dali all right,” George had told the artist when they’d met the previous night at the Casino. “He’ll be lurking about somewhere. He loves to be seen. But if you are an artist, you really should meet my Aunt Mary...”

Later, on the balcony of Mary’s studio: “What kind of *art* do you do?” Mary asked, lips pursing around the end of the cigarette.

“I am influenced by Señor Dali,” the young artist told her, reaching into his portfolio and pulling out an example.

Mary waved her cigarette dismissively without looking at the painting. “Do you know Duchamp?”

The young artist took out his notepad. “Dada, yes?”

Mary shook her head, eyes fixed on the horizon. The sun had slunk down behind it in a simmering pink rage. “Dada. Why does everyone fixate on Dada with Duchamp?” A tail of ash hung limply from the end of her cigarette. “What about Picasso?”

The artist looked at his notepad. George topped up the whiskies, watching Mary watching the sun. “Guernica,” the young artist said.

“Guernica...of course Guernica,” Mary lifted the whisky to her lips but paused before drinking it. “More ice, George chéri. It needs more ice.” She handed the glass to her great-nephew and went on: “Picasso is the greatest of all the artists. He was also a total shitbag. But the man was...*touched*. Dali is a showman, a spectacular showman...” She took a long draw on her cigarette. Smoke unfurled in a dense plume from the corner of her mouth. She pointed at the framed lithograph of a white dove on the wall inside the apartment. “Recognise that?”

“It’s a Picasso...”

“It is. I bought it from him many years ago. To be honest, I’m not that keen on it. Birds...you know. They don’t do it for me. But it’s probably the most beautiful, most masterfully-achieved lithograph you’ll ever see. Show me what you’ve painted.”

The young artist held up his painting. A horse with elongated legs leered from the canvas, foam bubbling from its mouth, eyes black as war. The background was a cymbal clash of oranges and pinks. Mary smiled.

“You’ve come all this way to catch a glimpse of Señor Dali? George can show you where his house is.” She stubbed her cigarette out and stood up, scooping Filou into her armpit. “George chéri, Filou and I are going for our walk. There’s a space on the boat tomorrow if you want to invite your friend here. Otherwise...good luck, young man.” She placed a hand on George’s shoulder and leaned close into his ear. “You’re not a fairy are you chéri? Mon dieu, I seem to have fairies coming out of my ears!”

And in a waft of Guerlain, she was gone.

It was after lunch when they set out in the whaler. They’d already had three bottles of good wine with their plates of oysters and Mary was in that mood – the one which teetered on the fence between vivacity and belligerence. George hoped she would tumble on the side of the former, though increasingly these excursions ended in drunken rants, where Mary would accuse her entourage of ‘putting upon’ her, of being ‘a bunch of fucking leeches’. For now, at least, her mood matched that of the water – it rippled playfully, belying what lay beneath.

“George chéri, be a dear and fix us all a Bullshot, Peter, Missie and I are parched!” she said, steering the boat out towards the open water beyond the bay. She wore a silk scarf around her head and a pair of huge tortoiseshell sunglasses. Peter and Missie reclined on the leather bench beneath the awning alongside the bemused-looking art student whose name they had still not ascertained. Mary shouted to him.

“I hope you thought to bring your bathing suit, young Dali? It’s so terribly hot, we simply must go for a plunge.”

The artist’s expression melted like a Dali clock. “No Señora Callery, I didn’t bring it...”

Missie put her hand on his knee. “No matter. We prefer to do it nude anyway.”

Mary threw her head back and roared, and Peter said; “Missie darling, leave the poor boy alone and take your drink,” indicating the glass which George was offering.

As the sea opened up between the whaler and the port, the landscape swung into relief; white buildings amid bent and twisted rocks. Mary knew every inch of that landscape, both its summer and its winter moods, the way the uppermost ridge of the mountain rose and fell across the sky like the line of a ragged heartbeat. One hand on the boat’s wheel, she turned to look at it again, but her Chanel-clad eyes were dazzled

by the bleaching of the sun. As they reached the outer limits of the bay, the water turned from blue to deep green, and seaweed moved beneath the boat like gymnasts' ribbons. A shoal of anchovies seethed alongside and Missie dangled an arm out, trying to touch one. Peter said; "Why don't you get in with them, Princess?"

"What, in my clothes?"

"Nude, you said."

"You just want to see my tits," Missie said, smirking but not looking at Peter.

Again Mary roared. "Missie dearest, it's not as if we haven't seen them before. Well, everyone except young Dali I guess," and the artist's face reddened. "Then again, tits may not be his thing, huh George?"

George nodded sarcastically and drained his Bullshot. "You know me, Aunt Mary."

"Is George a fairy?" Peter asked, lacing his arm around Missie's shoulder. "Are you a little queer, George?"

"Kaftans and bells are not really my style, Peter," George replied. "Although I kinda think Aunt Mary would like them to be. I think she'd find me more interesting."

Mary blew kisses in the air and said, "Never George chéri, you're perfection just the way you are."

She docked the whaler at one of the small craggy islands which rose out of the sea and climbed unsteadily onto the rock. She stripped off to her bathing suit and dived headlong into the sea, re-emerging a few yards out in a flurry of bubbles.

"Come on in, Georgie! Get some sun on that ghastly white New York flesh!"

"In a while, Aunt Mary."

"How about you, Missie?"

"I haven't brought my suit."

"Since when did that stop you?"

"There are two young men on this boat, in case you hadn't noticed." Missie held her glass out to George for a top up.

“You’ll just have to go in fully clothed then,” said Peter, and with that he scooped her up and threw her over the side of the boat. The tub pitched violently back and forth and both Peter and Mary shrieked with laughter. Missie surfaced, still holding her Bullshot glass aloft, now filled with sea water instead of liquor, her black locks stuck to her head like a cap.

“You asshole, Peter,” she gulped, swimming back towards the boat.

“Did you catch any fish, Princess?”

The young artist clung to the edge of the boat not knowing whether to show outrage or laugh along with the rest of them. Peter held out his hand and pulled Missie back aboard. She held out her glass to George and shook her hair like a dog.

“You need a hand out of those clothes too?” Peter asked, admiring the sodden outline of his wife’s body.

“How chivalrous of you dear,” she replied, and as George handed her another Bullshot she threw it directly over Peter. “In a word, no. But thank you anyway.” Missie turned her back on her husband, and facing the young artist, she pulled her shirt over her head and tossed it aside. She feigned a stumble into the young artist’s lap, pushing lace-cupped breasts into his face.

“I do apologise,” she said, pulling herself up. “Turbulent waters make the boat rock.” The young artist glanced beyond her at the gently rippling sea.

Mary was back on the island now, sitting astride a boulder as if on horseback. She ran her hands over her hair, slicking the water from it. “Missie dearest, do behave, you’re old enough to be his mother,” she shouted.

“I’m still not as old as you though Mary, dear,” Missie trilled and raised her glass in to the air.

Mary pretended she hadn’t heard. “George chéri, come and sit by me. And bring me my drink will you dear?”

Mary considered her great-nephew from behind her huge sunglasses as he dutifully filled her glass. He had talent, George. At twenty-two, he had yet to find his own style, but some recent pieces he had shown her – a series of abstract, angular sculptures

crafted from metal and wire – had appealed to her. She thought back to their first meeting in New York over four years ago.

He'd come to her show at Knoedler's, all twisted-up in awe, looking at her sculptures and barely being able to drink the complimentary wine for shaking; this was Knoedler's after all and here he was, this kid who wanted to be an artist...But she remembered him further back from then. He was her niece, Marcella's, boy, who took ballroom dancing classes at the Colony Club in New York while Marcella drank Martinis in the Club lounge. He'd grown since then though, in confidence and in talent, yet she still saw awe in his demeanor when he spoke to her.

She patted the rock as he approached and he sat down alongside her, handing her the glass.

“How are you finding Cadaques, chéri?”

George smiled. “You know..it's fun. Kinda...*charged*.”

“Charged in what way?”

“Creatively. Sexually. There's this current running through it. A pulse.”

“You're right George. Charged is the word. Now you know why we all come down here.”

“And I thought it was just for the light...” George looked at his aunt and smiled again.

“Indeed,” she replied, slugging back her cocktail. “And the alcohol. The problem with this stuff is that it goes down like goddamn Crush soda.”

Sun was ablaze on the water, a chorus line of golden nymphs dancing on the waves. Mary lay back against the rock and closed her eyes, feeling its hot, sharp points digging into her back. George looked out at the horizon. The more he looked, the more it blurred. Heat seemed to be rising from the sea, as if the whole bay was on fire.

Mary woke to shouting. George's voice, clear and urgent.

“Get in the boat. Everyone, in the boat!”

“What's going on?”

“The waves. They’re coming at us like a cliff. We need to get the hell out of here, and fast.”

Mary scrambled to her feet, cocktail-woozy and half-baked by the sun. “What are you talking about George?” Then the wind hit her – full on, like a punch in the face, throwing her back against the rock. “Jesus....”

Missie and Peter were both drunk, passed out in the boat, and the young artist was grappling with his drawing pad and charcoals.

“Réveillez-vous! Réveillez-vous!” he screamed, while George started the whaler’s engine. “Putain, on est foutus, je vous dis!”

“Shut up and help Mary!” George shouted, but the wind stole his words. Waves leapt about the boat and the wind shook it, but the island gave no shelter – the waves clawed at it from all sides, pulling it under the water.

“Jesus Christ George, why didn’t you wake me?” Mary was shouting, trying to climb back into the boat. George was at the wheel, waiting for her before he headed off into the waves.

“I did wake you! I fell asleep myself.”

“What the hell are you doing?” she yelled, barely in the boat before grabbing the wheel. “You’re steering us straight into the waves!”

“Aunt Mary! We need to take them head on!”

“George, for chrissake this is insanity!” Peter shouted, just conscious, pinned back in his seat by the force of the wind.

Mary pulled the boat sideways, intuitively pitting it against the rising waves. “The wind will blow us back into the bay, George!” she shouted. George shook his head as forcefully as the boat shook them.

“No! It won’t! We’ll go under! Into the waves, it’s the only way to go!” He prised her hands from the wheel and pushed her to where Peter, Missie and the young artist clung to the leather bench. “We need to find the angle, then divert inwards.”

“George! You’re an asshole!” she was shouting, “A fucking reckless son of a bitch! You’re going to kill us all!”

Seawater spumed over the bow of the boat, and Peter ventured forward but was thrown back by the wind. Mary looked once more at the coastline, the ridge of the mountain, the Escher-like construction of a town she called home. She convinced herself this was the last time she would see it. Led into oblivion by little George. He'd worn shorts and a vest for those ballroom classes, she remembered. And tiny black sneakers, that marked the herringbone floor.

"Get out of there and help me get this fucking awning down," Peter was shouting at the young artist, who was curled up under the leather bench. The wind tugged at the awning, trying to uproot it from its hinges. And like the canopy of a parachute, the awning collected the wind, and the twin forces almost lifted the boat clean out of the water.

"We're done for!" Missie was saying, "I can sense it, this is the end."

And then, George found his angle. He swerved the whaler until it was head on to the waves and the wind, and it hurtled into the port with five shock-stricken passengers clinging to its rails. Three or four marineros – the only people to still be out on the deserted docks – helped to pull it in, muttering in Catalan about these "bojos aquests Americans" who had failed to read the changes in the weather on their restless coastline. The sea slapped down on the dock like rain, and the occupants of the whaler scrambled onto it and into the shelter of Meliton.

Rage, shock and rivulets of mascara-tinged seawater converged on Mary's face. "George. You nearly killed us out there. It's by the grace of God we're alive. You're never coming out on my boat again, do you hear?" She signaled to the barman for a round of drinks.

"I nearly killed us? That's pretty rich, Aunt Mary. I saved us. I was the one who saw the waves, who steered the boat in."

"Oh don't give me that! If you'd seen the waves earlier we'd never be in this mess and I might still have a goddamn boat. The whaler's ruined. You were reckless, George, with the boat and our lives." The barman offered her a cigarette and she took it, not pausing to look for her holder.

George shook his head and drained one of the whiskies that the barman had begun filling up along the bar. "Fine. Whatever you say, Aunt Mary. If you'll all excuse me, I'm going back to the house."

Peter made as if to stop him, but Mary wafted her cigarette in the air. “Leave him, Peter. Let him go sulk if he wants to.” She turned to the young artist, who stood shivering in a pool of briny water. “You can go now too, young Dali.”

“But my paintings...”

“You’re welcome to try and salvage them from the boat, but I suggest you may need a fishing rod and waders. Bon courage.”

Later that evening at the Harnden’s, dried off but still well-lubricated, Mary recounted the ordeal to their guests.

“Sounds to me like your nephew did the right thing,” said one of them. “It’s what any sailor would have done. Your nephew saved your lives, dear Meric. And how thankful we are to him for doing so.”

Mary’s bracelets jangled. “It seemed reckless at the time, but I guess looking back you are right. But for Christ’s sake, don’t tell George that.”

The next day, she unhooked a Calder piece from the wall and handed it to George.

“Take it, chéri. Peace offering,” she said. Walking out of the room she added, “Not an apology.”

CAROLINE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, NOVEMBER 1966

2:02am

She thought for a moment she could smell marijuana drifting in through her window from the apartment below. The guy grew it down there, Caroline knew, a great jungle unfurling beneath a sky of electric light. The doorman turned a blind eye in return for the steady provision of weed. There was nothing that couldn't be bought, including discretion.

She was back in the living room, and by her feet was a large box containing photographs, hundreds of them, flung in there with no regard for order or date. Mother archived all her documents, letters were filed in alphabetical order, and within that, by date received. How often had she pressed upon Caroline the importance of archiving? But Caroline had always failed to see the point. You archive them for what? Posterity? No-one cares about who wrote to whom when you're dead.

Caroline reached into the box and pulled out a handful of prints, mainly shots of Mary at work in her atelier in New York, along with some individual shots of her sculptures. Caroline had taken them on Mary's Rolleiflex and she remembered the day well – Mary had trusted her to take some pictures for an exhibition she was preparing for at the Arts Club of Chicago.

“Just use your intuition and shoot,” she told Caroline. “Try and get my best side though...”

Caroline felt like the most important person in the world – 20 years old and a real photographer! Looking at the pictures now, even through whisky-soused eyes, Caroline could appreciate that they were not bad shots. The ones of Mother at her work bench were particularly well-achieved, capturing the expression of total absorption Caroline knew so well.

Another handful of shots taken around the same era. Mother and Caroline together, ‘the beautiful one’ with her ugly duckling sidekick. Why on earth were they made to pose so, at that desk, looking off into an imagined distance to the left? And how

ghastly she looked in that dreadful lace-collared dress. The discord between them was palpable on that picture, she thought. Perhaps they had just had an exchange of words. She tore it into neat quarters and tossed the pieces under the couch.

There was a shot from East Hampton when Binker was a baby and Giggie was alive. Another of a lost evening in Huntington where she was wedged alongside Mies and the Mathews, and cocktail glasses sang like a chorus line on the table in front of them. She remembered the dress she was wearing on the picture – a white, highly starched number from Bloomingdales which she'd absolutely adored.

Three or four shots taken in the apartment she shared with Simon; one where she was holding Binks, another of her looking seductive, foregrounded by a pair of cream high heeled shoes. Simon may have been a musician but he had no idea of composition, she thought, ripping the pictures up and sending the pieces the way of the others.

She brought out more she had taken herself, moody landscape shots inspired by Vladimir Barinov. They seemed terribly self-conscious now, and highly derivative. She felt a swell of self-loathing in her gut. Just over a year ago, she had made the decision to quit interior design and go freelance as a photographer. After all, despite the crass nature of these early attempts, her passion for photography had never left her. In fact, in among the languages, the art, the piano, the interior design, and all those other pursuits taken up and subsequently dropped, it was the one remaining passion.

Her decision had been inspired by two things. Firstly, the need for cold, hard cash. Despite signing up to agencies all over New York, she hadn't had so much as a sniff at an interview for any interior design work since she'd been laid off from her job at a small design firm in the City several months before. She figured that if she could earn as little as \$400 a month photographing rich folk with their animals, she would be able to move to a loft in a lousy district and survival might have been possible.

This somewhat half-baked decision was sealed by an external vote of confidence - for who wouldn't have been swayed by the verve and encouragement of the man who would become Caroline's third and final husband, Don Porter?

**

He was the store manager at Klein's, as flamboyant as the deals he did on women's clothing, and the rumor was that he may have been a homosexual.

("People have no imagination in this City," she told her friend Jane. "Just because he's nearly fifty and has never gotten married, there's an immediate assumption that he must be a fairy!")

Caroline had been sent to Klein's on her first assignment for her new firm (the one she left Katzmann's for to become Chief Color Specialist on a salary of \$11,000 a year!) There were just 12 of them in the company, and she had been selected to design an entire floor at a new branch of Klein's.

("I'm flabbergasted!" she wrote Mary when she heard the news. "I've never done such a thing, I think I am on the verge of a *crise-de-nerfs*! My new nails have been chewed to nothing, probably a good thing, it means I am physically able to type this letter to you!")

She first met him in the elevator on her way to the manager's office. He wore a black suit, no tie, and she noted open pores on the end of his somewhat bulbous nose.

"You must be the interior designer?" he said. "I don't envy you going to meet the manager. He's kind of..." Porter looked around the elevator as if checking that they weren't being watched. Then he whispered; "An asshole."

Caroline couldn't conceal a smirk. "I don't know about that Sir. I'm just the colorist..."

Porter hopped out of the elevator at the floor below the management suite. "Well, don't let him hustle you. The man has no taste. Good luck!" The doors closed and Caroline felt heat rising up her back. It was imperative she got this right – hell, this could be the job to make her career – what if this Porter guy was as much of a schmuck as people made out? He could make it impossible for her to make her mark. She stumbled anxiously out of the elevator and told his secretary she had arrived.

Don Porter opened the door to his office with an impish grin and immediately she realized she'd been duped.

"I told you I was an asshole," he said. "Come in."

She flushed but sat down as instructed and began taking out the plans from her bag. He sat in the seat opposite her and opened the drawer in his desk.

“I don’t know about you, Mrs Boosey, but I find it hard to get the creative juices flowing without a little lubrication.” He pulled out a bottle of Scotch and two cut-glass tumblers. The sight of the liquor imbued her with an instant sense of calm. She had considered topping herself up before the meeting - a nip from her hip-flask is all that would have been required to take the edge off - but here she was being offered the opportunity to legitimately self-medicate.

“Just a small one then. I need to keep a clear head.”

“Oh absolutely. But drinking alone is such a bore!”

She pulled out the plans and flattened them out on the desk. She accepted the glass of Scotch and resisted the desire to drain it all in a single gulp. “As I understand it, the floor is to be devoted to pets,” she began, sipping the liquid and feeling the delicious burn in her throat. “Their basic needs, but also a range of services such as nail clipping and so on?”

“Correct,” Porter said. “Collars, coats, leashes, but higher-end than the junk you buy at Frank’s.”

“As a cat-lover, I’m always looking for original accessories. My mother lives in Europe and the things she sends me for my Harold are just so gorgeous, so different from anything we get here. I think this needs to be the theme for the floor, Mr Porter; accentuating the difference.”

“I had a fun vision for a kind of shampoo bar for dogs too,” Porter said, animatedly. “I can just see all these pooches in bathing caps surrounded by bubbles!”

“What a picture! Had you thought about including a photograph in with the shampoo? I know many people who would pay top dollar for a fun shot of their dog in the tub.”

Porter shuffled in his seat and took a sip of whisky. “That’s not half a bad idea, Mrs Boosey. I like your thinking. Tell me about the color scheme then? You’ve got me stirred up now.”

“Well, pet stores tend to be bland, smelly, not too much attention to detail. My thought was to reverse this. Make it glamorous. Use golds, silvers, sumptuous tones. I even thought a few rhinestones here and there might be fun - perhaps at point of sale, or laced around the pillars. Ladies who come up here will have first passed through

clothing, footwear, accessories. Their experience needs to be cohesive. Here is how I envision it might look.” She handed him a sketch together with swatches of her proposed color scheme.

Porter studied it then clapped his hands. “I like it. And more to the point, I like you, Mrs Boosey. We’re on the same wavelength, which is the right start to any relationship.”

She thought she may have detected a whiff of flirtation in his voice, but she reminded herself of the rumors and the fact that she did, in truth, find him somewhat effete. She took another sip of whisky and went on. “As for furnishings, here are my thoughts...”

After this first meeting, Caroline suspected that the gossip about him might have some weight. But when he called her up later that afternoon at her office and asked if she would like to go dancing with him on the weekend, she accepted. She felt she’d had no fun and seen no-one except Pa and Paula for weeks. The pressures of a new job had left her tired and strung out, the shadow of Philip Adams still loomed over her mood, meaning she stayed in with no-one but the cat and a bottle of Scotch for company. Even just some male companionship might be nice, and Don Porter would be a fine person to fill that void.

The weekend came and he took her for steak and cocktails, followed by dancing until 1am at Cherry on the Upper East Side. He liked proper dancing, and knew footwork to the waltz and the jive. He led her around the floor, both of them half-cut on cocktails, and though he was shorter than her, Caroline liked the feeling of being under the supervision of a man. She permitted herself to feel vulnerable in his arms, knowing she’d loathe herself for such weak female behaviour in the sober light of day.

At this point, she had no desire for any sexual relations with Porter and didn’t feel any such charge between them. In fact, a polite kiss on the cheek at the end of a gay night was the punctuation to their relationship for over a year. It wasn’t until he got down on one knee outside her brownstone in January 1966 and, under a raw winter sun, asked her if she would be his wife, that she looked upon him as anything other than the very dearest of friends.

MARY

CADAQUES, November 1966

She returns home to letters. A neat pile of them on her mantel in the hall. Pepita has put the flowers into vases; all but the white roses are brown and drooped. She had expected Nelly and Flou-Flou, but the house is empty. Nothing has changed or been moved, but the place feels different. She goes to call Nelly but stops herself; instead she picks up the letters and sits by the unlit fire to read them. It is impossible to know what to write on occasions such as this, but flicking through the condolences, she almost wishes people wouldn't have bothered.

Her eyes fall on an envelope written in the hand of her friend Teeny Duchamp. They'd been playing chess on the Abiquiu Lady the day Mary had received the telegram from Fritz, but the letter is stamped Villiers sous Grez. She opens the letter and reads;

"...think on about what we discussed regarding Villiers. It is a place of restful contemplation, yet close enough to Paris for us to flâne les rues like the old days. It may also provide you with some respite from your memories amid dear friends who love you. Talking of whom, we had dinner with Man Ray and Robert Lebel recently, both of whom were extremely saddened by the news and asked that I send on their deepest sympathies to you...."

Villiers, Paris, Teeny, they all feel so far away from her existence here in Cadaques. Paris has long since packed up, its people migrated to the countryside round about. Villiers had been a future possibility, dreamed up over rooks and knights and martinis, but Mary now saw no reason to wait. Once East 68th was sold along with Quai Voltaire, she would be left with an ample sum to take up her friend's suggestion and buy a place up there.

Of course, she would never leave Cadaques - here she was shielded on all sides, by tufted cliffs and a wide and glittering sea. The light, (oh the light!), was almost biblical – as close to a religious experience as Mary thinks she'll ever get. But Villiers could be a bolt-hole in the north, the next chapter in the pursuit of happiness and contentment.

Her thoughts turn to the girl who lies dead beneath the earth in a graveyard half a world away. Would Caroline ever have been happy? Even as a baby, she seemed furious at life, curled tight with colic or else affecting a constant low braying sound as if to remind everyone of her disapproval. As a tiny girl, toddling around Paris after Mary with cold, bluish knees and a perpetual look of displacement.

So they'd sent her away to the Garrison School in Maryland, hoping she'd get a taste of the sort of gay times Mary enjoyed at Spence. But the letters were always heavy with sadness, no friends to speak of, no enthusiasm for her studies. But far from sympathizing, reading them made Mary inexplicably angry. This was just typical of Caroline, she thought, unable – or unwilling – to make the best of a situation, always looking to someone else for the answers. When poor report after poor report came home signed by that officious goddamn Mrs Offutt, Mary felt relieved to be on the other side of the Atlantic.

They had shared happy moments though, hadn't they? Weekends in Paris, holed up against the freeze outside, their cold feet stacked up one on top of the other under a shared woollen blanket listening to the Met Opera broadcasts through a crackling wireless. Weekends in New York, or Long Island, going for pedicures together, talking about men. Weekends where the pain of leaving each other seemed, like lovers, hard to bear, and so they would fight tooth and nail in the dying hours of their time together, and then yearn each for the other when the void came.

This was part of life, part of love. Mary understood this. And though the love part had never come easy to her, she had at least tried it, attempted to learn its machinations. Death is such a permanent solution to transitory pain. Why oh why had she done it?

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, 1965

She received notice of being laid off in January. Sadly, they had no choice, they told her, but references were available should she require them for future work. What future work? she asked herself. At almost forty, she couldn't help feeling that the pool of employers in New York City likely to hire her was drying up.

Back at Mary's house on East 68th Street, Caroline helped herself to liquor from the buffet and prepared to write her mother with the news. Where in the hell *was* Mother at the moment? Cadaques? Paris? On a train bound for Milan? Only one thing was certain - Mother was somewhere in Europe, secure in the knowledge that the Atlantic was always reliably there between herself and her obligations. Pulling back the cover on the typewriter, Caroline felt a familiar pang of fury and irritation brought on by thoughts of Mother. Unfair, this pang, perhaps, but irrepressible once it had taken hold.

She started typing, but her nails, pristinely manicured by a pale-faced girl at Saks, had grown so long that she could barely press the keys down. She tried with a pen and managed a short missive in bedraggled, looping script.

Dear Mother,

Another day, another job lost! There was nothing to be done. They were happy with my work, but it seems small design firms in NYC are not the place to be employed at this moment in time. I have registered with agencies across town, so fingers crossed something will come up soon.

I know that both you and Father worry when I am out of a job because you might have to support me. I so often wonder why you even had a child together; all I have ever been is a burden to you. On the occasions that I have needed help it is all so tragically oppressive to you both. But don't worry, I am not writing to ask for money this time – only to keep you updated with my life, as I wish I were updated with yours. I'm not even sure where you are!

I wish I could sit down and talk to you about this, it is all too long to write in a letter.

Sending all my love to you, as always, wherever you are.

C

She placed the letter in an envelope and printed Mother's Cadaques address on the front. Most probably it'd sit on the mantel in her hallway for weeks before being read, by which time Caroline would be back at work and the news wouldn't be worth reading. Perhaps this was Mother's rationale for never being in touch. News that had to travel the breadth of an ocean before reaching a sympathetic ear was no longer worthy of the name.

She picked up the telephone and called her friend Porter. He lived downtown but she knew he'd take a cab to see her if necessary. He came up in the middle of the night once to comfort her during a short-lived period of sobriety. She was sweating so profusely in withdrawal she genuinely believed she might be dissolving into her bedclothes.

"Hello?"

"Porter it's me. Take me for dinner and drinks? Although, we could skip dinner if you like. I haven't much stomach for food."

He arrived an hour later and they went to Paul's for late cocktails.

"What happened, honey?"

"I'm officially unemployed."

"That ain't so bad. I thought you were going to tell me something really tragic."

"It is kind of a tragedy. I feel old and jaded. Like I haven't the will to carry on, somehow."

Porter ordered two Martinis and took her hand. "You do melodrama so well, Caroline. But you're only thirty-nine years old for Christ's sake! Look at this as an opportunity. You'd outgrown Joostens anyway."

"But I don't know anything else. Who would want me?"

“You have talked to me about photography. Your work at Columbia, shots of your mother for an arts brochure. One of the first things you ever talked to me about was an idea of photographing rich folk with their dogs.”

“Yes but I could never earn money from it. Some things are best kept as hobbies...”

“Oh nonsense! This is the perfect opportunity for you to spread your wings, see what you’re really capable of. Sure it might sound scary, but no-one ever got far without challenging themselves.” He handed her the Martini and indicated for her to drink. She removed the olive and bit into its bitter, gin-infused flesh. “I know a guy, Bill Hennings, he’s the only photographer in the social district, does all the weddings and such. To be honest, he isn’t an especially good photographer in my opinion, but he has the best technical knowledge. I’ll give him a call, see if he can’t help you get started.”

Porter’s excitement was palpable and she couldn’t help but be carried along by it. “You’d do that for me?”

“You know I would. Anything to see that smile back on your face.”

**

Bill Hennings emerged from the dark room in his studio on East 48th Street and extended a damp hand to Caroline. He was older than Caroline had anticipated, early fifties perhaps, with fine, cat-like features and a prowling, feline manner.

“Good to meet you, Mrs Boosey. Don sent you, right?” he took up a towel and wiped down his face.

“Yes, and I’m so grateful to you for seeing me, Mr Hennings.”

Hennings gestured a chair and she sat in it, holding her camera (bought the previous day in anticipation of her new career) like she held Harold; tenderly and close in to her breast.

“How do you know Don then?” Hennings poured them both two fingers of Scotch, draining his before she’d even lifted hers off the table. He topped it up again and looked at her.

“We’ve known each other a few years now. I was his designer at Joosen’s. Until I got laid off that is. Hence the change of direction.” She picked up her glass and realized

she was shaking slightly. This felt like a significant moment. Could this man change her life?

“Know much about photography?” He reached forward and took her camera from her.

“My mother taught me how to use a camera from an early age. She was quite a photographer herself. I learned quite a bit about it on my course at Columbia. But that was back in ’45...”

Hennings smiled. “Things have changed a bit since then. Don said you wanted some technical direction – developing, enlarging, lighting and such. Have you seen this latest atrocity?” He picked up a camera from the table in front of them and handed it to her. “The Swinger. It talks to you, tells you when to take the best shot. Then it develops in ten seconds. The concept is neat, I suppose, if you’re a college student or a housewife from Poughkeepsie, but the quality of the shots isn’t worth the paper they’re printed on. I swear by my Leica. Haven’t changed her for years and she hasn’t let me down.”

Caroline examined The Swinger with amusement – not so much at the camera itself, but at Henning’s reaction to it. She was reminded of Professor Barinov all those years ago, and how affronted he would get with new, ‘faddish’ photographic equipment.

“I just bought my camera,” Caroline said. “I’ve known the guy in the photo shop for years, he recommended it as a good intermediate piece of equipment.”

“Well, if you already know a bit about composition, I guess we should start in the dark room. Come on through.”

**

By the time Don Porter proposed in January 1966, Caroline had assisted Bill Hennings on a handful of projects around New York, photographing everything from brides to bar mitzvahs to babies. Her favorite assignment was at the home of an aged, purple-hatted woman and her German wolfhound, the self-titled ‘Duchess and the Duchy of Sands Point’, who wanted a photograph of themselves in regal attire looking out over the peninsula. It was Caroline’s job to arrange the Duchess’ silks in such a way that they would not obscure the subjects, but each time Hennings went in for the

shot, the wind would lift and the Duchy would end up hidden behind a length of errant, billowing cloth.

It was at this shoot that Caroline decided that once she made the leap of faith and started out alone, her specialist subject would definitely be animals, preferably dogs or cats, possibly accompanied by old women. In the event, it wasn't so much a leap but a push – on learning of her betrothal to Porter, Hennings stated that as she was likely to be devoting most of her time to her new husband, this inevitably meant less time for photography and therefore he would be looking for a new apprentice.

“If I wasn't such a cynic, I'd bet Hennings is jealous,” Caroline told Porter bitterly.

“You're probably right. Any man would be jealous of me, marrying you.”

Caroline looked at him over her glasses. “I rather meant jealous of *me* marrying you. I think he's got the hots for you.”

“Don't talk stage-rot. We've known each other years. Besides, he's married.”

“Plenty of 'em are.”

Porter gave her a mild look. “Whatever. It doesn't matter anyways. As I've told you before, look for the opportunities. He's taught you all you need to know.”

MARY

CADAQUES, 1965

News of the nuptials blows in on a cold Atlantic wind, despite the fact that her daughter has clearly made every effort to keep it from her. An elopement, evidently, as befits a woman rebounding into her third marriage with a man whom everyone in Manhattan refers to as ‘the temperamental type’. In her studio in Cadaques, Mary picks up her blow torch and considers how she might proceed with her daughter from here.

Anger is a useless emotion. Direct it into the work, it serves a purpose there at least. She blasts the steel structure she is working on with a purplish flame. Tears are not forthcoming. They rarely are, especially where the actions of her ridiculous daughter are involved. What is left? Despair? Incredulity? She’s done them all. No, this time she will exercise restraint. If Caroline doesn’t wish her to know about this latest calamity, so be it. At least she’ll be spared the endless, conflicted correspondence. Indeed, it’ll be interesting to see how long she keeps it from her.

Momentarily, she thinks of her ex-husband. What does he make of all this? Likely he will be doing his best to turn a blind eye. She knows he is currently working on getting one of his cronies the New York Mayorship, although by all accounts he is working harder on pickling himself to death. Is this one of those occasions when Mother and Father should be united in their approach, should she sent him a wire?

The idea of being part of a ‘parental union’ repels her and quickly she dismisses it. She knows what he’ll say anyway – he isn’t the most enlightened of men in his views on ‘alternative’ ways of living, she’s not sure she can bear to listen to another one of his diatribes. Besides, she’s heading to New York in a couple of months, an exhibition at Knoedler’s then up to Utica for a group exhibition at the Munson-Williams-Proctor institute; perhaps she’ll catch him then.

Ex-husbands and wayward daughters aside, the upcoming New York trip is not one she is looking forward to. It is going to involve making a decision about her house on East 68th Street – whether to succumb to the ever-encroaching Synagogue and sell to the Rabbi, or keep it. She loves that house with its studio on the bottom floor, and all

its noise, and ever since she bought it after her divorce it has been a place of refuge in many a storm. Letting it go, with the prospect of its walls being smashed apart and redeveloped into a community wing or whatever the Rabbi's plans are seems indecent.

She has procrastinated for over three years though, knowing in her heart it will have to go. Caroline described the block as becoming 'hellish' and has urged her to sell in favour of a 'duplex co-operative apartment with doorman and service' in the East 50s. But maybe this is all leading to the inevitable conclusion that she is done with Manhattan. Or Manhattan is done with her. Either way, her old friend Teeny Duchamp's proposal – that Mary move to Villiers-sur-Grez with her – is looking more attractive by the day.

Working the steel sculpture has brought some lucidity. She decides to wire her friend, the art dealer, Harold Diamond, in New York. Paintings are stacked up in cobwebbed corners in every room in East 68th Street, so many she's forgotten what's there. Better have to have them valued and sold now before Caroline's new husband trades them in for a Mercedes like the last one did. She'll ask her great-nephew George to come along too. Last she heard, he wanted to be an artist- indeed he wasn't long back from a trip to Cadaques where he'd shown interest pursuing her in the Modernist aesthetic. She liked this, and felt flattered by it, and wanted to help him any way she could. It'd be good for him, she thinks, to meet Diamond and get a sense of what a painting is worth.

Once the paintings are cleared out, the next and natural step will be to sell the house. The fact of having made a decision bolsters her. She's back in control. She places the blow torch down on her workbench and heads off to send the wire.

**

"Harold dear, these are the ones I want to sell." She indicates the large stack of paintings which are propped up against the wall. "The rest are coming back to France with me." She is kneeling on the floor of the studio on East 68th Street taking the Europe-bound ones out of their frames. "Georgie, help me with this will you cheri. They need to go flat in my suitcase."

She holds a small picture up and appraises it if it were a dress from Saks. Handing it to George she says, "Start with this one. If you can get it out, you can keep it. A gift

from me for all your help. But I'll have the frame, I rather like it." She sends air kisses up to him and resumes what she is doing.

George looks at his Aunt Mary as if she were half-crazed. He is familiar with her impulsive ways (in Cadaques he noticed her habit of giving things away to the first person who showed an interest them – money, paintings, clothing, even her studio, which she said she would bequeath to the Harndens' daughter Marina just because she said she liked it). But this is the second painting she has given him. He can't help but feel a little embarrassed.

Diamond sidles up to George and glimpses the painting. "If you want, I can sell that for you. I'm guessing a student like you could do with the money, and that thing there will set you up in paintbrushes for life."

George looks at Mary and she shrugs. "Go ahead, it's yours to do what you want with it. But don't forget, I want the frame."

While the men grapple with the canvas, Mary uncovers an unframed sketch. The first is of the back of her head – her hair is twisted into a simple chignon and the side of her face is poised towards a distant future. She is instantly back in a time and a place – the chateau at Boisgeloup – and she is standing in that magical *atelier de sculpture*, gazing at the light and the tools and the space in which the master worked. He had drawn her without her knowledge and presented the sketch much later, weeks, months even, scratching a signature on the bottom and handing it to her as if it were a café menu and he were a surly waiter. She puts the sketch to one side and covers it with a copy of Life. Then she continues with the triage.

Diamond leaves with a long inventory and George's small unframed Calder for which he anticipates he will get in excess of \$5000. George has just watched him write out a check for Mary to the tune of \$250,000. When the door closes behind Diamond, Mary places the check in the drawer of the buffet and takes out a bottle of brandy.

"There's an expression in French, Georgie. *Arrete de gober des mouches.*" Mary lights up a cigarette and fixes them each a brandy and seltzer. "Literally translated, it means stop swallowing flies. Ergo, pick your jaw up off the floor."

George laughs and takes the brandy. "Christ Aunt Mary, did I count the zeros right?"

“Cheri, that’s not even the half of it. Diamond would shit his pants if he saw what I have overseas. There wasn’t a hell of a lot of any significance in what he took. Don’t forget, I’ve been a collector for many years.” She winks at him and sits down. “Georgie, I want to ask you something. Have you seen much of Caroline?”

“I hear more about her than I see her. I think she’s doing OK...”

“You’ve heard she’s married again?”

“No shit? I had not heard that. Who is it this time? Someone hopelessly good-looking and exceedingly rich, I hope?” George is a good kid, but if he hasn’t heard about this Porter guy, there’s a chance it hasn’t bled into the wider family consciousness yet.

“I...haven’t met him. I’m meeting with her tomorrow for dinner though and hopefully I’ll see him then.”

“Name?”

Mary smiles uneasily. “I’ll let her tell you. But George? Keep this to yourself for now, OK cheri?”

**

Caroline wears a full length mink coat and a pair of French kidskin gloves; it is the end of May but still a chill lingers in the early evening. Besides, she’s only just found the coat again and wants an excuse to wear it. It has been mothballed in a closet for 16 years, brought out for occasional brushing and worn only a handful of times.

She’s arrived at the theatre early, wanting to get a couple of drinks down her before Mother arrives. She hasn’t yet decided whether to tell her about Porter. She’s not sure if she can handle the earache and the details all feel so complex it wearies her to think about it. Mother will be livid, she knows, on so many counts. But it has happened so quickly, and she has never been there to talk it through with. Until now.

Mother appears in the bar like a whirlwind, silks flying, hair teased up like a risen loaf. “Carolina my dear! I thought I had the wrong theatre – it is *Mame* we’re here to see isn’t it? – I barely had time to look at my ticket. Let me look at you – you’re wearing the mink my darling, you look fabulous in it, I have a closet of furs you can have, I’m sick to death of bringing them out to air...”

Caroline is unnerved by how effusive her mother is, and it sets her on edge even more. She's known Mother like this before of course, but usually it a sign of something to come, a warning knell of sorts. But what? Is it feasible she has heard about the marriage, despite the lengths Caroline has gone to to keep it secret?

"Hello Mother." She leans in a kisses her on the cheek, and smells cigarette smoke shrouded under a liberal cloud of Shalimar.

She's gained a few pounds, Mary thinks, but keeps the observation to herself. Caroline always gains when she's in love, which must be a good sign, she supposes. "I'll take a scotch and soda," Mary says to the barman. Then turning to Caroline, "So you've gone blonde. And short..."

Caroline touches her hair diffidently. She's fresh from the salon this morning where her stylist had convinced her to go for a bob. "And the only way to wear it is blonde," he told her.

"Hmmm. What do you think?"

"It's cute." In truth, Mary isn't convinced – her daughter has a round face which doesn't lend itself to short cuts, and the blonde makes her look frightfully severe, almost masculine. But tonight is about maintaining relations, keeping the peace. Hopefully sharing some confidences. "What made you decide to have such a change?"

"You tell me. Maybe it's turning 40."

"Or a new fella?" Mary stirs her scotch and soda impishly and takes a sip.

Caroline smiles but says nothing.

"So. Angela Lansbury as *Mame*?" Mary says.

"She's had good reviews so far," Caroline replies. "That critic in *Playbill* was frothing over her."

"He's camp as they come though; the fairies love all the glamour of a character like *Mame*, don't they?" Mary watches for a flinch from Caroline, but the round, bob-framed face remains impenetrable.

“Strange choice though, Angela Lansbury, don’t you think? I thought it would go to someone better known.” Caroline drains her drink and checks her watch. “I’ll take another please,” she tells the barman.

The bell sounds three minutes, and drinks in hands, they make their way to their seats. As the lights go down, Caroline thinks about her mother’s comment. Is it guilt and paranoia making her suspicious about both Mother’s motives and now those of Porter? After all, he had been the one to buy these tickets for them, describing *Mame* and the show as ‘a total riot.’ She finishes a third drink and thinks only of how long she will have to sit here before she can get to the bar for another.

**

They eat a late supper at Sardi’s. By the end of the entrée, they have thoroughly assessed Lansbury’s merits as *Mame*, concluding that:

“Actually Mother, I think she was superb.”

“Yes, as do I. Better in the role, in fact, than Rosalind Russell.”

“She’s my age you know, or thereabouts. She looks older though, right?”

“Oh definitely. She’s no raving beauty but she has a certain allure.”

The main course is taken over with discussion of Mary’s piece for the Met Opera proscenium. But it is not for the want of trying to give Caroline an opportunity to divulge:

“Would you be available to attend the opening, dearest, I can’t see a way I can get back over now before at least Christmas. I could see if George would accompany you, unless, of course you have someone else you could take..?”

“Sure; there’s a possibility I might be working away, but even so, I’ll come back for it.”

“So you have someone to go with?”

“Yes.”

“A man?”

“For Chrissakes Mother, I’m not sixteen. I’ll be sure to have someone to go with. I’m more interested in what you are proposing for the space. Tell me about what you’ve done so far...”

Dessert, and Caroline talks about her photography work and the opportunity in Texas which has come up through Bill Hennings. “Hennings is kind of an ass, but I trust him. I think it could be good for me. And I would have my name on the front of a book!”

“It sounds good. Are you earning any money from it though?”

“The fee is still be negotiated, but they’ll put me up in an apartment in San Antonio for four months, provide me with a car and a living allowance.”

“Well, as you say, you’re not sixteen. I wonder how far photography is going to get you, but I guess everyone has to start somewhere...”

“I’m hardly starting out. I studied photography in college don’t forget and have kept a hand in ever since.”

“Don’t get snippy. All I mean is that you haven’t exactly been a career photographer. Assisting on a few shoots doesn’t make you an expert.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, as always.”

“Oh you’ve taken me all wrong again, and here you are getting bent out of shape...”

“Would it be so hard for you to be happy for me for once? For you to give me a nudge of encouragement? Perhaps if I’d had a letter of introduction from you into the photography world rather than finding a way in myself, your view would be different.”

“That’s unfair. I only ever want what’s best for you.”

“Well that’s easy for you to say, isn’t it? Wanting the best for me from your studio in Cadaques. You have no idea or interest what’s happening in my life, you never have, yet you permit yourself an opinion.”

“I’m not allowed an opinion now?”

“Frankly, no. I’m tired of opinions, yours and everyone else’s. They seem to make everyone happy but me.”

“Am I supposed to just sit here, listening dumbly to your updates then handing out money to bail you out when it all goes wrong? If that’s what you want, I can do that. Go ahead, tell me anything you want, I’ll just sign the check...”

Eyes on surrounding tables glance at them sidelong.

“Don’t be facetious. It doesn’t suit you Mother. At least, it doesn’t suit the image of you that you like to portray. And as for money, you seem happy to hand it out to anyone but me – not that I ever ask for much. It’s easy for someone in your position with inherited wealth...”

Mary places her knife and fork together on her plate and waves for the waiter. “Well, this was nice, while it lasted.”

“It’s always nice for a while. But it never changes, does it?” Caroline looks at her Mother. Their annual conference is over and they have managed to maintain the usual level of superficiality. Only when Caroline can take it no more does the bile seep in and ruin it.

But this time she is relieved it is over. She won’t have to worry about whether or not to tell Mother about Porter, about whether it might slip out on an intoxicated tongue. She can go home and begin preparations for Texas, Mother can slink back across the ocean and forget her obligations for another few months.

The check arrives and Mary goes to pay it, but Caroline takes it from her. “I wouldn’t dream of having you pay for my supper Mother. This one’s on me.”

Mary shrugs. “Very well. Will I see you before I head back to Spain?”

“That depends when you’re going back. I’m supposing you have a million people to see and things to do...”

“I do have people to see and things to do. None of them are any more important than you, but I see little point in our getting together for it to end like this again. So let’s leave it.” She tosses a handful of dollar bills onto the table. “A word of advice though, if you’ll permit me? We all have choices and free will, so choose to quit playing the victim. It is a distinctly unattractive trait and one you’d do well to shake off. Take control of your life, for god’s sake. Goodbye, Caroline.”

She walks out of the restaurant, her hair wobbling about top of her head. Outside, she lights up a cigarette and blows the smoke furiously into the air. Theatre lights flash, cab top-boxes zip about like fireflies, and inside, she too is alight, though she outwardly she exudes unwavering calm. Without pausing to look back, she heads towards Broadway for a cab.

There'll be other chances to have the husband discussion, she tells herself, when Caroline is ready. Maybe she's having doubts herself and doesn't want to admit it. But Mary can't help feeling hurt that things have come to this between them. Despite everything, they have always shared things, even if it has ended in tears and recriminations. But to elope with a stranger - a *fairy!* - and not tell her?

She hails a cab, instructing the driver to take a detour past Sardi's on the way to the Colony Club.

"That's one hell of a detour," the driver tells her.

"Please just do it."

Mary peers out into the night looking for a glimpse of her daughter, and sees her striding along West 44th towards Broadway; the trail she has just walked herself. She is reassured. This will resolve itself, she tells herself. Everything does, in the end.

It is the last time she will ever see Caroline.

CAROLINE

NEW YORK, MAY 1966

“I’m just gonna come out and ask you something,” she murmured. She was ghastly drunk, but momentarily she felt the clarity of soberness.

“I knew something was eating you. Go ahead, ask me anything.” Almost imperceptibly, Porter loosened his grip on his wife’s arm.

Stars dusted the tops of the city skyscrapers and in the Park, the pitched roof of the old Dairy came into view, luminescent under the moon.

“Can we sit?” Under the curved wooden jambs she turned to him and fixed him in the eyes. He had kind eyes, she had always thought, the sort which gleamed in perpetual playfulness. She felt a stab of sadness about what she was about to say, but she couldn’t hold back any longer.

“The thing is, we’ve been married just over three months. Now I’m no goddamn Lady Chatterley but we never seem to make love! And when we do, we’re so wrecked I’m never sure whether it’s happened or whether it was just some dream I’ve woken from. Thing is Porter, there are rumors about you. I haven’t cared a bit in the past, but I’m beginning to ask myself if they’re true.”

Porter, liberally soused himself, stood up and steadied himself against one of the wooden trusses. “Now look here, Caroline. I don’t know about these rumors – god knows New York is full of ‘em. But you’re my wife, I married you because I love you. And love isn’t just about rolling about in the hay.”

“Don’t you find me attractive?”

“What kind of a question is that?”

“A valid one, given the circumstances.”

He moved towards her but thought better of leaving the refuge of the post. “You’re beautiful, inside and out. I’ve always told you that, why do you need to ask now?” He finished his sentence with a hiccup flourish, causing them both to giggle.

“Oh Jeez Porter, I don’t know. Maybe we knew each other as friends for too long. Intimacy doesn’t seem, well, intuitive, to say the least.”

“You want me to make love to you, is that it? OK, let’s make love.”

“What, here?”

“Why not here?”

“Because we’ll be arrested for a start. And besides, we’re wrecked. I’ll wake up tomorrow...”

“...and it’ll all have been a dream. Jesus, we’re not in Kansas, Dorothy. You’re like a little girl sometimes, you know. Life isn’t all fairytales. If we don’t make love enough, then there’s fault on both sides. Don’t know why it makes me a goddamn fairy!” He glared down at her, the trademark playfulness suddenly absent from his eyes. “That is what you’re accusing me of, isn’t it? Being a fairy? Don’t think I don’t hear the rumors, Caroline, they’re nothing new. I have no idea where they started, but god knows there only needs to be a dying ember in this City for someone to start a fire.”

She was startled by his anger; he was no longer level-headed and cool. It had flared up out of nowhere, it seemed, and she couldn’t help feeling slightly frightened by him.

“Porter...”

“No, I see where this is going. You’re trying to get me to admit something which plain isn’t true. I had you out as something different, but I see you’re just like the rest.”

“Now wait a minute. You’ve blown this up, put words in my mouth. It’s a damn shame when a wife can’t have a civilized discussion with her husband without him getting all aerated.”

He was staggering now, trying to figure out which path led out of the Park and back onto the street.

“What, you’re leaving me here?” she shouted. A young couple hurried past, pretending they weren’t there; the sound of pigeons, settling in for the evening in the canopy overhead.

“I’m looking for the way out of the Park, you fucking baby.”

“Don’t swear at me, you asshole!” She pulled herself up to follow him as ducks on the lake erupted in a scornful cackle. “And you can shut the fuck up too!”

He had gone, disappeared into the darkness. She attempted to move but thought better of it and sat down again on the path that ran through the middle of the Dairy. She was too far gone for humiliation, but self-pity gored her insides and she found herself simultaneously crying and retching into her lap. Her favorite de Lennart plaid capri pants, a gift from Mother from Paris, ruined.

A minute later – or it may have been an hour – he reappeared and wordlessly hoisted her up. Together they tottered out of the Park, each holding the other up, ignorant of the passers-by who looked at them as if they were a pair of drunken hobos.

**

Next morning, there was coffee, there were croissants, still hot from the bakery oven they had recently come out of. There was, however, no mention of the argument last night. Truth be known, Caroline couldn’t quite remember it, the details were frayed like cloth. She eyed Porter across the table, wondering if he was in a similar haze.

“Are we OK?”

He looked up from his magazine, eyes twinkling. “Of course.”

The rope which had held her taut was cut; she slumped back in her chair in what she took to be relief. Nibbling on the edge of a croissant, she said; “Did I mention the phone call I had yesterday from Bill Hennings?”

“You may have...about what?”

“He called to tell me about a job, believe it or not.”

“Really? What kind of a job?”

“Well, it’s a book, in fact. It’s a commission from a small publisher. I would be photographing people with their pets! Rich folk, mainly, for a coffee table type publication, hardback, glossy, you know the sort of thing. It would be decent money and a great opportunity for me.”

“That’s swell Caroline. But wait - why doesn’t Hennings want to do it?”

She topped his coffee up and wiped her mouth with a napkin. “There’s the rub. The job’s in Texas.”

He raised his eyebrows and put the magazine on the table. “How long would it be for?”

“Four months.”

“So, you want to take it?”

“Well now, I don’t know. Great opportunities aside, it’d mean leaving you for that period of time.”

“It is a good opportunity. He’s clearly forgiven you for whatever sin you committed.”

She looked at him sharply. “You didn’t put him up to this, did you?”

“Why would you say that?”

“Oh come on Porter, he’d do anything for you.”

“Meaning what? Back here are we? I wondered how long we would last before this line of discussion reared its head.” His neck dappled red with anger and humiliation.

“I didn’t mean it like that...oh come on.”

He stood up and went for the door. “You know, Caroline. Maybe it would be a good idea for you to take the job. A little distance might not be a bad idea right now. In the meantime, I’m going for a walk. I need some air.”

The door slammed and she was left alone in front of a pile of croissants, warm coffee and the endless hum of a city under construction.

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, November 1966

2:24am

The needle drags around the record with a soft, muted throb, throb, throb. It has a pleasing, regular rhythm, she thinks, seeming to be in perfect synchronicity with the one inside her head. Letters, dissected like body parts, speckle the floor. Photographs, too, in willful disarray. *Take control of your life*, Mother had told her that night at Sardi's. And in this chaos she feels control, for it is she who has created it and it is she who will choose whether to clear it up.

But the notion of control is unfamiliar to her. She has so long felt needy and vulnerable – she sees this now, suddenly, with an acrid clarity. It is little wonder her fate has always been ultimately to be left, abandoned, for who would want the responsibility of someone who requires so much for so little in return?

Leaving for Texas, she had known of course. Four months was the longest she and Porter had spent apart; no-one knew they were married (indeed, the deed had been so fleeting, so utterly clinical, she could forgive herself for wondering if it had happened at all.) He was for all intents and purposes a single man and she a single woman. She had no hard proof of any infidelity, or even of any predilection for men, but she felt it in his letters – sparsely-written and intermittent as they were – and in the loveless air which seemed to fall between San Antonio and New York, and ultimately, in her gut, which is where it mattered most. She had always known, but she had needed him as much as he needed her – each a smokescreen for the other.

She had seen him last at the unveiling of Mother's sculpture at the Met, a brief return from Texas to represent the great Meric Gallery. He had come not as her husband but as an onlooker, someone to stand on the sideline and applaud. This status was tacit but they both understood, sealed when he leaned in to kiss her and she turned so that his hard lips brushed her cheek.

She returned to Texas still married. But sitting here on the carpet of her rented accommodation in San Antonio she feels nothing of spousal love. Had she ever felt the love of a spouse though? She'd had three of 'em and she still couldn't be sure. Love itself is a mystery to her, a state of being to be earned via a baffling game of

emotional pitch-and-toss. Forty years old and she still hasn't learned the rules. Only her cats have ever seemed capable of accepting and reciprocating her love, but hasn't that always been an exchange based in need too?

Now might be the time for tears she thinks, but none will fall. On the contrary, calm descends; more profound than she has ever felt it before. This isn't a Phanodorm calm, though she's taken two of those, and it isn't a Johnny Walker calm either – those calms are underpinned by a quiet emotional rage. No, this time she feels different.

Caroline is looking at a small girl sitting on her bed at the Garrison School in Baltimore; the child's hair is parted neatly into two thick pigtails and she is looking out of the window at the gently weeping willows. A suitcase is half-unpacked on the bed, and Caroline hears the sound of children's laughter floating on the breeze. *Have you heard the way she speaks?* the voices are saying. *That French accent, ooh la-la!*

She approaches this young version of herself and takes her into her arms, holding the pigtailed head side-on to her heart.

It is not your fault, she whispers. *Do you hear me Caroline? It's not your fault. It's not your fault...*

The young self resists at first. The heartbeat and the warmth of the embrace are as foreign and repellent to her as this room in Baltimore. But then she yields, closes her eyes and falls into the incantation. *It's not your fault, it's not your fault...* And Caroline rocks her like a baby against her breast.

A noise in the stairwell stirs her. She pulls herself up from the floor, scoops Harold up in a fluid movement and kisses him on his head. He lets out a lavish yawn and begins purring noisily. The purring continues as she sets him down on the couch and moves purposefully towards the open window, shucking off her slippers as she goes.

She climbs onto the sill and curls her toes around it, looking out. The moon swims above her, a silver dollar fish, high and bright. Beneath, the route to the courtyard: a cool, dark tunnel, echoing with hushed voices and the unfettered dreams of those sleeping within it.

And as she peers down, she feels a weight lifting. She hasn't realized until this moment how heavy it has been, or how long she has been carrying it. The weight will

be handed on to someone else now, she knows. It has to be, in order for her to be free. Lightness engulfs her and she feels herself beginning to float.

For the first time in her life, Caroline is happy.

EPILOGUE

MARY

23, rue du Buisson, VILLIERS-SOUS-GREZ, France.

11th February, 1977

Duchamp had built the awning himself some years ago, an umbrella-like structure made of metal and wood. Teeny had it shipped from their apartment in Cadaques after he died, and here it was now, stuck on the back of her property in Villiers-sous-Grez, providing the two neighbors beneath it with shade from a fragile February sun.

Mary is concentrating on the chess board – her King is under imminent threat from her friend Teeny’s rook. She is irritated by this unforeseen turn. Her strategy has gone to hell.

“I’m getting too old for this game,” she says, acknowledging checkmate.

“Nonsense,” Teeny replies, taking Mary’s King with a deft slide of the rook. “You’re just a sore loser.”

Mary leans back and pulls her blanket up around her shoulders. She lights up a cigarette. “I feel I just don’t have the appetite anymore, you know?”

“For chess?”

“Perhaps.” Her fingers twitch around her Scotch glass. Has it really been three years since she held a blow torch and actually created something with it? Since she smelled iron filings beneath her fingernails, and the scent of freshly-cut wood? She thinks of the fish sculptures she had been so keen to get started on, half-finished and abandoned on the workbench in her studio.

“I thought your health was improving? Doctor Lafarge said...”

“I don’t give a damn what Doctor Lafarge said. He’s a quack. I may go to Paris for a second opinion. The pains in my stomach haven’t improved a bit.”

Teeny looks at her friend. For all Mary complains of stomach pains, her consumption of rich food and alcohol has not abated. If anything, it has increased since they moved into adjoining houses in Villiers. She uses alcohol to punctuate the day – a bullshot at breakfast, white wine at lunch, mid-afternoon scotch, pre-dinner champagne, then red wine and digestifs leading the way unsteadily up the stairs to bed.

“Then you must go to Paris,” Teeny says. “We need to get you back working.”

Mary nods. “Good. I’ll have Samia make me an appointment. Now, how’s the time? Surely we must be due another drink.”

Samia duly arrives with a tray of cocktails together with a bowl of shiny black olives and some toothpicks. Mary drinks down her Scotch and soda with a lusty ‘ahhhhh’. Her stomach twinges as the liquor swills around its inflamed lining, but she knows the twinge is transitory, a mere pre-cursor to the delicious sensation of light-headedness that follows a hit of an afternoon drink.

She turns to Teeny. “I’ve been thinking about Caroline these past few days. For the first time in many years, I’ve seen her in my dreams. Don’t know why now, particularly. But in them she’s a little girl, holding a toy rabbit, just like in the portrait I have of her in my bedroom.”

“Does she say anything to you in these dreams?”

“That’s the thing – I don’t remember. I never remember. I wake up, aware she’s been with me, but no more. I choose not to think about the past. It is an entirely fruitless pursuit. All my life, I have looked forward...”

“Perhaps you need to look back, Mary.” Teeny reaches for her friend’s hand and places her own on top of it tenderly. “Then the dreams might stop.”

“I’ve changed my will recently, maybe that’s it. Most of my possessions I have left to my niece, but the house on 68th Street will go to Caroline’s husband.”

Teeny stares at Mary.

“I never told you she’d married again, did I? I never told anyone. Why would I? She never told me. Besides, he is a little worm of a man, a queer to boot. I met him once, after she’d died. He came to my show at C Holland in New York and had the front to introduce himself. She would have been mortified if she’d known...”

“But you’ve left him the house. Why?”

Mary looks out at the fields and the white sky beyond. “Atonement.”

The next morning, Mary wakes to stomach pain; acute, breath-taking, unlike anything she’s felt before. She clutches her stomach and calls for Teeny through the wall. Crawling down the stairwell she calls again, hoping her friend will hear her through the door which links the two houses. Samia appears and utters, “O Mon Dieu!” Mary feels a frantic swoosh of air as she rushes into Teeny’s quarters to raise the alarm.

For a moment, Mary thinks she sees Caroline – the curve of her cheek silhouetted against the white light coming in through the window. She tries to call her but no sound comes out. Caroline turns toward the window and looks out.

CAROLINE!

Mary reaches toward the light, frantic now, but it is too bright; Caroline’s image dissolves and all that is left is a shadow of her, burned onto the backs of Mary’s eyes.

She wakes. The pain has subsided and she is in the back of an ambulance amid a tangle of tubes.

“Where am I going?”

Teeny says, “We’re taking you to Paris, Mary, to the American hospital. You’re very sick, dearest.”

The American hospital: Russian vodka, Dr Jackson, Josephine Baker, the bound-up, bloodied limbs of wounded soldiers. Driving her ambulance through heavy mist on the roads to Angouleme, and rows and rows of plane trees...

And of course, Paris herself. The City of Light, ablaze with hope, the spirit of creation and dreams of restless youth.

“Of all the places to die,” she whispers.

She closes her eyes and she sees Caroline. This time, the girl is looking directly at her, smiling and beckoning her toward the failing light.