

SAY GOODBYE TO THE WIND

At midnight I heard music playing from the abandoned nightclub among the dunes at Lagoon West. Each evening the frayed melody had woken me as I slept in my villa above the beach. As it started once again I stepped from the balcony on to the warm sand and walked along the shore. In the darkness the beachcombers stood by the tideline, listening to the music carried towards them on the thermal rollers. My torch lit up the broken bottles and hypodermic vials at their feet. Wearing their dead motley, they waited in the dim air like faded clowns.

The nightclub had been deserted since the previous summer, its white walls covered by the dunes. The clouded letters of a neon sign tilted over the open-air bar. The music came from a record-player on the stage, a foxtrot I had forgotten years before. Through the sand-strewn tables walked a young woman with coralline hair, crooning to herself as she gestured with jewelled hands to the rhythm of this antique theme. Her downward eyes and reflective step, like those of a pensive child, made me guess that she was sleepwalking, drawn to this abandoned nightclub from

one of the mansions along the shore.

Beside me, near the derelict bar, stood one of the beachcombers. His dead clothes hung on his muscular body like the husk of some violated fruit. The oil on his dark chest lit up his drug-filled eyes, giving his broken face a moment of lucid calm. As the young woman danced by herself in her black nightgown he stepped forward and took her arms. Together they circled the wooden floor, her jewelled hand on his scarred shoulder. When the record ended she turned from him, her face devoid of expression, and walked among the tables into the darkness.

Who was my beautiful neighbour, moving with the certainty of a sleepwalker, who danced each evening with the beachcombers at the deserted nightclub? As I drove into Vermilion Sands the following morning I peered into the villas along the shore in the hope of seeing her again, but the beach was a zone of late-risers still asleep under their sealed awnings. The season at Vermilion Sands was now in full swing. Tourists filled the café terraces and the curio shops. After two or three hectic weeks at festivals devoted to everything from non-aural music to erotic food, most of them would jettison their purchases from their car windows as they sped back to the safety of Red Beach. Running to seed in the sand-reefs on the fringes of Vermilion Sands, the singing flowers and sculpture formed the unique flora of the landscape, an island ringed by strange sounds.

My own boutique, 'Topless in Gaza', which specialized in bio-fabric fashions, I had opened two years earlier. When I reached the arcade near Beach Drive at eleven o'clock that morning a small crowd was already peering through the window, fascinated by the Op Art patterns unfurling as the model gowns on display flexed and arched themselves in the morning sunlight. My partner, Georges Conte, his art nouveau eyepatch raised over his left eye, was settling an electric-yellow beach-robe on to its stand. For some reason the fabric was unusually skittish, clinging to him like a neurotic dowager. Gripping the wrists with one hand, Georges forced it on to its stand, then stepped back before it could clutch at him again. The robe switched irritably from side to side, the fabric pulsing like an inflamed sun.

As I entered the shop I could see it was going to be one of our more difficult days. Usually I arrived to find the gowns and robes purring on their hangers like the drowsy inmates of an exquisite arboreal zoo. Today something had disturbed them. The racks of model dresses were seething, their patterns livid and discordant. Whenever they touched, the fabrics recoiled from each other like raw membranes. The beach-clothes were in an equal state of unrest, the bandanas and sun-suits throwing off eye-jarring patterns like exhibits in some demented kinetic art.

Hands raised in a gesture of heroic despair, Georges Conte came over to me. His white silk suit glimmered

like a bilious rainbow. Even my own mauve day-shirt was unsettled, its seams beginning to shred and unravel.

‘Georges, what’s happening? The whole place is in uproar!’

‘Mr Samson, I wash my hands of them! Sheer temperament, they’re impossible to deal with!’

He looked down at his dappled sleeve, and tried to flick away the livid colours with a manicured hand. Upset by the disturbed atmosphere, his suit was expanding and contracting in irregular pulses, pulling across his chest like the fibres of a diseased heart. With a burst of exasperation he picked one of the model gowns from its rack and shook it angrily. ‘Quiet!’ he shouted, like an impresario calling an unruly chorus line to order. ‘Is this “Topless in Gaza” or a demonic zoo?’

In the two years that I had known him Georges had always referred to the dresses and gowns as if they were a troupe of human performers. The more expensive and sensitive fabrics bred from the oldest pedigree stocks he would treat with the charm and savoir-faire he might have reserved for a temperamental duchess. At the opposite extreme, the flamboyant Op Art beachwear he handled with the cavalier charm he displayed to the teenage beauties who often strayed by accident into the boutique.

Sometimes I wondered if for Georges the gowns and suits were more alive than their purchasers. I suspected that he regarded the eventual wearers as little more than animated chequebooks whose sole function was to feed

and exercise the exquisite creatures he placed upon their backs. Certainly a careless or offhand customer who made the mistake of trying to climb into a wrong fitting or, even worse, was endowed with a figure of less than Dietrich-like proportions, would receive brusque treatment from Georges and be directed with the shot of a lace cuff to the inert-wear shops in the town's amusement park.

This, of course, was a particularly bitter jibe. No one, with the exception of a few eccentrics or beachcombers, any longer wore inert clothing. The only widely worn inert garment was the shroud, and even here most fashionable people would not be seen dead in one. The macabre spectacle of the strange grave-flora springing from cracked tombs, like the nightmare collection of some Quant or Dior of the netherworld, had soon put an end to all forms of bio-fabric coffin-wear and firmly established the principle: 'Naked we came into this world, naked we leave it.'

Georges's devotion had been largely responsible for the success and select clientele of the boutique, and I was only too glad to indulge his whimsical belief in the individual personality of each gown and dress. His slim fingers could coax a hemline to shorten itself within seconds instead of hours, take in a pleat or enlarge a gusset almost before the customer could sign her cheque. A particularly exotic gown, unsettled by being worn for the first time or upset by the clammy contact of human skin, would be soothed and consoled by

Georges as he patted it into place around its owner's body, his gentle hands caressing the nervous tissues around the unfamiliar contours of hip and bust.

Today, however, his charm and expertise had failed him. The racks of gowns itched and quivered, their colours running into blurred pools. One drawback of bio-fabrics is their extreme sensitivity. Bred originally from the gene stocks of delicate wisterias and mimosas, the woven yarns have brought with them something of the vine's remarkable response to atmosphere and touch. The sudden movement of someone near by, let alone of the wearer, brings an immediate reply from the nerve-like tissues. A dress can change its colour and texture in a few seconds, becoming more décolleté at the approach of an eager admirer, more formal at a chance meeting with a bank manager.

This sensitivity to mood explains the real popularity of biofabrics. Clothes are no longer made from dead fibres of fixed colour and texture that can approximate only crudely to the vagrant human figure, but from living tissues that adapt themselves to the contours and personality of the wearer. Other advantages are the continued growth of the materials, fed by the body odours and perspiration of the wearer, the sweet liqueurs distilled from her own pores, and the constant renewal of the fibres, repairing any faults or ladders and eliminating the need for washing.

However, as I walked around the shop that morning I reflected that these immense advantages had been

bought at a price. For some reason we had accumulated a particularly temperamental collection. Cases had been reported of sudden panics caused by the backfiring of an engine, in which an entire stock of model gowns had destroyed themselves in a paroxysm of violence.

I was about to suggest to Georges that we close the shop for the morning when I noticed that the first customer of the day had already arrived. Partly concealed by the racks of beachwear, I could only see an elegantly groomed face veiled by a wide-brimmed hat. Near the doorway a young chauffeur waited in the sunlight, surveying the tourists with a bored glance.

At first I was annoyed that a wealthy customer should arrive at the very moment when our stock was restive – I still remembered with a shudder the bikini of nervous weave that shed itself around its owner's ankles as she stood on the high diving board above the crowded pool at the Neptune Hotel. I turned to ask Georges to use all his tact to get her to leave.

For once, however, he had lost his aplomb. Leaning forward from the waist, eyes focused myopically, he was gazing at our customer like a seedy voyeur of the boulevards starstruck by some sub-teen nymphet.

‘Georges! Pull yourself together! Do you know her?’

He glanced at me with blank eyes. ‘What?’ Already his suit had begun to smooth itself into a glass-like mirror, his invariable response when faced with a beautiful woman. He murmured: ‘Miss Channing.’

‘Who?’

‘Raine Channing ...’ he repeated. ‘Before your time, Mr Samson, before anyone’s time ...’

I let him walk past me, hands outstretched in the attitude of Parsifal approaching the Holy Grail. Certainly I remembered her, sometime international model and epitome of eternal youthfulness, with her melancholy, gamine face recreated by a dozen plastic surgeries. Raine Channing was a macabre relic of the 1970s and its teenage cult. Where, in the past, elderly screen actresses had resorted to plastic surgery to lift a sagging cheek or erase a tell-tale wrinkle, in the case of Raine Channing a young model in her early twenties had surrendered her face to the scalpel and needle in order to recapture the child-like bloom of a teenage ingénue. As many as a dozen times she had gone back to the operating theatre, emerging swathed in bandages that were rolled back before the arc lights to reveal a frozen teenage mask. In her grim way, perhaps she had helped to kill this lunatic cult. For some years now she had been out of the public eye, and I remembered only a few months beforehand reading about the death of her confidant and impresario, the brilliant couturier and designer of the first bio-fabric fashions, Gavin Kaiser.

Although now in her late twenties, Raine Channing still preserved her child-like appearance, this strange montage of adolescent faces. Her gaze reflected the suicides of Carole Landis and Marilyn Monroe. As she spoke to Georges in her low voice I realized where I had seen her, dancing with the beachcombers in the

deserted nightclub at Lagoon West.

When I bought the boutique the faded fashion magazines had been filled with her photographs ... Raine with her wounded eyes, looking out above the bandages around her remade cheeks, or wearing the latest bio-fabric creation at some exclusive discotheque, smiling into Kaiser's handsome gangster face. In many ways the relationship between Raine Channing and this twenty-five-year-old genius of the fashion houses summed up a whole disastrous epoch, of which Raine's mutilated face was a forgotten shrine. One day soon, before she reached the age of thirty, even that face would dissolve.

However, as she visited our boutique this grim prospect seemed a long way distant. Georges was delighted to see her, at last meeting on equal terms one of the too-bright luminaries of his apprenticeship. Without a thought for our disturbed stock, he opened the windows and display cases. Curiously, everything had quietened, the gowns stirring gently on their hangers like docile birds.

I waited for Georges to enjoy his moment of reminiscence, and then introduced myself.

'You've calmed everything down,' I congratulated her. 'They must like you.'

She drew her white fox collar around herself, rubbing her cheek against it. The fur slid around her neck and shoulders, nestling her in its caress. 'I hope so,' she said. 'Do you know, though, a few months ago I hated

them? I really wanted everyone in the world to go naked, so that all the clothes would die.’ She laughed at this. ‘Now I’ve got to look for a whole new wardrobe.’

‘We’re delighted you’ve started here, Miss Channing. Are you staying long in Vermilion Sands?’

‘A little while. I first came here a long time ago, Mr Samson. Nothing in Vermilion Sands ever changes, have you noticed? It’s a good place to come back to.’

We walked along the displays of gowns. Now and then she would reach out to stroke one of the fabrics, her white hand like a child’s. As she opened her coat a sonic jewel, like a crystal rose, emitted its miniature music between her breasts. Velvet playtoys nestled like voles around her wrists. Altogether she seemed to be concealed in this living play-nest like a bizarre infant Venus.

What was it, though, about Raine Channing that so held me? As Georges helped her select a brilliant pastel gown, the other dresses murmuring on the chairs around her, it occurred to me that Raine Channing resembled a child-Eve in a couture-Eden, life springing from her touch. Then I remembered her dancing with the beachcombers in the deserted nightclub at Lagoon West.

While the young chauffeur carried out her purchases I said: ‘I saw you last night. At the nightclub by the beach.’

For the first time she looked directly into my face, her eyes alert and adult above the white adolescent

mask. 'I live near by', she said, 'in one of the houses along the lake. There was music playing and people dancing.'

As the chauffeur opened the door of the car for her I saw that the seats were filled with playtoys and sonic jewels. They drove off together like two adults playing at being children.

Two days later I heard music coming again from the abandoned nightclub. As I sat on the veranda in the evening this faint night-music began, the dry metallic sounds muffled by the powdery air. I walked along the shore through the darkness. The beachcombers had gone, but Raine Channing wandered through the tables of the nightclub, her white gown drawing empty signatures in the sand.

A sand-yacht was beached in the shallows. Beside it a bare-chested young man watched with hands on hips. His powerful thighs stood out under his white shorts in the darkness, the thermal surf breaking the dust into ripples around his feet. With his broad face and smashed Michelangelesque nose he resembled some dark beach-angel. He waited as I approached, then stepped forward and walked past me, almost brushing my shoulder. The oil on his back reflected the distant lights of Vermilion Sands as he moved among the dunes towards the nightclub.

After this rendezvous I assumed that we would see no

more of Raine Channing, but the next morning when I arrived at the shop in Vermilion Sands I found Georges waiting nervously by the door.

‘Mr Samson, I tried to telephone you – Miss Channing’s secretary has been calling, everything she bought has gone berserk! Nothing fits, three of the gowns are growing out of weave –’

I managed to calm him down, then spoke to Raine’s secretary, a tart-toned Frenchwoman who sharply informed me that the entire wardrobe of two evening gowns, a cocktail dress and three day-suits which Raine had purchased from ‘Topless in Gaza’ had run to seed. Why this should have happened she had no idea. ‘However, Mr Samson, I suggest you drive out immediately to Miss Channing’s residence and either replace each item or reimburse the total purchase price of six thousand dollars. The alternative –’

‘Mlle Fournier,’ I insisted stiffly with what little pride I could muster, ‘there is no alternative.’

Before I left, Georges brought out with elaborate care a cyclamen sports-suit in a shantung bio-fabric which he had ordered for one of our millionaire customers.

‘For my good name, Mr Samson, if not for yours – at moments such as these one should show the flag.’

The suit clung to me like a willowy, lace-covered cobra, shaping itself to my chest and legs. Its colours glowed and rippled as it explored the contours of my body. As I walked out to my car people turned to look at this exquisite gliding snakeskin.

Five minutes after our arrival at Raine Channing's villa it had quietened down considerably, hanging from my shoulders like a wounded flower. The atmosphere at the villa seemed set for disaster. The young chauffeur who took my car whipped it away with a snarl of tyres, his eyes moving across my face like razors. Mlle Fournier greeted me with a peremptory nod. A sharp-faced Frenchwoman of about forty, she wore a witchlike black dress that seethed around her angular shoulders with the movements of a shrike.

‘An entire wardrobe ruined, Mr Samson! Not only your own gowns, but priceless originals from Paris this season. We are out of our minds here!’

I did my best to calm her. One danger with bio-fabrics is that they are prone to stampede. Moments of domestic crisis, a cry of anger or even a door's slam, can set off a paroxysm of self-destruction. My own suit was already wilting under Mlle Fournier's baleful eye. As we went up the staircase I smoothed the ruffled velvet of the curtains, settling them into their niches. ‘Perhaps they're not being worn enough,’ I temporized. ‘These fabrics do need human contact.’

Mlle Fournier gave me a surprisingly arch glance. We entered a suite on the top floor. Beyond the shaded windows was a terrace, the painted surface of the sand-lake below it. Mlle Fournier gestured at the open wardrobes in the large dressing room. ‘Human contact? Precisely, Mr Samson.’

Everywhere there was uproar. Gowns were strewn

across the facing sofas. Several had lost all colour and lay blanched and inert. Others had felted, their edges curled and blackened like dead banana skins. Two evening dresses draped over the escritoire had run rogue, their threads interlocking in a macabre embrace. In the wardrobes the racks of gowns hung in restive files, colours pulsing like demented suns.

As we watched I sensed that they were uneasily settling themselves after some emotional outburst earlier that morning. ‘Someone’s been whipping them into a frenzy,’ I told Mlle Fournier. ‘Doesn’t Miss Channing realize one can’t play the temperamental fool near these fabrics?’

She gripped my arm, a barbed finger raised to my lips. ‘Mr Samson! We all have our difficulties. Just do what you can. Your fee will be paid immediately.’

When she had gone I moved along the racks and laid out the more damaged dresses. The others I spaced out, soothing the disturbed fabrics until they relaxed and annealed themselves.

I was hunting through the wardrobes in the bedroom next door when I made a curious discovery. Packed behind the sliding doors was an immense array of costumes, faded models of the previous seasons which had been left to die on their hangers. A few were still barely alive. They hung inertly on their racks, responding with a feeble glimmer to the light.

What surprised me was their condition. All of them had been deformed into strange shapes, their colours

bled like wounds across the fabric, reflecting the same traumatic past, some violent series of events they had witnessed between Raine Channing and whoever had lived with her in the years past. I remembered the clothes I had seen on a woman killed in a car crash at Vermilion Sands, blooming out of the wreckage like a monstrous flower of hell, and the demented wardrobe offered to me by the family of an heiress who had committed suicide. Memories such as these outlived their wearers. There was the apocryphal story of the murderer absconding in a stolen overcoat who had been strangled by the garment as it recapitulated the death-throes of its owner.

Leaving these uneasy relics to their dark end, I went back to the dressing room. As I eased the last of the disturbed gowns on to their hangers the terrace door opened behind me.

Raine Channing stepped out of the sun. In place of her clinging white fur she now wore a bio-fabric bikini. The two yellow cups nestled her full breasts like sleeping hands. Despite the clear evidence of some fierce row that morning, she seemed composed and relaxed. As she stared at the now placid tenants of her wardrobe, her white face, like a devious adolescent's, more than ever resembled a surgical mask, the powdered child-face of a Manchu empress.

‘Mr Samson! They’re quiet now! You’re like ...’

‘St Francis calming the birds?’ I suggested, still annoyed at having been summoned to Lagoon West. I

gestured towards the sealed wardrobes in her bedroom. 'Forgive me saying so, but there are unhappy memories here.'

She picked up my jacket and draped it over her naked shoulders, a gesture of false modesty that none the less held a certain charm. The fabric clung to her like a pink flower, caressing her breasts and arms.

'The past is something of a disaster area, I'm afraid, Mr Samson. I know I brought you out here under false pretences. Something went wrong this morning, and you are the only neighbour I have.' She walked to the window and gazed over the painted lake. 'I came back to Vermilion Sands for reasons that must seem crazy.'

I watched her warily, but something about her apparent frankness destroyed caution. Presumably the midnight lover of the sand-yacht had left the scene, no doubt in a holocaust of emotions.

We went on to the terrace and sat in the reclining chairs beside the bar. During the next hours, and the many that followed in that house without mirrors above the painted lake, she told me something of her years with Gavin Kaiser, and how this young genius from the fashion world had found her singing at the open-air nightclub at Lagoon West. Seeing in this beautiful fifteen-year-old the apotheosis of the teenage cult, Kaiser had made her his star model for the bio-fabric fashions he designed. Four years later, at the age of nineteen, she had her first face-lift, followed by even

more extensive plastic surgery in the years immediately after. When Kaiser died she came back to Lagoon West, to the house near the deserted nightclub.

‘I left so many pieces of myself behind in all those clinics and hospitals. I thought perhaps I could find them here.’

‘How did Kaiser die?’ I asked.

‘From a heart attack – *they* said. It was some sort of terrible convulsion, as if he’d been bitten by a hundred rabid dogs. He was trying to tear his face to pieces.’ She raised her hands to her own white mask.

‘Wasn’t there some doubt ... ?’ I hesitated.

She held my arm. ‘Gavin was mad! He wanted nothing to change between us. Those face-lifts – he kept me at fifteen, but not because of the fashion-modelling. He wanted me for ever when I first loved him.’

At the time, however, I hardly cared why Raine Channing had come back to Lagoon West. Every afternoon I would drive out to her villa and we would lie together under the awning by the bar, watching the changing colours of the painted lake. There, in that house without mirrors, she would tell me her strange dreams, which all reflected her fears of growing young. In the evenings, as the music began to play from the deserted nightclub, we would walk across the dunes and dance among the sand-strewn tables.

Who brought this record-player to the nightclub with its one unlabelled disc? Once, as we walked back, I again saw the young man with the powerful shoulders

and broken nose standing by his sand-yacht in the darkness. He watched us as we walked arm in arm, Raine's head against my chest. As she listened to the music jewel in her hand, Raine's eyes stared back like a child's at his handsome face.

Often I would see him at noon, sailing his sand-yacht across the lake a few hundred yards from the shore. I assumed that he was one of Raine's past lovers, watching his successor with a sympathetic curiosity and playing his music for us out of a bizarre sense of humour.

Yet when I pointed him out to Raine one afternoon she denied that she knew him or had even seen him before. Sitting up on one elbow, she watched the sand-yacht beached three hundred yards away along the shore. The young man was walking along the tideline, searching for something among the broken hypodermic vials.

'I can tell him to go away, Raine.' When she shook her head, I said: 'He was here. What happened between you?'

She turned on me sharply. 'Why do you say that?'

I let it pass. Her eyes followed him everywhere.

Two weeks later I saw him again at closer quarters. Shortly after midnight I woke on the terrace of Raine's villa and heard the familiar music coming from the deserted nightclub. Below, in the dim light, Raine Channing walked towards the dunes. Along the beach

the thermal rollers whipped the white sand into fine waves.

The villa was silent. Mlle Fournier had gone to Red Beach for a few days, and the young chauffeur was asleep in his apartment over the garages. I opened the gates at the end of the dark, rhododendron-filled drive and walked towards the nightclub. The music whined around me over the dead sand.

The nightclub was empty, the record playing to itself on the deserted stage. I wandered through the tables, searching for any sign of Raine. For a few minutes I waited by the bar. Then, as I leaned over the counter, the slim-faced figure of the chauffeur stood up and lunged at me, his right fist aimed at my forehead.

Sidestepping into his arm, I caught his hand and rammed it on to the counter. In the darkness his small face was twisted in a rictus of anger. He wrenched his arm from me, looking away across the dunes to the lake. The music whined on, the record starting again.

I found them by the beach, Raine with her hand on the young man's hip as he bent down to cast off the yacht. Uncertain what to do, and confused by his off-hand manner as he moved around Raine, I stood among the dunes at the top of the beach.

Feet moved through the sand. I was staring down at Raine's face, its white masks multiplying themselves in the moonlight, when someone stepped behind me and struck me above the ear.

I woke on Raine's bed in the deserted villa, the white moonlight like a waiting shroud across the terrace. Around me the shadows of demented shapes seethed along the walls, the deformed inmates

of some nightmare aviary. In the silence of the villa I listened to them tearing themselves to pieces like condemned creatures tormenting themselves on their gibbets.

I climbed from the bed and faced my reflection in the open window. I was wearing a suit of gold lamé which shone in the moonlight like the armour of some archangelic spectre. Holding my bruised scalp, I walked on to the terrace. The gold suit adhered itself to my body, its lapels caressing my chest.

In the drive Raine Channing's limousine waited among the rhododendrons. At the wheel the slim-faced chauffeur looked up at me with bored eyes.

'Raine!' In the rear seat of the car there was a movement of white-clad thigh, a man's bare-backed figure crouching among the cushions. Angered by having to watch the spectacle below in this preposterous suit, I started to tear it from my shoulders. Before I could shout again something seized my calves and thighs. I tried to step forward, but my body was clamped in a golden vice. I looked down at the sleeves. The fabric glowed with a fierce luminescence as it contracted around me, its fibres knotting themselves like a thousand zips.

Already breathing in uncertain spasms, I tried to turn,

unable to raise my hands to the lapels that gripped my neck. As I toppled forward on to the rail the headlamps of the car illuminated the drive.

I lay on my back in the gutter, arms clamped behind me. The golden suit glowed in the darkness, its burning light reflected in the thousand glass panes of the house. Somewhere below me the car turned through the gates and roared off into the night.

A few minutes later, as I came back to consciousness, I felt hands pulling at my chest. I was lifted against the balcony and sat there limply, my bruised ribs moving freely again. The bare-chested young man knelt in front of me, silver blade in hand, cutting away the last golden strips from my legs. The fading remnants of the suit burned like embers on the dark tiles.

He pushed back my forehead and peered into my face, then snapped the blade of his knife. ‘You looked like a dying angel, Samson.’

‘For God’s sake ...’ I leaned against the rail. A network of weals covered my naked body. ‘The damn thing was crushing me ... Who are you?’

‘Jason – Jason Kaiser. You’ve seen me. My brother died in that suit, Samson.’

His strong face watched me, the broken nose and broad mouth making a half-formed likeness.

‘Kaiser? Do you mean your brother –’ I pointed to the lamé rags on the floor. ‘– that he was strangled?’

‘In a suit of lights. What he saw, God knows, but it

killed him. Perhaps now you can make a guess, Samson. Justice in a way, the tailor killed by his own cloth.’ He kicked the glowing shreds into the gutter and looked up at the deserted house. ‘I was sure she’d come back here. I hoped she’d pick one of the beachcombers but you turned up instead. Sooner or later I knew she’d want to get rid of you.’

He pointed to the bedroom windows. ‘The suit was in there somewhere, waiting to live through that attack again. You know, I sat beside her in the car down there while she was making up her mind to use it. Samson, she turns her lovers into angels.’

‘Wait – didn’t she recognize you?’

He shook his head. ‘She’d never seen me – I couldn’t stand my brother, Samson. Let’s say, though, there are certain ciphers in the face, resemblances one can make use of. That record was all I needed, the old theme tune of the nightclub. I found it in the bar.’

Despite my bruised ribs and torn skin I was still thinking of Raine, and that strange child’s face she wore like a mask. She had come back to Lagoon West to make a beginning, and instead found that events repeated themselves, trapping her into this grim recapitulation of Kaiser’s death.

Jason walked towards the bedroom as I stood there naked. ‘Where are you going?’ I called out. ‘Everything is dead in there.’

‘I know. We had quite a job fitting you into that suit, Samson. They knew what was coming.’ He pointed to

the headlamps speeding along the lake road five miles to the south. 'Say goodbye to Miss Channing.'

I watched the car disappear among the hills. By the abandoned nightclub the dark air drew its empty signatures across the dunes. 'Say goodbye to the wind.'

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