

Prologue

(Monday 21st October 1940)

Adam opened the window, lit a Woodbine, and gazed down onto Green Park. He had reserved a bedroom on the second floor and left the details in a note within the shield of a knight over a week ago. Julia's note in reply expressed a reluctance that was more and more evident in her correspondence, but he was insistent. Eventually, on the previous Friday, she had agreed to come. He had signed under his real name and asked that a bottle of champagne be brought up to the room. It was sitting in a bucket of ice on a table near the window. There were two iced flutes. A cold wind blew in and he pulled his overcoat closer to him. The barrage balloons floated eerily in the sudden stillness of the late afternoon. He ran a hand down the side of the bottle. It was still slightly warm and there were no drips of condensation on the glass so he pressed it further into the ice and twisted it down so that the ice made a crunching sound. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past three. He had suggested three o'clock.

His knowledge of her movements was diminishing. Whereas in the past there would be a note in the church every weekday, now they were frequently absent. He wondered whether she would even show up. How many afternoons had they spent in the Stafford? He had no idea. They had kept no records and any communications were always destroyed. If he had been accused of a crime of which he was innocent – a murder perhaps – and the time and date of the crime was one of these afternoons, he would not be able to prove his alibi. This lack of any evidence meant that it would be difficult to prove any case against them. But it also meant that, on one level, nothing ever happened. Nothing could be verified. If she were to deny that she loved him, that she had ever even met with him privately, he would not be able to prove the contrary. He looked at his watch again. Three thirty. *Well this has been a waste of money*, he thought. He would stop leaving her notes. It was causing him too much pain.

Then there was a knock on the door and he rushed over to open it. Julia was wearing a long black coat and had a headscarf with a peacock motif, *probably from Liberty*, he thought. Stray curls of blonde hair escaped from under it. She gave him a warm but distracted smile and they kissed in greeting.

– Ooh, it's cold in here. Can't you shut the window?

He stubbed out his cigarette and did as she had asked and then turned back into the room to look at her.

– Champagne? Are we celebrating something?

– As a matter of fact, we are. Can you guess what? – Oh, Adam! I'm not in the mood for silly games.

Adam turned around, looked back down onto Green Park and said morosely over his shoulder:

– It's four years to the day since we spent the night together in the Feathers. This is our fourth anniversary.

– Four years ... our lives are flying away from us.

He heard her approach him as she said these words. Her tone was sad. And then her hand was on his shoulder and she stood beside him and leaned her head into his side.

– I'm sorry, Adam. I didn't mean to sound ungrateful. I'm under a terrible strain, that's all.

They stood together in silence for a long while gazing out into the place where their affair had most of its origins. At last she said, more brightly, – Come on then. Let’s have some of that scrumptious bubbly.

She took off her overcoat and scarf and laid them neatly across an armchair. He studied what she was wearing underneath: a dark blue tweed twin-piece and a cream-coloured blouse.

John Wilson

– I know what you’re thinking. That it’s rather dowdy for an assignation, especially on our anniversary – but I can hardly draw attention to myself.

They moved over to the table, Adam poured and they each took a chair. Tiny bubbles rose to the surface and popped in long unbroken chains. He lifted his glass and tilted it towards Julia.

– To us.

– Yes. To us.

– What’s upsetting you?

– I got a lovely letter from Agnes this morning. Well ... not so much a letter ... but she had drawn a picture of a house, a boxy thing, with a line of blue crayon at the top – that was the sky – and a line of green crayon at the bottom which was the grass.

– When did you last see them?

– And she had written, scrawled really, “To Mummy and Daddy, love Agnes”, and then put a line of crosses under her name.

– They’ll be able to come back soon, I’m sure.

– I couldn’t bear to lose them, Adam

– Why should you lose them? They’re much safer where they are. – I’ve been sleeping very badly. I’m so tired.

She turned away from him, wiped her eyes and drained her glass.

– Top-up please ... Thank you ... So much has changed in the last four years.

– We haven’t changed though.

Julia didn’t answer and stared out of the window. They finished their second glass in silence. Adam didn’t know what to say.

– Would you like some more?

– Let’s leave a glass each for afterwards.

And she rose and walked over to the window. He followed her and, standing behind her, he pulled her close to him. Her body arched and she pressed her bottom against him. He raised his hands to her breasts and began to caress them.

– Oh, Adam!

He began unbuttoning her jacket and she shifted her arms and shoulders so that it could fall to the ground.

- Are you sure I should be doing this in front of the window?
- We are not being watched yet, Adam.
- Yet?
- My blouse?

He undid the buttons and with the same fluent movement she allowed it to fall to the floor.

- And my brassiere.

She was naked from the waist up and still staring into Green Park.

- I could close the curtains?
- Not today, Adam. My skirt?

He closed his eyes and let his fingers stroke her neck and then slide down her torso, caressing her breasts and twisting her nipples before moving down to her tummy and reaching for the top button of her skirt.

- And my suspenders.

He unclipped them and she reached down to pull off her stockings until all she was wearing were her panties.

- Shouldn't we move away from the window? – No, Adam. Put your hand inside.

John Wilson

He led her naked to the bed and she pulled back the blankets and climbed under them. He hurriedly removed his clothes and climbed in next to her. Pressing against her so that they touched at every point, he savoured her body's warmth. He looked into her eyes. Longing, desire and sadness. The sky was beginning to darken. She stroked his face.

- I want this to be memorable.
- I love you so much!
- I love you too. I mean it, you know.
- Why should I not believe you? – I mean it, you know.

And they made love. Adam had never known Julia to be so passionate. She gripped his wrists with such force that the bruising didn't go down for days – he had to pull his frayed cuffs down over the contusions. She kissed his neck in a way that made him feel she was trying to eat him. She groaned and howled. When at last their bodies went limp, the bed was in ruins. They lay still for a long time afterwards.

- Let's have that last glass of champagne.
- Do you want me to cover you with a sheet? – Come to the window, Adam.

And the two sat naked at the same little table.

- Julia. What’s wrong?
- I don’t think we can carry on any longer.

His heart lurched.

- Why ever not?
- It’s this war. We’re taking enormous risks.

She started to cry. Adam did not know what to say. He needed to persuade her not to give up.

- Do you remember that time when I asked you whether, if we weren’t both happily married with children, you would marry me and you said yes?

She was sobbing.

- Yes.
- Do you think that will ever happen? – Not now, one day perhaps.

And she sobbed again.

- When?
- Maybe in twenty years. – Twenty years?

He didn’t think that he could live that long. He was overcome by violent coughing. Still sobbing, Julia said she wanted to go back to the bed. She climbed into the ruins and immediately fell asleep. She was still naked and had her right hand behind her head and her left across her breast. Her right leg, bent at the knee, touched the floor and her left was at an acute angle, with her foot resting on her right upper leg. She looked defenceless. He pulled up a chair and watched her gentle breathing as the sky darkened into night and she became no more than a silhouette. Then he closed the curtains.

The time came when he had to wake her. She roused herself, pulled herself off the bed and, almost mechanically, dressed herself, picked up her overcoat and scarf from the armchair and put them on. Then she opened the door to leave.

- Goodbye, Adam.
- Please don’t leave me! – Goodbye, Adam.

And she turned and was gone