

room and Eleanor, naked, was ironing a pile of clothes. As she pressed down hard with the iron, as if trying to force it through the board, she wept, and her tears fell on the clothes.

'Eleanor, what's the matter? Tell me, please. Has your agent rung with bad news?'

I went to her. Her dry lips moved, but she didn't want to talk. She went on moving the iron across the same patch of shirt. When she lifted the face of the iron I felt she wanted to place it on herself, on the back of her hand or arm. She was half mad.

I disconnected the iron and put my leather jacket over her shoulders. I asked her once more what the matter was, but she just shook her head, flinging her tears over me. I gave up asking stupid questions, and led her into the bedroom and put her to bed. She lay back and shut her eyes. I held her hand and sat there, looking around at the clothes flung about, the make-up and hairspray and lacquered boxes on the dresser, the silk cushion from Thailand with an elephant on it, the piles of books on the floor. On the table beside the bed was a gold-framed photograph of a black man in his mid-thirties, wearing a dark polo-neck sweater. He had short hair, looked athletic and was very handsome. I guessed that the picture had been taken four or five years ago.

I felt Eleanor wanted me there, not to say anything, but just not to go away. So as she went off to sleep, I settled down for a serious think about Changez. Eleanor I would consider later; at the moment there was nothing I could do.

If I defied Changez, if I started work on a character based on him, if I used the bastard, it meant that I was untrustworthy, a liar. But if I didn't use him it meant I had fuck-all to take to the group after the 'me-as-Anwar' fiasco. As I sat there I began to recognize that this was one of the first times in my life I'd been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before. I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my twenties, something was growing in me. Just as my body had changed at puberty, now I was developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to myself, especially in violating self-imposed prohibitions. Perhaps no one would know I'd based my character in the play on Changez; perhaps, later, Changez himself wouldn't mind, would be flattered. But I would always know what I had done, that I had chosen to be a

liar, to deceive a friend, to use someone. What should I do? I had no idea. I ran over it again and again and could find no way out.

I looked at Eleanor to make sure she was sleeping. I thought I'd sneak off home and get Eva to do me some stir-fried vegetables in her wok. Build myself up. But when I stood up Eleanor was watching me, and she was smiling slightly, too.

'Hey, I'm glad you're here.'

'But I was planning on going and leaving you to sleep.'

'No, don't do that, darling.'

She patted the bed. 'Get in, Karim.' I was so pleased to see her looking cheerful that I obeyed instantly, getting in beside her, pulling up the covers and resting my head on the pillow next to her. 'Karim, you little idiot, take off your shoes and the rest of your clothes.'

She started to laugh as I pulled off my jeans, but before I'd got any further than my knees she was nibbling my cock, long before any of the foreplay which, as I'd been informed by the numerous sex manuals I'd devoured for years, was essential to celestial love-making. But then, Eleanor would do such things, I thought, as I lay there enjoying it. There was extremity in her soul. In certain states she might do anything. As it was, she always did whatever occurred to her, which was, admittedly, not difficult for someone in her position, coming from a background where the risk of failure was minimal; in fact, you had to work hard to fail in her world.

That's how it began, our sex life. And I was stunned by it; I'd never had such strong emotional and physical feeling before. I wanted to tell everyone that such regular live-fire through the veins was possible; for surely, if they knew of it, they'd be doing it all the time. What intoxication! During rehearsal, when I looked at her wearing a long blue and white skirt, sitting in a chair with her bare feet up on the seat, pressing the swathes of cloth down between her legs - and I told her to wear no underwear - my mouth flooded in anticipation. I'd get an erection and would have to flee the improvisation for the toilet, where I'd wank, thinking of her. When my smiles revealed that this was what I was doing, she'd join me. We began to think that all business buildings should have comfortable facilities, with flowers and music, for masturbation and love-making.

Physically, Eleanor wasn't coy like me; she didn't conceal desire; there was no shame. At any time she'd take my hand and lay it on