



GEOFFREY ARCHER

JAVA SPIDER

A DEADLY GAME IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST
EXPLOSIVE COUNTRIES

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About the Author

Geoffrey Archer is the former Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent for ITN's *News at Ten*. His work as a frontline broadcaster has provided him with the deep background for his thrillers - the bestselling *Skydancer*, *Shadow Hunter*, *Eagle Trap*, *Scorpion Trail*, *Java Spider*, *Fire Hawk*, *The Lucifer Network* and *The Burma Legacy*. A keen traveller, he now writes full time and lives with his wife and family in Surrey.

ALSO BY GEOFFREY ARCHER

Sky Dancer
Shadow Hunter
Eagle Trap
Scorpion Trail
Fire Hawk
The Lucifer Network
The Burma Legacy
Dark Angel

JAVA SPIDER

Geoffrey Archer



Author's Note

The island of Kutu doesn't exist. However, the events that take place there in this story will be familiar to islanders in some parts of the Indonesian archipelago, particularly in East Timor and Irian Jaya.

All of the characters and some of the companies in this work of fiction are invented. Any resemblance to actual persons or companies is purely coincidental.

*To Eva, Alison
and James*

One

Jakarta, Indonesia
Wednesday 05.55 hrs

STEPHEN BOWEN DREW back the curtains of his tenth-floor hotel room. The dawn sun sat on the city's concrete horizon, the colour of a ripe guava, staining the city's pollution haze a murky pink.

The Indonesian day began early. Already across the street he saw brown-backed men bolting the steel frame for another new bank. By midday the blazing sun would make such work impossible. By mid afternoon it would be raining – tropical torrents, silver rods of water bringing street life to a halt.

Bowen slid open the glass door and stepped on to the small, tiled balcony. From the road below came the putter of two-stroke *bajaj* tricycles, weaving their smelly way through the commuter traffic. Already the sun felt hot on his face.

He had patrician good looks, with peppery hair combed in lines neat as plough furrows. A man in control. His appearance had served him well. Politics, business, women – his looks had helped.

He leaned on the steel rail and gazed down at the crush of traffic. The country's population was growing at two million a year, Jakarta almost choking with bodies. A tough place for foreigners, although many lived here, oiling the wheels to create business for their companies back home.

This was his fourth visit to Indonesia. He loved the place in the way he loved casinos. Men living by their wits,

playing their cards right and winning big. The place smelled of banknotes.

His first two trips to the south Pacific had been as a backbencher, free to explore his own business interests. The third and this one had been official. Straitjacketed by being a minister of Her Majesty's government. Publicly, at least.

He heard the door chime and let in the room-service waiter. The dowdily-dressed, brown-faced Javan eyed Bowen's maroon silk pyjamas, set down the tray and grinned. Fruit, coffee and fried rice. Bowen gave him a thousand rupiah note. Big money here, thirty pence back home.

The waiter bowed, but his eyes mocked. Bowen closed the door and locked it. Always the eyes that gave away the Javans' contempt for the pink-faced Europeans who'd once been their masters.

Bowen drank the fresh-pressed juice. Half an hour to go before the car came. Half an hour in which to be washed, dressed and checked out of this middle-ranking, characterless hotel. His case lay on the second bed, almost packed. He'd done it last night, several hours and a change of hotels after the final handshakes that had concluded his official visit.

The trip had been a success. The Memorandum of Understanding he'd signed meant the two governments were now firmly locked into the arms deal, with final terms to be settled between the British manufacturers and ABRI, the Indonesian military. The contract had been hard fought – they'd beaten the French by a whisker. Although the donkey work had been done by the UK consortium DefenceCo p.l.c., the clincher had come from him. A touch on the political rudder, a twisting of arms, and a high-stakes gamble that was set to pay out in style.

Bowen sat at the low table and ate the slices of pineapple and mango but rejected the *nasi goreng*. Greasy chicken-

fried-rice was not his idea of a breakfast. He downed some coffee then removed his pyjamas and packed them, before stepping into the shower.

For a man of nearly fifty the Rt Hon Stephen Bowen MP, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, was fit, his muscles toned regularly in a Westminster gym. A mat of dark hair extended from chest to groin. As the water pricked his skin he felt a shiver of anticipation, like when entering a casino – the thrill of risk, the buzz that came with abandoning life's safe zone. What he was about to do was, he knew, distinctly unwise – but it would taste like nectar.

Twenty-four hours ago he'd received a guarded invitation from an Indonesian friend, a lavish offer of hospitality. A child could have seen that accepting it would rate as ministerial impropriety if it became public knowledge back home – the personal bank account of his host was to benefit handsomely from the arms deal he'd just signed. If the London papers found out they'd chew him to pulp.

Stephen Bowen, however, was a man facing his second half-century, a man whose marriage survived in name only. What he'd been offered, few in his situation could resist – the promise of a few days on a luxury yacht and the intimate company of an exceptionally pretty woman half his age.

He'd convinced himself no one back home would ever know. Total privacy had been guaranteed by his host. He'd cut free from his Foreign Office minders in Jakarta, moving from the plush suite in a five-star tower where he'd spent the past few days into this more anonymous hotel. And he'd ignored the Ambassador's demands to know where he was going for his 'few days' leave'.

He turned in the shower, letting the spray play on his chest and stomach.

Selina was her name. Working for the Indonesian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, she'd acted as social secretary for his visit. Only ever seen her in a smart business suit.

As he towelled himself down, he felt a moment's guilt about Sally. Always did in the hours before an indiscretion. A twitch of regret at not having made a better fist of his marriage. His fault entirely, but too late to change.

He dressed quickly in clean, blue sports-shirt and buff, cotton trousers. Three days of bacchanalian pleasure on the big man's motor yacht, a little light gambling – and Selina ... Didn't even know her second name. Knew her smile though, and her submissive eyes. Every man did in his dreams. And now the dream was being made flesh. A little thank you, a little *quid pro quo* for the way he'd fixed the arms deal.

And what a deal. Good for Britain, but above all good for *him*. As Bowen closed his Samsonite bag, he felt the thrill of the tightrope. One slip and he'd be finished. Never before had he staked so much. Never before had he *had* to. The arms deal he'd signed would not only benefit the nation he served, it would save him from bankruptcy. Unless he got found out ...

He checked his watch. Time to go. Seven hours ahead of London. Still Tuesday there. He grabbed his briefcase, did a final check round the room, then wheeled his bag into the corridor and let the door click behind him.

Indonesia was another world from the one he'd cut his teeth in. Normal politics, normal business practice didn't exist in a nation controlled by a single man, his family and his cronies. The key to business here was simple yet complex – knowing who to bribe. Dozens of Indonesians in the military and in government would benefit personally from the deal he'd just signed.

Bowen knew little of the details. DefenceCo handled it. In the company accounts the money would be listed as commission, a lump sum to a single agent, which would cascade down to the other beneficiaries. The choice of agent was crucial. DefenceCo's man could not have been better placed.

Bowen emerged from the rattly lift and strode across the lobby to the cashier. Even at this early hour there was a check-out queue. He waited in the air-conditioned chill for a couple of minutes, glancing towards the swing doors for the limousine. Then he passed his Visa card to the smiling clerk and checked his bill. One night only, supper in the room, no phone calls.

‘You use minibar?’

He shook his head and signed the slip. Pocketing the receipt and his card, he turned – and almost collided with her.

‘Good morning, Mr Bowen!’

Selina. White T-shirt today, blue denim skirt, eyes as black as her hair, a face the shape of a heart and a smile as shy as a virgin’s.

‘Oh, hello! Hi ...’ he floundered, his throat dry suddenly. ‘I ... I didn’t realise *you* were picking me up. I was expecting some ugly driver.’

Heart pounding, he fell in love.

‘I the ugly driver,’ she grinned. ‘You ready?’

‘Ready, willing and able,’ he purred, stupidly.

The City of London - a few hours earlier

Tuesday 19.35 hrs

An autumn nip in the air. A London night black with gloom.

Nick Randall hated murder cases. They gave him a knot in the stomach and a feeling of guilt. Not to mention revulsion – particularly when the weapon was Semtex. No limit to the number of ways it knew to smash up bodies.

He stared broodily through the car window as the siren wailed them out of the Blackfriars underpass and into the clog of traffic the explosion had caused.

‘Damn!’

Every lane solid. Nothing moving. He leaned forward.

‘Turn that frigging siren off,’ he told the driver. ‘No way we can get through this, short of flying.’ He settled back in the seat, waiting for the jam to clear.

The attacks had begun in the summer. Crimes of *envy* the government called them. The targets until now had been the super-rich – company executives pilloried in the press for corporate greed. The terrorists had escaped detection so far, unknowns, cleanskins. They’d begun low key with a break-in at a rich man’s home – then graduated to arson and letter-bombs. And now an explosion in a City bar.

Randall was a detective-sergeant, known by his peers in Special Branch as an easy-going bloke, except when the ‘media’ got on their high heels, howling about the police’s failure to catch the terrorists. Tomorrow’s papers would be another uncomfortable read.

‘What gets me is the way they always demand resignations,’ the driver complained, as if reading his mind. ‘If we can’t find the buggers with the men we’ve got, how’re we goin’ to do it with fewer?’

Randall grunted. Not enough hours in the day. Earlier he’d rung home to tell his girlfriend Debbie he was going for a quick drink with the lads but would be back by eight. Ten minutes later he’d had to phone again.

The traffic crawled. Near the Bank of England, the Mondeo cut free and the driver banged on the siren again. Blue lights everywhere. Fire pumps, ambulances. Havoc, just when the City had been winding down for the evening.

Wag’s Bar. What a name. Conjured up a picture of smug young traders drinking the cream off their money-market profits. That’s how the wannabe revolutionaries with the Semtex must have seen them. Not fat cats *yet*, but heading that way.

The rich getting richer and the poor poorer – a symptom of the times. Randall was as envious as the next man of six-figure salaries, but drew the line at killing people over them. The terrorists, however, had uncovered a vein of

public sympathy for their crimes, which had curbed the information flow. No mean feat. Usually took a war for people to sanction murder.

A hundred metres ahead, a uniformed City constable pushed back gawpers and cameramen to let the Mondeo into the narrow street of banks and brokerages. The car stopped. Fluttering tape sealed an alley. Randall waited a moment, reluctant to leave the vehicle's warm, friendly smell. Outside on the alley's cobbles he could see the litter of terror. Splintered timber, shards of glass and thick, dark smears of blood.

Hooligans. Mad buggers. That's what they were. Yet when the attacks began, people had called them Robin Hoods. On the first raid, a domestic break-in, nothing had been stolen. Just a fine emulsion of human excreta sprayed over the soft furnishings. Tabloids had loved it.

Two more raids like that, then they'd got nasty. A north London mansion burned to the ground. The millionaire owner and his wife unharmed, but not their twelve-year-old daughter, asleep upstairs. Arson, and murder. That's when the case had become one for the Yard.

The car's fan sucked in smoke.

'All right, constable,' Randall growled. 'Tell me to move my arse.'

'Move your arse ... *sir*.'

Randall had lived with terrorism for six years, mostly IRA. This lot had seemed different - anarchists, social revolutionaries or whatever - but now they were into Semtex he'd begun to wonder. Not the sort of stuff you could pick up at a chemist's. And he knew the Provisionals still had tons of it.

He closed the car door and sniffed the air. Damp from the doused fire, and acrid with burned plastic. His soles crunched glass as he stepped over the fat snakes of hoses. 5' 10", with thick, brown hair and a body useful in a scrum, he picked his way forward.

He ducked under the incident tape and approached the gaping, smoke-blackened cavern, all that was left of the bar. Bomb Squad were inside. So were paramedics checking none of the remaining bits of human tissue could be sewn back to life.

A uniformed City sergeant checked who he was then told him there were eight dead.

'That's from a count of the heads,' he added ghoulishly. 'And there's about thirty injured.'

'Witnesses?' Nick shivered and tugged up the zip of his dark green Berghaus.

'Anyone who was inside and *lived* is down at the hospital.'

Nick sniffed the bitter, black smoke. A foam fire. Furnishings had burned but not much else. Ceilings down, fittings smashed. Just a few ounces of plastic would have been enough. He imagined the place. Young people, mostly men, crowding in after work, their gym-hardened bodies pulped by the blast.

One of them must have seen something.

'Which hospital?'

'Southwark.'

'Thanks.'

He stared into the wreckage. Eight lives gone here tonight. Eight families pole-axed. Not right, no matter how unjust the world.

'World's gone mad,' he muttered.

Out there somewhere, were the handful of people who'd done this, but Randall's team had no clue who they were. Heavy surveillance of PIRA regulars and of known subversives had produced nothing. The group called itself the Revenue Men, acting to stamp out graft and corruption according to a statement posted to the media two weeks ago. Levying a *tax of suffering* on their victims was the way they'd put it. Somebody with a sick sense of humour.

From the charred shell of Wag's Bar a woman from Forensic emerged, carrying a heavy plastic sack. Nick knew

her a little, having chatted her up once in the canteen. Married, he remembered. They exchanged grimaces but said nothing. Then he returned to the car, avoiding the larger shards of glass. The back seat was still warm. Comforting.

‘Bastards,’ he mumbled. ‘How do they sleep at night after doing something like that?’

Randall picked up the folder containing photos combed from the files at the Yard and the Security Service, MI5. Any suspect with a remote chance of being involved. What he needed was a break. For a witness to recognise someone.

‘Southwark,’ he told the driver. ‘The hospital.’

Away from the incident scene the traffic soon thinned. London was strangely nervy these days, more so than when the IRA did their worst. In the canteen at the Yard the reasons for this were the subject of speculation. The chaps with university educations said because the Irish were *foreign*, the Brits had stood up to them. But the Revenue Men were *Brits*, part of *us* – a sort of enemy within. It made people anxious. Made them wonder where they’d stand if the barricades went up.

All fanciful crap as far as Randall was concerned. More evidence of the futility of having letters after your name.

The driver stopped at a road block. A random check. Traffic Branch threw them up all over the place. Groping in the dark, the press called it. The driver flipped his warrant card and they were through.

Groping in the dark? Or leaving no stone unturned ... Earlier that afternoon, Randall had slung the Nikons round his neck, stuffed the press pass in his pocket and slipped in amongst the hacks to take a look at a group of women picketing parliament. Anti-arms-trade. Not a shred of evidence linking them with the Revenue Men. But it was faces. Faces to add to the collection that one day might ring a bell.

The Southwark hospital had been new, twenty years ago, but looked ready for demolition now. At casualty reception normal patients were being turned away. The City bombing had swamped facilities here.

Nick showed his ID and was taken inside. Twenty minutes since the last bomb victim was admitted, he guessed. The most serious were already in theatre. Treatment bays lined the walls of the department, all full. Some victims lay motionless, wounds covered with bloodstained dressings. In others staff worked on their patients.

A harassed casualty officer brushed past, her pager bleeping. Young-looking but in charge. Nick touched her arm.

'Any fit enough to talk?' he asked. 'I'm police.' He showed his ID.

She took in his face then noted the cord trousers and pullover under his coat. Preferred her policemen in uniform probably, Randall guessed.

'Just a moment. I'm being beeped.' She grabbed a wall phone, dialled a number, gave her name and listened.

Her face was English and cultured. Well-bred, well-educated and good-looking. Like the crowd he'd been brought up with as a child and then rejected in his teens. She harangued the caller with words all the more cutting for their omission of obscenities. Finally she slammed down the receiver.

'If they want miracles they should phone a priest,' she snapped, turning back to him. 'Now ... you're looking for witnesses?'

'That's the idea.'

'Well, there's a man over there. I think he worked behind the bar. Minor cuts and burns. And shock, so take it easy.'

She led him to a bay with its curtains closed, then abandoned him as her pager trilled again. Nick peered inside. The man was in his thirties, his face red. Flash burn, he guessed.

'Hello. Can I talk to you? I'm police.'

A blank stare. 'Why?' The man's voice trembled.

'Just a chat.'

'No,' he moaned. 'I mean why'd they do it?' Angry now, as if it were Nick's fault.

'That's what we're trying to find out. Maybe you can help.'

'Bit bloody late ...'

'I don't think so. You worked there, is that right?'

'*Worked* there? It was my sodding bar.' His face twisted with the shock of his loss.

'I'm sorry. You must've known everybody in there, then?'

The man turned away, mouth trembling. Nick left it for a few moments.

'I wonder if you'd look at a couple of pictures?' he asked after a while. 'No rush.'

He leaned through the curtains, spotted a chair and retrieved it. He placed it beside the bed and sat down.

'OK now?' he checked. The man nodded. 'Sorry to press. Any strangers in the bar tonight?'

'Always a few I don't know. Mixed up amongst the regulars.' His eyes were remembering what he'd seen.

'Nothing special you noticed? Someone acting strangely, differently?'

The man thought, but couldn't get his brain past the images of shattered flesh. He shook his head. Nick took out the photos from the folder.

'Who's this, then? Are these the ones?' the bar owner asked.

'Just wondered if you've ever seen any of them.'

The man took the prints from him, but his hands couldn't hold them still.

'Here. Let me.'

Nick watched the bar owner's eyes as he shuffled the prints. Nothing. The man shook his head again, which

made him wince this time. He put a hand to the small dressing on his neck. A glass-splinter cut.

‘Can I take your name and address in case I want to contact you once more?’

Randall wrote it down.

‘You bloody nail them, right?’ Angry again. ‘Those were my *friends* ...’

‘Don’t worry. We’ll get ‘em.’ He pushed through the curtain, wishing he believed it.

The young casualty officer was on the phone again, close to losing control. She really was a very pretty girl, he decided. Pale, creamy skin with heat blotches on her cheeks. When she put the receiver down, she looked close to tears. He wanted to hug her.

‘Any luck?’ she asked, dabbing her nose with a tissue.

‘No. He couldn’t help. Got any more?’

‘There’s two others able to talk. But they’re confused ... Still, if you’re gentle ...’

‘I’m always gentle.’ He gave her the smile that had got him in deep water several times too often and watched her blush.

West End of London

22.45 hrs

Charlotte Cavendish pushed through the glass door, paused on the step and turned up the collar of her fawn coat against the cold. It had been a long day, made longer by the Wag’s Bar bomb. She should have gone off shift at seven, but at the thinly-staffed News Channel when something big happened it was all hands to the pump.

‘Got ‘ny change?’

She jumped. Hadn’t noticed the vagrant huddled in the entrance. She peered left and right for the lights of a taxi.

‘I *said* can you spare some change, please?’

More of a threat than a request. She pulled the black leather purse from her pocket and gave him a pound.

'Thanks, miss.'

'For something to *eat*, right?'

She wished she hadn't said that. Made her sound like her own mother.

'Yes, miss. I'll go to the caff,' he mocked, lifting a lager can to his lips.

Charlotte stepped on to the pavement as a taxi turned into the street, its lamp like Florence Nightingale's. She crossed to the kerb, arm outstretched.

Inside the cab, she flicked on the heater and hugged herself for warmth. She looked for the usual sign saying THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING. None there, so she lit up. Her nicotine levels felt uncomfortably low. The News Channel was a non-smoking office.

Charlotte pushed her free hand through her blonde hair and squeezed the tension from the back of her neck. Aged twenty-nine, she was a video-journalist with a new, low-cost television news station broadcasting on cable and satellite where *everyone* abbreviated her name to Charlie. She was ambitious – chief reporter at the BBC was where she'd set her sights. Meanwhile, as a humble VJ for now, she was jack of all trades – on-screen reporter, off-screen writer of scripts for the studio, and occasional camera operator.

The wine bar bomb had squeezed out her earlier report on the arms contract with Indonesia – submarines, patrol boats and aircraft upgrades, worth half a billion pounds. Lots of jobs – and votes for the beleaguered government. In the afternoon she'd filmed the small crowd outside Downing Street, anti-arms trade activists protesting that the weapons were for a regime that ruled by torture and murder.

In truth she knew little about Indonesia. Had to look up the Times Atlas to find where it was. Foreign news wasn't

high on the News Channel's agenda anyway, so when Wag's Bar flashed they'd switched her to the bomb story.

A News Channel cameraman had been one of the first at the scene. She'd edited and voiced his tape from the studio. Horrific footage. When another reporter was sent to do the live spots there she'd been glad it wasn't her.

The taxi stopped at red lights, the third in a row. The driver was black. She didn't see herself as socially or racially prejudiced, but the Revenue Men bombings had divided people. Haves and have-nots. Irrational fears had crept into her head.

She glimpsed a flash of white in the mirror – his eyes watching her. She shifted across to be out of his sight, then felt bad about it. The driver slid the glass partition. Charlotte shivered. No conversation please. Just get me home.

'D'you mind openin' the window if you're goin' to smoke?' he asked.

She smiled weakly. Why did *everyone* make her feel bad about her habit?

'Sure.' She took a last deep drag, opened the window a crack to throw out the butt, then closed it. Better to die of nicotine starvation than of cold.

She'd been with the News Channel for a year. Joined when it started, after training and working at the BBC for four years. The Channel wasn't her style – a downmarket mix of hard news and soft porn financed by a tabloid paper – but it *had* given her the chance to be a reporter. She knew she had the looks to make it up the ladder and hoped she had the talent. All she needed were the breaks.

The taxi's brakes squealed. Ahead stretched red tail lights. A jam that seemed to go on for ever. The driver slid back the glass again.

'Sorry 'bout this. Didn't see it in time. Could've taken the back doubles if I'd realised ...'

'What's up, can you tell?'

'No. It's way ahead. But there's blue lights. P'lice. They keep doin' this. Road blocks. Lookin' for the bombers ... Haven't a clue, have they?'

They were stuck. No way to turn or move forward.

'Nothin' I can do. Sorry.'

'Don't worry,' she told him. 'At least it's warm in here.'

'Yeah ...' The driver hugged himself. 'If we're stuck here long enough, I might get in the back there with you!'

All she could see in the mirror was his grinning teeth.

'Don't even think it ...'

The words slipped out before she could check herself. The driver turned away and hunched his shoulders. Damn! Rich white bitch - that's what he'd think.

Charlotte bit her lip. Oh for the knack of never saying the wrong thing - particularly to men. She would turn thirty next year. Always thought she'd be married by that age, but the long hours and the frequent need to drop everything for the job didn't sit well with relationships.

There *had* been affairs, mostly short-lived. Men lost interest when they came second to a career. She did have dates occasionally - men she met in the course of her work. Businessmen, politicians, powerful men turned on by a woman they'd seen on TV.

From the start at the News Channel she'd made a rule not to go with men from the office. Then, two weeks ago loneliness and fear had got the better of her.

Heading home late after a gruelling day, she'd gone for a drink with the video technician she'd been working with. Jeremy was pleasant enough, but a boy - a diffident, fair-haired lad who browsed computer magazines in his meal breaks and tended to blush when he talked to her. She'd babbled to him about how frightening London had become and he'd suddenly turned grown-up and protective. Insisted on escorting her home and she hadn't objected. Slept on the sofa that night. The next night, however, he'd shared her bed.

The taxi driver slipped his cab into gear. The tail lights were moving again. He wound up the volume on his radio. A talk show. The topic – the Revenue Men and the Wag’s Bar bomb. Charlotte pricked up her ears. Some of the callers were *supporting* the terrorists.

The highway to the west rose up on to its elevated section. The taxi picked up speed. Five more minutes to the cosy, ground-floor flat in Shepherd’s Bush which she’d bought three years earlier on a mortgage she couldn’t afford.

The driver slid the glass again and switched off the radio.

‘Down here somewhere?’ He’d turned left off the highway.

‘Third on the right, then second left.’ She’d felt safe in this neighbourhood, until a recent spate of burglaries. ‘Just before the next lamppost, please.’

She reached in her bag for her purse. Out on the pavement, she handed him a ten-pound note.

‘I didn’t mean that, you know. About gettin’ in the back,’ he whined, giving her some change. ‘No offence.’

‘I know. And I didn’t mean to sound like a racist bitch. It’s been a long day.’ She gave him an extra pound.

A four-storey Edwardian house converted into flats in the sixties, Charlotte had picked the ground floor apartment for its neat rear garden. No worries then about intruders.

She undid the mortice lock, then slipped in the Yale key. The light was on inside, just as she’d left it that morning. Stepping into the tiny hall, the warmth welcomed her. Ten seconds to de-activate the alarm. She tapped a code on the small wall panel installed just days ago at Jeremy’s suggestion.

She hung her coat by the door, then checked her face in the gilt-framed mirror next to it. Brown, almond-shaped eyes, high cheek bones and a mouth that men liked kissing. A complexion that got puffy when tired. She straightened

her hair. Hell! Forgotten to book an appointment to get her roots done.

From behind the closed kitchen door she heard a muffled mewling. Since the alarm was installed the cat had been banned from the run of the house. She opened the door.

‘Hello Rudolf,’ she whispered, stroking the fluffy grey creature that pirouetted at her feet. ‘Are you a hungry puss?’

She flicked on the kitchen light and searched the cupboard for cat food. The last tin – the type the cat disliked. Have to buy more in the morning. Silence, apart from the relentless tick of the wall clock. The place felt so empty.

She opened the can and forked tuna into the cat bowl. The animal sniffed it once, gave a look of bitter resentment, then pushed through the catflap into the garden.

‘Sodding animal!’ Charlotte hissed. ‘I’ll bloody give you to Oxfam if you don’t watch it ...’ She left the spurned food in the bowl. Stupid name for a cat, Rudolf. As a kitten he’d looked like Nureyev.

She opened the door to the living room. A folding metal grille covered the French windows to the garden. Hideous, but she slept better knowing it was there. Her furniture was a jumble, acquired during the past four years. A squashy velvet sofa, a dining set in chrome and a sideboard with glasses and a bottle of Stolichnaya. Beside it was the answerphone. She checked. No messages.

She was glad Jeremy hadn’t rung. Their relationship which she’d drifted into for reasons of self-interest was getting out of control. Her fault for encouraging him. Yesterday she’d even asked him to take her to Devon at the weekend. A visit to her *parents*. Madness. Her mother would get the wrong idea, her father hated visitors and, anyway, had been extremely ill, and Jeremy would think she was serious about him.

She ran a bath, dropping her clothes on the floor. Breasts smaller than she would have liked, hips bigger than she wanted. She sprinkled Badedas under the running tap and fluffed up the foam.

Jeremy had a car and she didn't. That was the point. That's why she'd asked him to take her to Devon. To save her a train ride. Pretty selfish really. But then, she assured herself, the relationship wasn't *entirely* one-sided. Sex for him was no longer a *solitary* activity, she thought bitchily. And he was doing it with someone famous, to boot.

But not for much longer. Not if her horoscope was to be believed. Much talk of a new man in her life.

Jakarta

Wednesday 07.05 hrs (00.05 hrs GMT)

She smelled of lilies and musk, sitting just inches from him, but he couldn't risk touching her. It was too soon. The invisible barrier between them had still to be broken and it wouldn't be while they remained jammed in the traffic. Stephen Bowen tapped his head against the window in frustration. Gridlock, time and again in their escape from the city.

Outside, an arm's length away, skinny youths hung from buses, staring and grinning, nudging each another about the middle-aged European with his pretty young Indonesian girl. That his intentions should be so plain to these yobbos needled him. Where was the privacy he'd been promised?

She'd probably done this before, he decided. Paid by the big man to sleep with useful foreigners. How else could a low-salary government employee afford a brand new Toyota?

Yet he wasn't sure. For the first few minutes of the drive she'd been chatty and smiley, still the professional from the protocol department, but beneath the mask there was a

tension which suggested that perhaps she *wasn't* so experienced at this sort of thing.

He cleared his head, concentrating on the game. Whatever she'd done before, whoever she'd done it with, it didn't matter. For the next three days she was there for *him*, and by God was he going to make the most of it.

Suddenly the traffic unblocked and they turned on to a toll road that sliced through the city's overcrowded suburbs towards the airport.

'This road owned by president daughter,' Selina announced, back in tour-guide mode. 'She make us pay big price to use it. You know how we say *expensive* in Indonesia?' she asked, laughing.

'Nope.'

'*Mahal*. India has *Taj* Mahal, but we have *Toll* Mahal!' She laughed again.

Bowen chuckled. 'Very good ...' He longed to touch her.

'You're very lovely, Selina,' he growled, relaxing slightly. 'Makes my heart go boom-badi-boom-badi-boom-badi-boom! Remember that film? Peter Sellers?'

She frowned, not understanding. 'You think I *lovely*?' she asked coyly.

'Oh yes. And how ... You've got ebony eyes, velvet skin, the body of an angel ...'

'Ohhh ...' she giggled, blushing. 'You make me embarrass, Mr Bowen.'

'Stephen,' he beamed. 'Steve if you like.'

After thirty minutes the car turned into Soekarno-Hatta Airport. Skirting the taxi-choked terminal, Selina took a road parallel to a chainlink fence, then halted at a red and white pole. Beyond, executive jets were parked. She gave the gate guard two thousand rupiahs and he let them in.

Bribes at every level. Without them the country couldn't function. Big commissions at the top, a pittance at the bottom to oil the wheels of even the simplest service.

The General Aviation terminal was old and drab.

'He's meeting us here?' Bowen checked. His host had been vague about the travel arrangements.

Her face clouded.

'No. He er ... he meet us in Singapore.'

'*Singapore?*' he exclaimed. 'He told me yesterday his boat's in Bali.'

'Yeh. Bali where boat is. But *he* have to go Singapore last night for business dinner.' Her smile had gone, replaced by that tension he'd seen earlier. 'We go Singapore first, pick him up. *Then* we go Bali.'

She looked acutely uncomfortable. Javans hated giving bad news, he'd been told. She was expecting him to be angry.

'That's going to take some time,' he remarked gently.

'Maybe two hours more. Not long. And airplane very comfortable. You like champagne?'

'What kind of plane is it?' He had a terror of small aircraft. Claustrophobia.

'Is British!' The smile was back. 'One-two-five. Very nice. Big so-fa.' She flickered her eyebrows flirtatiously.

'Now you're talking ...'

Inside the scruffy terminal a small, empty executive suite was furnished with sticky, vinyl-covered armchairs. Selina left him there with a cup of coffee and took his passport to be stamped.

Bowen picked up the *Jakarta Post* to see if his picture was in it. Certain to be. When the president met a visiting minister, no paper here dared ignore it. The photo was on page two. Full face of the president, but just the back of his head. He read the copy.

President supports 1750 Billion Rupiah arms deal for ABRI. Britain will supply two ex-Royal Navy submarines and four new-build corvettes, together with special equipment to upgrade the Hawk fighter jets delivered in the 1980s. British Foreign Minister Stephen Bowen was

yesterday honoured by a reception at the Presidential palace.

An honour indeed for a *junior* minister like him, but Bowen knew the reason. The DefenceCo agent for the arms deal was a *very* close associate of the president. Bowen had been given a hint the old man himself might be on a percentage.

He smiled. This was the most extraordinary country. Conventional economics didn't apply here. Contracts went not to the *lowest* bidder, but to the *highest*, to ensure the price included a commission big enough to line the dozens of pockets involved.

The door burst open.

'Come quick! They wait for us.' Selina was flushed from running.

'Right. Where's my suitcase?'

'They load already. Come quick.'

He pursued her on to the tarmac where a uniformed official hustled them to the jet fifty metres away. The air was thick and hot, the humidity rising.

'Why the sudden panic?' he panted.

'I don' know. Control tower, maybe.'

Air traffic. Always air traffic. He looked at the HS-125 and shivered. Why did they make those planes so darned small?

Ducking, he climbed inside, fighting his terrors. His eardrums popped as the door closed. When the engines began their whine, he felt he was being buried alive.

Cream leather. Two large armchairs and a long, soft bench which he eyed with interest. Selina strapped herself in on the other side of the narrow aisle.

'Nice plane, yes?' she smiled, eager to please.

'I rather prefer jumbos,' he confessed.

The aircraft swung towards the runway. He knew he'd feel better once airborne. He sank back into the soft

leather and closed his eyes. He kept them closed until the plane had climbed above the early morning turbulence. Then he looked through the glass and saw the capital spread out below under its shroud of pollution. Six hundred square kilometres of urban sprawl – in the centre a golden triangle of corruption and wealth, but around it slums.

When he turned to look at the girl, she was gone. He unclipped his belt and glanced behind. She was leaning into the cockpit, talking to the co-pilot. The hem of her T-shirt rode up, exposing the ridge of her spine, her skin the colour of dark honey. The thin denim of her skirt was tight across her small, firm behind. Bowen began to feel better.

‘Now where’s this champagne you promised me?’ he chuckled as she sat down again.

‘You want I look in the ice-box?’ The refreshment cabinet was on the floor behind her seat.

A waft of lilies again as she crouched beside him. He’d explode if he didn’t have her soon.

Suddenly the plane banked to the right. Bowen looked out. They were in a long, steady turn. He frowned. They were changing course, heading east, along the Javan coast. Singapore was northwest.

‘What’s going on, Selina? We’re heading east.’

‘Ye-eh,’ she laughed. Her eyes betrayed her nerves, but all Stephen Bowen could see was her soft mouth and her perfect, perfect teeth. ‘Yeh, it all change again. He just call pilot from Singapore to say he take Garuda flight to Bali. We meet him there after all.’

‘Good. Straight to Bali, then,’ he smiled. Ninety minutes flying time. Ninety minutes alone with her.

‘Yes,’ she purred, lips parted. Her eyes spoke to him – *fuck me now if you want.*

He reached out and slipped his hand round the back of her silky neck. He glanced towards the cockpit to check the door was closed.