

*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 1*

First let's look at Mercedes' eyes. She is gazing up intently so we have a clear view of them, and for once she is not wearing her sunglasses. They are the most remarkable thing about her face; not because of their shape, size or distance from each other, which are all standard issue, but because they are a deep cornflower blue flecked with violet. A photograph of her with red eye from the flash is something to behold. At this moment her eyes are crossed comically because she is examining the tips of her hair, held up to the light and in contrast to the sky. This bad habit, in which she can be absorbed for hours, is to check for split ends, a plight she suffers from terribly, especially here with the relentless sunshine and sea salt. She surveys the handful, picks out some culprits and snaps off the ends. Then she scoops another fistful of the Earl Grey-coloured stuff and begins again.

Teta emerges from the beach-house, plops down on the sun lounger beside her and without missing a beat whacks Mercedes' hand so the hair falls.

"You told me to do that if you started that stupid habit again. It's infectious; I will also do it now even though my hair was cut last week by the best hairdresser on Wilshire."

"Too kind," Mercedes replies, crossing her arms over her broad chest. "What's going on in there?"

"Still dusting."

Through the doorway of the beach-house behind them the interior is shrouded in gloom but it is clear from the sound of low voices and other intermittent noises that there are people moving purposefully inside.

Squinting over lowered sunglasses, Teta starts to handle the tips of her hair in exactly the same way. Her eyes are pale and greenish and her hair is the colour of custard. Two figures lounging on a beautifully informal terrace, strewn with magazines, bottles of mineral water and swimming paraphernalia. Here they are, soaking up the late afternoon sun and humming to their ipods as the sea laps only a few meters away.

Normally, they would only be seen wearing expertly applied make-up and with immaculate hair, but now they have the bleak and unkempt look of most women in their natural state. They sometimes twist on their loungers to watch what is happening inside. Baking in the heat, they occasionally pass comment. Through the genteel chit-chat a subject develops, gradually becoming more focused until they are pulling out their headphones and sitting up, looking around the terrace in a determined manner. The taller one, Mercedes, enters the house and a few minutes later returns with a spiral bound pad of blank paper and a pencil case. They move to a nearby dining table and organize it into a work desk.

Both are now drawing, silently and with great concentration. After ten minutes they examine each other's results and Teta says:

"Is that how you draw?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you drawing in a certain style or is that how you draw?"

"I don't know what you mean... this is how I draw. It's not good or what?"

"No, it's not that. Is that how you mean to do it or is that just how it comes out?"

"I'm not sure..."

They are both sketching the same thing. Though their styles are noticeably different it is clear that what they are conjuring on the sheets is the same subject. We can see that Teta has had no formal training – actually has no idea at all how to draw. She has started and stopped, sipped water, taken new sheets of paper. She has changed the size of the face several times, finally settling on something small that hovers in the middle of the paper. Mercedes, on the other hand, has worked slowly on the same sheet, methodically marking out the symmetry line down the middle of the face, placing the levels for the eyes, the bottom of the nose and the centre of the lips. She has an eraser in one hand and constantly modifies the faint lines as she makes them. What emerges as her marks get darker and more precise is a long angular face with a glaring expression and a brush of dark spikey hair. It is a very masculine face, cruel, with a strong jaw and cheekbones, but it rests on an overly thin neck.

"I think his eyes are closer together, see, the way I have drawn him," says Teta.

"Mmm. What's hard to show is the colour of his skin. That's what makes his eyes glitter and his teeth shine out so much. They are very white aren't they? He hardly ever smiles."

Teta makes no response to this. She has stopped drawing, and is now sitting on her hands in a posture of defeat. Instead she makes quiet suggestions for improvements. Under her direction the taller woman corrects the eyes, adds eyelashes and shapely eyebrows, a cleft in the chin and a five o'clock shadow.

"You could make a skin tone by rubbing it with your finger."

"No, that's not allowed. They know he's an Arab anyway."

Mercedes puts down her pencil and turns to face Teta, confident from the success of her drawing. "You know I don't think I ever saw you talk or even look at him until the other evening. I'm surprised you know so much about his appearance."

Teta avoids the accusation by scrutinising the drawing as if it is a fascinating first edition lithograph. "What did Orran do for the skin then?"

"Orran never drew him."

"What? I don't believe it. I thought that he drew everyone."

"Not at all. It looks like that but he doesn't."

Teta thinks. "His drawing of me made me like him more. It made me feel special, as if he was the only one of you who cared about who I really am. You all just see the superstar. I could tell him things from the past I usually never speak about. Is that bad?"

"No. It's just drawing. He's not killing anyone. He always tries his best and that's what's important."

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Teta was not the only person who had enjoyed the attention and portraiture of Orran Kirby in that fateful week. He had been sketching Gustav Klem on the night Hannah's fate was sealed. That June night had had the last breezes before the airlessness of high summer had hit in earnest. We see Hannah turn off the busy main square and into the steep narrow path that is the start of the route up the volcano. She is in the same white tennis dress she had worn that afternoon for the knock-about in the grounds of the rehabilitation clinic with doctors Davda and Anselmo. Thinking of those quaint ladies she turns and surveys the bay below her: there was the beach-side clinic, with all the patients safely tucked up in bed already no doubt. *Those sagacious psychiatrists would not approve of where she was going now, that's for sure!* She turns off this path onto a smaller more secluded track, and as she approaches a modern gate she becomes cautious. She looks up the driveway lined with herbaceous borders at the anonymous villa, piecing together a map in her mind from the anecdotal information Mimmo has given her. Before we know it, she has silently scaled the gate, vaulted over and is walking up the path, keeping to its shadier corners. Her hem brushes against gelsomino and bougainvillea, and a courteous tabby cat lets her pass undisturbed.

The façade of the house is blank; the entrance is on another side. There are only a few small windows, but on top there is a roof terrace, with vines and creepers trailing over the parapet. As she approaches the building the faint sound of music can be made out, so the image has now acquired a soundtrack. Not that she realises it is music at first - it sounds more like a slowed-down fire alarm in the distance - but by the time she is close enough to touch the façade of the villa with her fingertips a melody has emerged. It is what can best be described as 'Haunted House' – the meandering, unfocused, echoey organ music assigned to anything spooky. She loves this sound, in combination with the breeze and the warm shadows cast by the artificially lit maritime pines. *No wonder Orran and Morgane would rather hang out up here than with us down there.* The low voices and clinking glasses that can be made out over the music suggest there is a small private party going on, not only on the terrace above, but in the courtyard that Mimmo had described to her. She presses her back and palms to the concrete surface of the building and edges towards the laughter and organ music. As she approaches a corner she can tell that people are very close, but hidden on the other side.

She is reminded of a family trip to Oslo, and the low-relief sculpture she saw on the façade of the town hall. There were three figures: on the side facing the bay were a man and woman holding hands, but the woman was reaching round the corner to stroke the hand of another man hidden from view. She always considered this a

confusingly racy motif for a civic building. But why did she feel so inclined to reminisce these last days? Perhaps it was because, a month shy of her seventeenth birthday, she was about to grow up, and childhood experiences were starting to take on greater meaning as thoughts and feelings started to loop round into new ones.

Pressed against the corner, Hannah can hear the conversation clearly enough now to know the speakers are talking fluent Mandarin. There is an outdoor shower beside her, and the tinted glass that encloses it reflects what is around the corner. Two European men stand in shorts and polo shirts. They are talking in this language to mask their discussion from the other house guests, who are dotted around a tidy courtyard edged with backlit foliage of aloe vera and agave. Some of the guests are watching a large video projection that she now realises is the source of the music. But these two men are talking business.

The glass surface of the shower cabin is perfect, so she has a mirror in which to examine the terrace. The people are middle-aged and dressed very simply, mostly seen in silhouette against the video projection, which looks like a computer game but is actually a CGI journey through a reconstruction of Pompeii. A cluster of people are approached by a stocky Middle Eastern man who serves drinks. *Could he be a friend of Shirhan?* A non-descript head near her nods vigorously, and she recognises this as one of the stock gestures of Orran. He is sitting close by with the Swiss banker Gustav Klem, the owner of the villa. Glasses of Aperol Spritz sit on the low table in front of them, next to some of Orran's conventional nude studies of Klem. Unlike the men with the impressive Mandarin, they are having a conversation she can understand.

"Holidays are a sore point," Orran sniffs.

"Oh?"

"I can never get away from the gallery."

"Hmm?"

"It's always so hectic."

"Uhuh."

"The new project, it's taking time to set up and all my cash is tied up in it. I'm expecting a lump sum pretty soon, but until then I'm at the grindstone. It's a strange way of conducting one's life isn't it, lurching from one situation to the next?" Orran laughs, trying to appear casual.

*Orran, the charming all-American autocrat* thinks Hannah. She knows where he expects that money from; the suspicions recently formed in her connective brain are confirmed.

"Believe it or not, but this is not what I would call a scintillating evening," Gustav eyes Orran intently. "Fancy a dip?"

"Mmm. Maybe." Orran fishes in his pocket for his iphone. After several Aperols he has dropped his guard, and has started to talk about his financial situation. But he has felt the pull of Hannah's mind, the sudden awareness of a probing consciousness lurking nearby. Using the phone's polished surface he sees her small white face reflected in the shower unit behind him. The expression in her eyes shocks

him. It was, he remembered later, as if she was playing some dangerous game. If there was anyone on this island more devious than him it was her; he has a presentiment of trouble.

His blank expression meets hers, but suddenly the white face disappears. A hairy hand has grabbed her bum and a leather-clad arm has hooked round her waist pulling her backwards. She giggles to disguise the tremor of fear running through her, hoping Mimmo won't expose her to Orran and the partygoers on the patio. But he won't, their affair is a secret. "Where have you been hiding?" She wriggles round. "I've been hiding," she whispers, and leads him away from the house down into the bushes.

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There. What do you think?" says Mercedes. Her drawing is complete.

"It's him. But the neck is too thin," Teta replies. Mercedes turns and waves to the man who has put his head out of the beach-house's doorway. He ducks under the police tape and approaches. He is of average height, very deeply tanned and wears a short-sleeved blue shirt and black trousers with a red stripe down the sides.

Mercedes proffers the sketchpad and speaks in an Italian that has the same boarding-school proficiency as her portraiture. "Here is a drawing, officer. We have no photographs of Sirhan, only this."

*"Grazi signorina. We will circulate it immediately."*

*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 2*

He looks nothing like the sinister caricature; the pathological killer with a rich glint of lunacy flashing in his eyes. No. His face may be angular but it is undersized, and his expression is not at all malicious. He gives off the impression of being a young man who moves forward through life one day at a time, without thinking very much about things; a bit like most people. He is small and delicate, not much more than a boy, perhaps aged between twenty and twenty-four. His skin is dark and luminous, burnished by centuries of prenatal sun. He is sweating profusely.

The Lipari police caught him trying to sneak onto a SNAV to Naples, not because of the drawing but because he was behaving suspiciously. Posters of a murderer had been pasted around the island with *Sirhan Nafisi: ricercato per omicidio* written underneath Mercedes' drawing. His stealthy creep had been in such contrast to the easy-going manner of the people around him on the pier as they lounged around waggling coloured plastic buckets and ice-creams that he had been easy to spot. Now, handcuffed to a wrought-iron garden chair, it looks like his prosaic forward progress has come to an ineluctable standstill.

"How come you're dressed like that?" Sophie asks him. He does not respond. He is being held at Gustav Klem's villa. The local police had phoned their contact Mimmo to ask if the investigations could be based there while the beach-house was checked for forensic evidence; the local police station was inadequate for so much activity. This evidence was being sporadically sent to the path lab in Messina. There are investigating officers from the local police, from Lipari and from the Messina police representing the district of Sicily.

There are more police swarming over the island now than there has ever been in its entire history. More were summoned because by coincidence there has been a break-in at Mimmo's sister Chiara's animal shelter. The Russian diplomat who has been a guest at the villa has vanished too, leaving behind a sick bulldog. No-one is suggesting that evil now suddenly prowls in every shadow on the island; it is more likely that a disjointed chain of misunderstandings has begun to unfold, each unfortunate incident occurring independently of the others. Even Hannah's death was surely nothing more than a stupid accident. The tourists are starting to make other plans, setting off for Panarea, Vulcano and Alicudi.

"Why is he dressed like that?" Sophie asks Chiara. Sophie has a vein pulsing in her forehead and she picks at a scab on her lip.

"*Quali sono questi vestiti?*" Chiara asks Sirhan.

"*La polizia mi ha dato questi vestiti di merda da indossare mentre si controllano miniera*" he replies in a flat tone.

"He says the police gave him these shit clothes while they examine his. They need to test them for evidence, and check his story..."

"What is his story?"

"He says actually nothing; just that he didn't do nothing."

Sirhan looks outlandish in the shiny day-glow tracksuit that has replaced the linen djellaba he usually wears. The male and female cops are milling around; so are occasional bath-robed house guests, none of whom seem to mind this interruption to their routine. The different social groups cross each other in front of Sirhan oblivious to each other, like sharks in a tank. A crate containing a sculpture, also day-glow coloured, is being unpacked in the middle of the courtyard and the Pompeii video is switched off. Gustav and his business partners lunch on the balcony above and survey the scene.

"Tell them to mind the sculpture!" somebody shouts down.

The sun is melting Sirhan's cranium. A few feet from him a woman has slipped off her robe and is using the recently installed smoked glass outdoor shower. Through its brown transparency you can see she is smirking. Chiara leads Sophie to a corner of the terrace.

"If she was killed on Friday, like they think, he could have done it. His friend Massoud is the housekeeper here. Massoud says he turned up early on Saturday morning, very upset about something... and the path outside is the one leading to the volcano, where she was found."

Several Lipari police arrive and approach the local officers standing by Sirhan. Sophie shifts uncomfortably, trying not very effectively to conceal a great deal of distress. Chiara cocks her head, listening. "I think they say that they found traces of Hannah's DNA on his clothes, and that the bruises on her throat match his hands. They even know that she was strangled by a left-handed person. *Allora*, it was him. *Incredibile!*"

"Did he tell Massoud anything?" Sophie looks even more distressed, as if she is camouflaging something that cannot be kept so for much longer. She fiddles compulsively with the strap of the video camera over her shoulder.

"He was crying, but wouldn't talk. He's been in Massoud's room watching television till Massoud told him there were wanted posters with his name under a drawing of Colonel Gaddafi all around the island."

Sophie stares at Chiara then at the cluster of officers gathered in the shade and then back at Chiara. She walks towards them, across the sun-soaked courtyard. She stops halfway, lingers by Sirhan, who looks at her with the same abject misery she saw on Friday evening. This time it is directly in her eyes and not mediated by the camera's lens. She turns back to Chiara. "Chiara! Will you translate for me?"

The two women approach the police. Sophie says she has something to show them and holds out her video camera. They cluster around the little fold-out monitor and she winds till she locates the spot she is looking for. The police go silent. Several turn around and look at Sirhan. Sirhan looks up at the minty sky, then at the paving stones; a drop of sweat lands on them. The police take the camera from Sophie's hands, talking volubly among themselves, starting to dial their mobile phones, waving

them in the air for reception. Sophie reaches for her camera as it disappears from view.

"Tell them I need the camera! For filming..." Chiara shakes her head. The police fire a barrage of questions at Sophie in incomprehensible Italian. Chiara says "Now it's evidence they say. And what will you film? They are taking it directly to the police station to show the detective interviewing Wim."

After some debate between Chiara and the police, Sirhan's handcuffs are removed and he calls for Massoud. Massoud comes over from the gate at the entrance to the property where he has been waiting to be beckoned; their packed bags are at his feet. Now Sirhan is a swishing blur of bright yellow. As he leaves the courtyard he turns to look angrily at Sophie, who sees him framed by the tall straight maritime pine trees. Then he is gone.



*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 3*

But let's go back a few days to when everyone arrived on Stromboli.

"So the drawings are from photographs?" Mimmo asks, nodding his head admiringly. Wim has removed his work from a leather portfolio and is starting to pin the drawings and watercolours on the walls of the beach-house's large salon, whose French windows lead to the terrace and the Mediterranean beyond. Mimmo met them at the port with a fleet of golf buggy taxis and now everyone is bustling around as they settle in. Sirhan is storing away their suitcases in the cupboard that takes up half of his tiny ground-floor living quarters along with the washing machine and a tall padlocked fridge.

"Yes. The first project was with fashion models. I'd hire them for a week and fly them to Africa for photo sessions. Then I met Mercedes, and through her Hannah, and I started using just them."

"Nice project." Mimmo looks at the drawings. "Where was the shoot for these ones?"

"Congo River."

"The worst part about Africa was that we didn't go out!" says Mercedes at Wim's side, running her hand through his tousled brown hair. "These few were by the beach in Benin," she says pointing with the other hand. "There was literally nothing to buy there. You know the police use bows and arrows in Benin?"

"We did some in Japan too." says Wim.

"I wanted to buy a bonsai tree, but they are so expensive. I don't know about travel. When you think about it, if you've met one person you've basically met everyone," says Mercedes.

"Wim, there's no wifi here." Teta is staring unhappily at her tablet.

"We hope to install it soon; next time you come it will be on," says Mimmo.

"And we shot in Venice, in a graveyard. Venice is a bit like Bruges..." (If Mercedes' brain was a room, one would be forever banging one's shins on the bulky, useless furniture that clutters every corner.)

Teta goes to her room. Morgane joins the group watching Wim hang his pieces of paper haphazardly all over the walls. She says: "The location is very important for his work Mimmo ... the explicitly exotic ... the adventurism of the nineteenth century. He's like Gauguin ... or Rousseau."

"*Si si*. Very nice." Mimmo eyes Hannah standing in the doorway scrutinizing the coastline. With her short hair, she reminds him of a little slave boy.

Orran joins them. He looks fresh and handsome after a shower that has washed away the five-hour ferry ride. He knows everyone except Teta and Sophie, who have both been hired specifically for the filming. The other women had all been at Wim's opening at Xavier Greengrove, the New York Gallery for whom he has been the

assistant manager for just under a year (branches also in Shanghai and Berlin; Dubai space opening winter 2013). He had never met Mimmo before, but they had corresponded over the rental agreement and travel arrangements as Greengrove gallery was co-producing the film. Mimmo is the caretaker of several holiday properties on the island, a native recently returned after years living in Columbia.

Sirhan brings them a tray of watermelon juice with crushed ice and mint. Morgane calls the group to gather round and raises her glass to propose a toast. "Ahh, every day is a new and exciting day to make art! It's going to be a beautiful film, Wim. *Bonne chance à tous!*" They all clink glasses.

At this point Orran leaves and heads off to greet those at the villa owned by Gustav Klem and the Swiss consortium who have rented Wim this beach-house. He knows them through the curator Morgane D'angleterre, whose projects they often fund. At the villa he sees Klem and some collectors he knows through Greengrove, couples gay and straight. He gets chatting over a cocktail with a woman who turns out to be a Russian diplomat based in Rome, and invites her to sit for a portrait. He has brought along a sketch pad and pencils just in case an opportunity came up to study someone with a face as interesting as hers. "It's just a hobby, please don't judge me," he assures her bashfully. The likeness he makes of her has a more pronounced jaw line, and he has given a beautiful bounce to her hair. She loves it and he draws another. He also draws her dog, which has had its ear badly scratched by the resident cat Bouffle.

Back down by the beach, Mimmo has stayed for the dinner of fresh salad that Sirhan has prepared, and Sophie has also emerged after her shower and nap. She can be heard laughing heartily on the terrace; she is telephoning her husband and daughter. She has a congenitally loud voice. Chiara had stopped by to welcome them briefly. Mimmo is flirting with the younger women of the group, who he assumes from the drawings will be receptive to his attentions. He leans in and asks provocatively: "If you were with someone new and then they told you on, say, your third dinner together, that they had herpes, would you see them again?"

"Hmm, I don't know," Hannah replies. "I think a lot of people who have herpes don't even know it, so the fact that they told you probably means they're responsible enough to get checked, and they know how to take care of it and everything. In a weird way you may be less likely to get it from them than from someone who never mentions herpes at all."

"I think I could do it if I saw myself marrying them," Mercedes says, "because then I wouldn't have to worry about getting it and giving it to someone else. We could just get married, be in love, and be happy together, and grow old with each other, and with herpes." Mimmo looks at Teta but she just shrugs and examines her nails.

"I'm going to say hello up at the other house," says Morgane getting up.

"Where exactly is this other house we've heard so much about? Can we come?" asks Mercedes.

"*Mais non!* It would not be right, turning up with lots of strangers..."

"Orran's there," volunteers Hannah.

"He knows them... it's owned by a group of collectors."

"Well then Wim should at least go up and meet them, if only to show them his work," says Mercedes.

"No. I don't want to. Let's keep things simple," says Wim with a brooding look. Wim has never been short of money so he has never needed collectors to buy his work. He had had his first exhibition at the age of forty-two, and then it was only because it pleased him, not out of necessity. He had never gone to art school. Instead he had travelled around the world on a motorbike with a succession of girls on the back. He didn't like other artists, never tried to explain his work, and didn't listen when Morgane did so on his behalf. She had introduced Wim to Orran, who had become very excited about his work when he found out that he was from one of the wealthiest families in Belgium, with a long history of supporting contemporary art. Wim's solo show of lewd watercolours had cemented a nice relationship with Mr. Dierickx senior, who was happy to see his middle-aged son finally doing something. He was now a major client, practically keeping the New York branch afloat.

"Somebody told me there are three types of collectors," says Hannah. "You have something called a 'completist', who wants one of everything. Then you have those who just want the best of something in a certain category. Then you have collecting by type, say frog ornaments or things with frogs on them. He said the last category is mostly women and the other kinds are usually men. What type are your collectors up at the other place Morgane?"

"They are the second. *Bonne nuit ma puce.*" Morgane kisses Hannah's head maternally, puts on her embroidered shawl and leaves.

"That food was brow." says Sophie.

"Halal meat is really cruel." states Teta from behind her sunglasses. No-one listens, but she has lived in Los Angeles long enough to know that much conversation is not listened to. It's done for the pleasure of talking, which means you can say whatever you want.

"Would you like to come for a walk by the beach?" Mimmo asks Hannah. He is like a bear round a honeypot.

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Most people find Mimmo's appearance off-putting, if not positively terrifying. Not Hannah; she thinks he is the coolest guy she has ever met. He wears black, even in the heat, which the setting of the sun now has brought little relief from. He wears sunglasses and his moustache is dyed black to hide the grey. The next day Hannah will get a shiver when she sees Dupont et Dupond in a *Tintin* comic. He has had a very primitive hair transplant that looks like a black toilet brush poking straight up from his skull. They walk to the nearest beach, where families are enjoying themselves as the last of the sun's rays dance on the speedboats in the bay.

"What's that strange rock out there? Is it a lighthouse?" The flaming west outlines a black rock.

"Strombolicchio; little dead volcano."

"How big is it? I can't tell from here."

"Who knows, big as a mansion? Size is very important isn't it..."

Hannah looks blank. "Oh... was that supposed to be sexual?"

"No. If it was sexual I would have ended it with 'bowchickabowwow'."

She laughs and strokes his hand. She feels complacent joy, here on this stark island for the first and only time in her life.

*Shooting Diary*  
Chapter 4

"Do you have any kids' books?" Hannah asks the sales-woman in the island's only bookshop.

"Do I have sex? Well..."

"No, do you have any kid's books?" Hannah repeats patiently.

"Kids? Yes. I've got one who's twenty-four and one who's nineteen. I know they're not really kids, but they still seem like it to me..."

"I said 'do you have any kids' books?'"

"Oh! Sorry! Yes, just there by the entrance," she gestures.

"Why do you want kids' books?" asks Orran.

"For a girl in the sanatorium by the beach that I got talking with this morning. She likes picture books, so I'm going to find her one. Dr Davda won't let her leave the grounds. You know the reason Mimmo isn't dead is because of that sanatorium. Last winter he decided to have a New Year swim and got overwhelmed by the waves. The hospital is open all year round and he was spotted by a doctor. He was pulled out and resuscitated. Apparently he had been dead for ten minutes. But it was beautiful, he said, the colours, the feeling of the sea lapping against his face, the tranquillity."

"So drowning's quite a nice way to die?" They browse the shelves filled mostly with discarded holiday paperbacks in Italian. Through the window Hannah can see Mimmo talking on his mobile phone. She peeks at him over a copy of *L'isola del dottor Moreau*.

"Excuse me," Orran is touched lightly on the arm by the sales-woman. "Did I hear you mention crime?"

He stares at her blankly. "I beg your pardon?"

"I thought I heard you mention crime." Orran looks at her with disbelief. Inwardly panicking, he reviews in his mind everything he has said since entering the bookshop.

"It's just that the crime section used to be where you're looking now but it's just been moved to the other corner." Orran shrugs as she turns and walks away.

"I think she's really deaf, that woman," Hannah says as she studies her book.

Mercedes, who had been waiting outside smoking in the rain with Mimmo, wanders in. She flicks through a fat paperback and sighs. "People don't want good books nowadays," the words roll off her tongue automatically. "I can't read any more of those year-old copies of *Grazia* at the beach-house."

"Look, here's a copy of *Kidnapped*," offers Hannah.

"I don't want to read Stevenson again. Does it always rain here? What kind of place is this? I had expected there to be more things to buy..."

They had awoken on their second day on Stromboli to a freak occurrence: clouds and a thin shower making the island dull and humid. It accentuated the barrenness of the landscape, with its black lava and scrubby gorse bushes. So both the

orgy and the filming had been rained off. With the cancellation of their first day of shooting Wim, Morgane and Sophie had made the most of things by setting off, under hastily found waterproof parasols, to scout for appropriate locations instead.

Orran gives Hannah a big bright smile, interested in what she has picked up. "Did you find something?"

"I think I'll give her this," she answers, waving the Wells paperback. "It's not a picture book, but she might identify with the theme. Wait! This is even better!" She pulls out a beaten up copy of *The Black Island* by Hergé from a haphazard pile. The comic is bought and bagged.

"Do you think Wim and the rest will be back yet?" Mercedes feels her wrist for a watch that isn't there.

"I'll go and see. I'm heading back to do some writing anyway. I need to work on my blog," says Orran.

"Tell them I've gone for an ice-cream. It's so hot and damp. There's no *air*. And Orran, give that darling stray kitten by the cactus on the road home a kiss from me."

They file out of the bookshop. Without interrupting his phone conversation Mimmo gives Hannah a surreptitious squeeze as she passes. Mercedes hooks her arm into Hannah's and leans in conspiratorially:

"Hannah Hazeldonk you have to learn to say no to those aggressive Italian men."

"Do I really?"

"No, I'm just kidding."

"I support chest hair."

"Good for you."

Mercedes turns into the café next to the bookshop while Hannah heads for the beach. She sees the girl through the chain-link fence as she turns off the path. The hospital's recreation ground stretches down to the beach and is deserted except for her. The girl is loitering by its perimeter in the rain, a wan figure in Chinese pyjamas, her hair plastered to her head. Hannah slips the plastic bag under the fence. The girl smiles when she peeks inside. She then adopts a supercilious expression: "Look! I treat my books like I treat people! Look! I rip the pages and bend the corners!" Hannah realises the girl is in a sanatorium for good reason.

"Do you like your doctors?"

"No. They tell me what to do all the time."

"Just because someone is wearing a white coat doesn't mean you have to do what they say. Ask them if they've heard of something called *The Milgram Experiment*."

She saunters back to the beach-house along the low road; the island has two, a high one along which the majority of businesses are clustered, and a low one by the coast. The rain has emptied the beaches, as if they have been evacuated before an eruption. She bows her head and thinks and walks.

At first it looks like no-one is home when she arrives back because the beach-house's large living room is empty of people, and contains nothing but equipment and Wim's drawings. She slowly climbs the stairs to the first floor. On passing Wim and Mercedes' bedroom she hears a noise that rouses her suspicion, and doesn't think twice about putting her eye to the keyhole. Orran is cramming what looks like bank documents into a calf-skin folder. She sees a Belgian passport and a bank card fall to the floor. She tiptoes to her bedroom down the corridor, more excited than worried by what she has seen. She finds Orran's pretty-man sparkle dubious because she is consciously developing her natural mistrust of:

1. authority.
2. charisma.

This is why she likes Mimmo so much. He is genuinely horrific. And anyway nice girls like bad boys, even though they know they are all the same. If Orran was doing something deceitful maybe it was time for some table-turning. Quite how she would do that she was not sure, she'd have to think about it. Right now, though, she needs to take a nap. The drop in atmospheric pressure has made her drowsy.

\* \* \*

By late afternoon the clouds had dispersed, and now the evening air is pleasant and refreshing. Hannah is hanging around the kitchen, eying Morgane suspiciously as she spoons pasta into Wim's outstretched serving bowl. *I didn't come all this way for pasta and candles!* Her parents like to listen to opera while eating spaghetti in their big dining room overlooking the Cogels-Osylei in Antwerp.

She had hoped on this trip to shake off all that bourgeois small-mindedness and transform herself into a video vixen.

And here was Wim and Morgane acting as if they were a hale and hearty married couple. It made her notice the age gap between the two sets of guests in the house: Wim, Morgane and Sophie on one side as recorders and directors: and her, Mercedes and Teta on the other as the subjects to be filmed. Orran was somewhere in between age- and status-wise. *La donna è mobile* lollops along on the stereo, while Mercedes, Teta and Orran drink watermelon juice on the terrace. They are looking at the sketches he made of them once the sun had come out. He and Teta had sat and talked for hours while he made drawings of her looking pensive and frail. She loves them, it is the real her.

Hannah is relieved that Sirhan has been given the night off. He's a great cook, of course, but there is something about him that makes her feel uncomfortably self-conscious. She wonders if he even knows what they are up to here...

"Dinner will be literally two minutes."

They start to assemble. There are only six of them tonight because Sophie has gone to find a wifi connection. The air carries the smell of jasmine and rosemary from the giant bushes that line the path leading down to their secluded beach-house; there is no backlighting here, the rocks around the terrace are dark and teeming with lizards

and ants. Plates are carried out to the terrace and candles are lit. Just as they are sitting down, a knock is heard at the front door.

"*Buonaseera ragazze, ragazzi...* I'm just picking up some extra supplies from the big fridge. *Buon appetito!* Smells really good. No Sirhan tonight?"

"How are your dogs Chiara?" enquires Hannah.

"Very good. Just the bulldog of this Russian diplomat staying up at the villa needs some eardrops."

"What about all your strays?" asks Mercedes.

"Ah same. We're doing what we can."

"You know sometimes poor families with children that aren't taught well don't know how to treat animals. I wish there was something that could be done about them. You know it's not fair on the animals if they get placed into a bad home like that. If they don't have enough money to take care of their children, how are they going to take care of an animal? And they don't even treat their children right?"

"Ah yes...?" Chiara replies with a look of puzzled concern. Everyone else ignores the speech.

"Are you heading up to the villa now, Chiara?" Orran asks, looking at the plate of spaghetti in front of him with indecision.

"*Si si*, for the dog."

"May I join you?"

Chiara shrugs. "Sure. Oh, by the way, Mimmo will come over a bit later to check the leaky shower for you Morgane. OK, bye bye."

Orran makes some excuses, grabs his canvas bag of art materials and is out the door with Chiara in a blink.

"Did you get your cats from a shelter Morgane?" asks Mercedes.

"No, I bought them from a breeder."

"Why does she keep her stuff here?" Wim inquires of no-one in particular.

"Can we do something about that music?" Hannah asks through a mouth-full of pasta. "It's the third time the cd has repeated." She gets up and turns the volume down.

"She has to order medicine in bulk from the mainland and Mimmo lets her keep whatever can't fit in the shelter fridge here I suppose," says Morgane.

"*Lekker*, Morgane."

"*La meilleure sauce du monde, c'est la faim, ma chéri*. It's been a long day." Morgane smiles at Wim, her teeth stained grey from the red wine.

"Do we say that in Dutch?" Wim asked Mercedes, clasping her hand. Wim and Mercedes always look good together because they are both so remarkably tall, towering over the others, even sitting down.

"Uh huh, '*honger is de beste saus*'."

Teta silently slips off to her room; she has said and eaten very little and wants to have a shower and get changed again. When dinner is coming to a close Wim



stands up and wanders inside to contemplate his work, already thinking about tomorrow's filming. Hannah and Mercedes finish tidying up.

"What color is your aura Merc?" Hannah asks her cousin.

"Em, I think my aura has black and white stripes."

"Vertical or horizontal?"

"Horizontal. No, vertical."

"Is that because horizontal stripes make your aura look fat?"

"Yeah." She stretches and yawns. "I suppose I should go and practice for tomorrow..."

\* \* \*

The location scouting earlier in the day revealed a suitable spot: an old burnt-out Fiat 500, hidden from view by high grass, off the winding dirt track that leads to the Observatory. Early the next morning, while it is still relatively cool, Wim surveys the scene and leafs through the folio of sketches he has brought. Here is one of Hannah and Mercedes entwined in a rickshaw that could be realized perfectly, transposed to the destroyed car. Morgane asks: "What are you imagining, Wim?"

"We can have Hannah and Mercedes in the white socks and geisha make-up. But let's use Teta as well. She's being paid by the day, after all. Seems like a waste..."

"It's not good constraining yourself with practicalities," muses Morgane, lost in a reverie. "Go with the flow... with what feels right. Maybe Teta can be spying on them... Eros and Psyche..."

The equipment, including a set of soft box lights that run on a heavy battery, is being carried up the steep track by Sophie, while Hannah, Teta and Mercedes get themselves ready on a picnic blanket nearby. Mercedes opens her professional make-up box, with its removable layers of cream and powder and other tools of the trade set out in rows. She is close enough that her breath disturbs the hair on Hannah's upper lip, and her nostrils whistle as she paints in eyebrows with great concentration. Teta is delicately applying vermilion lipstick to her nipples according to directions on a laser copied sheet of paper with photos and colour samples that Morgane has prepared as part of her art direction.

And then, just when everything is almost ready for the shoot to begin, it is announced that filming has to be postponed yet again. A special part of the microphone attachment has been left behind and Sophie will have to take the next Aliscafi to Panarea to get a new one. They cannot film without sound, because of the poems Mercedes is supposed to recite. There is some frustrated discussion, but it dissolves quickly into acceptance. Perhaps everyone is a bit more nervous than they care to admit about getting started on the cinematic masterwork.

The girls put their clothes on and file back to the house to remove their painted masks and get down to the serious business of sunbathing. "I'm going for a swim." Hannah packs her factor fifty sunscreen and towel and leaves. Mercedes and Teta lay

themselves side by side on the terrace. Healthy young blondes in generic white bikinis: they look like a lazy imitation of a nineteen-thirties propaganda newsreel. If Wim had less of an *idée fixe* he would have spotted this and created the film that Leni Reifenstahl never made for Mussolini. Sirhan, again at their service, sweeps the black sand that is forever accumulating on the terrace and in the house, averting his gaze discreetly from the women.

"May I draw you? To take your mind off things, dude." Orran asks Wim, who is milling around aimlessly, with nowhere to channel his frustrated creative zeal.

"No. I'm going to do some sketching myself." He walks past him to gaze again at his drawings.

"I'm going to the other villa, would you like to come?" Morgane asks Orran.

\* \* \*

A small stocky man wheels a racing bike with bulging side panniers down the path to the beach-house. He checks the number on the house against a sheet of paper with spidery handwriting. He leans the bike on a weather-beaten cactus plant and holds his hand up to shield his eyes so that he can see into the house, which is shrouded in darkness. As he lifts his arm we see his sleeve ride up, there is a tan line, pale above, red and freckled below. He has been cycling for several weeks. He rings the bell and the door is answered by Sirhan, who indicates to Mercedes that they have a visitor, and who in turn hauls herself off the lounge. The newcomer explains that he is an old friend of Sophie's from Glasgow. She gave him this address and said there was a back yard where he could pitch his tent for a few nights, and a shower he could use.

"Sure, go ahead." Mercedes heads back to the terrace and her magazine. He follows her warily, wondering how many other bikini-clad Amazons there might be there.

"What's your name?"

"Callum. Callum Lavendar."

At dinner that night, prepared by Sirhan with mountains of fresh herbs over everything, the group accept Callum as a kind of stand-in for Sophie, and they ask him the same questions about Glasgow – a city none of them have every visited – that they had already asked her. Did people there really eat fried chocolate bars? Then they reminisce about themselves: Wim's opening in New York; the crazy party in Knokke last summer, when Hannah had to be carried home because of her low alcohol tolerance. Callum is self-contained and his presence is neither enjoyed nor resented. It's quiet in the house, Orran has been gone all day and Hannah had only come back briefly to eat before heading off to secretly meet Mimmo. The others sit around talking while Mercedes picks at her hair.

When Orran arrives back at the beach-house in the middle of the night he does not see Callum sleeping under a dark blue sheet on the couch. He shrugs off his V-neck tanktop. Callum awakens but lies still. He can hear Orran breathing quickly, as if

he has been running. The garment hits Callum on the head as Orran tosses it aimlessly at the couch. Callum holds his breath while Orran gets a bottle of mineral water from the fridge and climbs the stairs. Once he is gone Callum lets out a volley of discreet sneezes.

*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 5*

"Is anyone home?" Chiara knocks at the door. Callum jumps up off the sofa where he has been napping. He makes a non-descript noise to indicate his presence there.

"Oh. Who are you?"

"A friend of Sophie's. Everyone is out, filming."

"Ah, OK. I just came to check my fridge – the shelter was broken into yesterday, so I want to make sure everything is OK here. Yes, the padlock is still there, no trouble. Really strange. You have a nice time on Stromboli!" She leaves and Callum flops back to the couch.

Sophie had returned from Panarea where she had picked up what she needed from a contact of Mimmo's. She had been badly stung on the lip by a wasp that had landed in her drink as she waited for the ferry back that morning.

"Always use a straw! Always!" Callum had warned her when they had spoken on the phone that morning. He always held the mobile away from his ear when speaking to her because she shouted so much. She and Callum had lived together in Glasgow before she moved to Berlin to look for work; now she had a young family and travelled a lot working on various film projects. Callum would often time his epic cycling tours of continental Europe to coincide with a visit to whatever location Sophie was based at, to get a bed and a shower en route.

He examines the backs of his hands, where the skin was cracked from a combination of sun, sweat and wind, checks his supply of anti-histamines and then tries to doze. The heat is really getting to him. After everyone disappeared off to the shooting location he had moved his blow-up mattress close to the water's edge to get a breeze. But then, because it was impossible to sleep, he had slipped into the water and stayed there for a long time. When he eventually got out, the heat was still so intense that after no more than two or three minutes he was already bathed in perspiration again.

\* \* \*

With Sophie's return, filming has resumed. Equipment and white-socked geishas are in place up at the burnt-out car. It is a day of unrelenting sun and stillness. Sophie lines up the shot; the rusty old Fiat with its front seats ripped out and dumped in front it is in the centre. Seen through Sophie's viewfinder, the car is framed by fico d'India cacti, with unwholesome prickly pears still attached, and looming behind it a huge, ropey ficus tropicales. The mood is effectively exotic. The three girls wear nothing but frilly ankle socks; Orran is in charge of a large stock of them because according to Wim's stipulation they have to be pristine throughout the shoot. They have the primitive geisha make-up applied by Mercedes, which, in combination with

their fair hair, looks incongruous, but Wim is adamant that the scene should correspond exactly with his drawings.

Mercedes has learnt lines of Wim's poetry beforehand, and her job here is to recite them dreamily as she and the other girls slither around in the grass in front of the car. This is to develop slowly, like a kind of ritual, into a scene involving all three girls on the car seats. Orran stands behind Sophie, clutching some of Wim's drawings and the stash of socks. Ostensibly his role is to have these things at the ready when they are needed, but he is really there to offer moral support. He is still smoking the Brazilian cigarettes he had bought in the airport when he had to smuggle a figurine to Rio in his luggage for Greengrove last month. The warning images on the cigarette packaging are the most hysterical he had ever seen. *When did it become normal to see erectile dysfunction, rotting teeth and lungs displayed on everyday objects?* A transgressive exhibition aimed at a very precise audience, and with a specific response in mind. Maybe he should mention this on his blog – it would look really interesting next to the stuff the Russian diplomat had told him on Thursday evening. But now Morgane is calling for fresh socks, so he snaps out of his daydream and fishes some out of the plastic bag.

Mercedes physically dominates Teta and Hannah, who are both very slim in build. Though he has photographed Mercedes and her cousin together many times, Wim has never requested them to actually have sex, perform together, until now. It is easy to tell they feel uncomfortable with it, but they are trying their best, determined to please him. Hannah moans orgasmically then brightly queries "Are we done yet?" The poses into which they contort themselves are meant to show their bodies to their best advantage to the camera. The relationship is to be with Wim and the viewers, not with each other. It looks forced.

Orran takes Wim aside and they talk quietly. In the meantime, Teta, as the professional, has decided to take things into her own hands. She is bored with all the shilly-shallying, and the poetry and the writhing, and frankly doesn't care for the analogy between a tongue licking a vagina and a brush on canvas. So while he is distracted she dispenses with Wim's direction and instead forces the girls' bodies into the more graphic positions she knows so well as a mainstream porn star. The bourgeois Flemish girls suddenly find themselves out of their depth and start giggling nervously. For a moment it feels as if the mood has changed to one of real possibility, but somehow this too fails to get going. How can they create an atmosphere of voluptuousness if they are forever stopping to change their socks, which they have to do because of the dust that is being thrown up by their writhings on the filthy upholstery?

After five hours of false starts, sock changes and make-up retouches, Wim shouts: "Cut! It's not working. Let's call it a day and pack up." He strides off down the mountainside leaving everyone else hanging mid-shot.

Teta's hostility to everyone is kept under strict control, but she is running out of patience with this group of amateurs. She has performed in the most abject group

sex at least three times a week for the last two years. She is, at this moment, one of the most recognizable young starlets of the adult film industry, signed exclusively with a top production company. She thinks of herself as an athlete rather than any kind of artist, and she is trying to be absolutely the best at what she does. She does not take drugs and she practices yoga and Pilates specifically prescribed for porn actresses for two hours of every day. She thinks Wim's project is grandiloquent bullshit.

\* \* \*

The whole household has heard Wim and Mercedes fighting in their bedroom, but have chosen to ignore it; no-one discusses the afternoon of frustrated fantasy. Callum made excuses to Sophie about wanting to sail round to the other side of the island and visit Ginostra, but the truth is he could not stand the atmosphere on the group's return, not in this terrible heat. Orran, equally anxious to escape from the oppressiveness of the place, has disappeared to the villa on the hillside, but not before he had persuaded Sirhan to leave the house on an errand so he could pick the padlock of the fridge in his room and extract some interesting-looking pills. These he has secretly given to Wim with a conspiratorial nod. Now Morgane, Teta, Sophie, Wim, Mercedes and Hannah are eating dinner in silence. Everyone is drinking more than usual to compensate for their discomposure. Sirhan, back now from his short trip, goes about serving and cleaning unobtrusively in the background.

"I cut myself on a rusty spike," whines Mercedes rubbing her upper arm.

"Well my face is fucking sunburned and I've got heatstroke!" Hannah snaps.

"You have to put up with it – it's your job." Teta is the only one who looks happy and animated. The moment of control she had experienced in the afternoon has made her come to life, as if the familiarity of her vocation has made her step out from behind a curtain.

"It's not my job," says Mercedes. "It may be yours but it's not mine. I wasn't brought up like that."

"What *is* your job? Or do you get your money at the bank of Mum and Dad like everyone else here?"

"What's your problem, Teta?" asks Hannah. She is in a terrible mood, picking at the skin that is already flaking off her nose.

"This is rubbish. Your film is not sexy and you have no idea." Teta throws down her napkin. Everyone falls silent; she begins to talk with great passion. She explains to them as best she can in her basic English that pornography works to a special tempo. If you don't obey the rules you will never produce anything erotic. You can't ignore, for example, the importance of the little opening scenarios that draw the viewer into the narrative.

"Huh? Those tacky stories about pizza delivery boys or school teachers?" asks Wim with a sneer. "This is art. What I'm doing is much more edgy. I know what I want to see and what turns me on."

"Do you want us to enjoy ourselves while you are filming?"

"Yes, if it looks good to me."

"But you don't notice when someone is starting to lose control, the way they should, because you are fixed on your stupid accessories. Poems are not sexy. And neither are the socks and make-up, Morgane."

"That's your opinion..." says Morgane, clearly put out at having her authority in matters of erotica questioned.

Teta explains that clichéd scenarios are essential to porno films because otherwise they just look like violence. So the scenario can even be rape, but it should be exaggerated and hyperbolic so it is not mistaken for the real thing. What they were doing today was too vague; Wim and Morgane do not understand the mechanics of the genre. She has an instinctive sense of what works in films like this, although she has never tried to articulate it before. Her agent had said her talent had arisen from all the horse-riding she had done as a child, all the non-verbal communication with large muscular beasts. But she knew that was only part of it, and not the most important part. On set, she had always loved lingering after a shoot to hear the crew discuss how the scene had gone. In a roundabout way, and always dressed up as bravado, they had somehow got to the fundamentals: the structure. One day she will be a director herself, and then she will recreate the incident, nine years ago, that had fused sexuality and danger together in her psyche to such great and lucrative effect.

"I know you have some kind of drugs Wim – I saw Orran give you a packet of something from Sirhan's room. Everyone; let's drink vodka and take some pills and I will teach you about how adult films work." She says this in a way that is both commanding and seductive. No-one can believe the difference in her temperament, now that she is in her natural domain. Wim pulls out a small cardboard box from his pocket.

"What exactly are those pills Wim?" asks Morgane dubiously.

"I don't know. Orran told me this afternoon that he had spotted them in the fridge and thought they might... help."

"That fridge is always padlocked," says Sophie with a furrowed brow.

"Yes, it's strange. He says they are some kind of animal aphrodisiac. Thought we could use some to spice up the filming."

Teta snatches the package and starts popping out small white lozenges into her palm. She presents two to each person in turn with such an air of authority that they cannot refuse.

To Sophie she says with a smile: "Just one for you. You are going to have to film everything."

Sirhan, pretending not to see what they are doing, continues slowly loading the dishwasher and fussing with wine glasses.

"Mercedes, you speak Italian don't you? Tell the boy to take two of these pills then run and buy us some vodka from the bodega," Teta orders. Mercedes holds the pills up to Sirhan's face and instructs him to do what he is told. He does so; he is

apprehensive, but he does it all the same, then leaves the house. While they wait for his return Teta uncorks a wine bottle and tells stories about her experiences as a porn star. She does a slow, expert striptease. The pills are working; everyone starts to tingle. They start drinking more and chuckling. Mercedes and Wim start stroking each other's bare arms and Sophie dips into the salon to fetch her camera, her eyes bright and wide.

By the time Sirhan returns Teta has pushed Wim onto the table, climbed on top of him and removed his t-shirt. She tells Mercedes to take her clothes off and climb onto his face. Sophie and Hannah stand back to admire the unfolding scene. Hannah catches Sirhan's anxious but decidedly stoned expression. She weaves over to him and takes his hand. "Don't be scared" she whispers, her face close to his. She pushes him against the fridge and feels an erection despite his worried eyes.

Sophie reaches for her camera...

The next thing we see is that she is filming Teta slapping Mercedes hard across the face as she has sex with Wim on the table. The vodka bottles are already empty and the room is in disarray. Wim is staring over Mercedes shoulders at a mono-print of him having sex with Mercedes. In the drawing she is holding something in her hand, and then he remembers. He clambers off her and goes upstairs, returning unsteadily with Mercedes' handbag. She has rolled off the table and is encircling Sirhan and Hannah, kissing Hannah over Sirhan's shoulder while feeling her way into the side slits of his djellaba. Wim pulls out something shiny from the bag.

"What's that?" asks Teta, who is looking over Sophie's shoulder at Hannah, Sirhan and Mercedes in the viewfinder.

"It's for Mercedes: she can't orgasm without her mirror. When she was a child she had lunch at her grandmother's house every day. She sat in a room and ate on her own in front of a mirror."

"Gimme that!" Mercedes pleads. Teta snatches it from him. "She can't come until I say so!" She looks at Wim with a mixture of anger and jubilation. "Strip out the intelligence! Know your market! Ahhh, finally! Some fun!"

"Well it's not really about that..." Wim mumbles incoherently, looking serious but still swaying. Teta strides up to him and grabs his face.

"This is what we need isn't it?" She laughs at him. He nods beatifically, completely in the thrall of this demonic orange pixie.

"Sophie, hold the camera straight. We need something more..." Teta looks around. Sirhan has his eyes screwed up tight, but is fondling Hannah's breasts, as if by keeping his eyes shut he does not have to acknowledge what he is doing. Teta drags him and Hannah into the centre of the room and one by one forces them both to swig from a wine bottle.



She whispers in Sirhan's ear: "You will never win you know." He neither hears nor understands her, his eyes are rolling back into his head. Teta guides his hands around Hannah's throat and squeezes.

Sophie looks at the scene through the camera. Sirhan's fingers around Hannah's neck in the half-light look wonderful because she is using a digital filter for high contrast.

Teta marches around the room. She orders Wim and Morgane to fuck, which they do, with glazed expressions, on the floor. She screams at Sirhan to strangle Hannah. He is crying. Teta grabs his hands and locks them around Hannah's neck even tighter. Hannah is almost unconscious; her tiny frame has no defence against the heat stroke, the drugs and the alcohol. Sirhan, drunk for the first time in his life, is still gripping Hannah's throat, and the glee in Teta's face makes him grit his teeth and squeeze even harder. Sophie comes closer, Morgane watches from the floor, everyone is complicit in this tableaux.

At this point Hannah blacks out, but only momentarily, and by the time she comes round again adrenalin kicks in and the spell is broken. Sirhan is looking at her in horror. She staggers to her feet and blearily takes in the scene. She sees Wim pounding away at Teta while Sophie films it; Mercedes masturbating while staring gravely at her own reflection in the hand mirror; Morgane smoking a cigarette and looking on blankly, wearing only her big red bra. In the shadows her face looks like that of a gorilla's – an intelligent and friendly gorilla, but a gorilla all the same.

Hannah tumbles out of the villa, coughing violently. It is the middle of the night and she is lurching through the unlit streets, up past the bookshop and bodega, through the empty town square and up the hill to Mimmo at the villa. She has to stop on the way to vomit, but only manages a dry retch. Suddenly, she realises she does not want to see Mimmo after all. She has changed her mind about him, found him lacking the other night when they had lay in the bushes after she spied on Orran.

\* \* \*

Orran had just started to enjoy a cigarette in the grounds by the main gate of the villa when he notices a figure scrabbling and sobbing on the dirt track outside. He peers through the gate and recognizes with disbelief that it is Hannah. He presses a button and the gates swing open slowly. She stumbles to a halt when she realizes there is someone there and that it is Orran. He blocks her entrance to the villa, but instead of turning back she continues on the path to the no-mans land of the volcano. Seeing her gasping for breath with eyes the size of saucers he knows Wim has taken his advice and given her the canine love potion.

He recognizes a window of opportunity here, and as she takes off from him at a heavy run he decides to follow her. But first he stashes his canvas tote bag in a bush, removing from a side compartment something that he places in his pocket. There is only one path up the volcano, much of it winding in zigzags. They are not fast, this

tag team, but they are quietly concentrated, and their progress is steady. He is surprised she does not try to take off in another more oblique direction, but she sticks to the path that is clearly visible in the moonlight. After a while they both in their own way zone out of reality, forgetting what they are doing as they fall into the rhythm of running. But she is so dizzy that he soon catches up with her. He grabs her t-shirt, wrenching it so hard it rips down the middle, its Egyptian motif torn in two. She struggles to free herself, panting that she knows he is evil and he will never catch her. But he not only does catch her, but punches her in the stomach to make sure she knows it. As she doubles over, heaving for breath, he grabs her left breast with a clunch (a cross between a clutch and scrunch), and twists it maliciously. She screams, but a kick to her already bruised stomach sends her sprawling unconscious beneath the stars. He stands over her, panting, his sandy hair falling over his forehead and the sweat stinging his eyes. He rests for a few minutes, regaining his breath, and looking at the spectacular view. Then removes from his pocket a vial of clear liquid and a package containing a syringe. He knows that poison is typically a woman's murder weapon but in the circumstances it seemed like the best option.

It now occurs to him that the best way of disposing of her body is by dropping it into the volcano, so he heaves her over his shoulders and staggers further up the hillside, a combination of endorphins and madness guiding him in the dark. But it is too difficult and he gives up, just dumping her by the path instead. For dramatic effect he pulls off the remains of her clothes and pockets the scrunched-up ball of jersey cotton. He decides not to go back to Klem's bed, but to the beach-house, curious to know how Hannah had got into the state she was in, and what had driven her to the momentous moment when she had crossed his path.

*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 6*

Mercedes and Teta do not materialise that morning, and everyone else is preparing for the scheduled shoot, despite their hangovers. All are somnambulant. The house is a mess and Sirhan is gone. The last anyone had seen of him was when he ran into his room in tears the night before, locking the door behind him. He may still be there. Hannah had disappeared at some point as well, when they were too distracted to notice. Those up and about were not sure who had seen her last. Maybe the sleeping girls knew something, but everyone was still too drunk to care.

Morgane is leaving on the six o'clock ferry to the mainland; she has to get back to Paris because she is curating the next show at the Palais de Tokyo.

Filming today is exclusively of her. She is to stand on the rocks and read a text she and Wim wrote together when they first became friends ten years before. Wim had written to her in 2003 care of the art magazine she was editing at the time. He had sent her unsolicited love letters and poems, collaged into photo books along with his first attempts at erotic sketches. His letters expounded on how her face and body had been an access ramp onto the road to discovery in own sexual journey.

In the mid-1970s Morgane had been used as a model by her artist mother, who made faux Victorian photographs, rather like Lewis Carroll's of Alice Liddell. She was only thirteen and the images made her a cult figure on the Paris social scene. She posed for famous photographers and painters, and had bit parts in several mainstream films, always in the role of a precocious poppet. She came to symbolize something of the prelapsarian licentiousness of Paris at the time.

But it was in the 1990s that Wim had seen her in a film, and realised that images of her were used on things like gig posters and record covers. He started collecting works depicting her; he wanted to be a collector like his father, but not of contemporary art. He wanted his libido to direct his acquisitions: she was a cult, not a prize. Then he discovered that the well-respected art critic and curator Morgane D'angleterre and his fantasy girl were one and the same person, and that even though she was now a stout fifty-year-old, sensuality was still her stock in trade. She had the same jet-black bobbed hairstyle. For her part, she had cultivated a friendship with him, the gangly millionaire with money to spend on things like research trips to Thailand. She had encouraged his drawings and photography, discussing them in the private language they had developed together. When his show had opened at Greengrove he presumed people would be shocked, or at best it would have a niche perverse following. He had been rather puzzled when it had been accepted so readily by the audience. He had not noticed that tastes had changed around him.

Teta reminds Wim of the young Morgane; Teta is to be her stand-in because Morgane has become too old and ugly to appear in the film. He knows that the sublimated sexual energy between him and Morgane can be expressed through the text that she is now rehearsing, but sleeping with her the night before had changed

things, killed something, and he has completely lost interest in the shoot. Right now he would just like to go back to bed.

Her scene is long and she has to read from a print-out. She stands with her back to a clear horizon, a small round shape against the sky, intoning in her most expressive, breathy French. Orran stays quiet, wondering if anyone will tell him what exactly it was about last night that makes Wim seem so cold and detached from the shoot.

The filming drags on all morning, and at about lunchtime Mercedes and Teta emerge from their bedrooms.

"So do I have to make my own coffee since Sirhan is not here?" Teta asks petulantly.

Mercedes chugs from a bottle of mineral water and points at the group on the rocks in the near distance. "They're filming on the coast out there. That would be even worse than that car. Think of the cuts and bruises you'd get. Have you seen Hannah?"

"No, she must be with them."

"I can't see her. Look at Morgane out there. I'm sure the reason she's such a mess is because she never had any kids. Oh, whatever. I'm going to go back to bed."

Morgane has finished her scene and is ready to leave. After goading Wim into doing this film she too has now lost interest, and wants to get home to her work and her cats. A golf-buggy taxi picks her up directly from the beach, her bag already packed, and Wim and Orran accompany her to the port. Orran is to join her soon to assist her in her Palais de Tokyo organisation because she will exhibit several of the Chinese painters he represents. As she waves to her boys (that is how she thinks of them) from the departing ferry, she notices that the air has changed: something is missing. And then she realizes she no longer has the odor of bitter almonds under her nose. She will die of breast cancer within a year.

\* \* \*

At the precise moment when Morgane was watching the scene at the port recede from her, Hannah's body was being discovered by a group of tourists scaling the volcano. Tours depart from the main square at five and the trek is timed for the most spectacular view of the sundown and lava eruptions. It had been too dangerous the day before and a hike had been canceled, so this one was fully booked.

Her body was a long way up the mountainside, and it wasn't until the hikers had been walking for an hour after passing the last civilized landmark – an overgrown eighteenth-century graveyard – that they had spotted it. In a panic they fled back down the hill en masse and as soon as phone reception was available the tour guide called the local police. There was no way up the mountain except on foot, so a helicopter had to be organized, and it was midnight by the time a tent had been erected over her body and halogen lights trained on her corpse. The volcano

announced the horror to the island populace with a particularly dramatic series of booms.

She was naked, and the exposure to the prolonged intensity of the sunlight had turned her pale skin a livid red. (One of the policemen who had lifted her body to place it in the body bag had got to see just how white the unexposed skin had remained, apart from some cuts and bruises, probably sustained on the way up through the lava rubble. On one side the skin was so pale it was almost green; on the other it was the colour of chopped liver. The man later told his wife that it had reminded him of something he had read in a book about the battle of Stalingrad. In the living winter hell of the kessel, cadavers had been kept warm next to an open fire so that the lice stayed on corpses and did not infest the soldiers. If the guard fell asleep or forgot to turn them regularly in the extreme cold, one side would roast and blister while the other side froze. His wife said it sounded more like a victim from Nagasaki and would he please stop talking about it.) But this is what Hannah looked like now: her entire front was scorched while her back was as stiff as ice. What a contrast it made with the unblemished pale skin turning a delicate rosy pink in the afternoon sun or from repeated kissing, and that sweet freckled face that Wim found so essential for his autoerotic photos. Now her skin was as tight as a sausage and gas was making the corpse expand in the heat. She had been bitten all over by insects, so that if there had been any punctures in the skin, from say a hypodermic needle, they would have been impossible to detect. But despite all this, and the blisters, the strangle marks on her neck were perfectly visible.

She was identified right away as the funny little redhead who hung around the sanatorium and played tennis with the mad girl and the dyke doctors. The island is small and they knew where to look for her companions, and by early the next morning the police chief has called on Mimmo.

\* \* \*

Wim and Sophie have left early to shoot prolonged scenes of natural landscape. Later they plan to hire a boat and record the lava rolling down the north-west escarpment, the impasse that separates Stromboli town from Ginostra, its counterpoint on the other side. They will also pick up Callum, who has been camping there.

Teta is in her room doing yoga when Mimmo and the police arrive. Mercedes and Orran are getting some morning sun before the relentless heat will drive them inside again. Orran answers the knock at the door. Mimmo translates for the police officers and everyone falls into stunned silence. Teta emerges and is informed of the death. She asks if she can have one of Orran's cigarettes, which she smokes intently, alone on the terrace, with short fast puffs. She then returns to the group and calmly tells the police that Hannah was murdered by the Iranian servant who came with the house. Both of them had disappeared two days ago.

"She wasn't with you, Mimmo..." says Mercedes looking vacantly out the window. Mimmo lifts his hands in a gesture of innocence.

"Do you have any photos of him?" asks the police officer.

"Of course I don't!" Teta snaps. Mimmo tells them he might have a photo, or rather his employee Massoud might. They try to contact Wim and Sophie but there is no reception. Orran offers to come to the police station. He thinks to himself *this house must be absolutely dripping with DNA after what seems to have happened on Friday night!*

More hunky Italian policemen arrive and look around the house, cramming themselves into Sirhan's tiny room and disrupting food packages stored there. The inhabitants are led out onto the terrace and the police cordon off the building with striped plastic ribbons. Forensics arrive and start dusting for prints, while on the other side of town Sirhan is informed by Gustav Klem's Filipino maid what she has heard and he scales the fence of the villa, just like Hannah had done, and disappears into the vegetation.

Mercedes and Teta calmly make their drawings for the police. When they are done they go for a drink at the local bar, not wanting to wait around for news in a house full of upheaval.

Over a bottle of beer Mercedes asks: "Why did you say Sirhan did it, Teta?"

"Because he's a filthy Arab rapist," she replies calmly.

"What...?" Mercedes cannot process this. But before she can question her Teta asks: "So why aren't you sad that your little cousin is dead?"

"I am sad, but it is her punishment."

"Punishment for what?"

"You wouldn't understand. You're not spiritual."

"How do you know what I am? My family is Sufi."

"I thought if anything you would be Russian Orthodox?"

"No. I get accused of being Russian a lot, but I'm not. I'm from North Ossetia. Chechnya"

As Mercedes looks at her, a distant memory starts to stir of history classes back in Gstaad. But her thoughts breeze over the bat-squeak of recognition and return to the sanctimonious mumbo jumbo that usually fills her head.

But maybe now you, reader, are getting an inkling that you have seen Teta somewhere before, and not just on your laptop. Look at her closely because you *have* seen her before, wearing even less than she wears now, years before she started her professional career. You did see her on the internet, but in a digital reproduction of the cover of a newspaper called *Izvestia*. Remember? There was a scandal and the editor of the paper had to resign. She is twelve, semi-naked, terrified and wounded, with long brown hair, bendy childish limbs. She is clinging to a young man, who may be a Russian soldier but it does not look like it. Maybe he's just a Chechen like her. The image gratuitously fills the front of the newspaper. When the picture was published no-one knew if she was alive or dead. She had been part of a group of hostages,

starved and terrified for three days. The Russian forces had tried to seize the school and capture the Separatists who had killed her classmates with their incendiary rockets. The editor had had to resign because the image looked far too much like the kind of pornographic scenario she later came to excel at enacting.

Mercedes shakes her head, as if trying to explain something to a small child. "It's punishment for something Hannah did in a former life, don't you understand?"

"I'm glad I'm not busy with this kind of thinking like you."

"I think sometimes women want to be killed. It's all a mystery. Manifest destiny."

Even Teta's steely heart crumples at the sound of these words.

*Shooting Diary*  
*Chapter 7*

The police were happy to close the case quickly, bribing the Messina coroner into recording that Hannah had died from inhaling the naturally occurring poisonous gas emitted by the volcano while she was under the influence of alcohol and an unidentifiable drug. Since the fatal poisoning of several volcano-worshipping hippies who had decided to live in a camp at the summit, no-one was allowed to visit the top unaccompanied. Why she had climbed there not wearing a stitch in the middle of the night was put down to the strange things that teenage girls do, driven by the same insanity as the volcano-lovers, whose brains were warped by the natural phenomenon's power to entice the credulous into acts of folly. Perhaps Hannah, a sporty youngster, had scaled the mountain instinctively, compelled by its hypnotic pull. Maybe when she got to the top she had planned to hurl herself into what she imagined would be a gaping crater spewing lava. Instead she would have discovered that the volcano mouth was actually a vast undulating terrain, like the surface of Mercury or Venus, scattered with a multitude of oozing, hissing orifices. Confused and exhausted like Ingrid Bergman in the film, she must have lain down for a sleep from which she had never woken up.

There were no suspects. Sirhan was cleared, Mimmo was the chief of police's mate, and no lunatics had escaped from the hospital.

Wim, still unsatisfied with what he had done, had insisted that they keep working on the film, which was nowhere near sexy enough yet. But with Teta's input it would be, and Orran thought the tragedy would be great for viral marketing before its showing at the Basel Art Fair next year.

Mercedes now saw Wim's face as a circle with an X where the mouth and eyes should be. Sophie needed the money.

\* \* \*

"Hi there! You catching the SNAV too?" Orran greets Callum on the gangplank.

"Yes, I'm going to try to make it to Matera today. I've only done about a thousand kilometres so far on this trip."

"You're Sophie's friend, aren't you? The cyclist... Lavender? I have a beautiful Colnago back in Brooklyn. You should see it. Well, enjoy your trip."

They part company and settle into seats on opposite sides of the lower deck on the morning ferry to Messina. Callum squints at the view and applies some eczema cream to his chapped hands. He forgets Orran and dozes off, the chug of the boat overriding the sensation of nausea induced by the smell emanating from the headrest, which reminds him of hamsters. The Sicilian coastline eventually comes into view through the salt-streaked windows. Callum thinks about the last few days. He is



looking forward to getting back on the road, back to solitude. What can a cyclist do on such a small island? It was odd, though, that the Belgian girl had died like that. No one had seemed to really care, which was strange because he thought she had been quite sweet in a spoiled kind of way.

It was not quite true, that no-one cared. The little girl in the sanatorium had taped the pages of her comic book back together and wished Hannah would come to visit her again.

Callum knows that the man he can still vaguely make out in his peripheral vision is a liar and a conman, and he doesn't need to know why. He is convinced he is Hannah's killer. He recognises in him the same coldness that he himself feels towards people in general. But while he can understand why someone might kill in a rage, he can't figure out how anyone could commit murder if they were not driven by anger or panic. What if it was done for no reason at all, just on a whim? This, he can see now, is where they differ. Callum was selfish and lazy, but he had enough of a conscience to check any impulse to physical violence. But the question still nags at him: why had Orran killed her? He realises that he does actually want to know. He wants a closer look and he decides to investigate the matter; it would give him something to think about while on the road over the next few days.

Once they reach Sicily, the short ferry ride from Messina to the Italian mainland port of Villa San Giovanni is much quieter; most travellers are heading further into the region. Callum and Orran stand together on the deck.

"This is a bit like the journey from Oban to Mull," Callum lies.

"I've never been to Scotland," Orran replies with a lie of his own.

"I see your sketchpad there. Did you get a lot of sketching done?"

"Oh this..." Orran looks down at the sketchpad poking out of his rucksack.

"Yes, I did a lot. Actually have you seen a garbage can anywhere?" He spots one and saunters over to it, takes out the sketchpad, folds it in two and shoves it into the bin.

"But what about your drawings?"

"Don't need them anymore. They've served their purpose. When someone sits for their portrait they feel as if they are being appraised, but in a detached way, and they like it. I found that out when I was at art school and made some money on the side as a life-model. It's an extreme form of hiding in plain sight. You forget that people are looking at you. That's when I learned to stop talking to myself, which was a bad habit I had. I would blurt things out and find myself making all sorts of admissions without realising it. Bad idea!"

"But the drawings?"

"I'm not really an artist. I only do them as an ice-breaker. You meet someone well-known, or rich, and you ask to draw their portrait. So you get to sit and chat with them and they're flattered, especially if the sketch is complimentary. I used to keep them, thinking one day I'd do a show of all the interesting people I'd met through sketching them, but I think that idea has run its course."

The mainland is getting closer; the ferry's engine is shifting gear, slowing down.

"The thing is, people tell you things too, like at the beauty parlour. The Russian diplomat at Klem's villa told me some funny stories when I drew her on Tuesday. And they seemed to chime with something Teta had told me about someone called Umarov, some kind of Sharia Emir. I don't know who this person is, but the story was so entertaining, I thought it would make an interesting article, and posted my thoughts on my blog. Teta really hates Muslims you know."

"Didn't the diplomat disappear?"

"Yes. Bizarre isn't it?" They gaze at the view.

"Was it with something from the dog shelter? Is that how you killed Hannah?" Callum asks with genuine curiosity and no judgment in his voice. Orran stares straight ahead at the coastline.

"But the other good thing about these psychiatrist couch sessions masquerading as life drawing is that I get to hear why normal people do what they do, why they get so upset about things. I think it's because I wasn't held as a child, I just don't have the feelings you are supposed to have. All these people with their codes of ethics, they just seem like suckers. It's good to have a stock of stories to make people feel sorry for you when you need them to. People will do anything for you if they feel sorry for you. I write them in a notebook." Orran turns to Callum and smiles. "And it's somehow nicer to take than to have, don't you agree?"

"Sometimes."

"You have to be a little bit smarter than everyone else, but not much. And it's nice to have nice books, buy nice things. My boss wants me to run a franchise for him in Dubai, which would be great because women don't seem to like me as much as they should. In Dubai I wouldn't have to deal with them would I? Hannah discovered I was fleecing Wim's father, she caught me with some documents. I know she saw me, and I couldn't run the risk of her mentioning it to anyone. You know, blah blah blah, the usual story. Jeeze! But it looks like I'm going to have to hide anyway. I've got a feeling I might have to keep my head down for a while. It doesn't look good, that diplomat disappearing like that. Anyway, yes, it's called Pentobarbital and it's what you put dogs down with. I heard her moaning about how she'd put on weight from all the pasta, and was fifty-one kilos so I knew how much I needed. How did you guess, by the way?"

"There was dog hair all over your jumper when you came home on Thursday night. I'm allergic to it."

"Really? Wow you are quite something."

They turn their back on the view and look at the cluster of tourists on the boat instead.

"Hey, are you into mnemonics Lavender?"

"I love mnemonics. Use them all the time."

"Can you believe I managed to *guess* Wim's pin number? 2504."

"I remember mine as 'The Tudor *Année Érotique*'."

"1569?"

"Exactly. So how did you guess Wim's?"

"He mentioned sulphuric acid just after I asked him if his cash card worked on the island.  $H_2SO_4$  is its chemical formula."

Callum had witnessed plenty of narcissism cozied together with incompetence on his little sojourn on Stromboli, but this was not Orran's problem. His was the combination of vanity and indiscretion brought together in a self-contained immoral unit. And he seemed suicidally talkative this afternoon.

"There I go again with my big mouth. You won't tell anyone will you? No-one need know of my life or my projects."

"Who would I tell...?"

"Good man. You're cool you know that? Here we are." The ferry bumps to a standstill and they part company.