

The Avengers Forever



Table of Contents

1. The Avengers Forever

A story in the present day, featuring John Steed, Cathy Gale, Emma Peel, Tara King, Mike Gambit and Purdey

2. Ever After

A story set around 1973. Why does Emma Peel think she is fashion designer Diana Smythe, and why does John Steed think he is a concert pianist named Brian Harris?

3. Script transcription, the *Diana* episode guest-starring Patrick Macnee

4. Photo Pages - John Steed kisses Cathy Gale

The Emma Peel series is rife with Steed and Emma in an amorous mood, but there was only one episode, *The Little Wonders*, in which Steed got to kiss Mrs. Gale.

The Avengers Forever

Chapter One: Spider's Web

PRESENT DAY

I. TIBET-BY-THE-SEA

It was Sunday, and the village of Tibet-By-The-Sea (along with its sister villages Upper Tibet, Lower Tibet and Tibet Magna) had braced itself for the weekly invasion from the Mulberry Senior Citizens Retirement Center.

The man who called himself John Gascoine walked very slowly – feeling his way with a very sturdy umbrella – down the main street of Tibet-By-The-Sea. He cut quite a dashing figure in an old-fashioned way, with the bowler hat perched on his snow white head, a light gray jacket over a black turtleneck sweater that slimmed an only slightly overweight 80-year-old figure, and light gray shoes that matched his light gray trousers. The deeply set eyes that looked out from under heavy lids twinkled with an enjoyment of life.

"Life at Mulberry isn't bad," John Gascoine told the victim that he had chosen for that day - a barber who plied his trade on Mackiedockie Street. "The ladies are quite taken with me. Of course they would be, what with the exciting life I've led."

"Is that so, sir?" said the barber, opening a drawer and bringing out a cut-throat razor. He turned back to Gascoine and suddenly the hand which held the razor was caught in a vise-like grip. "Ouch!" exclaimed the barber.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," Gascoine said with a sweet smile. He released the man's hand. "It's just that

you shouldn't go waving dangerous weapons like that about near the hands of a trained killer."

"A trained killer?" the barber said, with just the right expression of interested fear in his voice. He'd been in Tibet-By-The-Sea for ten years and had dealt with many a visitor from Mulberry Senior Retirement Center. He set his lips into an interested and inquiring smile, and listened with half an ear as Gascoine regaled him with the tales of his adventures as a super secret agent, many, many years ago.

II. THE TRITON PROJECT

In an inner office of the Mulberry Senior Citizen Retirement Center, two men relaxed in comfortable chairs, helping themselves occasionally to the tea and biscuits in front of them. The far end of the room was taken up by a big screen television screen, upon which scenes from the movie *Topkapi* played out.

"That Peter Ustinov, he's a right treat," said Mr. Honeywell, the head of the retirement center. Indeed, he looked a bit like a young Peter Ustinov himself, with a great deal of weight which he carried well, curly black hair and a pencil-thin moustache.

Mr. Quarl sipped his tea. "Oh, no, it's that Melina Mercouri who makes this film," he said, "I love that voice of hers." Mr. Quarl was a big man, with big muscles. Fans of old movies might think of him as the ex-boxer turned actor, Mike Mazurski.

They stopped short as there came a knock on the door. Mr. Honeywell pushed the mute button on the remote, and then another button. A large square opened in one corner of the big screen, which showed the outer office. Waiting with his face looking impatiently at the hidden camera was their colleague Mr. Strange. There was no one else in the office.

Honeywell pressed yet a third button, a panel door slid open, and Mr. Strange entered the room.

Strange was a man of only medium height, but with a solid build. He had a tendency to wear black clothing at all times, enlivened only by brightly-colored waistcoats. On this occasion he carried a briefcase.

"Report, Mr. Strange," said Honeywell.

"It's all arranged, sir. The Naval Base will open its doors to a visit from the Mulberry Senior Citizen Retirement Home next Sunday. It was my mentioning that we've got Rear Admiral Verinder, retired, here now that did it."

"Excellent, excellent. I told you, Mr. Quarl, that this Retirement Center is simply a vast spider's web, and our prey has finally arrived. Rear Admiral Verinder, retired, indeed."

Mr. Quarl nodded. "How many of the old folks do we have to bring next Sunday?"

"I said twenty-five." Strange said.

"Twenty-five? Are you mad?"

Strange shrugged. "We'll be slow moving to begin with, but once we get into the Base, what does it matter? And twenty-five old-age-pensioners for hostages -- if worst comes to worst and we need to play that card -- why, it'll be a dawdle."

Quarl looked grimly at Honeywell, but Honeywell did not seem to find the figure of twenty-five senior citizens excessive.

"At least you're going to run background checks on everyone we bring, aren't you?" Quarl said hopefully.

"Background checks?" scoffed Honeywell. "Now it's my turn to ask you if you are mad."

"But some of them might be ex-military."

"I'm sure most of them will be. In fact, if he's to be believed, we even have a super secret spy living with us. What of it? They're all over seventy years old! They pose no danger, even if they did find out what was going on."

Quarl folded his arms across his broad chest stubbornly.

"Come, come, Mr. Quarl," Honeywell said soothingly. "Our residents play card games, and go for long walks, and sit on chairs and watch the world go by, and you could snap anyone of them in two with your fingers. Now come, Strange. You're just in time to see the last half of *Topkapi*. Sit yourself down."

Strange poured himself a cup of tea. "Seven days," he murmured. "Seven days to Project Triton. It's been a long time coming."

"And we are well prepared," Honeywell said. He raised his teacup. Mr. Quarl and Mr. Strange followed suit. They touched cups with a musical ring. Then the three men settled down and devoted all their attention to the television screen.

Chapter 2: Enter Emma Peel

PRESENT DAY LONDON

Emma Knight (Emma Peel that was) finished stuffing her auburn hair (which owed something to Art at this stage in her life) under her bright blue bathing cap, that matched her bright blue swimming costume. She glanced at herself in the floor to ceiling mirror - very briefly, for Emma had never been a vain woman or one obsessed with her looks. She hadn't lost the tan she'd acquired after spending a fortnight's vacation in the Florida Keys some weeks ago, and while she was 65 years old her skin was as firm and toned as that of a much younger woman. She didn't work hard at keeping fit, but she worked hard at having fun and the one took care of the other.

Emma stepped under the shower for a few moments, then left the locker room and went out onto the pool deck. It was her pool, or at least as Knight Industries she had contributed the funds to get it built in the west London suburb near her home. The pool was Olympic-size, with three diving boards of varying heights on the far end.

A handful of youngsters were clustered in one corner, splashing idly about.

Emma dove in without preamble, and swam a couple of laps to warm up a bit. Then she climbed out, and made her way up the ladder to the 60m diving board. The splashing below her stopped as the youths looked up at her incredulously.

Emma walked out to the tip of the board and looked down at the silvery blue water far below. Taking a deep breath, she remained very still, as she visualized in her mind the procedures for a front pike dive. Then she flexed her legs and soared into the air.

She cut through the water cleanly, arced her back and smoothly rose to the surface. The youths gaped at her and then looked at each other. They remained still while the much elder woman put on a display for them - forward dives and backward dives of all kinds, each executed with grace and power.

"Miss, miss," said one of the youngsters, when it was clear Emma had made her last dive. "How can I learn to dive like that, miss?"

"They give classes. You can check the notice board - a new class is forming now."

There were a chorus of questions. "How did you learn to dive like that? Isn't frightening, standing up there so high? I'd be terrified."

Emma smiled. "You mustn't think that. It's a glorious feeling - once you get used to it."

Emma walked out of the Knight Diving Center with a long stride and a cheerful smile. Her swimsuit had been stuffed into a large brocade carpet bag which she swung against her thigh with insouciance. Emma moved with purpose - she had a lot to do. She strode briskly down the street toward the first of two stops she had to make before returning home.

As she made to enter the Quantum Computer store, she noticed that someone else was also heading in - a young man dressed in the droopy fashion of the day. She held the door open and gestured for him to precede her. He looked at her in shock and walked in without acknowledging the courtesy.

Emma shook her head slightly as she followed him in. She went up to the counter and smiled cheerily. "Good afternoon. I was in here yesterday - I've got a notebook computer on order. It was supposed to be ready today."

"Yes, miss," the clerk said, his teeth flashing white against his black skin. "It's ready for you - padded leather case and all." He reached under the counter and lifted out first a leather case, and then a notebook computer. It was light and thin, with a seventeen inch screen.

"I'll just check it - make sure all the software has been loaded properly."

"Certainly, miss."

Emma turned it on, and flicked rapidly through the folders, ensuring that all the special software she had ordered was there - she'd spent the previous day browsing for games and software programs which she felt would appeal to a very old friend.

"All present and correct," Emma said cheerfully. "I knew it would be, of course, but one must

check."

"Of course, miss. More people should double-check things to begin with. Save us from getting calls when they get it home and find out they don't have everything they need." He accepted her credit card and ran it through the machine.

Emma's next stop was Teddy's Theatrical Costumiers. "I need a nurse's costume, please," she told the clerk. The young man ran an eye over Emma's measurements, in a quite respectful manner. "Size 6?" he suggested, and made as if to turn.

"Um, no," Emma said with a smile. "I'd like a size 20. And padding to go with it."

"Oh, yes?" said the clerk.

"Yes, plus a gray wig, and some cheek pads. And the appropriate make-up necessities."

The clerk smiled. "The Mrs. Doubtfire look, eh?" he commented.

Emma grinned. "It's a friend's birthday in a couple of days. I'm going to give him a gift he'll never forget."

As Emma walked back to her car, which she had left at the carport at the Dive Center, a reminiscent smile played around her lips. Her old friend had delighted in impersonations, and outrageous characters, while sticking her in dull and boring roles such as hotel clerk, store clerk, teacher and nurse. Well, this time she was going to give him a nurse that he would never forget.

Emma stowed her parcels in the boot, and accelerated towards home.

Chapter Three: Countdown to danger

PRESENT DAY TIBET-BY-THE-SEA

The man who called himself John Gascoine relaxed in the billiard room of the Mulberry Senior Citizens Luxury Retirement Center.

He had poured himself a brandy and now sat in an overstuffed leather chair between two vast French windows. He warmed the brandy with the palm of his hand and listening with gentle enjoyment to the murmur of voices from the players, the quiet 'thunks' as cue hit ball, the louder cracks as the balls hit each other, and the rattling as a ball descended into its pocket.

The pleasantness was increased by the occasional sound of thunder and flashes of lighting coming from the windows, and raindrops pattering against the glass. A typical day in England, John Gascoine (Beresford Steed) thought to himself happily. He sipped his brandy.

Two men wandered by, deep in discussion of cricket scores. They were discussing Wisden (the cricketer's almanac) and complaining about a volume from 1964 missing from the Library. Scandalous!

Wild-white-hair-maned Professor Stephenson, born and bred in England but who for some reason affected a German accent, entered the Billiard Room and came across to Steed's chair. "My dear

fellow," he said cheerfully, "I'm sorry I'm late. But I see you have been using the time to advantage."

"Certainly, Professor," Gascoine told him with a smile. "Would you like a brandy before we start our golf game?" A particularly loud roll of thunder and a bright flash of lightning accompanied his words.

"No, no, I must keep a clear head if I am to have any chance of beating you. Are we ready?"

Gascoine finished his brandy and rose, slowly, to his feet. "Let's go. Through here, shall we?"

Gascoine opened one of the French windows, and he and Professor Stephenson stepped through, into the sunshine of a bright English morning. Gascoine closed the window behind him and the sound and light effects began anew. The two men left the pleasures of a rainy English morning behind and entered the bright sunshine, with the expectation of a day of 36 holes of golf in front of them.

The Great Golf greeter, clad in plus fours and a bulky sweater, greeted them at the starting gate of the Great Golf Game Center, and helped them to select the golf clubs they would need. They were playing the Greatest Golf Holes in the World Challenge, so they'd need clubs for snow, for ice, even for underwater. The vast panorama of the Miniature Golf Course, with its fairways and putting greens and exotic scenery, spread out before them. It was this Great Golf Game Center, more than any other amenity the Mulberry Luxury Retirement Home offered, that drew residents to it like flies to honey.

Professor Stephenson gestured for Gascoine to start first. Gascoine smiled and gestured that Stephenson really must be the first to start. Stephenson nodded his head in acquiescence and placed his ball on the tee. He took his stance as he assessed the various obstacles that stood between him and the first hole.

"Have you heard about next Sunday's outing, Mr. Gascoine?" Stephenson as he addressed the ball.

"To the Naval Base? Yes, I've heard."

Stephenson brought his club up to the ball slowly, then took it back. He brought it up slowly again, then took it back.

"I can't remember. Is it an old sea dog that you are?"

Gascoine smiled. "I was in the Navy during the War," he commented (for men of Gascoine and Stephenson's generation, there was only one War). "Briefly."

"So you are going to attend?"

"I'm not sure. That day's my birthday, you see, and I'm rather expecting to have visitors."

"Oh, is it so? Splendid. But surely you can bring them along?"

Gascoine nodded. Any visitors he'd have, male or female, would be quite delighted to get a tour of the nation's latest naval base, with all its mod cons and futuristic equipment.

"I'll issue them an invite, of course. Professor, I think that ball's about to grow moss."

Stephenson looked down at the ball he had still not hit, smiled, and the next time he brought his golf club to meet it, golf club head met ball with a satisfying smack. "Four!" roared the Professor.

Chapter Four: The best laid plans

PRESENT DAY FORT KNOX, KENTUCKY, USA

Cathy Gale stood in the darkness, her entire body rigid with terror. "This is ridiculous," she told herself. "Get control of yourself. Breathe. Just breathe."

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, held it and expelled it slowly. Then she breathed again.

"You can do this," she told herself. "You can do this. You've faced psychotic villains without a qualm, you've played roles before, roles that if you weren't convincing would result in you being shot in punishment. Here, all you'll get are rotten tomatoes."

Cathy took another deep, shuddery breath. She'd played roles before but only in front of one or two psychotic killers, never in front of 500 people with a spotlight on her and their ears hanging on her every word.

"We need someone with a British accent," her sister's daughter's husband had told her, "A posh accent. You'd be perfect, Cathy. You don't have to be a trained actress. We're putting on the show for charity, after all. You'll be splendid."

If he were in front of her now she'd strangle him, Cathy thought.

Was that her cue? She felt a cold ball of ice slip from her throat down her chest to her belly. No, no, not yet.

Cathy took another deep breath, and put her long cigarette holder in her mouth. Blast these laws in America that wouldn't allow her to smoke in the wings, let alone on stage. How silly she'd look on stage with an unlit cigarette in a cigarette holder clenched between her teeth.

Trevor - her sister's daughter's husband, came up to her at that point. Cathy's hands itched but she kept them at her sides.

"How're the butterflies?" he whispered.

"They've churned into sour cream by now," Cathy hissed at him.

"Oh, not to worry," he hissed back cheerily. "Once you get on stage just concentrate on your fellow actors. You've done it all before in rehearsals, after all, haven't you."

Cathy's fingers went for him, but Trevor intercepted them and kissed her knuckles. "You're a trooper, Cathy. Oh, there's your cue! On you go."

"And she got a standing ovation at the end," her great grand-niece continued to bubble, once the actress and her entourage had returned to their home. "Her Mrs. Tweed was the hit of the show."

"You *were* splendid," said her twin sister, Patrice (known as 'Pussy' during her wilder days) Galore. "It seems as if it were meant, somehow. You'd been helping Joanne learn her lines, she gets sick, and there you, already word perfect."

"I was in shock when I agreed to it," Cathy told her, accepting the very large whisky and soda that Patrice had prepared for her.

"I can imagine. But you've certainly saved the day. And the charity."

Cathy smiled. "I've never been so frightened in my life, and that's saying something, I can tell you. And I've got two more performances to get through."

"Piece of cake," said Trevor easily. "The first performance is the worst. Now that you've got that under your belt, the rest will be easy."

"I think it was nice of you to stay an extra three days and help out," said her grand-niece. "But I'm

so sorry you're going to miss your friend's birthday."

"I'm only going to be a day late," Cathy said with a shrug. "We had planned it as a week-long celebration, anyway. He'll understand. In fact I'm going to call him tonight and let him know."

Patrice dropped her voice to a lower register. "You're going to *call* him? With phone rates the way the are? Why not just email him?"

Cathy laughed. "My friend is a Renaissance man, but his area of mechanical expertise end with the motor car engine. He tried to fix a toaster for a friend once - the bread charred and the toaster itself ended up in orbit. We're going to try to pull him into the 21st century on this visit."

"We?"

"Well, it is his eightieth birthday party. A lot of his old colleagues are gathering to wish him well. People he's worked with over the years. Ste... I mean, Gascoine, for that is his name, is well-loved by all who knew him. He's getting a notebook computer and we're not going to rest until he knows how to use that email feature and promises to do so."

"Oh, Cathy," Patrice said in dismay. "You're going to be a day late for his *eightieth* birthday party?"

Cathy grimaced. "It's just a day. A day that he's going to spend peacefully at home, and the most excitement he'll get will be if he manages to beat Mike Gambit at a miniature wargame. It'll be fine."

Patrice Galore nodded, and stopped herself from saying, "If you say so." It wasn't as if Cathy weren't going to call the chap on his birthday, although if he was as old-fashioned as she let on, it was a surprise he'd have a phone. Perhaps he used one of the old-fashioned kind.

Cathy made her way up the stairs to her room, stripped off her clothes and stepped under the pins and needles of an ice cold shower. She was only a couple of years younger than Steed, and she didn't have any intention of dying yet awhile. Steed would be just the same. And by arriving a day late she'd have more time to spend with him alone, anyway. Cathy nodded. Yes, the fact that she'd be a day late wouldn't matter at all.

PRESENT DAY MULBERRY LUXURY RETIREMENT CENTER

Mr. Honeywell and Mr. Strange stood around a large table, upon which resided a very large scale model of the Tibet-By-The-Sea Naval Station. Mr. Quarl sat in his chair, watching *Return of the Pink*

Panther on the television set. It must be said, however, that most of his attention was given to the vast array of guns he had spread over the settee, which he was cleaning meticulously one by one.

Chapter Five: The Security Gambit

PRESENT DAY COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

It had been a magical evening for those patrons who attended Covent Garden's production of Nijinsky's *The Faun* ballet, with Mikhail Baryshnikov in fine form. Tuxedo-clad men and evening-gowned women filed out of the Garden in an orderly manner, chatting amongst themselves about the beautiful scenery and the exquisite dancing and the tragedy of ballet dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky who had created magic for many years, and then gone mad at the age of 30 and spent the rest of his life in an insane asylum.

The woman once and forever known as Purdey, tall and slender, with silvery blond hair and the effortless movements of a former ballerina, walked along on the arm of her husband, Mike Gambit. It was his left arm. He had lost his right arm twenty years ago, not in the service of his country, which would have at least made it palatable, but to a drunken driver on the M1 motorway. That the

drunken driver had killed himself in the same crash was scant consolation.

Gambit had been forced to retire from Department S, even though the prosthetic arm he wore was a marvel of technical virtuosity, and had set up a business, with his new wife Purdey as partner, as a security consultant for businesses and private individuals throughout the world.

As they walked through the cool night air toward Charing Cross Hotel, where they were staying the night, Purdey seemed in a dream, and Gambit knew she was reliving the last two hours, picturing Baryshnikov and his company of dancers leaping about the stage, and how it would have appeared if the lead dancer had actually been the incomparable Nijinsky.

"Oh," said Gambit.

"What?"

"I had a call, while we were in the theater. Let me get out my phone. I had it on vibrate."

Purdey released his good arm and he reached into his pocket for his cellphone. He pressed a few numbers and then held the phone to his ear. He listened for a few moments, his face growing extremely grim, then he snapped the phone closed. He stopped and faced Purdey, taking her hands in his.

"That was Marius, in Germany. The Alternities People have got their knickers in a twist and they absolutely insist that we fly over there for a series of meetings...that are going to last until next Monday."

Purdey looked at him, stricken. "But Steed's birthday is on Sunday!"

"I know. But I don't need to tell you how important Alternities are - and our business can't stand another setback, you know that, Purdey. We've got to both be there."

Purdey nodded. She bit her lip. "It's not like no one else will be there. Cathy Gale. Tara King. Emma Peel. They'll all be there. And we'll be there the day after, and we'll be able to spend the whole week with him."

Gambit nodded. "That's right."

Purdey nodded, and they started walking again. "But to miss his eightieth birthday party," she murmured. "When a man gets to be eighty, every day is precious. Every day might be...der Tag."

"Nonsense." Gambit said robustly. "Steed's in great shape, except for that arthritis of his. He'll live

until he's 90. And if he doesn't..." he glanced sideways at his wife and she glanced at him. "Emma Peel will be there." he repeated.

Purdey allowed her lips to quirk into a grin. "That's right. If they...um...and he...um...well, at least he'd die happy."

"That's not what I meant," Gambit said again. "One kiss from the lips of Emma Peel and Steed would wake back up quicker than Sleeping Beauty."

Purdey hugged his good arm. "Still," she said sadly, "I wish this hadn't happened. But he'll understand. I'll call him tomorrow and let him know. Being only one day late won't matter."

Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center, Tibet-By-The-Sea

Mr. Honeywell covered the mouth of the receiver and glared at his short, black-clad associate. "It is very distracting, Mr. Strange, to try to talk on the phone whilst in the background there is the constant sound of popping popcorn, not to mention that aroma. It's positively making my mouth water and I'm trying to concentrate here."

"Sorry," said Mr. Strange.

Honeywell forbore to answer that being sorry buttered no parsnips, and took his hand away from the receiver. "What was that again, Adrian?"

Honeywell nodded several times, and made a few notes on a pad by his elbow. "Right, I've got that."

He hung up the phone and brought the pad over to his chair by the large screen tv. Mr. Strange had taken the popcorn bags out of the microwave and emptied them into two large bowls. Honeywell helped himself to a handful as Mr. Strange shoved *Gambit*, (starring Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine) into the VCR, and turned it on. He put the mute on and turned attentively toward Honeywell.

"It's all working out so very well," Honeywell told him. "The Sleep Gas has been delivered. My contact tells me the crew of the *Triton* have all been given weekend liberty. On Sunday there will be nothing but a skeleton crew aboard the ship - not to mention the naval base itself."

"Oh, yes," Strange said appreciatively, licking butter from his fingers. "That will make things easier."

"Quite. And, the brass that are going to give Verinder and our group the tour of the *Triton* have

actually ordered that wheelchair ramps and other devices be placed in strategic areas, to assist our little lambkin getting around easier!"

"You're joking!" Strange exclaimed.

Honeywell grinned. "Admiral Verinder, retired," he said. "It's amazing what doors open when you can drop the right names."

Strange returned the grin. "And what doors can slam shut," he smirked.

The two men nodded at each other, then turned their attention to the television screen. Mr. Strange reached out a hand for the salt cellar.

Chapter Six: King For A Day

PRESENT DAY MONTREAL, CANADA

Tara Truffaut (Tara King that was) opened the door of her walk-in closet and eyed the vast array of shelves with a critical eye. On the shelves were not clothing but mannequin's heads topped with a variety of wigs - over a hundred of them. Some women collected shoes, and outfits to go with the shoes, Tara had always collected wigs. Which ones should she bring with her on her trip to England?

Before she could make a decision or even give some thought to making her decision, her two grandchildren's voices called to her from below. "We want to go feed the ducks, grandmama! It's almost time for mama to come get us and we want to go feed the ducks!"

Tara sighed. At age fifty-six she still retained her good figure, and one would not think to look at her that she was a grandmama, but today, after a day with her two five year old grandchildren, she was feeling very much like a grandmama. Fighting villains thirty years ago had never worn her out so much.

Nevertheless she trotted down the stairs at their request, slim and trim in corduroy jeans and a white button up shirt, helped the two darling little tykes collect breadcrumbs from the pantry, and then they set off for the pond behind her house to feed the ducks.

Tara had retired from Department S after only a couple of the years in the service, when she realized that Steed and the service were not for her and that she wanted a husband and children. She hadn't decided that til she'd met the right man, Jean-Claude Truffaut, a French Canadian with ambitions for politics. Now he was a minister in the Montreal government and fighting a hard battle to keep

Quebec in Canada.

When Tara and the tykes returned to her house, it was to find that her daughter had arrived to pick up the children. Tara didn't try to persuade her to stay for a cup of tea - she had packing to do and the tykes had been dropped on her unexpectedly that morning. Linda (Tara's daughter) handed her a small piece of Death By Chocolate Cake as a thank-you, and she drove away. Tara remained in the driveway returning the waves of her grandchildren, then turned her steps toward her house.

The front door was ajar. Surely she hadn't left that open when she and the grandkids had headed down to the pond? Tara sighed. She trotted back up the stairs and entered her room, with its open suitcase on the bed. Jean-Claude was not going to accompany her, which she thought was a pity. She'd spent little enough time with him these past two years...well, that was the fault of the Quebecois....

Tara reached up for one of her wigs when out of the corner of her eye she caught a movement in the shadows of the vast closet. Picking up the bust with one hand she turned sharply and shattered it over the head of the intruder. He collapsed at her feet.

“Well done, Mrs. Truffaut,” came another voice, in French, this time from the door. She turned and saw that this one had a gun, which he pointed at her with a steady hand.

“What is it you want?” she demanded, also in French.

“Your husband becomes a nuisance, madame. With you in our hands, he will no longer be a nuisance. Come, please.”

Tara assessed the situation critically. Could it be true? If they wanted to apply pressure to Jean-Claude, why hadn't they tried to kidnap his grandchildren? She did not want to ask this question for fear of putting ideas into their heads, but the man seemed to read her mind.

“We are not barbarians, madame, and we do not war on innocent children. Now, please, come.”

Tara took a deep breath. She'd go along with it - for a while anyway, until she could escape. But first...

“Look, you see I'm packing. I'm supposed to be taking a plane tonight for England.”

“You will miss your flight, madame.”

“Yes, yes, the point is I was going there to attend a friend's birthday party. He is going to be eighty years old on Sunday.”

“My felicitations, madame.”

“Thank you. The point is, you simply must let me call him and tell him I’m going to be delayed. He’ll be terribly hurt otherwise.”

The man with the gun looked skeptical.

“Look,” said Tara. “There on the dresser. See that white-haired gentleman with his arm around me? That’s him. Look there - look at that letter from a Mrs. Emma Peel. It gives all the details of the birthday party. I’ll show you his phone number in my address book and you can dial the number for me if you like.”

The man in the closet had regained consciousness by this time, and his compatriot ordered him to verify Tara’s words. At a nod from him, the man with the gun said, “*Zut alors*. Make your telephone call. But be very, very careful. You will say only that you are delayed due to a crisis with your husband, and that he is calling to you even as you speak.”

“Right,” said Tara.

The man without the gun dialed the phone number, then handed her the receiver. The man with the gun held it in a menacing manner. Tara took a deep breath as she heard the phone chirping away on the other end. No answer...then Steed’s answerphone clicked on.

“John,” said Tara, “this is Tara. I’m terribly sorry, John, but Jean-Claude took a bit of a fall this morning.” The man jerked his gun warningly. “Nothing serious,” Tara said hurriedly, “but I am going to be delayed. I’m terribly sorry to miss your birthday, but I’ll try to see you as soon as I can. Au revoir, John.”

She hung up the phone.

“Right,” said the man with the gun. “Let’s go.”

Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center, Tibet-By-The-Sea

The man known to the inhabitants of the Mulberry retirement Center as John Gascoine yawned and stretched. Tomorrow was the day, a day he’d been looking forward to for a long time. Not because it was his birthday, but because all his old friends were coming to visit him at the same time.

He turned and saw the light blinking on his phone. He pressed the button, and heard Tara King’s

recorded message. He listened to it, his brow furrowed. Why on earth was she calling him John? She, like all his friends from those days, simply called him Steed. Perhaps to clue him in that it was a practical joke? Because it was, of course. First Cathy, then Mike and Purdy, now Tara, all telling him that they were going to miss his birthday. What a mean practical joke for them to play on an old man. They'd probably jump out from behind a door or something to surprise him and serve them jolly well right if he had a heart attack then and there.

He poured himself a brandy and changed into his silk pajamas. Now it only remained for Emma Peel to call him and give him *her* regrets.

But as the night hours passed on, Emma Peel did not call.

Chapter Seven: Der Tag. Morning

PRESENT DAY

LONDON - EMMA KNIGHT'S HOUSE

Emma Knight (Emma Peel that was) reached out her hand and turned off her alarm clock. After a quick shower, she wrapped in her kimono, went into her study and turned on her computer. She took a quick look at her email and saw a message from Cathy Gale, saying she'd be a day late for the party - and that she'd left a message for Steed to that affect on his answerphone. She also saw a message from Purdey explaining their situation, and Purdey's hope that they would only be a couple of day's late for Steed's party. She said she'd called up Steed and left him a message on his answerphone.

There was no message from Tara King. Emma was surprised at this - first that Tara hadn't been delayed (it seemed to be a pattern) but more that she hadn't emailed to say she was leaving to catch her flight. Tara, as well as Cathy Gale and the Gambits, would be staying at her house in London for the week in which they were to celebrate Steed's birthday. Since the Underground went straight from Gatwick to downtown London there would have been no need for Emma to meet any of them, but Tara usually kept her apprised of her travel details.

Nevertheless, no message was all to the good. It meant Tara would be in London for Steed's birthday that night.

Their plan had been to take Steed to dinner in Tibet-By-The-Sea that night, than on to London for the entire week where they would go to see plays and visit a few touristy spots. In the back of Emma's van was a motorized wheelchair, with quite a few gadgets that Emma had designed personally. Not that Steed really needed a wheelchair, but once he saw it Emma was sure he'd fall in love with it.

Emma sent email responses to Cathy and the Gambits, then switched off her computer. She dressed quickly in jeans and a sweatshirt, picked up the suitcase which contained her corpulent nurse's costume, and the large brocade bag which contained Steed's new notebook computer, as well as some other odds and ends, and went to her van. She checked her watch. She'd arrive in Tibet-By-The-Sea in good time, change into the nurse's outfit in a convenient restroom, and then see Steed. Him and her, all alone. What fun they would have!

PRESENT DAY

TIBET-BY-THE-SEA, MULBERRY LUXURY RETIREMENT CENTER

Mr. Strange, his back to the tv that was lifeless for the moment, ticked off a series of entries in his notebook.

"The antidote to the sleep gas will be released in the vans on our drive to the Naval station," he said. "The drivers, and the passengers, including those Oldsters, will thus be immune to the Sleep Gas when we release it, but everyone else will be out like a light for at least twelve hours. Our men will man the gates and make sure no one gets in during that time."

"Good," commented Honeywell.

Strange nodded. "Our man on the *Triton* also has an antidote to the sleep gas. He'll be ready and waiting to escort us to the Weapons Bays."

"And with all those weapons....and the codes to activate them...no one will be able to stop us."

Strange nodded again and closed his notebook. "Operation *Triton* begins in five hours."

"Right." Honeywell glanced at the tv. "Five hours. Mr. Strange, I think we have just time enough to watch *Ocean's Eleven*. The original, of course."

"Of course."

Chapter Eight: Der Tag. Later that same Morning - Memories

PRESENT DAY

ROADSIDE CAFÉ QUITE NEAR TIBET-BY-THE-SEA

Emma Knight looked at herself in the mirror in the ladies lav. The pads she had stuffed into her cheeks swelled them out like a chipmunk, and the wig she had pulled over her own auburn hair was gray and piled in a high pompadour. Her bosom was tremendous under her nurses' outfit...

Mt. Everest and K2 had nothing on them. The Annapurna of her rear end was quite a triumph, as well. Emma smiled. Steed would never recognize her.

She folded up her real clothes neatly and stuffed them into her brocaded carpet bag, took a deep breath, and walked out of the lav into the café. No one paid her any mind. She exited the café, climbed into the van, and started the remaining five miles to Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center.

It had been an enjoyable drive up to Tibet-By-The-Sea, Emma mused. There had been plenty of people she could have called and talked to on her cellphone while she drove, but of course she didn't. Not because it was illegal to talk on a cellphone while driving in England (although it was, as was drinking a beverage or eating anything, even a candy bar!) but because Emma was nothing if not a good driver and she preferred to have both her hands on the wheel and her attention on the road in

front of her.

But she'd been immersed in pleasant memories for all that. She'd turned on the radio and listened to a cricket match in progress. Steed was a devoted cricketer and he'd continued to play into his seventies - indeed he and his old friends had had quite a cricket match for...his seventieth birthday, that had been, Emma remembered. She'd accounted herself well with the bat, too.

Hmmm...yes, that had been the game where she'd brought along a couple of her Little Sisters. Emma had never wanted nor had children, but after her retirement from Department S and return to domestic life with Peter Peel - and managing Knight Industries, she'd joined Big Sisters-Little Sisters and acted as mentor for quite a few teenagers whom she'd turned from the path of boyfriend-pregnancy-council house into the path of university degree-job in a scientific field-nice house-boyfriend. Much the best way to feel a success in one's life.

Which isn't to say she'd never wondered what it would be like to have been married to Steed. Probably divorced in two weeks, Emma thought with a smile. Steed was simply not a one-woman man, and even for her - and she knew she held a special place in his heart - he would not have been able to settle down for more than a year or two. And much as she loved him - and understood him - she would not have put up with any roaming. And he'd have seen that as challenge! She grinned...it might have been fun at that. - keeping track of him, matching wits with him as he tried to deceive her by this or that strategem...breaking in on them at the crucial moment....

Emma laughed, and shook her head. Their friendship had lasted more than 40 years because they hadn't got married to each other. They'd remained extremely good friends, even rekindled the romantic part of their relationship after the death of Peter Peel - (only a few years after his return, from injuries suffered in his plane crash in the Amazon), but they had remained as two ships crossing continually in the night - if they'd ever married it would have been to collide...and sink.

"The best of both worlds," Emma thought to herself. "That's what we've had. That's what we'll always have."

She paused outside the gates of Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center, took a deep breath, and drove through the gates. No turning back now.

Chapter Eight: Der Tag. Der Meeting.

PRESENT DAY

MULBERRY LUXURY RETIREMENT CENTER: TIBET-BY-THE-SEA

John Gascoine's eyes darted this way and that desperately, but there was no place he could run (fast enough) and no place he could hide from the very large, very loud woman in front of him. There was one solution (a quick karate chop across the throat) but he was too much of a gentleman to do it and besides there were too many witnesses.

He'd been up betimes with some of the other residents of the Retirement Center, practicing Tai Chi on the 13th tee of the quite, quite fantastic miniature golf course. It was a morning exercise regimen that Cathy Gale had suggested when she'd visited Steed there for the first time, and all the residents had taken to it. Like true Britons, they'd continued to do the slow, steady movements even as he'd been button-holed by the very large woman dressed in a nurse's outfit, looking like a Scottish dreadnought.

"Och, Mistair Gascoine," she'd said cheerily, pinching his cheek, "I'm glad to see thee up and about this marnin. Let me introduce myself. I'm your..." she dropped her voice to a terrifyingly throaty whisper, "birthday present." She beamed at him.

"I...I don't think it's my birthday today," Gascoine said feebly.

"Och, ye darlin' man. Of course it is. Yer friends will be coming to see thee tonight, and I'm here to get you ready. I'm to give you a complete physical checkup, ginger you up a bit, tho I must say..." she ran her eyes up and down and smiled quite terrifyingly, practically a leer, Gascoine thought.

John Gascoine was quite a connoisseur of women, and found beauty in all shapes and sizes, but the dreadnought in front of him was not only too, too daunting but too dreadful as well, with very white teeth which she flashed at him and a gleam in her eyes that he did not like at all. Not this early in the morning, and he hadn't had his first glass of champagne yet.

"Let's go, Mistair Gascoine," she said, taking his arm and practically yanking him off his feet.

"I...really, I...I don't think I caught your name," Gascoine said, feebly.

"I'm Nurse Pray," she told him.

"Pray? What a nice and...er..appropriate name, Nurse. But you see, Nurse, I don't have time for a checkup this morning. There's been a special outing planned for us - for some of us here, I mean to say, for the ex-military men here, to go to see the Naval Base...and the bus is going to be leaving in half an hour. I can't possibly miss it, but of course I can't ask you to come. Ladies aren't interested in military things, are they, and we'll be gone quite four or five hours, I'm sure."

"Och, ye darlin' man," Nurse Pray brayed. "How can ye say such a thing? Me own father trod the decks and had a heart of oak, didn't he?" She broke out into a terrible falsetto: "Hearts of oak are our ships, jolly tars are our men, we'll all stand together, steady lads steady." She thumped her chest, "We'll fight for our honor again and again!"

"It will be a joy to visit your wee Naval Base," she told him. "I'll serenade the darling passengers - I know quite a lot of sea chanties, you know. In fact I'll lead us all in song."

After hearing that, Gascoine looked around wondering if any of his fellow Tai Chi-ans were ready to jump on the woman, but either they hadn't heard her terrible promise or they weren't going on the tour and had no pity for those who were.

"Nurse Pray," Gascoine drew himself up, "I can deceive you no longer, much as I was tempted at first sight. But you're too kind, I can't do it. I am *not* John Gascoine. You have the wrong man. I think he's out for his early morning constitutional - you might try the 18th hole."

She wagged a finger at him. "Ye can't fool me, ye rascal. You were described to me...tall, dark and handsome, they told me you were."

"How kind of them," Gascoine said.

"Yes, wasn't it. Now, into your room with ye, and let's have ye out of those clothes."

Gascoine put his arms across the door jamb. "Nurse Pray, no. Thirty minutes, you remember. Only thirty minutes before the bus leaves. We can't possibly do anything in thirty minutes that would justify entering my room and removing my clothes." He paused, but he couldn't help it. "Or yours, either," he said with a roguish wink.

"Och, ye daaaarrrrrrrlin man," Nurse Pray simpered. She put her arms around him, actually lifted him up a couple of inches, and carried him back onto his bed where she landed on top of him.

Her face was so close that Gascoine was forced to gaze into her eyes..."Mrs. Peel!" he cried.

The large woman on top of him started to laugh. She rolled off him onto the floor and her body shook with mirth.

"Mrs. Peel!" Steed said reproachfully.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Steed, I..." she dissolved into laughter.

Steed got off the bed, and closed the door that had remained open after their impetuous entrance. He leaned his back against it til it clicked. "Right," he said meaningly.

"No, Steed." For all her bulk, Emma rose to her feet lithely. "We've only got thirty minutes, remember."

"*Only* thirty minutes?" Steed said, his eyes narrowing. "I don't think I like the way you said that. I'll have you know..."

"No, no," Mrs. Peel said, "But it'd take me half an hour to get out of this costume, and half an hour to get into it again. And we can't miss that bus, remember."

"I wouldn't mind if we missed it," Gascoine said sulkily.

"But I don't want to miss my chance of annoying everyone on the bus with my rendition of Hearts of Oak."

Gascoine laughed. "I always knew you were a frustrated actress, Mrs. Peel."

They embraced, and then arm and arm walked out of the room. Mrs. Peel, remembering her role as nurse, disengaged her arm quickly. "Don't want to give anyone else ideas," she murmured. "Not yet, anyway."

"Let's go see Admiral Verinder," Gascoine suggested. "Our newest resident. He's the big cheese, the head Stilton, who managed to wangle us this tour of the Naval Base, and the latest battle cruiser called the *Triton*. I'm looking forward to seeing that."

"Lead on, Macduff," Nurse Pray said in her penetrating voice. "I'll be delighted to meet the dear man."

"And he'll be delighted to meet you, I'm sure."

Chapter Ten: Trapped!

PRESENT DAY THE NAVAL BASE

I.

As the two minivans filled with oldsters headed towards the Naval Base, Admiral Verinder (ret) and John Gascoine continued their animated discussion of the Battle of Jutland which they had begun over the breakfast table. While Emma could have contributed comments and opinions to the discussion, being well up on Naval history, she had spent her time at the table making inroads into the marzipan delights, and now on the bus she was surveying the scenery and wondering what, if any mischief, she should come up with in her role as Nurse Pray.

The men in the cab of the van, the driver and a passenger dressed all in black with a snazzy waistcoat, she noted, were having an animated discussion which she could not hear, and occasionally glancing back at their charges. There was a strange aroma in the air, not unpleasant, but she couldn't place it.

II.

"The Sleep Gas antidote has been released in the back," Mr. Strange reported to the driver, Mr. Charon (whom we have not yet met in these pages). "By the time we get to the Base they'll all be immune to the effects of the gas."

"Thirty of 'em," Mr. Charon said. "Thirty! It doesn't matter if they're all conscious, we'll be a bunch of snails trying to chivvy them about."

"Don't be foolish. We get them on the ship and we lock them all in a room and forget about them."

Mr. Charon glanced back. "We've got a couple of ladies back there. We can't lock them in the same room with the gents. Not for hours on end."

Mr. Strange raised an eyebrow at this unexpected touch of delicacy from his colleague. "You can bring that up with Mr. Honeywell once we're on board," he said.

III.

Emma Knight glanced affectionately at John Steed. She saw Steed - she could never think of him as Gascoine, why had he chosen such a ridiculous pseudonym? - at least once a month. Either she came to visit him in Tibet-By-The-Sea, or he 'made a break from the stalag' as he called it, and came up to London to visit her. But each time she saw him these days she always felt a pang. He hadn't shrunk at all, height wise...but he relied on his umbrella more and more and moved slower and slower. His eyes were still the same, alight with mischief and intelligence, for all that they were set in rheumy folds. Each time she embraced him he was still wiry and strong, but that superb muscle tone had aged away. Time....Emma thought with an anticipatory shiver...time is not our friend.

What about me, fifteen years from now, when I'm eighty, she thought. Steed will surely be here, all the old gang...I'll have to get myself a toyboy to keep myself young...she chuckled at the thought and Steed glanced at her.

Steed, for this outing, was wearing his bowler of course, and a suit, and even carried his broly/cane. She wondered if it still had a sword within...probably did.

Admiral Verinder (ret) went up to have a chat with the driver, and Steed came to sit beside her. (All the other seats were filled but no one had wanted to try to sit beside her girth which spread over two-and-a-half seats.

"I can smell the tang in the air already," Steed told her. "We're nearly to the base. Apparently we're going to get a tour of the *Triton* first - Verinder's quite anxious to see it."

"As am I." Emma looked at him, and smiled. "I'm going to confess something to you. I'm rather glad Cathy and the Gambits were delayed. It's going to be nice to have you to myself all day."

"You'll have me to yourself all night as well," Steed said roguishly.

Emma blinked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Well...Tara's delayed as well, isn't she?"

"What?"

Steed stared at her. "She called me last evening - left a message on my answer phone, said she'd be delayed!"

"That's odd," Emma said. "She never called or emailed me. That's very odd. She always has done when something's come up in the past." (And something sometimes did. Tara was the wife of a politician, after all.)

Steed's stare grew fixed as a horrible thought struck him. "She called me John in the message," he said very quietly. "She called me John twice."

They looked at each other in sudden understanding. None of Steed's associates ever called him John.

"We've got to get off this van," Steed said decisively.

But while they'd been talking the van had passed through the entrance gates to the base, with the driver flashing an ID and the guard saluting Admiral Verinder.

Emma dug her cellphone out of her purse and started to punch buttons. No good. She was not in range of a signal. She stuffed the phone away.

"Wait til we're on board the ship," she said. "We'll go off into a quiet corner for a few minutes. I brought your birthday present with me -" she hefted the brocade bag. "It's a lap top computer, all primed and ready to go with wireless access. I'll be able to get online and I'll text message various people through their cellphones and get them started on finding out what's going on, if anything."

Steed nodded.

They spent the rest of the trip towards the ship in silence, each lost in thought. John Steed's thoughts were not pleasant ones. Tara was in trouble, and Tara had called him. She'd been in trouble since last night! And he'd failed her. She'd called him John, and obviously it had been a plea for help and how

could it not have occurred to him that it was a plea for help? If anything happened to her because of his delay...

He felt Emma take his hand and squeeze it. He looked at her with a grateful smile. She knew what he was thinking.

Steed stifled his impatience as the two minivans came to a halt in front of the vast ship called the *Triton*, and very, very slowly all the oldsters oozed out of the vans and into a queue to board the ship. A few Navy brass waited patiently at the top. There was going to be a ceremony of the Admiral, retired.

Emma looked at the van thoughtfully. She had stowed Steed's motorized wheelchair in it, and they'd intended that he'd use it while on the ship. But that was all changed, now. May as well leave it where it was.

If I wasn't 80 years old, Steed thought to himself, if I were only 70, I'd drag the driver out of that van, hop in it, and head back for town. But best to do this Mrs. Peel's way. She'll alert anyone and everyone, and by the time the tour of the ship ends we'll know whether we need to be heading to London to take wing on a flight to Canada, or to her house. He took a deep breath.

The next several minutes, as they all walked up the gangplank, met and shook hands with the brass, and then started heading towards the wardroom of the ship, were a blur. Then Mrs. Peel tugged at his arm and they faded back to the end of the queue and then through a metal door. Down into the depth of the ship they went.

"All this metal is going to wreak havoc on sending anything from that computer of your, isn't it?" Steed asked anxiously.

"It's the most powerful computer that could be got by someone with my connections," Emma told him. "Not to worry. Here, this is a good place."

They entered a small cramped room, full of dials on the walls and a few comfortable leather seats before them. Steed watched Emma open up the computer, press a button, and see the screen spring to life. She pulled up some kind of a program, and clicked her tongue.

"Plenty of networks available, all secure," she commented. She scrolled down the list. Her fists clenched. "It's no good, Steed. Every single network requires a password. I can't get online without one."

Steed sighed. "So we're going to be delayed...what...another three hours? I'm not going to be able to enjoy the rest of this tour, my dear. But I suppose we must go through with it. Once the ceremonies

for Verinder are out of the way I'll plead shortness of breath or something and see if we can't get away."

Emma nodded. She opened the door to the hallway again, and then as suddenly closed it.

"What's wrong?" Steed demanded.

Emma looked at him. "There are two men in sailor uniforms, unconscious, lying on the floor of the corridor. They don't look like they'd been in a fight. They look as if they had just...fallen over."

Emma opened the door again very cautiously, looking to left and right. The corridor spanned a long way, and in the distance she saw a couple other heaps of bodies. Steed's chin brushed her hair as he took a look over her shoulder. Then they pulled their heads back into the room and stared at each other.

"Something's rotten in the state of Denmark," Emma said.

Steed nodded. "Yes. Here, too."

They looked at each other. Simultaneously they took deep breaths.

"Well," said Steed, "let's get going, Mrs. Peel. We're needed."

Chapter Eleven: The Cruise

PRESENT DAY THE TRITON

Mr. Honeywell stood on the command deck of the *Triton*, gazing out into the harbor through the thick glass that surrounded the deck. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Mr. Quarl and Mr. Hausen move from position to position, fiddle with switches and then exchange looks and nods. Finally Quarl returned to Honeywell's side.

"It's all here, Mr. Honeywell," he said happily. "The engines, the steering, the navigation...it can all be controlled from this deck...it's all automated, as per advertised. For our purposes, a crew of five will be quite sufficient."

Honeywell nodded. Absently, he placed the fingers of his right hand between the third and fourth buttons of his vest and lifted his chin the slightest bit. "I can feel the power, Mr. Quarl," he said softly. "All of these tons of machinery, all the weapons, at our beck and call. The mere press of a button and this great leviathan will do anything we want it to do."

"With the right codes," said Mr. Hausen, who had seated himself in the main engineer's chair. "The captain has to input those codes, remember, and he's asleep."

"Not to worry, Mr. Hausen," said Honeywell cheerfully. "Mr. Strange should be here any minute with the solution to that problem."

Hausen nodded. He swiveled his chair back around and ran his eyes over the control panel once again.

The sound of footsteps caused him to look up.

The elderly Admiral Verinder entered the deck room, followed by the black-clad Mr. Strange, an ugly revolver in his hand. Behind him was Mr. Charon.

Verinder's face was white and he was shaking, but it was not from old age. His eyes were smoking with rage.

"Mr. Strange," said Honeywell chidingly. "You shouldn't have pulled a gun on our honored guest. Put it away, please."

Strange did as he was bid, then went to stand by the hatch, arms folded across his chest.

"What's this all about, sir?" demanded the admiral. "What's going on here?"

"Admiral, I intend to borrow this ship for the day. Take it for a little cruise."

Verinder's eyes bulged. "Don't be absurd, sir! You need a crew of 500 men to run this ship! And it seems you've killed them all!"

"Oh, not killed, Admiral, not killed. They are merely asleep...they'll wake up in 48 hours none the worse for wear."

Verinder took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. "Well, that's something, anyway. But you've scuppered your own chances of taking this ship for a 'cruise' as you put it. Without 500 men this craft isn't going anywhere!"

Mr. Honeywell clicked his tongue. "You insult my intelligence, Admiral. The Triton is the latest experimental craft - practically all of its operations can be controlled by radio...from this command deck. I know all about its capabilities, so don't try to pull any silly games with me."

"Well, aren't you the clever one then," snarled Verinder. "Go ahead, start the engines and head for open sea then, why don't you?"

"I will, as soon as you give me the codes which will enable me to set the machinery in motion."

"Ha!" crowed Verinder. "You were too clever by half! Only the captain and his first officer know the codes, and they're asleep for 48 hours! So put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Mr. Honeywell smiled at Verinder sweetly.

"All the officers aboard know the code, Admiral," he commented. "Otherwise, they'd be in rather a bad way if the captain or first officer were killed during a battle...they'd be dead in the water, wouldn't they?"

Verinder shrugged. "Doesn't matter how many of the crew know the codes - they're all asleep, aren't they?"

"Yes....all except you. So I need you to give me the codes."

"Me? Don't be daft! This is the first time I've been on this bloody ship!"

"To be sure, to be sure," Honeywell said, his voice as smooth as syrup. "But you spent the last two years of your career overseeing the design of it, and you are part of that cadre of senior officers who know....what is the technical term for it... oh yes...the override codes?"

Verinder's eyes narrowed. So. These men were very well informed. Well, it wasn't going to do them any good. What did they consider him? "Get stuffed," he said, viciously. "I've lived a long life, I'm not afraid of pain, and I'm willing to die for my country."

Mr. Honeywell sighed. "Mr. Strange."

Verinder straightened his shoulders and stared straight ahead. They could beat him bloody...they could threaten to put a bullet through his brain. He wouldn't talk.

A photograph was suddenly thrust in front of his eyes. A photograph of his wife...his sweet, kind, beautiful, fragile wife, tied to a chair with a strip of plaster over her mouth. Her eyes stared at the camera in shock.

"Taken this morning, Admiral," Honeywell said softly.

Verinder turned and lunged at Strange, who merely turned and guided the elder man down to the deck, not gently.

"We have more photos, Admiral," Honeywell barked. "And we have more than that. We have your son. Your daughter. Your grandchildren. We have them all."

Verinder lay on the deck, gasping for breath.

"Mr. Strange, that was unkind. Please help the Admiral to his feet."

"Get your bloody hands off me," grunted Verinder, standing up slowly. He stared at Honeywell. "I

give you the codes. Then what?"

"That's my secret, Admiral. I will say only that there are many weapons on this ship, but there is only a *chance* that they might be used to kill innocent people, if certain governments don't give us what we want. But if you do not give us the codes, all of your family will most certainly die."

Verinder stared at Mr. Honeywell. Then at Mr. Strange, who fanned a sheaf of photographs out across his chest so that Verinder could see them.

"Alright, damn you," Verinder said hoarsely. "All right. I'll give you the codes."

PRESENT DAY

THE TRITON - BELOW DECKS

John Steed sat quietly in one of the comfortable leather chairs, tapping his fingers slowly on a table, lost in thought. Mrs. Peel, being much the more mobile, had gone out to reconnoiter. He had remained behind to think.

Unconscious sailors could mean only one thing...someone was trying to take over the ship. Was that too great a leap to make on the basis of a bunch of unconscious men? No, not at all. He'd 40 years of experience with this type of thing and he knew in his water that that was what was happening. Someone was taking over this ship.

What could he and Emma do about it?

Emma moved as gracefully and powerfully as a woman half her age...but her days of going through a group of toughs like a dose of salts was long gone. And while he could despatch anyone who came close enough to him to *be* despatched, all the villains had to do was stay out of range and shoot him and that would be that.

No...they'd have to use *all* brains this time.

Mrs. Peel returned. She dropped into the chair next to Steed. Her face was grim.

"I've been through every room, every corridor. Men in heaps everywhere. Not dead....just....sleeping, it seems. But they won't wake up."

"Some kind of knockout gas," Steed said, nodding. "But why didn't it effect us?"

"Perhaps it came *with* us. From the Mulberry Retirement Home."

Steed grimaced. "That seems the logical explanation. I noticed an odd odor in the van. I paid no attention to it at the time...but perhaps it was something that inoculated us against this knockout gas."

"Us, and the ten attendants from Mulberry who came with us."

"Ten men, to hijack a ship? It doesn't seem possible."

"It must be possible, or they wouldn't be trying to do it."

"Well, we've got to...."

Steed paused. "Do you hear that?"

Emma cocked her head...then her liquid brown eyes met his. "The engines...I can hear the engines. Someone's turned on the ignition."

"That's right, Mrs. Peel. The ship's *moving*. And taking us with it. Somewhere."

Emma nodded. "The question," she said musingly, "is where. And why."

Chapter Twelve: The Avengers

PRESENT DAY MONTREAL

Tara Truffaut (Tara King that was) sat with her captors at the table, dining on delicious pressed duck. Henri was a gourmet cook, she'd give him that.

Things had not gone bad so far, Tara thought to herself. She'd had to ride in the back of a closed-in van so she'd been unable to see where they were going, and Henri (for that was whom she had hit over the head) watched her with gun at the ready at all times. She had sat quietly, eyes closed, paying attention to the left and right turns, and the time between those turns, and the sound of the van speeding down a highway.

They'd come to a halt and she'd been ordered out, to see that she was at a country house. Henri jerked the gun for her to enter the house. Tara tensed up as she did so, eyes darting this way and that assessing possible weapons. If they were going to shove her into an airless closet with a bag over her head, she would have fought back tooth and nail.

But they turned out to be gentlemen after all. They gestured her to a living room with television and bookcases and told her to make herself comfortable. Henri had returned his gun to his shoulder holster and gone into the kitchen to make dinner. The other man poured glasses of wine from a decanter and handed one to her. Tara accepted it cautiously. Since it had been poured from the same decanter odds were it wasn't drugged, and she could certainly use a drink.

She also noted that the man moved close to her without fear. He obviously wasn't expecting her to try anything. She thought about that. She was getting good looks at each of them, and she knew their names. Either they expected their ploy to catapult them into the safety of power immediately, or despite their politeness they did not intend for her to survive to be able to identify them.

For the rest of that evening, Tara King played a difficult game. She didn't want to appear without fear - that might give them ideas that they'd better be a bit careful about how close they got to her. Nevertheless she didn't want to appear like a spineless jelly fish, either.

"The thing is," she said now, placing another piece of delicious duck into her mouth, "that terrorism accomplishes nothing. Terrorists kill a lot of innocent people, and may end up getting what they want. Then another group of people decide that they don't like the way things are, and *they* turn terrorist. It's a never ending cycle, don't you see?"

The other man, whom Henri called Gerrard, merely shrugged his shoulders gallically. "We want what we want, and we shall force the current government to give it to us."

Tara shook her head and gritted her teeth in frustration. You just couldn't reason with people.

After dinner, they returned to the living room.

"Would you like to play cards, madam?" said Henri.

"I'd much rather watch television, if you don't mind," Tara responded. "It's almost time for BBC news."

"Oh, yes." Henri and Gerrard exchanged looks. "Our colleagues will have delivered our ultimatum to your husband by now. We will see if you our on the news, n'est pas?"

He turned on the set, and punched the channel for BBC news.

After about ten minutes of dialog that Tara listened to and didn't hear, the news presenter suddenly reached out as if handed a sheet of paper and began to read from it, out of sight.

"Strange goings-on in the town of Tibet-By-The Sea this morning," the presenter said.

Tara's ears pricked up. That's where Steed lived.

"Tibet-By -The-Sea is home to a naval base, and that entire base seems in the thrall of some kind of sleeping disease...everyone on the base from Naval personnel to civilians has been found fast asleep.

Today was the day that the HMS *Triton* was supposed to head to sea for its sea trials, and it did, so apparently the crew aboard ship were not affected.

And in other local news, an entire coach party of old-age pensioners from the Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center have gone missing! Their transport has been found at the naval base, but they themselves haven't been seen."

Whatever else the presenter might have said was lost as Tara's face went white and she flopped back in her chair, gasping for breath. "I'm...oh, dear...I feel faint. Please...please, a glass of wine."

Henri moved quickly, pouring a glass of wine and bringing it to her. He bent over her, holding the glass to her lips.

Tara King's hand moved faster than a striking snake. She reached up as if to steady his hand on the glass, and then darted to remove the gun from his shoulder holster. Then she placed her foot in his chest and shoved.

Tara was on her feet in an instant. "Drop your gun now, Gerrard," she commanded. "If I have to tell you twice I will shoot you instead. Don't believe I won't do it."

Gerrard grinned. "Oh, please, madame."

Tara pressed the trigger and a bullet whizzed past Gerrard's ear. Taking out a bit of the bottom. Blood started to flow. Gerrard's face went white and wordlessly he took out his gun - very slowly, and placed it on the floor.

"Kick it over here. Gently."

Gerrard did so. Tara bent down to pick it up, while keeping her head up and her eyes on the two men. She placed the new gun in the waistband of her trousers.

"Now, your car keys."

Gerrard blinked. "Quoi?"

"Your car keys, man. Give them to me."

Gerrard pulled his keys out of his pocket and slid them along the floor as well. Tara picked them up, and began backing towards the door.

"All right, gentlemen, listen closely, because I will say this only once. I don't have time to deal with

you in the way you deserve - so I'm not going to. I shall inform my husband that you released me of your own volition, because you saw the error of these kinds of tactics. Right?

Now I'm going to go visit my friend...." and she shook the barrel of the gun rather raggedly in the direction of the television before bringing it back to bear on them..."and if anything has happened to him I will personally track you both down, stick your heads into that duck press and press them until *all* the juices run out. Get it?"

And then she whirled and ran out of the room, out of the house, into the van, and gunned the van down the road.

Her two former captors stood staring at each other, their arms still raised in the air.

Eventually Gerrard recalled that he was bleeding all over himself and applied a handkerchief to his earlobe.

"I sincerely hope nothing happens to her friend," he said at last.

Henri nodded, fervently. "*Moi, aussi.*"

Chapter Thirteen: "We're needed"

PRESENT DAY GERMANY

Mike Gambit and his wife Purdey sat around the table in their hotel suite, pouring over the material they had brought with them to discuss the bid for the Alternities contract. They needed this job - it would not break the firm if they lost the contract but it would very likely drop them out of contention for similar jobs in the future.

They'd had a day of productive talks yesterday...without the key decision maker, who would be at the meeting the next day. It was they whom they truly had to impress.

Mike was in short sleeves, unself-conscious of his prosthetic right arm. He sipped tea, then looked at his watch.

"Almost time for the BBC news, Purdey."

Purdey picked up the remote control and turned on the television. Most of the channels were in German, of course - which both she and Gambit understood - but there was also the BBC news

channel and it was to this she turned.

She went back to her studying, occasionally tapping some information into her laptop computer, when the name Tibet-By-The-Sea caught her attention. Her head lifted in unison with Mike's and they looked at the screen in shock.

... this morning," the presenter said.

"Tibet-By -The-Sea is home to a naval base, and that entire base seems in the thrall of some kind of sleeping disease...everyone on the base from Naval personnel to civilians has been found fast asleep.

Today was the day that the HMS *Triton* was supposed to head to sea for its sea trials, and it did, so apparently the crew aboard ship were not affected.

And in other local news, an entire coach party of old-age pensioners from the Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center have gone missing! Their transport has been found at the naval base, but they themselves haven't been seen."

Very quietly, Purdey reached out and turned off the TV. She turned to look at Mike.

"It doesn't necessarily mean anything," she said. "Steed might not have gone to the naval base. He might be safe and sound in his flat right this minute, playing bridge with Mrs. Peel and the rest of them."

Gambit opened up his cell-phone. He'd put in the chip for Germany as soon as they'd arrived, so it fired to life immediately and he speed-dialed Steed's number. It rang and rang until he got Steed's answer phone.

"No reply," he told Purdey. He cut the connection and then dialed Emma Peel's number in London. Again...the phone buzzed and buzzed. "No reply."

"He's on that ship, Mike." Purdey said quietly. "You know he is."

Gambit nodded. "Depend upon it. But Mrs. Peel, Mrs. Gale...Tara...they're probably with him."

Purdey nodded. "Probably. But..."

Gambit nodded again. "The more help...the better. We've got to go. Look up flights while I pack."

After a few minutes Purdey said, "We can get a flight to London in two hours. I've booked us already."

"Good." Gambit tossed in the last of his clothing - he was quite dexterous with that prosthetic arm and hand. "I'll call Alternaties. They're gone for the night, I have no doubt, but I'll leave a message on Herr Reinhardt's answer phone."

"What will you say?"

"Simply the truth. Some old friends needs our help."

Purdey nodded grimly. "I hope they don't. But we need to be there in case they do."

"Right. Let's go."

PRESENT DAY FORT KNOX, KENTUCY USA

Cathy Gale curtsied to the sound of applause emanating from the audience and walked off stage, flushed with pleasure. There was *nothing* like that feeling, she thought to herself. She'd given pleasure to a few hundred people and they showed their appreciation with enthusiastic clapping. It was as heady a drug as liquor.

Another curtain call, this time with the entire cast.

Then the audience began filing out of the auditorium and the actors retreated to their dressing rooms. Since this was a charity operation all the women shared one dressing room, the men the other.

An hour later Cathy was back at her sister's house, relaxing on the sofa with a drink, watching the news. Patrice sat opposite her, idly paging through a copy of *Private Pilot*. Patrice had led a group of stunt pilots in her early years - now she operated an airfield and flew charters.

"Just in time for BBC World News," Cathy murmured, sipping her drink appreciatively. "I wonder what new crisis the world finds itself in today..."

"Same old, same old," Patrice said dismissively. The world goes on and the problems remain the same.

But on this occasion, the news was a bit different:

It was the same clip, had Cathy Gale but known it, that had aired an hour earlier in Germany and in Canada.

Cathy didn't even bother to call Steed's number. She knew he'd be on that ship. Of *course* he'd be on it.

"Patrice," Cathy looked at her sister. "How fast can you get me to London?"

Patrice glanced at the screen. She knew that Cathy's old friend John Steed lived at Tibet-On-The-Sea, and she knew her sister. "I can have the Gulfstream fueled and ready to go in an hour. File our flight plan and we'll be away."

"Right. I'll start packing."

Chapter Fourteen: Under Pressure

PRESENT DAY THE TRITON AT SEA

The other members of the Tibet-By-The-Sea Retirement home sat quietly in the large wardroom where they had been stashed. The wardroom was quite luxurious - an ice cream machine, a popcorn machine, several microwaves and refrigerators, bookcases covered in glass, and a large screen TV set and rack upon rack of DVDs.

After they'd investigated the room and found there was only one door, which would not open, they'd resigned themselves to their fate and started making inroads on the food. They'd been quite cheerful until the door had opened, briefly, and Admiral Verinder had entered the room. His face was sunken into a death's head and he sat hunched in a chair, casting a pall upon the whole affair. They left him alone and devoured the ice cream while they watched telly.

"I had to do it," thought Admiral Verinder to himself. In front of his staring eyes all he saw was his wife...his lovely, sweet, fragile wife, tied tightly to a chair and with a strip of plaster over her mouth. Even with the plaster across half her face he could see that it was crumpled as she tried desperately not to cry...And beside her his son and daughter, and their children....all strapped down, all terrified...even if they survived they would never be the same again.

"I had to do it."

But the *Triton* had so many weapons...nuclear warheads to name only two...if they fell into the wrong hands...the carnage they'd cause...

His family....against the deaths of thousands of innocent people...

He'd had to do it...

There came a knock at the door.

Everyone froze and stared at the door. Why would one of the bad guys *knock*?

Every face turned to look at Admiral Verinder. He felt their eyes on him.

Verinder forced himself to move. He got to his feet, and crossed over to the door. The knock came again, to the tune of "shave and a haircut."

"Two bits," knocked back Verinder.

There was a scraping sound, as if a heavy wrench were being removed from the hatch handle, and then the door swung open and John Steed and Emma Peel stepped inside.

"Thought we'd find you here," Steed said cheerfully. "Biggest room on the ship."

"Mr. Gascoine," said Verinder. "Nurse Pray. How did you get here?"

"Long story, Admiral, and we don't have time for it now. What's going on. Do you know?"

Verinder froze, for just a second...then said, "Bunch of terrorists. Hijacked the ship. That's all I know."

"How could they do that," said Emma, quietly. "This is a new ship, the latest design, remote controlled. They'd need access codes. How did they get them from?"

Verinder straightened his shoulders. "I gave the codes to them."

He looked at them, and saw no accusations in their eyes, only curiosity.

"They have my family," Verinder jerked out. "My entire family. Tied up in my own home...like animals waiting to be slaughtered."

Steed and Emma exchanged glances.

Emma turned back to Verinder. "You have the access codes...does that mean you'd also have the codes to the networks aboard this ship?"

"Networks? What do you mean?"

"I've got a laptop computer. I can get in touch with the outside world, if only I could get online."

"Oh, I see. Well, yes, I know the general password for that as well."

"Then we're in business," said Steed.

"Wait," said Verinder. "Who are you going to contact? If it's the police...or the military...they'll find out - they're bound to be monitoring the police bands. They'll harm my family."

"Not to worry, Admiral," said John Steed. "We know a few people who can handle this type of thing quite quietly."

"As long as they check their email," Emma murmured as she busied herself setting up the laptop. Verinder gave her the code, and within seconds she was online. "All right, Admiral, what's your address."

"45 Rupert Lane, W2."

Emma nodded and typed it in. "All right. I'm sending this to Cathy, Tara and the Gambits. Informing them of the situation and requesting that they liberate your family from their captors. Meanwhile, we'll take care of the situation aboard this ship."

She struck a few more keys, then hit send.

Verinder looked at the very old John Gascoine and the very large Nurse Pray. "What do you mean, "we'll take care of the situation aboard this ship?""

"Half of my tai chi class is here," pointed out Gascoine.

"Half of your *geriatric* tai chi class may be here," Verinder snapped. "But what of it. You can't even move! And this faaaa....this...."

Emma Peel was divesting herself of the Nurse Pray outfit. All eyes were on stalks by the time she'd finished.

"Admiral, I'd like you to meet Mrs. Emma Peel," Steed said, quite quietly. "And I may not be able

to move worth a damn these days but I am *still* John Steed, and when we work together as a team there is no one who can stand against us."

Admiral Verinder stared at the two professionals...and a touch of color came back into his face. "I believe you," he said.

Chapter Fifteen: The Rescue

PRESENT DAY LONDON

I.

"How did we get along without the internet," Purdey murmured to herself as he brought a tray piled high with cheese and crackers into the living room of Emma Peel's home. (Each of Steed's friends had keys to everyone else's homes - they were a peripatetic bunch and it was always "mi casa es su casa" amongst them.

Tara King, Purdey and Cathy Gale were holding a council of war. Their mission was to rescue a family of nine people, each one most likely tied up and unable to move in various rooms of a house located at 45 Rupert Lane. Mike Gambit was out on a recce even as they munched.

Cathy sipped her wine. "Just because the people were tied up in that house when they were photographed does not necessarily mean that they are still there," she commented.

"But the odds are very good," Tara objected. "Why go to all that trouble to tie them up, then untie them and move them somewhere else? And by moving them out of the house they'd increase the

chances of someone noticing something...odd. Much easier just to leave them where they are, surely."

"Well, I would have separated them," Cathy said. "But then I always like to assume that anything that can go wrong will, and have a contingency plan. If these people are super confident that their plan can't fail, perhaps they didn't see the need to split up their hostages."

"I'm sure they don't think their plan can fail," Purdey laughed. "They never would have expected two such people as John Steed and Emma Peel to be among their guests from the Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center."

"Yes. Sucks for them, as my grandson would say." Tara murmured.

At that moment, Mike Gambit entered the room. He shrugged out of a leather jacket to reveal a torn, dirty white T-shirt - a shirt without sleeves to reveal his missing right arm, but loose enough to not reveal that the rest of his musculature was that of a powerful athlete. His jeans were in a similarly tatty state. On his chest was a rather large, baroque, tasteless medallion - which was also a digital camera.

"They're there, all right," he reported, taking the medallion from his neck and handing it to Purdey, who immediately plugged it into a computer to download the photographs. "I hit every house on the street, asking for some cash for a hard up bloke, and everyone was quite generous." He extended a wad of pound notes. "After I'd refused to move off til they paid me. Made quite a noise at number 53, I can tell you.

"Then I got to #54 and the old lady answered the door. Verinder's wife. Terrified as could be, but putting on a brave front. They must keep her free to deal with any visitors, put off friends unexpectedly dropping over for tea, that sort of thing.

I talked loudly, demanding the cash, and said I wouldn't go away until I got some. She got all flustered, looked behind her...a man came to the door - *not* anyone in the photographs. A tough if ever I saw one. Handed me a wad of bills and told me to push off.

"You got any more people in there?" I demanded. "Hey, lady, any more in there? I can use as much help as I can get, ya know." And I wagged my stump at the tough. She looked at me...and she said, "It's just my family in here. But they can't have anything to do with the likes of you. We've given as much as we can. Please go away."

So I touched my forelock and shambled off to the next house."

Cathy nodded. "Confirmation then, I think. That the family's there, but only one guard?"

Gambit shrugged. "Probably don't need more than one, to watch over one little old lady and a lot more tied up."

"Depends on who the little old lady is, I'd say." Cathy Gale commented, and winked at Gambit.

Gambit grinned back. Then, "So, how are we going to get them out?"

II.

Mike Gambit lifted up the screen on the case that looked like a portable DVD player, and turned it on. The front lawn of 54 Rupert Lane appeared on the screen, as taken from a camera in a car parked on the opposite side of the road from the house.

He placed an earbud in his ear, then spoke into the voice-operated microphone that extended only as far as his earlobe, but nevertheless caught his every word.

"Testing, testing."

"Receiving you loud and clear," came Purdey's voice.

"I'm in position. The front camera is on. Turn on your cameras."

After a few seconds three small squares appeared in the lower right portion of the screen, with the faces of Cathy Gale, Tara Truffaut and Purdey in them, depending on who they were looking at any particular time. The three women were wearing glasses, each with a miniature camera embedded in the frame.

"All three cameras working," Gambit reported.

"Jolly good."

Gambit hefted the door battering ram - which he could manipulate quite easily even with his artificial hand. He didn't want to have to break in the back door - a security system might be activated and he didn't want to set it off, because it would cause the police to answer the alarm, and the news reporters would be on the scene before the alarm had died away.

On the other hand, if things went wrong inside, he'd have to go in.

"Gambit, we're going in."

"Right. Break a leg."

Purdey had parked the reconnaissance car at the front of the house an hour ago, and then strolled off casually down the street and out of sight, where she'd foregathered with Cathy and Tara. Gambit's van, with the door open, was parked behind the house, so that all he'd have to do was jump out and run up the path to the back door if the worst came to the worst.

It took training, and a bit of skill, to be able to concentrate on four screens at one time, but Gambit was a past master at it. He cradled the battering ram in his arm and waited.

Cathy Gale, Tara Truffaut and Purdey walked casually down the street towards their target. Tara carried a plate on which rested what looked like a German Chocolate Cake. They were each dressed to the nines.

They entered the yard at 54 Rupert Lane and walked up the path, chattering cheerfully to each other. Cathy knocked on the door. "Yoo hoo, Audrey," she called, knocking again. "The Cake Ladies are here."

The door opened just a smidgen, and Audrey Verinder looked out at them. "I'm afraid you..."

"Don't keep us waiting on the mat, there's a good girl," Cathy said loudly. "Tara's going to drop that cake any moment. Let us in," and then she pushed open the door and stepped into the hallway, followed quickly by Tara. Tara quickly took the lead and took two long steps into the living room, where a man with a gun was just beginning to extend his arm.

Tara threw the cake with the expertness born of long practice of 'turning anything handy into a weapon,' and the squidgy mass caught him full in the face. He didn't even have time to lift a hand to wipe his eyes before she'd taken another long stride and kicked him where it would do the most good.

Purdey had held back Mrs. Verinder. "Are there any more men in the house?" she asked.

"No, no, just him! My god, how did you know...how did you know...never mind that...please...my family...."

"I think they'll all need a cup of tea, Mrs. Verinder." Purdey said soothingly. "Let's go make some while my colleagues release your family, and I'll explain what's going on."

Seconds later Gambit entered the house and the hard work of restoring a family's shattered sense of safety and dignity began.

Chapter Sixteen: Endgame

PRESENT DAY TRITON, SOMEWHERE AT SEA

I.

Mr. Honeywell looked at his watch. Two hours to rendezvous point. In a mere 120 minutes, the HMS *Triton*, and all who sailed in her, would disappear.

"We're right on schedule, Mr. Strange," he observed complacently.

"Indeed we are, Mr Honeywell. Everything has gone like clockwork."

"Indeed. Nothing can stop us now."

II.

John Steed and Emma Peel sat in the wardroom of the HMS *Triton*. Thirty pairs of eyes looked at them expectantly.

"Vell, vy are we just sitting here?" demanded Professor Stephenson. "Ve can't let dese bastards get away vit it! Vat are we goink to do?" "

Steed glanced over at Emma and snapped his fingers. "I've got it! I know what we have to do!"

"Vat?" demanded Stephenson.

"Ve...I mean, we, have to come up with a cunning plan!"

Emma hid a smile.

Stephenson eyed Steed and harrumphed his fluffy mustache.

"All right, let's examine what we've got," Emma said. "Admiral Verinder tells us there are six men on the control deck. Each one armed. Each one very likely prepared to shoot to kill. There may be other men aboard - we don't know."

"Do you mean to say that this entire ship is being controlled from a single room? That there are no engineers manning their little dials in the engine room? Making sure the nuclear engines don't go up in a poof of smoke?"

"If there are any other men aboard," said Verinder, "that's probably where they'll be. But this ship was designed to be controlled from the control deck, yes. By computer. And so far it seems to be working perfectly."

Steed reached over and tapped Emma's laptop computer. "You said you gave the over-ride codes to our friends. Is there any way we could access the ship's computer from here...over-ride those codes again?"

Verinder shook his head. "No. I gave them the top codes. Only the prime minister knows the ultimate 'fail safe' code, if you'd like to call it that, that could bring this ship to a dead stop."

"It could be done," Emma mused, "by a brilliant hacker. Someone who had a few weeks to work on the problem."

"Ye-es..." said Steed. "Unfortunately I doubt if we'll have a few weeks, Mrs. Peel."

"Yes...brute force would be quicker. Sabotage the physical engines themselves, perhaps. Stop us dead in the water."

"I'd be very nervous about trying to sabotage the engines on a nuclear vessel, Mrs. Peel. Somehow

the thought of playing around with that much power makes me...uneasy."

Emma smiled. "Yes...unless you know exactly what you're doing things *could* get out of hand. Admiral, how's your knowledge of the nuclear engines?"

Verinder shook his head. "Not good enough, I'm afraid."

"So the only solution is to take out the men in the control deck." mused Steed.

"Yes. But how? They've all got guns. They won't hesitate to use them." growled Verinder. "And as long as they stay in that control room, we can't get at them."

"Then we'll just have to give them a reason to leave," said Steed.

"How? Knock on the door and say, 'Will you come out, please?'"

"Something like that," said Steed.

"We just need to be prepared for them when they do come out," Emma commented.

Steed nodded. "This is a big ship. Lots of stuff left laying around, I have no doubt. Let's go find it."

III.

A loud clanging noise reverberated throughout the control deck. Again. And again. And again.

"What is that?" demanded Mr. Honeywell.

"Sounds as if someone is pounding on a bulkhead or something," commented Mr. Strange.

"One of those oldsters in the wardroom, no doubt," said Mr. Francis. "Getting a bit fractious."

"Well, I don't propose to put up with it. Mr. Francis, go deal with, please."

Francis smiled an ugly smile. "With pleasure."

The big man left the control deck and made his way down the corridors to the wardroom. The wrench that had been placed under the handle was still there - preventing anyone inside from getting out. Francis removed the wrench, jerked open the door and stepped inside.

"What's all this then?"

He stood, frozen. There was no one in the room. He whirled, but too late. The door slammed shut, and there was the sound of the wrench being slotted back in place. Francis swore and yanked at the door, to no avail. He pulled out his gun and aimed it at the door...then hesitated. Bullets ricocheting off a metal door around a metal room...not healthy for the occupants of that room.

Francis swore some more.

IV.

Mr. Honeywell looked at his watch.

"It's been ten minutes. What's taking Mr. Francis so long?" he demanded.

For answer, the clanging noise came again. And again. And again.

As one, the men removed their guns from their shoulder holsters.

"I say we do nothing," said Mr. Quarl. "We stay in the control deck another hour...get to the rendezvous point, and *then* start searching with the rest of our men."

"*Something's* going on." Honeywell retorted. "I don't fancy sitting here while a bunch of geriatric roam around the ship trying to cause trouble. What if they're pounding on the engines?"

"They wouldn't be that stupid."

"They might be. Charon. You go with Mr. Strange. Check out the engine room."

"Shouldn't we go to the wardroom? Find out what happened to Francis?"

"Go to the engine room *first*. On your way back, stop at the wardroom and see what's going on there."

"Right."

Charon and Strange left the room. Honeywell and Quarl looked at each other. "*Under Siege*," said Honeywell.

"Not possible," replied Quarl. "No one who wasn't exposed to the Sleep Antidote could be awake...whether they'd locked themselves in a freezer or whatever. Whoever is on this ship is one

of our geriatrics."

Honeywell nodded. "Verinder must be doing something. Perhaps he thinks while we're at sea we can't contact our man at his house. If so he's a fool."

Quarl nodded at the communication control. "Why don't you send a message throughout the ship? Informing him of that little fat?"

Honeywell nodded. "I'll wait to see what Charon and Strange turn up. But if worst comes to worst, that's exactly what I'll do."

Quarl stretched his neck, rather like a boxer getting ready to go into the ring. He shrugged his shoulders, and his huge trapezius muscles bunched and bulged.

"Control yourself, Mr. Quarl," said Honeywell. "I don't want you to go about knocking heads together. We're too close to our rendezvous to handle them with kid gloves anymore, I'm afraid. If we see any white-headed figures anymore, shoot to kill."

"As you wish, Mr. Honeywell."

V.

Mr. Charon and Mr. Strange padded down the aisle way toward the engine room. Charon held his gun in his hand, Strange had replaced his in his shoulder-holster.

The clanging had stopped.

"I don't like this, Mr. Strange," Charon said quietly. "Thirty people running around this ship..."

"Hardly *running*, old chap," said Strange. "If the Mulberry people managed to get out of the wardroom somehow, that's one thing. But they can't do anything to us. I mean...please! We're 40 years younger than the youngest of them!"

"But how did they get out of the wardroom? And where is Mr. Francis? Why has he disappeared?"

Strange shrugged. "We'll find out. There's the door to the engine room."

He opened the door, turned, and began climbing down the ladder to the lower deck, holding on to the railing. After two steps, his hands slipped on the railing, he overbalanced, and fell backward off the ladder onto the metal deck below.

"Mr. Strange!" Charon yelled. He started to move down the ladder himself, then stopped. Strange must have hit his head on the deck, for he was unconscious. Charon took a closer look at the ladder leading down to the next deck...the first few treads were fine...the rest glistened as if they'd been covered in grease or oil of some kind...as had the railing.

Someone had set a trap, and Mr. Strange had sprung it. Charon regretted now that he had let out a yell. If he'd remained silent, some of those geriatrics might have come out of hiding to drag Strange away...but since they had heard his voice they knew he was up here and they might be laying in wait for him.

Charon's hand clenched on his gun. He had a bad feeling about this.

Should he try that old chestnut?

"I'm going for help, Strange," he called down into the hold. "You hold tight."

And then he ran swiftly down the corridor...stopped...and crept quietly back.

Strange's body remained where it had fallen. Nothing stirred.

Charon turned and headed back toward the control deck.

When he and Strange had come down this way, the ladder leading from the top deck to the second deck had been clean as a whistle. Charon did not give it a close look but started up. Half way up he felt his feet slipping out from under him and his hands unable to gain purchase. He fell backward with a yell of rage.

He hit the deck hard, but retained consciousness, enough to see a door open and a lithe woman dressed in sailor's fatigues come out and kick the gun out of his hand.

"Honeywell!" he yelled.

Another elderly figure came out through the doorway, Admiral Verinder. This individual shoved a sock into Charon's mouth - more viciously than necessary, Charon thought - and then he felt himself being dragged backward into the anteroom.

VI.

Emma hefted Charon's gun. John Steed held the one that Professor Stephenson had retrieved from Mr. Strange, who was now tied up and resting comfortably beside his colleague in crime.

"Now comes the hard part," said Steed. "If our two remaining villains have any sense, they won't come out of the control room, no matter how much noise we make out here."

Mrs. Peel nodded. "Noise won't do it. But if Professor Stephenson has been working wonders with those household chemicals we removed the wardroom..."

Steed nodded.

"I'll just go see if he's ready." Mrs Peel squeezed Steed's shoulder as she passed him, and went out of the 'operations room' where Steed and the rest of the Mulberry residents were headquartered. Stephenson was working in an adjacent room.

"Are we ready, Herr Professor?" said Emma.

"Yes, yes." said Stephenson absently, adding a dollop of liquid from one container into another. The second container began to smoke. "It is all prepared. Pour this onto the door to the control deck...and then stand back."

"Right."

VII.

Emma Peel bounced on her feet as the adrenalin flowed through her. This was living! It had been a long time, but now here they were again. The villains were at the gate, and it was she and Steed against them all.

Well, she and Steed and 28 other individuals of more and less usefulness....depending on how things panned out in the next five minutes...

She was ten yards in front of the door to the control deck. Steed, and half of the oldsters from Mulberry, were just behind the door. The half who were the most mobile, and the ones who could lift the heaviest wrenches.

Emma raised a hand signifying she was ready, and Steed nodded. He picked up the smoking bucket of material Stephenson had prepared and poured it thoroughly over the door.

The door began to smoke. Not only on the outside, but on the inside as well.

Within a minute, the two men in the control deck began yelling. Hatch door was unlocked and Honeywell stumbled out with streaming eyes. John Steed grabbed him with two strong hands and whirled him around into the blank space between two rows of hands holding upraised wrenches. He

never stood a chance.

With a roar like a bull, Mr. Quarl burst out of the control deck in a cloud of smoke and headed right towards Emma Peel. He had a gun in his hand but didn't seem inclined to use it.

Emma did the only thing she could do. She timed her drop perfectly, and Quarl went hurtling over her body, helped as he was because she grabbed his foot and twisted as he went by. He roared again and clambered to his feet.

Emma leveled her gun at him, holding it in both hands.

"Take one more step, and you are a dead man." she said quietly.

Quarl stood there, chest heaving. But he believed her. He raised his hands.

VIII.

"What a disappointment," said John Steed. "What a wuss!"

Emma laughed. "I'd say he was a smart man. It may have been anticlimactic for him to have given up without a fight, but it's too bad more villains don't do that. Give up when they know their beaten. Save a lot of lives."

"It's a bit unsatisfactory, though," Steed said sulkily. "I wanted to see you give him a few high kicks and then a whirl to send him in our direction so we could give him the coup de grace."

"Well, maybe next year."

Steed grinned. "This certainly was a birthday to remember."

"Oh, yes," said Emma. "And I almost forgot to give you your present." She leaned forward and kissed Steed on the lips.

"Best present in the world," said Steed huskily. "For now, anyway."

IX.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Steee-eed, happy birthday to you."

"And many more," chimed in Mike Gambit in the lowest baritone he could manage.

John Steed and the rest of the residents of the Mulberry Luxury Retirement Center were back home. Steed was surrounded by Cathy Gale, Tara Truffaut, Purdey, Mike Gambit, and Emma Peel.

They each raised their glass of champagne.

"To honor, trust, and commitment," said Steed. "To friendship, and the best people a man could ever know or hope to know. To the Avengers, forever."

They all touched glasses. And then they drank. And then they picked up their golf clubs and headed out to the Quite Quite Fantastic Golf Course to try their skill in cut-throat competition against each other, and all was right with the world.

EVER AFTER

Introduction:

This story is not part of The AVENGERS Canon, and it isn't part of my canon either. It's just a fantasy I was in the mood to write. Here's the background:

In 1973, five years after leaving *The Avengers*, Diana Rigg traveled to the United States to star in the situation comedy *Diana*. She played Diana Smythe, a fashion illustrator who worked for a department store in New York, and lived in her brother's apartment. The show only lasted for 13 episodes, unfortunately - it was pleasant enough but nothing really unique or memorable about her character or her supporting cast. Which isn't to say Diana didn't display a fine sense of comic timing - it was the writers who let her down. I say this based on the four episodes I've seen.

The highlight of the series was the episode in which Patrick Macnee guest-starred as the famous and successful pianist Brian Harris. He's in love with Diana, and she with him, but his life style is too hectic for her tastes.

From that episode comes this story. Much of the dialogue and action from this first chapter comes straight from the episode. (I appreciate the fact that nobody reading this story has ever seen *Diana*, let alone this episode, but I try to evoke it accurately). My story has touches of *Total Recall*, *The Prisoner*, and is perhaps one fitting end to *The Avengers*.

[At the end of this book is the transcription of the *Diana* episode.]

Chapter One

Doctor Roger Smythe and Doctor Tara King were dressed in the white linen gowns of their profession, but their visitor, who was not a doctor, outdid them all, with a cap on his head that completely hid his hair, and a surgical mask that obscured his chin, face and nose. Only his eyes were visible, bright blue eyes that seemed almost incandescent.

"We'll look in on John Steed first," Dr. King said, leading the way down the corridor. "I really think his Preparation is the crowning event in my career." They paused in front of a blank wall at the end of the corridor, and Dr. King pressed a button. The plate glass window in front of them glowed into life.

On the other side of the glass, a man sat in front of a wooden mock-up of a piano. He wore black tie

and tails, his fingers flashed over the keys, his eyes were closed and his face uplifted in rapture at the music he was 'playing.'. It was John Steed.

"Meet Brian Harris," Dr. King said, smugly.

"A concert pianist?" the masked man said. "How is that possible?"

"I could have made Steed in to anybody. It was just Brian Harris' bad luck that he resembled Steed so closely. And, of course, had no family."

"But a concert pianist? I don't think Steed can even carry a tune."

"He can now. He may not have the innate spark of genius that caused Brian Harris to scale the heights, but he can reproduce any Brian Harris performance that Harris recorded - and that's enough for most listeners."

The masked man nodded.

"Steed now has an entirely new persona overprinted over his old one. Faint childhood memories, young manhood, the Ecole de Music, eleven years of concert touring. Wine, women and song. He *is* Brian Harris."

"What about Emma Peel?"

"My esteemed colleague," Dr. King nodded to Dr. Smythe, "has taken care of Mrs. Peel."

They retraced their steps to the other end of the corridor, and Dr. Smythe pressed the button which revealed Emma Peel in her own white room. She was surrounded by artistic materials, and sat in a chair sketching intently on a large pad.

"Meet my sister," Roger Smythe said with a smirk. "She's divorced, and she's moving to New York to start a new life. She's already been hired at a department store and will take up her position as a fashion illustrator in a few weeks."

"Mrs. Peel, as a fashion illustrator for a department store? How delicious."

Smythe shrugged. "It was necessary to give her a mundane profession. Any position in which she had to exercise her physical or mental skills might interfere with her programming and cause her to start thinking ambitiously, which would undoubtedly dredge up old memories. As it is, she has extreme artistic talent and will probably blossom into one of the great artistic talents of New York."

"Not that that's saying much," Dr. King said with a sniff.

The masked man nodded. "And so the partnership of John Steed and Emma Peel has ceased to exist. They have no knowledge of each other."

Dr. King and Dr. Smythe exchanged glances. "Well," said Smythe, "We couldn't go that far."

The masked man's blue eyes turned into chips of glacier ice. "I beg your pardon?"

Dr. Smythe shook his head decisively. "The bond between the two of them was too strong. If we'd attempted to eradicate it completely, their subconsciouses would have gone to war immediately, knowing something was missing."

"So we took care of it," said Dr. King. "They know each other, in fact they'd once been lovers. But Brian Harris' self-absorbed life-style has driven her away. So they each exist in the other's history. But we've put in mental triggers - they will never be able to...er, get together...again."

The masked man nodded. "Very good, doctors. I am quite pleased with you. Now...there's an individual by the name of Bond..."

One year later

Diana Smythe stood in a department store window, trying to make head or tail of the window plan that one of her co-workers had designed before falling ill. A woman entered the window, short, elderly, with the charm of an elfish face.

"Hi, Diana."

"Hi, Norma." Diana greeted her boss cheerfully.

Norma looked around with a nostalgic smile. "Every time I get in one of these windows it's just like being on stage. It reminds me of the time I was an angel in the Christmas play in the third grade."

Diana grinned. "Were you a hit?"

"Not exactly. I whooped on one of the Wise Men. How's it going?"

"Fine. Unless I've got Marshall's plan upside down. In that case I'm in a lot of trouble."

"How's he feeling?"

"Well, he's in the third day of the twenty-four flu."

Norma shook her head, then gestured at the window. "I do appreciate your helping out like this, Diana."

"I'm glad to help."

Howard, the copywriter for the advertising department, entered the window at this time. Tall, with a soft middle, and hair that would have looked like Albert Einstein's on a bad day, he carried a handful of white placards. "Here they are, hot off the paint brush."

"Oh, thank you, Howard," Norma told her copywriter. "You didn't have to bring them down yourself."

"Oh, anything to get out of that office. I'm having trouble writing the ad. Everything I write seems to be phony."

"What's the ad for?" queried Diana.

"Fake fur."

Norma had been going through the signs. She held up one that read, in big, still-wet letters, DIANA SMYTHE - YOU'RE NEEDED. "Diana Smythe, you're needed."

Diana Smythe felt a frisson of some kind of emotion she couldn't identify, before the memories in her head clicked smoothly together. Of course. Brian Harris. The emotion became one of irritation.

"How on earth did he find me?"

Norma's face had lit up with curiosity and the scent of a possible romance. "Who found you? Who needs you? What does this sign mean?"

"It means the ghost of London past has come back to haunt me." Diana said resignedly.

"Well," commented Norma, "its calling card's a family size. Well, come on, let's finish here and go down and risk lunch at the cafeteria." She turned and saw a man walking past the window, bearing another sign. "Hey, are we being picketed?"

Howard caught a glimpse of the words on the sign. "That's not a picket."

"This is only the beginning, friends," said Diana Smythe. Memories were flooding back. Brian Harris...in love with her...but in love with himself more...always chasing after her...flattering but exhausting...yes...she remembered.

"So, whose this old friend?"

Diana glanced at Norma, reluctant to answer for she knew Norma's match-making instincts. But she said, "Well, it's Brian Harris."

"Brian Harris? The concert pianist?" Norma said delightedly.

"The same."

"The Brian Harris?" commented Howard. "He's a genius."

Diana nodded. "I'm sure he'd be the first to agree with you."

An attractive young woman entered the window at this moment, carrying an envelope. "Is there a Diana Smythe here? "

"Oh, yes," said Norma helpfully. "There she is."

The woman handed an envelope to Diana. "This is for you."

"Not another one," Diana said heatedly. She tore up the envelope. "Tell Brian enough is enough."

Norma took the pieces Diana handed her. "Enough," she said, handing the pieces to Howard, "Is enough." finished Howard, handing the pieces to the woman.

"Who's Brian?" said the woman in bewilderment. "I'm from accounting. That was your overtime check."

Diana smacked her forehead.

A couple of hours later, Diana entered her office, her eyes glancing over an individual seated in a chair face obscured by a newspaper. "You're late," said a familiar voice, and once again Diana felt that frisson of emotion she could not identify, before the emotion settled into pleasure at viewing an old friend.

"I'm late?" she queried.

Brian Harris put down the newspaper. "You're nine years, seventeen minutes and thirty two seconds late." Harris gazed at Diana Smythe, and the conflicting emotions that he himself felt were not in evidence. He hadn't seen Diana Smythe in nine years - he knew this, but he was in love with her, he knew that, too.

"I do apologize." Diana said with a smile.

"You're forgiven." he told her, matching her smile.

"How are you?"

"I'm a delight. And you?"

"Charming as ever. How did you find me?"

Brian moved very close to her. "When you left I put salt on your tail. You're not exactly inconspicuous. I went to London Airport and I said, 'Where did the tall girl go?' They, recognizing my impeccable taste, pointed due west." he reached into his pocket and brought out a small box. This is for you"

Diana's face glowed as she accepted the box. "Oh, Brian, you should have." She opened the box, as Brian said lightly, "It's nothing." And it was true - there was nothing in the box. Diana glanced at Brian questioningly.

"I never lie." Brian said with a broad grin. He handed her a sheet of paper. "Now, this was supposed to be in it. It's an invitation for dinner. You can fill in the name of the person you want to have it with. Will seven thirty be all right?"

Diana shook her head in amusement. "Seven thirty will be fine, thank you."

Brian grinned, turning away as he consulted his memo pad. "I hope I can manage it." he murmured.

Norma entered the office and her eyes lit up as they fell on Brian Harris.

Diana introduced them and they exchanged how-do-you-do's. "Norma is my boss," Diana amplified.

Brian ran his eyes up and down Norma's figure with flattering attention. "You're the most intelligently constructed boss I've ever seen."

"Thank you. Are you in town for a visit or a concert?"

Brian looked shocked. "Hasn't anyone told you?"

"No."

Brian glanced between Diana - who got up to get him some coffee, and Norma. "I'm playing with the New York Philharmonic tomorrow night at Lincoln Center."

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Diana handed him a cup of coffee. "Lincoln Center? Brian, that's marvelous."

"Yes, I've progressed from simple pianist to internationally renowned artiste. That means that Brian Harris is spelt wrong in eight languages. My current favorite is Blarney Harris." He sipped his coffee.

"In Japan?" asked Norma.

"No, in London." He put down the cup. "I say, I wonder if you could come with Diana to the concert tomorrow night."

Diana had sat down at her desk. "I didn't know I was going."

"Well, of course you're invited. I have influence. I can get you the very best seats at a reasonable price." He hesitated a beat for that to sink in, then grinned. "No, you're my guests."

"What about Norman?" asked Diana.

"What do we want with a Norman?"

"Norman is my husband." pointed out Norma.

"Oh, pity." Brian smiled at her.

"He'll be out of town tomorrow night." Norma said, very quickly.

"Splendid."

At this point Howard entered. Diana started to introduce him, but Brian interrupted with a conspiratorial grin at Howard. "Oh, you don't have to introduce us. He's my conspirator. He carried the cry of my heart to you."

"I didn't know you were the Brian Harris, then."

"I am always the Brian Harris."

"You know I don't think there's a record album of yours I don't have."

Brian looked at him with closer attention. "Oh, really?"

"I particularly like that Rachmanoff piano concerto."

"I'm inclined to agree with you."

"It's...it's...what's the word I'm looking for?"

"Magnificent?" suggested Brian. Diana smiled behind him as Howard snapped his fingers.

"Yes, that's it. You know, I wanted to come to your concert tomorrow night. Do you think there'll be tickets at this late date?"

"Be my guest." Brian said immediately. "Join the ladies."

"Oh, thank you, that's very kind of you."

"And after a scintillating performance, and an encore of Rachmaninoff specially for you, we'll open a bottle of champagne in the dressing room."

"Oh, I'd love to."

The phone rang, and Diana picked it up. "Hello? Yes, I'll tell him." She replaced the receiver. "Your limousine is awaiting downstairs."

"Oh, I shall have to desert you. The limousine awaits. I have to do some interviews." He pulled out his memorandum pad. "I have to do some today. I have to do the Tonight Show today, and...that can't be right. I have to do the Today Show today."

"No, no, no. They do tomorrow's Today Show tomorrow. Tomorrow's Tonight Show they do today."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Today's Tonight Show they did yesterday." Howard gestured at Diana for her further help in explaining.

"It's very simple." Diana commented. "You see they do the Tonight Show today for tomorrow But

It's too late to do the Today show. They did that already this morning."

"I think I'll be better off with Dick Cavett." Brian replaced his memo pad in his vest pocket and bestowed smiles on Norma and Howard. "It's very nice meeting you. Goodbye." He bent over Diana and gazed at her deeply. "See you tonight, which is today. Perhaps we'll extend it, to tomorrow. Goodbye."

Diana smiled up at him. "Goodbye."

Brian exited the room, and Norma and Howard turned towards her.

"Oh, Diana, he's wonderful." exclaimed Norma.

"He's a great guy." agreed Howard.

"Yes," said Diana, pensively, "he is."

Diana looked at herself very briefly in the mirror. She did not spend a great deal of time on her looks as a rule. But she wanted to look extremely nice for Brian tonight...at that point the door rang. She went out to answer it. Brian was there.

"Brian, you're early," Brian informed her. "I haven't finished dressing yet. Help to yourself to a drink. I'll be right with you."

He turned to the right and found himself at her wet bar. Diana shook her head admiringly. "You've still got it. Your sense of where the bar is located is still 100 proof."

"How about you? Can I offer you a drink?"

"Yes."

"The usual?"

"Yes. "

For some reason, Brian said, "Extra dry martini, straight up with a twist."

Diana's lips twitched. "Tall scotch."

"And water."

"Soda." corrected Diana.

"Of course!" Brian said, snapping his fingers. "The usual! Tall, scotch and soda." Why had he done that, he wondered. He knew what Diana liked to drink. He also knew that she didn't like him referring to all the women that he had had, at one time or another in his life.

Brian glanced around the room, with its many knick knacks and decorations, including a telescope by a huge plate glass window. "I love the drama of this room, you know. It's very similar to Roger's flat in London."

"Yes." said Diana. "The furniture is the same including the art collection."

"There's only one jarring note. That picture over there."

"Which one?"

"The atrocious one. It's the only time I've ever really disagreed with Roger's taste. Who's the artist?"

"Me." pointed out Diana.

"Oh, I'm sorry." said Brian, going back to mixing the drinks.

"There's no need to apologize."

"No," commented Brian candidly, "I'm sorry it's atrocious."

He handed her a drink. "There's your scotch and water."

"Soda." said Diana.

"Of course." Brian pulled back his left hand and handed her the drink in his right. "Scotch and soda. Now. What shall we drink to?" he moved closer to her. "Exciting, unusual. I guess we'd better drink to us." The two of them sat down, Diana on the divan and Brian on a chair. "The past. The two of us just talking, relaxing, and exchanging ideas..."

"Brian. I seem to remember our past was a quite frantic series of interruptions.."

Brian hadn't been paying attention. He interrupted. "By the way, how are you getting on in America. Are you getting acclimatized?"

"Well, I'm getting there. I know longer call the subway the tube. I say X, Y and Zee instead of X, Y

Zed. And I'm learning to tell my dates 'why don't you give me a call' instead of 'why don't you knock me up.'"

Brian laughed heartily. "Extraordinary language."

"You should hear what they say about ours."

Brian sipped his drink, gazing at the sweep of Diana's auburn hair. "Do you know," he said soberly, "there's not been a moment I haven't thought about you."

"And I've read about you." Diana said quietly.

"And thought about me?" Brian asked, equally quietly.

Diana shrugged. "Inevitably one reads, one thinks."

"Yes. Well, you don't need to believe every scurrilous thing you read. In particular that incredible thing.."

Diana waved a hand at him. "No, no, no. I've never read that one."

"Good." Brian got up and joined her on the divan. "I bet you don't know where I was last week. Waterford."

"Waterford." said Diana, somewhat blankly.

"Yeah. You remember that absolutely mad day. Ha ha. The canoe. We left our clothes on the shore, we had to buy 'em back again from those children that came by..."

Diana joined in his laughter but said, "The part I remember best about that particular day...."

"Yes, what?"

"Is my not being there."

Brian blinked. "It wasn't you?" He recovered smoothly. "It should have been. Do you know, I've often wish I hadn't been such an idiot and walked out on you."

"I walked out on you."

"Right. I wish you hadn't been such an idiot."

The telephone rang. Diana picked up the receiver. "Hello. Yes, he's here. It's for you." she handed the receiver to Brian.

"Ah."

"You gave out my number?" Diana asked, slightly annoyed.

"I knew you wouldn't mind. I gave it to the hotel in case there was a call. Yes? Hong Kong? Yes, I'll accept the charges. He began speaking, in a really atrocious Chinese accent. Dem guy ganor. Desoto desonto. Jee see san lie. Dozo." He hung up the phone. "My shirt maker."

Diana laughed. "Brian, you are incorrigible."

The phone rang again. "That's probably for me." Brian commented.

"Has it occurred to you that someone may wish to call me at my apartment on my phone." Diana said tartly, picking up the receiver. "Hello?" She listened very briefly, then unceremoniously handed it to Brian.

"Hello. Yes, this is he. Ohh, Barbara." He placed one hand over the receiver and whispered to her. "It's Barbara Walters." Back to the phone. "That's very kind of you, Barbara." Another phone rang. "Will you get that please, darling?"

"Certainly," said Diana with resignation.

Brian returned his attention to the receiver in his hand. "I'm very glad. I'm delighted that you want me to play the piano, but, I honestly don't think I can do it at six am. I mean, my fingers don't even start to lift until one."

"It's your manager." Diana called to him.

Brian covered the receiver. "Oh, what's he want?"

"He wants to know if you're interested in Denver."

"Well, only if Denver's interested in me".

"Only if Denver's interested in him." Diana told her receiver and hung up.

Brian was still on his call to Barbara Walters. "Look, I'm awfully sorry, Barbara, but even for you it is too early. Perhaps when it's a little later. Bye."

The doorbell rang.

"Don't tell me you gave out my address as well." Diana commented.

"My tailor, darling."

Brian opened the door to a short man of obvious Italian extraction, with brilliantined hair and a moustache. "Good day." He entered, carrying a gleaming black set of tails.

"Ah, Mr. Spinelli. Come in, come in."

"Excuse me. I have brought your tails."

"Wonderful."

"And I am sure you will find them exactly to your taste. But, more importantly, to mine." He helped Brian slip on the jacket.

"Lovely. They're really perfect. "

"Of course, it's a Spinelli."

Diana sighed. Clearly Spinelli and Brian Harris had gone to the same school of ego-mania.

"Of course." commented Brian. "But there is just one thing I have to do. This is important." He moved in front of Diana's coffee table, which would serve as a piano bench in a pinch. He stood quietly for a second, eyes straight ahead as if looking at an imaginary audience, then he brought his hands down to flip his tails out of the way as he sat down on the bench.

"The left one doesn't flip correctly." he reported.

"Impossible." snapped Spinelli.

"No, no, no." said Brian in all seriousness and concern. "See for yourself." He repeated the flip and once more the left one didn't flip correctly. "Mr. Spinelli. A gracefully flipped tail makes all the difference in the appearance to the piano player. Now, you'll just have to add more flip."

The short man glared up at him. "Mr. Harris. I have given those tails the precise degree of flip for performing at Lincoln Center. If you were performing at Carnegie Hall I would tend to agree with you, but for Lincoln Center, they're perfect."

Brian loomed over the tailor. "Mr. Spinelli. I'm the one who's going to be doing the playing, and I'm the one, therefore, who's going to be doing the flipping. And I demand more flip."

"One does not demand of Spinelli! For five generations the name Spinelli has been synonymous with excellence in design, workmanship, detail and flip."

"Mr. Spinelli. When I say more flip I want more flip!"

"Mr. Harris. I won't touch them!"

"I insist!"

"I refuse!"

"You won't get paid!"

Spinelli blinked. "You want flip you'll get flip." He seized the tails. "Good day, Mr. Harris." He looked at Diana. "Mrs.... Miss, . Lady.." he bowed and left to Diana's amused "Goodbye."

"Wasn't I right?" Brian appealed to her.

"Of course. There's nothing worse than a limp flip."

The doorbell rang.

"I'm terribly sorry, my darling, but, I've invited a few reporters in for an impromptu press conference."

"How many?" demanded Diana, her hand on the door.

..Well, Maybe ten. Perhaps twenty. I do hope you don't mind but I do think it's going to delay our dinner just a little."

"Yes," said Diana coldly. "Possibly another ten years." She opened the door and watched the reporters - men and women, enter. Brian greeted them with all the aplomb in the world.

"Come in, gentlemen, and ladies. Oh, it's delightful to see you all."

Diana ungritted her teeth. Brian obviously wanted her to act as his hostess, she would act as his hostess. She went into the kitchen, removed a few blocks of cheese and her cheese slicer, and got to work on canapes.

Diana Smythe spent a restless night. Every time she closed her eyes Brian Harris' face rose in front of her eyes...but he wasn't playing the piano...instead he was smiling and grinning and flirting with a succession of women and then turning and staring at her with a lifted lip as if mocking her...her anger was growing and growing...

The next morning Diana had forgotten her dreams, but the feelings of irritation with Brian Harris remained. She was almost ready to leave for work when the doorbell rang. "Good morning." said Brian with a smile. He carried a tray on which there were silver chafing dishes, and there was a paper under his arm.

"Good morning." Diana said cheerfully.

“Breakfast is served. Your morning paper.”

Diana took the paper from underneath his arm and glanced at the label on it. "Jones. Apartment 11A."

"We can put it back before they get up. They'll never miss it."

"I'm afraid they will. They've just bought a puppy."

"Oh." said Brian unrepentantly. He lifted the covers off the chafing dishes.

"Brian. I find that deeply moving. But you do seem to have forgotten I don't eat breakfast."

"But I cleaned and caught these kippers for you."

"Besides, I have to go to work."

"Work. You're not going to go to work today, are you?"

"Of course."

"But I thought we'd spend it together. Look, all I've got is a press conference this morning, a radio interview over lunch, then I've got a few publicity stills at two, and then we can go to the Lincoln Center and you can listen to me practice for an hour or two. Won't it be wonderful?"

"Brian, I have to work."

Brian took hold of her hand. "Oh, but I wanted you with me."

"I'm sorry."

"Why don't you phone in and tell them a little white lie."

Diana was actually tempted, but then she thought better of it. "No, no, no, I can't do that."

Brian was getting irritated. "What possible difference can it make if you don't go to work today. I mean, it's not really all that important, is it?"

That was a mistake. Diana's voice grew icy. "I beg your pardon. My work may not be as glamorous as yours, and I may not receive an ovation for it, but my job is just as important to me as your job is to you."

Brian was shocked. "Being a concert pianist is not a job!"

"Well, being a fashion illustrator is. And I have certain responsibilities and I can't just walk out on them."

Brian caught up her other hand, but Diana drew away from the warmth of his touch. "Oh, darling, what happened to the Diana Smythe who was full of life? A free spirit. You did everything for the moment. All you want to do is go to work in a bloody shop."

Diana maintained her iciness. "That is called making a living, Brian."

"Well, you've certainly changed."

"Unfortunately you haven't. You're still totally preoccupied with yourself."

"Now, look," Brian raised his voice, "Diana, all I want you to do is to take the day off."

"You're still as understanding and flexible as after."

"Darling. Dammit! You're being childish and immature."

"You haven't changed a bit. You still like to push people around! But you are not pushing me!"

"All right! All right!" He sat down, pouting. "I'll go to Lincoln Center and spend the day alone! With my piano."

Diana glared at him. In clipped tones she said, "I'd tell you what to do with your piano. But it's a physical impossibility." She closed the door, with herself on the other side of it.

"I'm an artist." Brian Harris snapped. "I can do anything with a piano."

Diana was back in the department store window, putting in the final touches. Norma entered. "Hi, Diana."

"Hi, Norma."

"Well?"

Diana walked away from her, busily arranging the tilt of the hats on the mannequins. "Well, what?"

"Well, how is Brian?"

"Oh, he's fine." Diana said uninterestedly.

"Diana, you meet a man you haven't seen in ten years. A man you obviously knew...very well. And all you can say is fine?"

Diana was getting tired of her friend's matchmaking. "Norma, fine is fine with me."

"Has he changed?"

"No, he's still as charming and stubborn and handsome and pigheaded as he always was."

"Half of him sounds delicious."

Diana smiled. "One minute I adore him and the next minute I'd like to throttle him."

"Well, you'd better make up your mind right away because look whose here." She indicated the man outside the window - Brian Harris bearing a bunch of roses. Norma gestured him to come inside.

"Oh, this is ridiculous." Diana said,

"He brought you flowers."

“Mm, he's very big on long-stemmed apologies. At times, my flat in London looked like a greenhouse.”

At this point Brian arrived. “Hello.” he greeted Norma. He handed her one the roses, which she thanked him for, and gave the rest of them to Diana.

“ Thank you.” she told him sincerely, sniffing at them delicately.

Norma glanced between the two of them, so obviously in love, and said, “Well, I guess I'd better go do whatever it is ...I'd better go do.”

“ Don't forget this evening.” Brian told her. ” My dressing room after the concert.”

“Oh, I wouldn't miss it for the world.”

Brian watched her leave and then turned to Diana. He took a deep breath. ”Um. I realize that the things I said this morning were unnecessary, harsh, and I hate to say it, but childish.”

“I think that summed it up rather nicely.” Diana greed.

“I'm sure you do.” Brian said with a smile. ” I realize I'm just a pain in the neck!”

“I was thinking a bit lower.”

Brian moved closer to her. “Do you know what I did this morning? I thought and stared at the piano. I couldn't even play chopsticks. All I was thinking about was our argument. Look, darling,” his voice softened, ”you know I get ..I get nervous before a concert. I admit I'm self-centered and sometimes I speak before I think, but the fact is I'm sorry.”

Diana stared at him in surprise. “Brian, do you know what you've just done?”

“No?”

“You have just apologized.”

Brian looked just as surprised. “I did, didn't I?”

“It's a first.” This was true, Diana remembered. When she was angry at him in the past, he'd always given her flowers...but he'd never actually said he was sorry...

“Don't let it get around.” Brian said in a conspiratorial whisper. ” It could ruin my image.” He

moved yet closer and there was a tinge of yearning in his voice as he said, "You are coming to the concert tonight, aren't you?"

"Of course." Diana said, surprised that he doubted it.

"And dinner afterward. Just the two of us?"

"I'd love it."

"Forgiven?" asked Brian, moving closer.

"Forgiven."

"Friends?" yet closer.

"Friends."

They stared into each other's eyes, and then Brian bent and closed his lips very gently over Diana's. They looked at each other, deep into each other's eyes, but the spell was broken by the sound of clapping. They looked up to see a crowd of people in front of the window, delighted with the show.

That night, Brian Harris entered his dressing room, followed by his manager. Brian's face was covered with a sheen of sweat and his tails hung limply.

"A disaster." Brian announced.

"Mr. Harris, everyone is entitled to an off night. I would certainly not call it a disaster."

"In my entire career I've never received as bad notices as tomorrow's."

"So you had a little problem with your Beethoven. The rest of your performance was brilliant."

Brian glared at him. "What do you mean? They walked *out*. I wish I'd been with them."

"They gave you six curtain calls."

"Three. If Beethoven had not been deaf, he'd be turning in his grave."

"Do you wish to see anybody?"

“No, they want their money back.”

“You know, you'd feel better if you get out of those tails and into something more comfortable.”

“Yes, into a 747, jumbo, back to London, dear, rainy old London.”

“And don't be so harsh with yourself. And don't talk down. Be affirmative.”

“You know, John. You're quite right. Forgive me, Ludwig,” he said this to a picture of Ludwig van Beethoven that hung on the wall. He reached into a drawer, brought out a bottle, and entered the inner, changing room.

There was a knock and John opened the door to Norma and Howard.

“Won't you come in?”

“Thank you.” they said, and entered.

Howard said happily, “Hey, he's not here.”

“He'll be with you in a moment.”

“Oh.” said Howard, less happily.

“Have a seat,” said John, gesturing. “Excuse me,” and he went out of the room.

“We should have waited for Diana.” Howard said nervously.

“She's talking to friends.”

“We made a big mistake coming here.”

“To the dressing room?”

“To the concert.”

“I don't know what to say to him.” Norma said worriedly. “I can't lie. He'll see right through me.”

“Do you think we can get away with just, 'good night?' What happened?” He just didn't play well tonight.”

Brian re-entered the room, wearing a dressing gown, his hair plastered down from the shower he'd just taken.

“Howard, Norma.” Brian greeted them pleasantly. “How good of you to drop by.”

“We simply had to.” Norma said awkwardly.

“How could we leave without telling you that...” Howard stuttered to a halt.

Brian looked at them, vaguely amused. “Yes?”

“Great..great, the seats were just great.” said Norma quickly.

“Perfect.” agreed Howard.

“And soft.” added Norma.

“Soft, soft.” agreed Howard.

“Did you enjoy the concert?” asked Brian.

Norma blinked. “Enjoy is not the word. I can't remember another night like this in my life.”

“Oh, me too” agreed Howard. “I'll be talking about this for weeks.”

“Yes.” said Norma quickly. “I don't know anybody who could have done what you did...the way you did it tonight. Well, I suppose we really ought to leave you alone because I'm sure you have a lot of people waiting...” she glanced around but of course there was no one else in the room, “to talk...to you.”

“Aren't you going to stay and have some champagne?”

“No, thanks very much.”

“We've to get up very early in the morning.” said Howard quickly. “You know.”

“Oh, I understand.” Brian said. “Well next time I come back we'll have to do it again.”

“Why?” asked Howard.

“They've asked me back in three months time.”

“Really?” said Norma. She recovered quickly. “That is simply marvelous. We'll see you then. Goodnight. Goodnight, and thanks again for anything.”

Howard peered around the door. “And, once again I just have to say...” and he closed the door.

John entered with Brian's tails. “Do you want these pressed?”

“No.” said Brian irritably. “Burned.”

John sighed and opened the door into the hallway. He stepped back to allow Diana Smythe to enter the room, and closed it behind him.

“Forgive me, Brian,” Diana told him, “but I got into a conversation with some rather long-winded friends. They really enjoyed the concert.”

“Then they must have missed it.” Brian snapped. “The one I was at was dismal.”

“Brian.” Diana said sympathetically.

“No. Intellectually I know that I perform poorly on occasions. But, I can't stand what happened tonight, darling, I hate myself.” He held up his hands. “I'm divorcing all ten fingers.”

“Brian.” Diana said again. “You had moments of brilliance.”

“You're remembering the past.” Brian said bitterly. “You of all people should know that I did not perform well.”

They sat down on the divan in the dressing room. “Now, listen.” said Diana seriously. “Your Chopin was beautifully performed. And you're Mozart was excellent.”

“What did you think of my Beethoven?” Brian demanded.

“Your Beethoven?” Diana stalled.

“I want the truth.”

“I was quite moved.”

“Yes, I saw you squirming. I was atrocious! I decimated Beethoven!”

“Those are your words, not mine.”

“Well, I want to hear your words.”

“Well, you played with conviction and....”

“ The truth.”

“Well, actually I was disappointed.

Brian stared at her, jarred out of his own self-loathing. “Disappointed?” he said in a dangerously low tone.

“Mmm. I simply don't think you played as well as you can.”

“You don't?”

“No.” Diana moved away from him.

Brian stood up and said very coldly, “May I ask what qualifies you for such an evaluation?”

Diana stared at him. “Well, it's an opinion and I'm not without some musical knowledge. I did study music in school.”

“An hour a week,” snapped Brian, “of music appreciation at a Buckinghamshire boarding school does not entitle you to set yourself up as a music critic.”

“You asked me to tell you what I thought.” Diana defended herself.

Brian was angry - he was furious, and he didn't know why. But he couldn't stop himself. “Well, you should think before you say what you thought.”

“But I thought....” Diana too did not know why Brian was so angry - surely he was not one of those men who thought that their women should always give them unqualified praise when it was not deserved?

“You should think before you say what you're think you thought.” snapped Brian.

Diana did not appreciate having her thoughts and ideas dismissed. She said very coldly, “I think we

should stop this before one of us says something we're totally sorry for.”

“One of us already has. I'm totally sorry for what you said. Good night.” Brian picked up the bottle and went back into the other room.

Diana stared at the closed door for a long second. “Good night, Brian.” she said very quietly. “And goodbye.” She tightened her fur cloak around her shoulders and left the room.

That night Diana had the same dream. It was always the same. She stood alone, no props around her...while Brian stood surrounded by women, enjoying their company, always turning back to look at her and sneering at her...and she kept growing angrier and angrier...but sometimes she thought she saw a look in his eyes...he wasn't sneering at her so much as begging for her help....

Brian Harris did not sleep well that night either. He was alone in his hotel suite - which had a piano in a place of honor. He sat at the piano and tinkled the keys...but he didn't feel like playing Rachmaninoff or Chopin and he didn't feel like he knew how to play anything else, let alone chopsticks.

What had happened? He'd been on stage playing Chopin, brilliantly, as usual, and then he'd taken a side glance and seen Diana in her place of honor and the way she had looked...it seemed to have triggered something in him. And then while he'd been playing Beethoven he simply hadn't been able to remember the notes...or even how to play!

And then the way he'd acted towards Diana. When she'd come to his dressing room intent to cheer him up and he'd hounded her to tell him the truth and then he had berated her for doing so. He hadn't been able to stop himself...but why? He hadn't wanted to pick a fight but something had been driving him on to do just that. And she'd left, of course. Diana wasn't one of those women who'd take a lot of guff and then sit and wait to take some more - she'd left and how was he going to get her back?

Brian held his head in his hands. Words echoed in his head, “Diana, you're needed...you're needed...I need you.”

Diana Smythe sat in her chair, her eyes far away. She felt a sickly sweet feeling of loss and yearning....she was remembering Brian Harris...all the things she remembered about him...she was in love with him...yes she was, but she could not...would not... stand the way he treated her....

The doorbell rang. Diana stood up and took a deep breath. "Don't let it be Brian," she thought.

It was Brian. He had his coat over one arm. "Bum bum bum." he said musically, whipping the coat off his arm to reveal a magnum of champagne. "I also do card tricks. Charming smiles. And apologies." Diana let him kiss her on the cheek.

She wanted to say many things, but it was like her brain was on autopilot. "Brian. Why do you keep coming back?"

He stood looking at her, hands at his sides, defenseless. "Probably because I love you."

"Because you love me?" Diana said with a tinge of disbelief in her voice.

"Well, is that so illegal in the United States?"

"But, Brian, you have no reason to love me." This was true, Diana thought. He was an internationally renowned pianist and monopolized the conversation and never listened to what she had to say...he was obsessed with her looks, that was all...

"You were born." Brian said quietly. "That's reason enough."

Diana actually laughed. "I'm terribly sorry, Brian, but you said precisely that, one night in Cambridge 11 years ago."

"Oh? Well, what's so terrible about being consistent? And what's so wrong about being loved?"

"Because," Diana said quietly, "with you it's a conversational gambit."

"I suppose you're going to say that I'm not capable of loving."

"No, no, you are capable of loving, but it is yourself that you love."

Brian stared at her. "True." he said. He crossed over and sat down on the arm of her chair, and she leaned her head against his chest.

"But once you love one person you can love another." He took her hand. "Darling, come with me. Look, I've got a concert tour, it's booked to the end of the year. All around the world. Now we'll travel, we'll laugh." He squeezed her shoulder. "We'll be full-time lovers and part time sparring partners. You're marvelous when you're angry, and I'm marvelous when we make up. What do you think?"

Diana sat still for long seconds, warring within herself. She wanted to. More than anything else. But she did not want to be a sparring partner, even if it meant that they'd be making up every night. Was there no way to change hi? No, there could be no way.

Brian himself was thinking, "Please, please say yes...I need you."

Very quietly, Diana said, "No."

Brian didn't let any expression of despair show on his face. "I want to ask you something else."

"Mh hm?"

"Are you still in the mood for dinner?"

Diana gazed up at him with a look that caused his heart to beat. "I'm starved."

Brian bent down and kissed her. He wanted to kiss her, hard, to take her in his arms, but he couldn't. Instead he stood up and said, "Good. What have you got in the house?"

Diana laughed. "I've half a can of artichoke hearts, some pickled gherkins and some fig newtons."

"We'll go out," he turned. "Darling. Diana. Thank you for being honest with me. I think we'd be better if we looked upon ourselves as two ships that passed in the night."

Diana nodded. "And count ourselves lucky that we didn't collide, and sink." She kissed him on the cheek.

Diana sat in her office, doodling on her sketch pad. Norma was there, sipping coffee. It was Monday, and another lovely day at work. A day to draw pictures and think of advertising copy.

Howard entered, cheerfully. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Howard," said Norma.

"How was your weekend," Diana queried.

"How could the weekend be with the kids fighting and the dogs yapping and Ethel complaining."

“Why was Ethel complaining?” demanded Norma.

“Because I was away all weekend. How was yours.”

Diana smiled. “It's the most relaxing Sunday I've had in weeks.”

Howard looked at her. “What did you do Saturday?”

“I saw Brian off. Why do you think Sunday was so relaxing?”

A phone rang and Norma answered it. “Hello. Oh, yes, just a minute please. Diana, it's for you. It's Brian calling from Denver.”

Diana picked up her extension. “Hello, Brian.” she said warmly. “Marvelous to hear you. Yes, Brian, I would love to have breakfast with you. But don't you think the fact that you're two thousand miles away makes it a titch difficult?”

At that precise second two men clad in tuxedos appeared in the doorway. One of them carried a tray. “Mrs. Smythe?” asked the man in the lead.

“Sh. She's on long distance.” Norma told him.

The man in the lead said, “Excellent. Over there, Fred.” The second man carried the tray in and put it down in front of Diana.

“Oh, Brian, you are deliciously mad.” She took up the orange juice. “Good morning, darling.”

Diana didn't eat breakfast, so she merely listened while Brian talked, telling her all about Denver and the people he was meeting. After he hung up, she went back to work.

It was time for lunch. Diana lifted the lid off the chafing dish on the tray, and then almost dropped it, as a sudden feeling of terror rushed over her. All that was on the tray was a single rose. Why in the world would she feel so horrified at the sight of it?

“*Meine lieblich, meine rose...*” she murmured to herself. And then stopped. Now why in the world had that phrase popped into her head? She didn't even know how to speak German...did she? But..it was a song, a song playing in her head.”

Diana leapt to her feet. “I'm going out for lunch, Howard. See you in an hour.”

“Sure, Diana.”

Diana didn't wait for the elevators, she took off her high-heels and then headed down the stairs of the building two and three at a time. Finally outside, she put her high-heels back on and started walking rapidly, anywhere, as kaleidoscopic images flashed across her eyes. Men's faces, all kinds of men's faces, men that she didn't know but whom she knew meant danger to her. And then always there was Brian's face, smiling...wearing a bowler of all things, and then everything was all right again.

"I think I need to go into therapy," Diana told herself at last. "Something is going on and I don't know what it is....does Brian have this much of a hold over me?"

Diana walked through the crowds of people that always infested a Manhattan side walk, until finally she came to Central Avenue, and she followed the path into the park. It wasn't much like walking through Hyde Park in London, but it was better than nothing.

As she walked, hearing the sounds of the birds and looking at the trees, she began to calm down. But that song, *Meine lieblich, meine rose*, it wouldn't go out of her head. Suddenly, behind her, Diana heard the sound of hoofbeats. She turned to see a policeman on horseback. The horse was a magnificent beast, its head arched proudly, its hooves stepping high....a magnificent steed.

Steed....steed...a picture slipped sideways into Diana's mind. Brian's face, very close to hers, lips warm and inviting, herself pressing him away. "You don't need to worry about that," came his voice. "I've been to the vet and had myself fixed. You don't think I'd want the patter of little Steeds all about, do you?"

Steeds. Steed. Steed?

Something seemed to shatter in Diana's mind. She clutched at her head as she sank to the ground...'Steed, Steed, John Steed,' echoed again and again in her head.

"Hey, lady? Hey, miss?" came an urgent voice.

Diana opened her eyes to see a young black kid looking at her, his face alive with concern.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "You're holding onto that tree for dear life."

Diana took a long, shaky breath. She smiled at the good Samaritan, and as she started to get to his feet he helped her. "I'm fine, thanks. Just a bit of a....well, a daymare, I guess you'd call it."

"Uh, sure." said the kid. "There was a cop who rode past here. You want me to go get him and take you to a doctor?"

“No, no, thanks, I’m fine. As a matter of fact, I’m perfect. Thanks for your concern.”

“Sure.” he nodded at her, then ran off.

Diana took another deep breath, then turned and retraced her steps. She had to get back to her office. She had to make a phone call to a travel agent. She needed a ticket to Denver.

II.

It was a long walk back to the office, and as Diana walked she felt the tension ease out of her body, and the memories and events that had battered her just a few minutes before started to fade, as if she had just woken up from a dream, and no matter how hard she tried to grasp at those memories to hold on to them, they faded away.

Brian...she thought desperately...remember Brian...I must go to him.

So it was that when Diana returned to her office it was with no memory of the preceding hour, but just one conviction - she must see Brian Harris. There was something she had to do, and when she saw Brian it would come to her.

She went into Norma's office - Norma was a friend, Norma was a romantic, Norma would understand.

"Norma, I need to take a couple of days off. Starting this afternoon. Please."

Norma looked up at her, surprised. "Certainly, Diana, certainly. Nothing wrong with Roger, I hope?"

"No, of course not, not at all." Diana smiled. "I just have to go visit...an aunt of mine." Suddenly she didn't want to mention that it was Brian she was going to see. Norma would probably think that anyway.

Norma smiled. "Alright, Diana. Don't worry about a thing. You go off and take care of your business."

Diana sighed, relieved. "Thanks, Norma. I'll be back in a couple of days."

Diana left the office, and Norma's gamine smile faded. Diana was right - Norma *did* assume Diana was going to see Brian Harris. Norma picked up the phone and dialed long distance - to London, England.

"Mr. Smythe? Norma here. Something happened today. Diana's going to take a couple of days off.

She's going to fly to Denver, I'm sure. Where Brian Harris is."

Norma listened to Smythe for a few seconds, then said, "Alright," and hung up. Immediately she picked up the phone again. When the individual on the other end answered she said, "Mr. Pat? I have a job for you and Mr. Knee."

III.

Diana left the building straight from Norma's office, taking the tube, the subway that was to say, back to her flat. The first thing she did was call up the airlines, and make a reservation for the next flight to Denver, leaving in just a couple of hours. Then she called a taxi. She threw a couple of things into a suitcase, closed and locked her door behind her, and was waiting outside for the taxi when it arrived.

She arrived at the airport with an hour to spare. Diana put her suitcase into a storage locker and then began to pace around the airport, too anxious to sit in one place. Besides, she hadn't brought anything to read. Diana paused in front of a newsagents. She may as well get something to read on the trip. Something to occupy her mind. Better than just letting her thoughts run around in her head like mice in a cage.

There was not much of a choice at the newsagents, lots of romance novels with sickeningly sweet covers that made her want to gag. She turned away from the books and found the rack of magazines. She chose several crossword puzzle books and a book of cryptograms - "Expand your mind with these brain teasers!" the blurb read. Well, she could certainly do with expanding her mind.

Diana managed to get a window seat, and barely noticed the portly man who sat beside her. He had also, as coincidence would have it, acquired a book of crossword puzzles to do. Diana took her pen and began on page one of the first book of her crossword puzzles. Beside her, Mr. Florrie began on his own crossword book. Minutes passed....Florrie looked sideways at Diana who was working with a pen and going through the crosswords one at a time quickly and efficiently, while he was still working on the first one.

Time passed, and she had finished all of her books. Mr. Florrie handed hers with a rather bemused smile. She accepted it and went to work on the half remaining pages.

IV.

Brian Harris entered his dressing room, followed, as usual, by his manager John. He had just completed his final concert in Denver and it had gone much better than the debacle in New York at

Lincoln Center. But he was no happier this night than he had been a week ago.

"Do you want to see anyone?" John asked, as usual. Brian shook his head. "I'm making an early night of it tonight," he said briefly. "I'm going to my suite. And no - don't send anyone there, either."

John looked at him curiously, but said, "Alright, Mr. Harris."

Brian went into the inner dressing room to shower and change, and then slipped out the back door and past the dozens of people waiting at the stage door. For a few seconds Brian felt a pang of guilt - he hated to disappoint the fans who were waiting for his autograph, and those other fans who were waiting for a bit more - though those fans were the last on his mind, now.

Diana should be with him now, he thought. Why wouldn't she come with him? Diana, she probably thought he went home with a different fan every night. Well, he didn't. He could, but he didn't. And if he liked to tease her with the fact that he could, and it didn't matter to her that he didn't, then that was all parsnips.

By the time he reached his suite Brian Harris was in a slow burn. He didn't know why he felt so angry, he only knew that he did, and that he was angry at Diana. He should go out and get a woman....serve her jolly well right.

Brian meant to head to the door once again. with that object in mind..but instead he found himself seated in front of his piano. That was one of the perks written into all of his contracts - he was always to have a piano in his suite. That was a bit odd, that, Brian thought idly, for the last year he'd always had a piano in his suite and he'd never played on it once. He stared at the keys, alternating black and white, and reached out a hesitant finger to tap them.

He didn't feel like playing Rachmaninoff...he didn't feel like Chopin or Mozart or Brahms....*Greensleeves*...he'd play *Greensleeves*....

Greensleeves, you do me wrong

To cast me off, so discourteously,

And I have loved you for so long,

Who but my lady, Greensleeves?

Brian stared at the piano keys...he placed his fingers on the keys....he didn't know how to play *Greensleeves*.

That was impossible. He *must* know how to play it....if nothing else he should be able to pick it out by ear....but his hands stayed on the keys...he couldn't do it.

Well, alright then, no *Greensleeves*. What else could he play? How about something simple...*Mary Had A Little Lamb*. He straightened his back, arced his palms...and stopped. How did one play *Mary Had A Little Lamb*?

Brian Harris blinked at the keys. Had he been drinking and not known it? Impossible. Perhaps he'd better have a drink and then try it.

Scotch and soda in hand, Brian returned to the piano. He gulped down half the drink, then attacked the piano...and Mozart's beautiful music rolled off into the night...beautiful...beautiful...alright now, segue into something very, very simple, like....like *Piano Man*, that piece of Billy Joel's that he so liked, a nice pop piece that made such a change from the classics. He hummed the lyrics:

And the waitress is practicing politics
As the businessmen slowly get stoned
Yes, they're sharing a drink they call loneliness
But it's better than drinkin' alone

Sing us a song, you're the piano man
Sing us a song tonight
Well, we're all in the mood for a melody
And you've got us feelin' alright

But he looked at the keys and for the life of him he had no idea what keys to hit.

How could this be possible? How could he play incredibly difficult pieces from Brahms, Mozart, those chaps, and yet he couldn't play something as simple as *Mary Had A Little Lamb*?

Brian Harris felt the palms of his hand grow cold and clammy with sweat. What was wrong with him? Had he had a stroke? Brain fever? He buried his face in his handsDiana, he thought...Diana, I need you. His eyes closed, Diana's lovely, smiling face appeared in front of him, comforting, secure. Brian remained at the piano, hands over his eyes, unmoving.

V.

There came a knock on the door. A familiar knock. 'Shave-and-a-haircut, two bits.'

Brian leapt to his feet, turning over the piano bench in his haste, and jerked open the door. "Diana."

She walked into his arms and stood pressed against him, her head buried in his chest. He held her, pressing her to him, feeling the warmth of her body.

"My dear," he said, holding her tighter, "You're trembling."

"I don't know why," she whispered. "I can't explain it. I needed to see you, Brian."

"I'm glad you came."

They stood together for a few more seconds, then Diana pulled away.

She walked further into the room, and Brian closed the door behind her. He turned, and then for some reason pulled a chair in front of the door. Then he went back to Emma and they hugged again. She lifted her face to his and very gently they kissed. Then they sat down on the couch, holding hands.

"Something's wrong, isn't there?" Brian said at last. "Something wrong with the two of us. I've sat at that piano for the last couple of hours, trying to play the simplest pieces...and I can't. I can't read music, I can't play by ear....I can play all the classics...but nothing else!

Diana nodded. "On the flight here, I went through about ten crossword puzzle books and a book of cryptograms in three hours. In ink. It was incredible. I felt like a genius - I knew everything. And, when I got done with the last page of the last book, I turned it over and drew this."

She took a piece of paper from her pocket. Brian unfolded it. It was the sketch of a man, wearing a vast eagle's head mask over his face, arms outstretched with claws at the end of them, and the words Ee-urp! resounding above him. It was a comical sketch, but Brian didn't smile at it. He looked at Emma.

"Something's wrong with us," he repeated.

They sat, holding hands, staring off into space as they thought.

"Analysis?" Brian asked at last.

"Takes too long," Diana replied. "Spending twenty years on a couch telling every minute activity to an individual who nods and says 'yes' and 'go on', is not my idea of solving the problem."

"What then?"

"Hypnosis."

"Hypnosis! You must be joking."

"No, Brian, I'm serious." She turned to face him. "We find a reputable hypnotist, of course. One of us stays in the room while the other gets hypnotized. We get sent back...into time or into subconscious, whatever you want to call it, and we find out what's going on!"

They stared into each other's eyes. Brian nodded. "Okay, Emma. We go first thing tomorrow." He brought up her hands to his lips. "Will you stay here tonight?"

Diana stared at him. She said, not angrily, "Why did you call me Emma?"

He blinked. "I...I don't know."

"Yes, Brian, I will stay here tonight."

They leaned forward to kiss...when there came a knock on the door.

"I have to see who it is," Brian said. "I'll get rid of them." Diana rose as well.

Brian got up and skirted the chair in front of the door to open it. A man filled the frame of the door, and in his hand was a gun. Brian slammed the door with all the speed and reflexes of the hands that could dance over a keyboard and look as if they were merely floating. He turned to glance at Diana, said "one-two-three", and opened the door again. The massive man had gotten a running start. He burst through the doorway, his shoulders brushing the jambs on either side, and tripped headlong over the chair in his path. Diana kicked him in the head as he tried to rise and he subsided with a whimper.

"What on earth was all that about?" Diana demanded.

"I don't know, but I have a hunch we're going to have to find out very soon," Brian commented. "My darling, I hate to disappoint you but I don't think we'd better stay here tonight. I've heard the best hypnotists are in California."

"They would be. Right, you have a car?"

"Of course not. Limousines and chauffeurs, everywhere I go!"

"Well, call up the limousine service, then. From the lobby, of course. Tell them you need a car, but you've already got a driver."

"Right."

Thirty minutes later, the chauffeur who had brought the car round was telling a curious 'fan of Brian Harris,' that Brian Harris had decided to drive back to New York, 'to see an old friend,' as he'd put it. But would be returning the next day, solemn promise. Meanwhile, Brian sat in the front passenger seat of the limousine, with a bottle of champagne filched out of the back, while Diana drove them at top speed towards Los Angeles.

For a long time they drove in silence. Brian sipping his champagne, replaying the image in his head of Diana very coolly and calmly kicking their attacker in the head and rendering him unconscious. He also replayed in his mind his own actions - the placing of the chair in front of the door, his reaction not of surprise but of...well, of what? adrenalin? at the sight of a man with a gun facing him. The slamming of the door, the turning to Diana - what had he expected that dear woman to do, and why had he been so sure she'd be able to do it? But she had, of course, knocked him unconscious as easy as winking.

"Let's play a game," Diana said at last.

"A game? While you're driving the car?" Brian asked facetiously.

"Not that sort of game," she glanced at him with a smile. "Word association. Is there any paper or writing material in the glove box?"

"This limousine is a first class machine from a first class service. They provide my every desire." Brian opened the glove box, and removed a squat notebook and a pen. He held it up. "Voila." he flicked past the first few pages, in which the limousine driver had apparently kept track of mileage and petrol purchased, and then sat with pen at the ready.

"Word game. Right." he said.

"Any chocolates in that glove box?"

"Under the seat," Brian reproached her. He brought out a box of individually wrapped gourmet chocolates, unwrapped one, and popped it into her waiting mouth. She savored it. He helped himself to one as well.

"Word game. Right." she said at last. "I say a word. You write down the first thing that pops into your head."

"Right."

"Night." said Diana.

"Day," replied Brian immediately. He wrote it down.

"Sun."

"Moon."

"Emma."

"Peel." Brian hesitated, felt a sickening lurch in the pit of his stomach. "Emma Peel," he said. "That sounds familiar."

"Yes, yes it does."

Diana continued driving. Brian gave her another chocolate.

"Horse."

"Derby."

"Piano."

"Man."

"Steed."

"John."

"John?"

"Steed." Brian sat very still, as sweat broke out on his brow and the sickening feeling in his belly reached acute proportions. He curved his arms around his stomach.

Diana was herself not doing to well. She took a deep breath. "Something's wrong," she gritted. "Something that's not naturally wrong. Not the both of us reacting like this."

"I've had enough of this game," Brian gritted in return. "At least, not playing it in a moving vehicle."

"Right. Turn on the radio."

At four o'clock in the morning, Diana decided that she'd done all she could for one night. Her eyes were burning and each time she thought of the names John Steed or Emma Peel it was like a knife stabbed her in the stomach, yet she couldn't help thinking of them. And she rather thought that Brian was in the same boat, his arms still wrapped around his stomach and his pater noticeably absent.

"I'm going to turn into the next rest area," Diana told him, "We've got to get some sleep."

"Sounds like a good idea to me." Brian agreed.

Ten minutes later a sign loomed up on their left, announcing a rest area. Thank heavens for American efficiency. Diana pulled the limousine, with its opaque windows, up between two parked semi-trailer trucks, their engines throbbing. "There's room for both of us in the back," she commented.

They got out of the front seat, and into the rear. It was not a giant-sized limousine, with room for a sauna, but with the seats turned down it was as large as a queen sized bed. The two of them were too exhausted to do anything but fall into each other's arms and sleep.

VI.

Diana woke up three hours later, feeling wonderful, her head resting on Brian's chest, his arms wrapped around her. It felt very, very right. She yearned to stay there, in his arms, but they didn't have time to waste.

"Brian," she whispered, kissing him gently, "We have to get going."

His eyes opened immediately. They gazed at her, and their expression almost made her melt. "Must we?" he said huskily.

"We must," she said softly.

"Under protest," he said, and giving her a squeeze, let her go. This time, he took the wheel, and she the passenger size, and she nibbled on chocolates as he drove.

They drove in companionable silence. Indeed, Brian glanced over to see that Diana was drowsing and he did not disturb her.

VII.

"What an awfully big city Los Angeles is," Brian told her, several hours later, as they sat in the limousine, parked by a curb in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. Brian had a very thick Yellow Pages on his knee. He paged through it until he found the Aitches, and looked for hypnotism. "There's a whole page of hypnotists," he pointed out to Diana. "Fancy that."

"Anyone look promising?"

"How about this chap? He ripped the page out and handed it to her, finger pointing at a name.

"Dr. Robert Hartley. Hypnotism and Help, Guaranteed." Diana read. "He'll do."

"He's certainly got a very prestigious address," Brian murmured, reading it. "Right on the LA equivalent of Harley Street. We can walk from here, my dear."

VIII.

Dr. Robert Hartley was a man of average height, balding, with friendly eyes and a soft voice. He invited Brian and Diana into his office and offered them coffee.

They had already discussed the tactic they would take. Brian explained that he was a concert pianist - Hartley said he'd heard of him which Brian found very gratifying, and perhaps if they delayed the session for an hour they could go find a piano and ...Diana kicked Brian in the ankle and he got back to the point.

"I can't play simple pieces, Doctor." he said abruptly. "Rachmaninoff, Brahms, Mozart, Chopin, yes. Anything else, no. I'm wondering if I have some kind of mental block. I'm wondering if you hypnotize me, will I be able to figure out why that is?"

"Of course, Mr. Harris. Here, sit down on the couch. Miss Smythe, if you'll excuse us?"

"Oh, no, doctor," Brian said quickly. "She must remain. In fact, I rather think that the only way I'm going to feel comfortable enough to be 'sent under' as you'd say is if she held my hand."

"Well, certainly. Miss Smythe?"

"I'd be delighted, Doctor," Diana said, giving Brian another kick in the ankle.

Dr. Hartley went to his desk, and brought out a large coin suspended from a chain. "Yes, it's done

just like it is in the movies," he said ruefully to their looks. "Now, just bear with me..."

Ten minutes later, Brian Harris was in a hypnotic trance.

"Ask him what his name is?" whispered Diana.

Dr. Hartley looked at her, startled. "I beg your pardon?"

"Please, doctor, this is very important. Ask him what his name is."

Hartley turned to his patient, and said, slowly and clearly, "What is your name?"

Brian's lips worked, his forehead creased, his blank eyes grew blanker.

"What is your name?"

"John," he croaked. "John Steed."

Diana's hand went to her mouth.

"John Steed," repeated Hartley. "Why do you call yourself Brian Harris?"

"D...on't know. Don't know."

"Ask him who is Brian Harris," Diana said urgently.

"Who is Brian Harris?" Hartley queried obediently.

"Concert pianist. Con..cert pianist....looks....like...me."

"Who told you?" Diana demanded urgently. "Who told you you looked like Brian Harris?" Robert Hartley repeated this question faintly, looking from one of them to the other and perhaps wishing he had a pair of straight jackets handy.

"Woman...doctor....Dr. Tara King. Told me...looked like Harris. Would be...Harris. Laughed at me.....nothing I could do...nothing I could do....'said they'd killed...said they'd killed..." Suddenly John Steed's eyes looked out of Brian Harris' face, and they filled with tears as they looked at Emma Peel. "They told me they'd killed you," he said huskily, and he went into her arms and wept.

VIII.

"Will he be himself again, when he wakes up?" Diana asked Dr. Hartley, wiping away tears of her own as she looked at the sleeping form of the man she knew as Brian Harris, who must really be John Steed.

"Yes," he said quietly. "You heard me give him his instructions. He's going to sleep, and when he wakes up he's going to remember everything. Now, what about you?"

Diana took a deep breath. "I think it was time I was myself again, too. But I'm going to wait, until Br...Steed is awake and in command. How long do you think that will take?"

"At least a couple of hours. I should really let him sleep longer, but I get the impression that this is rather urgent."

"Indeed it is, Doctor. Indeed it is." Diana looked down at the sleeping form of John Steed, the tear tracks still on his cheeks, and rage and anger and yes, hatred, filled her, for the people who had done this to them.

She recalled a psalm from the Bible and spoke it aloud. "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

She looked at Dr. Hartley, and smiled a smile. "Deuteronomy 32: 35." she pointed out. "A very apt quotation."

"Isomehow I think so...Miss Smythe."

"No," Diana said decisively. "You heard what he called me. My name is Emma Peel."

Ever After, Happily.....Interlude

Emma Peel lay nestled in the arms of John Steed. They had not made love - though they had started out to do so. But as they had started to undress each other while they kissed, Emma had suddenly began to cry, and Steed had wound up holding her in his strong arms while she had sobbed uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry, Steed," she had mumbled. "It's okay, my darling," he murmured, stroked her hair and kissed her forehead. They had comforted each other many times in the past, but he had never, ever, seen Emma Peel cry before, and his heart was breaking. But he held her close and after a while her sobs lessened until finally she fell into a sleep. Steed lay beside her contentedly, stroking her hair and thinking pleasant thoughts.

The next morning, Emma Peel woke up. She lifted her head from Steed's chest and kissed him gently on the lips. His eyes opened immediately. They stared at her questioningly, and this time when they began to kiss, she did not cry.

After a time, they showered, dressed, and went for a walk on the beach outside their hotel room, which Steed had decided to rent in the name of Brian Harris. They walked slowly, enjoying the scenery, the sound of the waves lapping the shore and the cries of the birds, and enjoying the feeling of their fingers intertwined.

"The first question is," said Emma Peel, "are we alive or dead?"

Steed looked at her. "I didn't think you'd have to ask that question after this morning," he said regretfully.

She shoved him with her shoulder. "Don't be silly. I mean *us*. John Steed and Emma Peel. Are we alive or are we dead? If we're dead....how did we die and how easy will it be to resurrect us? If we're alive, what are we doing, and how can we arrange a swop?"

Steed nodded. "I think a more important question is, who did this to us? That will dictate our actions in either case."

Emma looked at him grimly. "It's obvious, isn't it? Our Side did this to us, Steed. If it was the Other Side, why set up these elaborate charades - these new lives? All the planning, the money that must have been involved. Why not just kill us and have done with it? No...it must have been Our Side....our own side...."

Steed quickly put her arm around her and hugged her. She returned his hug.

"Why would Our Side want to do this to us, come to that?" he said. "We were the best..the elite agents of Department S. It doesn't make sense."

Emma nodded. "Well, we'll have to find out. One way or the other, we're going to get our lives back. And a couple of people are going to pay, very dearly."

Steed, thinking of the Emma Peel crying in his arms the other night, nodded. Yes, someone would pay.

THE RETURN

I.

“These peapods are marvelous,” said John Steed, helping himself to more from the bowl with his chopsticks. “Here, try one, Mrs. Peel.

He extended the chopsticks towards Emma and placed a peapod in her open mouth. “Mmmm,” she agreed. “Delicious.”

Emma Peel surveyed the table and scooped up selections of sweet and sour chicken and pork. “I love eating in American restaurants,” she commented. “They give you such big portions.”

“Well, it’s such a big country,” Steed replied, eying the mussels with askance.

“I’d like to travel to China sometime,” Emma said, “See what real Chinese food tastes like.”

“You’ve been to Hong Kong.”

“Yes, but that’s not China, is it? It’s very Westernized. I want to see the real country. Peer at the peasants. View the rice paddies. Eye the Forbidden City. Gaze on the Great Wall.”

“You know,” said Steed, “I’ve always wanted to walk on Hadrian’s Wall. That’s still there, isn’t it?”

“Hadrian’s Wall? Well, yes, bits and pieces of it.”

“Ah, Roman England,” Steed said musingly. “So romantic, isn’t it, Mrs. Peel? I can see you as Boudicca, grasping your spear and standing in your war chariot, ready to ride down the Roman legions.”

“You have a funny idea of romance,” Emma said with a smile.

“I’d be the Roman centurion whom you’d have to run over.”

Emma smiled. “Have some more sesame shrimp, Steed.” She popped a morsel into his mouth.

They ate for a few minutes in silence.

It was their second night together after having recovered their memories, which had been wiped away by the evil Dr. Tara King. Doctor Hartley had used hypnosis to bring back not only their

memories as Steed and Emma, but also their actions in the past year - Steed as a concert pianist and Emma Peel as a department store display designer.

“The question remains, Steed, and I can’t let it go,” said Emma, leaning back as a waiter stopped by to refill their water glasses, “Are we alive, or are we dead?”

The waiter raised his eyebrows.

“Well, I’m certainly alive, Mrs. Peel. I thought I proved that last night,” Steed said, sipping water.

“I meant,” Emma Peel enunciated every word, “are we alive or dead. In England.”

“Ah. In England. Yes, of course. That is the question.”

“It affects everything, Steed. If we’re dead...then our wills have been read, our possessions dispersed...all our friends and family have been grieving for us for two years....”

Emma’s smile faded and her eyes turned bleak.

Steed put his hand over hers.

“Unfortunately, Mrs. Peel..how could we not be dead? Indeed, it would be worse if they replaced us with doubles.”

“Doubles...” Emma murmured, comforted by the feeling of Steed’s warm, strong hand over hers. She lifted her eyes to his. “How are we going to find out?”

“We have to get back to England. But incognito. We can’t go as Brian Harris and Diana Smythe - the villains will have a watch for us at the airports. We’ll need new papers, new passports.”

“And where will we get them from?”

“I’ll have to call an old friend. Mrs. Gale.”

“Steed! You can’t just call her out of the blue! What if we *are* dead?”

“Then she’ll get a pleasant surprise. Or, knowing Mrs. Gale,” Steed smiled reminiscently, “an unpleasant surprise. You’re right, Mrs. Peel. Mrs. Gale is the ideal person to call, because she can tell us right away if we’re alive or dead.”

Their waiter, who had stopped by to ask if they’d like more tea, went away again.

They walked slowly through Chinatown on the way back to their hotel room, hand in hand. The Californian night was warm and very pleasant, and when they arrived at their hotel they decided to go for a swim in the outdoor pool. They felt safe at the hotel, for they'd checked in under assumed names. (It was the 1960s, a more innocent time, and there was no asking for IDs before handing over the room keys). They swam together leisurely, they played frisbee with some kids who were also enjoying the pool, Emma borrowed a dolphin float from a young girl and floated around in it til Steed 'sharked' her, rising up from underneath her and dumping her into the water.

They returned to their room and showered together, and then got into bed. Steed checked his watch, then picked up the phone and spoke to the operator. "I'd like to make a long distance call," he said. He gave the number, and seconds later the call went through. "I love the American telephone system," he mouthed at Mrs. Peel as he listened to the chirping of that distinctive British telephone ring.

"Cathy Gale," came a familiar voice.

Steed's mouth went suddenly dry. What was he going to say to her? What if she believed he was dead? If he did this indelicately, she'd punish him for it when they met in person.

"Hello?" came her voice.

Steed handed the phone to Mrs. Peel. "You talk to her."

Emma glared at him as she took the phone. "Hello, Mrs. Gale?"

"Yes, speaking."

"Mrs. Gale...this is going to be rather difficult...we talked, many years ago. I don't suppose you remember my voice?"

"No, I don't. Who is this?"

"Mrs. Gale, my name is Emma Peel."

"Emma Peel?"

"Yes. Do you...remember me at all?"

"Of course." Cathy Gale said warmly. "We talked a few times, after you joined Steed in working for Department S."

“And we bouted a few times,” Emma reminded her, “on the piste.”

“That’s right. I was impressed with your fencing skills. I knew you’d do well with Steed. And when your husband came back, I was so happy for you.”

A cold hand clutched Emma’s heart.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Two years ago, when your husband was found in the Amazon?” Cathy Gale said, suddenly cautious.

Emma took a deep breath. Steed looked at her in alarm and she smiled at him reassuringly. She returned her attention to the phone, but put one hand over her eyes, as if to help her concentrate.

“Mrs. Gale...have you seen Steed recently?”

“No, I’m afraid not. His new partner....a bit too immature for the job, I think. Wants to keep him for herself....I’m surprised Steed puts up with it, but, there you are.”

“Steed’s new partner. What’s her name?”

Beside her, Steed stiffened indignantly, mouthing the words, ‘new partner?’

There was a silence, then, slowly, Mrs. Gale said, “Surely you know?”

“Please, Mrs. Gale. All will become clear. What’s Steed’s new partner’s name?”

“Tara King.”

Emma’s hand across her eyes clenched. “Tara King.”

“That’s right.”

“Mrs. Gale, when’s the last time you saw Steed?”

“A couple of years ago. He brought Miss King by - introduced us.”

“And how was he looking at the time?”

“Well, he was his usual self.”

“I see.”

“All right, Mrs. Peel, I’ve answered your questions, now you’re going to have to answer some of mine. What’s going on?”

“Let me put it this way, Mrs. Gale. My husband never returned from the Amazon, and even if he had, I wasn’t around to hear about it.”

“Oh. Dear.”

“And, Steed is right next to me. I’m going to give him the phone. Talk to him, will you?”

Steed grimaced at her as she handed him the receiver. He tried to give it back to her, but she gave him one of her looks. He put the receiver to his ear. “Hullo, Mrs. Gale,” he said cheerfully.

“You sound like Steed,” Mrs. Gale’s voice came grudgingly. “But you’re going to have to do better than that.”

“Ask me a question, Mrs. Gale. Something that only you and I would know.”

“Very well. In all the time we worked together, did we ever kiss?”

“Oh, Mrs. Gale, what a question!”

“Yes, but can you answer it?”

“I was playing the role of ‘Johnny-the-horse,’ and you were my bird. I had to impress a few mugs, and I gave you a kiss. You weren’t best pleased. I was dressed like a vicar at the time.”

“It was the kiss and not your costume as a vicar that displeased me, Steed.”

“Quite.”

“After I left Department S, I went on a vacation. What was my first communication with you?”

“You sent me a Christmas card. It was postmarked from Fort Knox, Kentucky, USA. And in a curious coincidence, Mrs. Gale, I am actually calling you from the United States at this precise moment in time.”

“All right. Steed. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Mrs. Peel and I need your help.”

“Go on.”

Steed took the glass of whisky that Mrs. Peel handed to him, and began to talk.

II.

“Well, howdy there, pardners,” Cathy Gale greeted them.

“Don’t be cruel, Mrs. Gale,” said John Steed. He pushed the Stetson back on his head, and rubbed his large belly. “These high heeled boots are killing me.”

“You can say that again,” said Emma Peel, rearranging her massive bosom. “If I could see my feet, I’d take mine off.”

“I wish I could help you, Mrs. Peel,” Steed sighed.

They’d arrived at Gatwick Airport, rented a car with their fake passports, in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Tex Wayne, and driven to the Blue Boar Inn just a few kilometers away, where Mrs. Gale was waiting for them with a large white van.

“Get in,” Mrs. Gale told them, indicating the van.

In the privacy of the rear of the van they changed into less bulky clothing, removing the wigs, face and body padding. And the boots. They still didn’t look like themselves, for Mrs. Peel was now a red-head with a short, short hairstyle, and Steed was blond with a military style haircut and a goatee.

They climbed into the cab of the white van with Mrs. Gale. “What is that noise?” Steed asked, putting his hand on a small black box that separated the driver’s from the rest of the front seat.

“I’ve got a little Pekinese in there,” Cathy Gale said. “Pay no attention to him.” She engaged gears and brought the van out on the road. As she drove she checked the rear view mirror frequently. “I’ve been doing some research,” she reported. “John Steed and Tara King are still the top agents at Department S. And they’ve been doing some good work. Foiled quite a few dastardly plots from the Other Side. More to the point, no information has disappeared while on their watch. So, whatever their purpose in replacing you, it doesn’t seem to have been in an effort to steal secrets.”

“What about me?” Emma Peel asked. “Have I been in the picture at all?”

Cathy Gale shook her head. “You’d sold Knight Industries shortly after joining Department S, and

set up The Peel Foundation. That was your doing, I hope?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Good. Well, when Peter Peel...came back...you left St... Department S. You joined Peter Peel in the Amazon, setting up a mission to fly medicine and supplies to the indigent peoples. You’re supposed to be there right now. The Peel Foundation is still functioning and giving significant monies to charity, and Knight Industries is doing fine as well.”

Mrs. Gale drove in silence for some minutes, as Steed and Emma Peel mulled over this information. “Well, at least we aren’t dead.” Emma said.

“We’ve been replaced,” Steed said quietly. “And we’ve been replaced by Our Side.” Steed massaged his forehead with both hands. More than Mrs. Peel, he’d given his entire life to Department S, and was feeling extremely betrayed right now. He hadn’t wanted to believe it. But now....he dug his fingernails into his skin...but the pain didn’t make him wake up. He released his forehead and faced reality. He nodded. “I am afraid you’re right, Mrs. Peel.”

“But why?” she demanded. “It’s been tormenting me for days. Why? Why would they do this to us?”

“More to the point,” said Cathy Gale, “What are we going to do about it?”

She said it in a matter of fact way, with no emphasis on the word ‘we.’ She had taken it for granted that they would take it for granted that she was in this with them. Steed glanced at her and then held out his hand to her. She shook it firmly. Emma gave her a thumbs up sign, and she grinned.

“I think the first step is to find Tara King,” Emma declared. “Both Steed and I remember her as the Doctor who brainwashed us - at least initially. She would seem to be the prime mover in this little...tragedy we have here.”

“Steed...or Tara King...” Cathy mused. “I know where Steed lives.”

“I would certainly like to see this Steed,” said John Steed. “And perhaps...turn the tables?”

“Replace him?” Emma said. “No, Steed.” She said it more urgently than she meant to.

Steed looked at her. Took her hand.” All right, my dear. All right.”

Emma took a deep breath. She didn’t want to play identity games. She hadn’t liked it in the past, and she definitely didn’t like it now. She didn’t want to do anything that would separate her from Steed

- place him at risk of being brainwashed again. Not with a double for him out there. They had to work as a team, now so more than ever. Because they had only the two of them...well, the three of them, now. Them....against their Own Side.

“We’re going to Steed’s place.” Cathy said. “We’ll persuade...let’s call him Fred for the sake of distinction...to tell us where to find Tara King.”

“They may be expecting us,” Steed said. “They know we’ve regained our memories.”

“If he’s anything like you, he’ll be in his flat, waiting for you to attack him.” said Cathy. “With Tara King at his side. Just the two of them.”

“Should we do exactly what they expect, then?” Steed said cheerfully. “They went to so much trouble to create new identities for us. They didn’t kill us then. They won’t kill us now.”

“Probably not,” said Cathy Gale.

Emma Peel smiled. She let the two of them argue - or banter - or whatever it was they were doing together, while she sat thinking. Why...why would their own side replace them? It wasn’t for money - if her Peel Foundation and Knight Industries were still in business. It wasn’t for secrets - if Steed was still an agent and Tara King was an agent and they were doing ‘good things.’ Why, then? Why?

If it had just been Steed and Peel, she would have been willing to believe that it was a personal thing. Some agent had wanted to work with Steed and so had her replaced. But the scope of what had occurred was too vast for that. A great number of Department S members must have been involved. Unless...someone had combined business with pleasure?

“Steed...” she said, “do you remember....it was an old joke...an in-joke, I heard you say once. No one escapes from Department S.”

Steed looked at her. “Yes, of course.”

“Tell me what that meant again?”

“It was just a saying...coined a few years ago. A couple of agents had wanted to retire...they were in their prime. But before they could retire, they’d died.”

“In accidents. Not from natural causes.”

“That’s right.”

“And that was it? Just two agents?”

“Well, three from Department S. I’d heard a couple of other departments got hit as well. The whole of the Service went through a bad patch.”

“Of agents dying before they were able to retire.”

“Well, plenty of agents retired. Old ones. But young ones...young ones were never allowed to leave, anyway...what is it you’re driving at, Mrs. Peel?”

Emma shrugged. “No one escapes from Department S.’ We did. Not voluntarily, but we did.”

“What are you suggesting, Emma?” asked Cathy Gale.

“I don’t know, Cathy. I’m just trying to think of reasons, of motives for this insanity. And that’s all I can come up with.”

“But...if we weren’t planning on retiring....and we weren’t...why would they go after us?” demanded Steed. “Why not go after someone who wanted to retire?”

Emma shrugged. “Steed...Fred, rather...is still there. In Department S. With a new partner. I’m gone. And Fred’s new partner is Tara King, who brainwashed us. Why would someone with the skills of a ...a mad scientist, settle for being a mere agent?”

“Mere agent? I think I resent that,” said Steed.

“With Fred instead of you, she settled for being a mere agent,” Emma said.

Cathy Gale made a choking sound and then started to cough.

“Keep your eyes on the road, Mrs. Gale,” Steed told her.

“I’m sorry, Steed. Anyway, we’re here.” She brought the van to a halt. At the end of the road was Steed’s apartment block.

“You two get into the back,” Cathy ordered. “I’ll perform a reconnaissance and be back in fifteen minutes.” She placed a wig on her head and large glasses over her eyes - the kind that were in style, took the Pekinese out of its kennel with the words, “Come along, Snookums,” and left them behind. It took them some seconds before they could control themselves.

“That’s not the name of her dog,” Steed said. “She doesn’t even have a dog.”

“Oh, Steed, I’m sure she took one look at Snookums in a pet store window and couldn’t resist.”

“My auntie Genevieve had a dog once,” Steed mused. “It was a gigantic Doberman Pincher, and she was a tiny woman. But she had forearms like a lumberjack. Around children and other little old ladies, she had it under tight control. But when it was a postal worker or some smart aleck young manwhoosh. It went to the end of its telescopic lead like a rocket.”

They dissolved into laughter.

Cathy Gale returned to the van and stuffed Snookums unceremoniously back into his kennel. “Streets are clear. No other vans, no occupied cars, no surveillance equipment that I could see. And...your Bentley is there.”

“Which probably means that Fred is there.” Emma observed.

“Which means you two are probably walking into the lion’s den,” Cathy retorted.

Steed nodded. “Keep the engine running, Mrs. Gale.”

“Wait.” Cathy reached into her purse and removed two identical keychains, one of which she handed to Steed, one to Emma. “Just in case we’re separated. This one is for my cottage in Lancs, this one is for my Peugeot, which is currently at my flat here in London and which I certainly hope will remain there, and this one is for this van. If we are separated, our rendezvous point is the British Museum. Every day at noon, until we show up. Right?”

“Right.”

“And here...” she reached into her purse again and took out two walkie talkies. “If I haven’t heard from you in fifteen minutes, I’m coming in.”

Steed and Emma stepped out of the van. “Emma,” Cathy called. Emma turned back to her. Cathy handed her a pistol. “Better safe than sorry,” she said. Emma nodded. She stuck the pistol into the waistband of her trousers, pulling out her shirt to hide it, then turned and followed Steed toward the block of flats.

Cathy Gale took a deep breath, and checked her watch. Fifteen minutes. It was going to be a long wait.

John Steed and Emma Peel walked on cat-like feet into the entrance way of Stable Mews. . Numbers 1 and 2 were on the ground floor, Steed’s flat was on the first floor. They took the stairs rather than the elevator, but did not stop at the ground floor. Instead, they went up the remaining two flights,

checking the landings of each of the floors, to see what they could see. Nothing. They returned to the first floor.

“Do we knock?” Mrs. Peel whispered.

“I say we go right on in,” Steed replied. “It’s my flat after all.”

He stood to the left of his door, so that his silhouette would not appear in the glass, and pressed the button on top of the door jamb. The door clicked open. Steed nudged the door wide open with his foot. Silence on the inside.

Steed stopped, lost. Normally, he’d put his bowler on top of his umbrella and poke it around the door, waiting for a reaction. But he’d left his Stetson in Mrs. Gale’s van, and he didn’t have an umbrella, anyway.

“Helloooo,” he called. “Anyone home?”

No response.

Steed looked at his partner. “After you, Mrs. Peel.”

Emma grinned. She took off her jacket, and, holding it by the collar, walked into the living room.

She came to an abrupt halt. A man looking remarkably like John Steed was seated on the divan, a newspaper scrunched over his lap as if he had been reading it when disturbed. On the over stuffed chair beside him was a young woman wearing a preposterous wig and a miniskirt, drinking a large Old Fashioned.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” said the man who looked...and sounded...like John Steed.

He wasn’t quite like Steed. His hair was greyer, the hairline higher, his sideburns came down to the end of his ears. His belly strained slightly at his doublebreasted suit.

“Hello, Fred,” Emma said. “Hello, Dr. King.”

The impostor raised an eyebrow. “Fred?”

Steed heard this outside the flat. He raised the walkie talkie to his lips. “They’re both here,” he whispered. He stuffed the walkie talkie into his pocket, keeping his hand on the transmit button, and entered the room with a casual air. “That’s right.” he said coldly. “Fred.”

Both he and Emma looked not at the fake Steed, but at Tara King. They both recognized her.

“All right, Dr. King,” said John Steed. “Start at the beginning.”

“Sometimes people get burnt out,” Tara King said abruptly. “Or they lose their nerve. Or they start....second guessing their superiors. They want to leave the Department....but they can’t leave.”

Steed and Emma exchanged glances.

“They are sent to the Village instead,” Dr. King said. “A miniature city where they are kept and cared for, where they have all the comforts of home. Where they stay for the rest of their lives.”

Steed and Emma exchanged glances. Horrified ones this time.

“It was thought to try a more humane approach,” Dr. King said. “Instead of imprisoning them....recondition them. Wipe out their old memories and give them new ones. Put them back into society. It was decided to experiment with you two.”

“Who decided?” demanded Steed.

“One Ten. With input from myself.”

“So...Major Bee knows nothing about this?”

“Only the highest levels know this....Steed.”

“So this Village still exists?” demanded Emma Peel.

“That’s right!” Tara King rose to her feet. “That’s right! And thanks to you it will continue to exist! You’ve proven that the best brainwashing in the world can’t prevent agents from regaining their memories. So that experiment is no more. The Village continues.”

Fred lifted the newspaper from his lap. In his other hand he held a submachine pistol. “And you two are its next residents.”

THE PRISONERS I.

There was a fight, of course. They couldn't be expected to give up without a fight. Fred held Steed at bay with the machine gun pistol while Emma Peel attacked Tara King. They exchanged karate strikes and blocks, then Emma delivered a blow a bit too slowly and Tara King grabbed and twisted her arm behind her back, tripping her simultaneously face first down onto the floor. A karate chop to the neck and Emma Peel lay still. Steed started to rise but Fred lifted the machine gun pistol menacingly and he subsided back into his seat, giving his best insouciant look.

Tara King stood up, her face glowing triumphantly as she gazed from Fred to Steed.

“Youth over age every time,” Fred said.

Good thing Emma was unconscious, Steed thought.

“What happens now?” he demanded. Tara King peered into her handbag - a large, white, squat leather bag which looked as if it were about to sprout arms and start grabbing things, and removed two pairs of handcuffs. She knelt and applied one pair to the wrists of Emma Peel. Then she began patting Emma down, found the walkie talkie in her jacket pocket and removed it. She rolled Emma over and completed the search, finding the gun which had been tucked into the waist band of her trousers. She held it up to Steed. “So she thought she could defeat me without using her gun? Self-confidence goes before a fall, eh, Mister Steed?”

“So I've heard,” Steed said with a chagrined smile.

Tara King took the machine gun pistol from Fred, and held it to the head of Emma Peel. “Let Steed....my Steed, put the handcuffs on you.”

Steed rose to his feet and put his hands behind his back, allowing Fred to cinch them together tightly. Then Fred searched him, and found the walkie talkie in his jacket pocket.

They were remarkably lax, Steed thought, as Tara King brought a pitcher of water and poured it over Emma Peel, causing her to sit up gasping. They'd searched them superficially, but they hadn't examined the soles of their shoes, his belt, things like that....didn't they read Modesty Blaise or watch James Bond movies?

Tara waved the machine gun pistol at them. “Parked behind Steed's Bentley is my car. Get into it.”

“Where are we going?” demanded Steed.

“To the Village.”

“You can’t let Mrs. Peel go like that,” Steed objected, nodding at her wet hair and face as she gave him a Peelish look.

“She’d draw attention without even trying,” Fred told Tara King.

Tara brought out a towel from the lav and wiped Mrs. Peel’s face and hair. Emma gave her a Peelish look as well.

They were herded out into Tara King’s car and placed in the back seat. Fred drove, with Tara King right beside them. Tara flashed the machine gun pistol at them. “Any attempt to escape, Steed, and Mrs. Peel will suffer for it. And vice versa, Mrs. Peel.”

Steed and Emma Peel exchanged glances. Emma Peel closed one eye in a wink. Steed’s head inclined unobtrusively to anyone except Mrs. Peel.

When Tara King looked back at them via the rear view mirror, which she did frequently, she found Steed with his eyes closed, and Emma Peel snuggled close to him, with her head against his shoulder. Tara King’s lips would curve in a triumphant smile. They were defeated...she had defeated them.

Far behind, a car....not a white van but a hastily traded-for, much more unobtrusive car, followed them.

II.

“Shouldn’t we be blindfolded?” John Steed said, a couple of hours later.

Tara King turned to face them, smiling her triumphant smile once again. “It’s not necessary,” she said smugly. “You won’t be leaving. No one escapes from the Village.”

“You’re very confident,” Emma Peel said.

“The Village has been in existence for five years, Mrs. Peel, and no one has ever escaped. No one ever wants to escape. You won’t want to, either. All of your wants and needs are cared for. All of your desires are met. It’s a paradise.”

“From which we can never leave.”

“Well, if you’re going to look for a down side...there’ll be no pleasing you.”

They were driving down a long road between two Welsh mountains. The road seemed to go down and down...and down and down....until it swallowed them up and they were driving through darkness. The car came to a halt, and they were suddenly surrounded by men dressed in white form-fitting suits. Steed and Emma were unceremoniously dragged from the car.

“Good-bye, Steed, Mrs. Peel,” said Dr. Tara King.

III

“What a quaint village,” observed Emma Peel. She was walking arm and arm with John Steed down the gently rolling pathways of the village, with its quaint gingerboard houses, its seemingly pastoral simplicity...the men and women all dressed in the same outfits - men in black shirt and slacks, women in white dresses and carrying sun parasols.

“It will drive me crazy in a week,” Steed said out of the side of his mouth.

“That’s undoubtedly their plan.” Emma sided back to him.

Steed paused and addressed himself to the lighting of a cigar.

“How many days are we going to give them?” she asked as he attempted to blow a smoke ring.

“None at all. I say we make our move tonight.”

“Tonight?” Emma nodded. “Audacious, Steed.”

He smiled and blew one smoke ring inside another. “They’ll expect us to wait a day or two, to feel our way around and get the lay of the land. They’ll also be expecting us to be trying to get out.”

“As opposed to taking over the asylum with the help of the inmates? I don’t know if that’s going to be possible, Steed. Everyone here looks pretty contented.”

“Bunch of sheep,” Steed said disparagingly.

Emma glanced around, twirling her parasol. “Except for that man...there.”

Steed casually glanced in the direction that her parasol was twirling, and as casually glanced away. He saw a tall, brooding man standing on the edge of a gigantic chessboard, contemplating the game..a loner - the only person they’d seen who was not with someone else...a man whom he recognized. “It’s John Drake. He died, a year ago.”

“Time to bring him back to life, then.”

John Drake turned around. He was tall, an inch or so taller than Steed, with a lankier build. Brown hair cut short, face handsome in a gaunt sort of way, eyes angry. He stared at them for long seconds. Then he turned and walked away.

IV.

John Steed gazed downward with eagle eyes, searching, probing...finding. Ah, there was another straight-edged piece. He picked it up and fit it into the border he was building. “Ever read 1984, Mrs. Peel?” he asked, quietly. It was hard to hear, over the loud jazz music on the Victrola, but Steed and Emma Peel were so attuned to each other’s voices that they had no problem.

Emma Peel was sorting through the pile of pieces, separating out those with matching colors. They were busy working on a jigsaw puzzle featuring a fantasy golf links.

“Years ago, Steed,” she said, absently, using her long fingers to turn over piece after piece. “I was never impressed with it. Orwell wasn’t much of a science fiction writer, in my opinion. And it was boring.”

“Quite...but I was thinking more along the lines of the surveillance in the book. Big Brother is watching you.”

They turned to look at the big screen television set behind them. Although it was switched off, one button on it glowed red. Was it watching them?

“How many residents would you say this Village has?” asked Emma.

“About....two hundred,” Steed said, musingly, pouncing on another piece.

“And there can’t be two hundred....watchers...watching them.”

“You wouldn’t think so. Surely there couldn’t even be one hundred watchers...watching them.”

“Ye-es.” Steed glanced at the big black box again. “I envision a rack of television sets, with cameras alternating between each one.”

“Hard on the neck, looking up and down all those television sets every few seconds,” Emma commented, discarding one piece she’d been trying to fit into another with a sigh and moving on. “And sound.” she continued. “Hard on the ears, listening to a jumble of hundreds of people talking

to each other.”

“But at night, that changes.” said Steed. “Everyone is supposed to be asleep, and nobody’s talking. The watchers have it easy. They see someone moving, they hear someone talking, and they set off an alarm. Nights are not our friends.”

Emma glanced out at the sunset. “So what are you saying? We’re not going to wait for the witching hour of midnight?”

Steed fit a final piece into place, and the border was complete. “No time like the present, Mrs. Peel.”

They stood up as one. Steed held the front door open for her and they went out into the fresh air.

“Going somewhere?” asked John Drake.

IV.

The next morning Emma Peel and John Steed slept late and awoke betimes.

Waves of sunlight poured in through the open windows, rolling over the furniture and saturating them with warmth.

Then came the voices. Murmurs of discontent.

Steed rolled out of bed and padded to a window. He stood to one side, peering out cautiously. All of the inhabitants of the Village seemed to be out in the streets, looking around, lost as sheep.

“The natives are getting restless,” he told Mrs. Peel.

Emma propped several pillows behind her back and sat up comfortably, looking as smug and as satisfied as an oriental potentate. “They’re missing their television in the morning.”

“No radios, no television, no electric can openers, no cooking,” said Steed. “Which reminds me, I’m hungry.”

“Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, Steed. And tepid water.”

Steed sighed.

Among other things, they had spent the night before in snipping away at the electrical system of the

Village. It was now quite dead.

Steed glanced out of the window again. “Uh oh,” he said.”

“What’s the matter?”

“A mob seems to be forming. And they’re not heading our way.”

“How silly of them.”

There was a rustle of silk and Emma joined him at the window. Steed was right.

“They’re going to John Drake’s,” Steed snapped. “He’s the only discontented one here, and they know it. They think he’s done this on his own.”

“We’d better get dressed for action,” Emma replied, whirling away from the window.

III.

There were bicycles in the Village. Old fashioned bicycles, the kind with a very large front wheel and a very small rear wheel. Several of those bicycles had been cannibalized and now Steed and Emma rode down the streets on fast bikes, the kind with which you could really get some speed up if you needed to.

They rode past John Drake’s house, and paused. “It’s like a scene out of Frankenstein,” Emma said sadly. “I’m surprised they don’t have pitchforks and flaming torches with them.”

A mob was milling around Drake’s house, but they had not yet acquired the courage to go in after their quarry. They were working themselves up to it, however. Steed and Emma exchanged glances, in essence saying, ‘leave them,’ and then pedaled on. They made for the high ground.

There was only one ‘high ground’ around the pastoral village. Now it contained a stack of wood laid out as a bonfire. John Drake had never returned to his house but had spent the rest of the night creating it. Emma and Steed biked up to it and dismounted. John Drake appeared, none the worse for wear for having spent the entire night out in the open.

“They’re bound to come up here sooner or later,” Drake said in his abrupt manner.

Steed looked at his watch. “Noon. We have to hold out until noon.”

“Why so sure it will be noon?”

Steed shrugged. "Noon. Midnight. Those are the times when Things Happen."

It was all too easy, thought John Drake, as his eagle eyes were the first to see the dot on the horizon. He nudged Steed and then pointed to it. Steed nodded and looked at his watch. Good old Mrs. Gale. You could always depend on her in a crisis. But it was too easy, thought Drake. For two years he'd struggled to leave this place, and never succeeded. And now...just like that...a helicopter was coming over the horizon. And here they were, just waiting for it. He hid his face in his hands for a second or two. Hope was springing within him, and he was all too familiar with that old story, of a man imprisoned by the Inquisition. He too thought he'd been about to escape, and just as he'd breathed freedom's sweet air, the Inquisitor had appeared and drawn him back, deliberately crushing all hope at that penultimate moment. Could it happen this time as well?

The helicopter was closer now, and they could hear the steady beat of its rotors. Drake lit the bonfire. "That will bring them coming," he commented.

Steed and Emma nodded. "Only to be expected that we'd have to fight a few people before we made our escape," Steed said. "That's the way of things."

"The people I want to fight are at 3 Stable Mews," Emma said coldly.

Steed nodded. "We'll be taking care of them next. No holds barred, this time."

It happened very fast. The helicopter, a huge one, swooped in. It landed right beside them on the hilltop. There was a woman piloting it. Mrs. Catherine Gale, Drake deduced. They piled into the rear and Mrs. Gale took off again, sweeping the helicopter into a wide arc and returning the way she came. The madmen of the Village were still a hundred yards away from the top of the hilltop as they passed over them.

Drake looked at his hands. He took a deep breath. "Rather anticlimactic," he said, hoarsely. "But, God, how good it feels."

IV.

Cathy Gale dropped them off at a small county airport nearest London, and then took off to return the helicopter to whomever she'd borrowed it from. John Drake offered to come with them to 3 Stable Mews, but Steed declined with thanks. "This is something just between the four of us," he explained, and Drake nodded.

"Keep in touch," he said, extending a hand.

Steed nodded, tapping his blazer pocket where various code names and addresses now dwelled.

“Will do.”

V.

John Steed and Emma Peel arrived once more back at 3 Stable Mews. They looked at each other.

“We can’t go home again,” Emma Peel said sadly.

Steed shrugged. “Wherever we are will be home. America was rather nice. That California....we’d be right at home there.”

Emma nodded. “California...here we come. Well, let’s leave on a happy note.”

Simultaneously they climbed out of the car and made their way up to the false Steed’s flat.

This time, Steed didn’t pussyfoot around. He raised a foot and kicked the door in. He was in in a flash, just in time to shove the false Steed back into his chair. “Ladies first, old man.” he said, cheerfully.

Tara King rose to her feet slowly, her face a frozen mask of consternation. Emma Peel waited for her, standing on the balls of her feet, snapping her fingers rhythmically. She wanted Tara King to make the first move. Steed smiled inwardly. Mrs. Peel was going to have some fun.

Tara grabbed a vase from a nearby table and flung it at Mrs. Peel. Emma moved her head out of the way with a sinuous twist of her torso, but otherwise remained unmoving. The vase crashed behind her and shattered into a thousand pieces. The two Steeds winced simultaneously.

Tara glanced around for something else to throw. Her eyes caught the swords hung on the wall. With a long stride she was there and ripped one down. She did not have the decency to flick a sword over to Emma. The age of chivalry had withered away, as far as Tara King was concerned.

Tara brought the sword around in a swinging arc. Emma ducked underneath it and lunged forward, burying her shoulder into Tara’s diaphragm and literally picking her up and carrying her several feet, slamming her back into the wall. Tara gasped and lost her grip on the sword. Emma caught it before it fell to the floor and backed up. She gestured with her head for Tara to get the other sword.

But Tara King wasn’t a swordswoman, and Emma Peel was. Tara merely advanced, carefully. She’d judged Emma’s character correctly. Emma wanted to do this mano a mano. She tossed the sword to Steed, and then turned her attention back to Tara King, just as Tara had known she would. But the rest of the fight did not go as Tara had expected. They exchanged karate blows and blocks, in much the same way as they had done a few days previously. Only this time, Emma Peel’s blows were very

fast and very sure very no-holds-barred. Tara King wasn't prepared for the increase in speed and precision, and she was extremely disconcerted by the beatific smile on the older woman's face. When the final blow came that knocked her unconscious it was almost a relief.

Steed looked at Fred with a beatific smile of his own.

"Our turn now, eh, old chap?" Fred said.

Steed shook his head.

"Not at all, old chap. Although I could beat you to a pulp, make no mistake about that. But there's no point in proving it. We've won, you've lost."

"Hardly sporting of you, old chap." Fred said.

Steed only grinned. Coldly.

"I'm still John Steed," Fred said tightly.

Steed nodded. "And you're welcome to him. But you're to leave us alone, understand?"

Fred blinked at him. "I beg your pardon?"

"We're going away, Fred. We're going to make new lives for ourselves. You and Tara King can keep Department S."

Fred blinked again.

"That's *it*?" he said.

Steed nodded. "If knowledge of the Village were to get out it would seriously undermine the work of all of our secret service departments. If knowledge of what you did to Mrs. Peel and myself were to get out, it would also undermine things. So knowledge isn't going to get out. And Mrs. Peel and I are sick to death of Department S, which could do these types of things to loyal agents, so we're just going to go....elsewhere."

"I see," said Fred. "So that's it, is it? You're just going to leave?"

Without warning Steed whipped the sword around so the edge was just under Fred's chin. To his credit Fred only blinked.

“We’re just going to leave,” Steed replied. “And as long as no one tries to find us, or interfere with us in any way, all will be well.”

“I’d nod if it wouldn’t mean giving myself rather too close of a shave,” Fred said. “But your terms are accepted. You’re free to go.”

“Thanks,” Steed said laconically. He removed the sword from Fred’s throat and stood up.

“Mrs. Peel?” he said.

“Ready, Steed,” she said, calmly.

John Steed and Emma Peel exited the flat, closing the door of 3 Stable Mews behind them.

“California,” John Steed said musingly. “Hollywood, you think?”

Emma nodded. “Hollywood. I think I’ll make a good actress.”

“Mrs. Peel,” said John Steed, “You’ll be the best. Especially with me as your agent.” He took her arm, and they walked out into the sunshine of a new day.

DIANA - SCRIPT

THIS IS THE transcribed script of the Diana episode. Imagine Diana lovely as ever, not looking much older. Patrick Macnee has put on a few pounds (he's in his fifties after all) but is charming, with a great sense of timing. Speaks with a slightly higher register, his real accent? and without the clipped tones of John Steed.

DIANA

Episode "Mrs. Smythe, You're Needed"

Diana Rigg as Diana

Barbara Barrie as Norma

Richard B. Shull as Howard

Gino Coforti as Spinelli.

Guest Star Patrick Macnee as Brian Harris

Filmed 1973.

Diana in department store window, holding a plan of what the window is supposed to look like.

NORMA ENTERS Hi, Diana.

DIANA Hi, Norma.

NORMA Every time I get in one of these windows it's just like being on stage. It reminds me of the time I was an angel in the Christmas play in the third grade.

DIANA Were you a hit?

NORMA Not exactly. I whooped on one of the Wise Men. How's it going?

DIANA Fine. Unless I've got Marsall's plan upside down. In that case I'm in a lot of trouble.

NORMA Oh, how's he feeling?

DIANA Well, he's in the third day of the twenty-four flu.

NORMA I do appreciate your helping out like this, Diana.

DIANA I'm glad to help.

HOWARD CARRYING SIGNS Here they are. Hot off the paintbrush.

NORMA Oh, thank you, Howard. You didn't have to bring them down yourselves.

HOWARD Oh, anything to get out of that office. I'm having trouble writing the ad. Everything I write seems to be phony.

DIANA What's the ad for?

HOWARD Fake fur.

NORMA What is this? HOLDS UP SIGN SAYING DIANA SMYTHE - YOU'RE NEEDED. Diana Smythe - you're needed.

DIANA How on earth did he find me?

NORMA Who found you? Who needs you? What does this sign mean?

DIANA It means the ghost of London past has come back to haunt me.

NORMA Well, it's calling card's a family size. Well, come on, let's finish here and go down and risk lunch at the cafeteria.

MAN WALKS ALONG STREET WITH ANOTHER SIGN.

NORMA Hey, are we being picketed.

HOWARD That's not a picket.

DIANA This is only the beginning, friends.

NORMA So, whose this old friend?

DIANA Well, it's Brian Harris.

NORMA Brian Harris. The concert pianist?

DIANA The same.

HOWARD The Brian Harris. He's a genius.

DIANA I'm sure he'd be the first to agree with you.

WOMAN ENTERS. Is there a Diana Smythe here?

NORMA Oh, yes. There she is.

WOMAN This is for you. HANDS ENVELOPE TO HER.

DIANA Not another one. Tell Brian enough is enough. HANDS RIPPED UP PIECES OF ENVELOPE TO NORMA

NORMA Enough. HANDS THEM TO HOWARD

HOWARD Is enough. HANDS THEM TO WOMAN

WOMAN Who's Brian? I'm from accounting. That was your overtime check.

DIANA ENTERS HER OFFICE. MAN HOLDING NEWSPAPER PUTS IT DOWN. ITS BRIAN, played by PATRICK MACNEE:

BRIAN You're late.

DIANA I'm late?

BRIAN You're nine years, seventeen minutes and thirty two seconds late.

DIANA I do apologize.

BRIAN You're forgiven.

DIANA How are you?

BRIAN I'm a delight. And you?

DIANA Charming as ever. How did you find me?

BRIAN When you left I put salt on your tail. You're not exactly inconspicuous. I went to London Airport and I said, 'Where did the tall girl go?' They, recognizing my impeccable taste, pointed due west. This is for you. HANDS HER A BOX.

DIANA Oh, Brian, you should have. SHE OPENS SMALL BOX, THERE'S NOTHING IN IT.

BRIAN It's nothing. I never lie. BRINGS OUT PIECE OF PAPER. Now, this was supposed to be in it. It's an invitation for dinner. You can fill in the name of the person you want to have it with. Will seven thirty be all right?

DIANA Seven thirty will be fine, thank you.

BRIAN I hope I can manage it.

NORMA ENTERS: Hullo.

DIANA Norma, I'd like you to meet Brian Harris.

NORMA How do you do.

BRIAN How do you do.

DIANA Norma is my boss.

BRIAN You're the most intelligently constructed boss I've ever seen.

NORMA Thank you. Are you in town for a visit or a concert?

BRIAN Hasn't anyone told you?

NORMA No.

BRIAN I'm playing with the New York Philharmonic tomorrow night at Lincoln Center.

NORMA Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know.

DIANA HANDS HIM A CUP OF COFFEE. Lincoln Center? Brian, that's marvelous.

BRIAN Yes, I've progressed from simple pianist to internationally renowned artiste. That means that Brian Harris is spelt wrong in eight languages. My current favorite is Blarney Harris.

NORMA In Japan?

BRIAN No, in London. I say, I wonder if you could come with Diana to the concert tomorrow night.

DIANA I didn't know I was going.

BRIAN Well, of course you're invited. I have influence. I can get you the very best seats at a reasonable price. No, you're my guest.

DIANA What about Norman?

BRIAN What do we want with a Norman?

NORMA Norman is my husband.

BRIAN Oh, pity.

NORMA He'll be out of town tomorrow night.

BRIAN Splendid. HOWARD ENTERS.

DIANA Have you met Howard.

BRIAN Oh, you don't have to introduce us. He's my conspirator. He carried the cry of my heart to you.

HOWARD I didn't know you were the Brian Harris, then.

BRIAN I am always the Brian Harris.

HOWARD You know I don't think there's a record album of yours I don't have.

BRIAN Oh, really?

HOWARD I particularly like that Rachmanoff piano concerto.

BRIAN I'm inclined to agree with you.

HOWARD It's...it's...what's the word I'm looking for.

BRIAN Magnificent?

HOWARD Yes, that's it. You know, I wanted to come to your concert tomorrow night. Do you think there'll be tickets at this late date?

BRIAN Be my guest. Join the ladies.

HOWARD Oh, thank you, that's very kind of you.

BRIAN And after a scintillating performance, and an encore of Rachmaninoff specially for you, we'll open a bottle of champagne in the dressing room.

HOWARD Oh, I'd love to.

PHONE RINGS

DIANA Hello. Yes, I'll tell him. Your limousine is awaiting downstairs.

BRIAN Oh, I shall have to desert you. The limousine awaits. I have to do some interviews. PULLS OUT NOTEBOOK. I have to do some today. I have to do the Tonight Show today, and...that can't be right. I have to do the Today Show today.

HOWARD No, no, no. They do tomorrow's Today Show tomorrow. Tomorrow's Tonight Show they do today.

BRIAN I beg your pardon?

HOWARD Today's Tonight Show they did yesterday. Diana?

DIANA It's very simple. You see they do the Tonight Show today for tomorrow But It's too late to do the Today show. They did that already this morning.

BRIAN I think I'll be better off with Dick Cavett. It's very nice meeting you. Goodbye.

NORMA/HOWARD Goodbye.

BRIAN See you tonight, which is today. Perhaps we'll extend it, to tomorrow. Goodbye.

DIANA Goodbye.

NORMA Oh, Diana, he's wonderful.

HOWARD He's a great guy.

DIANA Yes, he is. LOOKS PENSIVE

DIANA'S APARTMENT. GETTING READY. OPENS DOOR. BRIAN STANDS THERE, COAT ON SHOULDER.

BRIAN Brian, you're early, I haven't finished dressing yet. Help to yourself to a drink. I'll be right with you.

DIANA You've still got it. Your sense of where the bar is located is still 100 proof.

BRIAN GOES BEHIND BAR. How about you? Can I offer you a drink?

DIANA Yes.

BRIAN The usual?

DIANA Yes.

BRIAN Extra dry martini, straight up with a twist.

DIANA Tall scotch.

BRIAN And water.

DIANA Soda.

BRIAN Of course! The usual! Tall, scotch and soda. I love the drama of this room, you know. It's

very similar to Roger's flat in London.

DIANA Yes. The furniture is the same including the art collection.

BRIAN There's only one jarring note. That picture over there.

DIANA Which one?

BRIAN The atrocious one. It's the only time I've ever really disagreed with Roger's taste. Who's the artist?

DIANA Me.

BRIAN Oh, I'm sorry.

DIANA There's no need to apologize.

BRIAN No, I'm sorry it's atrocious.

BRIAN HANDS HER A DRINK. There's your scotch and water.

DIANA Soda.

BRIAN Of course. HANDS HER DRINK FROM OTHER HAND. Scotch and soda. Now. What shall we drink to? Exciting, unusual. I guess we'd better drink to us. The past. The two of us just talking, relaxing, and exchanging ideas.

DIANA Brian. I seem to remember our past was a quite frantic series of interruptions..

BRIAN By the way, how are you getting on in America. Are you getting acclimatized?

DIANA Well, I'm getting there. I know longer call the subway the tube. I say X, Y and Zee instead of X, Y Zed. And I'm learning to tell my dates 'why don't you give me a call' instead of 'why don't you knock me up.'

BRIAN LAUGHS. Extraordinary language.

DIANA You should hear what they say about ours.

BRIAN Do you know, there's not been a moment I haven't thought about you.

DIANA And I've read about you.

BRIAN And thought about me?

DIANA Inevitably one reads, one thinks.

BRIAN Yes. Well, you don't need to believe every scurrilous thing you read. In particular that incredible thing..

DIANA No, no, no. I've never read that one.

BRIAN Good. HE SCOOTs CLOSER TO HER ON THE COUCH. I bet you don't know where I was last week. Waterford.

DIANA Waterford.

BRIAN Yeah. You remember that absolutely mad day. Ha ha. The canoe. We left our clothes on the shore, we had to buy 'em back again from those children that came by...

DIANA The part I remember best about that particular day....

BRIAN Yes, what?

DIANA Is my not being there.

BRIAN It wasn't you? It should have been. Do you know, I've often wish I hadn't been such an idiot and walked out on you.

DIANA I walked out on you.

BRIAN Right. I wish you hadn't been such an idiot.

DIANA Phone rings. Hello. Yes, he's here. It's for you.

BRIAN Ah.

DIANA You gave out my number?

BRIAN I knew you wouldn't mind. I gave it to the hotel in case there was a call. Yes? Hong Kong? Yes, I'll accept the charges. Dem guy ganor. Desoto desonto. Jee see san lie. Dozo. HANGS UP PHONE. My shirt maker.

DIANA Brian, you are incorrigible.

Phone rings.

BRIAN That's probably for me.

DIANA Has it occurred to you that someone may wish to call me at my apartment on my phone. Hello? HANDS PHONE TO BRIAN.

BRIAN Hello. Yes, this is he. Ohh, Barbara. It's Barbara Walters. That's very kind of you, Barbara. OTHER PHONE RINGS. Will you get that please, darling.

DIANA Yes.

BRIAN TO PHONE AND BARBARA. I'm very glad. I'm delighted that you want me to play the piano, but, I honestly don't think I can do it at six am. I mean, my fingers don't even start to lift until one.

DIANA It's your manager.

BRIAN (Covers receiver) Oh, what's he want?

DIANA He wants to know if you're interested in Denver.

BRIAN Well, only if Denver's interested in me.

DIANA INTO PHONE: Only if Denver's interested in him. HANGS UP PHONE.

BRIAN Look, I'm awfully sorry, Barbara, but even for you it is too early. Perhaps when it's a little later. Bye.

Doorbell.

DIANA Don't tell me you gave out my address as well.

BRIAN My tailor, darling.

SPINELLI Good day. SHORT ITALIAN ENTERS, CARRYING TAILS

BRIAN Ah, Mr. Spinelli. Come in, come in.

SPINELLI Excuse me. I have brought your tails.

BRIAN Wonderful.

SPINELLI And I am sure you will find them exactly to your taste. But, more importantly, to mine.
HELPS BRIAN SLIP THEM ON.

BRIAN Lovely. They're really perfect.

SPINELLI Of course, it's a Spinelli.

BRIAN Of course. But there is just one thing I have to do. This is important. GOES TO FRONT OF ROOM, FLIPS TAILS TO SIT DOWN ON COFFEE TABLE.

BRIAN The left one doesn't flip correctly.

SPINELLI Impossible.

BRIAN No, no, no. See for yourself. DOE S IT AGAIN. Mr. Spinelli. A gracefully flipped tail makes all the difference in the appearance to the piano player. Now, you'll just have to add more flip.

SPINELLI Mr. Harris. I have given those tails the precise degree of flip for performing at Lincoln Center. If you were performing at Carnegie Hall I would tend to agree with you, but for Lincoln Center, they're perfect.

BRIAN Mr. Spinelli. I'm the one who's going to be doing the playing, and I'm the one, therefore, who's going to be doing the flipping. And I demand more flip.

SPINELLI One does not demand of Spinelli. For five generations the name Spinelli has been synonymous with excellence in design, workmanship, detail and flip.

BRIAN Mr. Spinelli. When I say more flip I want more flip!

SPINELLI Mr. Harris. I won't touch them!

BRIAN I insist!

SPINELLI I refuse!

BRIAN You won't get paid!

SPINELLI You want flip you'll get flip. SEIZES TAILS. Good day, Mr. Harris. Mrs Miss, . Lady..

DIANA Good bye.

BRIAN Wasn't I right?

DIANA Of course. There's nothing worse than a limp flip.

Doorbell rings.

BRIAN I'm terribly sorry, my darling, but, I've invited a few reporters in for an impromptu press conference.

DIANA How many?

BRIAN Well, Maybe ten. Perhaps Twenty. I do hope you don't mind but I do think it's going to delay our dinner just a little.

DIANA Yes, possibly another ten years.

BRIAN Come in, gentlemen, and ladies. Oh, it's delightful to see you all. HORDES OF PEOPLE ENTER.

COMMERCIAL

Doorbell rings.

BRIAN CARRYING TRAY, WITH PAPER Good morning.

DIANA Good morning.

BRIAN Breakfast is served. Your morning paper.

DIANA READS NAME ON PAPER. Jones. Apartment 11A.

BRIAN We can put it back before they get up. They'll never miss it.

DIANA I'm afraid they will. They've just bought a puppy.

BRIAN Oh.

DIANA Brian. I find that deeply moving. But you do seem to have forgotten I don't eat breakfast.

BRIAN But I cleaned and caught these kippers for you.

DIANA Besides, I have to go to work.

BRIAN Work. You're not going to go to work today, are you?

DIANA Of course.

BRIAN But I thought we'd spend it together. Look, all I've got is a press conference this morning, a radio interview over lunch, then I've got a few publicity stills at 2, and then we can go to the Lincoln Center and you can listen to me practice for an hour or two. Won't it be wonderful.

DIANA Brian, I have to work.

BRIAN Oh, but I wanted you with me.

DIANA I'm sorry.

BRIAN Why don't you phone in and tell them a little white lie.

DIANA No, no, no, I can't do that.

BRIAN What possible difference can it make if you don't go to work today. I mean, it's not really all that important, is it?

DIANA I beg your pardon. My work may not be as glamorous as yours, and I may not receive an ovation for it, but my job is just as important to me as your job is to you.

BRIAN Being a concert pianist is not a job!

DIANA Well, being a fashion illustrator is. And I have certain responsibilities and I can't just walk out on them.

BRIAN Oh, darling, what happened to the Diana Smythe who was full of life. A free spirit. You did everything for the moment. All you want to do is go to work in a bloody shop.

DIANA That is called making a living, Brian.

BRIAN Well, you've certainly changed.

DIANA Unfortunately you haven't. You're still totally preoccupied with yourself.

BRIAN Now, look, Diana, all I want you to do is to take the day off.

DIANA You're still as understanding and flexible as after.

BRIAN Darling. Dammit! You're being childish and immature.

DIANA You haven't changed a bit. You still like to push people around! But you are not pushing me!

BRIAN All right! All right! HE SITS DOWN, POUTING. I'll go to Lincoln Center and spend the day alone! With my piano.

DIANA I'd tell you what to do with your piano. But it's a physical impossibility.

LEAVES.

BRIAN I'm an artist. I can do anything with a piano.

DIANA BACK IN WINDOW, PUTTING HATS ON DUMMIES.

DIANA Hi, Diana.

DIANA Hi, Norma.

NORMA Well?

DIANA Well, what?

NORMA Well, how is Brian?

DIANA Oh, he's fine.

NORMA Diana, you meet a man you haven't seen in ten years. A man you obviously knew very well. And all you can say is fine?

DIANA Norma, fine is fine with me.

NORMA Has he changed?

DIANA No, he's still as charming and stubborn and handsome and pigheaded as he always was.

NORMA Half of him sounds delicious.

DIANA One minute I adore him and the next minute I'd like to throttle him.

NORMA Well, you'd better make up your mind right away because look whose here.

DIANA Oh, this is ridiculous.

NORMA He brought you flowers.

DIANA Mm, he's very big on long-stemmed apologies. At times, my flat in London looked like a greenhouse.

BRIAN Hello.

NORMA Hello.

GIVES NORMA ONE OF THE ROSES.

BRIAN And will you excuse me? HANDS REST TO DIANA. And those are for you.

DIANA Thank you.

NORMA Well, I guess I'd better go do whatever it is ...I'd better go do.

BRIAN Don't forget this evening. My dressing room after the concert.

NORMA Oh, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

BRIAN Um. I realize that the things I said this morning were unnecessary, harsh, and I hate to say it, but childish.

DIANA I think that summed it up rather nicely.

BRIAN I'm sure you do. I realize I'm just a pain in the neck!

DIANA I was thinking a bit lower.

BRIAN Do you know what I did this morning? I thought and stared at the piano. I couldn't even play chopsticks. All I was thinking about was our argument. Look, darling, you know I get ..I get nervous before a concert. I admit I'm self-centered and sometimes I speak before I think, but the fact is I'm sorry.

DIANA Brian, do you know what you've just done?

BRIAN No?

DIANA You have just apologized.

BRIAN I did, didn't I?

DIANA It's a first.

BRIAN Don't let it get around. It could ruin my image. You are coming to the concert tonight, aren't you?

DIANA Of course.

BRIAN And dinner afterward. Just the two of us?

DIANA I'd love it.

BRIAN Forgiven?

DIANA Forgiven.

BRIAN Friends?

DIANA Friends.

They kiss on the lips.

Claps from window watchers outside.

Music.

BRIAN AND MANAGER ENTER DRESSING ROOM.

BRIAN A disaster.

MANAGER Mr. Harris, everyone is entitled to an off night. I would certainly not call it a disaster.

BRIAN In my entire career I've never received as bad notices as tomorrow's.

MANAGER So you had a little problem with your Beethoven. The rest of your performance was brilliant.

BRIAN What do you mean? They walked out. I wish I'd been with them.

MANAGER They gave you six curtain calls.

BRIAN Three. If Beethoven had not been deaf, he'd be turning in his grave.

MANAGER Do you wish to see anybody?

BRIAN No, they want their money back.

MANAGER You know, you'd feel better if you get out of those tails and into something more comfortable.

BRIAN Yes, into a 747, jumbo, back to London, dear, rainy old London.

MANAGER And don't be so harsh with yourself. And don't talk down. Be affirmative.

BRIAN You know, John. You're quite right. Forgive me, Ludwig. EXITS ROOM.

JOHN OPENS DOOR TO NORMA AND HOWARD

MANAGER Won't you come in?

HOWARD/NORMA Thank you.

HOWARD HAPPILY. Hey, he's not here.

MANAGER He'll be with you in a moment.

HOWARD Oh.

MANAGER Have a seat. Excuse me. HE LEAVES.

HOWARD We should have waited for Diana.

NORMA She's talking to friends.

HOWARD We made a big mistake coming here.

NORMA To the dressing room.

HOWARD To the concert.

NORMA I don't know what to say to him. I can't lie. He'll see right through me.

HOWARD Do you think we can get away with just, 'good night?' What happened. He just didn't play well tonight.

BRIAN ENTERS, DRESSED IN DRESSING GOWN.

BRIAN Howard, Norma. How good of you to drop by.

NORMA We simply had to.

HOWARD How could we leave without telling you that...

BRIAN Yes?

NORMA Great..great, the seats were just great.

HOWARD Perfect.

NORMA And soft.

HOWARD Soft, soft.

BRIAN Did you enjoy the concert?

NORMA Enjoy is not the word.

NORMA I can't remember another night like this in my life.

HOWARD Oh, me too. I'll be talking about this for weeks.

NORMA Yes. I don't know anybody who could have done what you did...the way you did it tonight. Well, I suppose we really ought to leave you alone because I'm sure you have a lot of people waiting...to talk...to you.

BRIAN Aren't you going to stay and have some champagne?

NORMA No, thanks very much.

HOWARD We've to get up very early in the morning. You know.

BRIAN Oh, I understand. Well next time I come back we'll have to do it again.

HOWARD Why?

BRIAN They've asked me back in three months time.

NORMA Really? That is simply marvelous. We'll see you then. Goodnight. Goodnight, and thanks again for anything.

HOWARD And, once again I just have to say...CLOSES DOOR.

JOHN ENTERS WITH TAILS. Do you want these pressed?

BRIAN No. Burned.

DIANA ENTERS, JOHN EXITS OUT SAME DOOR. Forgive me, Brian, but I got into a conversation with some rather long-winded friends. They really enjoyed the concert.

BRIAN Then they must have missed it. The one I was at was dismal.

DIANA Brian.

BRIAN No. Intellectually I know that I perform poorly on occasions. But, I can't stand what happened tonight, darling, I hate myself. I'm divorcing all ten fingers.

DIANA Brian. You had moments of brilliance.

BRIAN You're remembering the past. You of all people should know that I did not perform well.

DIANA Now, listen. Your Chopin was beautifully performed. And you're Mozart was excellent.

BRIAN What did you think of my Beethoven.

DIANA Your Beethoven?

BRIAN I want the truth.

DIANA I was quite moved.

BRIAN Yes, I saw you squirming. I was atrocious! I decimated Beethoven!

DIANA Those are your words, not mine.

BRIAN Well, I want to hear your words.

DIANA Well, you played with conviction and....

BRIAN The truth.

DIANA Well, actually I was disappointed.

BRIAN Disappointed.

DIANA Mmm. I simply don't think you played as well as you can.

BRIAN You don't?

DIANA No.

BRIAN May I ask what qualifies you for such an evaluation?

DIANA Well, it's an opinion and I'm not without some musical knowledge. I did study music in school.

BRIAN An hour a week of music appreciation at a Buckinghamshire boarding school does not entitle you to set yourself up as a music critic.

DIANA You asked me to tell you what I thought.

BRIAN Well, you should think before you say what you thought.

DIANA But I thought.

BRIAN You should think before you say what you're think you thought.

DIANA I think we should stop this before one of us says something we're totally sorry for.

BRIAN One of us already has. I'm totally sorry for what you said. Good night. PICKS UP BOTTLE AND EXITS ROOM.

DIANA Good night, Brian. And goodbye. LEAVES ROOM.

MUSIC

DIANA THINKING. ANSWERS DOOR. BRIAN THERE. Bum bum bum. TAKES OFF COAT TO REVEAL CHAMPAGNE. I also do card tricks. Charming smiles. And apologies. KISSES HER.

DIANA Brian. Why do you keep coming back?

BRIAN Probably because I love you.

DIANA Because you love me?

BRIAN Well, is that so illegal in the United States?

DIANA But, Brian, you have no reason to love me.

BRIAN You were born. That's reason enough.

DIANA Laughs. I'm terribly sorry, Brian, but you said precisely that, one night in Cambridge 11 years ago.

BRIAN Oh? Well, what's so terrible about being consistent? And what's so wrong about being

loved?

DIANA Because with you it's a conversational gambit.

BRIAN I suppose you're going to say that I'm not capable of loving.

DIANA No, no, you are capable of loving, but it is yourself that you love.

BRIAN True. SITS DOWN ON ARM OF CHAIR. SHE LEANS HEAD AGAINST HIS CHEST. But once you love one person you can love another. Darling, come with me. Look, I've got a concert tour, it's booked to the end of the year. All around the world. Now we'll travel, we'll laugh. HUGS HER. We'll be full-time lovers and part time sparring partners. You're marvelous when you're angry, and I'm marvelous when we make up. What do you think?

DIANA No.

BRIAN I want to ask you something else.

DIANA Mh hm?

BRIAN Are you still in the mood for dinner?

DIANA I'm starved.

KISSES HER ON MOUTH. STANDS UP AND MOVES INTO CENTER OF ROOM.

BRIAN Good. What have you got in the house?

DIANA I've half a can of artichoke hearts, some pickled gherkins and some fig newtons.

BRIAN We'll go out. Darling. Diana. Thank you for being honest with me. I think we'd be better if we looked upon ourselves as two ships that passed in the night.

DIANA And count ourselves lucky that we didn't collide, and sink. SHE KISSES HIM ON CHEEK.

END

TRAILER

HOWARD Good morning.

NORMA Good morning, Howard.

DIANA How was your weekend.

HOWARD How could the weekend be with the kids fighting and the dogs yapping and Ethel complaining.

NORMA Why was Ethel complaining?

HOWARD Because I was away all weekend. How was yours.

DIANA It's the most relaxing Sunday I've had in months.

HOWARD What did you do Saturday?

DIANA I saw Brian off. Why do you think Sunday was so relaxing?

NORMA PHONE RINGS. Hello. Oh, yes, just a minute please. Diana, it's for you. It's Brian calling from Denver.

DIANA Hello, Brian. Hello, marvelous to hear you. Yes, Brian, I would love to have breakfast with you. But don't you think the fact that you're two thousand miles away makes it a titch difficult?

TWO TUXEDO CLAD MEN ENTER, ONE WITH TRAY. Miss Diana Smythe.

NORMA Sh. She's on long distance.

MAN Excellent. Over there, Fred.

DIANA Oh, Brian, you are deliciously mad. DRINKS HER ORANGE JUICE. Good morning, darling.

John Steed and Cathy Gale - episode "The Little Wonders"





The scene as it took place in *Little Wonders* features Steed in shirt sleeves. The photo on the right, therefore, is presumably from a rehearsal for the scene.

They do seem to be enjoying it...