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PART ONE

Sunday, 27th June 1977

The bullet whined past her head and buried itself in the wooden door jamb. Everybody was screaming. Cathie pressed her knuckles into her mouth, her eyes wide with terror.

Marla sat up, shaking, clammy with fear and glanced over; but his half of the bed was empty. Agitated, she seized her black kimono, and padded bare-foot down the wooden stairs, to find him. After all this time, some of her uglier memories still surfaced – that bullet; those fingers tightening round her throat. She needed to snuggle into her husband's arms, to inhale his unique scent of fresh air and sunshine, to be returned to the present. Though every living thing outside had succumbed to the sleepy, slower pulse of summer, Marla was on edge, jangled.

In the Morning Room, now fully restored to its former beauty, he was gazing at the lake. She stole up behind him. Ever intuitive, he spun round.

'Another nightmare?' He drew her close, caressing her hair with his face, 'I love your clouds of red hair,' he murmured. 'Oops! I said "red" again. Sorry!'

'I don't really mind,' she laughed. 'It'll grow to clouds again one day, I suppose, only I'd be completely bald by now if you hadn't –'

'Stop!' he ordered, 'that's the past, think of the future.' He smiled, 'or the present.' Wheeling the screen round the sofa he eased her down and began gently to pleasure, soothe and de-traumatise her.

Yet, warm in his arms and despite exciting days ahead, she shivered. His use of the word 'red' had triggered an old memory of shopping for uniform with Nanny Joan when that boy had sneered at her red hair, and that horrid pock marked man had annoyed Nanny so much.

But presently, it was impossible, there on the sofa, to think of all that as the familiar caresses claimed the moment and engulfed her.

Early May 1950

Marla was beside herself with excitement from the moment she woke up.

'I've never been to London, Nanny.'

'I know you haven't.'

'And we're going on an *underground* train.'

'Today we're going to do lots of new things but if you don't stop wriggling I'll never manage to plait your hair. Then we'll miss the train and won't be able to go.'

'Not go to the most famous shop in the world? Nanny said they sold everything from hair ribbons to elephants. With supreme effort, Marla stood still. She badly wanted to see an elephant.

'We can't not go, Nanny.'