

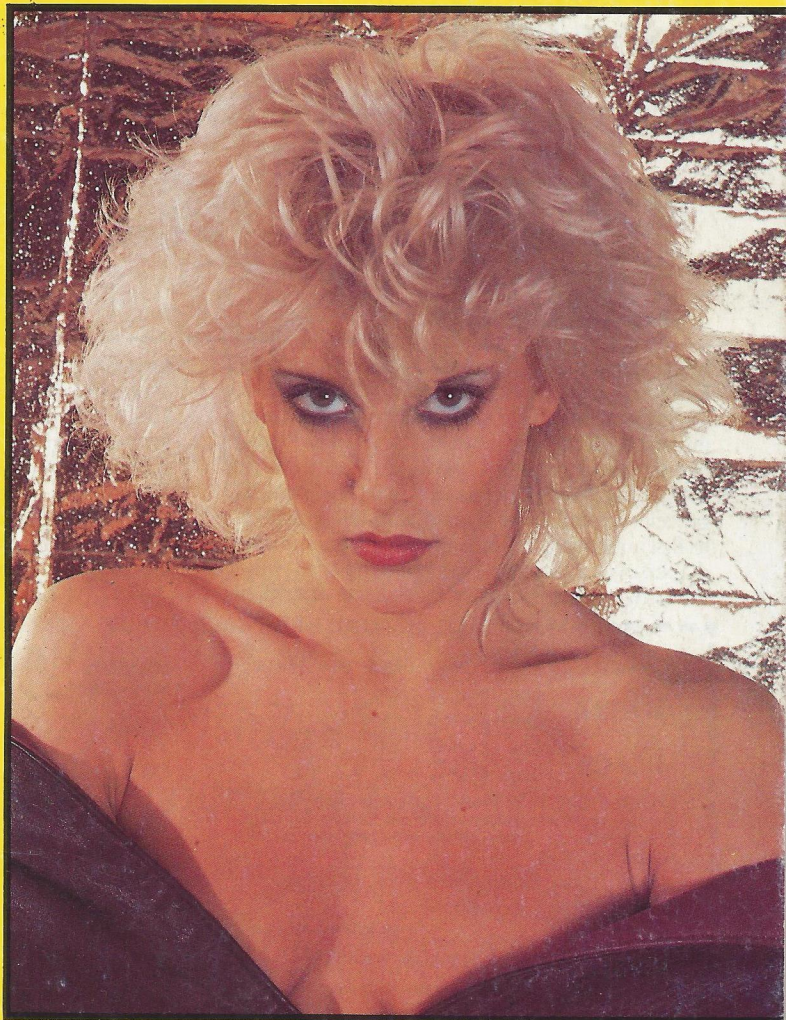
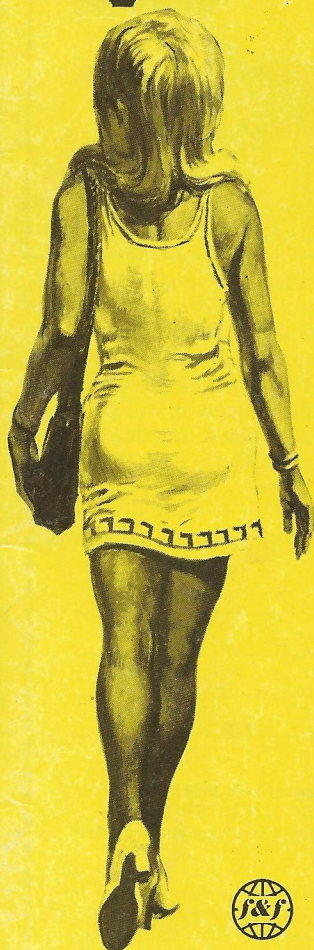
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Lisa Thomsen

Like a Puppet on a String

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Lisa Thomsen

Like a Puppet on a String

As Sibylla pulled her
key from her purse,
she became aware of
muffled noises from
within. She felt her
temper rising when
she recognized the
sounds of love. It was
almost too much for
her to bear...

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

SIBYLLA LUNDSTROM: a Swedish student who knows what it takes to get ahead in life.

LARS RERUP: a Danish student who loves Sibylla, but is not happy with her plans.

RICHARD STOLLBACH: a proprietor of a student pub and a puppet in the hands of a woman.

Sibylla Lundstrom slowly stretched her long, immaculate body, allowing the hot water of the shower to run over her flesh. As the Swede arched her head back, her long, beautiful, blond hair fell from her shoulders. Suddenly Sibylla, her eyes closed, felt soft hands caressing her body.

"Oh Lars," she whispered. "You are so wicked."

"Wicked?" answered a man's rough voice, as Sibylla felt the warmth of another body pressing against hers.

"No! No!" the student cried with delight. "I will say, though, you do seem to pop up at the right moment. I was just thinking about you."

When Lars found Sibylla's lips, he gave her a hot passionate kiss, trying desperately to control his feelings. The shower water ran over their bodies as if they were one.

She later turned slowly to Lars as they lay naked in each others arms. There wasn't much room for them to move because the bed and her room were so small.

Sibylla was a girl from Stockholm. Lars originally came from a small village not far from Copenhagen. Perhaps they were attracted to each other because they are both Scandinavian. Lars Rerup was studying law, Sibylla Teutonic languages. However, the long-legged Swede was not at all sure of her professional plans in life and would not let anything upset her. The love between these two northerners was deep, burning and very passionate, and it just seemed to grow.

"I have to get ready," whispered Sibylla, as she nibbled on Lars' ear.

"Going out?" the blond, muscular Lars said, stretching, as he lay running his fingers through her

hair, thinking of her like a school girl. Sibylla had recently turned twenty-one, and was two years younger than Lars.

"Yes, I have to go over to The Lexicon," she answered, pulling herself from his arms.

Lars observed Sibylla's naked body as she hopped out of bed and walked across the floor to her wardrobe. Her body is really beautiful, Lars said to himself.

"Hey Sibylla," said the Dane sternly. "What's the matter?"

After putting her panties on, she struggled with the zipper on her jeans, then she slowly slipped her blouse over her naked breasts.

"Sibylla," Lars once again called, "You know it's not my business to tell anyone what they should do."

Sibylla interrupted, "Lars, don't beat around the bush. I know you don't like it when I go over to The Lexicon. I don't go there because I like it, only to help out. You know I need every penny. The cost of living is expensive enough. And besides, I can't expect any help from home. So please Lars, what else can you expect me to do?"

He picked through his clothes which were hung on the chair before he joined Sibylla in the shower.

"That's not what I meant," he

said. "It's just that I don't like the guy who runs The Lexicon."

"Oh, you mean Stollbach."

"Yes, that's his name."

"Richard is just fine. I was happy and grateful when he offered me the job. The occasional evening in the bar helps out. It's a student pub, Lars, so I don't know what the hell you're so upset about."

"Yes you're right, Sibylla. But every time you go there, I get an awful feeling."

"You remind me of an old, gossip woman in our neighborhood. She crawled around and acted so stupidly."

"Stop it, this isn't the time for your bad jokes. I watched those guys' eyes follow you around. Stollbach gives you his looks too."

"My God, don't give me this crap. After all looking is not forbidden. I don't think anything of it!"

Lars didn't know what to say anymore.

"Maybe it's because you're jealous," Sibylla said as she began drying her hair.

"Maybe," Lars replied above the noise of her hairdryer. "Maybe I am jealous."

Sibylla turned off the dryer and slowly walked toward him.

"Listen very carefully to what I

have to say."

"Oh here it comes," he said.

"Yes, here it comes Lars. I don't belong to anyone, and I am not about to let anyone lay the law down for me. I know we go to bed together and enjoy each others' company, but it does not give you the right to control my life. After all, I have to live."

"And what about our love?" Lars asked.

"One has nothing to do with the other, Lars. When life goes so far that one has to be questioned, then it's not worth it anymore. It's very short and simple. I go and do what I want. If you don't like it, you can get lost! I don't want to argue with you because there is no need to."

"Well you have really done it now."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I will go and never come back again, Sibylla!"

She laughed. "Oh don't be so stupid," as she turned the dryer off for the second time. Lars turned to her, and she laid the dryer down and put her arms around his neck.

"Come now my kitten, it wasn't meant like that."

"It was all so clear to me," said Lars. "Do what you want. You can hop from one bed to another. Maybe you'll even accept money

for it."

"Are you for real?" Sibylla asked. Now she was really furious. "What do you think I am? No, spare me that. I really don't think you are all there, Lars. I go in the bar, serve a few beers, and have the occasional conversation. And in your eyes, I'm a whore! That's what you wanted to say, right Lars? You really have lost your marbles."

Now Sibylla was feeling very good, comfortable, and yes, very, very confident.

"Just by chance I dropped by the bar last night," Lars said. "You didn't realize I was there, and do you know what I saw?"

"What Lars?"

"That guy Stollbach gave you a kiss."

"You call that a kiss? I'm not going to listen to any more of your crap. If it makes any difference, come over to the bar and watch me all night."

"No!" Lars snarled. "After all, I am not your watchdog or kindergarten teacher. You are old enough to look after yourself!"

"It would be better to realize Lars, that..."

She stopped and turned as the door was closing, only to see that Lars was gone.

Suddenly, Sibylla found herself yearning, wondering whether

Lars would ever come back. She wanted to run after him, but her pride wouldn't let her. She had to earn a living somehow. Her ambition was to reach the top. But getting there was something she just didn't know about.

Do what you have to, you fool, she thought as she removed her leather jacket from the hook, picked up her keys and left the room.

Lars drove an old clunker held together by rust. Sibylla crossed the street quickly, as Lars started the engine.

"Will you drive me?"

Angrily, Lars hissed, "Walk, it's only around the corner. Then maybe you can think about the whole situation."

"There's nothing to think about," she said as Lars pulled away. She stood there for a moment, then with great confidence, walked briskly away with her long, blond hair blowing in the wind.

*

The Lexicon is a student bar. The prices there are kept low to attract them. The decor of the bar is a random collection of posters and junk from the Sixties and Seventies. Sibylla regarded the decor as "Bar Garbage Collec-

tion," which the customers seemed to like.

There wasn't very much going on as Sibylla arrived for work. Behind the bar stood the tall, slim owner of The Lexicon, whom Sibylla knew as Richard Stollbach. He was thirty-five years old. His unusually bright eyes made straight for Sibylla.

"Hello darling," he called. "You're late."

"Don't try to charm me, I'm boiling mad today," snarled Sibylla as she walked behind the bar and placed her purse on the back counter.

"Problems with Lars?"

"Yes," replied Sibylla. "He's not happy about me working here."

"You should..."

"Spare me the advice, Richard. I gave Lars a piece of my mind. I don't let anyone tell me what I can or cannot do, understand?"

"I know it's not necessary, Sibylla. I am very happy that you are helping out. Since you've been here the place runs better than ever. I don't know how to thank you. Without you I wouldn't know where to begin."

Sibylla noticed an intriguing spark in his eyes.

"Good," she said quietly. "Then you can give me a few more bucks, right?"

He smiled. "Why not, Sibylla. After all, you are one of those people who seems to know exactly what she wants."

"For sure," she answered with a lukewarm smile. "Ultimately everyone would like to buy whatever they want, right? Besides, everything has its price. Or are you of a different opinion?"

"No, not at all," he replied.

Sibylla then became aware that Richard was staring at her figure.

"You could become something great, something wonderful, Sibylla."

"Maybe I'll turn into a librarian," she smiled. "Then I can wear big glasses in a musty old reading room and loan out books, and listen to all the nonsense and gossip from other old maids."

They both laughed. Richard walked up to her, put his hand on her shoulder and looked her in the eyes.

"No Sibylla," he said slowly and quietly. "That's not what I believe is going to happen. You are not going to become a librarian. Instead you will become something wonderful."

"What then?" she asked. "The position of the Queen of Sweden has been filled."

"There are many queens who don't wear crowns, Sibylla."

"You talk in riddles."

"Maybe I will have the opportunity to explain it to you someday."

But at that moment some people arrived.

"Hmm, I see what you mean," replied the Swede, then she walked over to the antique, kidney-shaped tables.

"Hi, Sibylla," said the three students.

She knew them all and was comfortable with them. Meanwhile she noticed a very exotic smile on Richard's face.

By eight p.m., the bar was full. The air was so thick you could cut it with a knife. The Lexicon had its own atmosphere. There was a mixture of art lovers, riff raff and Bohemians, all talking nonsense, dancing, laughing, and of course getting very drunk. Sibylla would laugh with them, sometimes dance with them, but she wouldn't drink with them. Behind the bar she had her cola and sipped it from time to time.

When Sibylla worked, Stollbach usually disappeared for a few hours. Sibylla never knew where he went. He always said that he had other business to attend to. Then punctually at eleven p.m., Stollbach would return. He knew that he could rely on Sibylla at all times and that she wouldn't cheat him.

That night, soon after Stollbach returned, he relieved her behind the bar.

Suddenly, the door swung open and Lars tumbled in. Bewildered and sweaty, his hair hanging over his forehead, he spotted Sibylla right away and made a beeline to the bar.

"Get out of here," he said with a wobbly voice.

"You're drunk," she replied in a cool and unfriendly tone.

"Yeah I'm drunk, so what! I ask you, what have I done to you? This hassle with you is enough to make me sick."

Sibylla looked at him with disappointment.

"God, Lars, don't make a scene here. Sit down and I'll get you a beer. Then make sure you get home to bed. You look terrible."

"Yeah," he mumbled. "And it's all your fault, d'you hear, your fault 'cause you hang around this crummy joint."

"Do what?" she said, perplexed. "Can't you see I'm working here. I told you very clearly this afternoon that I am not here for the fun of it. Listen Lars, if you came here to make a scene, you'll get thrown out."

"You, of all people, will throw me out."

At first Sibylla struggled within herself, not knowing how to han-

dle the situation and feeling disheartened. Then all of a sudden she became angry, her disappointment had bottomed out.

"Yes," she wanted him to understand, "I will throw you out. Either you find a seat in the corner or you'll have to get out."

"Which corner do you mean, the one by the toilet?"

"Don't try to be funny," she said turning away. Then she rearranged the beer glasses. Turning, she looked to see where Lars had landed up and noticed he was beside the piano. His head was hanging forward. Somehow she felt sorry for him, but at this moment she decided not to go over and try to console him. He thought he was in the right, but Sibylla knew that was not so.

Between them was a kitchenette used to make light snacks. Richard was standing there watching the whole thing.

"It's not worth the trouble, Richard," she said. "I gave him a piece of my mind."

"Listen, I don't care whether he's your friend or not, trouble is something I don't need in my bar!"

"Everything is all right, Richard. I'm just trying to cool him down, that's all. I'll get him a drink and then he'll be quiet. He's at the end of his rope and will

probably clear out very soon."

Sibylla walked over to the piano and asked, "What do you want to drink, Lars?"

"Beer," he replied.

"Don't you think you've had enough to drink?"

His eyes fluttered wide open.

"You, of all people, trying to give me advice. You don't let anyone tell you what to do. Go on! When I say I want a beer, then I want a beer! So do your job, OK?"

"Idiot," she muttered as she walked to the bar. While she filled the beer glass, she watched him closely. She watched his lower jaw grind back and forth. Gradually, she sensed that something was about to happen. She tried to remain as calm as possible as she walked toward him.

"Cheers," she said, putting his beer down.

Sibylla then saw something that was enough to make her lose her self-control. Lars took hold of the glass and slowly poured it onto the floor.

"Oh, excuse me!" he said. "I'm so sorry, Miss Sibylla Lundstrom. You work here, so clean it up!"

"Now that does it." Suddenly Richard stood there, his face grim and his mind made up.

"Leave him alone," begged Sibylla.

"Get out," Richard bellowed.

"Get out," slurred Lars.

Sibylla realized that Lars didn't know what he was doing anymore.

"I won't tell you a second time."

"I'm going," replied Lars. "I know I'm disturbing you. Go ahead, take this little Swedish whore into the sack."

Richard then pushed him.

Sibylla gasped.

Richard hit the Dane so hard his nose bled.

"Now beat it," he screamed, and grabbed the Dane and kneed him in the groin. Lars staggered out.

"Leave him alone, Richard," said one of the students. "Can't you see he's totally drunk?"

"Never mind," said Richard. "And you shut your mouth. I'm the boss here. I say who comes into the bar. This guy is cut off whether he's sober or drunk."

Sibylla turned and ran to the kitchenette. She collapsed onto a stool and covered her face with her hands, shaking and sobbing. She couldn't remember when she last cried. Soon she felt Richard's hand on her shoulder.

"Don't take it so hard Sibylla," he said in an unusually soft voice.

"Here, drink this."

"What is it?" she sniffed.

"Cognac."

"But you know that I..."

"Drink!" He insisted so firmly that Sibylla couldn't resist. She took hold of the glass and for a moment just stared at it and then closed her eyes.

"Drink up."

Sibylla put the glass to her lips. She felt the heat flow down into her stomach. Slowly she put the glass down.

"Now girl, doesn't that feel better?"

"Yes," she said in a whisper. "I feel much better, thanks. I'll hurry and wash up. Then I'll be ready again."

"Hey, Sibylla," Richard said, holding her back.

"Please Richard."

"Do you honestly believe this Rerup guy is right for you?"

She laughed nervously. "Whatever made you say that? We have never seriously discussed whether or not we will stay together. At this moment I am not sure what I want, or what is right for me. At any rate, I don't want to see him for a while."

"Are you sure?"

"Very sure," she said with greater determination. "I don't want to see him. So, please, throw him out if he comes here again, otherwise I'll stay away."

"No! No, Sibylla. My God,

that's not what I want."

He approached her. Touching her, his hands and his fingers began playing with the strands of her hair.

"You know that I need you, Sibylla." His voice was tender and deep and it sent goose bumps down her back. "I need you very much, Sibylla, more than you know."

His face was close to hers and he stared right into her eyes.

"I-I must wash Richard," she said nervously. "I look awful, right?"

"The tears make you look more beautiful."

"Oh, stop it now," she sniffed. "You've never said anything like that before."

"Am I not allowed to?"

"I don't know," muttered Sibylla, jerking her shoulders. She broke free and fled through the door to the washroom. There she stood in front of the mirror over the sink. All of a sudden her face became very hard. Sibylla Lundstrom was experiencing a change of heart.

*

A week had passed since Lars last caught a glimpse of Sibylla. Usually it was every day. Once she saw him on campus but he

walked away.

Although Sibylla was determined not to run after him, she wanted to talk with him and clear her conscience. Somehow, she felt that it was partly her fault. But she wasn't sure what she wanted to say to Lars.

She now made her way to his apartment, located in another part of Hamburg. Lars lived in a simple student building that was built before the turn of the century and somehow managed to survive the last war. The front door had a stained glass window and looked very old and run down. Sibylla had a key to Lars' apartment.

It was shortly after four when she arrived and stood in front of his door. As Sibylla pulled her key out of her purse, she became aware of muffled noises from within. She felt her blood pressure rising. She was wrestling with the idea of walking away from the situation.

Finally she put the key in the lock and opened the door. Putting one foot in front of the other, she found herself standing inside. Down the hall there was another door, partly opened. As she listened, voices and laughter came from within.

Carefully, she walked towards the half-opened door on her tip-toes. As she pushed open the

door, there was Lars in bed with another woman. It was obvious. They were so involved in their lovemaking that they didn't notice Sibylla standing there.

"Good day," Sibylla said, as cold as ice.

Lars and the woman pulled away from each other, trying to pull the sheets over themselves.

"Do you think I have never seen you naked before, Lars?" asked Sibylla, her voice trembling. "You seemed to know what you were doing."

"Hey, what's that mean? You just blow in here and..."

"I have a key," she said. "Or did you forget that? I came over here for a different reason today. Here is your key. If you would give me mine, so that we can spare the hassle."

"Your key is there on the dressing table," he said awkwardly.

The woman by his side turned her head the other way. Obviously the situation was too much for her to bear.

As Sibylla snatched up her key, an ice-cold rage came over her. She turned around at the door.

"So, you may now carry on. It looks like the shock made that thing of yours go soft, Lars." Sibylla slammed the apartment door after her.

When she got home, she didn't

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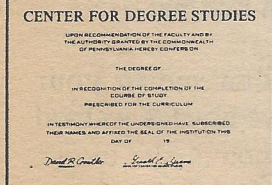
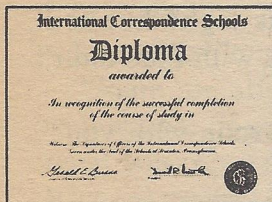
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quite know what to think or say. Her face was all wet and puffy. This was not just another episode, it was finally the end. And she knew it.

Yet she wanted revenge, even though she really didn't hate Lars. One thing was certain. She had been thoroughly shocked at Lars' apartment, which now made her very alert and aware of things.

That same night, she had her chance to get even. She was working at The Lexicon when Lars showed up. He was not only sober but also in the company of the same person Sibylla had found him in bed with that afternoon. Sibylla cursed at his impertinence, showing up at the bar like that. She thought he was trying to humiliate her.

"I'll throw him out," Richard shouted, when he saw Lars.

"No Richard, leave it," begged Sibylla, placing her hand on his arm. "Leave them alone. It's all over. I just want to be completely and totally finished with him. Maybe you could help me?"

"Me? What can I do, except throw him out? He will humiliate you, too, with that slut."

Sibylla was now in high spirits and cheerful as she served Lars and his new lover.

"Are you still angry with me?" Lars wanted to know.

"Don't act as if you are the only one, Lars. There are those who are far better than you."

She watched as his face turned bright red. This gave her great pleasure as she turned away, laughing to herself.

"Hey Richard. Can I have that cognac now?"

"Well of course, but you don't..."

"Never mind, it's OK," she said with a smirk. "Tonight I'm going to have a few, then things will start to happen around here, Richard. I'll finish this thing once and for all."

"God, Sibylla, don't cause any trouble for me."

"Of course not," she said, stroking the side of his cheek. "No! I won't cause trouble. What I do will meet with your expectations."

She then turned and served her tables in the bar. Within thirty minutes she started to feel her drinks. She was light-headed. Even that woman with Lars didn't bother her.

"Say, what's wrong with you?" asked Richard.

She went over to him.

"Don't ask, just kiss me."

"Here?"

"Why not? I can see in your eyes that you have always wanted to kiss me."

"Yes that's right but..."

"Then kiss me." Then she threw her arms around his neck.

"My God," he said. "You are..."

"Am I good? Tell me I'm good, Richard. I can be very much better if I want to be."

At that point, Richard thought that Sibylla was just using him to make Lars jealous enough that he would come back to her. Sibylla's moves seemed to be having effect. It was obvious that this game they were playing pleased Stollbach. Sibylla kept coming on to him.

Just before closing time, Lars approached the bar Sibylla let go of Stollbach's arm. Her eyes were shining, almost feverish.

"Sibylla, I..."

"What do you want?" she demanded. "Well, is there something you want from me?"

"I'd like to explain. It's all my fault."

"And that girl?"

"I'll send her home."

Then Sibylla laughed bitterly.

"Spare me all of this. Take her to that hole of yours and show her what you can do. I'm staying with Richard tonight."

Lars and the woman got up to go.

"That's right, eh Richard? We're going to have a wonderful time."

"I believe that too, Sibylla," he replied as he looked into her eyes. Stollbach put his arm around her and she playfully snuggled up to him.

Lars stood there helplessly, just what Sibylla wanted to happen. He looked so pitiful.

"Please, Sibylla."

"It's pointless when you behave like a whimpering dog." She looked at her watch. "Anyway, it's closing time. You'd better hurry or you'll miss the bus."

She watched as they left and then locked the door. They were the last customers.

Suddenly her legs were very weak.

"Now, Sibylla," Richard said pressing his body up against hers. "What did you mean when you said that you are going to stay here?"

She then felt that she had to prove that she was rid of Lars forever.

"I meant what I said. If you want, I will spend the night with you."

"My God, I never thought that it would be so simple."

"Everything is quite simple. It's as easy as can be. Or did you think I was just a prudish kid?"

"No! Not that, but..."

"You mean because of Lars? That's over. By the way, what did

you mean when you said that I could become something great?"

"Later," he said, as she felt his tongue caressing her ear lobe.

"Put the lights out and let's go," Sibylla whispered.

She then became Richard's lover, even though she really didn't know him very well. What she did not realize were the consequences from this encounter and her desire to get even with Lars.

*

In the following weeks Sibylla settled down in Richard's apartment. He was a very gentle and passionate lover. In his arms it was easy for her to forget Lars. Richard wanted to spoil his young, attractive lover. After his second night with her, he gave her a ring.

"My God, Richie, this must have cost a fortune."

"A token of my love for you, Sibylla. Later, when we have it made, you can have anything you want."

"Oh Richie, you'll never get rich at The Lexicon. The prices are too low and the timing is not right."

"I'm glad you think of me, Sibylla. Honesty between us is very important. You're right.

We'll never get anywhere with this bar. Together we can accomplish a lot."

She then noticed a flicker of embarrassment.

"If there is something you have to tell me Richie, then tell me."

"You know that I sometimes leave the bar. Haven't you ever wondered about that?"

"No, not really. Where do you go?"

"For the last little while I've had part-ownership in another bar."

"That's wonderful! From one bar to another, where?"

"It's a bar in the St. George district."

"Oh, that's too bad. Somehow I had the distinct feeling it had something to do with prostitution."

"A clever deduction," he said.

"Sorry, but I think St. George is the wrong part of town. A lot of girls who operate there are not registered. There are quite a few raids taking place. Also, can your partner be trusted?"

"I can't watch over him all the time, even though I get the distinct feeling he is cheating me."

"Bravo, Bravo," she said. "I'll make you a proposition. You look after the business in St. George and I will take care of things in The Lexicon! You know I can be

trusted, right?"

"You would do that for me?"

"Sure I would, Richie. After all, we want to reach the top."

"We want the top all right. But what about your studies?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll just have to put them on the back burner for the time being. As I told you, it's not my goal to become that librarian in a stuffy, old archives somewhere."

"You are much too smart for that, Sibylla."

From that day on, Sibylla managed The Lexicon and Richard worked in St. George at the other bar, The Nightbutterfly.

"Now listen here, Richie," Sibylla said as they sat going through the books. "Things can't go on like this."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll never get anywhere with these two bars. I want to look at your other bar."

"It's not your kind of place, Sibylla."

She smiled and crossed her legs.

"That depends. One gets used to anything, Richie. We've got to do something."

Yes, she was the boss. Stollbach was bursting with pride. He couldn't get over how businesslike she was. A true professional. She had the mind of an

accountant.

The next day, The Lexicon was closed.

"Please take me to The Nightbutterfly tonight, Richie. I want to have a good look at the place. Maybe we can change some things."

"Sibylla, there are all kinds of prostitutes and..."

"And what?" she said.

"These women, in many ways, bring in the money. You don't seem to realize this."

"I just want to see this bar!"

This demand of hers was so direct he had no other choice but to take her there.

Sibylla, to say the least, was astonished by what she saw on the way. Old streetwalkers and young girls were hanging around everywhere, ready to crawl into any dark hole and to reappear again as soon as there was an arm to grab onto.

"Honestly, what a dump. How in heaven's name could you buy a bar in such a lousy part of town?"

"It's too expensive in St. Pauli," he said. "That's where the better ones are. I can't afford them."

Sibylla looked at him and smiled reassuringly.

"One day we'll own the best, Richie. I guarantee it. Just leave things to me."

He looked at her with amaze-

ment.

"Where is this bar of yours?" she asked.

"Around the next corner."

Moments later, they entered The Nightbutterfly. The bar had about ten tables, half of them were empty. There were a few girls slouching at the bar staring into their glasses. Behind the bar was a heavy-breasted girl who was way over the hill.

"Hallo Richie," she droned. "Is that your helper there with you?"

Sibylla wasn't going to let them put one over on her.

"Listen up. I am Richie's business manager."

Stollbach flinched.

"This dump at its best, is one of the crummiest joints I've ever seen."

"What's that supposed to mean?" the girl behind the bar said.

"Do you really believe that any man would come here to get his kicks with a bunch of old withered-up hags like you?"

"What did you say?"

"I meant what I said," replied Sibylla. "With those tits of yours hanging on the bar, I guess any guy might get turned on, only if he was drunk or desperate enough."

"Cool it, Sibylla," exclaimed Richard.

This woman approached Sibylla from behind the bar sizing her up from head to toe.

"What do you know about this business? Have you ever gone to bed with a guy for money? Maybe ten in one night? Then you'd understand!"

Sibylla ignored her and said, "I want a Manhattan. Anyone know how to mix a Manhattan?"

Total silence.

Then abruptly, the girl returned to her place behind the bar and snatched up a shaker.

"Where is Heiko Jansen, Miriam?" she asked another girl.

"Gone gambling."

"Yeah, we hustle our asses off here, trying to keep this broken down place together and he's out there, gambling his profits away in Las Vegas!"

Sibylla meanwhile joined Richard at a table.

"Does that mean 'our' business partner is at a casino?"

"You said 'our.'"

Sibylla didn't know why she had said that.

Stollbach was taken aback once again.

"You know, Richie, I thought you were much smarter than this! He's shitting all over you, right?"

"But what can I do?"

"Throw him out, that's what!"

"But he has a lot of money

invested in here."

"How much?"

"About five hundred grand."

"Not a lot of money, but everything is going down hill here. Don't you realize that with these girls you will never win."

"God damn it, then I'll get other girls!"

"Settle down, Richie," Sibylla said. "I'll make you another proposition."

"And that being?"

"Listen, I'm a woman and I have a mirror. I know how to look. What the hell is a man doing running this place, absolutely nothing! Richie, you run The Lexicon and I'll take care of this place."

"Sibylla, you're crazy!"

"Why? Just because I show my tits around. Does this make you uncomfortable. After all, that's what they are paying for, right? Hey, aren't mine better than Miriam's flabby ones?"

Stollbach smiled at his lover.

"Yeah you're right, Sibylla. But I won't like it, you working here. I love you and don't want to see you in such a place, with these kinds of people."

"Do you, for once in your life, want something or don't you, Richie? There seems to be only one way for us to make it."

Yes, Sibylla Lundstrom, the

fast climbing Swede had decided to use her main assets, her looks and youthfulness, to reach the top.

*

Stollbach gave her a free hand in purchasing expensive dresses. It was as if she had him in the palm of her hand. She set the pace and took care of everything else.

"Now," she said as she casually walked in front of him. "What do you think?"

She stood there in this black, spandex dress. The dress was cut so low that it nearly reached her navel, displaying most of her breasts.

"Very good," said Stollbach.

"Now," she said, standing in front of the mirror. "I'll leave a little to the imagination. This is good for the guys."

"Yes, and most of all for me." Richard played with her ears. "You make me go wild, Sibylla." He grabbed her and passionately kissed her. The kisses then went to her breasts and down to her navel. "You drive me insane."

"I can do much more. You just wait, Richie."

Sibylla worked at the bar every night. Through some ads she got a few girls. It was not easy to get rid of Miriam but in the end she

did.

One night Sibylla was introduced to Stollbach's partner, Heiko Jansen. He was short and stocky.

Richard escorted Sibylla to the bar.

"From now on, she's giving the orders."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You didn't hear him, right?"

Sibylla said, while checking out the cleanliness of the glasses.

"We've got to get this bar rolling, but that won't happen when someone sits in a casino and gambles. Today we start fresh, understand?"

"For God's sake, Richie. Do you let her talk to you like this?"

"I talk to you like anyone in business should."

"Aren't you going a little overboard?"

Sibylla squinted her eyes.

"This is my business. You look after your shit. By the way, we need bottles of wine brought up. So go and get them."

"Listen here you..."

"Go do what I told you to do. If you want to be a partner, then you're going to have to do your share. Otherwise, you'll have to go sooner than you think."

"You must be crazy, Sibylla," Richard said as Heiko went to the wine cellar. "If he takes

his money out of here we're finished."

"Leave things to me. I'll do what's right. You look after The Lexicon. By the way, you've got to raise the prices immediately, otherwise it won't pay to stay open."

"God, it's a bar for students."

"But it's not a charity."

*

Sibylla hired two Viennese girls named Rita and Lisa. Rita had a very slender yet beautiful figure and a great personality. This was what Sibylla liked about her. Lisa was the opposite. She had a plain, youthful figure with a page boy hairstyle.

Sibylla didn't allow the girls to use a lot of makeup. Also, she had to be kept informed about everything. They had rooms on the first floor of the building. This made it easy for them to change shifts with one another. Sibylla knew it was illegal to deduct part of their salary for rent. She was playing it safe so no one could suspect anything.

For the next two days, the business ran badly because a few of the old prostitutes tried to edge their way in again. But Sibylla just threw them out. After all, it was her right.

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"We want to attract young people," she said.

It got around town that The Nightbutterfly was the place to go. On the third day, things began to move. After two weeks, the customers came because Sibylla knew what it took to keep them happy.

The cash register just kept ringing. Sibylla was always honest with Stollbach. The bar brought in four times as much as The Lexicon.

"I'm going to hire two more girls," she said. "Rita and Lisa have their hands full and I can't juggle their shifts."

Sibylla eventually grew aware that Heiko was out to cause trouble for her. He became very critical and unfriendly toward her. But then she didn't care for him either.

"Listen," he said. "One of these days, if you keep going the way you are with that big mouth of yours, you'll find us out on the street. You're not the greatest, understand?"

"Not yet," she said, taking another sip from her glass.

Lately, she drank more often and smoked heavily. She considered it to be part of her new job.

One night a gentleman came in alone. He looked handsome and reserved. He seated himself at the

bar near Sibylla.

"What would you like?" she asked, her voice sounding deep and hoarse. With flashing eyes, she looked him over.

"Bourbon," he said smiling.

"Bourbon. Coming right up." That day, she wore a wine-colored dress with a low back. It was cut along the side to her hip, showing off her long legs.

"You're Sibylla, right?"

"That's right."

"I've heard a lot about you, Sibylla."

"How wonderful."

"I would like to ask you something."

"What?"

"Would you sleep with me?"

Sibylla felt like slapping his face. Even her regular customers knew she was not a prostitute. She was the boss.

"I beg your pardon?"

"No. I really don't want to repeat myself."

Suddenly Sibylla felt a rush of white heat and started running her fingers through her hair. She thought that maybe Heiko was trying to trip her up. She was desperate to make a lot of money and live a life of luxury, but her own clients? She poured a bourbon for herself.

"It depends upon the circumstances," she replied.

"What are the terms?"

She smiled.

"Well, after all, it's money which ultimately decides the issue. You have to understand I'm not inexpensive. Why don't you just take one of my girls. They're cheaper and just as good as I am."

Turning his drink in his hand, he thought about it for a minute.

"I'm not sure. You are something very special, Sibylla. Something worth paying for."

She struggled with her conscience about it, but not for very long.

"How much are you willing to pay?"

She sensed he was evaluating her.

"Two thousand marks for the night."

Sibylla caught her breath, then exhaled slowly and quietly.

"Two thousand five hundred."

He didn't think twice about it. He just picked up his glass and swallowed.

"Settled," he said.

"Where?" she asked.

"Could you come to see me tomorrow?"

"Well of course."

"I'll give you my address. If it's possible, come at two."

"That's quite all right," she said as he gave her the particulars. It was a prominent address in a very

exclusive part of town.

"How can I be sure about the location?"

At that moment, he popped open his briefcase, took out two thousand and laid it on the bar.

"A deposit, Sibylla," he said.

"Thank you." She smiled, warming up to the prospect of their rendezvous.

"I will be on time. Would you like a bourbon?"

"Thanks."

"This one's on the house."

Then their eyes met and stayed like that for a while.

Suddenly, all of this somehow restored her confidence. She was unconcerned that this was prostitution. With him, it would be no different than going with someone else.

*

At six the following day, she returned to The Lexicon. She watched a few customers sipping coffee. Most of them sat there until their coffee got ice-cold.

"Where have you been?" Stollbach asked.

"I was working," she replied as she hung up her coat.

Her appearance pleased him very much.

"You were working?" he said bewildered. "The Nightbutterfly

isn't open yet."

"If you have a moment or two, follow me into the back room and I will explain everything."

Sibylla sat down crossing those gorgeous legs of hers.

As Richard came back, he noticed a large amount of money lying on the table.

"One can't make that kind of money faster than I just did," she said. "And I earned this in just an afternoon, Richie."

She then noticed how pale he had become.

"How did you get it?"

Very quietly she then walked over to the small bar and poured herself a stiff drink. Turning, looking directly into his eyes, she said, "Very easily. I went to bed with a man!"

"You?" He stood there speechless.

"It was easy," she replied, in a relaxed tone of voice.

"You simply lay down, let him play around, do his thing, then get up and leave as if nothing had happened."

"Is it necessary for you to do that, Sibylla?"

"It is necessary for both of us."

"Why, when we have two pubs?"

"Oh yes, that old Lexicon where nothing happens and The Nightbutterfly with Heiko always

meddling. Sooner or later he'll want out, Richie. Then it'll be too late and we'll be ruined. You already know that. We have to get ourselves out of there because we won't be able to buy Heiko out, understand? If I go and do what I did twenty more times, we'll have one hundred thousand. Do you read me, Richie?"

"How?"

"Easy. From now on, I charge five thousand a night. Others do, so why can't I? After all, I'm much better than most! Besides, I'm not giving anything away and you don't loose a thing, Richie."

"This is ridiculous," he said. "Mind you, I also had thought of this but I just didn't know how to tell you. Besides, I just want you for myself."

"But you don't make me walk the streets. It was my idea. Besides, you still have me."

She smiled but the look in her eyes was distant and lonesome.

"Lars is past tense," she muttered absently. "It's been over for a long time and I don't want to think of him ever again."

She was, of course, lying. Often she thought about him, hoping their paths would cross again one day. Right now her only goal was to make it to the top, and she would do anything and everything to become rich and independent.

"When I have fifty grand together, things will be run differently."

"Differently?"

"Yes. I will throw Heiko out. It runs much better now when he's not around. Also, I'll have to change the girls around, understand? I thought maybe we'd dump The Lexicon and look for another bar in the St. Pauli area."

"We'll never get in there, Sibylla."

"No? Well let me tell you, if you want something bad enough you'll get it. It all depends on determination and perseverance."

Sibylla possessed these qualities in abundance. If it meant being hard-nosed and tough, then Sibylla was ready. The timid, naive student had changed completely. This sometimes surprised even her. No longer did she want to live in the past. Richard calmly let things be. He knew that she could make an awful lot of money. For a long time, he had hoped that she would turn to prostitution. But Richard had no desire to be a pimp.

Sibylla was already more successful than he was. The competition, as well as jealousy, was heating up between them. And it was going to be risky for them both.

It wasn't long before the name

of the Swede would get passed around. She began staying out all night. She made only house-calls or hotel visits. Her customers knew what she had to offer was very, very exclusive.

About a month and a half had passed when early one morning, after closing The Nightbutterfly, Sibylla had a surprise on her way to Stollbach's apartment.

"Sibylla?"

The young woman felt her blood freeze in her veins. Lars was standing there, appearing from out of nowhere. Under the neon lights, he looked ashen-faced, his hair drooping over his brow.

"What do you want?" she sighed wearily.

"Sibylla, is it true what people are saying about you?"

"What are they saying?" she asked as she walked slowly to her car.

A couple of girls were standing nearby, waiting for customers.

"That you're a prostitute."

She looked at him closely and saw that he had a sympathetic smile on his face.

"Well, you once called me a whore. Before you had no cause to say that, Lars. Now you can say that and call me anything else you want, because it doesn't bother me anymore."

"Sibylla, I love you, damn it!"

"Do you know what, Lars? Love with me costs money. Less than two thousand five hundred won't get you anything from me. Maybe one day you can scrape it together. Then and only then, can we talk about love. There's nothing more to say. Goodnight, Lars."

"Sibylla, wait."

"Look, I just want peace and quiet, Lars."

"One day you'll be sorry for what you are doing, Sibylla."

"And if and when that day comes," Sibylla said, stepping back, "then it's my business and none of yours. Now please, get out of my way so I can get in my car and get the hell out of here."

She got in, started the engine, turned on the headlights and pulled away. She looked in her rear view mirror and saw Lars standing there, motionless. A wave of tenderness rippled through her body. Sibylla wanted to stop and run back to Lars, but it was too late for that.

She was on track and there was no way she could ever turn back. The only way for her was forward. Sibylla herself had opened the door to a completely different world, a door that she would never close.

Richard was sleeping when she

got home. She tried to be as silent as possible but he still woke up.

Sibylla lit a cigarette. In front of her was a glass of cognac, half full.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you. I tried to be as quiet as possible."

"I know," replied Richard. "But I always sleep lightly when you are not by my side. Did you have a customer?"

She smiled and nodded. "Yes Richie, I did have a customer. Now I have fifty-five thousand altogether."

"In such a short space of time?"

"Yeah, and there is no way that I am going to stop, especially when things are going so well. Anyway, I have been thinking about things.

"About what things?"

"We won't throw Heiko out of the business."

"Why not?"

"It would be very stupid. It is not possible to build up that dive in St. George. Anyway, I have a lot of rich clients. I want a bar in the St. Pauli area and that's what I am going to get."

"And what's going to happen to The Nightbutterfly?"

"We're going to get out," said Sibylla. "Heiko will have to buy us out, that's what. Then we'll see how well he can manage alone."

"What if he can't?"

Sibylla took a sip of her cognac. "There are ways and means by which we can force him, understand? If he can't pay us, then we will deduct what we have invested, day by day, month by month. Then you'll see how quickly he'll fold."

"Gee Sibylla, that's great."

"We'll get rid of The Lexicon. It is too unprofitable in my books. We'll concentrate all of our energies on getting into the St. Pauli district, OK? We are wasting our time with the student bar."

"When you worked there, you thought differently."

"That was different. Today I think about and see things in other ways, Richie. You should get used to the fact that you can learn something from me. You should try to be a little bit more like me. You are too soft and thoughtful. I have done a lot of thinking about this trade. You can't have any scruples. That goes for everyone around us. Otherwise, we'll end up in the gutter!"

She hadn't yet realized that she was already on her way to the top. Sibylla was a very smart lady and was aware that she had given Richard a weapon. But she wasn't sure if the day would come when he would turn on her. She knew

that he was untrustworthy, but did not know to what extent. However, she never gave much thought to this because the only thing that mattered to her was money.

*

Sibylla handled everything with poise, and always remained cool and collected. She had developed a special kind of charm which fascinated her men.

Sibylla had now managed to acquire a lounge in St. Pauli, which she named The Jamaica, which turned out to be, in many ways, very exotic.

"You should have asked me first," said Richard, as Sibylla laid the contract in front of him.

"The Jamaica is a great undertaking. It's not a bar like The Nightbutterfly, you know."

"Do you realize what you have taken on?"

"Of course I do," she said. "I have worked out the potential income and deducted all the costs. It's not a bad place is it, Richie? Why don't you trust me? Haven't I always done things right?"

"Well of course you have," he said. "Basically I have nothing against your plans and I don't want to interfere. Somehow, though, I feel I'm being manipu-

lated like a puppet on a string."

"You musn't think that way. Instead, why don't you be a little more like me. Give me your support, then we'll be much further ahead."

"How did you come up with the name, The Jamaica?"

She smiled coyly.

"It really wasn't very hard. You see, when one has clients on the inside track, those who have influence and power, then you're halfway there. Besides, there are people who bypass the rules and give you a boost, understand?"

"You mean that everything is not quite legal?"

"My God," cried Sibylla. "What's the matter with you, Richie? What in this world is legal, really? It's a dog-eat-dog world out there! Know what I mean, Richie?"

"Of course. After all, you know what you're doing. By the way, I'm pulling out of the lease on The Lexicon. That was also part of your plans, right?"

"Yes, of course. Anyway, I have to leave for a short while."

"To see one of your clients?"

"No, not this time. I have to meet with an architect who is going to renovate The Jamaica. If you like, you can come along. Otherwise I'll go by myself."

"What about The Lexicon?"

"That dump can be very easily closed for the day. We must concentrate on The Jamaica. This is just the beginning."

"You're simply marvellous, Sibylla."

Alone, he would never have had the strength or willpower to achieve as much as she had. But he shuddered at the thought of what would happen if the day ever came where Sibylla had total control of things, and booted him out as soon as she had all she wanted.

"By the way, in who's name is The Jamaica?"

"I'm thinking we should make it a limited company. The share capital is ours. I've got everything going. Now all you have to do is sign the contract, Richie. We are the proprietors, that's what matters. Oh, I nearly forgot. We have an appointment with the lawyer."

"You've thought of everything," he said, feeling somewhat disappointed.

"Everything right down to the last detail. So let's go and close up The Lexicon. You'll be surprised at what I have in store for The Jamaica."

Richard was astonished as he looked over the plans she had had drawn up. Eventually she would discuss them with the architect.

"It will be the sort of cabaret

where people can have fun and get stimulated. I have already hired the performers.”

“Performers?”

“Human beings, for God’s sake. I mean on stage. Everything from top to bottom. And of course everything has to be very up-to-date. You know these places exist, eh Richie?”

He knew about these places. He also knew that there was stiff competition out there. He did not interfere. He only reflected upon the whole situation and shook his head.

A few months later The Jamaica officially opened. There were fifty-five employees. Some worked on stage, while the rest were general help. Sibylla, posing elegantly in a shimmering white evening gown, watched over everything.

Richard always remained behind the scenes and kept the books ready for the accountant.

It wasn’t long before The Jamaica was famous. This was what Sibylla had dreamed of. It became the most popular night spot around. Every night the place was packed. The money poured in, just as Sibylla had planned. Meanwhile, Sibylla continued to take care of her private clients. She had, for those who could afford it, upped the price. There

were a few, very exclusive clients, who could afford her at any price.

“We’re going to buy The Rocky Bar,” she announced one evening over dinner to a very surprised Richard.

“The Rocky Bar?” he gasped, almost choking on a mouthful of food.

“Yes. You see, here at The Jamaica, we have an older, more mature type of customer. At The Rocky Bar, we would cater to the younger set. Obviously, we wouldn’t have a live show there. That wouldn’t be necessary. Also, we’ll have to renovate the place, so they’ll feel comfortable there.

Sibylla took all the credit for the success that followed. She hired top bands to play there. The Rocky Bar was packed every night and the money poured in here, too.

Even Richard seemed to change. He became more ambitious and businesslike.

“I’ve got to tell you, that I’ve looked into some real estate investments.”

“Some investment property?”

“A brothel,” exclaimed Richard. “The former owner was a madam who didn’t have any relatives and now lives in an old folks home. It’s my thinking that we acquire this property just for

bread and butter income. I've got all the documents right here."

"Very good," replied Sibylla coolly.

She raised her eyebrows as she scanned the papers. The whole thing didn't look good to her. Richard had gone too far.

"You should have asked me first," she snapped.

"Did you ever ask me, Sibylla?"

"No," she said quietly. "Then again, I didn't think it was necessary."

Richard was shocked and began trembling with rage.

"Are you trying to tell me something?"

He poured himself a whisky. They were both drinking more these days, but seemed to be able to handle it.

"No, Richie, I am not trying to tell you anything. After all, we are supposed to discuss everything, including any new plans."

"Can't I do anything?" he snarled.

"Of course," she replied. "But not this way, Richie. I have other plans."

"Oh yes, it's always your plans that are in the forefront. Sibylla's plans, Sibylla's housekeeping!"

"And Sibylla's work. I've worked hard, my dear, and I have no intention of doing this all for

nothing. Do you understand?"

He understood but had the distinct feeling that he had to defend himself. Could Sibylla be a threat and danger to him all of a sudden?

The silence between them continued for quite a while.

Richard continued his activities, and Sibylla didn't question him anymore.

One night by chance she left the bar and went to the office upstairs. She heard voices even though the office door was heavily padded on both sides. In order to eavesdrop, she had to put her ear against the door.

"The stuff's arriving from Amsterdam by train tomorrow," she heard Richard say. "And I want cash on the transfer of the shipment."

"What kind of shipment is it?"

"That you'll find out tomorrow," replied Richard, his voice steady and calm. At first Sibylla was confused. Suddenly it hit her. Richie was dealing drugs.

Sibylla knew that there was a lot of money to be made from it. She also had her doubts about getting into such a business, but would wait and see what would come out of it.

When the conversation broke off she burst into the room. The strangers visiting Stollbach

looked completely bewildered.

"Can't you knock first?" shouted Stollbach.

"Is it necessary for me?" she said, fuming. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Later, Sibylla."

"No, not later," she insisted. "Please, gentlemen, would you leave? I would like to speak to Richie alone."

They left the room immediately.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Richie clenching his fists.

"You made me look like a clown," he snarled.

"And you entered into a business without my knowledge. Besides, you took money out of our accounts to invest in this."

"And why not? I've just about had it with you. You alone have all the control. Why don't you look after the bars and mind your own business and forget about what I'm doing. After all is said and done, it's no less profitable than yours, OK?"

"That's for sure," Sibylla said. "It's just that it's a damn sight more dangerous."

"Dangerous!" he sneered. "Why do you think that child?"

"Stop calling me a child!"

His suspicions of her in the past few weeks turned out to be true. This proved just how independent

she had become.

"My name stays in the background."

"And the two guys who just left?"

"They're just border people. They have absolutely nothing to do with the deal. Middle men, understand Sibylla? Everything runs through a special system. Nothing can go wrong."

"And what if the train gets stopped at customs?"

"Then we're out of luck. One has to take chances, Sibylla."

"You read about these things everyday," she snapped. "Or are you so blind that you don't know which end is up and which end is down?"

"It's all over in a second, Sibylla. Hey, I want a piece of the cake and I have no intentions of giving this up, now or ever. It runs smoothly, just like your bars. So why not?"

She did not like the way things were going.

*

"You are so beautiful!" whispered her client, as they lay naked on a soft fur in front of a blazing, open fireplace.

His name was Jens. She knew of him, even though she had not asked. He came from a very

wealthy, influential family, about which she kept quiet.

Sibylla knew he was in his middle forties. He had very dark hair, with some grey mixed in. He was not very attractive. The pictures in the newspapers revealed that he was married. The money must have come from his side of the family. That made for such a dull romance.

"You are beautiful, Sibylla, and very expensive, but you are worth every penny."

How many times had she heard these words before? And each and every time she had this warm glowing feeling. With her eyes closed she smiled inwardly.

"Could we see each other next week at my home on Sylt Island, Sibylla?"

"Not next week. I have business to attend to."

He sat up.

"Do you mean your business with Stollbach?"

"What's Richie got to do with this?" replied Sibylla, irritated. She pushed her long, blond hair from her eyes.

Then he went to the apartment bar. He had leased the apartment especially for the two of them, so they would not be disturbed in their love nest.

"Stollbach is your partner, right? Is he also your lover?"

"Now listen here, Jens," Sibylla said firmly. "I don't ask you about your affairs, so please don't ask me about mine. I am here to provide a service for you, which you know very well. Come on, let's skip it. I don't want to talk about these things. One has nothing to do with the other. Discretion is important, especially in this type of business."

She noticed the gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"Sibylla, I must warn you!"

"Warn me! Why do you have to warn me? Because I am a defenceless prostitute and I am not registered as such? Oh no, Jens. You sleep with me, and the next instant you threaten me! You would only be..."

"No, Sibylla. That's not it at all!" Hesitating for a moment, he then said, "It's something entirely different. It's Stollbach's business. The Criminal Investigation Bureau is on his trail."

"Police?" replied Sibylla nervously.

"First of all, pour yourself a drink and please, get me a scotch and a little ice. Then sit down."

Sibylla tried to compose herself. Was this some kind of trick or was he trying to trap her and eventually get rid of her? For a very long time now, she was aware of the fact that for many

influential people, she was an inconvenience because she knew an awful lot about her clients' personal lives. She decided to play dumb. At any time things could become very dangerous for her.

"I don't want to lose you, Sibylla. I pay for your services and you always give me what I want. I could divorce my wife and marry you, but you know what kind of scandal that would cause."

"I know. And I must tell you right from here on in, that I could never belong to you and you alone. You see, I have great plans."

"I realize that," replied Jens, raising his whiskey glass. "We won't discuss each other anymore, Sibylla. OK? But everyone knows that Stollbach is involved with drugs."

"That's news to me," exclaimed Sibylla.

"Everyone in St. Pauli knows that you have control of the reins. After all, both you and Stollbach have quite an empire here, or am I exaggerating the situation?"

The Swede smiled, shaking her head. "No, you're not exaggerating. But one thing is for sure, we're not out to run a dirty business."

"Isn't everything dirty in St.

Pauli?"

"Now come on," Sibylla snapped. "In that case, I'm dirty too, seeing that I go to bed with you for money. It's this double standard that you have, Jens. Can I say something else?"

"Go ahead," replied Jens.

"OK. Should I pass this warning on to Richard?"

"Most definitely."

"If the situation was as important as you say it is, then maybe you should take it upon yourself to try and straighten things out with him."

Beads of sweat started to appear on Jens' brow.

"Are you crazy? What the hell could I do!"

"Stop it," she cried. "You yourself have control of the of the border-crossing."

"You seem to know an awful lot, Sibylla."

"Oh yes," she replied. "I mean, it really doesn't interest me, Jens. But does the name Jeanette Moreau ring a bell?"

"Not that I know of, why?"

Sibylla smiled broadly.

"She was your lover, Jens. Besides I know a lot more."

"What?"

Sibylla enjoyed putting him into a corner. Jens was trying desperately to remain calm.

"You know very well that

Jeanette Moreau worked for a diamond dealer. Putting it more directly, a diamond smuggler. In fact, she brought some stones from Amsterdam and you covered for her!"

"And how, may I ask, can you prove that?"

"Because I know, Jens and I can prove it anytime. Shouldn't we go with the principle that one hand washes the other? Don't get me wrong. I am not expecting any money for it. After all, you pay me very well and at the same time I truly believe that I earn every penny. Am I right?"

He was somewhat speechless.

"What do you want?" he mumbled.

"Not very much. We should however, try to work a little closer together, and not oppose one another. It would be in our best interests to do this. We must get through all of this. It would be very much easier for me to abandon this whole affair. You, on the other hand, are in a very different position"

He stood there flabbergasted.

"Are you threatening me, Sibylla?"

"No, my love," Sibylla tenderly replied, putting her hand inside his bathrobe. "It's not my style. I only wish to reach a satisfactory agreement with you which is in

the best interests of all concerned. I will tell Richard about your warning, but I do think something could be done from your side, Jens. What do you think?"

"I'll look into it, Sibylla."

She caressed him, knowing that she would succeed. Yet this small victory seemed pointless. Jens Klausen, like many a man who had spent the night in her arms, did not understand. Sibylla could be cool and detached or hot and passionate. It was such a strange combination of character traits that none of her clients could ever put it into words. This woman so completely captivated her men that she usually got what she wanted.

But love was not in Sibylla's life, not real love anyway. This was all a big lie, something she had to do many times a day.

"I will do anything and everything Sibylla," gasped Jens. "I must have you, Sibylla. I must have you because I need you so very badly!"

"I'll always be there for you," she whispered in his ear.

A few hours later she left the apartment, with a smile on her face. Sibylla knew that she had climbed another rung on the ladder. It was not very often that she could influence such an important client. She used her powers of

influence and persuasion with many of her clients, knowing that this was not going to last forever. Besides, she was getting older. At this moment, however, her stars were shining very brightly.

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With a graceful arc, Sibylla dived into the glittering swimming pool. With lazy strokes, she coasted to the other end of the pool.

"Richie!" she cried. "Don't be a spoil sport. Come into the pool with me."

"I'm beat," Richard sighed, dropping his tired body back into a lounge chair.

"Oh, Richie," she said, climbing out of the pool. She wore a gold-colored swimsuit which clung to her like another skin.

The weather was simply gorgeous. This, along with her swim, made her feel terrific.

She had purchased this beautiful villa near Ahrensburg a year earlier. The villa was not only a house, it was also a place to escape everything around her.

Richard was trying to snooze when she approached.

"Would you like me to mix you a drink?"

"Let Katherine do it for me," he said. Katherine was their maid.

"You seem to think a lot of her," she pouted.

Richard sat up and gave her a lop-sided smile.

"Are you jealous, Sibylla?"

"Not of that slut," she snapped.

She finished mixing herself a martini and sat down in the other lounge chair.

She wouldn't think twice about dismissing any of her staff if they did not do exactly as she wished. Sibylla was feared by everyone, even Richard. He knew exactly how this woman had tried to change him. However, Richard tried to keep up the illusion that he was an equal partner, or at least a near-equal in their businesses. As a result, there were always ongoing disputes between them.

Sibylla found a way, through her associates, for Richard to build his narcotics business, even though she knew it was illegal. It was, however, all associated with the most important thing for her, money.

"Stretching out and yawning, he said," We should take a vacation."

"A vacation? Now? Just as the two new bars are really starting to roll? No, Richie, now is not the right time."

"By the way, what did you discuss with Klausen? I mean about

the shipment coming in by plane next week."

"Everything is all right. One can solve many problems while in bed, my dear. Also, do you have the statements ready for the accountant? Those from The Jamaica, I mean. There are several missing!"

"I'll look for them," Stollbach replied peevishly.

She sensed his mistrust and knew that her relationship with Stollbach had changed forever. He was purely a business partner who now and again would go to bed with her. Sibylla played along with him like a sympathetic lover. She had learned and practised this often with her clients. Stollbach, on the other hand, felt quite secure.

One night Sibylla discovered something terrible. As she was walking down the hallway, she noticed the door to her room was open. She stood there motionlessly as she watched Stollbach hastily going through the papers in her writing desk. He didn't realize she was watching him. She entered the room.

"I hope," she asked, forcing a smile, "I hope, Richie, that I'm not disturbing you!"

"Of course not," he replied. "Why would you be disturbing me?"

"I only wanted to get myself a quick drink, Richie, and then go to bed. These past few days have drained me. Maybe we should go away on a vacation."

Sibylla was wearing a wine coloured housecoat, which displayed her beautiful body. She poured a drink from the bar, but she somehow could not rid herself of the nagging feeling that Stollbach was swindling her.

"Are you coming to bed or are you going out?"

"I have to go out for a while," he said, thinking for a moment. "There is something which must be attended to concerning the shipment from Amsterdam. You're not angry with me are you?"

"Of course not. I just want to go to bed early for a change. By the way, don't drink too much, Richie. I don't want you to lose your license."

"Don't worry. If I get too soused I'll get a cab. We don't want any trouble with the law, right?"

"That's for sure." Taking her glass, she slowly walked up the marble spiral staircase.

She wasn't quite sure whether or not Richard had sensed her misgivings. As she reached the top of the stairs, she turned around and noticed that Richard

was slipping out of the hallway. She heard the front door close and the garage door open and then saw him speed off into the night with the Porsche. Right away she hurried back downstairs. She had seen exactly which drawer he was sorting through. Upon opening the desk and examining the statements, it hit her. Her legs become weak and she started to shake. Sibylla had to sit down. It became obvious to her that Richard was regularly transferring funds into numbered accounts in Switzerland, about which Sibylla knew nothing.

"So that's it," she muttered. "You're cheating me, eh? OK Richard Stollbach, I'm going to get even with you!"

She didn't lose any sleep over the incident. She just played along as usual, remaining loving and caring towards him. But she knew that there would be an opportunity for her to skim money from their business accounts without Richard ever knowing. Sibylla would alter the ledgers because she now feared to leave anything there. After all, it was her money that had really built up the assets they had. Richard was just an accessory. She started to put aside the large amounts of cash that she would receive from her wealthy clients.

Sibylla found out Stollbach was completely unscrupulous. All he wanted was to be in the Syndicate. She shuddered at his ice-cold look and began to fear him. She now made plans and arrange for her financial security. She continued to enjoy the luxury of the villa for a while longer. She even threw magnificent parties. What Sibylla had always dreamed of, was starting to become meaningless for her. In fact, she even felt threatened by it. There were moments when she wanted to turn her back and run from it all. She was trapped by the very web she herself had spun.

*

"I am going on vacation for a few days," she declared one morning.

Richard seemed quite surprised.

"Where will you go?" he asked quietly. He was sitting on the veranda, eating breakfast which Katherine had prepared for him.

Sibylla pulled up a chair.

"I thought that it would be nice if I went home to Sweden. You know, it's been a very long time since I was last there. And besides, you know what a sentimental girl I am, Richie. Sometimes one gets homesick. I'll rent a cottage by the sea for a few

days and do nothing except relax. I've got to get away from here and think about things clearly. You do understand don't you?"

"Of course I understand. I distinctly remember that I had suggested it a few days ago. It's too bad that business won't let us to take a vacation together. Never mind, perhaps some other time."

His readiness to accept that she wanted to go away for a while surprised her. She had a feeling that while she was away, he would concentrate on his other illegal businesses. She would not be able to control the situation and knew that he would cheat her. She didn't trust him as far as she could throw him.

"When did you want to leave?"

"Oh," Sibylla remarked, "I really don't have any definite time or date. Maybe tomorrow. Then again, maybe I'll go this afternoon."

"For how long?"

"I don't know. However, I can always call and let you know. You can get along for a few days without me, can't you?"

"Well of course I can, Sibylla. You know that."

A little later she called the airport and inquired about the next flight out to Stockholm. She was lucky.

"I'll be taking the afternoon

flight," she told Richard casually. "The trip by train is too uncomfortable and it takes far too long."

"Yes, you're absolutely right. Take a plane. Do you want me to drive you to the airport at Fuhlsbüttel?"

She shook her head.

"No thanks. I'll take the taxi. I'm just happy that you didn't object to me taking this vacation."

"But why should I?"

"No, Richie, that's not what I really meant. I'm just happy that you're so understanding."

Sibylla wore a very elegant outfit to the airport. Everything seemed to match perfectly. Clearly she was a woman of wealth and sophistication. One didn't have to see it in her apparel. It was just simply there.

After a few hours, Sibylla arrived in Stockholm. She sat back for a moment or two. She just wanted to do or think of nothing, only to relax. This of course, she couldn't do. There were too many things going through her head. She was trying desperately to sort out her inner feelings and put them in order. She was afraid of being a fugitive because that's exactly what she would be if she were to step out of the business and go on her own. She had enough money to do this:

For as long as she had known

him, Richie had been just like a puppet. For a long time, she had been pulling the strings. Now there were others involved who controlled him. Sibylla knew that these people could be very dangerous. Richie would probably follow only their orders, not hers. Yet Sibylla didn't want to upset them.

Sibylla rediscovered the beauty of her homeland. The weather was just magnificent and it promised to be a beautiful vacation. Sibylla was yearning for peace and quiet.

Strolling through the harbor, she heard the waves beating against the dock and the sound of the gulls overhead. The summer sky was dappled with beautiful white clouds. She rented a small car and packed it carefully and then headed out of town.

It was a pleasure, once again, to be able to speak her mother tongue. She had not been able to do for a very long time. Only rarely would one of her clients be from Sweden.

The cottage she had rented was located on the seacoast. Its rustic decor was just perfect. At first she wanted to turn on the radio but sensed that music would disturb her. Then she made something to eat and afterwards decided to take a stroll. Slowly she felt the ten-

sions of past days and months leaving her.

The solitude by the still waters of the Baltic Sea was something very special. Now she was finally relaxing. At sunset the clouds were bright red over the sea. She sat on a large stone in the water. She had changed into a pair of jeans and an old baggy pullover. She then put her elbows on her knees and buried her face in her hands, her long blond hair falling forward. Now Sibylla was deep in thought, with only the sound of the surf surging against the rocks.

"Excuse me, may I speak to you?" Someone was speaking Swedish with a Danish accent. "You remind me of someone I once knew."

Sibylla had not yet turned in the speaker's direction. She knew exactly whose voice it was. It was Lars, but what was he doing here? She didn't want to turn around and face him. The past suddenly came rushing back to her.

"You don't want to be disturbed," came the voice behind her.

"I'm very sorry, please forgive me." Slowly she turned to face him.

"Sibylla," cried Lars. "My God, Sibylla, what are you doing here?"

"Vacation," she replied, with a

childish laugh. "I'm on vacation. Are you?"

"Me too. I just arrived a short time ago. I rented a log cabin."

"What a coincidence, Lars. I've rented a place, too."

"I managed to get a position in one of the Chancellery offices in Stockholm. It's closed this week, so I thought of taking a short vacation before I start. My original plan was to go over to the Lolland Island, but I landed up coming here. Why, I don't know. Was it coincidence, Sibylla?"

She shrugged her shoulders and stood there with her thumbs in her pockets.

"I don't really know, Lars. After all, we haven't seen each other now for a very long time."

"Yes, a very long time," he replied slowly and wistfully. "The last time was when you came out of the bar and drove away. Are you still working at the same bar?"

She smiled. If she was to tell him everything that had happened over the past few years, he wouldn't believe her.

"What do you want to hear, the truth or lies?"

"The truth."

"We have built a chain," she said. "We're the owners of six bars in St. Pauli."

"That's impossible."

"Yes, Lars, I have become very rich."

"And that guy Stollbach? Are you still together with him?"

She stood before Lars and observed the look on his face.

"We're business partners, Lars. Now and then things happen, you know. But there is nothing to it. I believe there was never any real love between us. Yes, I did succeed in business with him, but true love has always been something very special and sacred to me. Something that one can really believe in."

"You once spoke of love as something captivating, Sibylla."

"That's a long time ago," she replied. "Besides, I was young then."

"You are still young."

"No," she exclaimed, trying to be honest about it. "I am a few years older now and more experienced. Experience makes one older, Lars. Yet we all need someone, if you know what I'm trying to say."

She spoke with him as if he was her best friend. Sibylla was very composed and relaxed. She told Lars everything he wanted to know, even though the topic of prostitution bothered him. After a leisurely stroll along the beach, they arrived at Sibylla's cottage.

"I'm staying over there," he

said, pointing to a cabin in the distance.

"So we are neighbors for a few days." A mischievous twinkle appeared in Sibylla's eyes.

"Couldn't we continue our conversation sometime soon?"

"Why not? Come over to my cottage in a hour and I'll make you some real Swedish punch."

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Sibylla laid the table with great care and pleasure. She felt such warmth, but did not understand why. The bitterness that she once had for Lars was gone. It seemed so long ago and far away. Maybe she wanted to try and forget the horrible and nasty things that had happened to her over the years, but it hadn't been easy.

With growing impatience, she kept looking out the front window. Finally, there he was, striding up the path. He was a picture of strength and masculinity. His figure was a giant shadow and above was an ocean of stars.

"That looks beautiful," Lars said. On the table was a storm lantern and a large punch bowl.

"So, come right in," she begged. Her hair was gorgeous, like a model in a fashion magazine. At this moment she looked

like a young girl, radiating beauty and innocence. Soon Sibylla and Lars were carried away by their conversation. Things that had nearly been forgotten seemed to surface. They laughed a lot, enjoying each other's company. But the memories could be painful too and sometimes Sibylla was on the verge of tears. It was a marvellous evening.

"You know what Sibylla?" Lars said. "I know it might sound sentimental, but I just have to tell you because there may never be another opportunity. I don't know if we'll ever see each other again."

"Then say it, for God's sake!"

He reached for her hand.

"I am still in love with you, Sibylla."

"You know, sometimes one doesn't realize how much a man is worth until it's too late."

He drew himself close to her.

"Do you really believe it's too late?" he said in anguish.

Sibylla realized that the tone of his voice was one she had never heard before.

"I don't know," she whispered.

Suddenly she felt his lips on hers. It was just like it used to be. Love gushed through her. His caresses were those that she longed for and for years had missed. Richard had never shown

her love like this. With the other men it was just a service and a game.

They spent the night together. It was the most wonderful night of her life. However, Sibylla awoke terrified that she would lose all of this.

"You know, Lars," she explained the following morning, "I'm going back to Hamburg and take care of my side of the business."

"What are you going to do, Sibylla?"

"I'm going to get out. I'm going to take my share of the money from the business and come back home to Stockholm. That is if you will still want me?"

"Sibylla! Is this really true?" He wondered how such a heavenly thing could happen.

"Yes, Lars, I really mean it. The time has come for me to leave that way of life. You said it wasn't too late. I don't want the day to come when it is too late for both of us."

"Sibylla, I won't try to put any pressure on you. You yourself must make the decision."

She smiled, knowing that there was tremendous strength from within, a strength which she could now rely on.

"You'll have to help me a little, Lars."

"Will you tell Stollbach about us, Sibylla?"

She paused and thought a while.

"Yes, I'll do that. I don't think Richie ever really loved me. He was just happy I was around. Otherwise, he would still be stuck at The Lexicon."

"Then he might not let you go Sibylla."

"No?" she replied. "What can he do to me? He will have his cut and I will get mine. He'll just have to get along without me. He'll have no choice for I don't want it anymore. Why should I stay with him? He doesn't care for me. I live in a golden cage, Lars. I have started to hate the villa in Ahrensburg these past few months. I've always wished for luxury, but this kind slowly gets on your nerves and becomes unbearable. There's nothing human about it at all. Your goals start to drift away and there is nothing you can do to get them back."

He sensed that she was crying out for help.

"I wish you strength, Sibylla. You're really going to need it."

"I have already gained much strength from being here, Lars. I swear, I'm going to get out of this mess."

"Will you be leaving right

away?"

"No. I want to stay with you a few days more. Maybe..."

She suddenly stopped.

Lars grew worried.

"Maybe you won't be able to do it. That's what you wanted to say, right Sibylla?"

Shaking her head violently, she wailed, "No! It's not that. We must enjoy it while it lasts. Nothing lasts forever. Moments like these will never come again. Let's just go on as if it's going to be the last time. I'll leave sometime next week."

Lars tried to understand.

During the next few days she lived in her dreams. When she returned to Stockholm to do some shopping, she called Hamburg. She reached Anita Hollberg, a high-class prostitute. Often, Sibylla would rely upon Anita to manage her interests in the business.

"Well, Anita, how are things going there?"

"God, Sibylla, you've to get back here right away! I'm afraid that Richie is about to do something awful."

Sibylla turned pale.

"What's he doing wrong now?"

"He wants to sell The Jamaica."

"What? Has he gone crazy or something? The Jamaica is the best horse in our stable. Why

would he want to do that?"

"Why? One of his deals went tits up the other day. Now his partner or partners won't let him off the hook. He needs money badly. That's why he wants to sell."

Sibylla began to fear for her wealth.

When she returned to the beach, she became panic-stricken. She couldn't find Lars anywhere. There was no time for her to go looking for him. She felt that she had to get back to Hamburg because she feared the worst. In the meantime, she scratched a few words on a piece of paper, letting Lars know she would call him at the Chancellery in Stockholm. She asked him to return her key to the rental office. All that mattered to her now was for her to get to the bottom of things.

Hastily, she threw her luggage into the car, jumped in and drove away. At the airport, she was in luck for the plane to Hamburg was just preparing to leave. Unfortunately, it would not be a direct flight. Instead, she had to take a flight to Frankfurt and from there, a connecting flight to Hamburg. As she boarded the aircraft she became very nervous and uncomfortable.

On her arrival in Frankfurt she called Hamburg. Anita once again

answered the phone.

"How is the situation there now, Anita? I'm in Frankfurt and should arrive in Hamburg at eight. I'll take a cab directly to the office."

"They've arrested Richie."

"What?"

"Yes, I couldn't find out why he was picked up. Do you think that these people he has been dealing with have something to do with it?"

After she hung up the receiver, Sibylla buried her face in her hands. At this moment she forgot about Lars. He seemed so far away, just like before.

She arrived on schedule in Hamburg. She tried desperately to remember everything that had happened. She knew many people with influence, but they, too, had to draw the line somewhere.

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Hastily Sibylla climbed the stairs at the rear of The Jamaica to her office. As she entered, Anita stood up, looking frazzled.

"What happened?"

"Richie was in Ahrensburg this morning. Then he phoned me and told me that I should contact the lawyer, Ostermeier."

"Did you get hold of him?"

"Yes. He said he would attend

to the matter right away."

"I'll give him a call."

Sibylla was now burning with anger. What if they can prove Richie guilty? Would she also be in danger?

Sibylla managed to reach Ostermeier.

"What's this all about?" she demanded.

"Someone has betrayed Stollbach. They believe they have concrete evidence that he is dealing in narcotics."

"Absolute nonsense!"

"Really, Miss Lundstrom? I'll have to find out who is heading the investigation and who ordered that he be arrested. I will have to go to the jail immediately. First, he will be seen by the prosecutor's office. They will inform him of the exact charges against him."

"I will take care of things here, Ostermeier."

She then informed Anita that there were important matters that had to be taken care of and left for Ahrensburg. When she got home, she poured a double cognac and went to the telephone. She pulled her small black diary from her purse. It was her most valuable possession. Inside were the names and telephone numbers of many wealthy and influential people. She dialled a number.

"Hello Pit," she said very mat-

ter-of-factly.

"Sibylla," cried the male voice on the other end. "I've been trying to reach you, I want to make an appointment and get together with you."

"Richie's been arrested!"

"What did you say?"

"Yes, some idiot is trying to frame him. They talk of proof, I would like to know what proof they've got. You must know about it, don't you?"

"Sibylla, I am afraid there is not much I can do."

"It can't take that much to get him home by this evening, eh Pit?"

"Are you crazy? I can't do that. If anyone..."

"If you want to you can do anything and everything. You know, Pit, that you have always been wonderful to me and you have paid me well. It's nothing for you because it wouldn't be the first time you interfered."

"I'll see what I can do."

"I hope so. I'm sure you'll find a way to show that there is not enough evidence to convict Richie."

"But I..."

"Do it Pit," said Sibylla icily. "Do it Pit, or I shall have to resort to other, more drastic measures. I hope we understand one another?"

"I understand you perfectly, Sibylla."

"And something else," she exclaimed. "No one is to get any ideas about trying to boot me out. This must not fail, understand? Everything is written down and locked away. Believe me, Pit. I could break loose a scandal the like of which this city has never seen. And many heads would roll. So it all depends on how you play along. All I want is Richie back home again by this evening."

Later on that same day, a happy smiling man strode into the villa in Ahrensburg.

"Everything was a mistake," he exclaimed. "It's wonderful, though, that you came back right away, Sibylla."

As his lips brushed the side of her face, Sibylla thought only of Lars.

He behaved as if he really didn't know that it was Sibylla who had managed his release. It was of course, through her connections in high places that he was now free. Obviously, it was not done legally, but Sibylla knew that not much was.

"Didn't they tell you anything else, Richard?"

"No, nothing else. I would like a drink. Would you make me one, Sibylla?"

"Mix your own drinks."

"Hey, what's that tone of voice, Sibylla?"

"I didn't return to Hamburg just because of you."

"No?"

"No. You are not that important to me. I returned because of something entirely different."

"Why then?"

"Because I have learned that you want to sell The Jamaica."

"Yeah, and?"

"Yeah, and," she said screaming at him, "that's our best bar."

"Exactly. I need the money."

"Why? Because of your own dumb luck in your crummy deals. That's not what our limited company is there for, you know."

"Are you trying to give me orders, Sibylla?"

For the very first time she sensed that he was threatening to invade her own turf. Yet she was determined to stand firm.

"Yes, I am dictating to you. After all, it is my business as well as yours. And it is only right that any changes be discussed first. The Jamaica will not be sold. You'll just have to get your money from some other source. Maybe you can get some of the money back which you cheated me out of."

"What the hell did you say, Sibylla? Listen here..."

"No, you listen to me, Richie.

I'm going to say just one more thing to you. I've been to heaven and back this past while. After putting up with hell all these years, I have decided to get out of here and everything else!"

"What?" he looked lost and totally bewildered. "Are you about to throw in the towel?"

"That has nothing to do with it. Have I not earned enough, Richie? My fortune is enough for me, besides I can make a lot more if I so desire, anytime. It's just that I want to get out of this business and away from St. Pauli."

"Ha! Ha! You Sibylla, of all people?"

"Yes me," she replied. "I have done this for a very long time now, and everything else that goes with it, you know I've managed to get us to the top. And I can go even higher if I so choose. You, Richie, are on your way down. You've become very careless and irresponsible. When it comes to your private life, I really don't care. But when it comes to money, and money which belongs to the both of us, then I can't and won't play your games."

He placed his drink on the table and brought his fingertips together.

"Is there another man?" he asked Sibylla. "Only another man could have put these silly ideas

into your head."

"That's not true," she said quietly. "The idea is my own, but if you're interested, then I'll be honest with you. A man does exist. But I beg of you not to scream at me when I tell you his name. It's Lars Rerup."

Stollbach burst out laughing.

"With such an idiot. Only a woman like you could fall for that. You tried to find your old long-lost love. Do you really believe that it was that great?"

"Do you really think that I was that madly in love with you, Richie? You sleep with one girl today and another one tomorrow. Do you think that I'm not aware of your little affairs? I have known for a long time, and that's why I don't give a damn about you anymore."

"Listen here, Sibylla. You also ended up on the mat with many a man, is that not so?"

She looked at him in disgust.

"That's right," she replied. "But there is quite a difference. I didn't do it for nothing. You're the opposite. If you wanted whores, Richie, you paid for them. And you are still paying for them. Men like that, in my eyes, are pitiful."

"Then aren't your clients pitiful?"

"In many ways they are," she said, knocking the ash from her

cigarette. "I receive money for my services and think nothing of it. But why am I discussing this with you? The main point of our discussion was to find out the truth, and for me to get the hell out of this business."

She noticed that he was sweating and becoming more uptight and nervous.

"So my dear Richie, you should now be thinking of how you are going to release me from my side of the business."

"How can I possibly do that when my own things have gone sour?"

"That's not my fault," she calmly replied. "I always warned you not to get mixed up with that. You're just too small for all that."

"You think so, eh Sibylla?" Clearly, she had struck a nerve. He approached her, squinting, with a wild, piercing glare. "Be very careful, Sibylla, be very careful about that".

"Richie, you have no reason to threaten me. In fact, I should be threatening you because I got you out of that hole you were in. If it wasn't for me, and if someone had not destroyed all of the evidence, you would still be there."

"That was you who intervened?"

Sibylla did not say a word, instead she lit another cigarette.

"Console yourself," replied Sibylla. "I didn't do it because of what you are, or your worthless love. I did it because there was a great chance of me losing more money. You've got to realize that we're going to be up to our necks with taxes, and that is something I must try and ward off. I'll take care of that, then I'm going to take my cut from the business and disappear. From that moment on, the business will be all yours to do with as you please. You may, if you wish, get rid of the bars. Blow the money on drugs, I don't care. And I hope you get what is coming to you!"

As she turned to go upstairs, he grabbed her by the wrist.

"Listen here," growled Richard. "You shouldn't try to play the big madam here. One word in the right place and you..."

"And you'll be right back in the slammer." Throwing her head back, Sibylla broke away and rushed upstairs.

Stollbach stood there like a loser after their shouting match had ended.

*

During the next few days an ice-cold atmosphere existed between them. They were just like cat and dog, although when

they talked about their business they were civil to each other.

Sibylla was now aware that Stollbach had done much more than just cheat her. She had decided to repay him the very same way. Sometimes she would take part of the day's take and it would simply disappear. She adjusted the figures in the books so that he wouldn't know the difference. It would be nearly impossible for him to control the receipts. She fiddled with the books of The Jamaica the most because that's where most of their income came from.

"I have to talk to you. It's about the sale of the Jamaica," he said.

"Please," she said very calmly.

"Here, look at this, the balance sheets for the last three weeks. The Jamaica has taken in fifty percent less than before."

Sibylla smiled inwardly, because it was this fifty percent that she had put into her own pocket, and a little more, because Stollbach did not know what the actual profits were.

"Everything is so weird. It seems all our purchases have gone up, Sibylla. How do you explain that?"

"Obviously, someone has short-changed us."

"That's right, Sibylla. Maybe we did not have enough control

over everything."

"Then buy me out."

"I'm waiting for a consignment from Amsterdam. I need cash for this."

"I really don't give a damn," she replied in exactly the same manner as she had done when they first discussed the breakup. "You are not going to take one red cent out of the business. Otherwise, I'll make sure that your dealings will come to a quick end. Also, I'd like to point out that I have never seen a penny from your profits. Our business is now at risk and you've got nothing to show for your end of it."

"I'm not going to be dictated to by you and furthermore I'm not going to spoil my chances while I can still sell out."

"Think whatever you like and do what you have to," she replied. "Beg, borrow or steal the money, I don't care."

"Do you really think I'm your pet monkey? Just think back to the day when you were a student. You never had a decent pair of pants to cover your ass."

"I paid for them myself. You can't deny that. I sold my body. But you were so stupid, you couldn't even serve drinks properly. You probably drank your brains away, even then."

"You can't talk to me like that."

"Richie, without me you're nothing. When I'm gone you'll be an absolute nobody, wandering around St. Pauli and then you'll disappear. I'm going to see to that."

She grew tense, feeling that she had gone a little too far. Her face turned as white as a sheet.

Stollbach paused then backed off.

"It's all right," he said to her. "We'll find a way to get out of this fix. Will you be satisfied then?"

"Somewhat," she replied. "I just want it to be over and done with. My only wish is to wind things up and to be in Stockholm by next month."

"Maybe you'll be going sooner than you think."

Then he just turned away and left.

Sibylla wasn't sure what to think. What did he mean? Was it a threat?

A few days later Sibylla discovered something terrible. Stollbach met one of his business partners in the office above the Jamaica. The office door was open and she overheard Stollbach's voice distinctly mentioning her name.

"Sibylla's a threat to us all. She can ruin everything for us. I need more money to keep our operations going. But as long as she's

around, I can't move an inch."

Holding her breath, she stood there frozen with shock.

"What have you got in mind, Richard?" asked someone with an Italian accent. Sibylla had the distinct feeling Richard was dealing with the Mafia. Only recently she had warned Stollbach not to get involved with these people and their organization. But then again he just wouldn't listen. In this last while he always did what he wanted.

"Sibylla's got to go," Stollbach said. "She must never be seen again. We have an inheritance contract on both sides. When Sibylla's out of the way forever, everything will be mine and I will have a free hand to do as I please, understand? But there is one small problem."

"And this being?"

"I can't do it."

"Why, are you too gutless?"

"No, Mario, I can't afford to be directly involved. I must have a solid alibi, so someone else has to do it."

"No problem. I'll do it myself."

"I have already put a plan together."

Once again Sibylla was shocked. Stollbach had already planned out her murder.

"Fridays, Sibylla has an appointment at the beauty salon. It's

on Monkeberg Street. She goes in at eleven and is always finished by three. The salon is in a department store. There are a lot of doors."

"You mean that she's going to be cut down on the street?"

"That's exactly what I mean. There would be so much confusion there at the time, that you could clear out very easily without being seen. I was there last Friday and I know that it'll be a snap. A gun with a silencer ought to do the job just as she comes out. You better not miss. You won't get a second chance. A car will be waiting at one of the side exits."

"Not a bad plan, Richard, not bad at all. All I have to do is get close enough for one shot and your Sibylla will fall like she fainted."

"Until someone sees the blood, Mario."

"So what? By that time I'll be long gone. But what about doing it in Ahrensburg instead?"

"No. Impossible."

"When then?"

"Hmm, today is Thursday," replied Stollbach. "OK, Mario, tomorrow morning I'll call you as soon as Sibylla leaves Ahrensburg. She always drives her red Porsche and puts it in the indoor parking."

"Why not there then?"

"Too risky. It's not crowded enough. Something could go wrong. There would only be a few people coming and going from their cars. No, it's got to happen outside the salon."

Later on at home, Sibylla was so frightened and confused that she didn't know what to say or do. She could only think of what Stollbach had agreed to let happen to her. Could it be avoided? If she didn't go to her hairdresser, then he would only make it another time and place.

Escape, she thought suddenly. You have to get away, out of Hamburg, as quickly as possible without anyone seeing or knowing.

Sibylla took advantage of the time she had left to rearrange her finances. She had an account in a bank in Switzerland, where, from time to time, she would transfer funds from Hamburg. Richie knew nothing about this.

No matter what she was doing or thinking, the fact remained that the man with whom she had built up her business with, was now trying to murder her in cold blood. He must not succeed!

When Richie returned home that night, Sibylla was relaxing in the living room. She was wearing a negligee.

"Hi. Would you like me to mix you a drink, Richie?"

"No. I have to go out again. By the way, are you going to the salon tomorrow?"

Sibylla played along.

"Why? You've never asked about my salon appointments before?"

"Well, I was at Seibert & Co. recently and had a custom-made leather jacket ordered. I thought that if you were in the area, you would pick it up for me. It's close to your salon."

"Don't worry," said Sibylla. "After I'm through, I'll pick up your jacket. I'll do everything as you thought I would Richie."

"That's a strange thing to say, Sibylla."

"Let's forget this silly argument. And maybe, you should take some money to get started again."

"Do you mean that? Honestly?"

She winked.

She was now trying to pacify him, although she knew it would not change his plans to have her murdered. She wanted him to get the feeling that she felt secure, and that he should not suspect or mistrust her. One thing was certain. Sibylla would not go to the beauty salon. She would drive her Porsche to the indoor parking garage, and then disappear into

the crowd. From there she would take a taxi to the airport. But it would not be a flight to Stockholm. Instead, she was going to Geneva. There she would rest up for a few days and look after her financial affairs with her bank. She had planned out everything, even the papers and documents about Stollbach's drug dealing. They were to be her insurance in case of an emergency.

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Sibylla left her home on time the next morning. She knew that immediately after her departure, Richie would be on the phone to his Italian friend. She knew that the time bomb had started to tick.

As Sibylla arrived at the parking garage, she noticed two men on the other side of the street. They looked at her suspiciously.

Now she had to show up at the salon. Somehow she had to slip by them. Then it came to her in a flash.

Sibylla entered the salon and was greeted warmly by the whole staff. She was a valuable customer who tipped extraordinarily well. After all, this was one of the city's most expensive salons.

"Please take a seat here, Miss Lundstrom," said her regular hair-

dresser.

"You'll have to excuse me for a few moments," replied Sibylla.

"But of course, Miss Lundstrom."

Sibylla then left for the powder room. A window was located conveniently at the rear of the salon and shopping mall. Sibylla opened the window and crawled through it. On the outside she found herself by one of the main entrances parallel to Monkeberg Street. Directly across the way stood a taxi stand. She ran to one of the cabs, got in and then directed the driver to take her to the airport. By the time Sibylla would be missed at the salon, she would be far above the clouds.

Whatever Stollbach was thinking at this moment, Sibylla no longer cared. It happened exactly as Sibylla had imagined.

She looked at her watch. It was just before one o'clock. By this time she should have been shot. Yet now she was comfortable and relaxed, sitting back in her seat.

"May I offer you something?" asked the stewardess.

"Yes please. Bourbon with ginger ale."

Sibylla sat and enjoyed her drink and thought about how Stollbach would react.

He was furious. Shortly after one-thirty, Stollbach called his

Italian friend.

"Did everything go according to plan?"

"She must have spotted them or else she smelled a rat."

"What did you say?" Stollbach was so angry that his shirt collar began choking him. "How can that be?"

"We kept an eye on her," replied Mario. "She parked her car exactly as you said she would, then she went into the salon. The only thing is that she never came out."

"That's impossible," Stollbach hissed, grinding his teeth.

"We went into the salon and asked around. This Lundstrom woman must have gone through the window in the powder room. The hairdresser said that after awhile, they went to look for her, thinking that she wasn't feeling well. They found the window open."

"How is that possible?"

"I've got a hunch that when we were in the office yesterday discussing the plan, Sibylla must have overheard us. That old bitch knew. Where are the ownership papers you mentioned?"

"One minute," yelled Richard and scrambled up to a small wall safe in Sibylla's room. Richard found it empty.

He battered the wall with his

fists and cursed, "You piece of shit. You goddamn piece of shit."

*

Sibylla disembarked from her flight to Geneva. She now felt free and secure, but she wanted Richie to know that she wanted to meet with him, so that this whole matter would be explained, and that he would and should not be a threat to her any longer. She wanted peace and quiet, but did not anticipate that such concession could be a great mistake.

Sibylla checked into one of the most expensive hotels on Lake Geneva. Then she ordered champagne to her room and celebrated alone.

She reached for the telephone, paused then reconsidered. Eventually she dialled the number to the Ahrensburg. It rang for a long time before it was answered.

"Hello." Stollbach sounded hoarse and delirious.

"Hello my darling."

"Sibylla!" he screamed. "Sibylla, where have you been hiding?"

"Do you think I'm stupid enough to tell you that, when all you wanted was to have me killed. You made a terrible mistake, Richie."

"That wasn't meant to be serious."

"Well it was for me, understand? And if things had not been like they turned out, then I'd now be stone dead. All I want is for you to leave me alone and just let me have some peace. And Richie, if you do not do as I ask, then you're going to be sorry for everything you've ever done. I have things on you which I have collected for years."

"You're crazy," he snarled. "No matter what you do or where you go, Sibylla, you have really shit on me and you can't escape me. I will find you wherever you go. I suppose you'll go to Stockholm so you can be in the arms of your lover?"

"That's right," Sibylla replied, without realizing that she might be putting Lars in some kind of danger. "Is your reach long enough to touch even Sweden?" she went on, daring him.

"You're so wrong. I will leave you alone, Sibylla. Don't worry."

She knew he was lying. She also realized then that it had been very stupid of her to phone him and tell him that she was totally aware of his murder plans. He could now be sure that she was still a great threat to him. As long as she was alive, he would stalk her until the day came to silence

her forever.

Sibylla still had the receiver in her hand, long after Stollbach had hung up.

Then out of sheer panic she tried to reach Lars in Stockholm. But he was not available.

"Please take down a number for him," she told his secretary. "Mr. Rerup must call me the minute he gets back."

"But Mr. Rerup is in Falun. He had an appointment there and I don't know when he's getting back."

"Never mind. Whenever he comes back he should call me. It's a matter of life and death. Could you call him in Falun?"

"I will do my best, Miss Lundstrom."

"Thank you." Sibylla put the receiver down.

What was the matter with her all of a sudden? What was she doing? She had always been level-headed and thought through everything she would say and do. Now she was so frantic that she not only told Stollbach what she knew about his plans, she had even told him that Lars was working in the Chancellery. At this moment, she didn't know that Stollbach was in fact reaching out to Stockholm.

Late that evening Lars did return her call. He sounded very

upset.

"Sibylla, you've got to get out of there, right away."

"What's happening?" she asked, becoming more frightened.

"Stollbach has sent his hit men here to Stockholm. They were in the Chancellery and Miss Bergmann gave them a piece of paper with your address on it. She had to do it because they threatened her. I am still in Falun and I can't leave yet. Sibylla, get to a safe place. They are, by now, on their way to you. Go to the police."

"I can't do that! Under the circumstances, they would never believe me."

"But you have all the evidence on Stollbach," said Lars.

"That's right," she answered. "But part of it also involves me. God, what am I going to do? Maybe I can go to France."

"Listen Sibylla, I'll give you a telephone number of an elderly lady who can be trusted. No one knows her. Call her as soon as you have made your plans."

"There are no night flights."

"Then you can leave in the morning, Sibylla. Now for God's sake, get out of there."

"It's all right, Lars," Sibylla said, upset and now in tears. "I'll find a way out. It may be some time until we see each other again. I miss you tremendously,

Lars."

"I miss you too. Now, please, get going."

Then the line went dead. Sibylla looked as if she had seen a ghost. She drank the rest of her champagne and began packing her things.

"I am very sorry," she told the front desk clerk. "But I must leave immediately."

"There was a call about you earlier."

"For me?"

"No, not directly. Someone was asking whether or not you had checked in here. We confirmed this and the party excused themselves and hung up."

Sibylla felt an ice-cold tremor throughout her body. She knew Stollbach and his people were closing in on her.

"Listen to me. Do you know of another hotel around here which is very quiet?"

"I could get you a room at our sister hotel, La Maison del Monte. Would you like me to make a reservation?"

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Sibylla didn't check into the La Maison del Monte.

Instead, she checked into a small bed and breakfast house at

the other end of town. She registered under a false name and changed her appearance. She went to a beauty salon and had her long blond hair and eyebrows dyed dark. Then she bought a pair of dark sunglasses, which she wore all the time.

The owner of the hotel didn't recognize Sibylla at first.

"Something new for a change?" she told Sibylla sarcastically.

But the different makeup didn't bother the old woman. The main thing was that her guests paid. Also, because Sibylla's German was accentless, this enabled her to check in under a false name, Daniela Bergen.

Sibylla called Sweden and left her new address for Lars, but he never called back. Something must have happened.

Then came the event that would be Sibylla's opportunity.

It had started to rain. It was miserable, foggy weather. Sibylla wore a trenchcoat and a scarf. There was much for her to think about. In her handbag was the evidence on Stollbach. She had it with her just in case someone was going through her room.

Sibylla became aware of a crowd of people standing at the waterfront, watching a diver at work.

"What's going on here?" she

asked aloud.

"A young girl was shot," replied an elderly woman. "She was a blonde."

Sibylla felt shivers run down her back.

"When?"

"Not too long ago," said the same old woman. "I was sitting on that bench over there and saw her walking along the dock. Suddenly, two men came over from the parking lot. I didn't hear the shot. I only saw her fall into the water. Then the men put their guns away and ran off that way." She pointed to an alley.

Sibylla started to break out in a sweat. Was it possible that the bullet was meant for her?

"Did she have long blond hair?" asked Sibylla breathlessly.

"Are you from the police?"

"No, I'm just interested. It's awful isn't it?"

Sibylla felt terrible. She stepped on the spot where it had happened. A moment or two later, the diver surfaced pulling a corpse. They pulled her out of the water and laid her on the dock. The thick coat and dress had obviously pulled the girl under. She did have long, blond hair. As they turned her on her back, Sibylla became horrified. The young woman did look a lot like her, or was it something else? She didn't

know what to think.

It occurred to her that if she were dead, Stollbach wouldn't bother to pursue her anymore. She just had to fake her death.

"She wasn't carrying any identification," one of the police officers commented.

Taking one last look behind her, Sibylla noticed that the spectators were leaving. As soon as the diver left, she took her passport from her purse and threw it into the water.

She didn't realize what complications were to follow. She just wanted to protect herself from Stollbach and for him to think that he had succeeded. She watched her passport floating in the water unnoticed and knew as soon as it got soaked, it would sink.

"Monsieur," she called to one of the officers. "There is something floating in the water."

He glanced at it, nodded and removed it from the water. The officials compared the photo with the face of the dead woman and came to the conclusion that the victim was Sibylla Lundstrom.

Sibylla left confused by what had happened. In her room she waited impatiently for a call from Lars.

The following morning Sibylla bought a newspaper. She sighed

and shrugged her shoulders with relief.

"Swedish Citizen Murdered on Lake Geneva," said the headlines. She went on to read that the Swiss authorities had been looking for two suspects, one identified as Mario Paselli. Both were picked up at the Geneva airport.

Sibylla had a satisfied look on her face. She folded the newspaper and closed her eyes.

She was now free, officially dead. But she didn't know if Richard would be held responsible. In principle it was he who had murdered her. It was his misfortune to have mistaken someone else for her.

Two weeks passed and Sibylla hadn't heard from Lars or seen anything more in the papers about the murder.

Eventually she placed a call to Stockholm.

Lars was anxious to hear from her.

"I thought you were dead, Sibylla. That's why I didn't try to reach you. I wasn't sure what to do or how I could help you."

"No Lars, I'm not dead," said Sibylla with a chuckle. "Richie has fallen into his own trap. He had another girl murdered in my place. The idiot had this girl mistaken for me!"

Then he asked how she came to

change her identity. She told him about the passport.

"Are you crazy?" yelled Lars.

"How come?" replied Sibylla innocently.

"Now you have no identification papers. How will you be able to get out of Switzerland?"

She had never considered this. In her panic, her only thought had been the immediate circumstances.

"You're right, Lars," mumbled Sibylla. "How am I going to identify myself? I've even had my hair dyed and cut. No one would be able to recognize me. If you saw me, you would think I was a stranger."

"My God, Sibylla, how could you sink so low?"

"Was I supposed to die?" she wailed over the phone. "They were right on my trail. If I hadn't listened to your warning, then I'd be lying there instead of this stranger. You don't know how it was. For God's sake Lars, what am I going to do? Should I get false papers?"

"No, Sibylla. That would only make the situation worse. As a lawyer, I can't let you do that. There must be another way."

"You mean the only way out is the truth? If Richie hadn't been tripped up because of his gangster buddies and he knew that I was

still alive, then he would be after me. I haven't had any peace for a long time now, understand? I can't prove Richard had put a contract out on me. No one would believe that I ought to be dead. I want to live for a very long time, Lars. Please understand."

She heard him take a deep breath at the other end of the line.

"Try to be calm, Sibylla. I have to think of what can be done. At the moment I don't know. The situation is, of course, unfortunate. We'll have to stay in touch. I'll try to come to Switzerland. I think that by the beginning of next week I should have some free time."

"Oh yes, please," whispered Sibylla. "Don't leave me here alone, Lars. I need you more than I have ever needed you before."

"Stay calm, Sibylla. Avoid making any other mistakes so the authorities won't catch you. Where you are now is a very secure. As long as everyone thinks you are dead, no one will attempt anything. I will try to do everything I can for you, Sibylla, everything in my power."

"I have to thank you," she muttered, tired and holding back the tears. She herself didn't know what else to say.

It had been a long, long time since she had cried or anyone had

tried to reach out to her with real feelings of warmth.

Eventually, she thought back to her innermost feelings. The only wish she had in life was to find someone to love her.

*

The waiting was getting to her. Sibylla was contemplating leaving the place she was staying in. She felt like she was in limbo because of the uncertainty of her future. She had to concentrate on how things are going to be for her.

Then on the following Monday, Lars finally arrived. She simply choked up and fell into his arms sobbing.

"I am so happy that you are here, Lars. I'm afraid I've made so many mistakes. I don't know which way to go. I only wanted to protect myself."

"I know," he said, "but there are many things that have happened in the meantime that will change the course of events."

"What things?"

"Stollbach is dead."

"Dead?" asked Sibylla shakily. "B-but how?"

"Sit down. I will try and explain everything to you. Mario Paselli and his accomplice had incrimi-

nated him. They themselves didn't want to take the rap alone. A warrant for his arrest was issued for conspiracy to commit murder. It must have been too much for Stollbach. He must have been depressed."

"That's probably it. He was my puppet and it was my luck to let the strings fall out of my hands. Others then started to control Richie. It was the others who encouraged him to think about murdering me. How did he die anyway?"

"He committed suicide in his cell, Sibylla."

"Oh my God," she gasped, feeling shattered.

"Do you have sympathy for him?" replied Lars.

"No not sympathy, but somehow I feel at fault."

"You can't think about that now, Sibylla. You've got to think about your money."

"Money?"

"Yes, money. I remember when every second word from you was about money."

"I don't quite understand, Lars."

"Well, you had a partnership agreement with Stollbach. When they said you were dead and couldn't prove that he had anything to do with it, he got your share. He had already withdrawn

it from the accounts. Now Stollbach is dead and officially so are you. Now the state will get it all."

"My God," she exclaimed as she realized all of the implications and consequences. "That's terrible, all that money to the state."

"It's your decision how things should go."

"And how is my decision going to resolve anything? How am I going to be resurrected, Lars?"

"That's going to be difficult. How are we going to prove that you are Sibylla Lundstrom?"

"The woman who was shot was not cremated. The District Attorney's Office held everything back. It so happens that there are witnesses who can prove that I..."

"Oh stop it, Sibylla. Haven't you heard of Anastasia? She wanted to prove that she was the daughter of a Russian Czar. That also involved a lot of money, Sibylla. The state would try to prove that you are an imposter and a cheat."

"But I am not an imposter," she wailed in despair. "I am Sibylla Lundstrom, even with short, dark hair. That could be done anytime without changing a person completely. Don't you grasp all this Lars? You are my witness. You know exactly who I am."

"That alone is not enough. You have registered here under the name Daniela Bergen."

"But this Daniela Bergen doesn't exist," she said.

"You are mistaken," Lars replied. "I have also made inquiries here and this person does exist. In fact, she looks a lot like you do now. She dropped out of sight after a warrant was issued for her arrest because of her scams in several European countries."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Sibylla. "I must have picked this name up from reading a newspaper."

"Yes, that's it. Obviously something from your subconscious. You can't just drop Daniela Bergen's identity and try to claim the estate of Sibylla Lundstrom. This is just great. There you sit with no papers for either woman. And worse, it would not matter which name you pick. No one would believe you anyway."

Sibylla buried her face in her hands.

"Then I've lost everything," she whispered. "Under these circumstances, can I no longer exist as Daniela Bergen?"

"That's impossible. I told you before all this happened not to get a false ID. If you'd been caught, everything would've really been messed up. There aren't very

many opportunities to prove your identity, Sibylla."

"I could let my hair grow again," she said.

"We've got to get an awful lot of proof together. The only feasible way is to have the corpse identified that they fished out of the water."

"But how, Lars?"

"I don't know yet," he mumbled. "If she has already been cremated, then it will be too late."

"But I can't remain nameless. The money is not all that important anymore. Besides, I have quite a bit tucked away. I just want to be me once again. Is that too much to ask?"

"No, not really, Sibylla," Lars said, deep in thought. "I really don't know what else to do. If this doesn't work, I'll go crazy."

*

The following morning Lars rushed into her room. He was waving a newspaper around.

"Can you read French?" he asked.

"A little, but not very well."

"Please look at this. What does it say?"

"It's the body they fished out of the lake. There is also a photo of her."

"Are you positive?" he asked.

"Yes, it says the girl's real name is Suzanne Lorraine, and she comes from a bordertown in France. It also says she was vacationing here for a few days and had not called home as promised. She was last seen at the Hotel Belvedere where she was staying."

"My God, Sibylla. This might be our only chance. We must go to the police headquarters right away."

"Do you think we should?"

"Well, of course. She had relatives who can positively identify the body. She could not possibly look exactly like you."

"The resemblance was similar, however there must be other things which could determine the difference."

"OK then, let's go," said Lars, taking her hand.

They grabbed a taxi and headed for the police headquarters. They spoke with a detective called Sagon.

"A most remarkable story," he said. He put his hand behind his back and turned to look out a window. "So you maintain that you are Sibylla Lundstrom."

"I am Sibylla Lundstrom," she insisted.

"Now," Sagon replied with a sarcastic smile, "the looks of the

woman in the passport photo and that of yourself is quite different."

"I had my hair cut and dyed. I've already explained that to you and why I did it. They wanted to murder me. I realized then and there that I resembled the dead woman. If Sibylla Lundstrom was really dead then there wouldn't be any reason to pursue her anymore, right? I didn't realize what would come out of all this. I did it because I was scared to death, Monsieur Sagon. If the killers had realized their mistake then..."

"Pardon me, I must make a telephone call." He went into another room and returned a few minutes later. "I'm afraid to say, I have no good news for you. I was informed that the body of the dead woman is going to be cremated. The case is closed. We were able to determine that Miss Lundstrom had no relatives and..."

"You have to stop the cremation," cried Sibylla. "You must continue this investigation. I will prove to you that I really am Sibylla Lundstrom, and that this dead woman is Suzanne Lorraine."

"I will try to do what I can for you. In the meantime, make yourself available at all times and please, don't leave the country."

"How can I do that, seeing that

you have my passport?"

"At this moment, we haven't proved that you are Sibylla Lundstrom. We will, however, investigate further."

"Then please do it as quickly as possible," begged Sibylla. "Otherwise, I'll feel like I've been buried alive."

"You seem to have a peculiar sense of humor, Mademoiselle."

"It's not humor, Monsieur, it's just bitterness."

"They don't want to believe me." Sibylla said to Lars as they left the police station. "That's the feeling I have anyway."

"Try to calm yourself," said Lars, as he gently pulled her close to him. "You have to give them the chance to investigate. Now, don't you think we should go and eat something?" Lars asked, thinking that this might help Sibylla relax.

"I'm not really very hungry, but perhaps a good cup of coffee might do me some good."

"Let's go. In a few days, the world will look completely different. Then what will you do?"

With a sorrowful smile Sibylla looked at her lover.

"I am not yet ready to make any plans, Lars. Besides I think that for all the mistakes I've made in the past, I will now have to pay the price."

"Don't be so pessimistic," replied Lars. "All the excitement over the past few days has been just too much for you."

"Maybe you're right."

As they returned to the hotel, they were confronted by two detectives.

"Are you Daniela Bergen?" they asked her.

"No. My name is Sibylla Lundstrom."

"Well, no matter who you say you are, you are under arrest."

Sibylla was very surprised.

"I must object," cried Lars. "I am Miss Lundstrom's lawyer and..."

"Are you the accomplice of Daniela Bergen. She has been seen quite often in the company of someone like you. I'm sorry to say we must arrest you too."

He did not have any reason to think anything else. Lars knew that. After all, Sibylla did register in the hotel under a false name. This was now being investigated by the authorities. To the police it was obvious that this con artist was now trying to dip into the fortune of Sibylla Lundstrom.

Sibylla was interrogated at great length. What had happened to Lars, she didn't know. Sibylla now had the most horrible fears.

"Please, Messieurs, you must believe me. I am not the woman

you are looking for. I have nothing to do with Daniela Bergen."

They held a wanted photo in front of her. She was amazed at how alike they looked. It was as if they were twins.

"My hair is dyed," she screamed frantically.

"That is not something new to us," replied the officer. "You are a natural blonde, right? That we already know."

"Well then," she demanded. "Then that explains everything."

"Is that a confession?" the officer asked her.

"What do you mean a confession?" replied Sibylla, bewildered. Then she caught on that Daniela Bergen also dyed her hair. "Messieurs," she said in a sharp tone of voice. "You've forgotten one thing. You never took my fingerprints. If you had done that you would see that they are not those of Daniela Bergen, and realize you have the wrong person."

"Don't worry. You will come before the criminal investigation department soon enough."

Later on Sibylla was taken to be photographed and fingerprinted. Then she was taken downstairs to the cells.

It wasn't more than twenty minutes when the door of her cell opened and in walked Sagon. He

asked her to follow him. They went unescorted to his office. He asked her to take a seat.

"Now what!" Sibylla demanded.

"I'm afraid that we must apologize to you. It is regarding your case and not that of the wanted person."

"I have told you before, I am a Swedish subject and my name is Sibylla Lundstrom. Why do you try to make it harder for yourself? To think this is going on in a country known to be one of the most law-abiding in Europe!"

"Irrespective of that, it is my duty to be accountable for all that happens. The parents of Suzanne Lorraine are arriving today from France. And I just want to be very straightforward with you and show you the autopsy report. I hope you have the strength to read it. If there is anything wrong in the report, please tell me."

"I don't quite understand."

"Please read it."

Sibylla paused. She began to read then started to laugh.

"Why are you laughing, Mademoiselle?" asked Sagon, showing very little patience.

"But my teeth are not all mine. Two years ago I had a partial plate made in Hamburg."

"Can you remember the name and address of the dentist?"

"Of course I can. His name is Dr. Ulf Hansen. I can give you his address. He also had x-rays of my teeth and an impression. He would gladly tell you that he looks after my teeth, Monsieur."

Sibylla now felt more relaxed and confident than she had in weeks. And within herself she found a new peace. Then she saw a look of amazement cross Sagon's face.

"Well, if that's the way it is then..."

"That's exactly the way it is, Monsieur."

"Naturally we must check everything out, Mademoiselle. You are free to go back to your hotel."

"Can Mr. Rerup also be released?"

"Yes. I don't see any reason for holding you both any longer."

"How wonderful," Sibylla said sarcastically. She got up and went to the door. Sagon jumped up and quickly opened it for her.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle."

"Bonjour," replied Sibylla, haughtily.

Lars was already at their hotel when she arrived. She collapsed into his arms and let him caress her. Never before had her love for him been so strong. And never before was she so sure about him.

That night Sagon paid them a

visit. After a detailed explanation and an apology, he returned her passport.

"You seem quite exhausted, no?" he asked with a hollow laugh.

"Never mind," Sibylla replied lightly. "I'm going to the Swedish consulate and getting a new passport. Your country is fascinating, Monsieur. So very hospitable."

With a nod, Sagon turned and departed.

Sibylla burst out laughing.

"We're going to buy ourselves a beautiful home in Sweden," she said to Lars. "The hell with it. We will buy both the cottages so we can renew our love. We will have children, lots of children. I want to have at least ten."

"Then it's about time we got started," whispered Lars, kissing Sibylla and nearly taking her breath away.

THE END

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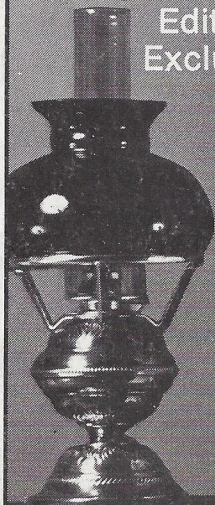
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