

1

Roseland

The naked man who lay splayed out on his face beside the swimming pool might have been dead.

He might have been drowned and fished out of the pool and laid out on the grass to dry while the police or the next of kin were summoned. Even the little pile of objects in the grass beside his head might have been his personal effects, meticulously assembled in full view so that no one should think that something had been stolen by his rescuers.

To judge by the glittering pile, this had been, or was, a rich man. It contained the typical membership badges of the rich man's club – a money clip, made of a Mexican fifty-dollar piece and holding a substantial wad of banknotes, a well-used gold Dunhill lighter, an oval gold cigarette case with the wavy ridges and discreet turquoise button that means Fabergé, and the sort of novel a rich man pulls out of the bookcase to take into the garden – *The Little Nugget* – an old P. G. Wodehouse. There was also a bulky gold wristwatch on a well-used brown crocodile strap. It was a Girard-Perregaux model designed for people who like gadgets,

and it had a sweep second hand and two little windows in the face to tell the day of the month, and the month, and the phase of the moon. The story it now told was 2.30 on 10 June with the moon three-quarters full.

A blue and green dragonfly flashed out from among the rose bushes at the end of the garden and hovered in mid-air a few inches above the base of the man's spine. It had been attracted by the golden shimmer of the June sunshine on the ridge of fine blond hairs above the coccyx. A puff of breeze came off the sea. The tiny field of hairs bent gently. The dragonfly darted nervously sideways and hung above the man's left shoulder, looking down. The young grass below the man's open mouth stirred. A large drop of sweat rolled down the side of the fleshy nose and dropped glittering into the grass. That was enough. The dragonfly flashed away through the roses and over the jagged glass on top of the high garden wall. It might be good food, but it moved.

The garden in which the man lay was about an acre of well-kept lawn surrounded on three sides by thickly banked rose bushes from which came the steady murmur of bees. Behind the drowsy noise of the bees the sea boomed softly at the bottom of the cliff at the end of the garden.

There was no view of the sea from the garden – no view of anything except of the sky and the clouds above the twelve-foot wall. In fact you could only see out of the property from the two upstairs bedrooms of the villa that formed the fourth side of this very private enclosure. From them you could see a great expanse of

blue water in front of you and, on either side, the upper windows of neighbouring villas and the tops of the trees in their gardens – Mediterranean-type evergreen oaks, stone pines, casuarinas and an occasional palm tree.

The villa was modern – a squat elongated box without ornament. On the garden side the flat pink-washed façade was pierced by four iron-framed windows and by a central glass door leading on to a small square of pale green glazed tiles. The tiles merged into the lawn. The other side of the villa, standing back a few yards from a dusty road, was almost identical. But on this side the four windows were barred, and the central door was of oak.

The villa had two medium-sized bedrooms on the upper floor and on the ground floor a sitting room and a kitchen, part of which was walled off into a lavatory. There was no bathroom.

The drowsy luxurious silence of early afternoon was broken by the sound of a car coming down the road. It stopped in front of the villa. There was the tinny clang of a car door being slammed and the car drove on. The doorbell rang twice. The naked man beside the swimming pool did not move, but, at the noise of the bell and of the departing car, his eyes had for an instant opened very wide. It was as if the eyelids had pricked up like an animal's ears. The man immediately remembered where he was and the day of the week and the time of the day. The noises were identified. The eyelids with their fringe of short sandy eyelashes drooped drowsily back over the very pale blue, opaque, inward-looking

eyes. The small cruel lips opened in a wide jaw-breaking yawn which brought saliva into the mouth. The man spat the saliva into the grass and waited.

A young woman carrying a small string bag and dressed in a white cotton shirt and a short, unalluring blue skirt came through the glass door and strode mannishly across the glazed tiles and the stretch of lawn towards the naked man. A few yards away from him, she dropped her string bag on the grass and sat down and took off her cheap and rather dusty shoes. Then she stood up and unbuttoned her shirt and took it off and put it, neatly folded, beside the string bag.

The girl had nothing on under the shirt. Her skin was pleasantly sunburnt and her shoulders and fine breasts shone with health. When she bent her arms to undo the side-buttons of her skirt, small tufts of fair hair showed in her armpits. The impression of a healthy animal peasant girl was heightened by the chunky hips in faded blue stockinet bathing trunks and the thick short thighs and legs that were revealed when she had stripped.

The girl put the skirt neatly beside her shirt, opened the string bag, took out an old soda-water bottle containing some heavy colourless liquid and went over to the man and knelt on the grass beside him. She poured some of the liquid, a light olive oil, scented, as was everything in that part of the world, with roses, between his shoulder blades and, after flexing her fingers like a pianist, began massaging the sternomastoid and the trapezius muscles at the back of the man's neck.

It was hard work. The man was immensely strong

and the bulging muscles at the base of the neck hardly yielded to the girl's thumbs even when the downward weight of her shoulders was behind them. By the time she was finished with the man she would be soaked in perspiration and so utterly exhausted that she would fall into the swimming pool and then lie down in the shade and sleep until the car came for her. But that wasn't what she minded as her hands worked automatically on across the man's back. It was her instinctive horror for the finest body she had ever seen.

None of this horror showed in the flat, impassive face of the masseuse, and the upward-slanting black eyes under the fringe of short coarse black hair were as empty as oil slicks, but inside her the animal whimpered and cringed and her pulse rate, if it had occurred to her to take it, would have been high.

Once again, as so often over the past two years, she wondered why she loathed this splendid body, and once again she vaguely tried to analyse her revulsion. Perhaps this time she would get rid of feelings which she felt guiltily certain were much more unprofessional than the sexual desire some of her patients awoke in her.

To take the small things first: his hair. She looked down at the round, smallish head on the sinewy neck. It was covered with tight red-gold curls that should have reminded her pleasantly of the formalised hair in the pictures she had seen of classical statues. But the curls were somehow too tight, too thickly pressed against each other and against the skull. They set her teeth on edge like fingernails against pile carpet. And

the golden curls came down so low into the back of the neck – almost (she thought in professional terms) to the fifth cervical vertebra. And there they stopped abruptly in a straight line of small stiff golden hairs.

The girl paused to give her hands a rest and sat back on her haunches. The beautiful upper half of her body was already shining with sweat. She wiped the back of her forearm across her forehead and reached for the bottle of oil. She poured about a tablespoonful on to the small furry plateau at the base of the man's spine, flexed her fingers and bent forward again.

This embryo tail of golden down above the cleft of the buttocks – in a lover it would have been gay, exciting, but on this man it was somehow bestial. No, reptilian. But snakes had no hair. Well, she couldn't help that. It seemed reptilian to her. She shifted her hands on down to the two mounds of the gluteal muscles. Now was the time when many of her patients, particularly the young ones on the football team, would start joking with her. Then, if she was not very careful, the suggestions would come. Sometimes she could silence these by digging sharply down towards the sciatic nerve. At other times, and particularly if she found the man attractive, there would be giggling arguments, a brief wrestling match and a quick, delicious surrender.

With this man it was different, almost uncannily different. From the very first he had been like a lump of inanimate meat. In two years he had never said a word to her. When she had done his back and it was time for him to turn over, neither his eyes nor his body

had once shown the smallest interest in her. When she tapped his shoulder, he would just roll over and gaze at the sky through half-closed lids and occasionally let out one of the long shuddering yawns that were the only sign that he had human reactions at all.

The girl shifted her position and slowly worked down the right leg towards the Achilles tendon. When she came to it, she looked back up the fine body. Was her revulsion *only* physical? Was it the reddish colour of the sunburn on the naturally milk-white skin, the sort of roast meat look? Was it the texture of the skin itself, the deep, widely spaced pores in the satiny surface? The thickly scattered orange freckles on the shoulders? Or was it the sexuality of the man? The indifference of these splendid, insolently bulging muscles? Or was it spiritual – an animal instinct telling her that inside this wonderful body there was an evil person?

The masseuse got to her feet and stood, twisting her head slowly from side to side and flexing her shoulders. She stretched her arms out sideways and then upwards and held them for a moment to get the blood down out of them. She went to her string bag and took out a hand towel and wiped the perspiration off her face and body.

When she turned back to the man, he had already rolled over and now lay, his head resting on one open hand, gazing blankly at the sky. The disengaged arm was flung out on the grass, waiting for her. She walked over and knelt on the grass behind his head. She rubbed some oil into her palms, picked up the limp half-open hand and started kneading the short thick fingers.

The girl glanced nervously sideways at the red-brown face below the crown of tight golden curls. Superficially it was all right – handsome in a butcher's-boyish way, with its full pink cheeks, upturned nose and rounded chin. But, looked at closer, there was something cruel about the thin-lipped rather pursed mouth, a pigginess about the wide nostrils in the upturned nose, and the blankness that veiled the very pale blue eyes communicated itself over the whole face and made it look drowned and morgue-like. It was, she reflected, as if someone had taken a china doll and painted its face to frighten.

The masseuse worked up the arm to the huge biceps. Where had the man got these fantastic muscles from? Was he a boxer? What did he do with his formidable body? Rumour said this was a police villa. The two menservants were obviously guards of some sort, although they did the cooking and the housework. Regularly every month the man went away for a few days and she would be told not to come. And from time to time she would be told to stay away for a week, or two weeks, or a month. Once, after one of these absences, the man's neck and the upper part of his body had been a mass of bruises. On another occasion the red corner of a half-healed wound had shown under a foot of surgical plaster down the ribs over his heart. She had never dared to ask about him at the hospital or in the town. When she had first been sent to the house, one of the menservants had told her that if she spoke about what she saw she would go to prison. Back

at the hospital, the Chief Superintendent, who had never recognised her existence before, had sent for her and had said the same thing. She would go to prison. The girl's strong fingers gouged nervously into the big deltoid muscle on the point of the shoulder. She had always known it was a matter of State Security. Perhaps that was what revolted her about this splendid body. Perhaps it was just fear of the organisation that had the body in custody. She squeezed her eyes shut at the thought of who he might be, of what he could order to be done to her. Quickly she opened them again. He might have noticed. But the eyes gazed blankly up at the sky.

Now – she reached for the oil – to do the face.

The girl's thumbs had scarcely pressed into the sockets of the man's closed eyes when the telephone in the house started ringing. The sound reached impatiently out into the quiet garden. At once the man was up on one knee like a runner waiting for the gun. But he didn't move forward. The ringing stopped. There was the mutter of a voice. The girl could not hear what it was saying, but it sounded humble, noting instructions. The voice stopped and one of the menservants showed briefly at the door, made a gesture of summons, and went back into the house. Halfway through the gesture, the naked man was already running. She watched the brown back flash through the open glass door. Better not let him find her there when he came out again – doing nothing, perhaps listening. She got to her feet, took two steps to the concrete edge of the pool and dived gracefully in.

Although it would have explained her instincts about

the man whose body she massaged, it was as well for the girl's peace of mind that she did not know who he was.

His real name was Donovan Grant, or 'Red' Grant. But, for the past ten years, it had been Krassno Granitsky, with the code name of 'Granit'.

He was the Chief Executioner of SMERSH, the murder *apparat* of the MGB, and at this moment he was receiving his instructions on the MGB direct line with Moscow.